

2.8 Stakeholders

Saturday, July 25, 2009, marked the official start to stakeholder involvement in the Rondout Creek Management Planning Project. Sullivan County Soil and Water Conservation District (SCSWCD) and New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) representatives presented information on their water resource programs and the various components of the stream management plans to the participants. Presentations were followed by a question and answer session that included passionate discussions that lead to very active participation in the planning process.



Figure 1 Rondout Creek Informational meeting, December 12, 2009

Results from the July 25 session reinforced that a critical component of the stream management planning process is public support and input for the project. Efforts were made to ensure that local stakeholders had ample opportunity to learn about the project and get involved through the hiring of a professional consultant - Gilmour Planning, which drafted and distributed a public opinion survey of streamside landowners along the Rondout Creek, Sundown (or East Branch Rondout) Creek, Sugarloaf Brook and the East, West and mainstem Neversink River. A roundtable committee of 20 local and regional stakeholders met three times (June, October and December, 2009) during the planning period to review the survey instrument and its findings and to offer insight about key concerns regarding the Rondout Creek. Community informational meetings were held in Denning and Neversink in March to introduce the results of the 2009 stream assessment of the Rondout creek.

Feedback from the public opinion survey helped guide key areas of interest for this management plan. Out of the 175 surveys sent out, SCSWCD received 76 (return rate of ~43%); nearly two-thirds of the responses were from second homeowners. For detailed information about the results of the survey, please view Appendix A to read the full report by Gilmour Planning. General themes include 1) A desire for more flood planning and emergency preparation (67% of Rondout responses) and 2) A desire for more road/drainage infrastructure improvements and restored floodplain (48% of Rondout responses). These interests persisted as respondents were asked what type of technical assistance they need. For the Rondout, bank stabilization and floodproofing received the highest number of responses (19% and 15% respectively), whereas easements and sustainable timber harvest received the lowest number (5% and 6% respectively). Additionally, when asked if they would like to be contacted 84% of those responding gave a positive response, with 55 providing specific name and contact information – a testament to value the streamside landowners place on their relationship to the Rondout Creek. A selection of written comments received on the survey is highlighted below:

- I hope someone can do something about the flooding!
- High water = water in cellar.
- Significant threat to stream quality is home septic systems and abandoned automobiles in and near floodplain. Road runoff may also be contributing pollutants and sediments.

- I have been coming to the Sundown area for my whole life + have never worried about the creek before. We have had 2 serious flood incidents impacting our property over the last 8 years + are concerned now every time it rains. What is going on??
- Streams should be kept clean of debris + when erosion exists, stone walls need to be installed for strength and beauty.
- The most disturbing changes/symptoms that I have noted since 1972 (prop. acquisition) are: repeat flooding with mud in the water; more trash at streamside.

In general, streamside landowners agreed that the Rondout Creek was an important feature of the area, despite its associated problems. Survey respondents expressed a desire to see the stream maintain its healthy state for the benefit of streamside landowners, outdoor enthusiasts and wildlife.

Public interest in this planning project continued to rise as word circulated from resident to resident. In particular, one resident took the initiative to host a Rondout Watershed Landowners Association meeting to offer a forum for discussion about stream issues and how this important stakeholder group might coalesce in order to have appropriate representation in future planning (Watershed Advisory Group) meetings. This meeting provided the prod to recruit additional interested parties, resulting in a well attended public meeting the following week which summarized survey and stream feature inventory results.

All of the stakeholders listed in Table 2 have an interest in maintaining the Rondout Creek as a well-functioning natural resource, and many of them have direct management influence over it. With the completion of the plan, the next phase will include review of the plan's recommendations by the community, stakeholders and a Watershed Advisory Group (WAG) – a formal extension from the initial roundtable gatherings, which has met twice to review the general recommendations within this Plan. The program team revised the Plan to ensure that it adequately reflects stakeholders' concerns. Follow-up presentations were made at Town of Denning and Neversink Meetings in August to finalize the draft plan and begin its formal adoption and implementation.

Table 2 Stakeholder groups within the Rondout basin.

Landowners	Federal Emergency Management Agency
Towns of Neversink & Denning	Community Organizations
Sullivan & Ulster County Soil and Water Conservation District	NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Region 4 staff
Town and County Highway Departments	US Environmental Protection Agency
NYC Department of Environmental Protection	NYS Department of Transportation, including Region
NY State Emergency Management Office	Tri-Valley Central School

The Watershed Advisory Group is currently evolving as the program establishes itself in the community. The group comprises twenty five local volunteer residents and involved agency representatives. Meetings were held in January and April of 2010 for guidance and input on the Rondout Stream Management Plan. Committees will form by the end of 2010 to engage in the implementation of the Rondout, Neversink and Chestnut plans.