

The Watershed Advocate

News from
The Catskill Watershed Corporation

Margaretville, NY

Winter 2009



Staying warm: Grass pellets may be one solution

The potential of grass pellets and woody biomass as sources of home-grown heat is being explored in separate research projects sponsored by the CWC and the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC).

The Franklin Town Highway Garage is the first of several Watershed buildings selected as a test site for a CWC-funded study by Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) to explore the feasibility of utilizing grass pellets as a bio-energy source for heating. Indoor and outdoor pellet-fired units will be installed at each site so that people can see both types of heating units in action. Their operation will be monitored for effectiveness, efficiency and ease of use, their air quality impacts will be gauged, and operation and maintenance issues examined.

The study will also determine the cost savings of using grass pellets instead of other forms of fuel. The Town of Franklin, for example, burned 3,000 gallons of fuel oil last year. The boiler that currently warms the highway garage uses about two and a quarter gallons per hour, and runs on average 12 hours a day in the winter. Thus the pellet stove project "is a pretty hot topic of conversation here, especially with the price of fuel," remarked Highway Superintendent Mark Laing.

Stoves that use wood pellets, made of sawdust and byproducts from sawmills and wood-working facilities, corn and even cherry pits have become very popular in light of high oil prices. The CWC project seeks to find a reliable and profitable way to produce grass pellets to use in these stoves, thus turning vacant grasslands in the Watershed "into one more weapon in the arsenal of alternative fuels," according to CWC Economic Development Director Mike Triolo.

At its meeting September 25, the CWC Board of

Troy Cave, a Franklin highway department employee, shows off the grass pellet stove that warms the offices and meeting room at the highway garage.



Directors authorized the expenditure of up to \$195,500 from the Catskill Fund for the Future for the three-year pilot project. Paul Cerosaletti and Marianne Kiraly of CCE have been consulting with Cornell agriculture professor Jerry Cherney, an avid promoter of the development of grass pellets as a low-tech, small-scale, environmentally-friendly, renewable energy system that can be locally produced, processed and consumed.

Prof. Cherney spoke on this topic at the 2006 Catskills Local Government Day, when he noted that New York State has about 1.5 million acres of unused or underutilized agricultural land, most of which is already growing grass. Farmers no longer raising dairy cows, landowners who have their fields mowed to retain open vistas, even New York City which is acquiring Watershed lands to prevent development and preserve water quality could turn unused grass into cash, and fuel.

"We think testing the stoves for grass pellets, and demonstrating their use will create demand so that some folks

Three more hamlets embark on wastewater studies

The hamlets of Trout Creek and South Kortright in Delaware County, and Lexington in Greene County, are the latest hamlets to participate in the CWC's Community Wastewater Management Program (CWMP).

The hamlets were included in the 1997 New York City Watershed Memorandum of Agreement's list of 22 communities needing wastewater solutions. Wastewater treatment plants, community septic systems and other solutions have already been provided or are in the planning stages for 14 of the 22 hamlets.

The town boards with jurisdiction over the newest hamlets (respectively, Tompkins, Stamford and Lexington) have passed resolutions to enter the CWMP study phase. Individual studies for all three will be conducted by Lamont Engineers. This phase includes four public information meetings in each community, coordination of GIS mapping and geotechnical testing, and evaluation of alternative solutions and service areas.

Approaches may include maintenance districts for individual on-site septic systems, clustered and/or community leach fields, or wastewater treatment plants.

Residents and businesses will be surveyed, maps will be prepared and cost estimates developed as part of the study phase, which will provide the town boards with the information required to review the preferred alternative, or to choose not to go forward with any CWC-funded project. Towns may opt out at any point prior to the start of construction, which is anticipated to begin in 2011 if no objections are raised.

Boiceville project underway

Meanwhile, Evergreen Mountain Contracting of West Kill, Greene County, has begun site work for the wastewater treatment plant that is planned for Boiceville under the CWM Program. Evergreen will also build a stormwater retention pond on adjacent New York City-owned property.

F. P. Kane Construction of Endicott will install the sanitary and stormwater collection systems in Boiceville as they did for the Bloomville Community Wastewater project. Brunswick Electric of Troy and S&O Construction Services of Pleasant Valley will install electrical, plumbing and heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems at the treatment plant.

Because bids for the Ulster County project came in higher than anticipated more than two years after it was first designed, the CWC Board in November added \$2.2 million to the previously approved \$10,078,000 construction block grant.

The 4-acre treatment plant site was acquired by the Town of Olive with CWMP funds. Once construction is completed (anticipated in 2010), it will sell a one-acre parcel of the site fronting on Route 28 that had been occupied by the former Trail Nursery.

Bloomville enters homestretch

Contractors in mid-January were making plans to conduct a clean-water test of the enclosed sand filter beds which will treat wastewater in Bloomville. Collection mains and storage tanks for the community wastewater system were tested in late autumn. No problems were found, clearing the way for springtime installation of 108 laterals serving 123 properties in the sewer district.

The project is expected to be completed by mid-year.

The \$7 million project includes two 30,000-gallon tanks in which solids will settle. Liquids will be pumped from the tanks through three sand filters enclosed in a barn-like structure. From there the effluent will be dispersed to 18 subsurface leach fields located in a former town gravel mine.

Stormwater improvements have been completed throughout the hamlet while the wastewater system was being built.

Contractors for this project are Stephen Miller Contractors of Mayfield, NY, F. P. Kane of Endicott, Hinkley Associates of Roxbury, and Avolio Construction of Norwich.

Hamden nearing completion

Laterals will also be installed in the spring to 82 properties in Hamden. Sewer mains and a large septic tank were completed in the fall, and good progress is being made on the sand filtration building, which is similar to the one in Bloomville.

Contractors for the wastewater project are T. C. Briggs of Prattsville, Hinkley and Avolio.

As with most other CWMP projects, stormwater improvements have been a major consideration in Hamden, where G. DiVincentis of Binghamton installed collection and treatment devices.

Ashland moves forward

Construction on a modified septic maintenance district in the hamlet of Ashland will begin this summer. The plan approved by the Ashland Town Board will feature individual on-site septic tanks for retention of solids, and

Continued on next page

Program offers help with commercial septic repairs

The CWC Board of Directors on December 2 approved rules for a new program that will repair or replace failed septic systems for small businesses in the Catskill-Delaware Watershed.

Small business owners - those employing 100 or fewer people - may be eligible for the program if their system is currently failing. To be eligible, the septic failure must be verified by CWC staff before any work commences. In addition, the failing septic system must be located within 100 feet of a watercourse, 500 feet from a reservoir of the New York City Water Supply, or within a specified priority area (the so-called "60-day travel time" area). Reimbursement is 75% of the cost of septic repairs up to a maximum of \$40,000.

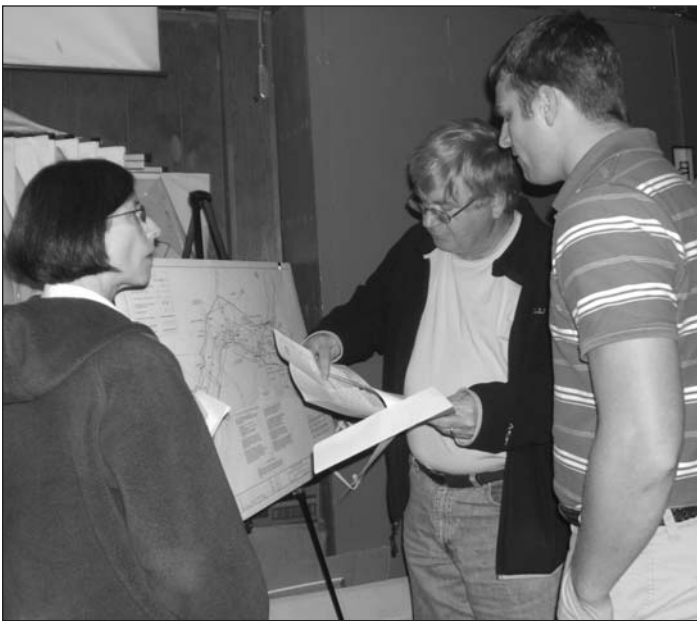
Apartment buildings and trailer parks are not considered small businesses for this program. Only commercial septic systems constructed before Nov. 2, 1995 are eligible for repair reimbursement.

Business properties served or potentially served by New York City- or municipally-owned sewer projects, or by Community Wastewater Management Projects developed by the CWC, are not eligible for the new septic repair program.

Commercial enterprises in 13 areas where a new Cluster System Septic Program is being developed may also be ineligible for septic repairs as they may be served by future wastewater projects addressing clusters of buildings. Arrangements may be made, however, for temporary or managed repairs in these areas.

The new Small Business Septic Repair Program is expected to be operational in the spring of 2009. Four-million dollars has been committed to the program.

For more information, contact Leo LaBuda.



Christopher Yacobucci of Lamont Engineers answered the questions of Larry and Colette Dewald at a meeting on November 18 before they signed an easement allowing the main sewer line for the hamlet of Ashland's Community Wastewater Project to cross their property.

Community wastewater

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a communal collection system for liquids to be directed to a central treatment facility.

All property owners (87) in the district will get a new septic tank; existing tanks will be pumped out, filled with sand and decommissioned. Homeowners will own their tanks, but the town will maintain them, along with the plant and nine pump stations to be installed to transport the liquid waste to the facility.

Bids are expected to be let in the spring.



A December inspection of the Trurans' Halcottsville septic system determined that they will need a new system and will qualify for 100% funding under the CWC's residential septic repair program. The tank was pumped by Frank Flachs (in hole), and excavated by Dave Cowan (second from left), with Dave and Lorraine Truran and CWC's Todd Henderson looking on. Meanwhile, the CWC Board of Directors recently adopted a measure allowing reimbursement for septic repairs done between January 1 and December 31, 2008 that were not within priority areas for the regular Septic Repair and Rehabilitation Program. Adequate monies in the program fund allowed the CWC to make this assistance available at year's end. Homeowners who think they may qualify for this assistance are urged to call 845-586-1400.

Connecting the dots to link people with recreation, nature and community

The theme of the Eighth Annual Catskills Local Government Day, held October 22, 2008 at Frost Valley YMCA, was the importance of collaboration and partnerships to the improvement of recreational opportunities in the Catskill region.

Thirteen presenters showed the audience successful examples of scenic, historic, artistic and cultural tours they have developed in the northeast, including projects both completed and on tap in Catskill towns and villages.

Two of those initiatives are spotlighted here:

A vision for the Route 28 Corridor

Communities along NYS Route 28, a major gateway from the Hudson Valley through the heart of the Catskills, will get some revitalization help thanks to a \$91,417 grant from the State's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF).

The Esopus-Delaware Corridor Revitalization Project involves the Towns of Andes, Hurley, Middletown, Olive, and Shandaken, and the Villages of Fleischmanns and Margaretville, which have banded together as The Central Catskills Collaborative (CCC).

Coordinated by Peter Manning, regional planner with the Catskill Center for Conservation & Development, the CCC will work with students from the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry's (ESF) landscape architecture program to produce corridor-wide and site-specific projects like signage, parks, streetscapes and roadside exhibits focusing on natural and community resources.

The aim is to build a shared sense of purpose, provide efficiencies through partnership, enhance the quality of life and improve the business climate along this historically important route. The potential for having the corridor designated a Scenic Byway is being explored.

The recent designation by the NYS Legislature of the Esopus Creek as an Inland Waterway allowed the Town of Olive to apply for the EPF funding on behalf of the CCC. The grant was awarded through the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program of the NYS Department of State, which will provide technical assistance to the communities.

Maren King, Assistant Director of the ESF Center for Community Design Research, will engage her students in the hands-on project, which may serve as a model that can be more broadly shared.

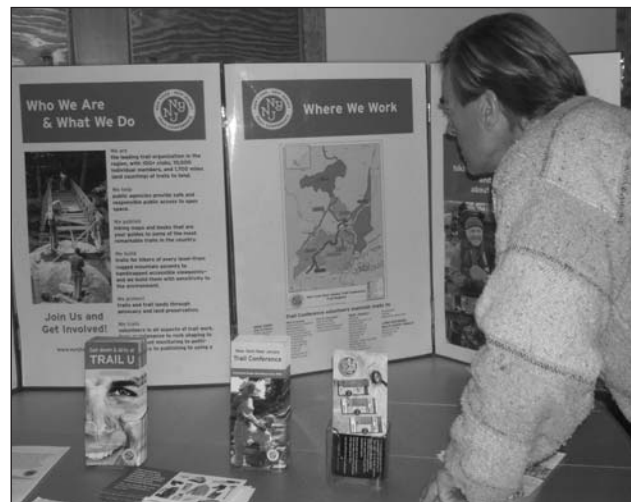
Making the most of the Mountaintop

Nine Greene County mountaintop municipalities and a wide range of agencies, organizations and private interests are developing The Mountaintop Community Resource Strategy.

The project is designed to identify and prioritize opportunities for recreational and cultural resource expansion and integration that are compatible with the region's natural environment while at the same time supporting the local economies. Nearly one year into the project, key recommendations have been identified and subcommittees formed to work on implementation tactics.

Recommendations include appointment of a Mountaintop Recreation and Event Planner; developing a comprehensive event and calendar publication and a branding strategy for the Mountaintop; creation of multi-use trails along streams and on old rail beds; enhancing fishing access; improving parking for access to NYC lands; establishing bike lanes on state and county roads; expanding the snowmobile network; creating nature education programming, and producing self-guided tours of natural, scenic and historic sites.

The final strategy will highlight both a short- and long-range implementation plan.



The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference was among 20 exhibitors at Catskills Local Government Day. Ed Goodell, executive director of NY-NJTC, participated in a discussion of economic and social benefits of recreational trails with Dave Perkins of the NYS Snowmobile Association, and Bill McMaster of the University of Vermont Extension who described the multi-use Kingdom Trails system in northern Vermont.



NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Pete Grannis (third from right) was the keynote speaker at Catskills Local Government Day. Joining him at the event, held at Frost Valley YMCA, were (l to r) Gene Kelly, DEC Region IV director; Jerry Huncosky, executive director of Frost Valley; Alan Rosa, executive director of the CWC; Wallace John, special assistant to the commissioner; and Willie Janeway, DEC Region 3 director. The momentum of this successful event continued the following day, when DEC sponsored a forum on regional environmental issues at Belleayre Ski Center.



Ed Frantz (left), the NYS Department of Transportation's Adirondack Park and Forest Preserve Manager, shared some conversation with Hunter Councilman and CWC Board member Paul Dibbell at Local Government Day Oct. 22. Frantz was among presenters discussing how collaboration between agencies and organizations can enhance recreational opportunity in our region.



Michelle Yost, director of the Greene County Soil & Water Conservation District's Watershed Assistance Program, asks a question of NYS DEC Commissioner Pete Grannis in a standing-room-only session at Catskills Local Government Day. Yost was herself a speaker in a session focused on the corridor approach to community planning. Nearly 150 people attended the annual gathering of local officials and community leaders.

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Furniture as art, naturally

By his own admission, John Houshmand is "zealous" about what he does. And what he does is design and craft "functional art, ironically disguised as furniture."

A Yale graduate, an artist, musician, philosopher, craftsman and retired contractor, Houshmand has melded his eclectic interests into a business with one foot in New York City, the other on a Catskill Mountain farm. There, in a three-story barn, 2,000 meticulously labeled slabs of wood - maple, black walnut, elm, oak, and the light and mystical pawlonia - wait to be transformed into tables, desks and other custom pieces.

Modern and minimal, the pieces often incorporate glass or bronze. At their core is warm and wonderful wood, its grain, knots and natural contours providing instant appeal for a high-end clientele willing to pay top dollar for a one-of-a-kind mirror or shelf unit or cabinet. Amazingly, the wood utilized in the creation of each piece comes from single trees, either diseased, damaged or marked for removal, that are too big, gnarly or are otherwise unsuitable for sawboards.

Houshmand's work graces homes, hotels, and corporate offices around the world. On a recent frosty afternoon, a dozen employees were sanding, staining, drying, trimming and assembling some of 15 current orders:

A collection of 18 chairs, two dining tables, a 20-foot console and a credenza are bound for Kuwait and the home of the King's niece.

A truckload of walnut edging which had been slated for the chipper is destined for Los Angeles where it will be stacked to form a uniquely engineered wall in the lobby of a development company.

An architectural column with inset boxes to hold LED candles will soon be shipped to a resort in New Jersey.

See more at www.johnhoushmand.com.

Business is brisk, and has outgrown the 1960s barn on the former Scotch Valley Ranch in the Town of Stamford. So Houshmand applied for a low-interest loan from the Catskill Fund for the Future to expand his operation to a second farm he purchased in the scenic valley on the other side of Narrow Notch. He is transforming a former cattle barn there into a spacious, more efficient production facility.

The new 30-acre site is more accessible and there is ample storage space on the concrete pad outside the barn for 200 logs Houshmand has collected for future projects. He expects to double the company's output in 2009.

"Thank God for that loan," says Houshmand as he surveys the company's new home.



Dining table crafted of black walnut, with spalted maple support beam, designed by John Houshmand.



Jeremy MacIntyre of Hobart, staining a table ordered by the niece of the King of Kuwait, is among 17 people employed at the Stamford workshop of John Houshmand (rear).



Birch Creek's bank is slip-sliding away in the vicinity of the Pine Hill community playground. A grant to the Town of Shandaken from the CWC's Stream Corridor Protection Program will armor and reseed the bank to prevent further encroachment on the park.

Need information?

Marcellus Shale drilling

As a public service, the CWC is offering a folder of information culled from various sources for landowners, municipal officials and Catskills residents interested in or concerned about the possibility for natural gas exploration in the Marcellus shale formation. The packet is available to anyone upon request: Call toll-free 877-WAT-SHED (928-7433); or 845-586-1400. The CWC has also added a page of pertinent Marcellus shale-related links to its website: www.cwconline.org, where you will also find details on a forum on the issue being planned for the spring.

Knotweed

Call us toll free at 877-928-7433 for a packet of information on how to prevent the start or spread of Japanese knotweed (informally known as "bamboo"), and how to deal with it once this invasive plant takes root.

Water testing

Homeowners seeking to have their water tested for coliform/E.coli bacteria at the Catskill Regional Water Testing Laboratory (CRWTL) in Delhi can pick up free collection bottles and instructions at several locations. Bottles are available at the lab (5 1/2 Main St., Delhi) or at Stamford Village Hall (84 Main Street, Stamford - 607-652-6671), Walton Town Hall (129 North Street, Walton - 607-865-5766), the Watershed Assistance Program office, 6049 Main St., Tannersville (518-589-6871) and the CWC, 905 Main St., Margaretville (845-586-1400).

Water samples for the total coliform/E.coli - presence/absence test must be taken directly to the laboratory (not the bottle distribution point) within 24 hours of being drawn. The lab can accept samples for this test between 8 am and 3 pm Mondays through Thursdays only. The test fee is \$30. For more info, contact the lab 607-746-8626, or visit www.catskillwaterlab.org.

Grass pellet study

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might go into the pelletizing business, and that would create jobs," explained Mike Triolo.

Bob and May Miller have already taken the leap, establishing a grass pelletization plant in Wells Bridge, Otsego County. They have been purchasing hay from Delaware and Otsego County farmers from a 40-mile radius, grinding and pelletizing it, and selling it by the bag to individual homeowners who had primarily used wood pellets in their pellet stoves. While ash removal has presented problems for some, most customers have been satisfied with the grass pellets.

The Millers, who operate the plant with their son Mike and his wife Mary Lou, heat the 40x60-foot building with its 18-foot ceilings, exclusively with an outdoor furnace that burns grass pellets. They have been working to develop the optimum pellet composition, size and moisture content and to produce a consistent product so that heat output can be tested. "We're making a better pellet as we go. This is all new to everybody," said May Miller.

She and her husband were raised on dairy farms and ran one in Franklin, Delaware County, for many years until they retired from farming. But their love of the land did not diminish. "We'd see grass going to waste, fields growing up to goldenrod, and it hurt our hearts to see that," May Miller remarked.

So, in their early 70s, the Millers decided to try a new venture. "We just like the idea of keeping the land in

some sort of production so future generations, someday, might learn to grow food on it again. Plus, mowing hay for grass pellets lets farmers use equipment in the off times."

When the other sites are selected for CWC-sponsored testing of grass pellet-burning stoves, the Millers will supply the fuel. Open houses will be scheduled at the demonstration sites so that the public can see both small and large scale applications of this heating technology.

Wood chips, too

Meanwhile, five facilities, including three schools, have been selected to participate in a WAC study that may lead to retrofitting their heating systems to use wood chips instead of fossil fuels.

Catskill Craftsmen, Inc., a wood products manufacturing firm in Stamford; O'Connor Hospital in Delhi; South Kortright Central School; Onteora Middle/High School in Boiceville; and Cairo-Durham Middle/High School in Greene County will undergo analysis of current energy demands and the economic, environmental and technical feasibility of retrofitting or replacing existing boiler systems to accommodate wood as a renewable fuel option.

Studies will also describe the current technology available for using locally produced wood-chips from the region's abundant low-grade forest resources.

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Sailing on the Cannonsville? Coming soon!

The NYC DEP plans to open the Cannonsville Reservoir to recreational boating in time for Memorial Day Weekend. This is exciting news to residents and visitors who have long wished they could launch a sailboat, canoe, kayak, rowboat, johnboat or scull on these big and beautiful lakes, which thus far have only been available to anglers with NYS fishing licenses and NYC access permits.

The DEP has consulted with several agencies and organizations to develop a three-year pilot program at the Cannonsville that may later be expanded to other New York City reservoirs. The program will allow anyone with a DEP Access Permit or Guest Pass to put their pre-cleaned boat in at six launch sites around the reservoir.

Boating will be permitted from sunrise to sunset seven days a week from Memorial Day through Columbus Day weekends. There are some location restrictions. Organized races must have prior DEP approval and commercial guide services may be allowed by permit.

To avoid the potential for introduction of zebra

mussels and other invasive fauna and flora, boats will have to be steam cleaned at specified sites where vendors are equipped and licensed to provide the service. Cleaning certificates and boat tags (Temporary for up to seven days, or Seasonal for the entire season) will be issued and must be displayed on each boat.

The City's recreational use regulations are being revised and re-promulgated to enable this change in use. The program is intended to promote environmentally sound economic development by giving tourists and visitors another reason to come to the Catskills.

While perhaps a dozen boats a day now use the Cannonsville Reservoir during the fishing season, as many as 100 a day may take advantage of the expanded boating opportunity during pleasant weekends, according to John Vickers, who is coordinating the pilot program for the DEP.

To obtain an access permit and more information about recreational opportunities on New York City lands and reservoirs, visit www.nyc.gov/watershed.