



# Ulster County Water Quality Coordinating Committee

*Providing a coordinated and collaborative approach to protect and improve the waters of Ulster County and ensuring the resilience of our watershed systems*

*Members: UC Dept of the Environment, UC Dept of Health and Mental Health, UC Dept of Public Works, UC Planning Dept, UC Soil and Water Conservation District, UC Environmental Management Council, and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ulster County.*

## **Mission:**

*Provide a coordinated and collaborative approach to protect and improve the waters of Ulster County and ensure the resilience of our watershed systems.*

## **Vision:**

*The Ulster County Water Quality Coordinating Committee envisions a resilient watershed system serving the health and welfare of the community and ecosystem within the County and the region.*

## I. Introduction

The Ulster County Water Quality Coordinating Committee (UCWQCC) was reinstated in 2019, under the auspices of the Ulster County Department of the Environment for the purpose of coordinating and collaborating with other agencies and organizations to ensure resilience in our watershed systems. The Department of the Environment was appointed the County's Water Quality Management Agency in 2017 by the Ulster County Legislature, pursuant to New York State County Law Article 5 § 220-A. As such, the Department of the Environment has the responsibility of meeting the requirements of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Phase II Stormwater Program (MS4 program) which requires coordination regarding stormwater management. They must also respond to an ongoing need and responsibility to drinking water protection and watershed management planning, as well as identifying and addressing significant changes due to climate change. As the Water Quality Management Agency, the Department of Environment is responsible for coordinating an Ulster County Water Quality Coordinating Committee.

An Ulster County Water Supply Advisory Board was appointed in 1988 by the Ulster County Legislature to oversee an update of the 1968 (Revised in 1970) Ulster County Comprehensive Water Supply Study. In 1998, the Advisory Board developed a Water Quality Strategy which focused heavily on addressing nonpoint source pollution. In 2004, the Ulster County Environmental Management Council (EMC) was designated as the Water Quality Management Agency, by the Ulster County Legislature, pursuant to New York State County Law, article 5 section 220-A. The responsibilities of the Water Quality Management Agency included interagency and intergovernmental coordination for the purposes of stormwater management and the identification of funding for projects. The core committee was comprised of the Environmental Management Council, the Ulster County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Ulster County Planning Department

and Cornell Cooperative Extension. In 2005, the EMC developed a new Water Quality Management Strategy focused on a coordinated, interagency approach to non-point source pollution. The designation of the EMC as the Water Quality Management Agency was rescinded by the Ulster County Legislature with respect for the fact that the EMC was comprised of volunteer directors and advisory personnel, and did not have the professional staff or funding to succeed as the Water Quality Management Agency.

This report is organized into three sections:

1. Introduction and Local History
2. 2020 Watershed Roundtable
3. 2020 Ulster County WQCC

The 2020 Ulster County WQCC section provides a summary of the activities of the UCWQCC for the year and a link to the UCWQCC webpage, hosted by the Ulster County Department of the Environment.

## II. 2020 Watershed Roundtable

On March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020 The UCWQCC co-hosted a Watershed Roundtable with local watershed groups (including; Lower Esopus Watershed Partnership, Rondout Creek Watershed Alliance, Wallkill River Watershed Alliance) that was open to governmental organizations, community partners, non-profits, and other groups working on water related issues in Ulster County watersheds. The event was very well attended. County Executive Pat Ryan introduced the event, Then Laura Finestone (Rondout Creek Watershed Alliance) and Mary McNamara (Lower Esopus Watershed Partnership) spoke on building relationships and capacity within organizations in Ulster County Watersheds. Amanda LaValle (Ulster County Department of the Environment) spoke of the opportunity to work together and build capacity and the resources that Ulster County offers. Jared Buono (Cornell Cooperative Extension) spoke of the support of the County and continuing to lead in resiliency work.

Everyone in attendance had an opportunity to share one fact or accomplishment and one need or opportunity for their organization or watershed. This was accomplished in a round table format. The attendees were then grouped at different tables and completed a Needs and Opportunities Assessment that was presented back to the larger group. Questions that the group answered were as follows:

- What is your group/agency currently working on that relates to watershed management or water quality?
- What opportunities could improve watershed management or water quality?
- What needs and gaps are not being addressed?

- What emerging issues should we know about?

Common themes among the groups for each section were:

**What is your group/agency currently working on that relates to watershed management or water quality?**

- Climate change, watershed planning, MS4 and stormwater management, ongoing outreach/education, buffer projects and assessment projects, disaster preparedness

**What opportunities could improve watershed management or water quality?**

- Watershed plans, state level work, resilience work, capacity and coordination, baseline water quality sampling

**What needs and gaps are not being addressed?**

- Funding (specific examples = matching funds, fiscal sponsorship, grant writing), maps/surveys, help with watershed plans, watershed working with municipalities, stormwater, groundwater

**What emerging issues should we know about?**

- Emerging contaminants, HABs, climate change, job issues, importance of clean water plans in NYS grant funding

### III. 2020 Ulster County WQCC

The 2020 UCWQCC was made up of the following organizations:

- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ulster County
- Ulster County Department of the Environment
- Ulster County Department of Health
- Ulster County Department of Planning, Economic Development and Transportation
- Ulster County Department of Public Works
- Ulster County Environmental Management Council
- Ulster County Soil and Water Conservation District

The UCWQCC met 5 times in 2020 and followed through on the 2020 goal of hosting open meetings and inviting community partners, other agencies, and non-profits. In addition to the Watershed Roundtable in March, open meeting presentations included Drinking Water Source Protection Program (DWSP2, NYSDEC) and proposed NYS Stream Protection Legislation (RiverKeeper) on protecting Class C Streams. Topics that were discussed during the year included:

- The Lower Esopus Road Stream Crossing Assessment project
- Ulster County MS4
- Efforts to make the Lower Esopus more accessible through the clearing of large wood

- The 2020 Watershed Roundtable
- A Needs Assessment generated at the Watershed Roundtable and by the members of the UCWQCC
- The Lower Esopus DEIS “Modification of the CATALUM SPDES Permit, and Draft Permit” (NYSDEC, NYSDEP)
- Green jobs in Ulster County as they relate to water

The Committee web page hosts meeting information and the yearly meeting schedule.

<https://ulstercountyny.gov/environment/ulster-county-water-quality-coordinating-committee>

In 2020 the WQCC achieved its goals of collaborating with other agencies and non-profits in hosting a Watershed Forum, as well as hosting open meetings with a broader community partner group, as well as expanding the needs assessment through the Watershed Forum.

**Goals of the UCWQCC for 2021 include**

- Making more connections to agriculture and regenerative agriculture techniques and how it relates to water quality.
- Reviewing the Lower Esopus DEIS “Modification of the CATALUM SPDES Permit, and Draft Permit” (NYSDEC, NYSDEP)

**Ideas for open meeting topics in 2021 include**

- Following up on the Fall, 2020 meeting on DWSP2
- Water Quality Improvement Program (WQIP) grant funding