

Moodna Creek Watershed Intermunicipal Council

Municipalities in New York can enter into agreements with other municipalities to collaborate on a wide range of issues. Intermunicipal collaboration and agreements is essential for the effective management and protection for water resources. There are several examples of existing, formal intermunicipal collaborative groups in the Hudson River Estuary region that are supporting ongoing dialogue and other activities about specific watersheds. This case study describes one of these agreements for the Moodna Creek, which drains about one-fifth of the land area in Orange County, NY and is the largest tributary watershed of the Hudson River that's entirely contained within Orange County.

Overview

The Moodna Creek Watershed Intermunicipal Council (MCWIC) was formed in October, 2010 when 14 towns and villages and the Orange County Water Authority signed a memorandum of agreement outlining goals and purposes for the council and establishing a formal framework for its governance, operations and procedures. This agreement does not create any binding commitments for members that reduce local land use controls, budgets or other aspects of local government authority with all of these matters remaining entirely within the purview of each municipal member. The MCWIC does provide an important forum for dialogue and collaboration about shared issues that often cross municipal boundaries.

Development and Formation of the Council:

- The Moodna Creek Watershed Conservation and Management Plan was developed by the Orange County Water Authority (OCWA), a county agency, to provide a framework for existing information about water resources, biodiversity, recreation, open space, and other resources and issues in the watershed. This plan was funded in part by the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation Hudson River Estuary Program, and it includes recommended steps to address priority issues in the watershed. This Plan recommended: *An intermunicipal or watershed group should be created to develop a long-term mechanism for intermunicipal coordination on priority watershed goals.*
- OCWA received funding to explore formation of the watershed group recommended in the plan. A team of county staff and consultants was formed to undertake a process of convening municipal officials and interested stakeholders to discuss the appropriate structure and approach for the proposed group.
- A number of existing intermunicipal watershed groups in New York were reviewed by group participants as potential options for the Moodna Creek watershed. The MCWIC structure was developed through dialogue at meetings led by the OCWA project team and agreed upon by participants.
- The Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) forming the council was signed at a meeting of the chief elected officials of the participating municipalities and OCWA the in October, 2010. One additional municipality signed the MOA at a later date and council currently has 15 member towns and villages.

Priority Issues and Activities:

The MCWIC has met quarterly and formed two subcommittees, the education subcommittee and the science and technical issues subcommittee. In mid-2015 the two committees were consolidated into one. The quarterly meetings have provided a useful forum for a number of educational presentations by invited guests, as well as an opportunity for updates and discussion among council members about relevant issues.

Some of the highest-priority issues for some council members have included flooding and in-stream flow. Educational programs have included talks on water quality, flooding, biodiversity, and other issues, including a science conference in 2014. In addition there were several kayaking and hiking trips in the watershed, work

on create and improve public access to streams and tree plantings at several sites, as part of [NYSDEC Hudson River Estuary Program Trees for Tribes](#) program..

The MCWIC developed a model Stream Corridor Overlay Local Law. Municipalities can adopt this law to provide additional protection of stream buffers to supplement the NYSEC Protection of Waters program. This model Stream Corridor Overlay Local Law was written by council members and staff of the Orange County Planning Department and the county's Water Authority. This can be found in Appendix C and at <http://hudsonvalleyregionalcouncil.org/regional-initiatives/hudson-river-estuary-program/>

The council has also supported the installation of stream elevation gages at a number of locations in the watershed. Existing and potential management strategies for planning and coordinating water releases from impoundments before and during storms and maximizing the use of available storage capacity during storms to reduce downstream flooding has been an important topic of discussion.

Resources on Intermunicipal Agreements for Water Resources Protection

[Watershed Rules and Regulations](#), an educational presentation by George A. Rodenhausen, on May 13, 2015, includes material about the legal basis for intermunicipal agreements in New York, and about a case study of intermunicipal collaboration on the Harlem Valley Aquifer and Land Use Study in Dutchess County, N.Y.

[Orange County Water Authority/Orange County Planning Department – Moodna Watershed Plan, Survey of Different Types of Intermunicipal Watershed Councils\(2009\)](#), is a summary chart with the formation date, reasons for formation, and other information about the structure of a number of intermunicipal watershed organizations in the Hudson River Estuary region and other parts of New York.

The Moodna Creek Watershed Intermunicipal Council's Memorandum of Agreement, and its Operating Procedures, are available at the [Moodna Creek Watershed Intermunicipal Council webpage](#)

The *Moodna Creek Watershed Conservation and Management Plan*, the *Moodna Creek Watershed Atlas*, and other resources are available at this [Moodna Creek Watershed resources page](#)

[Watershed Plans – Protecting and Restoring Water Quality](#) is a guide to watershed planning published by the New York State Department of State that includes material about intermunicipal watershed planning strategies.

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