

Town of Esopus LWRP Monitoring Report June 2015

Community Background:

The Town of Esopus is located on the west bank of the Hudson River, in Ulster County, New York. It covers approximately 42 square miles with a population of 9,041 (U.S. Census, 2010). The Town was called “esupu” by the local Native Americans, meaning “high banks”.

The Town of Esopus has a coastal area that stretches 11 miles along the Hudson River and three miles along the Rondout Creek, and ranges from 2,000 to 5,000 feet inland from the water's edge. The Wallkill River, a designated inland waterway, flows through the Town before it reaches its confluence with Rondout Creek. Black and Swartekill Creeks also wind through the town.



George Freer Memorial Park Beach

The Town’s waterfront is comprised of commercial and residential development. With the exception of the hamlet of Port Ewen, the Hudson River shoreline is developed at very low density, with many large estates and institutional holdings. U.S. Route 9W is a major transportation corridor within the Town, which, along with River Road, provides access to the waterfront area.

There are four New York State Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats located in the Town’s coastal area including the Rondout Creek, Kingston-Poughkeepsie Deepwater, Esopus Meadows, and Black Creek Habitats. These habitats support a diversity of fish and wildlife species. The Town is also known for its scenic value, and is included in the NYS designated Esopus-Lloyd Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (SASS).



George Freer Memorial Park

Public access within the waterfront area includes the following Town-owned waterfront parks: Sleightsburgh Park, George Freer Memorial Park and Lighthouse Park. Sleightsburgh Park sits on a 79-acre peninsula, "Sleightsburg Spit", at the confluence of Rondout Creek and the Hudson River. The park offers public access to Rondout Creek featuring a boat launch, a picnic area and walking trails. The property offers direct deep water access to the

Rondout Creek, and impressive views of the Hudson River and the Kingston Point and Esopus Meadows lighthouses. The park is a designated site of the Hudson River Greenway Water Trail. George Freer Memorial Park, located at the end of Canal Street features picnic facilities with a pavilion, a playground area, a beach and offers scenic views of the Hudson River and the Rondout II Lighthouse.

Lighthouse Park is adjacent to Esopus Meadows Preserve, a 96-acre park owned by Scenic Hudson. It offers scenic views of the Esopus Meadows Lighthouse. Black Creek Forest Preserve, a 130-acre Scenic Hudson preserve offers direct access to the Hudson River. The preserve features a suspension footbridge across Black Creek and 2.5 miles of hiking trails. There are also 27 designated trails within the Town including the Port Ewen Riverside Greenway Trail and 9W Trail.

Collaborations with Department of State:

Since the completion of its Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) in 1987, the Town has worked to advance its implementation. The Department of State (DOS) has awarded three Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (EPF-LWRP) grants to the Town (See chart: Grants Awarded - Title 11 Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program, Town of Esopus).

In 1998, the Town completed improvements at Sleightsburgh Park. Site improvements included the construction of a boat launch and fishing platform and installation of benches. The access road and parking area were also improved. Given this park is the only public launch on the Rondout Creek, it is used extensively by fisherman and recreational boaters to launch their crafts. The fishing platform is also used extensively and many kayakers wishing to enjoy the calmer waters of the Rondout Creek launch there as well.



Boat Launch at Sleightsburgh Park

Additionally, the Town received funding to purchase a mechanical aquatic weed harvester to improve efficiency of its aquatic vegetation control program. The aquatic weed harvester is used extensively to manage the invasive Water Chestnuts (*Trapa natans*) which had choked both the George Freer Memorial Park Beach and Lighthouse Park water areas. Over 35 volunteers are part of a program to cut the water chestnuts before they go to seed, which has

led to a significant improvement in the overall health of the waterfront. With access now free from these weeds, recreational use for kayaking, stand up paddle boards and small boat use at both parks has increased significantly.

The Town decided not to pursue the development of the Rondout Creek Intermunicipal Harbor Management Plan. However, the Town has been working in partnership with the City of Kingston and Town of Ulster on the development of a watershed plan for the tidal portion of the Rondout Creek. The goal of this project is to promote watershed awareness, planning and protection in the Tidal Rondout Creek Watershed.

LWRP Monitoring Process:

The goal of the monitoring process is for the Department of State - Office of Planning and Development (OPD) is to assess a community's consistency with its LWRP and to understand implementation activities and decision-making procedures related to the LWRP. Additionally, this process provides a forum for the community to highlight successes, and request technical and financial assistance for program implementation.

The Department of State (DOS) began the LWRP monitoring process for the Town of Esopus by sending a letter which described the process and a list of survey questions. Subsequently, DOS held a site visit with the Town. Representatives of the Town including Supervisor John Coutant, Councilperson Diane McCord, Planning Board Member Michael Minor, Planning Consultant Myles Putnam, Waterfront Advisory Board Chairperson Catherine Quick, and Waterfront Advisory Board Member Marion Zimmer discussed the responses to the survey questions and participated in the site visit, which was held in May 2015. The tour provided DOS staff with an opportunity to see first-hand existing recreational opportunities within the Town's waterfront area. The Town also had the opportunity to discuss issues within their waterfront area, expressing concerns about the Getty Oil Property which is adjacent to the Rondout waterfront.

Office of Planning and Development Findings:

Overview

The Town of Esopus Local Waterfront Revitalization Program was prepared in order to guide development within the coastal area in a way that protects and preserves natural resources, and enhances public enjoyment of the waterfront.

Overall, the Town has made great strides in implementing its LWRP and increasing the public's enjoyment and access to the Hudson River and Rondout Creek. It has done this through acquiring properties and easements along its shoreline, improving public access, and adding recreational amenities to these areas.

LWRP Implementation

Since its adoption in 1987, the Village has implemented several projects and actions outlined in the LWRP.

- Improved public access to the Hudson River and Rondout Creek waterfront.
- Constructed a boat launch and fishing platform and associated site amenities at Sleightsburgh Park.
- Improved public walking trails including the Port Ewen Greenway Riverside Trails, trails at Sleightsburgh Park and Esopus Meadow Preserve.
- Updated zoning districts within their waterfront area; designated riverfront residential districts RF1 and RF2 in 1987. RF1 was established to preserve the unique character of the area located between the Hudson River shoreline and Rt. 9W in the central area of the town's waterfront. This area is comprised of large undeveloped tracts, private and institutional estates. RF2 was established to regulate development in low-density areas along the Hudson River. A minor technical amendment was made in 1988. A new zoning map was developed and two planned unit developments were mapped in 1990. In 1993, a new planned unit development was designated at Esopus Lake.
- Updated Zoning Law; completed a zoning study in 1994 which included the expansion of commercial districts and adopted an updated zoning law in 1995. Some amendments to zoning law were made in 2009.
- Created a stormwater law entitled "Stormwater Management and Erosion and Sediment Control" in 2007.



Need for Updated LWRP

DOS encourages the Town to update its 28-year old LWRP to serve as a strategic plan for the waterfront. This would allow the Town to incorporate a harbor management plan/program that regulates water uses within the harbor area. This update would also provide an opportunity to educate and train the Town on its responsibilities to ensure that all applicable actions taken by the Town are consistent with the LWRP. A key element would be formal local consistency training by DOS staff to all pertinent local officials and boards.

LWRP Document Accessibility

The Town's LWRP is available at the Town Clerk's office and library and has been provided to each member of the Waterfront Advisory Board. An electronic copy is available on DOS's web site at the following link:

[http://docs.dos.ny.gov/communitieswaterfronts/LWRP/Esopus T/Index.html](http://docs.dos.ny.gov/communitieswaterfronts/LWRP/Esopus_T/Index.html)

Local Consistency Review

The role of the Town's Waterfront Advisory Board (WAB) is to advise and assist in the implementation of the LWRP, its policies and projects, including physical, legislative, regulatory, administrative and other actions included in the program. As part of the local consistency review process, the WAB reviews applications for site plans, zone changes, subdivisions and public work projects in the coastal area that are referred to them, and advises the appropriate agency as to their consistency with policies of the LWRP. The Planning Board, which is responsible for reviewing site plans, conditional use permits, subdivisions of land, lot line adjustments and site development plan reviews, refers actions to the WAB that are within the coastal area. The WAB, upon the request of the Town Board evaluates, in a timely fashion, proposed actions of State agencies within the coastal zone in order to assure consistency of such actions with policies of the LWRP, advises the Board of any conflicts and participates in discussions to resolve such conflicts.

The WAB also assists the Town Board in the review of proposed federal actions referred to it by the Department of State and provides its opinion concerning the consistency of the action with local coastal policies.

Grants Awarded			
Title 11 Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (EPF LWRP)			
Town of Esopus			
Year	Amount of Grant	Project Description	Status
2008	\$59,087.50	Aquatic Weed Harvester Program- To implement its Local Waterfront Revitalization Program, the Town of Esopus will acquire a replacement mechanical aquatic weed harvester to improve efficiency of the Town's aquatic vegetation control program, thereby preserving access to public beaches, use of non-motorized boating facilities and fishing areas of the river.	Closed
1998	\$15,000.00	Rondout Creek Intermunicipal Harbor Management Plan- The Town of Esopus and the City of Kingston will invite the Town of Ulster to join them in developing a harbor management plan for Rondout Creek. The	Closed

Grants Awarded
Title 11 Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (EPF LWRP)
Town of Esopus

Year	Amount of Grant	Project Description	Status
		plan will address protecting existing water dependent uses and accommodating new uses while protecting the habitat values of the creek. Other issues of concern are improving public access to the creek and increasing public awareness of the historical and environmental resources associated with the Rondout.	
1996	\$37,250.00	Sleightsburg Park Improvements- The purpose of the development and construction of Sleightsburg Spit Town Park is for public recreation, preservation of open space, and protection of an environmentally and aesthetically sensitive area. The project is located on a 79-acre peninsula, "Sleightsburg Spit" located at the confluence of Rondout Creek and the Hudson River in the Town of Esopus, Ulster County, New York. The property offers direct deep water access to the Rondout Creek, and unobstructed views of the Hudson River.	Closed