

## Whitewater Enthusiasts Focus Group Summary

Event Date: Thurs., Feb. 28, 2006, 6pm-7:30pm

Number of Participants: 14 people participated with some from as far away as Philadelphia, including canoe and kayak associations.

Process Summary: The group was an open-invitation focus group advertised through the newsletter, flyers and some newspapers as well as specific invitations to canoe/kayak associations. Presented with a series of leading questions, the group brainstormed issues and solutions related to stream-side landowners. Discussion points were recorded on large-sheet paper visible to the group.

Questions and answers for each are listed below. Main themes summarized in the Conclusions section.

### 1) “What do you like best about kayaking/boating/tubing on the Esopus Creek?”

- In backyard/ low consequences
- Accessible, but not too much traffic (cars)
- Scenery, eagles, beauty, unique feel
- Good beginner runs – in comparison to other streams regionally
- Historical uses – swimming, tubing
- \*\*Access – often without irritating landowners (mixed experiences)
- River is in Catskill Park – better care of stream
- Homeowners are accommodating
- \*\*Safety- Route 28 is right there for emergencies
- Scheduled recreational water releases
  - People travel in by clubs – AMC/KCCNY
  - 40<sup>th</sup> year of racing – youth participation & some Olympic athletes
- Welcoming community, good restaurants, lots of camping
- Main resource for area/ Economic Engine/ jobs- especially for youth
- Supports other local businesses-shops, motels, restaurants
- Provides a spring/summer/ fall adventure sports season
- Jobs-guide services
- Can park & play
- Any other stream with releases is 2 ½ hours away
- Many people travel from far outside the area – a word of mouth destination
- Can boat at *almost* any water level.

### 2) “How have you seen the Esopus Creek change over time?”

- Bed Erosion – clay issues
- More gradual angle of repose on rapids – Example: railroad rapids
- Water treatment plant at takeout
- Clay
- More Turbid (from:)
  - Schoharie Reservoir/Portal

- History: study done: siltation in reservoir: 25% from portal, 25% from stream-bed, 25% from Stony Clove?
- Flood events

### 3) “What would you change or improve about the Esopus Creek?”

- More Outhouses
- Picnic spots – “creek pull-offs”
- Steel removed (rails, rebar)
- Signs –should say “river access,” not “fishing access.”
- Who’s responsible for debris?
  - Deal with at low flow
- Boaters should make list of debris spots – it’s done in other streams
- Woodland Valley Project – turn into play feature – (loss of gravel bar)
- Consultation with whitewater community in restoration projects
  - Concerns were listened to, but not addressed in the past
- Construct drops to slow water/erosion
- Ability to request a release and know that amount of water can be expected (problems with races – have had to move gates for lower than expected flows)
- Previous requests for releases – got a “no” answer, but releases were there.
- Have more than four releases per year
- Reliability of stated release flows
- Access – need to know good places to take out
- Some people have been stopped from taking out at the water treatment plant after 9/11
- Build kiosk with safety, education, access maps
- Portal to cemetery – highly dangerous, area of previous drowning
- Landowners need understanding of safety issues – need for emergency takeouts
- Involve congressional/state representatives – promote economic development
- Deerfield River – model for debris removal, has flows to satisfy fishing/boating
- Catskill Park is ignored compared to Adirondack Park (less infrastructure, trails)
- Most conflicts with fisherman happen at mid-day – not best fishing time
- Need more information on whitewater recreation visible to general public
- Need central clearinghouse for general public on kayaking/boating- people don’t know how to safely get involved in water sports.
  - KCCNY – would help with providing information
  - Have liability signs at kiosks. (similar to skiing signs)

### Where is stream debris OK?

- Flatwater
- Need help for major obstructions – suggestion of this help on emergency basis from the Town
- History – Town Tinker Tubes & KCCNY used to be on a permit to do clean up. Are not on list any longer due to liability
- Need to identify property owners and set up “carte blanche” for cleanup permission
- Hazard notification:

- Other rivers have online postings of debris/ stream hazards
  - Also done by word of mouth
- Lack of education available on hazards
- DEC Website does have some limited information
- Model: Housatonic whitewater park has online information

### **Conclusions:**

1) Esopus Creek is widely recognized over a wide region as a high quality recreational whitewater stream for the following key qualities which should be preserved:

- Easy access and emergency takeout along Route 28
- Sense of community and quality travel venues
- Quality boating for beginners
- Quality of wildlife and preserved nature of being in the Catskill Park
- Recreational release flows

Many recreationalists travel from as far as Philadelphia to paddle the Esopus Creek, bringing economic support to the area.

2) Primary changes to the creek as perceived by this group are:

- Increased turbidity
- Loss of quality rapids/hydraulics

3) Major issues this group would like to see changed or addressed include:

- Debris –
  - Establishing a system for cleanup
  - Information clearinghouse on stream hazards
- Release flows – need clearer communication/ reliability of release flows and ability to request them and get clear answers (even if it’s “no”)
- Hydraulics – would like hydraulics to be improved and preserved when restorations are done.
- Safety –
  - More information for general public is needed – maps of safe/dangerous places.
  - Improve quality and information on takeouts
  - Inform public/landowners of emergency needs
- Services –
  - Clearer signage/ maps / information on river access/takeouts
  - River pull-offs/ picnic spots
  - Outhouses

4) This group also showed interest in continuing to communicate and possibly organize themselves as part of the Stream Management Plan Project.