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## **Otsego County Soil & Water Conservation District**

967 CO HWY 33 – RIVER ROAD – COOPERSTOWN, NEW YORK 13326-9222 – PHONE (607) 547-8337 ext. 4

12/14/2010

The following is a year end report for 2010:

As an end of year report, I have attached a list of all the significant accomplishments (whether complete or ongoing) of the District in 2010. I hope you will agree that the District has had a very productive year; continuing to expand into new program areas (Grazing, Wetlands and Streams) and implementing more conservation practices on the ground than we have in recent memory. We also continue to be productive in areas of local environmental education and concern, most notably our Envirothon program and the potential natural gas exploration as well as the new water quality standards and regulations being announced by the US Environmental Protection Agency for the Susquehanna River watershed in New York.

All of the items listed below are the result of hard work by the District Staff: Jordan Clements, John Jackson, Bob Weaver and Blanche Hurlbutt. Our ability to increase the number of BMP's being implemented in the County reflects a growing expertise and efficiency on the part of everybody.

Budgets continue to be tight and it is important to recognize all of those who have continued their commitment to conservation in Otsego County. The collection of supporters who fund the work we do is long and varied, but each is an important part of our work. A special thanks to the residents of Otsego County, the Otsego County Board of Representatives, the Upper Susquehanna Coalition, New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, our state and federal elected officials, SUNY Oneonta and Cornell University, the New York Association of Conservation Districts and the United States Department of Agriculture for continuing to be solid partners.

The items below also would not have been accomplished without the efforts of our local partners. Together, the local network of environmental professionals achieves many more goals than could be if attempted alone. This is certainly the case with the list below and partnerships with the faculty and staff at SUNY-Oneonta; Canadarago Lake Improvement Association; Cooperstown Water Board; Cornell Cooperative Extension of Otsego County and Cornell University; Goodyear Lake Association; Otsego County Conservation Association; Otsego County Farm Bureau; Otsego County Highway, Forestry and Parks Department; Otsego County Planning Department; Otsego Lake Association; Otsego Lake Watershed Supervisory Committee; Otsego Land Trust; USDA Farm Service Agency; USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and local municipal officials and departments.



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Finally, I think it's fair to say that none of our accomplishments would have been possible without the support of the residents of Otsego County and New York State. Thank you for keeping conservation in your thoughts and efforts!

Respectfully submitted,

Scott Fickbohm  
District Manager  
Otsego County SWCD



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### Agricultural Programs and Projects

The Agricultural Environmental Management Program continues to be our main agricultural program. To date, there are over 450 County producers enrolled. In 2010, we enrolled 33 additional farmers with environmental assessments performed on 11 farms. Nine of those assessments resulted in conservation plans being developed. Additionally, reviews and updates to District records were made on 15 additional farms.

Farms with conservation plans can also be enrolled in the Agricultural Non-Point Source Grant Program where we apply for state funding to implement the recommended Best Management Practices (BMP's).

In 2010, the District and its partners installed 1,000's of feet animal exclusion fence, laneways and crossings and developed alternative water sources all in support of prescribed grazing systems funded in 2007. These practices enable farmers to keep their herds from lingering in streams and creeks while maximizing the grazing potential of their pastures.

Also funded in 2007 and completed this year was the construction of 295,000 cubic foot manure storage facility on one of the County's largest dairy farms. This facility will enable the farmer to hold onto manure (a valuable form of fertilizer) through the winter and early spring when the threat of runoff to nearby surface waters is greatest.

In 2010 we were also awarded state funds to assist two other large dairy farms in Otsego County with the construction of silage leachate management systems. These BMP's will capture the nutrient rich runoff as it seeps from silos so that it can be spread in an environmentally sound manner. Lastly, we applied for additional grant funds to begin implementing a wide range of BMP's on 4 additional farms in the County in 2011.

District staff also assisted the farming community by preparing 190+ soil maps for County residents who were interested in reducing their tax liability while improving farm viability through Agricultural Tax Assessments.

2010 also saw the initiation of two new programs in Otsego County; the Graze New York Program has resulted in the formation of a Grazing Steering Committee, several area pasture walks and the development of 5 new prescribed grazing plans.

The Recycle Agricultural Plastics Program (RAPP) also began in 2010 with the receipt of transportable baling equipment from New York State and Cornell University. While the program is still being developed at this time, participants will be offered a no-cost way of recycling their plastic as an alternative to burying or other less desirable fates.



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### Special Projects

From time to time issues arise that don't fit neatly into established program areas but are in our interest to address and explore. In 2010, no issue fit this description as well as the potential for high-volume, horizontal hydraulic fracturing of low density shales for natural gas in Otsego County.

In an attempt to address the issue, the District took on the role of preparation; leaving the political battle of whether or not to allow this form of gas extraction in New York to those better suited.

One items considered critical to preparing for possible exploration on a large scale is the ability to characterize our water, both surface and ground, prior to any potential activity. Along these lines and with the help of the County Board, the District has initiated a stream sampling regime that includes twice-monthly monitoring of 50 streams around the County for pH and conductivity which are both indicators of a variety of possible contaminates.

The District also collaborated with the Susquehanna River Basin Commission to secure a solar powered, 'real-time' monitoring station below the confluence of Cherry valley Creek and Pleasant Brook. The site will be used to collect minute by minute water quality data similar to that described above as well as be the collection site for several grab samples for more, in-depth analysis.

On well water, the District issued guidance information to the public and local municipalities on how to establish baseline water quality for privately or publicly owned drinking wells. District staff are also in the process of becoming certified in the management of the kind of erosion and sediment control associated with construction sites.

Lastly, the District has presented information at a number of public forums when requested and is a member of the County's Natural Gas Advisory Committee (NGAC). The task of the NGAC is to assess the potential economic and environmental impacts that are likely to be experienced in Otsego County and, where jurisdiction allows, prepare for both positive and negative.

With the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation slated to re-release its draft Supplemental Generic Impact Statement for further public comment later this year, the natural gas issue promises to remain a lively one in 2011. Going forward, the District will expand upon the efforts described above, offer its comments as appropriate and continue to be responsive to the requests and concerns of the residents of Otsego County.



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### Stormwater and Flooding Programs and Projects

In 2010 we closed out the Oneonta Stormwater Program. This program provided the City and Town with a digital map of all the stormwater inlet and outlet locations and ‘areas of concern’ within their municipalities. The program also resulted in several meetings and presentations to municipal officials and the public regarding the impact of urban stormwater on our local waterways and in the context of the Chesapeake Bay. The effort was meant to help Oneonta prepare for potential designation as a ‘MS4’ community by the State as the EPA prepares a TMDL for the Susquehanna River in NY in 2011.

The Districts Hydroseeding Program also continued in 2010 with 20 loads of hydroseeding (approximately 6.6 acres) to sensitive areas in 6 Towns across the County. The District also assisted the County Hwy Dept with an additional 5 load project and assisted US Natural Resources Conservation Service by hydroseeding 8 loads on a wetland restoration project. Hydroseeding is a cost-effective way of reducing erosion during storm events through vegetative cover. This practice is especially effective for freshly dug road ditches as well as bridge and culvert work sites. The District was also awarded a grant for 2011 and 2012 to cost share an additional 40 loads of work in the County.

In 2009 the District was given the responsibility trying to address flooding around Canadarago Lake. Through an impressive partnership of stakeholders, the District raised funds to commission a Hydrology and Hydraulics Study (H&H) and a State of the Lake Study (SOL). The H&H, due to be released this winter, will determine if another dam (previously designed) would help the community during a flood event. The SOL will characterize the biology and limnology of the Lake so that a understanding of the Lakes current conditions can be had. It is hoped that the conclusions of both reports will assist the local and yet-to-be-formed Canadarago Lake Watershed Advisory Committee make informed decisions regarding the welfare of the Lake and future stewardship.

On the shores of Canadarago Lake, the District and its partners completed the Bakers Beach Project. This project focused on erosion problems along by installing heavy stone, sand, topsoil and seeding to over 200 feet of shoreline. The partnership included the DEC, local contractors, the Canadarago Lake Improvement Association and the Town of Richfield.

To further reduce the amount of sediment entering our waterways and to protect both private and public property, the District completed two stream projects in 2010. One project involved the installation of over 760 tons of stone rip rap to stabilize 280 ft of streambank along Butternut Creek in the Town of New Lisbon. This project prevented significant erosion of an adjacent agricultural field and protected County Highway 12 and its bridge during a 5 inch rain event just days after completion. The District also designed and received funding to install 3 wooden stream barbs for stabilization of 200 ft of streambank along Otego Creek in Mt Vision.



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### Water Quality Programs and Projects

In 2010, with the cooperation of the Otsego County Water Quality Coordinating Committee (WQCC) the District produced a report that reflected 1 year of monitoring nitrogen and phosphorus at 14 locations throughout the County. The data will guide the priorities of the WQCC and the District when addressing agricultural non-point source pollution. The data will also be the basis for the inclusion of local priorities in federal water quality programs. Additionally, the data may also be valuable as the EPA imposes a TMDL for Susquehanna River in NY.

Wetlands serve many natural functions in the landscape; they reduce flooding, take up excessive nutrients and sediment and increase biodiversity. For these reasons the District initiated a Wetland Restoration Program in 2009. Outreach efforts resulted in 19 residents being enrolled. Work included site visits, photography and all the appropriate mapping to pursue funding. In 2010 we began a Wetland as Buffer Project with the installation of 1,400 ft of fence (excluding a beef herd from entering the area) with the installation of 1-4 potholes scheduled for 2011.

In keeping with our priority on wetlands, the District completed its Wetland Easement Agreement with NRCS whereby we conducted 29 telephone interviews, reviewed the appropriate easement maps, aerial photography and site maps and conducted 9 site inspections to ensure the satisfaction of the participating landowners and confirm that the conservation easements placed on those properties continue to be honored.

The District also assisted in the implementation of two riparian buffer projects this year. The first included the installation of 600 ft of high tensile fence to exclude horses from access to a small creek in Hartwick. The project provided a gate and next year will be finished with the installation of a stream crossing and an additional 1,000 ft of fence. The second project included the installation of 2,500 ft of fence to create a 4 acre buffer on Fly Creek and create an over-wintering area for 50 beef cows.

### Education, Outreach Programs and WQCC

In 2010 the Districts Envirothon Program involved the participation of over 50 students from five local high schools. The local event, hosted with Montgomery County SWCD, was won by the team sponsored by the City of Oneonta. The team then went on to place 22<sup>nd</sup> out of 56 teams at the State event held at Keuka College in Keuka, NY. The District staff also contributed to the NYS Envirothon and the Canon Envirothon by contributing time in the planning and execution of both events.

In 2010 the District twice distributed 2,700+ newsletters to County residents to update them on our activities as well as promote our tree program. The District also participated in several outreach events including the Otsego County Fair, NY State Fair, Farm Days, Farm Progress



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Show, Earthfest, Boy Scout Jamboree, Otsego County Lakes Festival and the Goodyear Lake Festival. Fund Raising activities included the sale of over 22,000 tree seedlings and 1,000 fish to 240 County residents.

Lastly, the Water Quality Coordinating Committee, mentioned above, is a sub-committee of the District. The members of the Committee include local stakeholders who have an interest in maintaining the high water quality associated with Otsego County. While funds to implement projects have vanished over the past few years, the group has managed to rack up some significant accomplishments in 2010. These include hosting informational events on the remediation efforts in agricultural fields after gas pipeline installation, carbon trading and lakeside development. The group also facilitated the Otsego Lakes Festival, funding of water quality monitoring in the County and administering funds for the Buoy Program on Otsego Lake.

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I hope the readers of this report will agree that 2010, despite the turmoil of an economic downturn and the emerging natural gas issue, was a productive year for the Otsego County Soil and Water District. 2011 promises to be filled with even greater challenges, but with the continued support of all those mentioned above, it also promises to be another year of opportunity and active environmental stewardship.

Respectfully Submitted,

Scott Fickbohm  
District Manager  
Otsego SWCD