

Drinking Water – Why Do We Ignore It Until There’s a Crisis?

BY MICHELLE D. SMITH
 SPECIAL TO THE PCNR

In the years following the height of the Flint, Michigan, water crisis, the Hudson Highlands, like many other regions across the country, has seen its share of water problems. These include:

- Newburgh’s State of Emergency, from contamination of its drinking water
- Beacon’s moratorium on building, driven by concerns over water supplies
- Cornwall’s legal challenge to its water supply being tapped by another village

Here in Philipstown we hear stories of decades-old wells running dry for the first time in recent drought years, and wells getting drilled deeper and deeper. Recently, we witnessed spraying of herbicides next to the Cold Spring water supply. Road salt poses another problem in winter. Both the Town of Philipstown and Village of Cold Spring have water supply studies that are more than a decade out of date, and much has changed since those reports were issued.

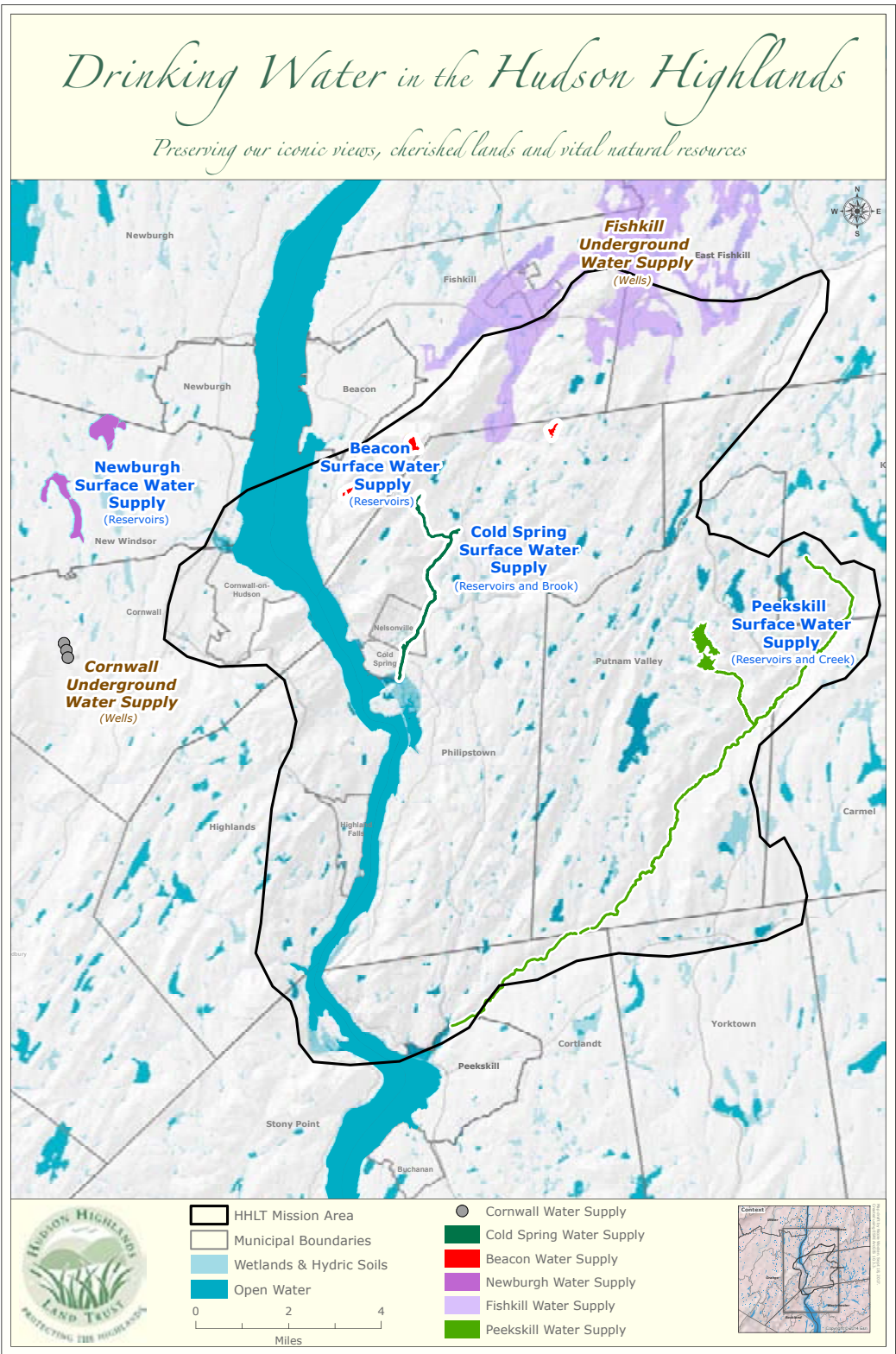
Newburgh’s water supply became contaminated due to widespread industrial activity in its watershed. In other highly developed areas across the state, such as Long Island, new tests are shedding light on previously unknown toxins in ground water supplies, complicating the future of their water supply.

How did something as simple and necessary as water get so complicated?

And why do water issues get so little public attention until it’s too late?

The time to act is now! Right here in Cold Spring and Philipstown, we should be getting our decade-old water supply studies updated as soon as possible. We also need to focus on protecting water quality at the source. This requires a sharper focus on land use in the watershed.

Lessons learned from Newburgh, Beacon and Cornwall



tell us we should be planning the future of our water supplies today.

A Model Water Supply

As an example of good planning, nine million New York City residents enjoy the largest unfiltered water supply in the country.

Why does clean water come more easily to NYC?

It’s because they built a system shielded from forces that threaten most other municipal water sources. By respecting the natural water cycle that has evolved over eons, they built a water supply protected from residential and industrial development, largely dependent on Mother Nature’s storage and filtering mechanisms.

Because so much of the land that feeds its water supply is protected, the NYC water system affects numerous towns, cities and counties well

beyond its borders. Here in the Highlands, the Catskill aqueduct runs under the Hudson River at Storm King Mountain and its chambers appear throughout our region. A large portion of eastern Putnam County, including 40% of Kent, belongs to drainage basins of NYC water supply reservoirs. Development activity there is accordingly restricted. Many of the municipalities throughout the Hudson Highlands rely on the NYC aqueduct as back-up for

when their water supply fails or needs repair.

The NYC water system is unique in its reliance on natural systems to control its water supply. It is also complicated by being extra-territorial, with the need to exert control over land use on millions of acres outside its jurisdiction. Despite these complications, considering the water problems faced by smaller cities and towns, it provides a model for how others could secure their water future.

The Value of Water Supply Land

That land conservation is the most efficient way to secure a reliable supply of high quality water is recognized well beyond large cities like NYC. It is also understood by large corporate water suppliers like Nestle SA, owners of Poland Spring, who now own or lease thousands of acres of undeveloped land across the state of Maine.

To secure their own water future, municipal governments need to start thinking more like Nestle! This requires a shift from the current water-treatment focused infrastructure to one more focused on source water protection. That means land conservation, restoration and inter-municipal agreements on activities in water supply watersheds. It could also include plans to reduce the expensive dependence on tapping the NYC aqueducts.

For example, in our region:

- The City of Newburgh’s watershed lies in the Towns of Newburgh and New Windsor
- Peekskill’s watershed lies mostly in Putnam Valley
- Beacon’s watershed is in Fishkill and Philipstown
- Cold Spring’s watershed lies in Philipstown

Philipstown, outside the villages, does not have a water district. Most of its residents draw from the less efficient bedrock aquifer.

As area cities, towns and villages are updating their comprehensive plans (e.g. Beacon, Cornwall, Philip-

stown), planning their water future should be front and center – both for quantity and quality of water. This requires a solid understanding of what land in their watershed is critical for protection. It then requires continued dialog and agreements with neighboring municipalities and landowners that house their watersheds.

This planning process also requires projecting water needs into the future. Lands on and around future well sites must be secured now to avoid the situation that Cornwall found itself in when a village to the south bought up land with wells tapping their aquifer.

Northern Philipstown and southern Fishkill sit atop one of the few primary aquifers in New York State. These towns should be planning now the future use of this productive and valuable water source. Additionally, Beacon, Cold Spring and Peekskill may need to consider diversifying their reliance on surface water, to reduce their exposure to droughts.

Securing Water for the Future

With population increase and continued development pressures, the number of water crises that cities, towns and villages face will continue to rise. Recognizing this, the more sophisticated players will take steps to secure the land that matters most to ensuring clean water supplies. Our municipal governments must play a leading role here, working in collaboration with local land trusts, community groups and various sources of funding. This work should begin today by updating our municipal water supply studies.

Michelle D. Smith is Executive Director of the Hudson Highlands Land Trust. She presented a synopsis of her views on clean water at the first Philipstown Community Congress at St. Mary’s Church. This piece grew out of subsequent discussions she and PCNR editor Doug Cunningham had about the critical importance of safe, reliable water supplies.

COLD SPRING FARMERS’ MARKET

COME JOIN US

outdoors

AT BOSCOBEL

Every Saturday 8:30am-1:30pm

BOSCOBEL | 1601 Route 9D | Garrison, NY

Reaffirm your promise.

Celebrate your Love.

Anniversary Bands

Explore our showroom, or consult with our designers to express your unique love.

JAYMARK JEWELERS

3612 Route 9 Cold Spring, NY 10516

(845) 265-9246 www.jaymarkjewelers.com

FRESH COMPANY

ARTFUL COOKING / EVENT PLANNING

Seasonal menus, skillfully prepared and delicious.

845 424 8204

WWW.FRESHCOMPANY.NET

The Cold Spring Fire Company

and the graduates of the 2017 Junior Firefighter Academy

would like to thank the following people for making this years’ 15th annual academy a huge success!

Philipstown Recreation

Putnam County Volunteer Fireman’s Association

Dan & Carol Valentine

Amanda Armstrong

McGuire Plumbing and Heating

Dawn & Tim Etta

Con Edison Pressure Control Group

Scott & Santa Warren

North Highlands Engine Company

Michael & Kathryn Ohara

Schmersal Inc

Bonnie & Ben Carmicino

Boscobel Restoration

Cathryn’s Tuscan Grill

Fishkill Golf Course

Joseph Pirraglia DDS, Pc

Kent Volunteer Fire Department

Michael & Patricia Junjulas

Mr & Mrs Paul Bajohr

Putnam Lake Fire Department

Scanga Woodworking Corporation

Valenti Concrete

Eagle Enterprises Inc.

Highlands Skayne / Country Goose

Mathilda Lafarge

Main Course

Ronald H. Richley

Carol Powell

Harold Lyons & Sons Inc.

AAA Emergency Supply

Paul & Maria Cofini

Con Edison Control System Engineering

Carlie & Nancy Norton

James & Paula Calimano

Judy & Elliott Hammond

Maria & Michael Jones

Mid-Hudson Concrete Products Inc.

Putnam County News & Recorder

Robert & Sandra Murphy

Suzen & Jerry Drogin

Pidala Landscaping Material & Supply

Gerelli Insurance Agency

Julia Butterfield Memorial Library

Mr Burleman

Badey & Watson Surveying & Engineering

The County Touch

Luz Mejia

Kathryn Gordineer

B&L Deli

Pidala Oil Company

C and E Paint Supply

David Moroney Construction

Philipstown Tree Service

Karen & Dinesh Kapoor

Maya Café

Mr & Mrs George L Uhl

Pet Pleasers

Robert & Annette Flaherty

Sylvia & James Spear

Carmel Fire Department

Gregorio & Gregorio Inc.

John & Sandra Falloon

Shea Construction

Marie Early

Donna Steltz

We would also like to especially thank the Philipstown Volunteer Ambulance Corps, Garrison Fire Dept, Village of Fishkill Fire Dept, NY State Office of Fire Prevention & Control, Putnam County Sheriff’s Department, Westchester County Department of Public Safety, FASNY Museum of Firefighting and all of the Instructors and Staff members who make this academy what it is!

Thank You!