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## **DEP Launches First Ever Watershed Forest Management Plan to Protect Water Quality**

*Plan Will Make Key Contribution to Protecting the Water Supply and Maintaining Filtration  
Avoidance Determination*

Environmental Protection Commissioner Carter Strickland today announced that DEP has launched a comprehensive Watershed Forest Management Plan that was developed in partnership with the United States Forest Service. The development of the plan is a key component of the 10-year Filtration Avoidance Determination awarded to New York City by the United States Environmental Protection Agency, which allows the city to be one of only five large cities in the nation to get a majority of its water from unfiltered sources. The plan will protect the health of forests on city-owned land surrounding the city's upstate reservoirs by promoting rapid tree growth. Healthy, vigorous, and rapidly growing trees absorb more nutrients from the soil, and their roots help stabilize steep slopes and stream banks, preventing nutrients and silt from running into streams and reservoirs. The plan serves as the guiding document for managing the city's forest resources, in addition to providing an overarching direction for the identification, prioritization and implementation of forestry activities to help meet the critical goals of protecting the watershed. An independent analysis conducted in the plan's development concluded it has the potential to help protect or create over 80 full and part-time jobs on an average annual basis over 10 years, contributing to over \$2.5 million in economic activity through the logging and sale of sawtimber and low-grade wood products.

"The health and vitality of watershed forests are key contributors to the quality of our drinking water," said Commissioner Strickland. "Since forests cover more than 75% of the 1.2 million acres in the Catskill/Delaware watershed area, the Watershed Forest Management Plan will protect the quality of the water supply that serves more than nine million New Yorkers. In addition, the Watershed Forest Management Plan will facilitate sustainable economic development, providing opportunities for loggers and mills in the Catskill region and keeping upstate beautiful for tourists to enjoy."

"Investing in forest management upstream saves money on water treatment downstream," said United States Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell. "This plan will save money, protect our environment, and keep New York's drinking water healthy for generations to come."

Forests in the watershed serve important ecological functions such as soil protection, filtration of water, and reduction of runoff from storm events. During the summers of 2009 and 2010, United States Forest Service crews conducted inventories of approximately 9,400 City-owned land parcels throughout the watershed. The inventories were then used to analyze and assess site conditions pertaining to the health of the forest. In addition to maintenance and improvement of the watershed forest's ability to retain more nutrients from the soil, protecting

forest areas prevents major land conversion through development and clearing, which can have significant impacts on water quality. Carefully planned forest management will help improve ecological integrity, create and maintain recreational opportunities, reduce exposure to forest safety hazards and provide economic benefits to the city and watershed communities.

The plan contains a wide array of diversification, treatment, and conservation methods, including but not limited to:

- Forest diversification to reduce risks to water quality. Maintaining diversity will enhance resilience to disturbance and improve forest capacity for natural regeneration.
- Best practices to promote regeneration to replace declining forest with new growth. Based on age and condition, regeneration plans can also mitigate damage caused by deer populations, pathogens and insects, as well as control the growth and spread of invasive plant species.
- Conservation practices designating special management zones that account for sensitive features such as surface waters, wetlands, vernal pools, or steep slopes. These management zones include specific practices to maintain stability, protect threatened plant species, and allow for local aesthetic and noise concerns.

Since the inception of the Land Acquisition Program, New York City has protected more than 120,000 acres of watershed land—including more than 78,000 since 2002—in the Catskill/Delaware and Croton reservoir systems. Approximately 90,000 acres of the land is forested. The Watershed Forest Management Plan supports several goals outlined in *Strategy 2011-2014*, a far-reaching strategic plan that lays out 100 distinct initiatives to make DEP the safest, most efficient, cost-effective, and transparent water utility in the nation. The plan is available under the Watershed Protection section of DEP's website at [www.nyc.gov/dep](http://www.nyc.gov/dep).

DEP manages the city's water supply, providing more than one billion gallons of water each day to more than nine million residents, including eight million in New York City, and residents of Ulster, Orange, Putnam and Westchester counties from the Catskill, Delaware, and Croton watersheds that extend more than 125 miles from the City, and comprises 19 reservoirs, and three controlled lakes. Approximately 1,000 DEP employees live and work in the watershed communities as scientists, engineers, surveyors, and administrative professionals, and perform other critical responsibilities. DEP has invested more than \$1.5 billion in watershed protection programs—including partnership organizations such as the Catskill Watershed Corporation and the Watershed Agricultural Council—that support sustainable farming practices, environmentally sensitive economic development, and local economic opportunity. In addition, DEP has a robust capital program with a planned \$13.2 billion in investments over the next 10 years that creates up to 3,000 construction-related jobs per year. For more information, visit [www.nyc.gov/dep](http://www.nyc.gov/dep), like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/nycwater](https://www.facebook.com/nycwater), or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/nycwater](https://www.twitter.com/nycwater).

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