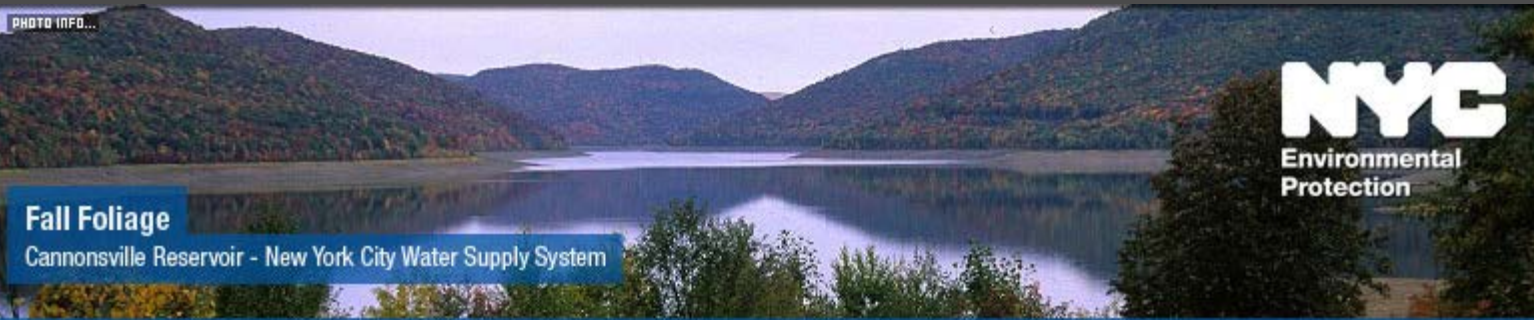




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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New York City Watershed Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Enrolls 1000 Acres Of Stream Buffers To Protect Drinking Water Quality

Commissioner Christopher O. Ward of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) announced today that the New York City Watershed Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) had recently passed the 1000-acre mark in enrolled riparian buffer land.

"We are extremely pleased with the progress of CREP in protecting New York City drinking water quality," said Commissioner Ward. "One thousand acres of riparian lands enrolled in CREP translates into 300 miles of well buffered streams feeding into the City's water supply reservoirs. In addition, through CREP and our Watershed Agricultural Program, we have empowered hundreds of farmers to become first line protectors of the watershed. New York City very much appreciates the commitment of the US Department of Agriculture to helping us in this vital task, especially the many hard working technical and administrative staff at State and local Farm Services Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service offices."

Under a 1998 agreement between New York City and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), USDA offers farmers in the City's Catskill and Delaware watersheds enhanced rental payments to remove environmentally sensitive riparian lands from production for fifteen years. USDA and the City then split the costs of installing conservation practices, such as tree and shrub plantings and cattle fencing, on the enrolled lands. The goals of the New York City Watershed CREP are to reduce the amount of silt, sedimentation, nutrients and waterborne pathogens from entering the tributaries and reservoirs of the City's Catskill and Delaware reservoir systems, as well as promote the continued health and viability of natural habitats and ecosystems in the watersheds.

"The New York City CREP has been a huge success, both environmentally and economically," said Farm Service Agency State Director Ron Robbins. "Buffers have reduced soil erosion and prevented nutrients from reaching the creeks, while fencing has removed animals from the water. Meanwhile, CREP has paid out over \$1.5 million into Delaware County and other watershed county economies.

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Taxpayers, farmers, contractors, and small businesses have all benefited from one of the most important conservation programs sponsored by the USDA."

CREP is a major component of the larger New York City Watershed Agricultural Program, which the City has supported since 1992. Administered in cooperation with the local Watershed Agricultural Council, the Watershed Agricultural Program provides technical and financial resources for over three hundred farmers in the watersheds of the City's reservoirs to develop and implement comprehensive pollution prevention plans. The primary intent of the program is to protect and enhance the quality of New York City's drinking water supply while also maintaining the economic viability of agriculture in the region.

Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) Executive Director Alan White said, "CREP has helped our technical staff and participating farmers accelerate the adoption of buffers throughout the watershed. CREP is a prime example of a voluntary, incentive-based program that is effective in protecting New York City's water supply. The partnership with USDA has allowed WAC to match NYC DEP funding with federal funding to increase the conservation impacts of our programs."