

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

December 7, 2011

No. 104

DEP Commits \$7 Million to West of Hudson Flood Mitigation

Money Will Help Advance Region's Effort to Mitigate Future Flood Hazards

Environmental Protection Commissioner Carter Strickland today announced that DEP has committed \$7 million to improving flood studies and maps in the West of Hudson watershed through a contract with FEMA in order to limit the damage from similar storms and other flooding events in the future similar to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee. This is in addition to \$2.7 million, which is now available for technical support and engineering services to help flood recovery efforts in local partnerships with Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The surveys for flood studies are underway in Ulster, Sullivan and Schoharie County and are set to begin next week in Delaware County. Updated floodplain maps provide an essential tool for communities working to identify key choke points and to focus funding on the best ways to mitigate future flood threats. This is especially important since flooding in the West of Hudson watershed due to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee far surpassed the inundation levels and damages of past record floods. Map Steering Committees comprising local leaders will also be able to use these funds to train their municipal floodplain managers.

“The recent storms have been devastating to our neighbors upstate,” said Commissioner Strickland. “During and directly after the recent storms, DEP provided assistance from its upstate and in-city crews to help watershed communities clear debris, open and rebuild roads, and clean and rehabilitate sewer lines, with in-kind contributions of manpower, equipment, and materials valued at roughly \$1 million. We also have to think about the long-term resiliency of the landscape. That is why these new flood studies will be critical in helping make the communities more resilient to future flood events.”

In response to the 2011 storms, DEP has dedicated additional resources to debris removal and stream and floodplain restoration in the watershed. In the towns of Middletown and Hardenburgh, for example, the Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District's Stream Management Program guided the debris removal work from extensive reaches of the Dry Brook and East Branch Delaware River using its post-flood emergency stream intervention protocol.

Reworking stream channels after floods, if not done correctly, can increase the hazards associated with future floods. The technical assistance provided through the Stream Management Program has helped ensure that stream work performed post-Irene won't leave the region's rivers more susceptible to erosion. Cumulatively this effort includes over 12,000 hours of staff time, 46 bridge inspections, 95 stream channel restoration projects, and over 100 sites where DEP staff collaborated with localities on stream permitting.

Since 2002, the Stream Management Program and its partners have completed comprehensive plans for most West of Hudson rivers, created a network of more than 25

restoration projects, and established local field offices to help landowners and communities solve stream-related problems, including reducing flood hazards, minimizing bank erosion and improving fish habitat. DEP has invested more than \$18 million for stream projects focused on flood hazard mitigation, which is part of more than \$55 million overall in funding for stream management planning, restoration work, and education and training.

The success of DEP's Stream Management Program depends on mainly three factors:

- State-of-the-art stream science (called fluvial geomorphology);
- Partnerships with local experts and stakeholders from soil and water conservation districts, Cornell Cooperative Extension, planning departments, towns and riparian landowners;
- Funding commitments: DEP has invested over \$55 million in stream management in the last 15 years, and helped the Soil and Water Conservation Districts leverage several million federal dollars.

In addition, on Tuesday the Catskill Watershed Corporation (CWC) announced a new \$2.5 million program to remove debris from streams throughout the watershed. The debris removal work will be coordinated among CWC, DEP and DEP's stream partners—the Delaware, Greene, Sullivan and Ulster County Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The Catskill Watershed Corporation is a regional not-for-profit established in 1997 with DEP funding to administer water quality protection and economic development programs in the Catskill and Delaware watersheds as part of New York City's program to retain an unfiltered drinking water supply.

During and after Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee, DEP worked with local communities to assist in the recovery and rebuilding while making sure to protect the watershed, including:

- Ahead of the storm, DEP increased water release rates at its reservoirs to enhance the reservoirs' ability to absorb storm inflow and minimize any potential negative impacts on the surrounding community or to drinking water quality.
- From the start of the storm, DEP Police assisted with search and rescues throughout the watershed.
- In order to ensure that cleanup efforts were implemented as quickly and efficiently as possible, DEP suspended enforcement of certain watershed rules and regulations in its West-of-Hudson watershed provided they are taken in response to Hurricane Irene and are immediately necessary to protect life, health, property, and natural resources and are conducted with easily adopted, common-sense protections.
- DEP deployed equipment and personnel to Prattsville, Windham, Margaretville, Phoenicia, Arkville, Mill Brook, Fleischmanns, Wawarsing, and other communities. Dozens of watershed maintainers, construction laborers, and supervisors used dump trucks, backhoes, excavators, loaders, and chainsaws to remove debris.

- A Vactor truck and crew from the city was deployed to clean manholes in Margaretville as were crews from sewer maintenance, which deployed flusher trucks and rodders to clean the collection system in the village.
- DEP wastewater treatment personnel from the city pitched in at the Tannersville Wastewater Treatment Plant, where a 150-foot section of road was washed away near the plant. They also assisted with repairing a broken sewer pipe which crossed a stream.
- DEP deployed engineers to assist in inspecting bridges throughout the watershed.
- DEP provided \$1 million in funding to help West of Hudson businesses recover from flood damage through the Flood Recovery Fund established by the Catskill Watershed Corporation and assisted with funding toward the repair of Schoharie County's emergency siren system for Gilboa Dam.

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 for the repair of Gilboa Dam and other in-city and upstate infrastructure, with a planned \$13.2 billion in investments over the next 10 years. For more information, visit www.nyc.gov/dep, like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/nycwater, or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/nycwater.

Contact: Farrell Sklerov / Michael Saucier (718) 595-6600