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Cannonsville Reservoir - New York City Water Supply System

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DEP Approves 50th Agricultural Project Allowing Farmers' Use of City-Owned Land

Milestone Represents 100% Increase in Farming Agreements in Past Year

Environmental Protection Commissioner Cas Holloway today announced the approval of the 50th Agricultural Use Project on City lands in the Catskill/Delaware watershed. An Agricultural Use Project is an agreement that allows a farmer to continue agricultural use on land that the city has acquired for water supply protection purposes. DEP has added 25 new projects in 2010, which doubles in one year the number of agricultural projects for the program, which started in 2003. DEP allows agricultural uses of City-owned watershed lands that are compatible with water quality protection. Agricultural uses include tapping maple trees for sap, harvesting hay, and harvesting row crops such as corn, and pasturing livestock.

"Agriculture is an important part of New York's economy," said Commissioner Holloway. "While we support farming within the boundaries of our watersheds, it is critical to make sure that it is done safely by preventing agricultural byproducts that could contaminate the city's water supply from reaching our source waters. With the proper controls, farming can safely take place on watershed lands. Whether it be incentivizing farming or opening up recreational areas for tourism, Mayor Bloomberg strongly supports economic development in the city's watershed that maintains the high quality water relied upon by nine million New Yorkers every day, and this program is an important part of that effort."

Farmers who wish to use city land submit proposals to continue agricultural use on the property under city ownership. The farmers pay a yearly fee and agree to follow certain practices to ensure the farming activities do not pose a risk to the water supply. Farmers can continue to use the land as long as potential risks to the water supply are identified and addressed through careful structural planning to reduce or avoid the transport of agricultural runoff into farm streams. This is important because this water eventually flows into New York City's water supply reservoirs. The 50th Agricultural Use Project is a 20-acre haying operation in the town of Conesville, in Schoharie

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County. The owner will continue to cut hay on the land while under City ownership, while agreeing to maintain a 25-foot buffer between agricultural work and the Manorkill Creek, a tributary of the Schoharie Reservoir.

In addition to the DEP Agricultural Use Program, DEP funds the Watershed Agricultural Council, which develops agricultural plans and helps implement strategies – from constructing and maintaining barriers that prevent manure from flowing out of barnyard areas to buffering streams – for privately-owned farms in the city's watershed that ensure that the water supply is protected. Some of the practices the City helps farmers employ are the construction and maintenance of: barriers that prevent manure from flowing out of barnyard areas and into watercourses; vegetated filter strips that buffer the sediment, nutrients or organic waste that travels from barnyards of feedlots to streams and watercourses; fencing, to keep livestock out of wetlands or other sensitive areas; and nutrient management systems to keep nutrients at a level that provides for maximum crop production but minimal impact on water quality.

Recent watershed protection initiatives include:

- ▶ Last month, the purchase of more than 4,125 acres of upstate land and easements for more than \$16 million in Delaware, Putnam, Greene, Ulster, Schoharie and Westchester counties. Since the inception of the Land Acquisition Program, the city has protected more than 115,000 acres of watershed land in the Catskill/Delaware and Croton reservoir systems.
- ▶ In September, the completion of a new sewer extension project in the hamlet of Grand Gorge in the Town of Roxbury that will help protect water quality in the Catskill watershed.
- ▶ In July, the completion of a new wastewater treatment plant and sewer and stormwater system for the hamlet of Boiceville in Ulster County that will help protect water quality in the Catskill watershed.
- ▶ In April, the expansion of a program to assist homeowners with problematic septic systems in the Kensico Watershed. Failing septic systems are potential sources of pathogens that can enter the New York City water supply. Rehabilitation and repair of failing septic systems improves the treatment of wastewater that is discharged in the watershed, resulting in better overall drinking water. The City has invested nearly \$55 million to help homeowners repair or replace failing septic systems, and almost \$125 million to construct new wastewater infrastructure in communities with concentrated areas of substandard septic systems.
- ▶ In February, the first new connections were made to the newly-expanded Grahamsville sewer system as part of a \$5.5 million DEP sewer extension project that will help protect the Delaware watershed.
- ▶ In January, the launch the Catskill Streams Buffer Initiative to help residential landowners protect their property and preserve natural habitats along stream banks in the Catskill/Delaware watershed areas. DEP is

providing \$3.6 million in funding and partnering with county Soil and Water Conservation Districts for the Initiative. The Initiative is one of the first programs in the nation that targets non-agricultural streamside properties.

Watershed protection is considered the best way of maintaining drinking water quality over the long term. New York City's program, one of the most comprehensive in the world, has been so successful at protecting the integrity of its water supply that the Environmental Protection Agency awarded the City a 10-year Filtration Avoidance Determination in 2007. Since 1997, the City has invested more than \$1.5 billion in watershed protection programs, including nearly \$55 million to help homeowners repair or replace failing septic systems, and nearly \$125 million to construct new wastewater infrastructure in communities with concentrated areas of substandard septic systems. The success of these programs is a main reason why New York City remains one of only five large cities in the country that is not required to filter the majority of its drinking water.

DEP manages the city's water supply, providing more than 1 billion gallons of water each day to more than 9 million residents, including 8 million in New York City, and residents of Ulster, Orange, Putnam and Westchester counties. 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 over \$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. For more information, visit www.nyc.gov/dep or follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/nycwater.

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