

Smart Moves for Smart Growth

By Carole Nemore

SMART GROWTH is thoughtful development, or re-development, that protects important resources, while ensuring economic sustainability. It continues to be a major program of Audubon New York. Last February, the Smart Growth Working Group (SGWG) met at our office to discuss comprehensive bi-partisan legislation that would have five elements: Smart Growth principles; broad-based, community involvement in a collaborative planning process; state certification of local or multi-town Smart Growth plans; state prioritization of existing funding assistance to municipalities with certified plans; and a reporting mechanism for the Quality Communities Task Force to the legislature and the public. In March, Audubon met with Assemblyman Tom DiNapoli, who indicated his intention to introduce comprehensive Smart Growth legislation this year and to work with Senate sponsors.

Also in March, Audubon met with staff of the Quality Communities Task Force to arrange a future meeting to strengthen the partnerships among the Smart Growth Working Group, the Quality Communities Advisory Group and the Lt. Governor, Charlie Murphy, of the Department of State, acknowledged the benefits of working with the SGWG, by stating that "the group helped to raise an awareness and give genesis to the Quality Communities initiatives, and that Working Group members who served on the Quality

Communities Advisory Committee were instrumental in shaping ideas and providing expertise during the Task Force's deliberations."

This year, Quality Communities is focusing on main street revitalization. The Governor's executive budget has proposed \$1.2 million for Quality Communities projects in 12 communities (Albany, Binghamton, East New York, Hempstead, Jamestown, Lockport, Mt. Vernon, Plattsburgh, Rome, Rouses Point, Schodack, and Watertown.) Open space projects, such as the Town of Warwick's new transfer of development rights program (a Quality Communities grant recipient) and the Town of Clifton Park's Open Space Plan adoption and dedicated funding stream are both moving ahead. A study is also about to be released by the Quality Communities Task Force that addresses innovations and alternatives to the "purchase of development rights" that would work in areas of the state not currently under development pressure.

A Smart Growth Conference will be held in Albany in spring of 2004 to feature the successes of local pilot projects around the state, both Quality Communities and non-Quality Communities funded. This will be an opportunity to learn from diverse localities and apply those experiences to new initiatives. If you have projects or topics to suggest for an interesting conference, please contact Carole Nemore at 518 869-9731 or cnemore@audubon.org.

A Stream Runs Through It Smart Growth at Home

By Carole Nemore

I'VE BEEN KNOWN to say that one of the best reasons to live in Albany is what lies just beyond Albany—world-class wilderness experiences in the Adirondacks, Catskills, Berkshires and White Mountains. Within a day's outing, I can hike along clear mountain streams or canoe through pristine wildlife corridors. So imagine my delight when I discovered that I could enjoy something akin to that in my own backyard in a suburb of Albany.

The Normans Kill courses west to east through several towns just south and west of the City of Albany. With rural beginnings it winds through increasingly suburban countryside to its mouth at the Hudson River, just south of Albany's busy port. Here, it carves a deep and scenic ravine that serves as the border between the City and the Town of Bethlehem where I live. Mostly it is a free flowing and sometimes flashy stream except where it's dammed up for a drinking water reservoir. And although it serves as a political border for several towns, the Normans Kill is not a visible community amenity. There are minimal streamside walking trails, no launch sites for paddlers or fishermen, no scenic drives along side it. Typically it garners merely a glance from a quickly moving car window traversing a bridge over it. A few years back, it became a big headache when it flooded, severely eroding steep slopes, destabilizing buildings, and necessitating a key road's closure for many months. For thousands of commuters detoured by its rechanneling and reconstruction, the Normans Kill was experienced as an annoying inconvenience. But when I travel by canoe, I see the Normans Kill differently.

First of all there is no launch site, so just getting to the stream is an adventure. At an unmarked location off a local road, I drag the canoe through an abandoned field, knee high in wild flowers and slide down a muddy, slippery embankment. Typically there's a fisherman or two at the launch spot when I arrive. After passing under the heavily trafficked road bridge, I paddle west against the flow because to go east means rapids and rocky ledges. It is a pristine experience. Herons fly from branch to branch as if to guide the journey. I disturb a flock of wild turkeys flying noisily overhead. There are silent deer, splashing fish, turtles, signs of bank beavers, an otter, a kingfisher. All this is experienced within a narrow tree-canopied corridor buffered by steep banks, fields and strips of forests. According to *Appalachian Waters: The Hudson River and Its Tributaries* (by W. Burmeister), "the Normans Kill is an outstanding water course with much aesthetic merit...cutting a serpentine streambed into the valley floor of a constricted trough... The lovely valley of the Normans Kill is supposed to have inspired Longfellow to create the famous poem *Hiawatha*."

What I don't see or hear is the increasingly congested and fragmented landscape that lies but a short distance away. Classic suburban sprawl edges ever closer to its banks, bringing impervious surfaces such as roads, sidewalks, buildings and parking lots into the Normans Kill's watershed. These hardened surfaces stop rainwater from being absorbed naturally into the soil; instead, the rain is washed away. If as little as 10% of a stream's watershed is impervious, it will begin to impair the stream's ability to stay within its course. If the watershed is 30% or more impervious surface, then the stream's water quality is also likely to be imperiled. And so, inspired by its remaining but fragile natural beauty, I was moved to help protect this extraordinarily beautiful place.

As Audubon New York's point person for Smart Growth programs, undertaking a project to protect the Normans Kill tributary to the Hudson River has moved quickly from a wish, to an idea, to a possibility. In 2003 the Hudson River Estuary Program, a state program dedicated to restoring the Hudson River, awarded Audubon a grant to undertake a stream corridor protection plan for the 17 mile stretch that is most imperiled by development, east of the Watervliet Reservoir in the Town of Guilderland, westward to its mouth at the Hudson River, through a piece of New Scotland and the Town of Bethlehem and bordering Albany.

With the help of interested residents from the Towns of Bethlehem, Guilderland, New Scotland, and Albany, I propose to identify areas along the stream corridor that are most significant for biodiversity, and in need of restoration, and to discover potential opportunities for public access. Hopefully this project will encourage visitors to its banks and enhance appreciation for it. My theory is that if you know it, you will love it. And if you love it, you will protect it. From educating landowners about lawn care practices, to creating a launch site and a perhaps a walking trail along its banks...the Normans Kill is an unrealized community asset whose time has come. If you are interested in becoming involved in a Task Force, please contact me at cnemore@audubon.org or 518-869-9731.

Beaverkill/Willowemoc Update

By Graham Cox

AUDUBON NEW YORK, working in connection with the Catskill Organizing Committee, consisting of the Open Space Institute, Trout Unlimited, Audubon and other Catskill partners, has narrowed its search for priority conservation areas in the Beaverkill/Willowemoc watershed in the Southern Catskills to approximately a dozen sites. Audubon New York's Stewardship Committee members John and Patricia Adams, Jane Sokolow and Ned Ames and John and Mia Wilkinson have shepherded this important project.

Using Audubon New York's and the Open Space Institute's GIS capability as well as recommendations provided by Trout Unlimited, the search for conservation targets has been shortened to a priority list of properties that will be the focal point of available funding sources this year. Stu Root and Eric Hammerstrom of the Catskill Committee have worked locally to ground-truth priority projects. Audubon New York will provide advocacy support in the coming months, as the best methods for conservation action are determined.

The watershed for these remarkable and famous trout streams are renowned in the United States as the birthplace of fly-fishing for trout in the 19th Century. It is identified as a priority project in the New York State Open Space Plan and its 300 square miles is largely forested with limited development. Protection of the watershed is critical to the continued high quality of the trout fisheries, as well as the scenic and bio-diversity values of the region. There is great recreational and economic value to the local economy associated with expanded access to the streams and stewardship of its natural resources.

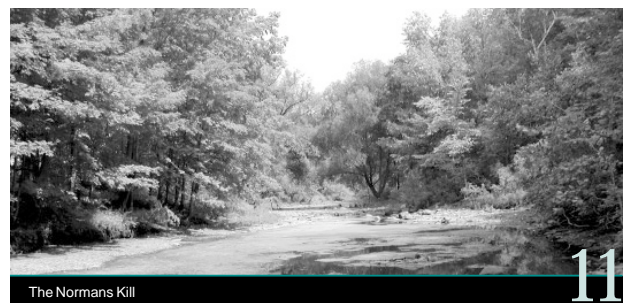
The group is already promoting its priority list and meetings have been held

with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Covered Bridge over the Beaverkill



NYS DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION



The Normans Kill

BROWN THORNTON