



New York & Long Island Field Offices

<http://nyfo.fws.gov>
2009



Congressional District 22: Maurice D. Hinchey

"The most alarming of all man's assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials."

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

Hudson River PCBs – Remediation and Restoration

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) have polluted the Hudson River environment since the late 1940s. Two General Electric manufacturing facilities located in Fort Edward and Hudson Falls, New York, discharged over a million pounds of PCBs into the river. The PCBs are a major concern because they last in the environment for many decades, low concentrations pose health hazards to humans, birds, fish, and mammals, and they accumulate in living creatures over time.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) participates in remedial activities by providing technical expertise to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Biological Technical Assistance Group (BTAG). The goal of the process is to clean up or contain the PCBs to reduce present and future risks to human health and the environment. Dredging is anticipated to begin in the spring of 2009.

In a Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA), the Federal and State trustee agencies are responsible for evaluating the injuries associated with PCB contamination of the natural resources of the Hudson River and determining appropriate actions to restore those resources. Ongoing injury assessment studies include work focused on adverse impacts to mink and birds on the Hudson River.

More information regarding the Hudson River NRDA is available at:
<http://www.fws.gov/contaminants/restorationplans/HudsonRiver/index.html>





Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

The USFWS's Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) Program, in cooperation with the Upper Susquehanna Coalition, a network of New York and Pennsylvania county natural resource professionals, continued applying the Susquehanna River Headlands/Wetlands Earmark to develop strategies, partnerships, programs, and projects to protect the headwaters of the Susquehanna River and Chesapeake Bay watersheds. Additionally, in FY 2008 the PFW Program restored 90 acres of emergent wetland habitat in Tioga County. **16 acres were restored in the Town of Barton, Tioga County:**



Spillway eroded



Primary drain plugged



Spillway and drain restored

70 acres were restored in the Town of Owego, Tioga County:



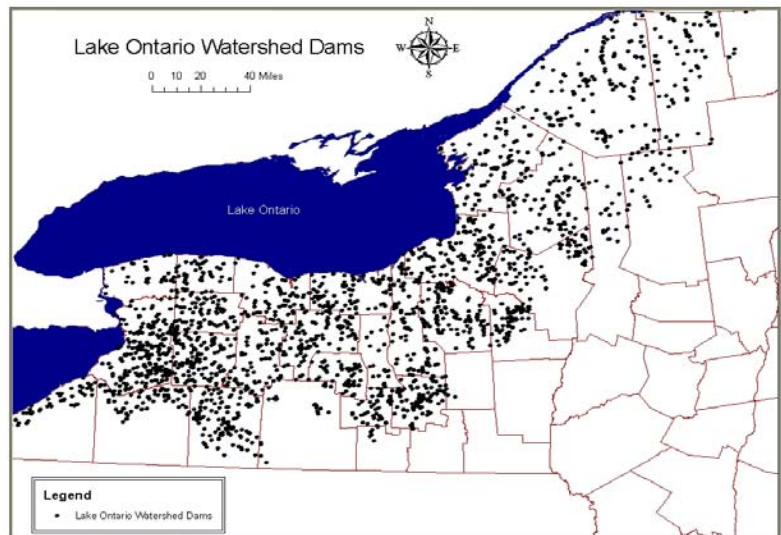
Damaged by beaver activity and Susquehanna River flooding



Beaver dams removed, berms constructed, water control structure installed

Dam Removal/Fish Passage

New York has 1.34 million anglers and an additional 1.55 million non-residents who come to New York State to fish each year. Dams impact fish passage and degrade stream ecology, resulting in a decline in fisheries. There are more than 6,000 dams in New York State. The NYFO is working to evaluate dam removals in the Lake Ontario Watershed and the Susquehanna River Basin. The



USFWS has many programs to help communities fund a dam removal such as the National Fish Passage Program, the PFW Program, the National Fish Habitat Initiative, and the Wildlife Restoration Act.

Upper Susquehanna Dam Removal



The USFWS has evaluated dams within the upper Susquehanna River watershed to determine if there are opportunities for implementing fish passage, boat portage/passage, or dam removal. This evaluation was performed under a contract with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). Dam mitigation in the upper Susquehanna Basin can provide ecological benefits for diadromous and riverine fish, improve recreational opportunities for boaters and anglers, and improve water quality. Of the 95 dams evaluated in 8 counties, 9 dams were determined to have a medium to high potential for either implementing a fish and/or boating passage project or dam removal. High priority dams include the Rock Bottom and Willow

Point Dams, located in Binghamton. These dams are the first dams on the Susquehanna River in New York. Fish passage at these two structures will promote passage of species such as American shad.

New York Regional Interconnect, Inc.

The New York Regional Interconnect, Inc., (NYRI) has proposed a 200-mile 500kV transmission line from the Utica area (Oneida County) to Orange County, New York. The NYRI requested early designation from the Department of Energy as a National Interest Electric Transmission Corridor; however, this has not been granted. Former Governor Pataki signed a law limiting the use of eminent domain for transmission line projects in New York. There is a great deal of public opposition to the proposed project. In the fall of 2008, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission authorized incentives to the project sponsor for project construction, however it is not clear if the project will go forward.

The USFWS trust resources include Federally-listed species (bog turtle, dwarf wedge mussel, and Indiana bat), as well as migratory birds, interjurisdictional fish, and waters of the United States. The NYRI will likely require authorizations from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) for impacts to waters of the United States. The Corps will need to consult with the USFWS pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. Several alternatives which reduce potential impacts to habitat, listed species, and migratory birds, may be available for this project. The USFWS has no official position regarding the project at this point; however, we are providing technical assistance to the NYRI regarding information needs to assess the project for potential impacts. We are also coordinating with the NYSDEC, National Park Service, and Regional Solicitor's Office.

Wind Energy Projects

Wind energy has generated much interest from developers due to Federal tax incentives, a State renewable portfolio standard, and the desire for diverse energy sources. These projects have been greeted with mixed reactions by local residents and public officials. We regularly respond to requests for information on projects located within Congressional District 22.



In New York State, 13 wind power projects have been constructed having a total nameplate capacity of over 1000 megawatts. We are tracking the progress of projects for at least 107 sites throughout the State. Studies at most of the sites indicate low wildlife use. A few sites, however, may be of concern due to the presence of listed species or concentrations of birds. Currently, there are several wind energy projects proposed in the Catskill Region. We will work with State and local officials in the review of projects in District 22 and recommend measures to limit wildlife impacts.



Endangered Species

There are several Federally-listed species within your district including the bog turtle (threatened), dwarf wedge mussel (endangered), Indiana bat (endangered), and northern wild monkshood (threatened).

Bog turtle

The bog turtle is a small wetland-dependent turtle that occurs in two areas in New York – the lower Hudson Valley and in several counties bordering Lake Ontario. The USFWS reviews projects to determine potential impacts to listed species, such as the bog turtle. We are also a partner in efforts to restore and manage habitat for the Federally-listed threatened bog turtle along with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, NYSDEC, New York Natural Heritage Program, and Environmental Defense. This involves control of invasive plant species using techniques such as bio-control of purple loosestrife, manual removal, herbicides, and controlled grazing using cows, goats, and sheep to restore open fen and wet meadow habitats.



Grazer at bog turtle site

Indiana bats

Indiana bats are found over most of the eastern half of the United States. As of the last winter count there are approximately 513,000 Indiana bats rangewide. New York provided a home to approximately 52,000 of these. Your district is home to the largest number of wintering Indiana bats (previously up to 38,000) in a few clustered abandoned mines/caves in Ulster County. These bats have been tracked to spring/summer roost sites in Ulster, Orange, and Dutchess Counties with the majority in adjacent districts.



Little brown bats with WNS (NYSDEC photo)

Unfortunately, there is a new threat to the survival and recovery of the Indiana bat, white-nose syndrome (WNS). WNS refers to a white fungus on the noses of many affected bats. The fungus may be a symptom and not the cause of the mortality observed to date. In addition, bats affected with WNS do not always have the fungus, but may display abnormal behaviors.

WNS has been found in over 45 caves/mines in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Vermont, (and likely New Hampshire and West Virginia) and is killing thousands of winter cave-dwelling bats. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), with the assistance of multiple laboratories throughout the country, is spearheading an investigation into the source and possible spread of WNS. The USFWS is the primary point of contact for the public for cave advisories, decontamination protocols, status of affected sites, and other general information on the syndrome. We have organized surveys for the syndrome at additional caves throughout New England and important hibernating sites elsewhere. We are also facilitating information exchange among USFWS and NYSDEC biologists, through weekly conference calls, and among all involved research labs to avoid redundant investigations. The USFWS is maintaining a database of caves and mines that have been searched in 2008 and 2009 to track new reports of the syndrome. Web pages have also been developed to disseminate accurate information. For additional information, please visit http://www.fws.gov/northeast/white_nose.html