

Stormwater Gap Analysis Report for the Towns of The Au Sable River Watershed

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Au Sable River Watershed

Introduction

Runoff from construction sites often flows into local lakes, rivers, and streams. More often than not this runoff is polluted with sediment, oil and grease, solid and sanitary wastes, concrete truck washout, phosphorous, construction chemicals, nitrogen, construction debris, and pesticides. This pollution can cause physical, chemical, and biological harm to the waters of North Elba, including the Au Sable River and Lake Everest.

Of the pollutants listed above, sediment is usually the primary pollutant of concern. Sediment loss rates from construction sites are typically 10 to 20 times greater than from agricultural lands, and 1,000 to 2,000 times greater than from forestlands. In fact, construction sites can contribute, in a matter of months, more sediment than would have been deposited naturally over several decades. If left unchecked, excessive sedimentation can fill rivers and lakes. This filling can cause flooding problems, destroy aquatic habitats, and negatively impact recreation, which in turn negatively impacts the local economy.

To help combat this problem, the New York's General Permit for Stormwater Discharges requires operators of Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) to develop, implement, and enforce a stormwater management program (SWMP) by January 8, 2008. A MS4 community is an entity located in a geographic area that meets certain population and environmental criteria. Regulated municipalities were notified in early 2003 of their responsibility to obtain coverage and comply with the requirements.

While none of the towns in the Au Sable River Watershed are MS4 communities, and therefore do not have to develop, implement, and enforce a SWMP, there are several reasons the towns may wish to do so. Implementing a SWMP can help preserve and even improve the unique terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat found in the Adirondack Park such as the cold-water trout streams. In addition, a SWMP can help prevent beach closing and generally improve the recreational opportunities in and around local waterways. Finally, the State of New York may, in the future, decide to regulate smaller communities such as the towns in the Au Sable River Watershed. Having a plan in place, would reduce the amount of future work required to meet these potential regulations.

Gap Analysis

To determine whether or not the towns in the Au Sable River watershed currently meet the MS4 required SWMP, the Au Sable River Association (ASRA), under the direction of the Essex County Water Quality Coordinating Committee, conducted a gap analysis. The ASRA examined the town's zoning ordinance and similar documents for any

stormwater control regulations. These were then compared to New York State's minimum regulations for MS4 communities to determine any gaps in the current laws.

Findings

Based on the results of the gap analysis, the following towns did not conform to any portion of the MS4 stormwater control regulations:

- Peru,
- Chesterfield,
- Au Sable,
- Black Brook,
- Jay,
- Keene, and
- Wilmington.

None of the towns met partial regulations, and only one town met all the MS4 stormwater control regulations. The town that met all the regulations was the town of North Elba.

Recommendations

The ASRA sent a report to each of the towns outlining the importance of stormwater control regulations. In addition, sample laws were sent to each town that did not comply with the MS4 stormwater control regulations. The executive director from the ASRA has extended an invitation to each town to go over the finding and the sample law in more detail at a town meeting. To date, Wilmington is the only town to request this service. The presentation occurred in July of 2006.

Conclusions

The Au Sable River is nationally and internationally recognized for its resources, which include white-water recreation, several tourist attractions, a nationally wild trout fishery, recreational canoeing, several rare species, and its astounding beauty. Adopting a Stormwater Management Program is one way to help ensure a healthy future for both the Au Sable River and the towns within its watershed.