

Sullivan County Democrat

Callicoon, New York
October 14, 2003 Issue

National Award-winning, Family-run Newspaper
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News



Democrat Photo by Ted Waddell

CLEM HALLQUIST, LEFT, a member of the Town of Woodstock (Ulster County) planning board, attended the opening ceremony and tour of Frost Valley's new model forest on Friday because "I'm interested in good forest management." Joining him were Doug Burns, center, and Pete Murdoch, both USGS hydrologists.

A Forest To Model After

By Ted Waddell

CLARYVILLE — It's no secret that healthy forests mean high-quality drinking water.

And now the area has one to model other forestation efforts upon.

On Friday, Frost Valley YMCA and the Watershed Forestry Program celebrated the opening of the Frost Valley Model Forest.

"We are not just sitting on the side of the road on the edge of a forest, we are sitting on the edge of a new knowledge," said Jerry Huncosky, Frost Valley CEO, in his opening remarks.

"Over that bridge, down the trail and up the hill, the forest is waiting to teach us all something that we didn't know before," he added, "a new learning that will allow us to become better stewards of the home we call Earth."

The Frost Valley Model Forest has been in the works since the late '90s as a project to demonstrate best practices in forest management

and watershed protection through education, research and outreach. Partners in the model forest project include the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Watershed Agricultural Council, SUNY College of Environmental Science & Forestry, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

Other organizations involved in the project include the Catskill Forest Association, Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development.

Guest speakers featured NYC DEP Commissioner Chris Ward; Tom O'Brien, executive director of the Watershed Agricultural Council; Dr. Rene Germain, representing SUNY's College of Environmental Science & Forestry; Robin Morgan of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service; Bruce Williamson, NYS DEC; and Peter Murdoch of the USGS.

Approximately a month ago, the World Bank and the World Wildlife Fund confirmed that healthy forestlands shield and filter drinking water.

New York City's water supply system is one of the largest surface storage and supply in the world, supplying high-quality drinking water to nearly 9 million consumers (representing almost half of the state's total population) who used an average of 1.3 billion gallons of water a day in 2002.

The total watershed area is 1,972 square miles.

Most of the city's tap water comes from three reservoir systems north and east of the city: the Croton, the Catskill and the Delaware.

According to information provided by the NYC DEP, in non-drought periods, the Croton system supplies about 10 percent of the daily supply; the Catskill, almost 40 percent; and the Delaware, the remaining 50 percent.

The Catskill/Delaware watershed is comprised of six reservoirs: Ashokan, Cannonsville, Neversink, Pepacton, Rondout and Schoharie. More than 75 percent of the nearly 2,000 square miles of watershed are forested, and most of these lands are privately owned.

The 300-plus-acre Frost Valley YMCA Model Forest is situated in the Neversink River watershed and was developed with a long-term mission of education, outreach and environmental research.

Visitors to the model forest can walk a signed roadway to observe firsthand examples of forestry "that balances forest production, wildlife management, recreational use and water quality protection." According to Huncosky, the Frost Valley Model Forest employs two forest management practices, "demonstrating how landowners, foresters and loggers can manage and maintain water quality through forestry": Best Management Practices (BMPs) and cultural "prescriptions" based on a Forest Management Plan (FMP).

In 2002, Frost Valley YMCA and a professional forester developed a FMP with assistance from the Watershed Forestry Program to guide Frost Valley's multiple land use objectives of educational and recreational usage, forest harvesting and wildlife management, while limiting the impact of land use activities on water quality.

In addition, several ecosystem research projects are underway to help scientists understand the relationship between forestry and water quality.

Exploring the forest's role in water quality protection are researchers from the USGS, USDA Forest Service and SUNY College of

Environmental Science & Forestry.

“We created a model for forest management which is critical in maintaining water quality within the city water supply system,” said NYC DEP Commissioner Ward while taking a break during a walking tour of the model forest project.

Dick Rommel has been with the NYS DEC for 33 years.

“Education for the future is the main goal,” said the senior DEC forester. “Forests are important to us because of water, wildlife and recreation – the whole gamut.”

Tim Hoffmann used to be a ranger with the National Park Service (NPS) along the Upper Delaware River.

After hanging up his Stetson several years ago, he pursued a career as a local forestry expert.

During the initial planning stages of the Frost Valley YMCA Model Forest, Hoffmann wore a couple of hats: professional forestry consultant and industrial forester representing Mallory Lumber.

“Education and outreach for the kids is the most important aspect of this model forest,” he said.

“It’s utilizing proven science. . . . It’s a working landscape that provides cleaner water by filtering the phosphates out of the soil and reducing levels of nitrogens.”

Every year, more than 30,000 people visit the Frost Valley YMCA to participate in a wide variety of environmentally oriented educational programs.

“Old-growth timber just standing around doesn’t filter water nearly as well as a young, healthy, growing forest,” added Hoffmann.

For more information about the Frost Valley YMCA Model Forest and/or to schedule a tour, call 985-2291.

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