

# The Forests of Ancram

## Ancram's Conservation Advisory Council

January 2021



Ancram's forests are among its most valuable, widespread, and biologically significant resources. They are vital to the quality and quantity of the water in our wells, from which nearly all of Ancram's businesses and residents obtain their drinking water. They provide essential habitat and services for animals, plants, the human community, and our economy generally. (Town of Ancram Natural Resources Conservation Plan [Ancram NRCP] iii, 19, 28, 29, 40.) And they are also beautiful to look at! In this newsletter, we discuss these precious resources and ways our town and its residents can help preserve and enhance them. Our primary source is the Ancram NRCP, formally adopted by the town in 2015.

### Benefits of Large Forests

"The most effective means of sustaining groundwater supplies, clear lakes and ponds, and cool, clean streams with stable banks are to maintain substantially forested watersheds, and maintain riparian zones [relating to the banks of streams and other water bodies] with undisturbed vegetation and soils. Forests with intact canopy, understory, and ground vegetation, and intact forest floors are extremely effective at promoting infiltration of water to the soils, and may be the best insurance for maintaining flow volumes, temperatures, water quality, bank stability, and habitat quality in streams and ponds." [Ancram NRCP 28-29]

In addition, large forests have values for biodiversity not duplicated by smaller woodlands. [Ancram NRCP 40] "Certain area-sensitive and disturbance-sensitive wildlife require large interior forest areas to maintain local populations in the long term. These

include mammals such as bobcat, black bear, and fisher, and many neotropical migratory songbirds, such as black-throated blue warbler and scarlet tanager (both species, among others, identified by NY's Department of Environmental Conservation as Species of Greatest Conservation Need), that tend to disappear from landscapes where only small forest patches remain." [Ancram NRCP 40] Forests also support intermittent woodland (vernal) pools, which are crucial to the life cycles of several types of amphibians. [Ancram NRCP 35-6]

"Large forests are a declining habitat in the region, so protection of Ancram's large forested areas, and prevention of further forest fragmentation", are crucial to maintaining our community's biodiversity. [Ancram NRCP 40]

### Benefits of Smaller Forests

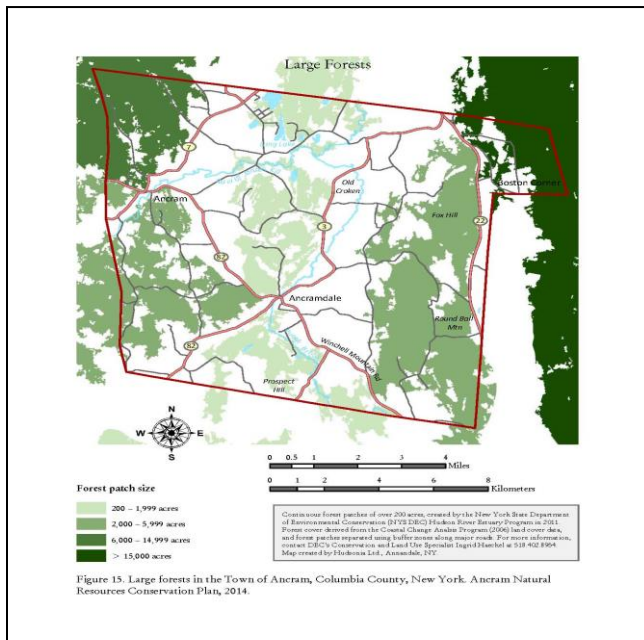
"Smaller forests also have conservation value, both as habitats in their own right and as 'stepping stone' travelways for plants and wildlife between larger forest patches." [Ancram NRCP 40] For example, forest patches along a stream can create a riparian corridor that helps maintain water quality and wildlife habitat, and serves as a travel route for forest plants and animals. [Ancram NRCP 111] "Similarly, wooded hedgerows in an agricultural matrix often provide valuable breeding habitat, food sources, and travel routes for animals that would not otherwise use the agricultural landscape." [Ancram NRCP 111]

## Benefits of Backyard and Street Trees

Indeed, even relatively isolated trees, such as those in our backyards, around our homes, or along roads and streets, play a role in improving the cleanliness of groundwater and air, reducing storm runoff and soil erosion, providing habitat for birds and other animals, moderating temperatures, storing carbon, and improving aesthetic appeal and economic value. [Elmendorf, Chunko, and Harmon, “Forest Stewardship: Backyard Trees,” Pennsylvania State University 2008, 2016 (Penn State Extension No. 14), 2-3.] Street trees also add to the comfort and safety of users. [Ancram NRCP 61]

## Ancram’s Forest Resources

Figure 15 from the Ancram NRCP, reproduced below, graphically shows the layout of Ancram’s largest forests. These include the Taconic Mountain range in eastern Ancram, which is part of an immense and substantially unfragmented 40,000-acre forest. [Ancram NRCP x, 111]



These Taconic Mountain forests “are a primary recharge area for the wetlands and streams of the Harlem Valley”, “support numerous species of

regionally rare” plants and animals, and “provide



Overlooking Doodletown WMA. Photo credit: Jamie Purinton

wintering and breeding habitat for diverse songbirds and raptors”. And “the ridge serves as an important bird migration corridor.” [Ancram NRCP 49]

Other large forests in Ancram include the regionally significant forested area in northwestern Ancram, including the Doodletown Road area, that is part of a much larger forest of about 7,500 acres extending into Copake, Gallatin, and Taghkanic (the photo above is of this area). [Ancram NRCP xiii, 77, 111]

Within Ancram itself, the forested hills generally have the largest expanses of unfragmented forests. [Ancram NRCP 53] These include Prospect Hill and vicinity and many of the other forested hills west of Route 3, as well as the large forests west of Route 82. [Ancram NRCP xiii] The largest forest located entirely within the town, more than 4,500 contiguous acres, is just west of Route 22 and includes Fox Hill, Kite Hill, and Round Ball Mountain [Ancram NRCP 111], portions of which are now part of the Columbia Land Conservancy’s Overmountain Conservation Area. The photo in the banner on page 1, above, by Jamie Purinton, is from Round Ball.

In addition to the hillside forests, the Punch Brook valley, running from south to north in central Ancram, contains large forested areas with important scenic assets, and several significant floodplain forests, as does the area in western

Ancram drained by the Roeliff Jansen Kill. [Ancram NRCP xii, xiii, 76] Floodplain forests also occur in northeastern Ancram, along significant lengths of the Noster Kill, and in smaller fragments along other Ancram streams.



Taconic Range from Boston Corner. Photo credit: Jamie Purinton.

[Ancram NRCP 47] Some of the forests along the Roe Jan Kill and the Noster Kill “are ecologically distinct and possibly irreplaceable”. [Ancram NRCP 47]

### *How We Can Protect Ancram’s Forests and Trees*

The NRCP emphasizes a number of policies to enable our town’s forests to do their jobs for us. Among them, Ancram should protect our larger forests from fragmentation and restore woodlands to link smaller or otherwise isolated habitat patches. [Ancram NRCP iii, 23, 32, 40, 54] Conserving areas nearby and adjacent to our larger forests and existing conserved lands, and establishing conserved connections in the gaps between lands with existing conservation easements, would help. [Ancram NRCP x, xi, 73-76]

Threats to our water resources would be further reduced by avoiding the clearing of trees, shrubs, and grasses “on steep slopes or in areas of shallow soils”, “e.g., during road, driveway, or house construction”, “or along a stream or lake shore for landscaping or other purposes”, or “in the floodplain”. [Ancram NRCP 18] Since riparian areas “with dense herbaceous or woody vegetation

are especially effective at dampening floodflows and holding soils in place”, “broad buffer zones of undisturbed vegetation and soils” should be established and maintained “along streams, and around wetlands, lakes, and ponds.” [Ancram NRCP 30, 32, 47, 54]

In addition, we should avoid clearing our wooded properties of woody debris and leaves, a practice that has a long-term negative impact on the health of the forests and trees. The debris, rotting leaves, and dying wood are needed to feed the trees and provide habitat for many animals including beneficial insects. (For more on the benefits of rotting wood, see, George Wuerthner, “The Ecological Value of Dead Trees,” *The Wildlife News*, December 20, 2018, available at: <https://www.thewildlifeneews.com/2018/12/20/the-ecological-value-of-dead-trees/>.)

Further, around hayfields, cropland, orchards, and pastures, hedgerows including trees should be protected and enhanced to help support pollinators and wildlife. [Ancram NRCP 54, 57] And sustainable forestry practices should be followed wherever forests are used for timber production. [Ancram NRCP 54]

Finally, on development sites, the preservation and planting of trees and other vegetation would help maintain pre-development patterns and volumes of surface water infiltration to the soils and, on properties containing wetlands, reduce the threats to these sensitive areas caused by development. [Ancram NRCP 19, 32]

The town has zoning laws to try to protect the environment. But, as landowners, we each have the responsibility to make land use decisions on our own properties that will respect and care for the ecosystems we all depend on. If you are not sure what is appropriate and would like more information, please contact the Conservation Advisory Council (email Kim Tripp at [ktripp2@hotmail.com](mailto:ktripp2@hotmail.com) to start, and the appropriate CAC members will be contacted and get back in touch with you).

*The Importance of Preserving Ancram's Forests, Woodlands, and Trees*

By preserving, restoring, and reconnecting our town's forests and woodlands, and even by preserving and planting trees on roadways and smaller lots, we can help protect the cleanliness and volume of our water resources, preserve the town's scenic viewsheds and recreational resources, enhance flood control, clean our air, moderate temperatures,



*Overmountain Conservation Area. Photo credit: Jamie Purinton.*

conserve biodiversity, and reduce the harmful effects of climate change. These effects will facilitate every important environmental goal necessary to the preservation of the town's rural character sought by the 2019 Ancram Comprehensive Plan (which repeatedly emphasizes the town's goal of preserving its rural character [Ancram Comprehensive Plan, e.g., 4, 11, 18-20, 36-37]).

*Acknowledgments and Additional Resources*

The Ancram NRCP, on which this newsletter is based, was prepared by Hudsonia Ltd. and the Town of Ancram Conservation Advisory Council with funding from the Town of Ancram, the Hudson River Valley Greenway, and the Hudson River Bank and Trust Foundation. It is available on the town's website at: [https://www.ancramny.org/ws/wp-](https://www.ancramny.org/ws/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Ancram-NRCP_27-Jan-2015.pdf)

[content/uploads/2016/10/Ancram-NRCP\\_27-Jan-2015.pdf](https://www.ancramny.org/ws/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Ancram-NRCP_27-Jan-2015.pdf).

The Ancram Comprehensive Plan can be viewed at: <https://www.ancramny.org/ws/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Final-Comp-Plan-Part-1-with-edit-5-8-19.pdf>; and <https://www.ancramny.org/ws/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Final-Comp-Plan-Appendix-April-18-2019.pdf>.

Additional information on ways landowners can protect their forest resources can be found on the website of the Berkshire-Taconic Regional Conservation Partnership, including a "Resources" page with links to additional information sources: [www.taconics.org/resources](http://www.taconics.org/resources).

The Columbia Land Conservancy is cosponsoring a group of women landowners and natural resource professionals from the Catskills and the Hudson Valley region of New York as a way to foster learning experiences and discussions about forest property: <https://facebook.com/groups/womenowningwoods/about/>.

The Housatonic Valley Association has put together a "Story Map" about the forests of the Northeast: [Follow the Forest \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com).

The Farmscape Ecology Program has resources on our local ecology and the interaction between forests and plant and animal life. See, for example: "Forests," at: <https://hvfarmscape.org>.

Cornell Cooperative Extension has an issue of their magazine entitled, *In These Woods: Understanding Forest Ecology* (Issue 2, April 2020). The issue covers topics such as the history of forests in New York State, forest ecology, managing and caring for forests, sustainable harvesting, and identification of trees, as well as a section on additional resources. The issue is available here: [www.https://ceecolumbiagreene.org/resources/in-these-woods-april-2020/](https://ceecolumbiagreene.org/resources/in-these-woods-april-2020/).