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FOREST EDUCATION

Project shows public that well-managed forests benefit NYC's water supply.

BY JOANNE CASTAGNA

CLARYVILLE, NY

Deep in the Catskill Mountains,

interpretive signs posted along a new forest road guide travelers and relate the positives and negatives that various forest management methods can have on the watershed that supplies drinking water to New York City residents and businesses.

This road is actually a two-mile walking path that meanders through the Frost Valley YMCA Model Forest (FVYMF) project funded by the New York District of the Army Corps of Engineers. Consisting of 400 acres and belonging to the Frost Valley YMCA here, the model forest is a "living classroom" that educates the public about forestry methods that yield economic benefits while protecting the region's water quality.

■ WATERSHED SYSTEM

The forest is part of the 6,000 acre Neversink River Watershed, one component of the 2,000-square-mile New York City Watershed System that supplies drinking water to half of New York State's population.

"This water is potentially vulnerable to non-point source pollution and over 75% of the watershed is forested," says Douglas Leite, Corps Project Manager of the New York District. "Non-point source pollution is contamination that is not directly placed in water. For example, in areas where timber is being harvested, rain can wash sediments that contain nutrients, such as phosphorus, from forest roads into streams and eventually, reservoirs. Algae can feed off these nutrients and deplete the water's



Culverts channel streams and water runoff to filtered areas. Road is crowned and trenched.

oxygen, adversely affecting water quality. There are improved techniques for timber harvesting that can reduce the chance of non-point source pollution."

■ MODEL FOREST

These improved techniques can be learned through public education. In 1998, under the Corps' New York City Watershed Environmental Assistance Program, the Frost Valley YMCA was chosen to be one of several watershed locations to host a model forest as a living classroom to serve two purposes: to educate forestland owners about how to implement voluntary practices to prevent non-point source pollution during timber harvests and to keep forests working so that their owners can afford to pay taxes and hold large tracts of land. Large tracts of contiguous forest-



land help assure clean drinking water.

Annually visited by about 31,000 landowners, foresters, loggers, students and others, the model forest officially opened in the fall of 2003.

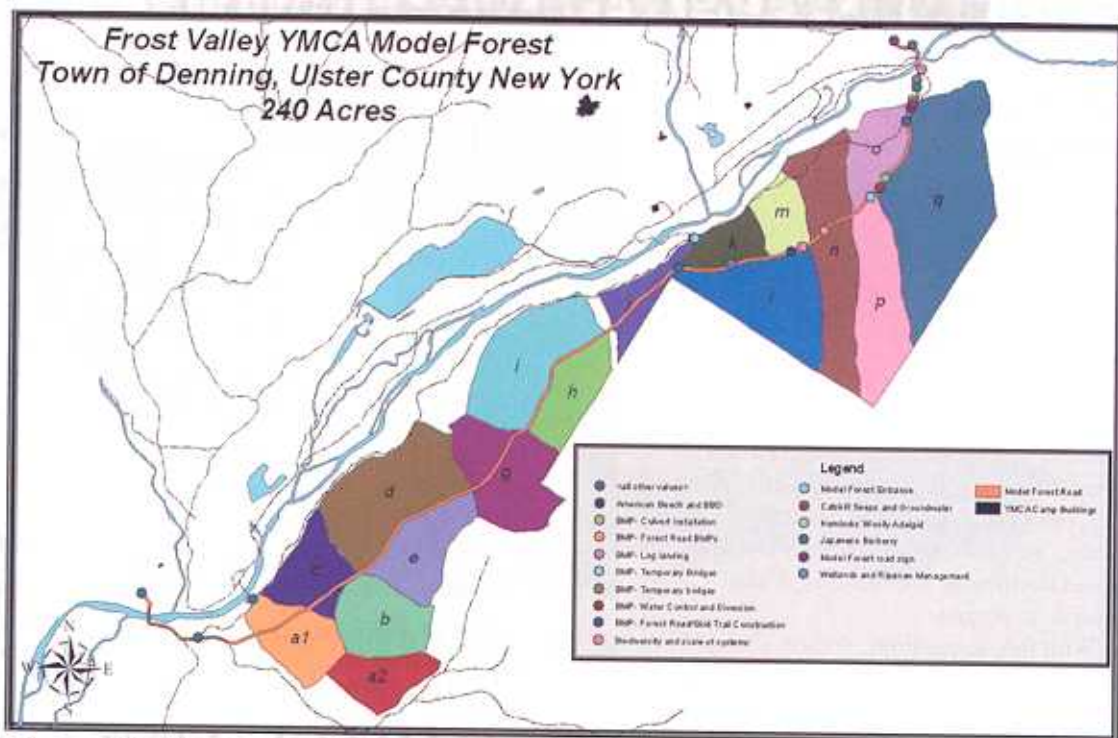
The project continues to be developed by a team comprised of specialists from various partnering agencies, including the Corps' Project Manager,

the Watershed Agricultural Council, Frost Valley YMCA, State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Geological Survey, New York City Dept. of Environmental Protection, New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation, Catskill Forest Assn. and the Cornell Cooperative Extension.

DEMONS

In addition to guided tours along the path, visitors may also observe demonstrations at 16 experimental blocks consisting of 19 acres. These are treated with various silvicultural prescriptions and sustainable forest management techniques that yield economic benefits. Best Management Practices (BMPs) and ecosystem research projects are also demonstrated.

Kevin Brazill, Watershed Agricultural Council Forestry Program Manager, says BMP demonstrations include the use of temporary skidder bridges, water bars and culverts. "Three temporary bridges have been installed to protect streams from pollution caused by vehicles. We also show water bars that are sculpted landscapes on forest roads to divert water away from the road so pollution from the road doesn't enter the water. Finally, we have culverts that are metal or plastic piping installed beneath a road to channel stream waters quickly and safely off the road into filtered



Schematic identifies forest species, activities, demonstrations.

areas," he says. In addition, visitors learn why road layout is important during timber harvesting, about the heavy equipment used and the role that foresters, loggers and landowners play in decision-making.

"Visitors are not only shown how to protect the environment but also how to have more profitable forestry through various silvicultural prescriptions," concludes Brazill. Ongoing are several such prescriptions, including crop tree release and patch cuts, being practiced to determine what effect they have on the forest.

WEIR INSTALLED

Various ecosystem research projects on water quality and timber harvesting are being conducted as well. For example, the SUNY College of Environmental Sci-

ence and Forestry, in cooperation with the U.S. Geological Survey, have set up a weir that collects data on nitrate, carbon dioxide levels, pH, temperature and sediment loads before, during and after timber is harvested. This provides scientists an idea of the impact harvesting has on water flowing through the forest.

"The partnering agencies on this project are truly great to work with and the end result has been a wonderful place to learn about forestry and conservation of private land," adds Brazill. "Thousands of school children from New York City come to the YMCA annually and we are confident that the model forest will help them to understand the importance of forested ecosystems as they relate to the water coming from their taps."

To learn more about the model forest visit www.frostvalley.org or www.nycwatershed.org.

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Both adults and children learn from instructors and interpretive signs. Activities include logging, even if done with old equipment.