

ULSTER NORTH SCENIC AREA OF STATEWIDE SIGNIFICANCE

UN-5 Esopus Creek Subunit

I. Location

The Esopus Creek subunit is located southeast of the Village of Saugerties. It is based around the confluence of the Esopus Creek and the Hudson River and extends upstream from the mouth of the Creek for approximately one mile. It is about 0.75 miles long and just under 2 miles wide. The subunit includes the Hudson River from the mean high tide line on the eastern shore, sharing a common boundary with the Estates District SASS on the eastern shorelands of the Hudson River, and land to the west of the Hudson River, with its western boundary being the coastal area boundary, following NY Route 9W. The subunit is located in the Town of Saugerties, Ulster County, and the Town of Red Hook and Village of Tivoli, Dutchess County. Consult the Ulster North SASS map sheets, numbers 1 and 2, for subunit boundaries.

II. Scenic Components

A. Physical Character

The Esopus Creek subunit is a dramatic landform of steep creek banks giving way to a delta of extensive tidal flats. The Esopus Creek flows over a dam and through a sinuous horseshoe curve, constrained by steep rocky cliffs, before entering the Hudson River. The Saugerties Lighthouse signifies the entrance to the creek and stands at the end of a dike built by the federal government a century ago to maintain the channel of the Esopus Creek. As a result of deposition, a filled wetland and rich tidal habitat spreads to the north and south of the dike, which extends a half mile from the west shoreline into the center of the Hudson River. The tidal wetlands and flats contain a variety of wetland vegetation including wet meadows, flooded dead trees, flooded shrubs and emergents. In addition to the extensive wetland vegetation the subunit contains a mix of wooded areas, scrubby vacant land, and landscaped lawns.

B. Cultural Character

The subunit exhibits a predominantly urbanized land use and is a mix of residential and waterfront commercial development, interspersed with the ruins and vestiges of a rich industrial heritage.

The subunit has a long history of industrial and commercial activity and a close relationship with the Hudson River both in prehistoric times and the colonial period dating from the early Dutch saw and grist mills along the Esopus Creek in the early Seventeenth Century. Settled by the Dutch around 1710 and later by the Palatines, Saugerties initially experienced limited growth. As late as 1811 the hamlet contained only 21 houses.

In the 1820's Henry Barclay sparked the expansion of the community when he established the Ulster Iron Works and the Barclay Fiber Company. He was responsible for much of the present structure of the subunit. The area around the Esopus Creek and the Hudson River developed an extensive variety of industry and commercial activity including lumbering, white lead, gunpowder, ice and paper industries along with an active port which shipped bluestone from the local quarries.

At the western edge of the subunit is Barclays Dam, constructed in 1825 over the first falls on the Esopus Creek. It rises fifty feet above the tide water of the Hudson River and creates an extensive mill pond behind it. A raceway canal, cut through to solid rock to the east of the dam, diverted water to power the factories below the dam on the banks of the Esopus Creek. These included Barclays Mills, constructed in the early 19th century, the site of the manufacture of the first machine-made paper in America (1826) and the first application of the process of manufacturing purified, high strength iron in America (1828).

The dam and the abandoned raceway still exist along with industrial ruins and one vacant building, "the Bindery" on East Bridge Street. This is all that remains of the once thriving creek-side industrial activity. Two designated archaeological sites are located in the subunit. On the north side of Esopus Creek, close to the sewage treatment plant is a site which contains evidence of prehistoric and 19th century occupation and to the south of the creek are remains of an industrial complex including foundations, a stone tramway and

parts of a former iron works. Parts of Saugerties Village are included within the Esopus Creek subunit. The village was laid out as a model village by Henry Barclay in 1827. By 1840 it had become the industrial and population center of Ulster County. The village was originally incorporated in 1832 as the Village of Ulster, but on Barclay's death in 1855 it was renamed Saugerties. The lack of twentieth century growth in the Village has meant that there are few modern developments, and many buildings of historic interest remain intact. As such the Village of Saugerties has scenic and historical value as an excellent example of a 19th century settlement on the Hudson River which reflects many aspects of the broader social and commercial changes that affected the upper Hudson Valley during this period. It offers a wealth of historic associations and an architectural record of a variety of 19th century residential building styles.

The subunit contains the Southside neighborhood, a large residential neighborhood that extends up the slope from the Esopus Creek to the ridge line traversed by NY Route 9W. The neighborhood developed in association with the waterfront industry of the 19th century and includes a mix of housing types ranging from modest vernacular dwellings on small lots, some of which have been converted to multi-family use, to large mansions along Barclay Street and one remaining vacant industrial structure, the "Bindery". The neighborhood contains many buildings of historic and architectural interest. Along the south banks of the Esopus Creek is located Lynch's Marina, the winter home of the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, and a boat club. Relatively new residential development, including some subdivisions, has occurred to the north of Esopus Creek around Lighthouse Drive.

The present Saugerties Lighthouse, dating from 1867, is an important cultural feature in the subunit. Built on massive stone foundations to the west of an earlier stone lighthouse constructed in 1838, the lighthouse directed river traffic when Saugerties was a major port on the Hudson River. Originally placed at the confluence of the broad delta of the Esopus Creek with the Hudson River, the structure now stands at the end of a dike built by the federal government a century ago to maintain the channel of the Esopus Creek. Saugerties Lighthouse, the oldest remaining lighthouse on the Hudson River, is listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places. It has been restored to operation by the Saugerties Lighthouse Conservancy. Limited public access is available to the lighthouse, which now contains a museum displaying artifacts of the lighthouse and the thriving period of early commercial activity on the Saugerties waterfront.

The sewage treatment plant on Dock Street and boat storage at the end of Ferry Street provide an element of discordance, but do not detract from the scenic quality of the subunit.

Boating activity on the Esopus Creek, the diversity and abundance of wildlife and the changing patterns, colors and textures associated with the tidal flats provide ephemeral characteristics which enhance the scenic qualities of the Esopus Creek subunit.

C. Views

Views from the Esopus Creek subunit are varied. Full and partial views of the Esopus Creek and the Hudson River and views of the Estates District SASS on the eastern shorelands are available from Rt. 9W and local streets, while to the west are seen the looming and ever present Catskill Mountains. Often views are contained and focused to the banks and curves of the Esopus Creek. From the points at the confluence there are extremely long views up and down the Hudson River. Views from the Hudson River and the eastern shorelands are of the mouth of the Esopus Creek and the Village of Saugerties. The many historic structures, boat traffic, and the landforms provide an unusual contrast and diversity, set against the background of the Catskill Mountains. Focal points include the lighthouse and several historic structures.

III. Uniqueness

The subunit is unique. The winding course and steep banks of the Esopus Creek, the human modification of its confluence with the Hudson River, and the resulting point of land protruding into the Hudson River with an historic lighthouse at the end are unique features in the Hudson River.

IV. Public Accessibility

The Esopus Creek subunit is publicly accessible via local roads, the Esopus Creek, the Hudson River and the Saugerties Lighthouse. There is no publicly-owned land on the waterfront within the subunit, although

limited public access is available to the lighthouse with the consent of the Lighthouse Conservancy. The Lighthouse Conservancy has applied for permits to build a walkway across the wetland to the lighthouse which will significantly increase access to the shore. The wetlands at the mouth of the Esopus Creek are owned by New York State, but access to this fragile resource is only available by water. The creek is viewed most often by the large numbers of local boaters. The subunit is highly visually accessible from the passenger trains on the east bank of the Hudson River, which offers views of the tidal flats and confluence. It is visible from the eastern shorelands of the Hudson River, and part of the Estates District SASS, notably in the middle distance in views from the Clermont State Historic Site, Tivoli Landing, Tivoli Bays State Nature Preserve and Cruger Island.

V. Public Recognition

The Esopus Creek subunit receives favorable public recognition, notably from the local population, boaters and as the middleground in views from the estates on the eastern shore of the Hudson River. The architectural and historic importance of Saugerties Lighthouse has been recognized by its inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

VI. Reason for Inclusion

The Esopus Creek subunit has high scenic quality and features a positive variety of scenic components. The landform is a dramatic mix of steep slopes, tidal wetlands and flats providing both variety and contrast, unified by the water features of the Esopus Creek and the Hudson River. The low density estate development on the edges of the subunit provide a contrasting built form and pattern of development to the more dense urban character of the surrounding areas. The built development of the subunit features a variety of contrasting designs. The subunit is very important as the middleground of views to the Catskill Mountains from the Estates District SASS, notably the Clermont State Historic Site. The subunit is accessible via local roads and the Esopus Creek and is visible from the Hudson River and trains on the eastern shore. The subunit is well recognized. It is generally free of discordant features.