

2.1 Regional Setting

The West Kill watershed is located in the central Catskill Mountain region of southeast New York State. “Kill” is the Dutch word for “stream” or “brook”. The West Kill flows from its headwaters on West Kill and Hunter Mountains, running 9.5 miles, often adjacent to and sharing its valley with Greene County Route 6 and NYS Route 42, to its confluence with the Schoharie Creek just west of the Hamlet of Lexington. The entire 31.2 mi² watershed falls within the Town of Lexington, in Greene County. The upper part of the watershed, in Spruceton Valley, is considered one of the most beautiful areas in the Catskills.

In 1885, the Catskill and Adirondack Forest Preserve was established by the NY State Assembly. An 1894 amendment to the New York State Constitution (now Article 14) directs: "the lands of the State now owned or hereafter acquired, constituting the forest preserve as now fixed by law, shall be forever kept as wild forest lands. They shall not be leased, sold or exchanged, or be taken by any corporation, public or private, nor shall the timber thereon be sold, removed or destroyed."



In 1904, the Catskill Park was designated, establishing a boundary or ‘blue line’ around the Forest Preserve and private land as well. Over the years the Forest Preserve and the Catskill Park grew, with the Catskill Park now comprising approximately 700,000 acres, about half of which is public Forest Preserve. The Catskill and Adirondack Parks are nationally unique because they are a checkerboard of public and private land; a grand experiment in how nature, even wilderness, and human society can coexist in a

landscape. The entire West Kill Watershed lies within the Catskill Park with approximately 16,182 acres of land designated state owned forest.

A dominant characteristic of the West Kill Watershed’s regional setting is its location within the 2,000 square-mile New York City Water Supply Watershed. The NYC Watershed is the largest unfiltered water supply in the U.S., providing 1.4 billion gallons of clean drinking water each day to over nine million residents in New York City and some smaller municipalities (nearly half the population of New York State).

The West Kill is a tributary of the Schoharie Creek, eventually emptying into the Schoharie Reservoir, which in turn supplies water through an aqueduct into the Esopus Creek, which then flows into the Ashokan Reservoir. The Ashokan provides approximately ten percent of NYC’s drinking water.

The NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) operates this drinking water supply under a Filtration Avoidance Determination (FAD) issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the New York State Department of Health. Central to the

maintenance of the FAD are a series of partnership programs between NYC and the upstate communities, as well as a set of rules and regulations administered by the DEP. Due to its location within the NYC Watershed, land use in the West Kill watershed is subject to the NYCDEP rules and regulations written to protect water quality. As detailed in Section 2.10, the DEP offers a variety of watershed protection programs to encourage proper management practices within the watershed.