

# The Wallkill needs help Water quality report highlights need to clean up river

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**Riverkeeper and Wallkill River Watershed Alliance release letter calling for Governor Cuomo and state Legislative leaders to fund DEC Study**

**Public invited to learn more at Wallkill River Summit March 28**

The Wallkill River at the Gardens for Nutrition in New Paltz in August 2016. Community gardeners use the Wallkill for irrigation. (Emily Vail / DEC)

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Riverkeeper released a new report today, detailing the results of five years of water quality monitoring by community scientists in the Wallkill River, showing that 87 percent of samples have failed to meet federal guidelines for safe swimming.

The report's finding will be presented as part of the Wallkill River Summit at on Tuesday, March 28, at 5 p.m. at SUNY New Paltz Student Union Building, Multipurpose Room. The public is encouraged to attend.

The release of the report coincides with the sending of a letter requesting state funding for a critical Wallkill River water quality study that will help to provide a roadmap for most efficiently reducing pollution. Riverkeeper and the Wallkill River Watershed Alliance sent the letter to Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the leaders of the New York State Assembly and Senate, Speaker Carl E. Heastie and Majority Leader John J. Flanagan. Several municipalities and elected leaders in the region have expressed support for the study.

Dan Shapley, Riverkeeper's Water Quality Program Director, said: "The data gathered by community scientists, and the Harmful Algal Bloom that affected 30 miles of the river for 60 days last summer, show that the Wallkill needs help. The DEC study needs funding so we can begin to prioritize ways to reduce pollution and restore the river to health. There's something for everyone to do to help, and I hope people concerned about the river will join us at the Wallkill River Summit March 28."

## **Key findings of Riverkeeper's Water Quality Report**

Community scientists sample 24 sites on 85 miles of the Wallkill River, from its source at Lake Mohawk in Sussex County, N.J., to its confluence with the Rondout Creek in Ulster County, N.Y. Riverkeeper measures concentration of the fecal indicator bacteria *Enterococcus* (Enterococcus) using EPA-approved methods. Results are reported in Enterococcus count per 100 mL of water. Enterococcus is present in

the guts of warm-blooded animals, and while it is used to detect the likely presence of untreated human sewage, in some cases it may also indicate the presence of fecal contamination from geese, cattle or other animals. Riverkeeper measures results of water samples based on the EPA's Recreational Water Quality Criteria, which New York State is currently using to update state Water Quality Standards.

- 87 percent of 685 samples taken from the Wallkill watershed fail to meet Environmental Protection guidelines for safe swimming or other recreational activities where ingestion of water or full body contact is likely.
- Average levels of contamination (as measured by the geometric mean, a type of average) are more than 10 times the EPA safe swimming criterion (Wallkill Entero count of 380.7 vs. EPA criterion of 30).
- Contamination levels vary from place to place, but are elevated throughout the river's course, indicating the need for action to reduce contamination from multiple sources in multiple communities.
- The Wallkill is particularly affected by rain, demonstrating the most profound worsening of water quality from rain-related contamination of any tributary studied by Riverkeeper to date. This points to the need to reduce stormwater runoff in cities and villages, and on farms.

### **About the Wallkill River Summit**

The Wallkill River Summit will bring together scientists, agencies, elected officials and the public to learn about the Wallkill River and what we can do to contribute to its restoration. The summit will cover topics including flooding, fishing, and the proposed Pilgrim oil pipelines with a focus on water quality.

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