

## A voyage of discovery launches on the Wallkill River

By John DeSanto / For the Times Herald-Record

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We all know the Wallkill River.

Heck, many of us cross it on bridges just about every day.

But do we really know the problems and conflicting interests of what flows beneath?

Yes, it starts as a very small stream flowing out of Lake Mohawk in Sparta, N.J. and meanders northward. Which in itself makes it unique, since very few rivers flow north between two major rivers flowing south.

So that's different.

And it's also one of the few rivers that is captured by a creek – the Rondout – before the combined waters reach the Hudson River near Kingston.

So that's pretty cool.

It's 88 miles long and drains 785 square miles, including a large swath of Orange County, a goodly portion of Ulster County and a small part of Sullivan County.

It passes through 48 municipalities on its way to the Hudson and has 69 tributaries in New York state.

One of the first steps towards cleaning up the river occurred in 1998 when the Wallkill River Conference was held at Orange County Community College in 1998, sponsored by the Orange County Land Trust.

Another conference was held in April 2015, this time at SUNY New Paltz, and the Wallkill River Watershed Alliance was formed out of that meeting.

But today, eating fish from the Wallkill is still not recommended, and bathing in its waters can be hazardous to your health.

Progress on cleaning the river has been stop-and-go, partially because there are so many competing interests and municipal jurisdictions.

Fifteen years ago, Times Herald-Record reporter Greg Cannon slid his kayak down the muddy banks of the Wallkill River and began paddling north, writing about his findings in a series of articles.

Tomorrow I will begin a week-long sojourn on the Wallkill in an attempt to recreate that trip. I've invited many experts from several different organizations to join me on the paddle.

While I'm not exactly sure what will happen during this voyage of discovery, readers of this newspaper will certainly be the first to know.

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