

# Awakening Awareness and Understanding of the New York City Watershed

by *Diane Galusha*

The smallest program run by the Catskill Watershed Corporation (CWC) is perhaps its most important. The Watershed Education Program is all about the future, its intent to awaken young people to the wonders of water and instill in them a sense of responsibility for its long-term protection.

In partnership with the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the CWC provides grants to schools and nonprofit organizations in the five-county New York City Watershed west of the Hudson River, and in the five boroughs of New York City.

The grants – 282 since 1998 – fund water-related classroom projects, field trips to environmental education centers, student research, curriculum development, teacher training, cultural programs and other initiatives. While the CWC does not itself run education programs, it provides the funds for schools and groups to either devise their own programs, or to secure some of the many programs offered by other organizations, from the Catskill Center and Trout Unlimited to the Audubon Society and the Council for the Environment of New York City.

Students raise trout in their classrooms and release them in watershed streams. They collect invertebrates and test water samples. They learn about watershed history and culture through theater, story and song. They plant trees to prevent erosion, build watershed models, and visit the big, pristine lakes that supply millions of people with water every day.

The purpose of the program is to increase awareness and understanding of the human and natural history of New York City Watershed West, the development and operation of the City's reservoirs and water supply system, the diversity and importance of aquatic and terrestrial life in the watershed and the importance of preserving and conserving water.

A major aim of the grants program is to promote communication

and understanding between upstate water stewards and downstate water consumers who are connected by this remarkable water system, and dependent on clean water for mutual survival. Through grant programs offered by both the CWC and the Watershed Agricultural Council ([www.nycwatershed.org](http://www.nycwatershed.org)), upstate and downstate teachers bring their students together so that they might learn from each other.

A 13-member advisory group of educators and agency representatives reviews grant proposals and recommends projects for funding to the CWC Board of Directors. Recommended proposals must be approved by the CWC and by the DEP.

The CWC staff serves on several public information and education committees at work throughout the Catskill-Delaware Watershed to spread the word about water resource issues through festivals and special events, stream management projects and community planning efforts. The CWC is also involved in development of the Water Discovery Center ([www.waterdiscoverycenter.org](http://www.waterdiscoverycenter.org)), a world-class education and exhibition facility dedicated to understanding global water problems and solutions.

For more information on the CWC's education efforts, go to [www.cwconline.org](http://www.cwconline.org). Many other education programs are detailed at the Catskill-New York City Watershed Educators Network website, [www.watershededucators.org](http://www.watershededucators.org).

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*Photo by City Parks Foundation, courtesy CWC*

Teachers are also learners in professional development programs supported by CWC education grants. This group is studying forest and plant life in a New York City park.



*Photo by Trish Adams, courtesy CWC*

An older student and a pre-school youngster share the wonders of a net dipped into a tributary of the East Branch of the Delaware River in a watershed learning project funded by the CWC's Education Program.