

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Office of the Regional Director, Region 3 – Hudson Valley Catskills
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August 26, 2019

Janine King, Village Manager
Stanley H. Kellerhouse Municipal Building
One Van Wyck Street
Croton-on-Hudson, NY 10520-2501

RE: Croton Gorge Unique Area

Dear Village Manager King:

Thank you for your continued interest in the Croton Gorge Unique Area and for providing your recent request for funding. It was a pleasure to meet with you and the rest of the Croton River Task Force on August 6, 2019 to hear the collective concerns first hand. The Department appreciates the continued efforts you and other members of the Croton River Task Force have made to the Unique Area and the surrounding properties.

During the conference call with DEC staff in February 2019, we discussed working together to develop a stewardship program. The Village's funding request included an annual stewardship program as well as funding to offset law enforcement overtime costs to the municipalities. In addition, a request was made for a one time grant of \$80,000 to \$100,000 for the purchase of an appropriate watercraft for police enforcement. As previously indicated, the Department supports an increased presence on busy summer weekends and has been sending DEC Forest Rangers and Environmental Conservation Officers to the Unique Area. However, the Department does not have the ability to transfer this type of funding to another municipality.

While the Department cannot accommodate your specific funding requests, please note that the Department plans to implement the following additional measures immediately at the Unique Area to address the ongoing concerns raised during our meeting:

1. Refuse cleanup and removal

Department staff will be working with Town of Cortlandt Department of Environmental Services (Stephen J. Ferreira) on several joint refuse collection and removal event. Staff from our Lands and Forest and Operations will be onsite the following dates:

Monday August 26th

Tuesday September 3rd

Monday September 9th



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During these events, staff will collect any refuse left at the Unique Area, place in bags carry out of the gorge and place near the Town parking lot. Upon completion for the day, DEC staff will alert Town DPW head Stephan Ferreira so that his staff can collect and dispose of any refuse collected. The plan would be for the Town to collect refuse on the same day if possible to limit wildlife encounters. Please note that the above schedule is for the remainder of 2019. A long term schedule or schedule for 2020 have not yet been developed, but is being considered.

2. Volunteer Stewardship Agreement

The Department has entered into a Volunteer Stewardship Agreement (VSA) with Diane Alden, a member of the Croton River Task Force. This VSA will run from August 23, 2019 until December 31, 2020. Primary activities covered under the VSA include garbage collection and educational efforts to visitors to the Unique Area. The VSA also includes assistance from the Department with regard the removal of any refuse collected by the volunteer.

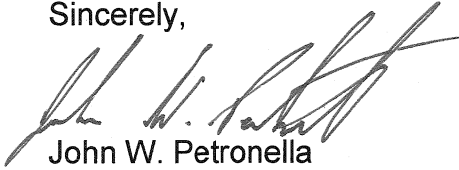
In addition to the above measures, Environmental Conservation Officers and Forest Rangers will continue to have a presence at the Unique Area on weekends, when visitor use is at higher levels and when complaints are received. Additionally, a forester from DEC's Division of Lands and Forests will continue to visit the facility to routinely check on signage, and the kiosk we share with the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation that manages the contiguous lands known as the Old Croton Aqueduct.

Please also note that Department is continuing to evaluate a long-term stewardship agreement and funding to provide seasonal stewards during the summer of 2020. These stewards would provide an educational and interpretive role at the Unique Area. The Department has similar agreements in place with other organizations like the Trail Conference and have seen success at some of our other high use areas.

Regarding the collection of water samples and testing for Fecal Coliform and the requests to the Department to temporarily close the Unique Area, we defer to the Westchester County Department of Health (WCDOH). Should the WCDOH provide any warnings or advisories on the potential health impacts of swimming or contact with impacted water, the Department will post on our property and the kiosk located on NY State Parks property with their permission, to alert visitors of the potential risk.

The Department recognizes that these measures are temporary in nature and a long term solution will need to be developed with all involved parties moving forward. The Department is committed to a continued dialogue with local communities on ways we can work together to make this property an even better place for the public to enjoy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John W. Petronella". The signature is stylized and cursive.

John W. Petronella
Acting Regional Director

Cc Delroy Taylor, Westchester County DoH
Mayor Brian Pugh, Village of Croton on Hudson
Dana Levenburg, T. Ossining Supervisor
Linda Puglisi, T. Cortlandt Supervisor
Diane Alden
Linda Cooper, NYS OPRHP