

Roosevelt Vanderbilt National Historic Site Hydrologic Trip Report
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Subject: Roosevelt Vanderbilt National Historic Site (ROVA) was visited on 27 June 2003. This visit was made to provide a familiarity with ROVA hydrologic resources, specifically the historic Val-Kill Pond. David Hayes, ROVA Natural Resource Specialist, provided a two hour tour of the facilities.

Val-Kill Pond

Restoration of Val-Kill Pond at Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site is currently in the planning and environmental compliance phase. The park would like to dredge the pond to provide a scene reminiscent of the late 1950's when Eleanor Roosevelt resided in this area. Three firms have reportedly been identified to prepare NEPA compliance documentation along with plans and specifications for the proposed action. The park is also working on a landscape plan to remove tall vegetation along the periphery of the pond in order to restore the open pond views enjoyed by Roosevelt. The original work order for NEPA compliance was previously reviewed and commented on by the regional hydrologist who is available for consultation as needed as these plans progress.

The pond was created by damming the Fall-Kill, a slow moving low gradient stream. The headwaters for the Fall-Kill are in Clinton, NY and it discharges to the Hudson River. The pond has filled in over time due to siltation and vegetative growth. Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), which is an invasive specie, is prolific in the pond. The large number of Canadian geese (*Branta canadensis*) in the vicinity of the pond has become a nuisance for the park. The NY threatened Blandings Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingi*) has been noted in the park area near the pond.

The current status of the pond is typical of dammed areas, which are prone to sedimentation and successive vegetative growth over time if not periodically maintained, e.g. dredging. Purple loosestrife is generally considered undesirable in northeast US wetlands and should be removed; however, this plant was apparently found during Roosevelt's time as she had commented on the beauty of the purple flowers in the area. Given the presumed presence of loosestrife during the Eleanor Roosevelt era, the park may wish to retain a controlled population for interpretive purposes. Controls on the Canadian goose population should be established to protect water quality. Habitat for the Blandings Turtle should be encouraged while attempting to provide the park's interpretive mandate. This may include retaining part of the current near shore vegetation in lieu of providing unadulterated vistas. Researchers at the NPS Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area (DEWA) are currently studying DEWA turtle populations and may provide a good resource for examining the needs of turtles

at ROVA. Christina Costellano has agreed to be available for assistance with turtle questions if so desired (Expansa@aol.com phone: 914-576-2354).

General Observations

Ponds throughout the ROVA area will experience the same fate as the one at Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site over time. Maintenance of these facilities should be considered proactively if this is an undesirable result.

Water resource values should be mapped and documented. A technical description of wetlands, streams, and vernal pools would provide information on habitat and functional values of these systems.

The Hudson River is the significant water body in this area. Activities supporting River enhancement and protection should be continued. Park watershed protection supports this goal. Continued monitoring of streams flowing to the Hudson River from park lands provides documentation of appropriate land use management techniques and will provide an early indication of potential stream degradation.

The area surrounding these park units is heavily pressured by urbanization. Potential impacts to the parks may include septic input to surface and groundwater, potential transportation spills, and increased impermeable area. Park staff is encouraged to stay abreast of development and water management issues in the area. Routine water quality monitoring should continue with established standard operating procedures in order to assess changes in water quality and quantity. This data should be reviewed on a regular basis.

The 1997 Water Resources Management Plan details issues and recommendations for water management in the ROVA parks. While the visit to the parks was brief, it appears that this report remains pertinent to the parks' water issues.