

ASHOKAN RESERVOIR

PROTECTING DRINKING WATER

Ashokan Reservoir is part of the largest unfiltered drinking water system in the United States. The reservoir system sustains nearly 10 million people in New York City and the Hudson Valley. To keep the water clean, New York City collaborates with public and nonprofit groups to preserve open space, maintain wastewater treatment infrastructure, runoff from local farms, and protect the health of streams, forests and wetlands. These efforts in the Catskills are considered a worldwide model for protecting drinking water at its source. Because the water is delivered to consumers without filtration, public access to Ashokan Reservoir and its lands are carefully balanced with the need to protect water quality. That is why visitors are reminded to carefully follow all the rules of the trail.

Scientists from the New York City Department of Environmental Protection collect and analyze thousands of samples from the reservoir system each year, including tests for approximately 250

parameters. Their work is complemented by a network of robotic monitoring stations that collect more than 1 million measurements each year. These intensive protection and monitoring programs make the reservoirs some of the most carefully studied bodies of water in the world. From this vantage point, a buoy marking one of these monitoring stations is seasonally visible.

Sampling at monitoring buoy



Ashokan Reservoir construction, ca. 1906

BUILDING THE RESERVOIR

Ashokan Reservoir (constructed 1907–1915) tripled the amount of water accessible to fast-growing New York City. The Catskill region was ideal for new reservoirs because its streams carried an abundance of high-quality water that could be delivered to the City by gravity alone. Ashokan Reservoir was uniquely designed with two basins to manage fine silt and clay that was deposited by glaciers when they carved out the eastern Catskills. Water from the Esopus Creek enters the west basin where suspended particles can settle. The water then passes through a dividing weir into the east basin. Water from Ashokan Reservoir is delivered to New York City through the 92-mile Catskill Aqueduct. The 128-billion-gallon reservoir was the centerpiece of the Catskill Water Supply System, which is considered a marvel of modern engineering.