

In the Sourlands

Recycle the Rain

By Caroline Katmann

*Rain, rain go away,
Come again some other day.
We want to go outside and play,
Come again some other day.*

This is one of the many rhymes I remember from my childhood in Brooklyn. Perhaps it was popular elsewhere, too, but we young city dwellers really disliked the rain – it pooled on the sidewalks making roller skating difficult. The slick stoops were not viable for a good game of stoop ball. Often, rainy days meant remaining cooped up in your apartment building after school.

These days, I don't think any of us would be calling for the rain to go away but this rhyme came to mind recently while thinking about the challenges we have when it comes to protecting water, here in the Sourlands. The clay soils and hard rocks of the Mountain bring city sidewalks and paved streets to mind. Rainfall and snowmelt are not easily absorbed here, creating increased storm water runoff and poor recharge of groundwater. In addition to the challenges of the Sourland geology, impervious surfaces in the region - pavements, buildings and even lawns - limit groundwater recharge. It does not take an extended or severe drought to cause water shortages here. This is why residents of the Sourlands should practice water conservation, every day.

Approximately two thirds of the Sourland streams flow into the Raritan River, while the remainder flow west into the Delaware River. Several headwater streams begin their journey as springs on top of the Mountain and flow down to larger streams such as Alexauken Creek, Fiddler's Creek, Moore's Creek, Rock Brook, Beden's Brook, Stony Brook, the Neshanic River and the Millstone River. The Sourland headwater streams and their associated ponds and wetlands are also linked to underlying aquifers. While most of the larger Sourland streams flow year-round, some of these headwater streams maintain flow only during snow melt or after significant rainfall and cease to flow during dry periods, leaving isolated pools of water.

Property owners in the Sourland Region can play a major role in protecting and improving both water quality and water quantity by simply maintaining a natural buffer area of native trees, shrubs, and grasses along their stream and wetland areas. These are called "riparian buffers." The more "natural" the buffer area, the more it can perform its critical functions, which are to stabilize stream banks, absorb water and allow it to seep into the ground, filter out sediment

and other pollutants from storm water runoff, shade and cool the stream, provide organic debris for the stream's food chain and reduce flooding. Another important way to protect water quality is to limit the use of chemicals in your home and on your property. Both groundwater and surface water can be seriously affected by lawn and garden chemicals, such as fertilizers and pesticides. Harsh household products, such as bleach and solvents, are another source of pollution. Residents have a direct impact on the health of the ecosystems of which they are a part! Avoiding or minimizing the use of these products will help protect your well and the other waters of the Sourlands. Alternative practices and products are effective and often less expensive. Nontoxic household cleaners work well. For more information about water in the Sourlands, visit www.sourland.org.

Practice conservation in your own backyard with these stewardship recommendations:

1. Conserve water as if always in a drought.
2. Eliminate or minimize the use of pesticides, fertilizer and harsh household chemicals.
3. Maintain natural buffers around all streams and other bodies of water, as well as wetlands and vernal pools.
4. Minimize development and the addition of impervious surfaces, such as pavement, buildings and even lawns.
5. Eliminate unnecessary outbuildings.
6. Divert storm water runoff to low-lying areas to help groundwater recharge.
7. Capture rainwater for use in gardening and landscaping. Roof gutters can be configured to drain into rain barrels, which have standard spigots.
8. Have your septic system pumped out regularly; maintain it proactively.
9. Help educate your neighbors about stewardship of our water resources.
10. Join Sourland Stewards, a Sourland Conservancy project promoting best stewardship practices. Visit www.sourland.org/stewardship or email lcleveland@sourland.org.

Rain barrels are an excellent way to *recycle the rain*. They help with flooding and improve water quality. The Sourland Conservancy is sponsoring a Rain Barrel Workshop, on Sunday, June 7, 1 – 3 pm. Participants will learn the purpose and function of rain barrels and then build their own barrels. For more information and to register, email lcleveland@sourland.org.

Since 1986, the Sourland Conservancy has worked to protect the ecological integrity, historic resources and special character of the Sourland Mountain region.