

Chautauqua Watershed Notes  
From the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy  
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Up a Creek or Two  
By Susan M. Songster-Weaver



**The willow post project along Goose Creek, designed to reduce stream-bank soil erosion, appears to be flourishing, even with beavers munching on some of the posts. Photo by Sue Weaver.**

I'm proud to say I'm broadening my horizons. Instead of just kayaking places I know, I've been up a creek or two, with a paddle, and enjoyed myself immensely. Exploring the Prendergast Creek and Goose Creek this fall were great adventures.

Every time I travel Route 394 to Chautauqua Institution or Mayville, I'd see Prendergast Creek and say, "Someday I'm going to kayak that creek," and "someday" finally came. Prendergast Creek flows through the towns of North Harmony and Chautauqua and into Chautauqua Lake. It's easy to access the creek from the New York State DEC public boat launch at Prendergast Point by paddling southeast to the mouth. Chautauqua Lake is very shallow in this area with lots of reeds and water lilies and the kayak is a perfect way to travel.

Passing Snug Harbor Marina and a few perch fishermen, I journeyed up the creek. This stream meanders back and forth and I was surprised at how deep some of the pools were. From the kayak I could plainly see the erosion caused by high water on the outsides of the bends. Having never seen this creek during a storm, I could imagine how powerful it must be when fueled with heavy rains.

After paddling upstream for close to an hour, I decided to turn around, even though the creek was still navigable. Only one shallow riffle and a large snag of trees had given me any trouble. Spotting great blue herons, green herons, painted turtles and a few large perch in the deep pools enriched the adventure for me. The Prendergast Creek Wetland Preserve is located on the south side of the stream's outlet and after kayaking this area I can see why it is important for this six-acre site to remain undeveloped.

The day was still young after I loaded my kayak into the truck. “Why not explore Goose Creek?” I thought and off I went. Goose Creek is also a tributary of Chautauqua Lake, flowing through the towns of North Harmony, Harmony and a little part of Busti. I chose to access the creek from the Ashville Bay Marina because I wanted to kayak around the bay and enter the creek at the mouth. They allowed me to use their launch, which was nice, but was told that there usually is a fee.

Ashville Bay was fun to paddle around. I spotted a small flock of hooded mergansers and glided quite close to them. I also saw three or four cedar waxwings hopping from branch to branch in a dead tree at the mouth of the creek.

Goose Creek is an interesting stream. I didn’t realize there were so many cottages in this area and how much the stream meandered back and forth. It took me quite a while to get to Route 394 and the Chautauqua County Soil and Water Conservation District’s willow post project site. I was delighted to see how well the project was progressing. Heavy rains this year had washed away some of the soil along the bank, but the tangled masses of willow roots were holding fast. Beavers had also been in among the posts, snacking on the buffet, but even those stumps were generating branches. From my perspective, this project looks like a successful endeavor and should be replicated in other areas of the watershed where erosion needs to be curtailed. Although I couldn’t go very far up Goose Creek, I enjoyed every inch of what I paddled.

What an amazing day! There is so much to see and do in our watershed if you take the initiative to broaden your horizons. Prendergast and Goose Creeks are two creeks I’d paddle again, but not until after I explore some other places. Experiencing these wild and wonderful areas makes you understand how lucky we are and how important it is to protect what we have.

The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is a local, private not-for-profit organization supported primarily by membership donations and grants from private foundations. Its mission is to preserve and enhance the water quality, scenic beauty and ecological health of the lakes, streams and watersheds of the Chautauqua region. It is the only local-based not-for-profit organization actively conserving important habitats, scenic sites and watershed lands in the county. It takes a preventive approach to address lake algae and plant problems. For a list of upcoming events go to <http://www.chautauquawatershed.org/> or call 716-664-2166.