

**CHRIS GIBSON**

19th District, New York

1708 Longworth Building  
Washington, DC 20515  
(202) 225-5614

<http://gibson.house.gov>



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

**HOUSE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE**

Subcommittee on General Farm  
Commodities and Risk Management

Subcommittee on Livestock,  
Rural Development, and Credit

**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Subcommittee on Tactical Air and  
Land Forces

Subcommittee on Intelligence,  
Emerging Threats, and Capabilities

Subcommittee on Military Personnel

July 23, 2014

Dear Friends,

I'm writing to provide you with an update on the Watershed Advisory Group for the 19<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. Attached is the update, which provides an overview on what actions have been undertaken to date, and where the focus of my efforts both in the District and in Washington will be moving forward on Watershed related issues.

I do want to sincerely thank all of the many constituents and officials from across the District and beyond who have contributed to the WAG in ways big and small. Your efforts have been noted and appreciated by many. A list of these individuals is included on page three of the update.

I look forward to continuing to advocate for all of our constituents as we continue to address the many problems that need to be resolved in the Watershed region. Given the devastating impacts of recent floods both minor and major over the past few years in the District, we all know that many areas remain vulnerable, and all involved must come together to focus on achievable solutions for the future.

Thanks again for all who have helped here, and I look forward to seeing you soon.

Very sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Gibson'.

Chris Gibson  
Congressman, 19<sup>th</sup> District, New York

## **Watershed Advisory Group Update July, 2014**

Early in 2013, Congressman Gibson formed The Watershed Advisory Group (WAG) to investigate and evaluate the issues concerning Watershed management throughout the West of Hudson Watershed area in the 19<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. The goal of the WAG was to inform the Congressman regarding the various Watershed-related issues faced by constituents across the district, and the many facets of the relationships between the NYC DEP, NY State agencies, Federal agencies, County and Local municipalities, and those constituents. This initiative was similar to previous Advisory Groups the Congressman had created, including Veterans, Agriculture, and Energy Advisory Groups, all of which played important roles for those policy areas.

A diverse group of competent volunteers was organized representing residents from across the District. This group spent many hours meeting with representatives of the affected Towns and Counties. Research was done with the assistance of the Coalition of Watershed Towns (CWT), Catskill Watershed Corporation (CWC), several County Soil & Water agencies, as well as the DEC, DEP, FEMA, NRCS, and EPA. Spearheaded by Co-Chairman Bob Illjes, significant input was received from key Watershed leaders such as Al Rosa, Tim Cox, Jeff Baker, Carl Stuendel, Dean Frazier, Assemblyman Pete Lopez, Senators John Bonacic and Jim Seward, and many others, just to name a few.

Several areas of concern were highlighted, including reservoir management, the Filtration Avoidance Determination renewal process, stream repair and mitigation efforts, the Consent Decree process for the Lower Esopus, DEP land acquisition practices, agricultural land issues, and several other areas. What was clear is that most of these issues varied significantly in importance by geographic location, which was expected, so that moving forward it would be necessary to focus on local issues as part of the broader effort. It was also widely recognized that we seem to have entered a period of changing weather patterns that is producing stronger and more frequent storms that are impacting the Watershed significantly.

One of the issues which overlap many of the Watershed's regions is reservoir management. The key issue we found is that many constituents and local leaders were very concerned regarding the management practices of all the DEP reservoirs at levels which appear to create a constant threat to the residents who live below the dams, while also having an inconsistent policy of managing water releases from the reservoirs. While the DEP to its credit has through conservation efforts reduced its water usage significantly, and improvements have been made or are underway across the Watershed and its delivery system to NY City, the protocol of maintaining these reservoir levels at capacity has essentially not changed for over a generation.

Another critical area needing help is the Lower Esopus Creek region. The effects on the Lower Esopus being used as a "waste" channel from the Ashokan Reservoir with little regard for the impacts of such actions are unacceptable. These actions have significantly affected the health, safety, and financial well being of constituents of the five Towns below the Ashokan Reservoir. We look forward to seeing comprehensive and effective improvements implemented through the Consent Decree review process currently underway.

A third area of focus is the Upper Delaware River area. There are important environmental, economic, and flood mitigation concerns that need to be addressed through several methods, including the Delaware River Basin Decree Party members, the DRBC, and numerous advocacy groups like the UDC and FUDR. Congressman Gibson's office is actively involved in this process through the DRBC Congressional Task Force, of which he is a Co-Chair, and gaining input on a constant basis from all stakeholders involved in this region.

A fourth area of focus is the Schoharie Creek Watershed. There are several important projects moving forward there, including the Schoharie Stream Mitigation Project which is currently the single largest NRCS EWP flood mitigation project underway in the nation, and the Gilboa Dam improvement project. Other issues involve stream flows and stream remediation efforts in both Greene and Schoharie counties.

A fifth area of focus is the Mountaintop region in Greene County. This area was very hard hit by Hurricane Irene, and many constituents and towns continue to struggle to fully recover from the damage. The issues most important in this region are flood mitigation and stream infrastructure improvements, along with continued support and emphasis of the flood recovery.

To that end, the Congressman has appointed Liaisons to each of these areas of concern. These Liaisons will be responsible for reaching out and listening to stakeholders in their respective areas, advising the Congressman on relevant issues, and help advocate the Congressman's positions on how best to solve and work through the issues to meet the challenges each area faces within the Watershed.

Here is the list of Liaisons:

- Diane Tharp will be the Reservoir Management liaison.
- Bob Illjes will be the Esopus/Ashokan Liaison.
- Dean Frazier will be the Delaware River Basin Liaison.
- Tony Van Glad will be the Schoharie Creek Watershed region Liaison.
- Bridget Pelham will be the Mountaintop Liaison.

As needed, additional Liaisons will be appointed moving forward.

All of these Liaisons are currently very active in various arenas of the Watershed mosaic, and the Congressman is grateful for their service and willingness to continue to help advise on all of the many challenges moving forward. The Congressional Staff in both the District and Washington DC Offices will also continue to be very engaged in all matters involving the Watershed, and will continue to work not only with the Liaisons but all stakeholders across the District.

In summary, the Watershed Advisory Group has performed well in its primary role of informing the Congressman of what the issues are and how they have developed over the decades. The focus moving forward is how the Congressman and his office can be helpful in trying to resolve the issues by working with all the stakeholders involved. By necessity, this will often involve compromise by these stakeholders so that the best possible outcomes can be achieved for the largest number of constituents who are impacted by Watershed issues. We look forward to working with all involved on these important matters.

For more information, please contact District Director Steve Bulger via e-mail at:  
*steve.bulger@mail.house.gov*  
Office: 518-610-8133

***The Congressman would like to thank the following individuals for their help and input on the Watershed with either the WAG and/or the Congressman's Office:***

Bob Illjes, Co-Chairman  
Assemblymen Pete Lopez & Cliff Crouch  
Senators John Bonacic & Jim Seward  
Al Rosa, Tim Cox, Nate Hendricks – Catskill Watershed Corporation  
Carl Stuendel & Jeff Baker – Coalition of Watershed Towns  
Diane Tharp  
Dan Ruzow

**Delaware County**

Dean Frazier  
Mike Triolo  
Jim Thomson  
Bob Bishop  
Jim Eisel  
Chuck Schroeder  
Bob Homovich  
Joan Homovich  
Wayne Reynolds  
Rick Weidenbach  
Bruce Dolph  
Cindy Donofrio  
Graydon Dutcher

**Greene County**

Bridget & Bob Pelham  
Wayne Speenburgh  
Jeff Flack  
Michelle Yost  
Jim Hitchcock  
Larry Gardner  
Steve Walker  
Kory O'Hara  
Innes Kasanoff  
Gary Harvey

Dixie Baldrey  
Frank Hermance  
Warren Hart  
John Farrell  
Rene VanSchaack

**Schoharie County**

Pete Nichols  
Steve Hoerz  
Tony Van Glad  
Jim Buzon  
Gene Milone  
Phil Skowfoe  
Matt Avitable  
Alicia Terry  
Bill Cherry  
Dan Crandell  
Harold Vroman  
Joanne Noone

**Sullivan County**

Clayton Brooks  
Charlie Breiner  
Dick Coombe  
Rick Coombe  
Brian Brustman

**Ulster County**

Gary Bellows  
Jim Quigley  
Mike Warren  
Rob Stanley  
Bernard King-Smith  
Mike Hein  
Amanda LaValle  
Kelly Myers  
John Morrow  
Vernon Benjamin  
Terry Bernardo  
Shane Gallo  
Mary McNamara  
Candace Balmer  
Bernt Leifeldt  
Greg Helsmoortel  
Glenn Hoffstader  
Rich Parete  
Patrick Landewe  
Ralph Swenson  
Sylvia Rozzelle  
John Gill

Paul Rush, Dave Warne, John Vickers, Jeff Graf, Ira Stern – NYC DEP  
Andrew Feeney, Chris Holmes, Susan Mutch, Rick Lord – NY State Emergency Management  
Judith Enck, Berry Shore – EPA  
Bob Price, Howard Bartholomew, Jim Meinsma – Dam Concerned Citizens  
Fred Huneke – Watershed Agricultural Council  
Pam Young – NYS Dept. of Health  
Jim Tierney, Tom Blanchard, Tom Snow - NYS DEC  
Alexander Cochran, Kyla Hynes, Lori DuBord - Governor's Office  
Peter Wright, Don Pettit – USDA – National Resources Conservation Service  
Andrew Boyar, Laurie Ramie - Upper Delaware Council  
Jeff Skelding, Dan Plummer, Sherri Resti - Friends of the Upper Delaware  
Kate Hudson, Paul Gallay – Riverkeeper