

Rondout West Branch Tunnel Shutdown FAQ about impacts

1. WHAT IS THE RONDOUT WEST BRANCH TUNNEL (RWBT)

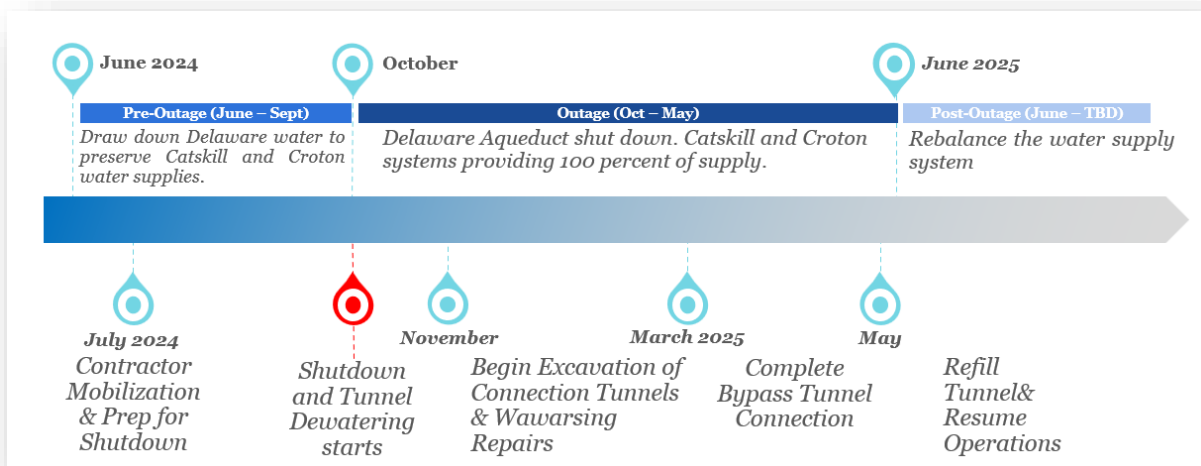
New York City (NYC) constructed the Delaware Aqueduct in the 1930s and 1940s to connect the Rondout Reservoir and the Delaware water supply system in the southern Catskill mountains to New York City. Effective October 1, 2024, DEP will temporarily shut down the aqueduct to make critical repairs to it, including the connection of a 2.5-mile bypass tunnel under the Hudson River. That project, as well as water supply operations throughout the shutdown, have been in the planning process for more than 20 years and will have impacts on the supply system’s reservoir levels as well as some recreation activities throughout the City’s watersheds.

2. WHY IS THE RWBT BEING SHUT DOWN?

Effective October 1, 2024, DEP will temporarily shut down the RWBT to allow contractors to make necessary repairs to the tunnel. In the early 1990s, DEP identified two significant leaks in the aqueduct, one near Newburgh and one in Ulster County in the Town of Wawarsing. Combined, the two leaks in the tunnel lose roughly 30 million gallons of water daily. In 2021, DEP finished building a 2.5-mile bypass tunnel under the Hudson River to replace the portion of the tunnel with the most significant leaks. DEP will also need to repair the smaller leak in Wawarsing. Accomplishing these repairs will require DEP to shut down the Delaware Aqueduct and drain it before connecting it to the new bypass tunnel.

3. WHEN WILL THE TUNNEL SHUTDOWN PROCESS BEGIN?

Shutting down the tunnel involves a lot more planning and work than simply turning off a valve. The shutdown plan has been in development for nearly 20 years and involves maximizing reservoir levels throughout the entire system before the water stops flowing into the Delaware Aqueduct.



Starting in June 2024, DEP will prepare the water supply system for heavier reliance on the Catskill System to the north and Croton System to the east. This preparation involves allowing some of the City's nineteen water supply reservoirs to fill while lowering others. This process will account for anticipated seasonal water cycle fluctuations while ensuring enough water is in the right reservoirs to meet water user demands while preventing other reservoirs from exceeding capacity.

DEP expects to shut down the tunnel in October 2024 while work continues through May 2025. By June 2025, the system will move into its post-outage phase, re-balancing the water supply system across the three water supplies.

4. HOW LONG WILL THE SHUTDOWN LAST?

Once the RWBT stops flowing, DEP anticipates it will remain offline for eight months. However, as with any major infrastructure project of this scope and magnitude, slight variations may lessen or slightly increase that timeframe.

5. HOW WILL THE SHUTDOWN IMPACT RESERVOIR LEVELS?

Before and during the shutdown, many reservoirs will experience changes to their water levels that are different than seasonal averages. While most fluctuations will stay within normal operating ranges, several reservoirs located East of the Hudson River may experience significant drops in capacity for a few months during the shutdown period.

6. CAN I CHECK THE STATUS OF A RESERVOIR LEVEL?

DEP will maintain status updates and important information on reservoir levels affected by the RWBT shutdown on the DEP Website. A link to this information can be found on the [DEP Recreation Website](#).

Additionally, DEP shares updated reservoir water levels on its website. However, individual capacity levels are not available for all reservoirs located East of the Hudson River, just the total Croton System: [Reservoir Level Website](#)

HUNTING AND HIKING

DEP currently manages more than 150,000 acres of City-owned water supply lands for low-impact public recreation, including hunting, hiking, and trapping. Allowable recreational uses also include winter activities such as cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. More than 300 recreational units are open to the public. To learn more about these lands and the allowable recreational uses, visit nyc.gov/dep/recmap.

7. WILL ANY DEP PROPERTIES OPENED FOR LAND-BASED RECREATION, SUCH AS HUNTING OR HIKING, BE AFFECTED BY THE SHUTDOWN?

At this time, DEP does not anticipate any restrictions on current open recreation units or properties for normal land-based recreational activities such as hunting, hiking, or trapping, where allowed.

8. HOW IS WATERFOWL MANAGEMENT CHANGING AS PART OF THE SHUTDOWN PROJECT?

DEP has a longstanding program to manage waterbird sources of fecal coliform bacteria to protect water quality at Kensico and Hillview Reservoirs. As part of this program, DEP conducts pre-dawn and post-dusk surveys and disperses waterbirds as needed to protect water quality. Dispersal methods consist of physical chasing with boats, often coupled with non-lethal noisemakers (pyrotechnics.) As the Catskill and Croton Systems will be more heavily relied upon to augment the water supply in the City, DEP will expand the Waterfowl Management Program to additional reservoirs during the shutdown.

Recreational users may notice the use of pyrotechnics at Ashokan, Boyd Corners, West Branch, Croton Falls, and Cross River Reservoirs. Simultaneously, DEP will also maintain full compliance with state and federal regulations projecting nesting and wintering bald eagles.

BOATING AND FISHING

One of the most popular forms of recreation on City-owned watershed property is fishing and boating. Anglers can fish from shore or boat on all DEP water supply reservoirs, which total approximately 36,000 acres. DEP permits anglers to store their fishing boats in designated reservoir boat storage areas. DEP also allows shore fishing in designated areas of the reservoirs. Additionally, several East of Hudson reservoirs, including Amawalk, Bog Brook, Boyd Corners, Cross River, Diverting, East Branch, Muscoot, Titicus, West Branch, Croton Falls, Middle Branch, Lake Gilead, and Lake Gleneida, allow ice fishing.

In addition to fishing boats, DEP offers recreational boating opportunities on several West of Hudson Reservoirs, including Cannonsville, Pepacton, Schoharie, and Neversink. Individuals must get their personal canoe or kayak steam cleaned at an approved vendor, receive a boat tag, and store it at one of 16 different launch sites temporarily or for the season, which runs from May 1 through October 31 each year. Paddlers can also rent a kayak from several approved vendors throughout the watershed. More information on the Recreational Boating Program is available here: <https://cwconline.org/boating/>

9. WILL THE SHUTDOWN HAVE ANY IMPACT ON FISH OR OTHER AQUATIC LIFE?

- In the Croton System certain fish species (bass, sunfish, perch, walleye) use the shallow, weedy, nearshore areas of the reservoir to spawn. Some of this spawning activity will occur during the period when these reservoirs are drawn down (early to late spring). Fish spawning at these lowered elevations may experience impacts (lower survival and/or growth, higher mortality) due to unfavorable substrate or habitat displacement as the reservoir fills.
- Nearshore spawning for bass and sunfish in the Delaware and Catskill Reservoirs will be impacted less than the Croton System because scheduled drawdowns will occur mostly outside of the spawning window for bass and sunfish species and these reservoirs will not be drawn down as extensively as those in the Croton System.
- In many Croton System reservoirs aquatic plants grow in the nearshore areas of the reservoir. These areas may be exposed as part of the shutdown and the plants in the exposed areas will not grow or will die off. When normal operation of the reservoir resumes these aquatic plants will return. Due to operational and bathymetric differences most of the Delaware and Catskill Reservoirs do not have any substantial established aquatic plants so this will not be an issue.
- DEP will be operating the reservoirs differently than has been done historically and that includes the releases from the Croton System reservoirs. Anglers will notice lower water levels in the various tributaries connecting EOH reservoirs. The DEP will be releasing the minimum mandated flows (NYSDEC) from the Croton System reservoirs instead of our normal releases. We do not anticipate impacts to naturally spawning trout. Furthermore, much of the release reductions will occur during the cold-weather months so we are not anticipating water temperature to be limiting.

10. WILL RECREATIONAL BOATING ON ANY OF THE RESERVOIRS BE AFFECTED?

DEP does not plan to implement any restrictions for recreational boating (canoes and kayaks) on the Cannonsville, Pepacton, Schoharie, and Neversink reservoirs. The season will operate as scheduled from May 1, 2024, through- October 31, 2024. However, when reservoir levels are lower during the shutdown period, the distance that recreational boaters may need to walk to reach the water may increase. This impact will be most noticeable at the end of the 2024 recreational boating season and the beginning of the 2025 season.

11. WILL THE SHUTDOWN IMPACT MY ABILITY TO BOAT OR FISH ON THE RESERVOIR?

DEP does not plan to restrict fishing boats or shoreline fishing during the shutdown period. However, there may be an increased distance between where you store your boat and the water line due to anticipated lower reservoir levels.

In some reservoirs, during the months with the lowest water levels, reaching the water's edge may be more challenging as previously submerged rocks, vegetation, or uneven terrain is exposed. Since the shutdown will begin in late 2024, the most significant impacts will occur over the second half of the shutdown (late winter through spring). In May 2025, DEP anticipates that it will be able to start the process of refilling and rebalancing the reservoirs.

12. WILL THE SHUTDOWN IMPACT ICE FISHING ON THE RESERVOIR?

During the shutdown, ice fishing will be restricted on several reservoirs since water levels will fluctuate due to higher use in winter months. This fluctuation can cause a gap to form between the frozen surface and the reservoir's water level, creating unsafe conditions. Therefore, on reservoirs where this is possible, DEP will restrict ice fishing during the tunnel shutdown period. Please visit the DEP website for an updated list of reservoirs closed to ice fishing, and always obey any notices or signs posted in the field.



Example of Ice Fishing Restricted Sign

13. WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION

DEP will continue to provide updated information on the shutdown and any anticipated recreational impacts on the [DEP Recreation Website](#).