New York City's Water Story: From Mountain Top to Tap

The water we use today is the same water that fell as rain when dinosaurs roamed the earth. In its endless cycle, water is the only substance that naturally exists as a solid, liquid or gas.

Water's journey from mountain top to tap begins when rain and snow fall on watersheds, the areas of land that catch, absorb, and carry water downhill to gently and swiftly flowing streams.

Streams provide life-cycle needs for fish and other aquatic organisms. Oxygen is trapped in the fresh water as it tumbles over rocks into deep pools. Overhanging tree branches keep water cool as fresh water continues its journey.

Water is naturally filtered by the soil and tree roots in dense forests as it travels toward reservoirs. The sun's heat energy releases some water molecules back into the atmosphere as gas, continuing the hydrologic cycle.

Thousands of skilled workers constructed dams and reservoirs to store large amounts of clean water and aqueducts to carry it great distances by gravity from watersheds to New York City.

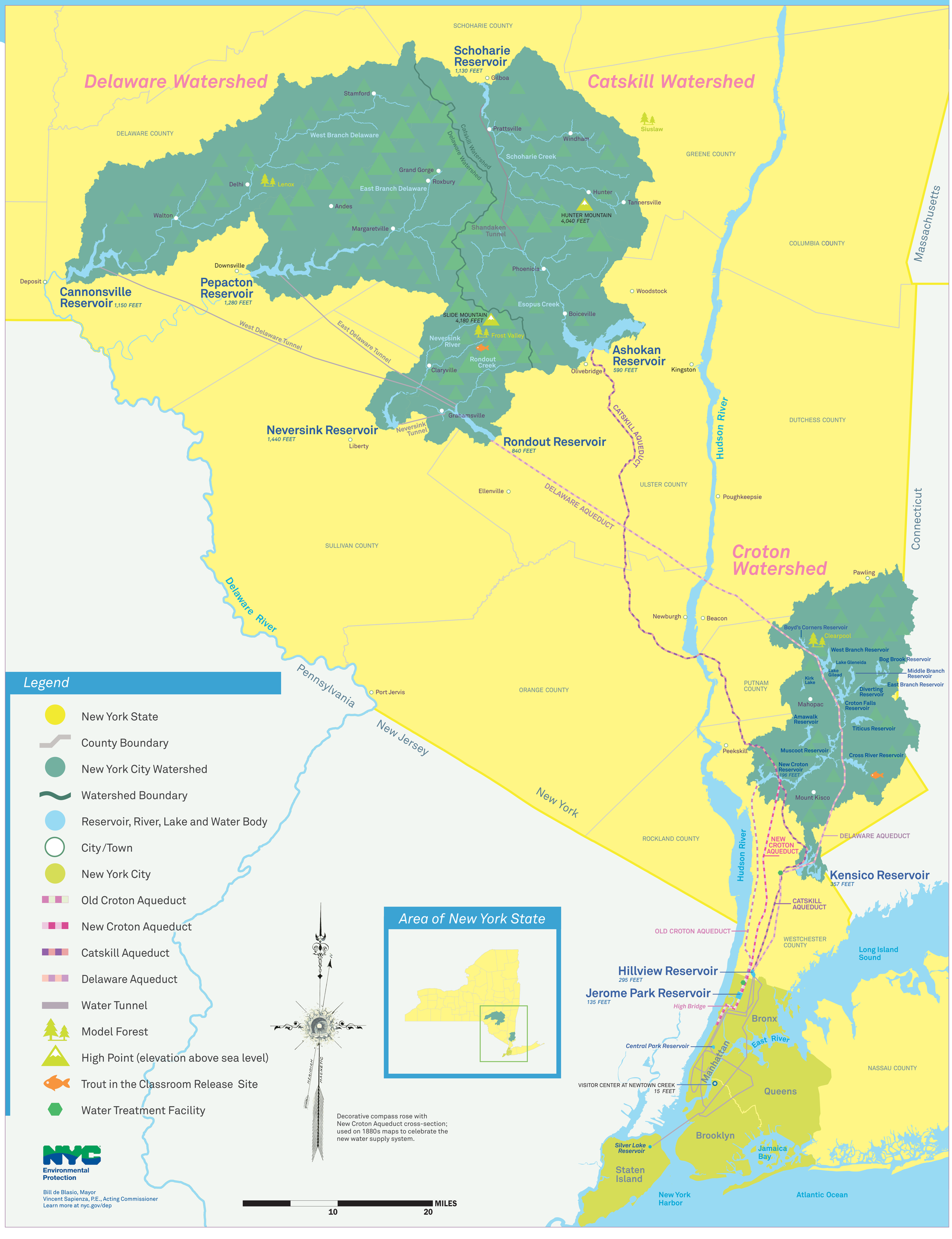
The 41-mile Old Croton Aqueduct was the first to deliver a clean and plentiful supply of water to New York City. The High Bridge, completed in 1848 and hailed as an engineering masterpiece, carried the aqueduct across the Harlem River on large stone arches.

Water flowed through the Croton Aqueduct, filling reservoirs where the Great Lawn in Central Park and the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue now stand. New Yorkers rejoiced in 1862 when another reservoir was built in Central Park to support the needs of a growing city.

Today, thousands of miles of tunnels and pipes deliver one billion gallons of water each day from the Croton, Catskill, and Delaware watersheds to more than 9 million people. How do you use water? How much water do you think you use?

After water is used for cooking, bathing, and other activities, it travels down the drain and through sewer pipes to wastewater treatment plants where it is cleaned and returned safely to the waterways surrounding New York City.

Water is all around us. We experience it in many different ways using all of our senses. As water cycles through its endless journey, we appreciate that it will continue to nourish us and all living things.



Legend

- New York State
- County Boundary
- New York City Watershed
- Watershed Boundary
- Reservoir, River, Lake and Water Body
- City/Town
- New York City
- Old Croton Aqueduct
- New Croton Aqueduct
- Catskill Aqueduct
- Delaware Aqueduct
- Water Tunnel
- Model Forest
- High Point (elevation above sea level)
- Trout in the Classroom Release Site
- Water Treatment Facility

Decorative compass rose with New Croton Aqueduct cross-section; used on 1880s maps to celebrate the new water supply system.

Area of New York State

NYC Environmental Protection

Bill de Blasio, Mayor
Vincent Sapienza, P.E., Acting Commissioner
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