
Newburgh's Water: Flowing Through Time

A self-guided water tour of Newburgh, New York



Scan for the audio tour
outdoorpromise.org/watertour

How to use this booklet

For more than 300 years, Newburgh's story has followed its water: the creek that gave this place its first name, the mills, a water crisis, and the people working to win it back. Turn up your sound and follow along.

Follow the water, not the clock.

The nine stops run from the Hudson waterfront to Crystal Lake — about 11 miles and 55 to 70 minutes if you drive it straight through. You can start anywhere and take as long as you like — with one exception: Frank Masterson's Recreation Area at stop 7 is open 7am to 3pm.

Every stop has audio.

Scan the code below to open the free audio tour, then tap the stop you are standing at to hear it read aloud in English or Spanish. Headphones help; a car stereo is better.

Ride with us.

Outdoor Promise runs guided bus tours over this same route, with a guide on board. Check outdoorpromise.org for dates and the pickup point.

Stay safe.

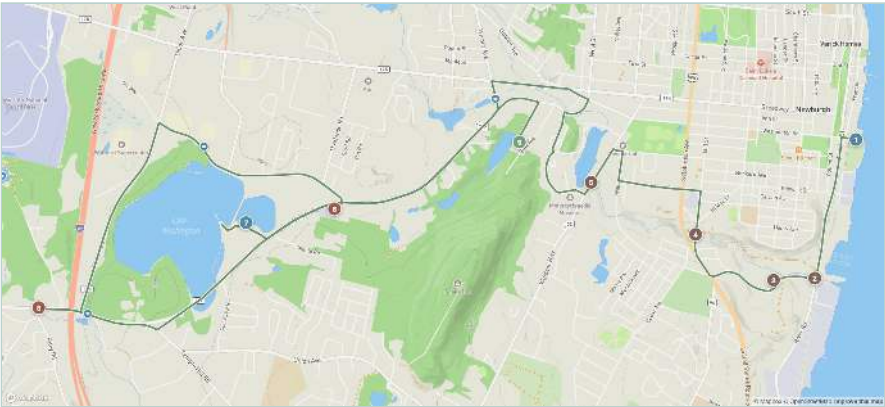
Several stops are on active roads. Park fully off the roadway, watch for traffic on the Mill Street bridge, and don't enter fenced or private property — the American Felt & Filter mill is viewed from Walsh Avenue only.



Free audio tour

Scan, then tap any stop to hear it read aloud — English or Spanish.

The route at a glance



Map © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

- 1 People's Park (Consolidated Iron Site)
- 2 Quassaick Creek Mouth
- 3 American Felt & Filter
- 4 Mill Street Bridge
- 5 Muchattoes Lake & the Lake Street Dam
- 6 The Water Treatment Plant
- 7 Frank Masterson Park
- 8 Silver Stream
- 9 Crystal Lake

9 STOPS **11** MILES **55-70** MINUTES

Start anywhere. The tour is built to end at Crystal Lake — 109 acres whose future as a park is now in the City Council's hands — but the water tells its story in either direction.

People's Park (Consolidated Iron Site) — Piers, Shipyards & What Was Taken



2026 People's Park today — the cleaned Consolidated Iron site, green to the river's edge, with the boat launch and the city behind it. Outdoor Promise



c. 1900–06 Newburgh from the Hudson at the height of the working waterfront. Detroit Publishing Co., Library of Congress (public domain)



1891 T. S. Marvel & Co.'s shipyard — the yard that built steamships up to 400 feet long, with lumber stacked on the riverbank. Nutt, 'Newburgh: Her Institutions, Industries and Leading Citizens' (1891), phototype (public domain)

We begin where the city met the world. About 100 years ago, this was one of the busiest working riverfronts on the Hudson. Steamboats docked at the landing. The Marvel shipyard built steamships up to 400 feet long. Water Street was packed with shops. Then came “urban renewal.” Between 1956 and 1974, the government tore down about 120 acres here. More than 1,100 homes and businesses were bulldozed. Whole streets disappeared. Most of the people pushed out were Black. The new city they were promised never came. But the pollution stayed in the ground. A scrapyard called Consolidated Iron, right here, became a federal Superfund site — a place so polluted that the government had to step in. The cleanup cost \$45 million. It removed about 117,000 tons of dirty soil. Now you're standing in People's Park: poisoned ground turned back into a public riverfront. Every other place on this tour is upstream from here. All of that water ends up in the river in front of you.



Can you eat the fish from the Hudson?

The river in front of you carries PCBs, a group of harmful chemicals. For about 30 years, two General Electric factories far upriver, at Hudson Falls and Fort Edward, dumped them into the Hudson. The dumping stopped in 1977. But the PCBs sank into the river mud and stayed. The Hudson became one of the biggest Superfund cleanup sites in the country. For about 50 years, the State told people not to eat what they caught here.

That changed on April 1, 2026. PCB levels had dropped, so New York eased its advice for the lower Hudson for the first time in about 50 years. This advice can change again. Before you fish, check the New York State Department of Health's latest Hudson River advice.

UP TO 4 MEALS A MONTH

- Striped bass
- Yellow perch
- Brown bullhead

DON'T EAT — ANYONE

- Carp
- Smallmouth bass
- Walleye
- Channel catfish
- White catfish
- Gizzard shad

Children under 15, and anyone who could become pregnant, should follow stricter limits. For any fish you keep, remove the skin and cut off the fat. That lowers the PCBs you eat.

**STOP 1 · PEOPLE'S PARK (CONSOLIDATED IRON SITE) — PIERS,
SHIPYARDS & WHAT WAS TAKEN**



c. 1900–06 Water Street — the commercial spine later erased by urban renewal. Detroit Publishing Co., Library of Congress (public domain)



1891 The Newburgh shipyard, 1891. NYPL Digital Collections (public domain)



c. 1900–06 The steamer Albany at the Newburgh landing. Detroit Publishing Co., Library of Congress (public domain)

Quassaick Creek Mouth — Where Newburgh Began



2026 The mouth of the Quassaick meeting the Hudson — fuel tanks on one bank, the working waterfront on the other, and the creek slipping out between them. Outdoor Promise

The first settlement here was named for this creek. Long before Europeans came, the Waoranecks lived here at Quassaick. They were a band of Munsee Lenape people, led by a chief, or sachem, named Maringoman. They fished this creek mouth, where the river tides reach in, and they hunted the valley behind it. Then Europeans arrived, and what came next was not a fair trade. In the 1640s, Dutch soldiers attacked Lenape communities along the lower Hudson and killed many people. In the Esopus wars of the 1660s, the Dutch sent some Munsee captives to the Caribbean as slaves. Settlers pushed for the land at Quassaick for about 40 years before they got it. In 1709, about 50 German refugees from the Palatine region arrived here. Britain's Queen Anne paid for their trip. In 1719 their land grant named this place the Palatine Parish by Quassaick.

STOP 2 · QUASSAICK CREEK MOUTH — WHERE NEWBURGH BEGAN

By then, the people the creek was named for had been driven away. Their descendants are still here today: the Stockbridge-Munsee Community in Wisconsin, the Delaware Nation and the Delaware Tribe in Oklahoma, and the Ramapough Lenape closer to home. Even the name Quassaick is still argued over. It may mean a place of stones, the end of the marsh, or high land. Where the creek meets the Hudson, the water rises and falls with the tides. River herring, American eels and even Atlantic sturgeon still swim into this creek mouth. Every place on this tour drains through it. This is where the water enters Newburgh's story.



1825 Newburgh in 1825 — still a river town shaped by its creek. NYPL Digital Collections (public domain)



1798 A surveyor's map drawn on May 1, 1798. It calls the creek "Quassy Creek." Even the spelling of the name has changed over time. Wm. W. Sackett, surveyor · City of Newburgh Archives

American Felt & Filter — The Mill That Outlived Its Dam



The Kilmer Wire Works in a watercolor. The works made wire, nails, fencing and iron rods. Today this land is the American Felt & Filter site. Watercolor, Historical Society of Newburgh Bay & the Highlands collection · City of Newburgh Archives



1891 The Kilmer Manufacturing Co. wire works on Quassaick Creek in 1891 — the 26-acre site that later became American Felt & Filter. Nutt, 'Newburgh: Her Institutions, Industries and Leading Citizens' (1891), prototype (public domain)



2026 The mill today, seen from Walsh Avenue — the 1891 stack still standing over the Outdoor Promise bus. Outdoor Promise, Sept 2026

Felt has been made along this stretch of the Quassaick since 1865, when the Stroock felt company started. In 1929 the business was sold and became American Felt & Filter. This land has an older factory story, too. In 1891, the Kilmer company ran a big wire mill on this same 26-acre site. Back then, about a dozen mills lined this creek. Together they made the Quassaick Newburgh's engine. Today this mill is the last one still running. For a long time, a dam here held back the creek. Then, in October 2020, the Strooks Felt Dam became the first dam ever removed from the Quassaick. Riverkeeper, the State, the City and the County took it out together. Fish from the Hudson could swim up the creek again. And the story is still changing. The company has talked with the Quassaick Creek Greenway about protecting the wooded land it owns along the creek. The mill that once blocked the creek may help set it free.

Mill Street Bridge — Driving Over 270 Years of Water Power



SCAN TO
LISTEN



1891 Nine of the mills and factories on this creek in 1891 — among them Ross' Flour Mills, the Orange County Woolen Mills, the Walsh Paper Mill and Brown's Lime Works. Nutt, 'Newburgh: Her Institutions, Industries and Leading Citizens' (1891), phototype (public domain)



"Walsh's Dam, Newburgh, N.Y." on an old hand-colored postcard. Walsh's paper mill used the water of this creek. The Walsh Road Dam still carries the name. Postcard · City of Newburgh Archives



2026 The creek running under the stone arch at Mill Street — the water that turned every mill on this tour. Outdoor Promise

You're crossing the Quassaick right now. The water under your wheels is what built Newburgh. By 1753, Hasbrouck's mill was grinding grain on this creek. During the American Revolution, Robert Boyd made guns here on the Quassaick. By 1891, about a dozen mills used this water, from Orange Lake to the Hudson. The mills are mostly gone, but some of their dams are still here. Dams block fish from swimming upstream. After the Strooks Felt Dam came out in 2020, the next dams in line were the Holden Dam and the Walsh Road Dam. The Walsh Road Dam stands just downstream of the Mullins Courtyard public housing apartments. It sits in a flood zone, next to a sewage pump station. The State counts this neighborhood as an environmental justice community — a place that carries more than its share of pollution. Outdoor Promise called for removing the dam in 2022. Once both dams are gone, about a mile and a half of creek will open up to eels, herring and bass. Below you, the creek's past and future run together.

Downstream: the Twin Arches

Follow the creek down from this bridge and you'll reach the oldest crossing still standing on the Quassaick. It is two arches of brick and stone, set at an angle to the water, just west of the pump station dam. We don't know who built it or when. We could not find a date or a builder in any record. But we do know what it marks. A plan that treats this creek as Newburgh's "other waterfront" uses the arches as a boundary: the creek's lowest stretch runs from here down to the Hudson.

The arches have also waited a long time. In 2002, the Quassaick trail plan called for fixing the Twin Arched Bridge, and it listed that job twice. More than 20 years later, the arches still have not been restored. The oldest thing on this creek has waited the longest.



The Twin Arched Bridge across Quassaick Creek — the earliest existing crossing of the creek. Photo by Peter Smith



1875 Mills along the Quassaick on the 1875 map. NYPL Digital Collections (public domain)

Muchattoes Lake & the Lake Street Dam



1891 The ice houses of the Muchattoes Lake Ice Company, with crews cutting on the frozen lake. Nutt, 'Newburgh: Her Institutions, Industries and Leading Citizens' (1891), phototype (public domain)



2020 The Lake Street dam in spring — the structure that makes Muchattoes a lake, with the neighborhood standing directly behind it. Outdoor Promise, May 2020

You're standing at the dam that makes this lake. Some locals call it “Machado's.” Muchattoes isn't a natural pond. It's the Quassaick Creek, held back by this dam on Lake Street. At the south end, the water spills over a small waterfall. Before home refrigerators, this still water was a business. In winter, work crews cut big blocks of ice from the frozen lake. They stored the ice in ice houses and sold it around the city. The ice business ended, but the dam stayed. No water on this tour is closer to where people live. Schleiermacher Park, Delano-Hitch Park, the Armory, Burton Towers and the Lake Street apartments all surround it. Yet a 2020 look at the shoreline found problems. The Lake Drive access road was closed. People were dumping trash at the South William Street lot. That's why the Quassaick Creek Greenway matters. The Greenway plan calls this spot Trailhead E — a way in to a future trail along the creek. In 2020, Outdoor Promise filmed a virtual field trip here for the Yale Day of Service project “Placemaking Muchattoes Lake.” This water is worth reaching. The question is whether people can get to it.

The Water Treatment Plant — The Night the Water Changed



2026 The City of Newburgh Water Filtration Plant on Little Britain Road. Outdoor Promise, Sept 2026

This is where Newburgh won the 2016 water emergency. That year, the city learned that Washington Lake, its reservoir, held high levels of PFAS. PFAS are called “forever chemicals” because they don’t break down. The city didn’t wait to be told what level was safe. On May 2, 2016, it declared a state of emergency. Overnight, it switched the whole city to backup water from Brown’s Pond. That water came through “Platt’s Folly,” a \$6 million backup system. A former superintendent built it for a plane crash that never happened, and it had never once been tested. “It was a very, very long night,” Water Superintendent Wayne Vradenburgh remembers. By June, the city was drinking water from the Catskill Aqueduct, part of New York City’s water system. It still is today. Then New York State built a giant carbon filter here to pull PFAS out of water. Water first ran through it in January 2018. Carbon is full of tiny holes. As water moves through, PFAS sticks to the carbon and stays behind. This plant has 18 huge tanks, and each one holds 40,000 pounds of carbon. The superintendent calls the water that leaves here “second to none.” The plant also tests for more kinds of PFAS than the law requires. One more detail: a few years ago, workers dug up a water pipe stamped 1887 — and it was still in use. The pipes are old. The fight to keep the water clean is not.

What the filter is

The filter here uses granular activated carbon. That is carbon, a lot like charcoal, treated so it is full of tiny holes. A small handful has an amazing amount of surface hidden inside it. When water flows through, PFAS molecules stick to that surface and stay behind. Newburgh's system has 18 tanks, and each one holds 40,000 pounds of carbon. The tanks work in pairs. The first tank catches the PFAS, and the second tank backs it up. The system was built big enough to treat all the water this plant can send out: up to 8.85 million gallons a day. New York State owns it, and city workers run it. Water first went through it in January 2018.

Two things are worth knowing. First, carbon fills up. When it's full, it has to be replaced — about every six years. The filter is a job that never ends. Second, filtering water is not the same as cleaning up the pollution where it started. Washington Lake, and the ground under the air base that drains into it, are a separate job. New York has held the U.S. Department of Defense responsible for that cleanup since 2016.

The superintendent says the plant goes past what the law asks: “I have to by law test for what they tell me... But we have went over that and tested for even more. I don't have to report those because it's not a law. But we absolutely watch.”



2026 Inside the plant: the big carbon filter tanks the water passes through, and the pipes that feed them. Outdoor Promise, Sept 2026

Frank Masterson Park — 163 Years of City Water



2026 Washington Lake from above: the intake houses on the water, the causeway, and Masterson's Pond in front. Outdoor Promise



2026 Open 7am to 3pm. Catch-and-release fishing from shore, April 1 to November 30. Outdoor Promise, Sept 2026



2026 The footbridge over the pond's outlet, where the water heads underground. Outdoor Promise, Sept 2026

For 163 years, this lake was Newburgh's water supply. From 1853 until 2016, Washington Lake sent water to the city, mostly by gravity, flowing downhill. Its outlet is strange. The water drops into a “swallow hole,” flows about a mile underground, and comes back up at Trout Hole Spring. You're standing in Frank Masterson Park, a place where anyone can walk to the water's edge. In 2016, PFAS from the nearby air base ended the lake's run as the city's water supply. PFAS are “forever chemicals,” and here they came from firefighting foam. The air base is now a New York State Superfund site — a place so polluted that the State steps in to force a cleanup. The military's own schedule says its study of the pollution won't finish until 2051. The cleanup comes after that. Newburgh's crisis also helped push New York to set some of the nation's strictest limits on PFAS in drinking water.

Don't eat the fish

Catch and release only — New York's advice since July 24, 2017. Put back any fish you catch in:

- Washington Lake
- Lockwood Basin / Masterson Park Pond
- Recreation Pond
- Silver Stream
- Beaver Dam Lake
- Moodna Creek
- the stream from Stewart State Forest to Beaver Dam Lake

The problem is PFAS from firefighting foam at the air base. Fishing is fine. Eating the fish is not.

The swallow hole

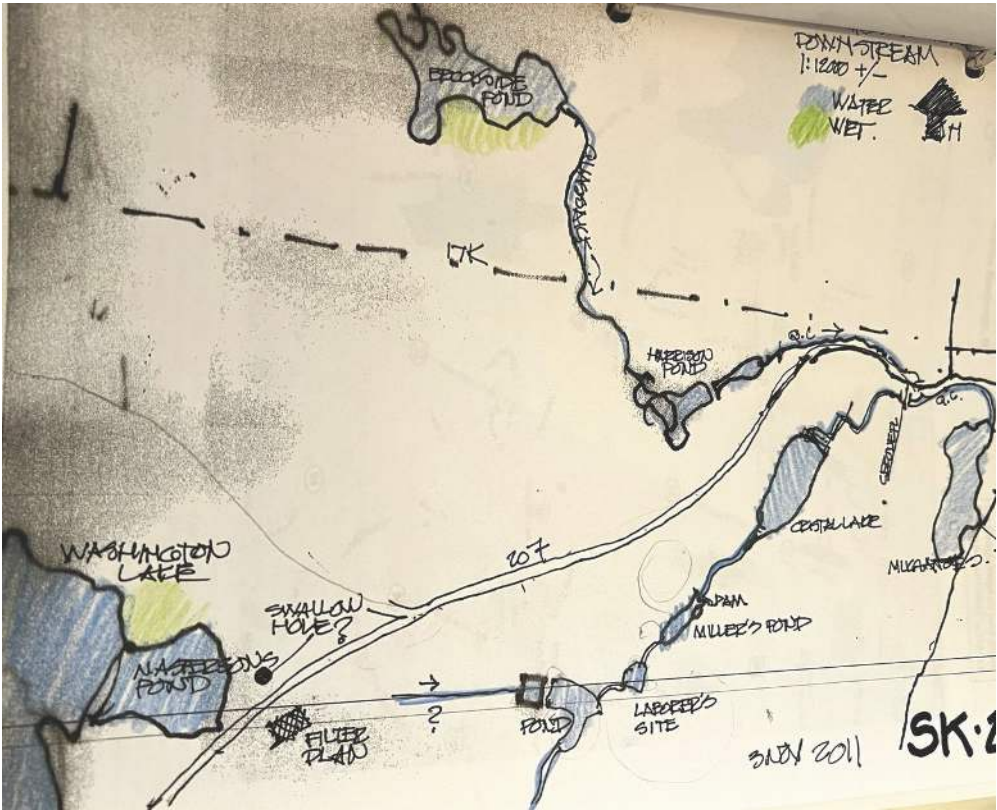
Walk along the channel below the footbridge and it just ... stops. The water reaches a crack in the limestone rock and goes down into the ground. The Water Department calls this a swallow hole. Rainwater slowly dissolves limestone over a very long time. That opens cracks that grow into underground passages. Scientists call this kind of land karst. In karst country, water on the surface and water underground trade places.

An 1891 history of Newburgh says the lake's outlet runs underground for nearly a mile, then comes back up at Trout Hole Spring. Water Department staff think the water keeps going from there, on toward Crystal Lake — the last stop on this tour. They weren't the first to think so. Peter Smith, a Newburgh architect who studied this watershed for years, drew the same chain by hand on November 3, 2017: Masterson Pond, the swallow hole, Miller's Pond, then Crystal Lake. He labeled it “swallow hole?” — with a question mark. Two sources, years apart, reached the same idea. Neither could prove it, and no study has been published.

Still, stand here a moment. What you can see for yourself is a creek that ends in the middle of a lawn.



2026 The swallow hole: the channel runs to this limestone seam and the water simply goes down into it. Outdoor Promise, Sept 2026



2017 Peter Smith's downstream sketch — Washington Lake and Masterson's Pond at left, the swallow hole marked with a dot and a question mark, then the chain on through Miller's Pond to Crystal Lake. Peter Smith field sketch, 3 November 2017 (Quassaick Creek Watershed Alliance binders)

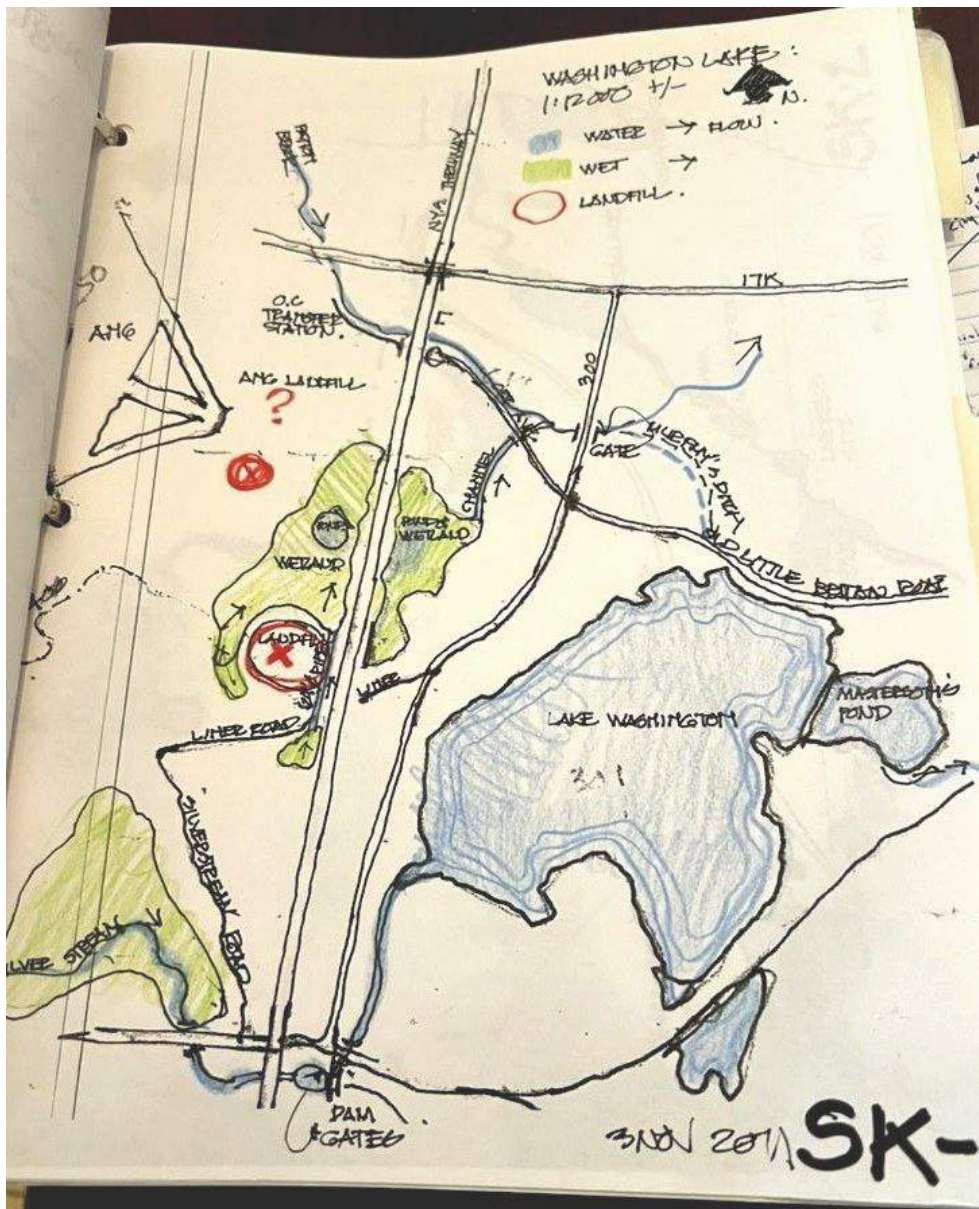
Silver Stream — Where the Contamination Reached the Lake



2026 Silver Stream slips under Little Britain Road here, through a culvert below the guardrail that most drivers never notice. Outdoor Promise, Sept 2026

This quiet stream is the reason this tour exists. More than 100 years ago, people dug a channel to connect Silver Stream to Washington Lake. The goal was to add water to the city's supply. About a century later, that same channel carried the poison. At Stewart Air National Guard Base, firefighting foam with PFAS washed out of the fire station. It flowed through a pipe called Outfall 002 into Recreation Pond, then down Silver Stream, and into the reservoir the whole city drank from. The State's Superfund investigation traced that path. Today, a temporary system treats stormwater upstream. Meanwhile, the State and the U.S. Department of Defense still disagree over the full cleanup. The route turns around here. Point northwest, toward the base — that's where the pollution came from. The most peaceful stop on this tour is the one that changed everything.

STOP 8 · SILVER STREAM — WHERE THE CONTAMINATION REACHED THE LAKE



2017 Peter Smith's watershed sketch — Silver Stream at lower left, wetlands in green, flow arrows in blue, and two landfill sites circled in red: one beside the Air National Guard base, marked with a question mark. Peter Smith field sketch, 3 November 2017 (Quassaick Creek Watershed Alliance binders)

Crystal Lake — The Ward With No Park



2025 Crystal Lake from the air in autumn, looking north. Woods ring the lake, with the edge of the city beyond the trees. This is the land the Newburgh Wants a Park campaign asked the City to protect. Ronald Zorrilla / Outdoor Promise, October 2025

For generations, Newburgh families swam here. Crystal Lake sits below Snake Hill, where a stream was dammed to make the lake. It was a beach and a hangout close to downtown. The street by the parking lot is still called Beach Street. A 2004 study of the creek found rare life nearby. On Snake Hill grows black cohosh, a plant that is rare in New York. The rare Appalachian blue butterfly lays its eggs on it. Now the community is writing the next chapter. You're standing in Ward 3. It is the only ward in Newburgh without a real park. It has less than one acre of parkland, and 71 percent of the people who live here are people of color. Across the whole city, parks cover just 2.8 percent of the land. Planners recommend 12.5 percent. Making these 109 acres a park would more than double Newburgh's parkland. In 2023, the Newburgh Wants a Park campaign asked the City to do just that. Twenty-nine community partners backed it, including Scenic Hudson, thread collective, Riverkeeper, Newburgh Sanctuary and Outdoor Promise.

What the 109 acres hold

An eight-acre lake, Millers Pond, and the wetlands between them. Hiking trails, open to the public since 2018. Newburgh Sanctuary's healing gardens, an urban farm started here in 2020 and led by people of color. A historic Jewish cemetery. Right next door rises Snake Hill, 705 feet high. Crystal Lake is Trailhead G, the western end of the Quassaick Creek Greenway — the far end of the creek this tour has been following.

Why the word “park” matters

The City already owns this land. What it doesn't have is protection. The land is zoned Conservation Development District, and that zoning allows building on it. The campaign asked the City to rezone the land and officially make it a park. That step would make the park permanent, so a future City Council couldn't simply change its mind.

How it got here

In the 1600s, this was Waoraneck Lenape homeland. In the 1940s, it was where Newburgh went swimming. By the 1970s, the site had been abandoned. In 2004, Scenic Hudson bought land on Snake Hill next door. Trails opened to the public in 2018. In February 2023, the City paid for a survey of the land. In December 2023, the Newburgh Wants a Park campaign brought its case to the City, with 29 community partners. The City Council has made it a priority. The decision is now in the Council's hands, and no vote has happened yet.

More than 1,000 people signed its petition. In a survey, 98 percent of residents said yes. Newburgh Sanctuary, a farm led by people of color, already grows healing gardens here. Crystal Lake is also a Greenway trailhead, and the Quassaick Creek Fest has gathered here. That same year, the City paid for a survey of this land and called it “an important first step.” The City Council has made it a priority. Now the decision is in the Council's hands, and no vote to make it a park has happened yet. A place the city forgot could become a place the city keeps. That is the whole story of this tour, in one lake.



2025 Autumn over Crystal Lake. Trails and Newburgh Sanctuary's gardens sit in the woods along the far shore. The 109 acres hold lake, wetland and steep wooded hillside, all inside the city. Ronald Zorrilla / Outdoor Promise, October 2025

Get involved

Clean water in Newburgh was never just handed to us. And it isn't one group's job. Many groups work together here. They heal old factory land, free the creek, protect green space, and guard the water in your tap. Here's how you can join them.

Walk the creek

Go to a Quassaick Creek Greenway planning workshop or a QCWA meeting. Help plan the new trail and parks.

Go to a Restoration Advisory Board meeting

These public meetings happen four times a year. They are in English and Spanish and streamed live. This is where the public gets a say in the air base PFAS cleanup.

Get your hands in it

Join a creek cleanup or a community science day with Riverkeeper and QCWA — at Crystal Lake, Muchattoes Lake or Ward Brothers Park.

Defend the tap

Ask the Water Department if your home has a lead pipe. You may be able to get up to \$10,000 back for replacing it. Test your water, and choose the tap over the bottle.

Take the water plant tour

The City Water Department gives tours of the water plant. Ask when the next one is, and see up close how your water is cleaned.



Who to join

Newburgh Clean Water Project

A group of neighbors teaching about PFAS and lead. They run the World Water Day forums and connect residents to the RAB.

www.facebook.com/newburghcleanwaterproject

Quassaick Creek Watershed Alliance (QCWA)

Watches over the creek: cleanups and water checks. Meets every month.

www.facebook.com/QCWAjc2009

Riverkeeper

Helped remove dams on the Quassaick. Runs creek cleanups, eel counts and the Fish Migration Celebration.

www.riverkeeper.org

Scenic Hudson

Helps raise money for the Quassaick Creek Greenway, a plan for trails and parks along the creek. A community leadership council guides the plan. Hosts public planning workshops.

quassaickcreekgreenway.com

City of Newburgh Water Department

Keeps the water safe. Gives water plant tours, publishes the yearly water quality report, and runs the lead pipe replacement program.

www.cityofnewburgh-ny.gov

Stewart ANGB Restoration Advisory Board

The public meeting on the air base PFAS cleanup. Four times a year, open to all, in English and Spanish, and streamed live.

About this tour

Newburgh's Water: Flowing Through Time (NYS DEC EJ CIG R11) · OP Adventure Bus

Every fact in this booklet comes from a cited source: Nutt's 1891 history of Newburgh, Ruttenber's histories of the region, the Newburgh Water Commissioners' reports, New York State environmental and health department records, City of Newburgh Council records, the Newburgh Wants a Park campaign brief, and interviews with the City Water Department. Outdoor Promise keeps the full source list for every stop — ask us at outdoorpromise.org.

Researched, written and produced by Outdoor Promise. Historic images: Nutt, Newburgh (1891), NYPL Digital Collections, the Library of Congress (Detroit Publishing Co.) and the City of Newburgh Archives. Current photography: Outdoor Promise.

This project is funded in part by the New York State Environmental Protection Fund, as administered by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Office of Environmental Justice.

The opinions, results, findings, and/or interpretations of data contained herein are the responsibility of Outdoor Promise and do not necessarily represent the opinions, interpretations, or policy of the State of New York.
