

ANNUAL REPORT: 1989

The D & R Canal Commission can look at 1989 as a year of significant achievement. Leading the list of the Commission's accomplishments for the year is the adoption of a revised MASTER PLAN to guide development of the park and the adoption of a completely revised program for protecting the Canal Park from the harmful impact of new construction.

MASTER PLAN

The first edition of the MASTER PLAN--adopted in 1977--was a great success. It was a popular guide to use of the park, it contained an introduction to the history of the canal and information about its natural and man-made resources, and it was a good guide for the park's overseers. But even a good plan becomes dated after a dozen years.

The 1989 edition of the MASTER PLAN is structured like the first edition. It includes a history of the D & R Canal, a section-by-section description of the present-day Canal Park, a statement of the principles and objectives which will guide management and development of the park, an overview of the management structure, and a resource inventory that includes sections on water, physiography, geology, soils, vegetation, animal life, access to the park, historic sites in and next to the park, and population of the region. Appended to the plan are a bibliography and a copy of the D & R Canal State Park Law of 1974.

The MASTER PLAN is part of the process of planning for the development of the Canal Park. Its role is to establish the basic principles and objectives for the park. The Commission has adopted a series of other planning documents which translate these principles and objectives into specific plans for picnic areas, campgrounds, trails, and other recreational facilities.

The new plan, like the first edition, recognizes that the park has five basic roles: a water supply system, a recreation site, a historic site, a natural area, and a means of enhancing urban areas. The Canal Park is recognized as a spine for the central New Jersey region; it holds together in an unbroken chain the natural, recreational, and cultural resources of the region.

Copies of the plan will soon be available from the Canal Commission.

NEW REGULATIONS

The adoption of new Review Zone regulations was not entirely a 1989 accomplishment. The Commission staff had been working on these regulations for almost five years, but it was not

until January of 1989 that the first half of these regulations were adopted. Throughout the balance of the year the number one priority of the Commission staff was to adopt the rest of the regulations. Eleven days into 1990, Helen Fenske, Acting Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection, authorized the adoption of the final portion of the regulations.

The new regulations represent a major change in the Commission's ability to protect the Canal Park. In its 1974 enabling law the Commission is instructed to administer a land-use regulatory program which protects the Canal Park from the potentially harmful impact of new development. In 1980 the Commission began this work with the creation of a 400-square-mile review zone and regulations which address storm water management, set-backs from the park borders, and other ways of reducing the impact of new development. The new regulations increase the required distance between adjoining projects and the park, require the preservation of corridors along the major streams that enter the Canal Park, and establish standards for the design of new or improved roads in the vicinity of the park.

The most significant feature of these new regulations is the stream corridor preservation requirement. This is a precedent-setting regulatory technique that has been championed by environmentalists and condemned by developers. The Canal Commission concluded that for the Canal Park to function properly as a water supply system and natural area it would be necessary to preserve a natural corridor along the major streams that come into the park. These corridors function as protective barriers for the streams, filtering pollutants from storm water running off roads, parking lots, and buildings. They reduce flooding because corridors of natural vegetation tend to act like sponges, absorbing excess runoff after storms. The protected corridors are also vitally important habitats for wildlife. They provide the three things that are essential for the survival of birds and other wildlife--shelter, food, and water.

LAND ACQUISITION

There is a widespread belief in central New Jersey that in only a few more years there will be no opportunity to preserve more land for parks or nature preserves. Development of the region has become so intense that land which is not saved now will soon become the site of yet another warehouse, shopping center, or housing development.

Adding land to the Canal Park to increase public use, buffer the park, or enhance it as a natural area has therefore become a major priority for the Commission. Unfortunately, throughout the late 1980's there was no money for State parkland acquisition. In November, 1989, however,

the voters approved a Green Acres bond act which included \$80 million for State land acquisition and development.

Anticipating this new bond act, the Canal Commission had earlier approved and assigned priorities to three major acquisition projects for the Canal Park. The Commission is hopeful that one of these projects will be funded with this newly allocated money so the Canal Park can continue to expand beyond its original vision of being a narrow band of land on either bank of the historic canal.

The Commission staff has also supported land-saving organizations whose projects benefit the Canal Park. Chief amongst these is the Delaware and Raritan Greenway, Inc., which was formed by several environmental and planning organizations in the area. The D & R Greenway has been involved in several projects in 1989, and promises to be a highly significant factor in land conservation for the Canal Park.

MISCELLANY

1989 was a year of bridge and road projects for the Canal Park. The Harrison Street bridge over the canal was built in 1989. The Commission heard, and agreed in concept, to the idea of a new canal crossing at Port Mercer. An old bridge on Canal Road in Griggstown has been closed for six months while various government agencies decide how to design its replacement. A section of the I-295, I-195, Route 129 complex in Trenton and Hamilton which is to be built over a filled-in portion of the canal elicited renewed scrutiny. A new Trenton planning agency, the Capitol City Redevelopment Commission, proposed a new road along a half-mile section of the canal in downtown Trenton. The NJ DOT proposed a new road that will connect Mapleton Road in Plainsboro directly with a major east-west road in that area. Mapleton runs right on the bank of the canal at a particularly popular section of the Canal Park. Each of these projects received attention in 1989 and all--except the Harrison Street bridge--remain unresolved.

A new organization was formed which could help to improve the setting of part of the Canal Park. The Delaware River Greenway is made up of public and private organizations in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and has the goal of promoting the natural, cultural, and recreational values of the Delaware River from Bordentown to the Water Gap. The Commission's Executive Director became a co-chairman of this fledgling organization. The Delaware River Greenway hopes to overcome the idea that the river is a dividing element, seeing it instead as the central element in a landscape that

is rich with natural and man-made resources. It expects to work with both State governments, the many county and municipal governments in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and with private groups to focus more attention on the river corridor and to develop a stronger network for public enjoyment.

In December an agreement was signed between NJ DEP's Divisions of Water Resources and Parks and Forestry which tentatively makes the 3000-acre Six Mile Run Reservoir property, (Franklin Township, Somerset County) a State Park. Water Resources may take it back if they decide it is wise to build a reservoir there, a decision that will be reached by mid-1991. For years the residents of this area have hoped that this property, which adjoins the Canal Park, would be developed as a park instead of as a reservoir. If this agreement is fulfilled, the Six Mile Run State Park will be a great asset to the Canal Park.

In 1989 the Commission's Review Zone work was slightly reduced from the 1988 load, reflecting the slowing of the region's economy. The Commission granted approval to 28 projects in the "A" portion of the Review Zone (the area within 1000 feet of the canal) and 77 projects in the "B" portion (the drainage basin of the Canal Park).

In May the "D & R Canal Kingfishers" competed with 28 other teams in the Audubon Society's World Series of Birding. The Kingfishers were the only team sponsored by a NJ DEP agency. The Kingfishers had fun, made a respectable showing, raised a little money, and raised peoples' consciousness of the importance of the Canal Park as a habitat for migrating and nesting birds.

(CAPTION)

The Central New Jersey Chapter of the Sierra Club has undertaken a project of erecting 30 signs along the Canal Park that will include a map of the entire canal, a historic photograph, and information about the canal and park. The Commission staff has been working with them to supply photographs, to select sites for the signs, and to prepare captions and text. The signs, which will be paid for through donations from corporations and individuals, will be a valuable way of showing people the entire sixty-mile length of the Canal Park and the importance of the canal's history.

(CAPTION)

Rocky Hill, c. 1900. On the left is the railroad station, in the center are the "A" swing bridge over the canal and the bridgetender's house, and on the right is Barney McCloskey's Tavern. This view is from a historic post card in the Commission's collection. In 1989 the Commission was able to add almost fifty postcards to its collection of historic cards on the D & R Canal. Working with the Canal Society of New Jersey and the filmmaker Cliff Crawford, the Commission was able to add over one hundred historic images of the canal to its photographic archive during the year. Any contributions to this collection (which is used to further understanding of the canal's historic heritage) would be most welcome.