

The Rondout Reservoir
Year Completed: 1951
Capacity: 49.6 billion gallons
Watershed size: 95 square miles

Rondout Reservoir is part of New York City's water supply network. It is located 75 miles northwest of the city in the Catskill Mountains, near the southern end of Catskill Park. It is the central collection point for the city's Delaware System, which provides half its daily use.

History

The reservoir was made possible by the construction of Merriman Dam along Rondout Creek. Construction began in 1937 and ended in 1954, three years after the reservoir began delivering water. It would be the first of four built by the city to satisfy its growing demand in the years after World War II. Three villages – Lackawack, Montela and Eureka – were condemned and flooded in the process. The small settlement of Grahamsville remains in existence just west of the reservoir.

In 1998, the city's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) issued an advisory warning against eating more than one reservoir-caught smallmouth bass fish per month after a poison called mercury was confirmed in three fish caught in the reservoir. Since there is no industry in the reservoir's vast watershed, this contamination is believed to be the result of acid rain from coal-fired power plants in the Midwest.

The resulting body of water is a single basin 6.5 miles long. It holds 49.6 billion US gallons, which comes not only from the reservoir's own 95 square-mile watershed but from Cannonsville, Neversink, and Pepacton reservoirs.

Combined, the four reservoirs account for 320.4 billion US gallons of water, 890 million gallons of which goes to the city every day. All this water is fed from the Rondout to West Branch Reservoir in Putnam County via the Delaware Aqueduct, the world's longest continuous underground tunnel at 85 miles.

Activities

Rondout is easy to reach. However, access to the actual reservoir is tightly restricted and has been even more so since the September 11, 2001 attacks forced an increase in security. Fishing is permitted in season with a New York state license. The reservoir is known, as are most Catskill fishing areas, for its trout. However boats are not allowed to leave the reservoir for environmental reasons and must be stored near it year round. Hunters with valid city and state permits may also use the lands around the reservoir where hunting is permitted during the season. Beyond this, however, no recreational use of the reservoir is permitted.