



New York Sea Grant is a joint program of Cornell University, the State University of New York, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

New York State has 3,400 miles of diverse coastline and is the only state in the U.S. bordering both the Great Lakes and Atlantic Ocean. More than 85% of NY's population lives in a coastal region.



New York Sea Grant regional offices provide innovative research, technical assistance, and outreach on such issues as water quality, coastal resilience, marine & freshwater fisheries, invasive species, algal blooms, aquaculture & seafood, coastal literacy, and shoreline community development.

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NYSG Focus Area
for this project summary:
Healthy New York
Ecosystems

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New York Sea Grant Evaluates the Extent of Ghost Dams and Dam Safety Programming in New York

NYSG is partnering with state and federal agencies to advance safety awareness around New York's dams.

Recent significant flooding events from extreme rainfall have overtopped or destroyed unmapped dams ("ghost" dams) in the Northeast. New York Sea Grant (NYSG) undertook an evaluation of the extent of these dams in the Black River Watershed and evaluated the amount and accessibility of outreach material related to dam safety.

NYSG and the New York State Water Resources Institute (WRI) were awarded a Cooperating Technical Partners grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in 2022 to evaluate the state of dam safety outreach and education in New York and to map the extent of ghost dams in the Black River Watershed. Phase I of this work was completed in partnership with the WRI, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and FEMA in 2024.

Resources were collected from governmental, not-for-profit organizations, academic and media agencies and recorded to a central repository, with case studies of dam failures, restorations, and removals combined into an ArcGIS StoryMap for public use. Inventory of ghost dams within the Black River Watershed was completed by WRI. The StoryMap, final report, and ghost dam inventory were used to assess the need for and creation of additional dam safety outreach material for New York State residents to be completed in Phase II of this project, continuing the Cooperating Technical Partners partnership between NYSG and FEMA. The StoryMap of this effort is publicly accessible at <https://arcg.is/9OPzi0>.

Project Partners/Funders:

- New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
- New York State Water Resources Institute at Cornell University
- Funding: Federal Emergency Management Agency Cooperating Technical Partners Program

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Top: A low-head dam during high flow in Onondaga County, NY. Above: An earthen "ghost dam" in Cortland County, NY. Photos: Roy Widrig/NYSG