

# York Water District is always there

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By Ron McAllister

You never really think about it, do you? Water, I mean. You turn on the tap and out it comes; cool, clear and fresh. Depending on where you live in York — providing you don't have your own well — your drinking water comes from one of three collaborating water districts: the Kittery Water District (whose entire water supply is in the town of York); the Kennebunk, Kennebunkport & Wells Water District; or the York Water District (YWD). About 60 percent of homes in York receive their residential water from the YWD.

The relative invisibility of the system probably contributes to its being taken for granted. Chases Pond is the most visible part of the system but you can't swim or fish there so you might easily overlook it even though it is 137 acres and up to 37 feet deep. There are also two large storage tanks in the system: a two million gallon tank in the village and a three million gallon tank in Cape Neddick.

This is plenty of capacity for current and future demand. During winter months the town regularly draws less than 750,000 gallons per day while in summer the daily demand can rise to as much as two and a half million gallons. Luckily, the plant can process up to four million gallons of drinking water every day.

I recently toured the YWD's water treatment plant on Chases Pond Road. Now that I see how they filter, clean and purify the water, I can appreciate how fortunate York is. Why does York water taste so good? This question was posed to Ryan Lynch, manager of the treatment plant. He gave three interrelated answers. "First, the source." Chases Pond — one of six ponds in the 5,000 acre watershed — is a pristine natural reservoir and the origin of most of York's water. "Then, there is the treatment; the particular filtration devices and chemicals used to clarify and purify the water." Different treatment plants require different chemicals to remove suspended solids and to kill any latent microorganisms. "And, third, is the distribution system." This has to do with the age and condition of the mains delivering the water to customers.

Lynch's three tiered answer reflects three areas of activity for which the YWD is responsible: 1) watershed management, 2) water purification and 3) distribution of water to customers. Gary Stevens, resource protection manager for the YWD, gave me an overview of the expanse of land protected by the district. The YWD portion of the watershed is 2,090 acres West of I-95 and the YWD owns more than 90 percent of it. Stevens patrols it regularly to ensure that prohibited activities which might affect the watershed are prevented. This includes the controversial dog policy which mandates that people with dogs must carry out dog waste and keep their dogs on leashes.

Don Neumann, a 35-year employee of the YWD is the district's superintendent. He explained how the district works. "It's a quasi-municipal district," he said, "separate from the town of York." Five trustees are elected by York's voters but there is no official connection between YWD and Town Hall or the Board of Selectmen. Instead, the YWD is governed by the Maine Public Utilities Commission.

Neumann also talked about the third leg of the stool: distribution — 90 miles of underground pipes, mostly east of I-95. The YWD was incorporated in 1929 though it had existed as a private company — the York Shore Water Company, founded by Josiah Chase — since 1896. The reason the utility was established was not so much to deliver drinking water, as to provide fire protection. The system of hydrants — on average less than 1,000 feet apart throughout the service area — remains a key function of the district. The proximity and condition of the hydrants helps keep insurance rates down for property owners.

It makes you wonder: What is the value of a gallon of clean drinking water? YWD charges \$58.53 for the first 1,000 cubic feet of water delivered quarterly to residents. A thousand cubic feet of water contains 7,480 gallons. That's less than a penny a gallon. The price is higher for seasonal connections but it still works out to less than \$0.02 per gallon. Some of the best water in Maine for that price is still a bargain, don't you think?

If you doubt it, consider the price of a gallon of Poland Springs water — \$1.29 at Hannaford's Market. Think about it.

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