



THE WATERFALL CENTER FOR BIOREGIONAL LEARNING

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Bioregionalism is a philosophy and practice that identifies regional ecosystems and encourages a sense of belonging, understanding and adaptation to the landscape.

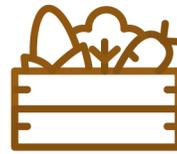
ELEMENTS OF A BIOREGION



ECOLOGY



COMMUNITY



FOOD SYSTEMS



LANDFORMS



ECONOMY

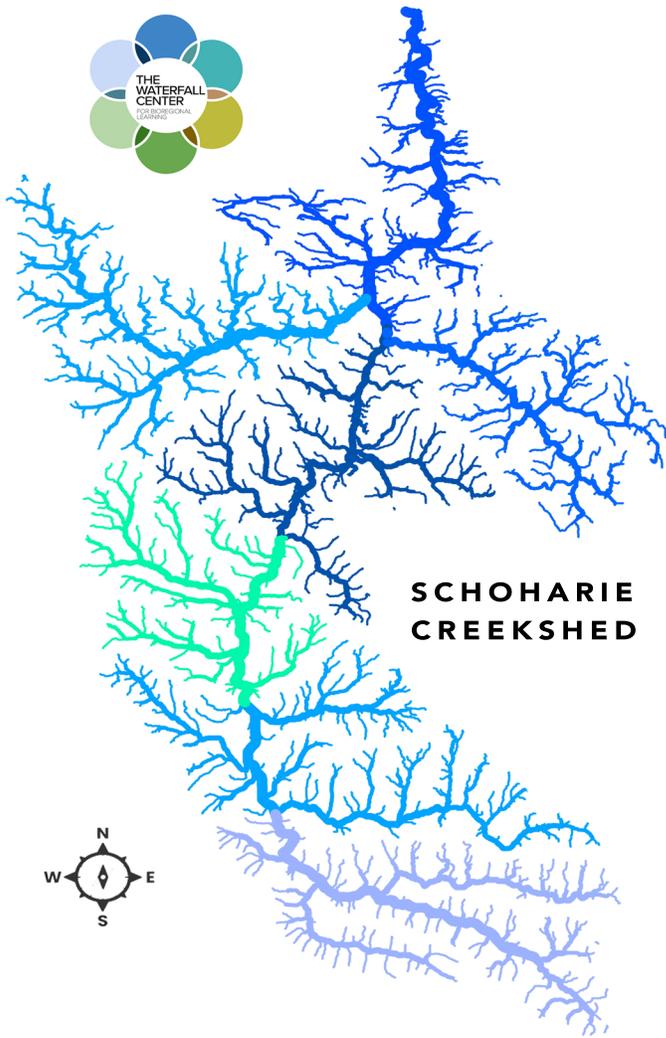
WHAT IS A BIOREGION?

We can define a bioregion along watershed and hydrological boundaries as well as historical and cultural identities. Some delineations begin with the oldest “hard” lines: geology, topography, tectonics, wind, fracture zones, and continental divides. From there, bioregional definitions work towards understanding the “softer” lines: living systems such as soil, ecosystems, climate, marine life, and flora and fauna. Finally, we can define the “human” lines: human geography, energy, transportation, agriculture, food, music, language, history, cultures, and ways of living within the bioregion.

WHY BIOREGIONALISM MATTERS

Bioregionalism is a powerful framework for understanding and meeting the needs of a defined community. Many people have little sense of where their water comes from, what grows naturally around them, or how local ecosystems function. This disconnection has real consequences: poor land stewardship, resource extraction without accountability, and communities that lack the knowledge to sustain themselves. Bioregionalism helps communities understand that having a sense of place - in the deepest ecological sense - is a prerequisite for caring for it well. Initiatives like: watersheds managed by local councils for the greatest public good, food systems built around regional production, and indigenous land stewardship practices which help to restore traditional ecological knowledge, are all expressions of informed bioregional decision making.

In the context of globalism and the instability of supply chains, thinking bioregionally helps communities reclaim a sense of agency and belonging. A strong sense of place-based identity also helps to counter the alienation of modern life. When people feel genuinely connected to the land they live on – knowing its rhythms, stories and limits – they tend to take better care of it and of each other.



SCHOHARIE CREEKSHED BIOREGION

The Schoharie Creek watershed, which encompasses a drainage basin of approximately 315 sq miles for the Upper Schoharie Reservoir alone, includes three New York counties: Greene, Schoharie, and Delaware.

Agricultural Heritage: Breadbasket of the Revolution

The Schoharie Valley's fertile limestone soils made it one of the most productive farming regions in colonial America, so vital to feeding Continental Army troops that it earned the title "Breadbasket of the American Revolution." Agriculture remains a defining feature of the bioregion today.

Rural Life, Culture & Community

The Schoharie watershed retains a distinctly rural character that has become increasingly rare in the Northeast. Small towns, family farms, local fairs, volunteer fire departments, and deep-rooted community networks define daily life here. This social fabric, built over generations, is inseparable from the land itself.

Cultural & Indigenous Significance

The Schoharie Valley is part of the ancestral homelands of the Kanien'kehá:ka (People of the Flint), also known as the Mohawk People. It is known as the Eastern Door of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Kanien'kehá:ka are the keepers of that door.

Geology & Karst Hydrology

The watershed drains ~1,000 square miles from the northern Catskills to the Mohawk River. Limestone bedrock creates rare karst features — sinkholes, caves, and springs — hosting Howe Caverns and Secret Caverns. This geology produces cold, mineral-rich water that shapes the entire ecological character of the region.

Ecological Transition Zone

The Schoharie sits at a crossroads between northern hardwood forest (beech, sugar maple, yellow birch) and Appalachian oak-hickory communities. This overlap creates exceptional biodiversity, with both northern and southern species sharing habitat across the elevation gradient from Catskill peaks to valley floor.

Trout Fishery & Water Quality

The Schoharie and its tributaries — especially Batavia Kill and Huntersfield Creek — support wild brook and brown trout. This is historically significant: the Catskills are the birthplace of American fly fishing, and the Schoharie remains one of the Northeast's premier wild trout streams.

New York City Water Supply

The upper Schoharie feeds the Schoharie Reservoir, a key component of NYC's drinking water system. This designation has driven land use restrictions and conservation easements across large portions of the watershed, inadvertently preserving forest cover and riparian habitat that might otherwise have been lost to development.

Wildlife & Biodiversity

Low human population density and a mosaic of farmland, wetlands, hedgerows, and forest sustain black bear, bobcat, fisher, river otter, and rich breeding bird communities in riparian corridors. The landscape structure is a model of working land coexisting with intact habitat.