

Black River Initiative

Spring 2009



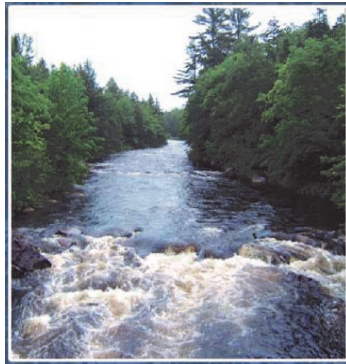
Special points of interest:

- Updates on Regional Planning Activities
- Local Projects
- 2009 River Events
- Looking Ahead

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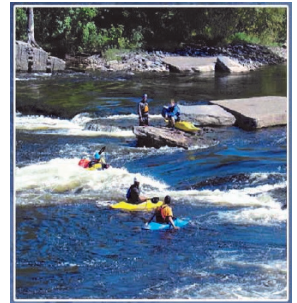
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Black River Initiative Update



about progress on projects taking place up and down the River.

There has been much activity in the Black River corridor since the last edition of the Black River Initiative newsletter update. Since then, many things have been accomplished and new elements are underway. In this newsletter, you will find articles with information about some of the projects that comprise the Black River Initiative and what progress has been made to date along the river corridor and within the Watershed. Please take a look inside to learn more



Blueway, Byway & Watershed: Regional Plans Link Environment and Economy

Among the articles that follow, you will read about three regional efforts that complement one another. The Black River Blueway Trail Development Plan focuses directly on improving and promoting the Black River as a resource for recreation and tourism. The Black River Trail Scenic Byway is a theme-based automobile route highlighting the river's role as an historic transportation corridor and former canal; the shared industrial heritage of the communities that harnessed its energy; and its recreational opportunities. The Scenic Byway's Corridor Management Plan focuses on strategies for improving the tourist experience and stimulating economic development along the river corridor. Both plans take a corridor approach to coordinating local and regional actions for maximum benefit to all.

value in downtown revitalization and its economic value as a tourist resource, they have also shown greater concern for protecting the river's water quality. Many locals still remember the river's reputation as a "dirty" river. It's difficult to promote fishing, recreational paddling, or world-class white-water rafting and kayaking on a river with such an image. Fortunately, reduced industrial pollution and the construction of wastewater treatment plants in communities have significantly improved the river's water quality over the years. The Black River Watershed Plan is intended to identify local strategies to minimize future environmental threats to the Black River while continuing to improve its water quality even further. The articles that follow provide more information about these and other projects along the Black River.

As communities along the Black River have come to appreciate its aesthetic

The Black River Blueway Trail: A Project That Promotes the Black River and Black River Communities



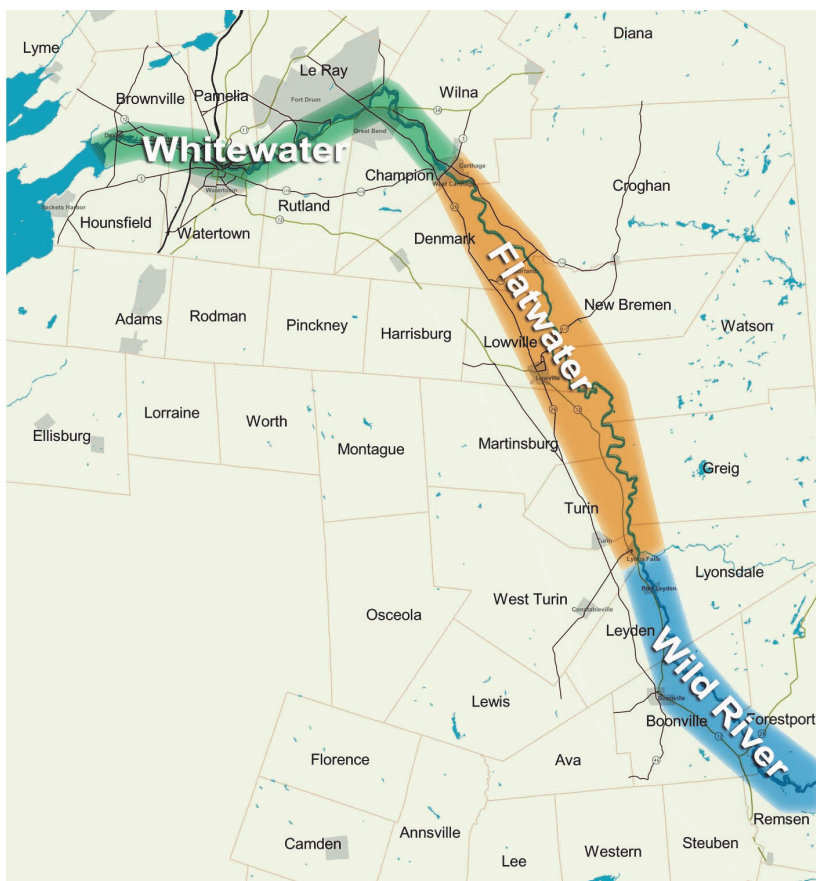
The Black River Blueway Trail project began with a 2004 Environmental Protection Fund grant to create a blueway trail development plan. A blueway trail is the water equivalent of a hiking trail or greenway. It facilitates recreation and environmental awareness in and along a waterway while linking communities

and land-based attractions such as recreational trails, historic sites, and parks. The Black River already offers a variety of recreational activities including fishing, canoeing, white-water rafting and kayaking, and boating. The Plan looks at how to augment those and market recreational venues as a package, or brand. The Blueway Trail also encompasses adjacent communities. This is an opportunity to promote cultural tourism and address the potential of added hospitality and tourism related services for Blueway Trail communities.

White, Still and Wild: A Blueway Trail Development Plan for the Black River was completed in 2007 and is available for review at www.tughill.org/projects.htm. The report defines the river's three distinct character areas as wildwater from Forestport to Lyons Falls; flatwater from Lyons Falls to Carthage; and whitewater from Carthage to Dexter. It provides a number of recommendations for enhancing river access and recreational opportunities; improving

scenic views; creating gateway information centers; and strengthening marketing and promotion.

A second Blueway Trail grant implements several of the Blueway Plan recommendations for improvements along the Black River, including a signage plan, brochures, and three access improvement projects—Lyons Falls Turning Basin, Town of Turin's Burdicks Crossing, and Dexter's Fish Island Project. While work on the signage plan and brochures is still in progress, the access improvement projects in Lyons Falls and Dexter are nearly complete. More information about these and other river projects can be found in this newsletter.



A third Blueway Trail implementation grant was awarded in 2008. The work included in this project supports the removal of four navigation hazards located along the calm 40-mile mid-section of the River between Lyons Falls and Carthage, high quality marketing materials, www.blackriverny.com website enhancements, and the design of two public access sites in the Town of Forestport.

The strength of the Blueway Trail program is that 37 communities working together can garner more funding and a greater overall impact than communities working individually. The future holds many possibilities for furthering community

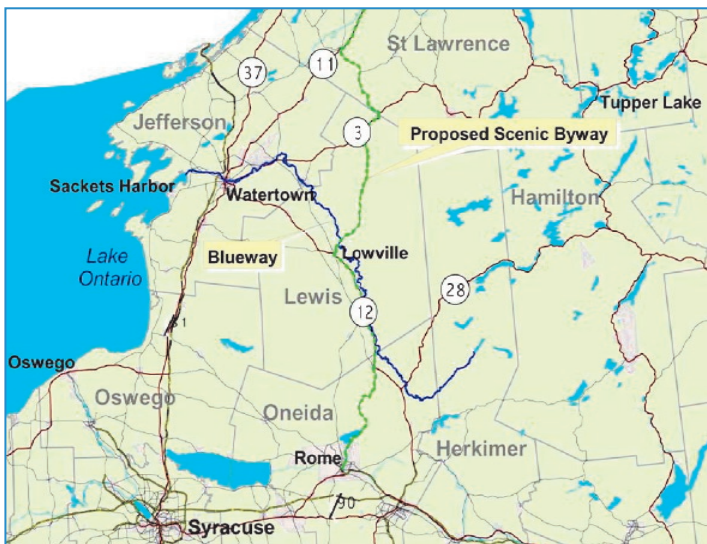
driven initiatives, adding to the overall value of the Black River Blueway Trail as a regional resource.

Blueway Trail funding is administered by the NYS Department of State's Office of Coastal, Local Government, and Community Sustainability Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) through Title 11 of the Environmental Protection Fund.

Black River Trail and Maple Traditions Scenic Byways: Corridor Management Plans Wrapping Up

Overview

Corridor Management Plans (CMP) for the Black River Trail Scenic Byway and Maple Traditions Scenic Byway are completed and are posted on the Tug Hill Commission's website (www.tughill.org/projects.htm). Both CMPs were prepared by the Commission in partnership with the Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA), with significant input from local byway stakeholders. Funding was provided by the NYS Department of Transportation's Scenic Byways Program through the Federal Highway Administration and Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century.



The CMP documents detail plans for economic development strategies that promote tourism while preserving the natural, historical, cultural and recreational resources and maintaining the distinctive qualities and character of the two routes. They also describe how to maintain and enhance the byways and propose numerous regional and local projects and actions as well as recommendations for future implementation. Once approved, the plans set the stage for additional byway funding to implement those actions and other community projects that support the Byway CMP goals.

Black River Trail Scenic Byway

The Black River Trail starts in Rome and follows the old Black River Canal along Route 46 to Boonville.

From there it follows the Black River through Lowville, Carthage/West Carthage, and Watertown, ending near Dexter where the river empties into Lake Ontario. A spur route is proposed from Boonville to Forestport to the river's headwaters. The Black River Canal had run from Rome to Carthage, and communities from Lyons Falls to Dexter share an industrial heritage based in common on the power of the Black River's flows. This historical connection reinforces the physical connection these communities share through the Black River. Furthermore, the byway's theme also reinforces efforts to promote the river as a recreational "blueway" trail with riverfront parks, canoe and boat launches, fishing access points, hiking trails, and opportunities for both flatwater and whitewater paddling.

Maple Traditions Scenic Byway

The proposed Maple Traditions Scenic Byway highlights the simple and historical traditions of people living close to the land, while providing present-day people with access to a variety of outdoor recreational activities. Beginning in Lowville, the 80 mile route takes travelers past farmlands, woodlands, the American Maple Museum in Croghan, and ends in the "Maple City" of Ogdensburg—at the foot of the Ogdensburg-Prescott International Bridge to Canada which spans the St. Lawrence Seaway. Along the way, travelers visit family-operated sugar bush operations where maple syrup is produced using wood-stoked fires and horse-drawn wagons; observe Amish farmers working their fields; and are tempted by a variety of locally crafted, traditions-based products such as furniture, cheeses, meats, candles, baskets, and candies. An alternate loop through Canton brings travelers past the Traditional Arts in Upstate New York's (TAUNY) North Country Heritage Center, whose exhibits, archives, and local product gallery highlight and preserve the rich living heritage of customs and folk arts from across the entire North Country region.



Black River Watershed Management Plan

Many of the projects along the Black River that you are reading about in this newsletter have been underway for quite some time and are focused on the river corridor. Recognizing that river activities depend heavily on water quality, the Black River Watershed Management Plan was initiated to protect and restore water quality to ensure the success of the projects and communities involved.

The Black River Watershed Management Plan encompasses both a traditional surface water quality planning exercise, which focuses on the enhancement, protection and improvement of water quality in the Black River and its tributaries, and three additional studies which will provide a more in-depth understanding of the watershed. The three additional studies include a Socioeconomic Characterization of the Watershed, a Stakeholder Outreach report and a Groundwater Assessment. The intent of these "sister projects" is to strengthen our understanding of the Black River Watershed by learning about its inhabitants, understanding socioeconomic trends such as population and job statistics, and more fully characterizing groundwater resources.

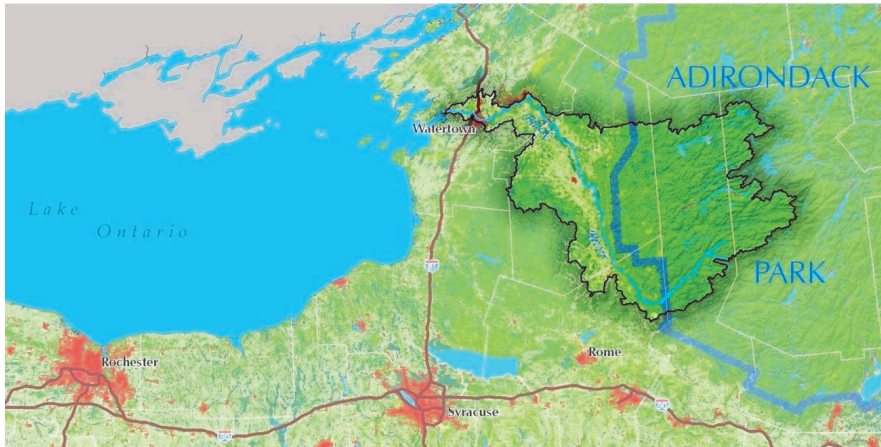
The purpose of including the entire watershed is to ensure that the Black River drainage area, and the quality of water within it are protected and improved wherever possible, and that the resource continues to provide for the needs of those that depend on it for their livelihoods, well-being and recreational opportunities. Using a variety of funding sources, the planning process will include building community consensus; watershed characterization; inventory of existing conditions; identification of problems and opportunities; identification of land and water use controls and institutional arrangements for water quality management; and identification of specific resource protection and management needs.

Preparation and implementation of the Black River Watershed Management Plan will advance the pro-

tection and restoration of water quality and ensure compatible land use development, helping to protect the River's scenic and natural resources.

The Black River watershed spans Hamilton, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis and Oneida counties. The river is a major tributary of Lake Ontario and also supplies drinking water for the City of Watertown and Fort Drum.

The Black River Watershed planning efforts are being coordinated by the Lewis County Soil & Water Conservation District, the NYS DEC and the Tug Hill Commission. The Town of Greig is the lead grant recipient. The plan is being prepared through consultant services (Bergmann Associates, along with Camoin Associates) procured by the Town of Greig and overseen by a Project Advisory Committee, which includes numerous agencies and local stakeholders from each of the watershed counties. It is funded with monies from two Environmental Protection Fund grants (through the NYS Department of State's



Division of Coastal, Local Government and Community Sustainability) to the Town of Greig and matching funds from the Black River Advisory Committee Fund (Brookfield Power) and Senator Griffo. A National Fish & Wildlife Foundation grant was secured by the Tug Hill Commission for the three additional studies being completed as part of this initiative. Draft and final components of the Management Plan can be found on the Tug Hill Commission website at www.tughill.org.

Phase I of this project is complete including the Stakeholder Outreach Report, the Groundwater Study, the SocioEconomic Report, and the Watershed Characterization. The Sub-watershed Prioritization Report is in draft form with comments currently being solicited on its content and methods. In Phase II, which is slated to be complete by the end of 2009, the sub-watershed prioritization report will be finalized and the final report, the Watershed Management Strategy Report will also be completed.

Village of Black River Revitalization

Enhancing waterfronts along the Black River has been central to the revitalization of several communities through which it passes. The Village of Black River is no exception.

In 2005, the Village's central business district lost its last remaining commercial enterprise. The loss of businesses over the years was due partly to the challenges faced by Main Streets across the Country, but exacerbated by the lack of public sewers to support business growth or development. With the completion of a public wastewater system in 2007, and the regional growth spurred by the transformation of the 10th Mountain Division at Fort Drum, the village is looking to the Black River and its proximity to the military installation as two key assets around which to base its revitalization efforts.

A 2005 county bridge reconstruction project over the river in the center of the village incorporated significant streetscape improvements by adding

brick pavers, benches, and ornamental street lighting while also improving views of the Black River from the bridge and the river bank. In 2008 (with funding from the New York State Quality Communities Program, Route 3 Sewer Board, and Jefferson County Job Development Corporation) Black River completed a "Community Visioning and Strategic Visioning Plan." That plan identifies retail priorities, suggests alternative scenarios for redevelopment of vacant parcels in the downtown area, and recommends general design guidelines for the downtown area.



The Village's next project will be developing a land use plan and considering zoning revisions that will more effectively support mixed use development in the central business district. These planning efforts—along with the improved appearance of the riverfront streetscape—appear to now be generating business interest in the community.

Boonville Black River Canal Museum Now Open



The Boonville Black River Canal Museum opened to the public in the summer of 2008. The museum is located on the canal trail at the intersection of Route 12 and Main Street at the south en-

trance to the village. Post cards, magnets, history books and blanket throws are available for sale.

The museum is housed in the Hemlock Mercantile, a replica of an old country store, built by local volunteers. Adjacent to the museum, an original canal warehouse, located along the canal, has been restored with funds from a Transportation Enhancements Grant and an Environmental Protection Fund grant written by the Commission. Volunteers have also constructed a life-size canal boat replica at the museum complex for visitors to board and experience. For more information, photos, and historical information, visit the museum website at www.blackrivercanalmuseum.com.

Navigation Improvements

The 40-mile flat water portion of the Black River from Lyons Falls to Carthage/West Carthage provides the longest, continuous water route on the river. Unfortunately, during low-flow summer conditions, safe navigation is impeded to varying degrees by a number of hazards that have been known to damage hulls, outboard motors, and even to injure paddlers or occupants. These hazards are primarily dam remnants, timber piles, and submerged former abutments from the river's former days as part of the canal system.

In 2003 and 2004, communities along this stretch of the river held a series of meetings to discuss their shared interest in promoting increased use of the Black River as a resource for recreation and tourism. Improving navigation of the river

was their highest priority. With funding from former Senator James Wright, they were able to enlist the US Army Corp of Engineers to complete a 2006 navigation study with recommendations and cost estimates for removing those hazards.

Given that the 2007 Black River Blueway Trail Plan supported the navigation study recommendations, the Town of Martinsburg was able to obtain a 2008 Blueway Trail Implementation grant for removing navigation hazards at four sites in that town's portion of the Black River. Those sites include dam remnants at Bushes Landing and Otter Creek, boulders near the Glenfield Bridge, and old pilings near Roaring Brook.

Martinsburg is currently awaiting a contract from the Department of State, with hopes that the projects can begin this summer.

Dexter's Fish Island Project Improves River Access for Disabled



The Fish Island project has been in the works for over twenty years, since Dexter's Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP) recommended river access improvements at this site. Throughout the years, the Fish Island Partnership, which has more than 100 members, collected funds to construct a handicap accessible pavilion, pier and dock.

A \$13,000 Blueway Implementation grant (EPF) is one part of over \$100,000 in state and corporate grants (including legislative funding from then Assemblyman, and now Senator, Darrel Aubertine), as well as individual and group donations, village funds, and thousands of dollars worth of volunteer hours, donated equipment, and materials.

In 2007, the disabled-accessible pier, a 576 square-foot pavilion, and a gravel walking path around the island were constructed. Dexter officials worked with Jefferson County Planning to prepare schematic designs and with the DEC for design, permitting, and project guidance.

The Partnership continues to seek funding for improvements, disabled-accessible picnic tables, restroom facilities, and lighting, to name a few, but the main components of the park are available to the public. There will be a formal opening of the new park in 2010, however, the pavilion will be dedicated to Sam Johnson on 9/11/09. For more information, contact the Fish Island Partnership vice-chairman, Donald Rickett, at (315) 785-8872.



Lyons Falls Canal Basin



The Lyons Falls Basin Committee of Lyons Falls Alive!, a community revitalization group with over 30 active members, along with the Village of Lyons Falls has been working together to clean up and preserve the turning basin and the series of locks that connect the village to the Black River Canal. Historically, canal boats would dock in the turning basin to exchange goods or passengers before returning to the Black River via three locks along a short towpath.

The group began work in April 2006 on the Canal Basin Park project with the goal to create public recreation opportunities that tie into the historic significance of the canal and the Black River. Work completed to-date includes excavating, grading, tree removal, fill material, construction of a retaining wall and steps, picnic tables, benches, grill, lighting, gravel path, interpretive materials, and landscaping, including dry-stacked stone planting beds, trees and bushes. The project includes hundreds of community volunteer hours, donated services, use of equipment, and materials.

The Village has obtained \$10,146 in grant funds from local organizations toward the project including the Pratt-Northam Foundation, Forest Presbyterian Church, and Iroquois Gas. The Black River Blueway Trail Implementation grant (EPF) awarded in 2006 contributed \$9,000 toward the project.

Lyons Falls Receives Boost To Revitalization Efforts

The Village of Lyons Falls, with grant writing assistance from Snowbelt Housing, was recently awarded a community planning grant of \$20,070 from the NYS Office of Community Renewal. Those funds will support strategic planning for housing, infrastructure, and economic development—including how to capitalize on its location to the Black River Blueway Trail and Black River Trail Scenic Byway. A week later, the downtown revitalization effort received a \$434,000 grant from the New York Main Street Program, again with grant writing assistance from Snowbelt Housing. That grant will help to fund building renovation in the village center, including the rehabilitation of Millie's Great American into a new Dollar General Store, that will feature grocery items. Renovations will include façade work, and interior work on commercial and residential space.



The Village recently erected a pavilion at its community park with funding support from Senator Joe Griffo.

Waterfront Development in the Twin Villages

Over the past several years, the Villages of Carthage and West Carthage have been working cooperatively to become a "Community of Choice." The Twin Villages are strategically located along the Olympic Trail Scenic Byway, the proposed Black River Trail Scenic Byway, the Black River Blueway Trail, and at the northern terminus of the 41-mile Black River Canoe Trail. The Carthages have undertaken a number of projects aimed at capitalizing on their existing natural amenities and recreational opportunities.

In 1998 the Village of Carthage received an Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) grant for improvements to Long Falls Park, located along the Black River near Guyots Island. Grant funds were used to purchase picnic tables, construct an interpretive kiosk, install a concrete pad for a future pavilion, and to build a new concrete bridge connecting the mainland to Guyots island. A second EPF grant was awarded to the Village in 2006 for Phase II of the Long Falls Park Project. The \$112,420 EPF grant will be matched with \$124,000 in village funds, in-kind labor, and a private donation. The \$236,420 Phase II project will include clearing of Guyots Island, installation of lighting, benches, barbecues, picnic tables, a stone pathway, a gate at the base of the bridge on the mainland park, fencing around mill remnants and the perimeter of the island, and two pavilions – one on the island and one on the mainland.

Given the Island's long history of significant industrial development, an archeological assessment was required to ensure that project construction does not disturb the integrity of any important industrial artifacts. A final draft of Guyot's Island - Phase I Archeological Assessment has been submitted by Matthew Kirk, Hartgen Associates, to the village and is awaiting final approval by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). The Village has contracted with Hartgen Associates to provide archeological oversight during project construction. The village is currently amending the engineer's scope of work and will

look to begin construction as soon as a qualified engineering firm has been selected.

Funded through the Quality Communities Program and the River Area Council of Governments (RACOG), the Villages have recently completed the Carthage/West Carthage Waterfront Development Plan. The plan, prepared by peter j. smith & associates, provides both an outline of the shared vision for future development along the Black River as well as a roadmap to achieve that vision. Implementation details are included for nearly a dozen projects "that will increase awareness, appreciation, and general enjoyment of the Black River waterfront". The final plan has been distributed to the respective municipalities for approval and implementation and can be viewed at www.racog.org.

Based upon recommendations outlined in the Carthage/West Carthage Waterfront Development Plan, the Village of West Carthage submitted a request for funding to OPRHP in December 2008 for consideration under the Recreation Trails Program to implement public expansion and pedestrian access, walkways and amenities to the South Main Street Trailhead and Boat Launch Area. The proposed project features an asphalt walkway, picnic shelter, wood chip wetland trail, concrete boat launch ramp, asphalt road and parking area, tree plantings interpretive panels and signage and benches. Award announcements are expected later this year.



2009 Paddling Events for the Amateur and the Expert

The **2009 Lewis County RiverFest** will take place on August 1st. The Lewis County Riverfest is an 11.3 mile canoe and kayaking event. Going strong for almost 30 years, Riverfest draws participants of all ages from all over New York State and even Canada. Registration is required; snacks are provided. For more information, contact the Lewis County Chamber of Commerce at (315) 376-2213, or info@lewiscountychamber.org.



World-class free-style whitewater kayaking events have been hosted in Watertown for the past 5 years. Events have included the 2004 U.S. Team Trials, the North American Cup in 2005, 2007, and 2008, and the 2006 World Cup Championships (featuring competitors from 18 countries including Japan, Australia, Czech Republic, Israel, Canada, and Spain). Event organizers, *Blackwater Development*, have plans to bid on the 2009 USA National Freestyle Championships and North America Cup.

These events also offer the opportunity for amateur enthusiasts to take part in educational classes and other non-pro events held in conjunction with the competition. *Blackwater Development* plans to expand events and educational instruction to other whitewater communities interested in promoting paddlesports on the Black River. For more information please contact Blackwater Development at (315) 782-0705, tommygunn44@hotmail.com or sleinad@gisco.net.



The **Black River Classic Feeder Canal Canoe & Kayak race** will be held on August 22nd as part of that weekend's annual *NYS Woodsmen's Field Days* in Boonville, NY. For more information, call the NYS Woodsmen's Field Days office at (315) 942-4593, or visit www.nyswfd.com.

Visit www.BlackRiverNY.com

BlackRiverNY.com was first established by a partnership between the City of Watertown and the Thousand Islands International Tourism Council. With funding from Assemblywoman Dierdre Scozzafava, the site has evolved to include the entire length of the river corridor. The most recent Blueway Trail grant will support additional enhancements to the site over the course of the coming year.





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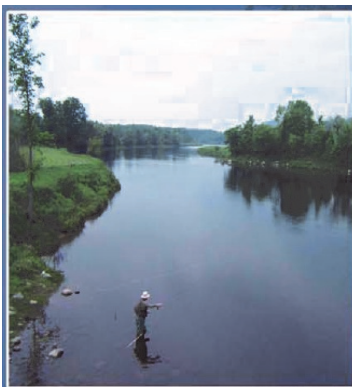
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LOOKING AHEAD – FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Black River Trail Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan, the Black River Blueway Trail Development Plan, and the Black River Watershed Management Plan are all regional plans that cut across municipal boundaries to address issues and opportunities related to a shared resource. While all three address the Black River or its watershed, they do so from different but complementary perspectives. Together they address the Black River’s environmental significance, its recreational value, its opportunities for economic development and tourism, its historical role in the region’s growth and development, and its aesthetic contribution to the communities through which it passes.

Locally, these regional plans open up funding opportunities for project implementation. Projects that further the goals of these regional plans are



more attractive to grant reviewers. Smaller projects that may not compete effectively on their own, may be combined for joint funding applications to support these regional plans and may increase their chances for funding. These regional plans can also serve as a springboard for more detailed local plans that further increase the opportunities for implementation funding while also aiding local decision-making. Communities may also incorporate information from these regional plans into their own comprehensive planning efforts.

If your community has a project in mind, or has questions about how any of these plans can support your local planning or implementation efforts, feel free to call the Commission office at **1-888-785-2380**. In the meantime, we will continue to provide periodic updates to keep you informed.