

Black River Corridor Initiative

Update #1

This newsletter is intended to update you on a several initiatives either pending or already underway along the Black River corridor. With so many complementary projects related to this one major resource, communication and coordination will be key to maximizing the benefit for all communities along the corridor. For more information on any of these projects, call the Tug Hill Commission at 785-2380 (toll free at 1-888-785-2380) or visit our website at www.tughill.org/projects.

BLUEWAY OR BYWAY? Would you believe both?

You will soon be hearing two similar terms on a regular basis. They sound similar, but actually refer to two different though complementary projects.

Blueway refers to a the Black River itself, a designation recently awarded by Governor Pataki along with a grant from the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). **Byway** refers to the scenic automobile route for tourists that follows the Black River and Black River Canal for a major portion of its route.

Both of the above projects are explained in further detail in separate articles below, and are highlighted on the enclosed map.

GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES FUNDING FOR BLUEWAY TRAIL PROJECT

Earlier this summer, Governor Pataki announced a \$27,000 Environmental Protection Fund grant for the Black River Blueway Trail Project. The Town of Martinsburg had submitted the application on behalf of all 36 municipalities along the river from the headwaters above Forestport out to Lake Ontario. Martinsburg will also be administering the grant. 26 municipalities were able to provide supporting resolutions for the application and 17 municipalities each pledged an average of \$700 each as part of the local match.

A “Blueway Trail” is a small boat and/or paddling route (or series of routes) along a waterway that combines recreation and environmental awareness while linking communities and land-based attractions such as recreational trails, historic sites, and parks. The Black River offers a variety of recreational activities: including fishing, canoeing, whitewater rafting and kayaking, and boating.

Wastewater projects along the corridor have significantly improved water quality in recent years and several communities have focused their revitalization efforts on the presence of the river. Communities along the river have been developing riverfront parks, creating riverside trails, and promoting a range of events including casual paddles, fun competitions, and national-level kayaking competitions.

The EPF grant will fund a **blueway trail development plan** for the Black River. That plan will knit together all of the individual projects along the river into **a cohesive strategy for developing the full potential of the river as a regional economic asset**. Elements of the plan will address promotion strategies for attracting targeted market groups; physical improvements to enhance river access and its appeal as a destination; and signage (directional and interpretive).

The project should be underway by late 2005, beginning with the selection of a consultant to complete the plan under the direction of a regional steering committee. Once the plan is completed, funds can be requested in future grant rounds to help implement its recommendations. That might include the development of new boat launches, signage, and/or promotional brochures. The completed plan could also be used as documentation to support individual communities in their efforts seek funding for local projects along the Black River.

BLACK RIVER SCENIC BYWAY CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Black River Scenic Byway is one of 14 scenic byways in the 14-county Adirondack North Country Region that were established by state legislation in the early 1980s. Scenic byways link communities along a scenic automobile route with a common theme. Some communities by themselves may not generate much tourist activity, but when linked together along a common theme they can provide an overall travel experience that will draw tourists into a region or encourage them to follow that route as a scenic alternative. That then creates an opportunity for communities and business along that byway to serve those tourists and capture some of their spending dollars.

The Black River Scenic Byway starts in Rome, NY, follows the old Black River Canal along Route 46 before following NYS Route 12 and the Black River to Lowville. From Lowville, the byway then heads north along Route 812 to the International Bridge in Ogdensburg.

The Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA) oversees the development and promotion of the scenic byways in this region, with the exception of the Seaway Trail which has its own non-profit organization. The Tug Hill Commission will likely be working with ANCA to help develop the Corridor Management Plan (CMP) for the Black River Scenic Byway. The process will include public input sessions to identify cultural, historic, scenic, and recreational attractions along the byway and to develop strategies for developing and promoting the byway as a route of choice for the traveling public. The CMP then becomes the justification for additional funding to support promotional activities and various community development projects along the byway. More details will be publicized as they become available.

BLACK RIVER NAVIGATION STUDY TO PROCEED. MAJOR SUPPORT FROM SENATOR WRIGHT.

The US Army Corps of Engineers is presently conducting a navigation study on the 40-mile stretch of the Black River from Lyons Falls to Carthage/West Carthage. This section of quiet flatwater is popular for canoeing, but does contain some potential hazards due to debris in the river, such as old pilings and the remains of old jetties and dams from the river's early history as part of the Black River Canal. Navigation on some lower stretches of the river is also impeded by sedimentation. Champion had requested the assistance on behalf of the River Area Council of Governments and the Lewis County municipalities that share that stretch of river. Those communities had been discussing ways to jointly promote the recreational potential of this shared stretch of river, and debris removal was identified as a high priority for improving safety and enjoyment of the river.

The Army Corps approved the \$100,000 study in February of this year. However, in order to proceed, the local communities needed to provide a 50% match consisting of at least \$25,000 in cash. Although the in-kind portion would be met through such activities as the steering committee's work and mapping services from the Commission, the cash match had not been secured. Senator James Wright was able to secure the cash match in time for the project to proceed this summer. The report and its recommendations for subsequent actions should be available by October 2005. The effort to remove navigation impediments will be a several-year-process, but should prove complementary to the long term goals of the Blueway Trail project.

SCOZZAFAVA SUPPORTS RIVER EVENT PROMOTION

A \$10,000 grant through Assemblywoman Diedre Scozzafava supported the organization and promotion of a series of paddling events on the Black River this summer. The funding made possible the revival of Lewis County's annual RiverFest after a two-year hiatus due to insurance costs, and the introduction of a new canoe rodeo event (called a "canoedeo") on the riverfront shared by Carthage and West Carthage. The Adirondack SummerFest (Port Leyden) also received support for its two-day event that included canoe and kayak races.

A portion of the funding will also support a cooperative effort to promote the above events, along with several others, as an event series—hopefully creating greater visibility for all. That effort should be in place for the summer 2006 event series. Other events scheduled for this summer, in addition to the ones already mentioned above, include the Black River Classic feeder canal race (Scheduled for Aug. 20th as part of the Woodsmen's Field Days in Boonville), and championship freestyle kayaking events in Watertown (see Watertown article below). This regional promotion will also tie into website promotion on the internet. See article below.

WWW.BLACKRIVERNY.COM SITE TO BE EXPANDED

The Thousand Islands International Tourism Council currently maintains a website designed to promote the Black River at www.BlackRiverNY.com. The site includes links to articles on the Black River as well as events information and a map of recreational access sites along the river. Although the site was initially developed to promote the Jefferson County portion of the river, it is currently being expanded to include a map and events information for the rest of the river corridor through Lewis and Oneida counties.

WATERTOWN HOSTS CHAMPION-LEVEL KAYAKING EVENTS

This summer, August 24-28, 2005, Watertown will host the North American Freestyle Kayaking Championships on the Route 3 Wave. The event has its own website at www.blackwaterchallenge.net. This event follows last summer's event when the City of Watertown hosted the Team Trials for the US Freestyle Kayaking Team, drawing world-class athletes from across the country.

These events are the product of a public-private partnership between the City of Watertown and Black Water Development Corporation, the event organizers. Black Water Development Corporation has also lined Watertown up to host one of three events as part of the 2006 World Cup, sponsored by the International Canoe Federation.

BLACK RIVER FEATURED IN THE CONSERVATIONIST

The June 2005 issue of The Conservationist featured a three-page article on the Black River, authored by David Zembiec, the Commission's director of community development. The article gives an overview of the river's changing character as it flows from its headwaters in the Adirondacks to where it empties into Lake Ontario. It also summarizes the variety of recreational activities available on the river: fishing, canoeing, kayaking, and whitewater rafting.

Black River Monitoring Stations

The Lewis County Soil & Water Conservation District is in the process of purchasing and installing 4 remote water quality monitoring stations that will be tied via telemetry to the District's website. The monitoring stations will also monitor flow levels, helping to provide advance flood warnings. The stations are being funded by the Finger Lakes Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance (FLOWPA).

Black River Watershed Plan

The Town of Greig, with the assistance of the Lewis County Soil & Water Conservation District and the Tug Hill Commission, applied to the Environmental Protection Fund in June for funds to prepare a Black River Watershed Plan. The Black River watershed encompasses portions of 5 counties (Hamilton, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, and Oneida), and Greig plans to work closely with the 37 local municipalities within the watershed and the 5 county Soil & Water Conservation Districts. The goal is to create a comprehensive document detailing water quality characteristics, land use, and water quality stresses and priorities in the watershed in a bottoms-up approach that builds local interest in the resource and helps communities embrace locally set standards and implement their visions. A completed plan will give communities decision-making information, build capacity in local government on water quality issues critical to their well-being, provide better understanding of the link between water quality and economics, and identify opportunities for local actions to help improve and manage water quality.