

FISH CREEK UPDATE

Working Group Meets To Discuss Easement Changes

About 45 people met at The Alpine in Constableville on October 4, 2018 for the annual meeting of the East Branch of Fish Creek Working Group. The group was originally formed in the mid-1990's in response to the sale of the Lyons Falls Pulp and Paper lands in southern Lewis County. All attendees introduced themselves, and then heard updates from Molpus Woodlands Group, The Nature Conservancy, and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC).

Molpus Updates

Tim Burpoe, property manager with Molpus Woodlands Group who manages the property on behalf of the Corrigan Fund who owns the approximately 30,000 acres south of G&W Road, talked about lease administration, timber harvest operations, and roads. The easement terms allow a total of 15 camps on the property. Those located on the east side of the East Branch of Fish Creek have exclusive hunting rights on their acreages. Camps on the west side of the East Branch of Fish Creek have 5- acre exclusive envelopes around the camp. Eleven of the 15 camps are currently leased, with space available on the east side of the property. Molpus and NYSDEC also inspected all of the existing hunting camps, who are each allowed 1,000 square feet, to see what has changed. Tim urged camp owners to let Molpus know before making any changes to structures, to avoid potential problems.

Molpus currently has one timber harvest underway on 700 acres off Camp 4 Road. A temporary bridge has been installed over Roaring Brook, and the harvest will take at least two years. Kevin Reagan out of Camden is the logger.

Gates on roads are being reinstalled this month. Several roads that also serve as snowmobile trails are in rough shape: North-South Road, Camp 4 Road north of Broad Brook turnoff to Tri Corners, and Camp 2 Road to Tin Shanty Road. Thanks to Don Edwards for clearing the culvert on North-South Road and putting some materials on top. The woods road off Camp 2 road has been closed due to decking on bridge being unsafe.

The Nature Conservancy Report

All TNC owned land (north of G&W Road) is leased, and TNC continues to have a PILOT agreement with the towns, county and school districts that is funded primarily with lease revenue. The second year of forest restoration work continues, with a goal to increase species and structural diversity. That has included one-acre patch cuts and 35,000 tree seedlings planted in the eastern part of the property. The climate-resilient species include oak, pine, hickory, red spruce, and black cherry.

TNC has secured a DEC nuisance permit for beavers and is working with clubs to get agents for that permit. Beaver control may start to be written into lease language.

Thanks to Don Edwards and other landowners for work on G&W Road.

NYSDEC News

NYSDEC has been working with Molpus to allow lessees to post the 5-acre envelopes on the west side of the Corrigan property, and has updated the four kiosks on the entire property with new maps and signs. Boundary line signs are being replaced as maintenance occurs, and DEC websites related to the project have been updated. DEC received very few complaints from open hunting last year, which was the first year of public hunting.

Reconstruction of G&W Road is finished except for a small section between the town line and Hydrant Road. Tabolts Corners to the town line of Osceola has been completed. The Alder Creek crossing just south of Page Pond has a new metal arched culvert, and gates that were stolen last year continue to be replaced. Daisy chain locks are being used on the property south of G&W Road – it is important that camp owners use them properly. If assistance is needed please contact Tim or Mike. Snowmobile clubs have been helping with road maintenance by brushing, and the snowmobile trails will remain the same as last year. Lastly, NYSDEC is putting the Fall Brook bridge replacement out to bid this winter, with an expectation of late spring construction. Included in this project is purchase of a right-of-way to Osceola Road.

The East Branch of Fish Creek Recreation Management Plan update process will begin this year, in conjunction with a Unit Management Plan for the adjacent state land (state land in Lewis County east and south of the easement lands, up to North Osceola). There will be a November scoping meeting at the Constableville Fire Hall for the public to provide input. The next

step will be a draft plan being written by DEC, and then another round of public comment when there is a public draft.

The non-motorized Tug Hill Traverse trail is open for public hiking between G& W Road and Michigan Mills, thanks to the work of the Adirondack Mountain Club Black River Chapter and Bob McNamara, Zach Wakeman, and Dave Larabee. Two bridges will be constructed on the 3.5-mile stretch once administrative approval is secured by DEC. Next steps to expand the trail may include the southern end near North Osceola Road to improve access to two detached forest preserve parcels, and potentially north to the Tug Hill Wildlife Management Area. When complete, the trail will be over 20 miles long

General Discussion

Illegal ATV use has been minimal this year, except for Camp 4/Joe's Road area. There were questions regarding creating a designated ATV route on the property. The way the easement was written, the ATV rights were basically extinguished. The easement could potentially be modified but the process would be onerous and require significant political will. It was noted that the ATV trail system continues to be developed and connections are important.

The Working Group plans to meet again in Fall 2019.

Organization/Agency Contacts

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***Shared Goals of the East Branch of
Fish Creek Working Group***

(From April 1997 Report)

1. To maintain a high-quality, sustainable environment for the health, safety and enjoyment of our children, our children's children, and successive generations.
2. To provide for the protection of the core forest's long-term timber productivity, water quality, and overall natural resource and habitat health, as

well as traditional hunting, trapping, fishing and recreational uses.

3. To provide for resource protection in a way that avoids a shift in the property tax burden to local taxpayers, prevents a negative impact on local job availability, and sustains the economic viability of area communities.
4. To help spread the costs of protection over the many beneficiaries at the local, regional and state level.
5. To maintain mixed ownership of most of the eastern core forest, and find ways to provide for recreational access in a way that does not threaten natural resource quality or adversely affect private property rights.
6. To encourage continued private land stewardship through voluntary compliance with environmental standards and methods, such as timber harvest guidelines.