Conservation Easements 101: Fact vs Fiction

Wednesday, January 13, 2021
Online Zoom Webinar
The Tug Hill region of New York covers 2,100 square miles (1.38 million acres) between Lake Ontario and Adirondacks.

It is the third largest contiguous forested area in New York State.
The region is made up of 41 towns containing 18 villages, with ~104,000 residents, 50 people per square mile.

Town populations range from a low of 78 people to a high of 9,450 people. Two-thirds of region’s population concentrated in villages around the edge.
Rising from Lake Ontario at about 250-foot elevation to its west, the Tug Hill plateau rises to 2,000 feet on its eastern facing escarpment.
Lake Ontario and plateau combine to create an average annual snowfall of 200 inches, heaviest snowfall east of the Rockies.
And some of the most sustained winds.
Despite the pride of its people, by most economic measures, it is one of the Northeast’s poorest regions.
However, by natural resource measures, its abundant forests, farms, recreation and wild lands make it one of the most valuable areas of the State.
Tug Hill’s economy is based in forestry, farming and outdoor recreation.

A working landscape!
The Measurables

• Approx. 73% of the Tug Hill region is comprised of forest land
• Approximately 400,000 acres in Agricultural Districts
• Nearly 10,000 jobs in the forest and agricultural sectors
The Immeasurables

• Clean Water: Aquifer, Surface Waters as Drinking Water Sources for Communities (Cities of Rome and Oneida)
• Clean Air: Carbon absorption and cycling
• Recreation: Snowmobiling, skiing, snowshoeing, ATV riding, mountain biking, hunting, fishing, trapping, bird watching, photography…
• Wildlife Habitat: Deer, Bobcat, Bear, Fisher, Otter, Trout, Mussels…
• Scenic Views and Open Space: Rural landscape, fall colors, panoramic views
The Intangibles

• Availability to access for rest, relaxation, exercise and rejuvenation
• Community identity & values – Sense of place
• Connection to family history
• Connection to web of life
What is Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust?

- Regional, private, nonprofit organization
- Founded in 1990 by group of local citizens
- Incorporated as a 501(c)3 in 1991 (celebrating 30 years in 2021!)
- Serves Tug Hill portions of Jefferson, Lewis, Oswego and Oneida Counties
Mission

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust’s mission is to protect the wildlands, working forests and farms of the Tug Hill region and surrounding areas, and to promote appreciation of the region’s natural and cultural heritage, for present and future generations.

We do this through

Land Protection
Outreach & Education
Land Trust Background

• Over 90 land trusts in New York State, over 1,700 nationally
• Funding comes from individual donations, grants, special events
• 6 staff
• Office at the Zoo in Watertown
• 20,074 acres under conservation easement through four county area
• 263 acres owned in fee (Rutland and Lorraine)
Conservation Easements 101: Fact vs. Fiction
Question #1

Is public access required on a conservation easement property?
Fact: Public access is *NOT* required
Question #2

Who decides what is allowed in the conservation agreement?
Fact: Landowner and land trust work together

- Work with landowner to determine their vision of the property and resources to protect
- Restricts use of property to protect natural values
- Individually tailored
Question #3

Does a conservation easement take the land off the tax rolls?
Fact: Landowner Continues to Pay Taxes

- Landowner continues to pay property taxes
- Eligible for an annual state income tax credit
- Special legislation in Tug Hill regarding state easements
Question #4

Does the land under a conservation easement have to stay in a “forever wild” condition?
Fact

Lots of variation on what can be done

• No two easements are alike
• Limits type and amount of development to protect natural values
• Majority are working farms and forests
• Not every property is suitable for a conservation easement
• Over 20,000 acres in easement

Millard Easement – West Canada Creek
Question #5

Why do landowners choose to do a conservation easement?
For the love of the land

Bill Gleisner – ACUB Project

Henry Parry – Parry Farm Camden
Protect Tug Hill Working Lands
Peace of Mind

Parry Farm Easement – Camden
Leave a Lasting Legacy

Community Benefits
Tax Benefits

Income Tax Deductions
- Federal income tax deduction
- NYS income tax credit

Lower Estate Taxes

Kelly Easement – Trenton
Save the Special Places
Provide clean air, water, and open space for us …
… and for our children
But that is not the end of the story.

Land trust’s role

• Monitor the property at least once each year

• Enforce the terms of the conservation easement
Summary…what is a conservation easement?

• Voluntary, legal agreement between landowner and land trust
• Limits the type and amount of development that can happen
• Conservation Easements are forever
• Filed with the deed and successive owners are bound by the terms
• Public access is NOT required
• Landowner continues to pay property taxes
Thank for joining us tonight.

Two more upcoming webinars!

Wednesday, February 10, 7:00 p.m.
FARMLAND CONSERVATION

Wednesday, March 10, 7:00 p.m.
FOREST CONSERVATION

Register at www.tughill.org
Questions?

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