

HEADWATERS



2020 NEWSLETTER & 2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT, ISSUE 57

NYS TUG HILL COMMISSION · DULLES STATE OFFICE BUILDING · 317 WASHINGTON STREET · WATERTOWN, NY 13601 · (315) 785-2380 · WWW.TUGHILL.ORG



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A Year for the Record Books

Dear Tug Hill local officials and colleagues across the region and New York State,

Very few of us could have imagined what 2020 would bring. The year started out promising at the commission, launching registration for our 2020 Tug Hill Local Government Conference, publishing the Tug Hill Recreation Guide, and working as usual with our towns and villages, with much focus on a growing number of large scale solar energy development proposals. We held an in-person board meeting in January in Amboy, I spent time in Albany in February, and people were just starting to talk about the new virus and what it might mean. Early in March the general level of concern increased, and on March 17 the commission staff joined most of the state workforce in working remotely.

Fast forward to now and think about what we have done and learned in the past several months. Many have become Zoom experts, as the software became a crucial tool in our professional and personal lives. We have seen each other in our homes, met each other's pets, and been thankful for technology that keeps us in touch and doing business. We have taken more webinars than we can count, cursed our internet connections, and learned how to share our screens. Our vocabulary has expanded – social distancing, contact tracing – and we have accepted, albeit sometimes begrudgingly, that wearing masks is the new normal for now.

We are as anxious as everyone to get back to business as usual. In the meantime, we continue to support our towns, villages and partners in whatever capacity we can. Stay safe and healthy, and look forward to how good it will be to gather when this is behind us.

My best to all of you - *Katie*

Meet the NYS Tug Hill Commission's Staff

Commission staff provide support to Tug Hill councils of governments in community and economic development, land use planning, natural resource management, geographic information systems (GIS), training and related fields.

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From left first row: Gwen Decker, Katie Malinowski, Carla Fowler, Angie Kimball. Second row: Alaina Mallette, Jean Waterbury, Paul Baxter, Matthew Johnson. Third row: Jennifer Harvill, Mickey Dietrich, Felicia Passino.

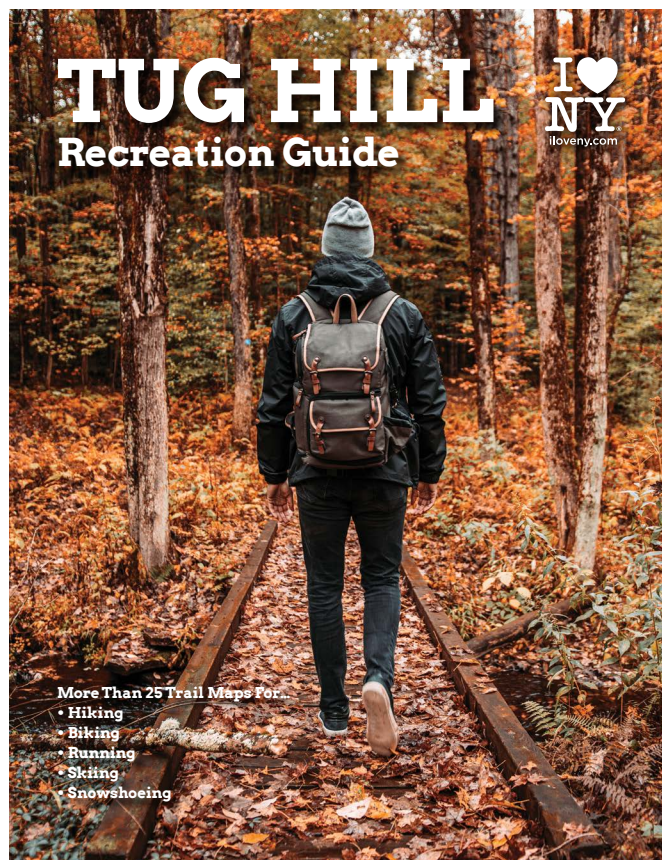
"Helping local governments and citizens shape the future of the Tug Hill region"

GIS Mapping and Analysis

In March 2020, as the country switched to virtual workplaces, so did the commission. Fortunately, over the years, the commission has been shifting its geographic information systems (GIS) over to open-source software, which made for a seamless transition to work from home.

Originally, the commission created hand-drawn maps for communities, but has modernized its GIS as new technologies became available. Today, the commission uses [GIS Cloud](#) for online web mapping. With feedback from the town of Lee, a new GIS Cloud application will be launched in 2021. The commission still fulfills community and regional mapping requests when staff are able to dedicate time to the task. Examples of GIS map work in 2020 are updated official roads maps for the towns of West Turin and Pinckney.

A major regional GIS project in 2020 was publication of the [Tug Hill Recreation Guide](#), which includes maps for download and geolocation on mobile devices. The guide was created with support from the 1000 Islands International Tourism Council, Lewis County Chamber of Commerce, Oswego County Tourism, Oneida County Tourism, and Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust. The commission also partnered with the Development Authority of the North Country to analyze likely locations for solar energy system development, which are shown in our [Planning for Offsite Solar Energy Development](#) issue paper. The commission updated the regional [Tug Hill brochure](#), which can be seen online on our website. At an international scale, staff participated in two sessions of the QGIS North American virtual conference. ■



ABOUT HEADWATERS

Headwaters is the annual newsletter report of the NYS Tug Hill Commission.

The Tug Hill Commission is a state funded, regional agency overseen by a board of nine unpaid commissioners - two each from Jefferson, Lewis, Oneida, and Oswego counties, and one at-large.

Commissioners are appointed for five year terms: three each by the Governor, State Senate and State Assembly. The commission has an administrative link to New York State's Department of State.

CHAIRMAN

Jan J. Bogdanowicz
Lewis County

VICE CHAIRMAN

Michael G. Yerdon, Sr.
Oswego County

SECRETARY

Thomas E. Boxberger
Jefferson County

MEMBERS

Leona M. Cheresnoski
Jefferson County

Roger W. Maciejko
Lewis County

Geraldine J. Ritter
Oneida County

William W. Scriber
Oswego County

Leveraging Collaborations to Benefit All

As always, the commission worked closely with partners in 2020 to better prepare Tug Hill and neighboring communities to address the pressing issues of our time, such as renewable energy development and broadband coverage. Existing and new regional projects progressed despite—and in the case of broadband, due to—the global pandemic. Thank you to all our partners.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

In January and February staff wrapped up solar energy development conversations with the Cornell Cooperative Extensions of Jefferson, Lewis, Oneida, and Oswego Counties; the Development Authority of the North Country; Jefferson, Lewis, Oneida, Oswego, and St. Lawrence County Planning Departments; Jefferson, Lewis, and Oneida County Industrial Development Agencies; and Jefferson, Lewis, and Oswego County Soil & Water Conservation Districts. These discussions became the outline of the [Planning for Offsite Solar Energy Projects](#) issue paper, which has since been updated to reflect new state 94-c regulations.

With these planning tools the commission assisted four municipalities in creating or rewriting their renewable energy regulations. Thanks to our partners at the law firm of Conboy, McKay, Bachman, and Kendall LLP, the commission hosted a [Renewable Energy and Land Use](#) training session in the fall. Lastly, collaboration with the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry evaluated the impact of renewable energy development on property values. The research group found through literature review and GIS analysis that there was no conclusive impact of wind energy on property values in Lewis County.

BROADBAND COVERAGE

With the COVID-19 outbreak, issues with broadband on Tug Hill became more apparent and urgent. Areas of greatest concern are households with K through 12 children attending school virtually, persons with telehealth needs, and with people teleworking. Following the example of the new Upstate Cellular Coverage Task Force's work in the Adirondack Park and the Catskills, it became clear that a regional approach to data collection to address fixed and mobile broadband issues should be implemented. Partnerships with the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board, the Development Authority of the North Country, the Mohawk Valley Economic Development District, and county administrators were fostered to address broadband issues.

To better understand the broadband barriers and assets in the nine-county region, the consulting firm ECC Technologies has initiated broadband coverage research in Lewis, Jefferson, Oswego, and Onondaga counties, and the other five counties will soon follow suit. This research will help identify unserved and underserved communities to better service their needs and apply for broadband grants in 2021 and beyond. Key areas being studied are accessibility to service, affordability, and quality of throughput.

AdkAction is also supporting local efforts to collect plans of record from Spectrum so the counties and local communities can plan for broadband expansion. The commission has partnered with Syracuse Community Geography to visualize spatial demographic data as well as anchor institutions. Several school districts within Tug Hill have provided important testimonies and data to continue adding to the full broadband picture.

BLACK RIVER WATERSHED

In September and October, the commission hosted the [2020 Virtual Black River Watershed Conference](#) in partnership with the Lewis, Jefferson, Hamilton and Herkimer County Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. In addition to the presentations given by the county districts, guest speakers were invited to present from Fort Drum Cultural Resources, Jefferson Community College, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and the NYS Department of State.

After integrating feedback from interested organizations, recreational users, and citizens, the Tug Hill Commission and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Great Lakes Program published the [Black River Initiative Progress Report: 2010-2020](#). The progress report and presentation has led to additional coordination and discussions towards achieving the recommendations of the Black River Watershed Management Plan and the Black River 9 Element Plan.

OTHER PROJECTS

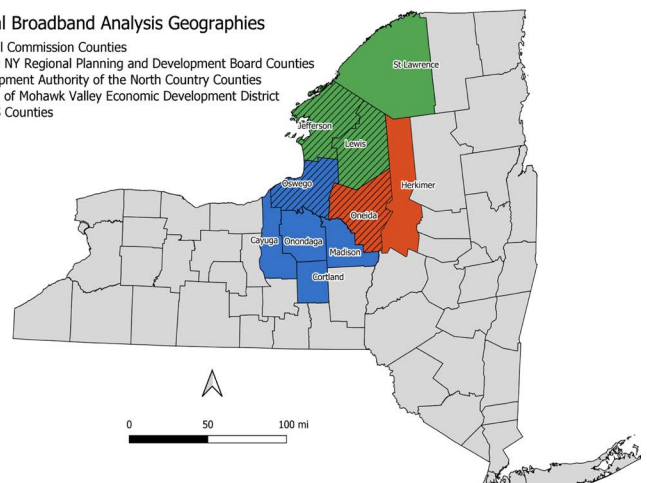
Lewis County municipalities approved a LED street lighting project for inclusion in Lewis

County's first shared services plan. By incorporation into the plan, LED project participating communities have the potential to receive a rebate based upon a percentage of their savings. To date, Lewis County communities that have approved their individual LED projects are the towns of Martinsburg and Denmark, and the villages of Copenhagen, Croghan, Lowville and Lyons Falls. In Jefferson County, the towns of Adams and Wilna and the villages of Adams, Carthage, Deferiet, Sackets Harbor, and West Carthage approved plans. The entire project was spearheaded by the River Area Council of Governments. This project was awarded a NYS Department of State administered Local Government Efficiency Grant.

The Constable Hall Association and the Tug Hill Commission recorded the very popular "Constable Chronicles" webinar series in the fall. Martha Constable Murray and Peter Hayes' stories brought to life the history of the Constable family. All three webinars, narrated by Martha Constable Murray, who is a direct descendant of the builder of Constable Hall in Constableville, can be found on the commission's [YouTube channel](#). ■

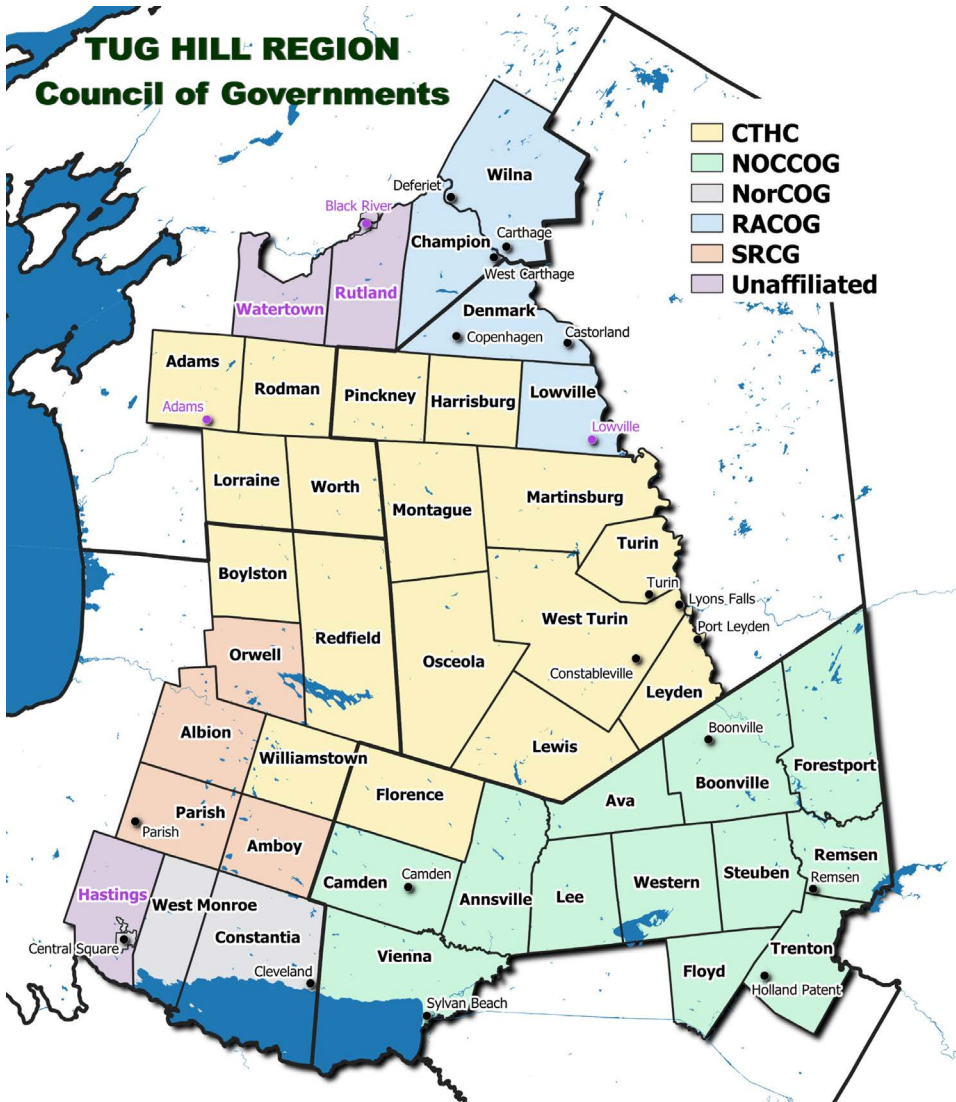
Regional Broadband Analysis Geographies

- /// Tug Hill Commission Counties
- Central NY Regional Planning and Development Board Counties
- Development Authority of the North Country Counties
- Portion of Mohawk Valley Economic Development District
- All NYS Counties



COG REPORTS

COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENTS REPORTS



There are five councils of governments (COGs) in the Tug Hill region. These independent intermunicipal organizations are supported with staff from the Tug Hill Commission and local government dues. Currently 53 of the 59 towns and villages within the region belong to a COG.

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SALMON RIVERS COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (SRCG)

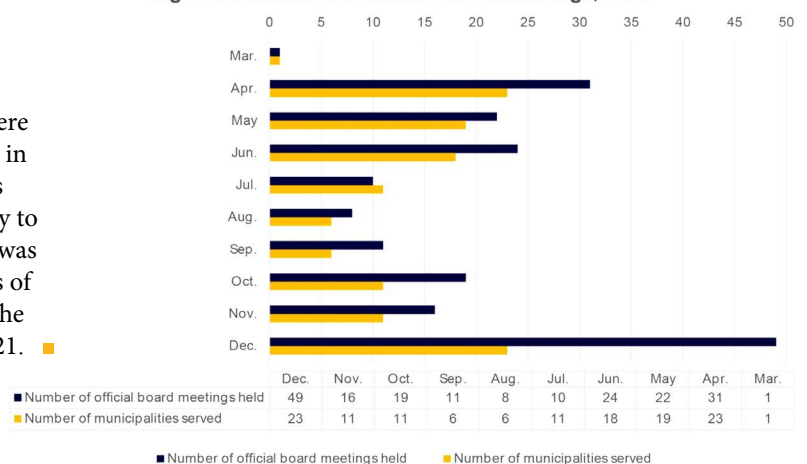
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Local Governments Go Virtual

Towns and villages across the region were able to take advantage of commission - hosted Zoom meetings, to do their part in fighting the spread of COVID. As displayed in the graph to the right, remote meetings took off in the spring at the beginning of the pandemic, eased during the summer as

infection rates locally were low, and picked back up in the fall as infection rates climbed. This new ability to hold meetings virtually was enabled through a series of state executive orders. The effort continues into 2021. ■

Tug Hill Commission Hosted Zoom Meetings, 2020



The Cooperative Tug Hill Council

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, 2020 was a busy year for the 21 municipalities of the Cooperative Tug Hill Council (CTHC). Minimum maintenance road legislation that CTHC and the commission have championed for years did not move through the legislature this year in large part due to in-person meeting restrictions and the legislature prioritizing the health emergency. CTHC continues to identify and address issues that have prevented progress. The legislation would add a section to NYS Highway Law to allow

rural municipalities to classify low volume and minimum maintenance roads.

Four wind energy projects are active in CTHC. The Number Three and Deer River projects continue in the Article 10 process, both receiving Public Service Commission approval and working through the certificate conditions process, while the Mad River project was recently withdrawn from Article 10. The Roaring Brook project in Martinsburg was approved through a local review process, and construction has begun.

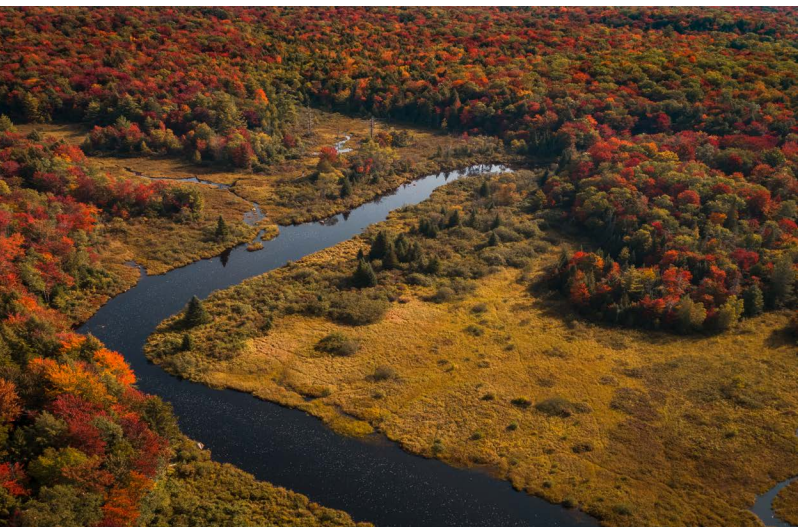
The existing Maple Ridge wind project approved a second PILOT agreement, requiring involved towns to make budget changes to address the new terms.

The Cooperative Tug Hill Zoning Board of Appeals heard five cases this year. Several more CTHC towns and villages worked to add solar and wind protections through either zoning law updates or freestanding local laws. Seasonal use zoning amendments and driveway installation local laws were also added by several towns to help strengthen protection on minimum maintenance roads. Mini comprehensive plans, excerpted from decades of cooperative planning work, were prepared with help from an intern. Work is now being done with Pinckney and West Turin to officially adopt the plans.

The Tug Hill Reserve Act (Chapter 486 of the unconsolidated laws of 1992) recognizes the state and national significance of the water, wildlife, forest, farms, and recreational resources of the region, and allows for protection of these as-

sets through the preparation of a local reserve plan by a council of governments. CTHC towns have continued work on special area protection by updating original maps, mostly done in the 1990s, using newer mapping technology to produce a more uniform regional map. This year the town of Pinckney, the last of the original CTHC 16 towns to do so, approved their updated map.

Associate circuit rider Kay Chapman, who had contracted with CTHC since 2006, did not renew her contract for 2020. Her position was filled by new associate circuit rider Karleigh Stuckey. Karleigh has done a great job in her first year, even with the uncertainty in meetings due to the pandemic. She and our second associate, Beth Steria, rose to the challenge and attended meetings in person or virtually as needed, or just kept in contact with the municipalities if no other option for meeting attendance was possible. ■



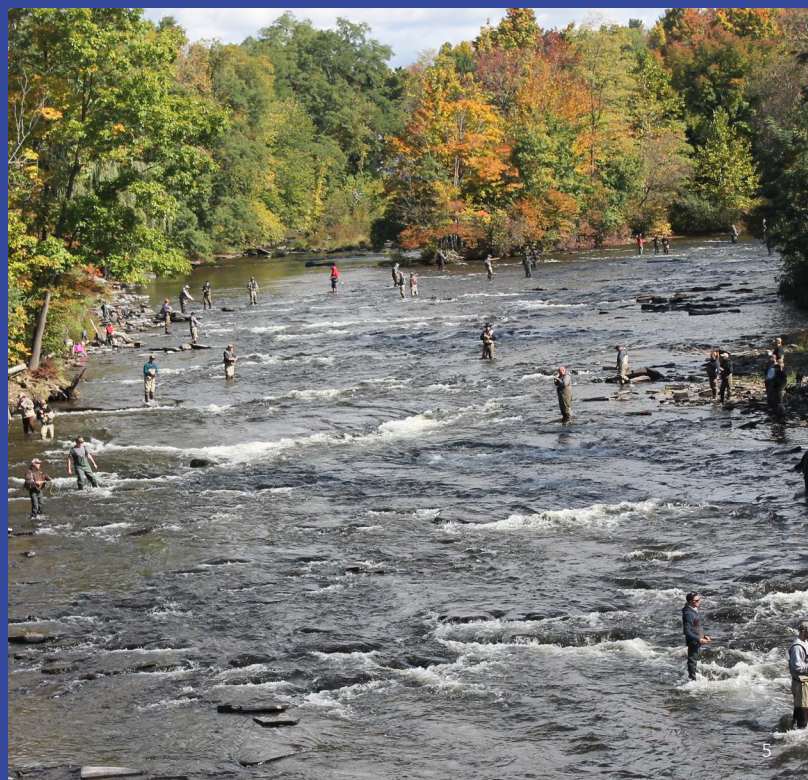
Salmon Rivers Council of Governments

Salmon Rivers towns and villages were also impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Some held municipal meetings remotely to decrease group size and protect officials and residents who may be more vulnerable.

Amboy completed its draft comprehensive plan update and held a public hearing in October. The effort to bring water to the town and village of Parish continued with the hiring of consultants to manage the implementation process. The effort was slowed when updated construction estimates, while still within state-established limits, were higher than initially thought. The water

district now has a referendum scheduled for early 2021 to ask district residents if they wish to continue the project at the new, higher estimated cost level. In 2020, the town of Orwell once again experienced problems with sufficient supply to its water system and has begun to explore the feasibility of improvements.

Traffic flow in the Salmon Rivers area was disrupted in late spring 2020 when the County Route 22 bridge (Bennetts Bridge in Orwell) was closed by the county for replacement. The closure will extend into 2021. ■



River Area Council of Governments

The River Area Council of Governments (RACOG) was impacted by the pandemic but continued to move initiatives forward, holding 91 meetings remotely April to December. RACOG's remote intern from Fort Drum, US Army Major Peter McCain, assisted with a resource management plan and mapping.

The group moved forward with the LED street lighting project. The New York Power Authority program begins construction in summer 2021 for the towns of Adams, Denmark, Martinsburg and Wilna, and the villages of Adams, Carthage, Copenhagen, Croghan, Deferiet, Lowville, Lyons Falls, Sackets Harbor, and West Carthage. The town of Champion and village of Castorland will convert streetlights

to LED through National Grid.

Discussion continued on Community Choice Aggregation with the town of Champion and village of West Carthage starting the process. The town and village of Lowville began updating their joint comprehensive plan and are using a web-based platform to assist with this effort. The RACOG economic visioning summit, scheduled for last April at the new Zero Dock Street restaurant in Carthage, is postponed until next fall.

Carthage, Copenhagen, and Deferiet continue to partner with Jefferson Lewis BOCES on walkable community projects, adding amenities such as benches, bike racks, boardwalks, and picnic tables to encourage safe,

shared use of roadways by pedestrians and cyclists. RACOG continues to support Black River related recreational opportunities in the region. The group

discussed interest in the railroad bed from Lowville to Carthage by a developer to install pedal cars, connecting area attractions. ■



North Shore Council of Governments

North Shore communities did their best to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. Some closed their municipal buildings for a time or made local officials available by appointment rather than offer open office hours. Still, communities strove to do as much as they safely could in pandemic times.

The town of Constantia is still working on bringing sewers to the town, and the village of Cleveland received assistance from the Tug Hill Commission on developing GPS data on municipal assets.

One major accomplishment in 2020 was the completion of

restoration and rehabilitation of the historic Cleveland Dock Fishing Access Site. Now open to the public, the site provides unique access to fishing on Oneida Lake and draws visitors for open water fishing, ice fishing, and boat docking. Cleveland Dock also provides emergency services access and helps connect boaters to the NYS Canal system.

Due to deterioration of its waterfront structures, including two breakwater walls, Cleveland Dock was in danger of total collapse. Rehabilitation work included removal of a failing concrete and timber sea wall and replacement with a steel sheet pile wall system. Improvements include grading, timber guide rails, railings, sidewalk, a concrete wall cap, benches, site electric, lamp posts, a hand launch for non-motorized boats, and parking lot upgrades. Univer-

sally accessible site features include parking spaces and access along the edge of the pier, a picnic table, and fishing access along the pier railing. This facility, owned by the NYS Canal Corporation, will be maintained by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

This project was funded through NY Works, DEC and the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation and was supported by the village of Cleveland, Oswego County, the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board, the North Shore Council of Governments, the Oneida Lake Association, and the Tug Hill Commission in a sustained effort which bore fruit in 2020. ■



Northern Oneida County Council of Governments

Sadly, NOCCOG began 2020 with the passing of municipal consultant Jennifer Armstrong-Symonds in February. Although the position has not been filled due to state budget constraints and the pandemic, commission staff have filled this role along with support from associate contractors, providing coverage to the council's 12 towns and five villages.

NOCCOG's long-time associate contractor Harlan Moonen completed his tenure in January 2021. Harlan has been a valuable member of the NOCCOG team since 1997, covering over 1,500 meetings during his tenure. NOCCOG worked with associate contractors John Healt and Lisa Bellinger in

2020, both of Boonville, and Joe Rowlands of Steuben begins work in January 2021.

NOCCOG contracted with Mark Clark of Camden to assist them with GPS work for infrastructure mapping projects, such as water, sewer, lighting, sidewalks and trail systems. Mark was trained in August and worked on GPS projects with the towns of Annsville and Camden. More GIS work is planned for 2021.

The Oneida and Herkimer Local Government Education Committee, which provides training opportunities for local officials, offered a budget workshop with Laird Petrie in October. Planning assistance in NOCCOG included a SWOT

exercise in Floyd and the adoption of a comprehensive plan in Vienna. Zoning assistance was provided to Forestport, Vienna, and Western, with several communities updating solar

regulations. Commission planners also worked with Annsville on an official map for the town and Sylvan Beach on a Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan for the village. ■



Commission Funding 2020-21

The Tug Hill Commission's funding remained the same as last year. Most of the commission's funding comes from its annual state appropriation. Approximately 85% of the budget is spent on salaries, with the balance covering commission operating expenses.

In 2020-21, commission staff trained more than 1,600 local officials using the Zoom platform and holding virtual webinars, started working on 32 new projects across the region, maintained progress on an additional 84 projects and answered many technical assistance questions.

Commission staff also worked with state agency partners on a variety of statewide priorities and initiatives. These included dealing with COVID-19, shared services, broadband

issues, complete streets, watershed programs, and conservation projects.

The commission employed 13 people, including four circuit riders for the region's five councils of governments. The other nine staff members provide program and administrative support out of the commission's Watertown office; however, for much of the year staff worked remotely from home.

The commission continues to look for fiscal savings while sustaining vital services to the Tug Hill region, and looks forward to helping our communities in the coming year. ■

Lorraine-Worth Shared Court Legislation

To address many years of a justice court vacancy in the town of Worth, legislation sponsored by Senator Patty Ritchie and Assemblyman Ken Blankenbush was signed into law by Governor Cuomo this past November to solve the problem. Using New York's Uniform Justice Court Act section 106b that authorizes multiple municipalities to elect a single justice to preside in justice courts of two or more adjacent towns in the same county, the towns of Worth and Lorraine now have a combined judicial district.

The two towns spent years following the steps outlined in the statute to effect this change, including joint resolutions, a study and plan, public hearings, and local approvals. The town of Worth also had to request several temporary appointments by the Fifth Judicial District while work was underway. The state legislation was the final element needed to complete the process. A candidate for the position will need to run for election in November for a four-year term.

This is the second consolidated court operating in the Cooperative Tug Hill Council region, with the Harrisburg/Montague/Pinckney court having been in operation since 2012. The towns of Lewis and Boylston have also effected legislative changes regarding residency requirements for judges to expand the pool of people available to run for the office in these municipalities. For in-depth information on court issues such as consolidations and other solutions to judicial vacancies, see the [Justice Court Consolidations](#) issue paper. ■



NYS TUG HILL COMMISSION

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FEBRUARY 2021

Commission Pivots to Online Training

Commission staff learned to adapt with remote capabilities in 2020 and effectly provided training and outreach to our communities. Our two major training events, the Local Government Conference and Black River Watershed Conference, were moved from an in-person to a virtual format this year. While using video-conferencing is not ideal for networking and fellowship, it does allow an effective means of education, outreach and interaction.

The commission held 24 webinars, three of which were a hybrid format where a limited number of participants could opt to gather in a group setting, while most participated at the same time via Zoom. We managed to hold one in-person training session very early in the year before the pandemic took hold. Speakers included

some of our staff. Director of Planning Matt Johnson delivered Planning Board Basics and Evaluating and Amending Your Zoning Law. Circuit Rider Angie Kimball brought us Justice Court Solutions. Circuit Rider Mickey Dietrich and Planner Alaina Mallette joined with several presenters on QGIS presentations. We also worked with partners in the private sector, as well as governmental partners to bring a variety of topics to our communities.

Overall, we reached over 1,600 participants (not unique), and much to our surprise, reached people from all over the country, and even a few in different countries, as they tuned in for "The Constable Chronicles" webinar series in the fall. We hope to keep using the webinar format, even after the pandemic is over, to offer our commu-

nities options when travel, weather, illnesses or other circumstances prevent gathering in-person.

All of our training sessions are recorded and can be found on the commission's [YouTube channel](#).

Since there will be no in-person local government conference or Black River Watershed conference in 2021, planning is already underway for more virtual workshops in 2021 to help our communities stay current on their training. ■

