

FISH CREEK UPDATE

Working Group Meets To Discuss Activity on Easement Lands

Around 25 people met at Snow Ridge Ski Resort's Tavern 230 in Turin on October 21, 2021 for the annual meeting of the East Branch of Fish Creek Working Group. There was no meeting in 2020 due to COVID. The group was formed in the mid-1990's in response to the sale of the Lyons Falls Pulp and Paper lands in southern Lewis County. After attendee introductions, updates were heard from Molpus Woodlands Group (property manager for the Corrigan Fund), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

DEC News

Michael Giocondo gave DEC's report. During 2020, due to COVID limitations, DEC focused on basic maintenance and keeping culverts clear, as there were several washouts and beaver issues. In 2020, the Fall Brook bridge was replaced, but the road from North Osceola Road is still being developed. In addition to road improvements up to the bridge, a parking lot will be built some time next spring or summer to provide better access to that area of the easement. The G&W Road was also regraded in 2021.

Priorities for 2022 include starting work on road improvements to the Michigan Mills Road extension just past the gate which

may require a brief road closure. When road work is being done, DEC is putting in bigger culverts to meet updated guidance related to fisheries and climate change. Heron Brook Road will likely be closed indefinitely for vehicle use due to a failing culvert crossing issue. The North Osceola Snowmobile Connector Trail off Camp 2 Road will be improved to address wet areas.

DEC has also been working on a revision to the East Branch of Fish Creek Recreation Management Plan. The new draft plan will be out for public comment in the next several months.

Progress has been made on the non-motorized Tug Hill Traverse Trail with significant work done by Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust and the Adirondack Mountain Club, led by Bob McNamara and Zach Wakeman. The section between Michigan Mills and G&W Roads (4.2 miles) is complete with the installation of two footbridges this past year. About 7 miles of brushing was completed, 4 miles in the EBFC North compartment and 3 miles in the EBFC State Forest section. The northern section should be finished next summer. There will also be some "out and back" opportunities, to supplement the complete trail. There has also been a reroute on the southern end of the trail; it will now go through the Detached Forest Preserve Lots, State Forest and EBFC South easement along the West Fork of the Salmon River.

The Nature Conservancy Report

Brian Roat from TNC reported that there have been 10,000 seedlings planted on TNC property in conjunction with the University of Vermont, who is doing all the monitoring. There has been 80% survival among the red and white oaks, red pine, lower among the white pine and sugar maples. There has been a focus on bridging smaller creek crossings to mitigate impacts. TNC is considering decommissioning Wagon Wheel Road to the north of North Branch of Mad River TNC is working with clubs to executive beaver nuisance permits.

TNC is also participating on a red spruce planting project, genotyping Tug Hill red spruce to determine if there any genetic variance with the Adirondack population. Ultimately several thousand red spruce will be planted on TNC property.

Molpus Updates

Tim Burpoe, property manager with Molpus Woodlands Group, reported that the pandemic negatively affected their markets early on, especially in the low-grade markets, which makes up ~80% of what is harvested. Markets have begun to turn around and they are making use of local markets for pallet, saw and veneer logs. A small (~20 acres) logging job is being done by Ryan Charbonneau Logging, LLC.

There are some hunting club leases available on the property, call Tim if you are interested. Beavers continue to be a nuisance on the Corrigan Tract. Tim mentioned that there may be issues along Tin Shanty Road for snowmobilers due to recent washouts along this snowmobile trail. G&W Road has seen more beaver activity due to young males moving from the north side of the old railroad grade to the south

Clubs have been helping them keep culverts open and Molpus Woodlands Group is grateful for the help they provide. This winter there will be more trappers out to help reduce the population.

Molpus/Corrigan enrolled in 480a in February 2019, to reduce costs as they paid \$200,000 in real property taxes in 2018. The effect the enrollment had on local taxing jurisdictions was detailed in the Tug Hill Commission's 480a paper, [The Forest Tax Exemption and Impacts on Municipal Budgets](#). Timber and hunt club income are exceeded by real property tax expenses annually and Molpus works to reduce expenses. By entering the 480a program they have reduced their taxes by 56%. Molpus was paying over \$7 per acre in taxes every year. Tim notes that municipal tax levies are not affected by this, but acknowledges that there is a tax shift to other taxpayers. There is a 6% stumpage tax paid upon harvest which makes up for some of that shift.

Dave Smith of the DEC noted that the DEC has had proposals over the last several years to modify 480a to allow for reimbursement to local governments should 480a signups result in more than a 1% shift in taxes to other landowners. They have come close to making this happen but twice it was dropped from the Governor's proposed budget near the end of the negotiation process with the legislature. It is still up to the legislature and governor to amend that law. Katie Malinowski brought up that during state discussions about the Climate Act there has been discussion again about reimbursing municipalities that have a certain percent shift in taxes. Michael Giocondo also pointed out that NYS has paid a portion of the taxes on the easement lands since the easement was secured.

General Discussion

A question was asked about nuisance beaver permits. It was explained that they allow beaver to be taken out of season.

Some attendees expressed frustration with the number of gates. It was stated that some club members have been ticketed from driving on roads where they're not supposed to be but said that lack of signage makes it difficult to know what roads are open/closed. All the gates make it difficult to travel between and within clubs on the "hill."

It was explained that the gates are meant to restrict where the public can go. Lessees have the same rights as the public, plus some additional rights. They have the right to use motorized vehicles on roads to access envelopes or camps, as laid out on lease maps. DEC provides a map of open roads to the landowners that have been agreed upon by the two parties. The land manager shares with the lessees which roads they can use.

There is a need to address accessibility for those with mobility issues. Club members are aging, some are veterans, not long for this life and they cannot get to various locations on the property to enjoy quality of life. It was suggested that perhaps some routes could be open for people with disabilities under the program that DEC sponsors. There was also discussion about access to the monument to the pilot lost in a F-86 crash in the 1960's.

Contacts

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Shared Goals of the East Branch of Fish Creek Working Group – April 1997

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.