

FISH CREEK UPDATE

Approximately 35 people attended the October 6, 2022 meeting of the Fish Creek Working Group, held at Tavern 230 in Turin. 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 the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, LandVest, and the Tug Hill Commission.

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)

Mike Giocondo started with some DEC staffing updates. The Forest Ranger covering the East Branch of Fish Creek area is now Ranger Jennifer Snyder. Questions and requests on camping permits, can be made to the Lowville Office, (315) 376-3521. Keith Rivers is the new DEC Regional Forester in Region 6, Mike Giocondo is now the Supervising Forester in Lowville but is still handling conservation easements. The Environmental Conservation Officer covering the area is ECO Shana Kraeger.

Trail work the past year has focused on two existing trail segments on the conservation easement – Heron Brook and Tug Hill Traverse. DEC is working to improve the Heron Brook trail. A Student Conservation Association (SCA) crew from the Adirondacks came in June to work on the steep section of trail by improving the trail grade and installing several stone steps from the ridge to creek. The initial location of the parking area has been moved because of washed out culverts, now located at the intersection of Camp 4 and Heron Brook. The road in that area was also brushed out this year.



Work on the Tug Hill Traverse has been led by Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust (Bob McNamara) and Black River Chapter of Adirondack Mountain Club (Cindy Stewart). The primary focus in 2022 has been to connect the Tug Hill Wildlife Management Area (WMA) through Beech Tree Road to the north conservation easement, continuing through The Nature Conservancy property to the already established trail on the East Branch of Fish Creek State Forest. Other than improving some stream crossings and doing more marking next year, that section of trail is complete. Between the state forest, northern easement, and WMA, approximately 10 miles of trail has been brushed out since start of project. Additionally, DEC installed a registration box at Michigan Mills Road, and during the summer of 2021 had 24 users/groups registered.

Road maintenance and upgrades continue, and this year's big project was at the start of Michigan Mills Road Extension, replacing failing culverts and installing an additional culvert, as well as a main pipe for the stream. DEC also graveled and fixed the road from the gate to just before Kampski camp. A culvert was replaced on North-South Road as well, but unfortunately the significant rains the past few weeks and beavers have created another washout, that will hopefully be fixed again before winter. Overall, high populations of beavers continue to cause plugged culverts and flooding issues.

DEC mentioned working with trappers to help mitigate the beaver issue and any interested lessee-trappers were encouraged to contact Landvest or DEC to make arrangements to help. Lastly, over the next few weeks DEC will work on grading some roads in the north part of the property before winter, including G&W Road.

Administratively, the Tug Hill East Unit Management Plan, which includes the East Branch of Fish Creek State Forest, Lesser Wilderness State Forest, East Osceola State Forest and detached Forest Preserve parcels, has been submitted to Albany for approval. There were a few minor changes made to the plan but nothing significant enough to require another public comment period. It should be finalized in next six to eight months. The update to the Recreation Management Plan, which covers the two conservation easement parcels, should be completed as a draft this winter with the projected comment period being next spring.

DEC is continuing work to modify the conservation easement on the EBFC north property, which will add the Lyndaker parcel. That modification went out for public comment earlier this summer and is now working through the approval process.

Attendees noted that gates make it hard for interactions between clubs, because it is not easy to travel between camps. Discussion regarding keys should be directed to LandVest as the owner's local representative. LandVest still learning about keys and gates and determining a way forward.



LandVest

Bluesource Sustainable Forest Co. is the parent company that purchased the Tug Hill property along with other former Lyons Falls Pulp Paper ownerships - Three Lakes, John Brown and J.P. Lewis (North Lake) for a total acreage of approximately 50,000 acres. Empire Riverland LLC is the actual owner of record, a subsidiary of Bluesource.

LandVest not the owner, but the manager who reports back to Bluesource for ultimate decision-making authority.

LandVest has offices in Lowville and Hancock, NY and manages almost 200,000 acres in NY out of this region of LandVest. Jack agreed with Mike Giocondo that beavers are an issue on their Tug Hill property and steps have been taken to encourage more trapping this fall. The property purchase closed in December 2021, LandVest was chosen to manage starting mid-January 2022. It is taking approximately a year to evaluate and get to know each other, focusing on administrative tasks and writing a 100+ page management plan, which needs to be approved by DEC, for the Tug Hill Tract, for easement requirements and 480a requirements. Bluesource also plans to enroll property in the Forest Stewardship Council. Bluesource is also working to create a carbon offset project, the first step being to inventory all the new tracts, which is in process.

Harvesting on the ownership will continue but at a lesser pace than prior landowners. LandVest estimates 300 to 500 acres will annually be harvested on the whole 50,000 acres. It will be two or three years before harvest are planned on the Tug Hill tract. Attendees raised questions about ATV access, including specific questions regarding connecting ATV trails in Osceola through the Bluesource property to ATV trails to the north. Bluesource is not inclined to allow an ATV trail across the property, but Jack indicated he would politely listen to advocates if they wanted to voice their concerns/ideas to him. Mike Giocondo indicated that not only would Bluesource need to approve a trail, but the conservation easement would need to be reviewed to determine the status of ATV rights. Then the trail would also need to be approved via the state recreational management planning process.

Jack Santamour is working with Lewis County to allow a trail on property LandVest manages near Harrisville, and there have been many problems, including driving around gates and erosion problems. Jack acknowledged that it is a small percentage of ATV riders, but it is a burden and cost to the landowner. Some attendees felt that the problem ATV riders come from out of state, and there were questions regarding what ATV clubs are doing to educate ATV riders.

Jack gave a brief overview of the carbon offset aspect, noting that the first step is to calculate the number of tons of carbon available today on the property. The amount of carbon is then compared to the regional baseline, this area being in the northeast region. If a property has more carbon on it than the baseline, the excess can be sold like a stock on the carbon market. This does not preclude harvesting, as long as harvesting does not exceed annual growth or the offsets sold. There was a question on if the carbon offsets will be subject to the 6% severance tax. The answer is that under the current 480-a, since wood is not severed from the stump and still available for harvest in the future, it is not subject the 6% severance tax.



Attendees also had question about marking the five-acre envelopes around camps. DEC has left it up to the owner and club members to post the five-acre envelopes to prevent trespass. There was also a question about how many camps are available for lease. Jack believes three on Bluesource property, one that was called Lesser Wilderness and two others.

The Nature Conservancy

Brian Roat was unable to attend the meeting, but did report to Katie that TNC is working on an assessment of culverts on their property to determine what needs replacing or improving. They are starting with replacement of the culvert at the blowout on Hydrant that occurred this spring. A question was asked about any changes in beaver trapping policy on the TNC lands and this will be investigated.

SUNY Oswego Lake Effect Electrification Study

Katie Malinowski shared a handout from SUNY Oswego about a National Science Foundation-funded research project they are undertaking this winter. Weather stations are being sited in various areas around Tug Hill, and students will also be launching weather balloons during lake effect storms this winter. The balloons must be retrieved, which may be challenging depending on where they land. If anyone finds a weather balloon, they can either let the Tug Hill Commission or Scott Steiger at SUNY Oswego know to aid in retrieval. The goals of the project are to answer two questions: how do lake effect storms become electrified, and do wind turbines initiate lightning during these storms and under what conditions do these turbines initiate lightning, if so.

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.

