



Photo by Emily Fell.

Black River Initiative

While 2021 saw continued progress in support of the Black River Initiative efforts to keep our waters clean, in 2022 we were all coming back to life with the return to more normalcy and in-person gatherings. Many were able to bring in new resources for watershed work, with investments from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and additional grant capacity to support project implementation. As we breathe new life into this initiative, we look to the horizon, which seems so distant and far away, but realize its closer than we think.

New life means new people, ideas, and support. In 2023, we aim to promote more diverse collaboration and bring in new perspectives. Diversity is beautiful, like the scenery of the Tug Hill in the fall, the diverse colors of the various species of trees with their oranges, purples, and reds make the landscape that much more luminous. All who appreciate and want to get involved in work to improve the land and water resources of the Black River watershed are invited to join us. Let us know if there are barriers we can help work through. Happy New Year!

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Black River Environmental Improvement Association Cross Country Skiing trail. Photo by Emily Fell.

Black River Watershed Conference

Over 70 private citizens, professionals, and local leaders convened in June at 3 Willows Event Center in Lyons Falls for the 12th Annual Black River Watershed Conference. Presentations on Japanese Knotweed control, stormwater management, agricultural best management practices, municipal culvert replacements, urban forestry sustainability, and drinking water source protection were among the many presentations given to connect watershed stakeholders with important information and tools for the watershed. To access the presentations, visit: <https://tughill.org/black-river-watershed-conference-2/>



Presenter at the Watershed Conference.

Photo by Tug Hill Commission

Save the Date!

2023 Black River Watershed Conference on June 14th
Hope to see you there!

Deer River Access Improvements in Copenhagen

As part of a Pratt Northam Community Grant, the village of Copenhagen was able to make improvements to a community park on NYS Route 12 that offers access and views of Deer River. Improvements included a new pavilion, storage area, picnic area, and benches. Local students assisted in building these structures.

Be sure to stop by and enjoy a picnic lunch and the sounds of the river the next time you are in town.



Access improvements to Deer River on NYS Route 12 in Copenhagen. Photo by NYSDEC.

Good News from Jefferson County SWCD

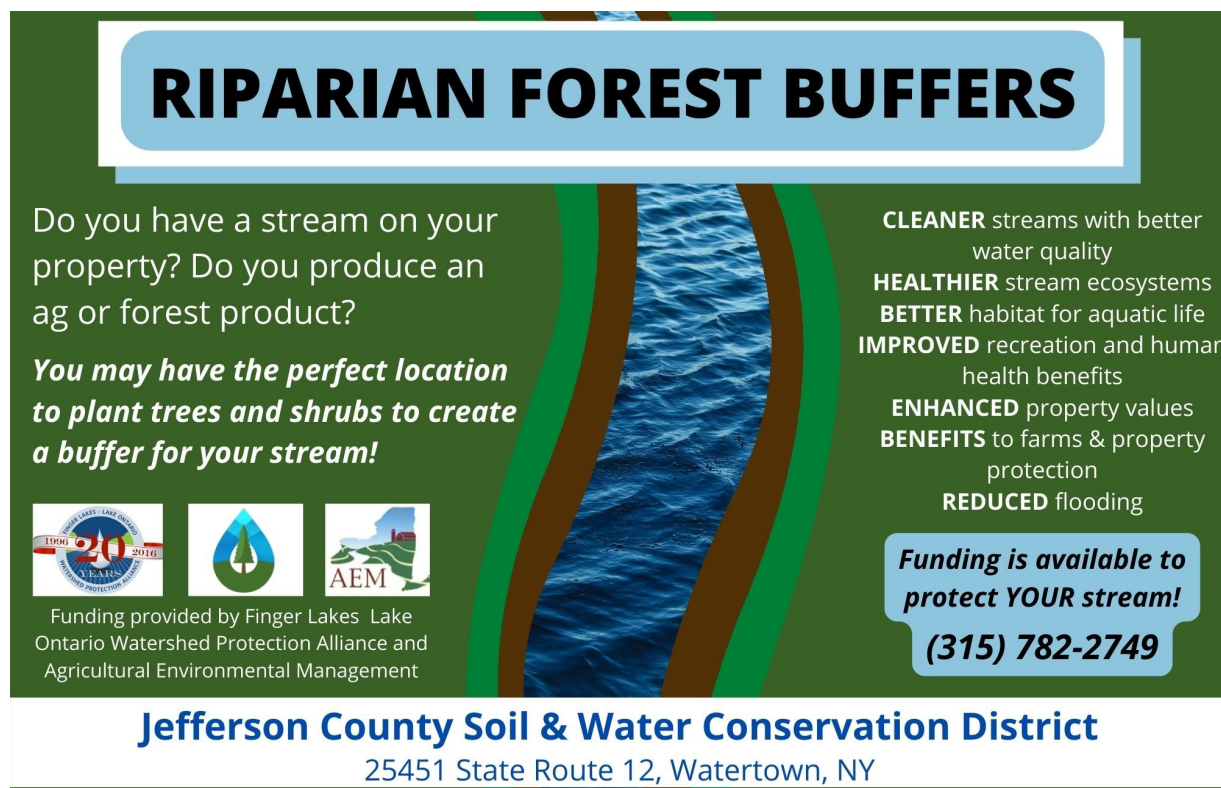
The annual tree sale from Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District (JCSWCD) is on! After taking a break last year, the district is pleased to share that the tree and shrub seedling sale is back and trees are available at a 25% discount thanks to the generous support of the Finger Lakes-Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance (FOLLOWPA). There's so many diverse native trees to choose from, including cedar, spruce, dogwood, cherry, aspen, hazelnut, white oak, red oak, serviceberry and more!

For the full list and additional details, visit: <https://jeffersoncountyswcd.org/shop/>

The deadline to order is February 24th, 2023, so act fast!

On March 9th, 2023, JCSWCD is offering the NYSDEC endorsed 4 Hour Sediment and Erosion Control Training to help municipalities, developers, and contractors get training on the implementation of Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans. Trained staff are required to be present when soil disturbance activities are performed, as called for under the DEC Municipal Separate Stormwater Sewage System Permit. To reserve your spot, visit: <https://jeffersoncountyswcd.org/product/4-hour-erosion-and-sediment-control-training-2023/>

If you are a landowner in Jefferson county with access to water, you may be interested in a riparian buffer. Check out the flyer below:



RIPARIAN FOREST BUFFERS

Do you have a stream on your property? Do you produce an ag or forest product?

You may have the perfect location to plant trees and shrubs to create a buffer for your stream!

Funding provided by Finger Lakes Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance and Agricultural Environmental Management

CLEANER streams with better water quality
HEALTHIER stream ecosystems
BETTER habitat for aquatic life
IMPROVED recreation and human health benefits
ENHANCED property values
BENEFITS to farms & property protection
REDUCED flooding

Funding is available to protect YOUR stream!

(315) 782-2749

Jefferson County Soil & Water Conservation District
25451 State Route 12, Watertown, NY

Tree Watertown Planting in the Black River Watershed

Tree Watertown is the city of Watertown's Street Tree Advisory Committee and works with the city and other area partners to help educate our community on the benefits that trees provide through continued planting and maintenance over time. In addition to educational outreach, Tree Watertown promotes tree stewardship through various efforts including volunteer tree planting projects, workshops, and tours of the city's Downtown Arboretum. Each year, Tree Watertown and the city of Watertown, partner with local organizations and conduct Watertown's annual spring and fall volunteer tree planting events to engage community volunteers and encourage their participation in tree planting activities.

Tree Watertown hosted the city's 21st Annual Fall Tree Planting Project in 2022. This year, most of the trees were planted along North Pleasant Street, located less than 750 feet from the Black River. The new trees will help intercept pollution and runoff from the street that would otherwise drain to the river. Over 70 volunteers participated in planting 42 trees and produced over 145 volunteer hours. Tree species planted as part of this project include apples, maples, oaks, serviceberry, eastern hophornbeam, basswood, and other northern hardwoods. As the trees mature, they will help absorb pollutants from the air, and will slow down and reduce the amount of pollution laden storm water from entering the City's storm sewers during peak flow events, or during seasonal snow melt.

Tree Watertown is always looking for new members to join these efforts and help plan annual tree stewardship and planting activities. All who are interested in planting and protecting trees are welcome to join.

To learn more and get involved, visit: <https://www.watertown-ny.gov/UrbanForestryProgram>



Above: City of Watertown arborist and city planner greets volunteers at the fall tree planting event.

Below: Tree Watertown members assisted with staging the tree planting locations on North Pleasant Street.

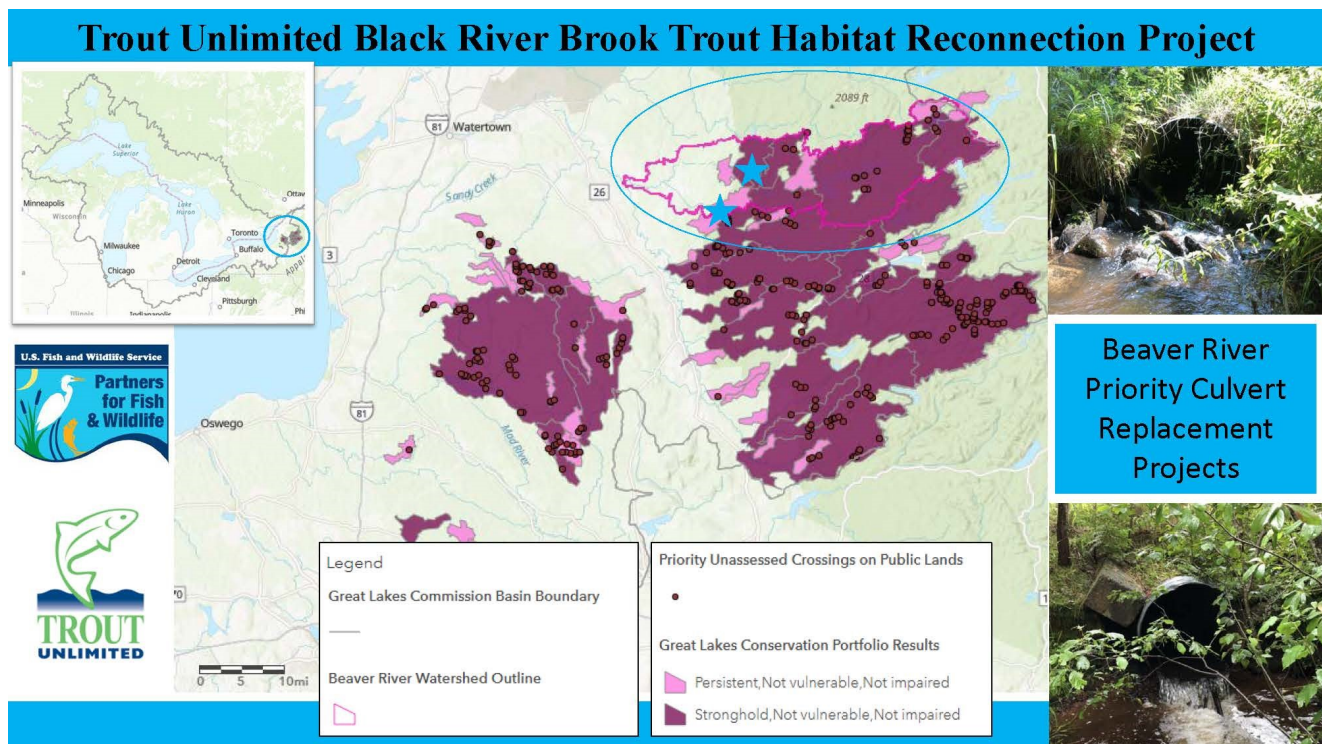


Trout Unlimited Helps Get Grants for Culverts

Trout Unlimited has been assisting communities in the Black River watershed with understanding where culverts can be enhanced to improve passage for trout species and other aquatic life, while also improving transportation assets and reducing risk of road flooding.

In 2022, Trout Unlimited assisted two communities in the watershed with grant applications to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Sustain our Great Lakes funding. The communities were awarded \$319,600 in funding to reconnect coldwater habitat for brook trout, and funding for Trout Unlimited to complete 350 additional culvert assessments in the watershed using the North Atlantic Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative Protocols.

Culvert right sizing work will restore 7.5 miles of habitat for native brook trout, and will take place in the town of New Bremen, and the town of Croghan. To learn more and connect with Trout Unlimited, email Jacob Fetterman at: Jacob.Fetterman@tu.org



Black River Adaptive Modeling Project

The Black River Adaptive Modeling (BRAM) project phase I is underway with the goal of identifying water quality data available, assessing data usability and evaluating gaps. It is anticipated that the data will be used towards adaptive modeling and an updated 9 element plan for the watershed. This will enable stakeholders to implement best practices throughout the watershed effectively, be more competitive for additional grants, and track progress of the Black River Initiative towards achieving desired outcomes.

A stakeholder meeting is planned for **January 25th at 3:00pm**. To learn more, please reach out to Gabriel Yerdon, Tug Hill Commission project specialist, at: gabriel@tughill.org.

A New Threat to Forests in the Watershed

Beech leaf disease (BLD) is a new threat to native and ornamental beech trees. First discovered in Ohio in 2021, BLD has since spread across the Northeastern United States and Canada. Within New York State, 15 counties have BLD present including Oswego and Herkimer County, putting the Black River watershed at near term risk. Being a major part of the northern hardwood forest type (maple-beech-birch),

American beech trees make up a significant portion of forest land in the Black River Watershed. Lower and middle elevation regions of the Adirondacks within the Black River watershed are particularly at risk where northern hardwood forests are a dominant forest type.

Loss of beech trees would cause changes in the watershed's forest structure that would affect the whole ecosystem and impact many wildlife species that rely on beech mast as a main source of energy. The loss of beech along cross country skiing trails would alter the recreational experience, and loss of trees along waterways can contribute to increased erosion.

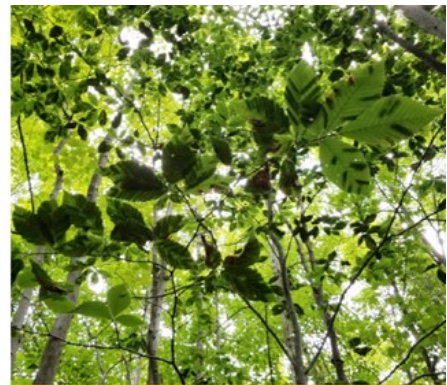
Symptoms of BLD include leaf striping and curling that impedes the ability of the host tree to photosynthesize causing mortality in infected trees within 5 years after the first signs of infestation appear.



Striping



Curling or leathery texture



Darkened stripes in canopy

Signs of BLD on Beech trees. Photo by NYSDEC.

Efforts are underway to help track the spread of BLD. You can help by learning to recognize symptoms of the disease, and reporting observations to nyimaps.invasives.org. Look for signs on beech leaf trees on the Black River Outdoor Environment Association Trails, in the Black River Wild Forest, and Independence River Wild Forest, as well as along the Black River Trail. The St. Lawrence-Eastern Lake Ontario Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (SLELO PRISM) is collaborating with partners to host guided walk and talks to help recruit trail volunteers to aid this effort. Those interested in volunteering to help should sign-up to become a member of SLELO PRISM's invasive species Volunteer Surveillance Network (VSN) can click this [link.](https://www.sleloinvasives.org/learn/vsn/), or go to <https://www.sleloinvasives.org/learn/vsn/>

Detecting Aquatic Invasive Species in the Watershed

In 2022, SLELO PRISM and Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program (APIPP) collaborated on environmental DNA sampling within waterways connecting the St. Lawrence Eastern Lake Ontario and Adirondack PRISM regions. The Black River watershed was one of five watersheds of focus. A total of 66 sampling sites were assessed across the region, with 14 of those sites within the Black River watershed. Sites were selected through an assessment using satellite imagery and GIS tools followed by field verification and were based on the most highly probable areas in which AIS could be introduced or spread, accessibility, and other criteria.

Black River watershed sites were sampled two times, with sample sites spread from its headwaters on Tug Hill and the foothills of the Adirondacks, to where the river drains into Lake Ontario at Black River Bay.

Ten aquatic invasive species were targeted for eDNA presence including Silver and Bighead carp (*Hypophthalmichthys spp.*), Northern snakehead (*Channa argus*), Tubenose goby (*Proterorhinus semilunaris*), Tench (*Tinca tinca*), Rusty crayfish (*Orconectes rusticus*), Round goby (*Neogobius melanostomus*), Hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*), Carolina fanwort (*Cabomba caroliniana*), Eurasian watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*).



Sampling locations in the Black River watershed. Map by The Nature Conservancy.

The results from this project will help to improve understanding of aquatic invasive species (AIS) distribution and enhance aquatic early detection work between programs. Results are being analyzed at a SUNY Oswego lab and a report will be available this winter. Learn more about this project and view a recording of previous webinars along with other resources on SLELO PRISM's [eDNA webpage](#) or visit: www.sleloinvasives.org/initiatives/edna For more information, contact Brittney Rogers at: brittney.rogers@tnc.org



eDNA sampling photo by Brittney Rogers, © The Nature Conservancy

Lewis County Administering NYS Septic Replacement Fund

New York State's Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC) has opened Round 3 of the State Septic System Replacement Fund Program, which provides funds to help homeowners replace cesspools and septic systems on or near priority waterbodies. Lewis County is participating in this program and eligible properties include those located within 250 feet of the Beaver River, lower, and tributaries.

To make it easier to verify if your property may be eligible for this program, we have added a layer has been added to the County's [GIS mapping website](#) and a [reference guide](#), complete with screenshots, is available on the Lewis County Planning and Community Development [website](#) to walk you through this process at www.lewiscounty.org/departments/planning/septicfund

Round 3 has increased Lewis County's allocation of funding for this program and the priority waterbody from \$85,000 to \$275,000. This funding provides a 50% reimbursement, up to \$10,000, for design, reparations, and installation costs of a new septic system or cesspool. Funding will be available until exhausted or, at the very latest, December 31, 2026.

Property owners with aging, likely to fail, or substandard septic systems or cesspools located along or near the lower branch of the Beaver River are encouraged to apply to help improve water quality. To apply for the program, complete and return the application form, which can also be found on the Lewis County Planning and Community Development website.

It is important to note that the state Department of Environmental Conservation and the Department of Health determine priority geographic areas in which property owners are eligible to participate based on the following factors:

- Presence of a sole-source aquifer used for drinking water
- Known water quality impairment linked to failing septic systems, and/or
- The ability for septic system updates to mitigate water quality impairments

While Lewis County does not decide which waterbodies should receive this funding, if you feel other waterbodies should be considered, please reach out to New York State at nysepticreplac@dec.gov.

Please contact Lewis County Planning if you are interested or have questions regarding this program via email at megankrokowski@lewiscounty.ny.org or by phone at 315-376-5423.



Lewis County Planning map of eligible properties.

The Black River Trash Bash: What, Who, Where, When, Why, and How?

What is it?

The Black River Trash Bash is a cleanup event with the added fun of contributing to a very important dataset! The Tug Hill Commission and colleague Nichelle Swisher, District Manager at the Lewis County Soil and Water Conservation District, helped start the event in 2010 to mark the release of the Black River Watershed Management Plan and to draw attention to the river as an important ecological feature. Nichelle named the event the “Black River Trash Bash,” although anywhere within the watershed, or any watershed, is a good place for a cleanup.

Who participates and where do cleanups take place?

Anyone can participate anywhere (we all live in a watershed), but Black River Trash Bash events are consistently held by the Adirondack Communities Advisory League and the Jefferson and Lewis County Water Quality Coordinating Committees. In the past, events have been held in Inlet, Boonville, Lyons Falls, Eatonville, and Watertown. We try to align the Black River Trash Bash during the International Beach Cleanup timeframe in the fall of every year, but there’s no “bad time” to pick up trash or to collect information about it. The individuals or community groups organizing their events schedule their own dates and times.

Why and How to participate?

The answer is NOT because we like to pick up trash! The Black River Trash Bash is more than just cleaning up the shoreline, which, is important on its own. We’re raising awareness and engaging citizens from school aged to retirees. Equally important, this locally held event provides information to a Great Lakes-scale data collection project and a worldwide effort to promote clean water. Learn how you can join a clean-up at: <https://adopt.greatlakes.org/s/>

Everyone can relate to the saying, “think globally, act locally,” right? Data about garbage (hey, don’t trash it), has value on the local, regional and global scales. No matter where its collected, whether it’s a public access site on Otter Creek, a boat launch in the city of Watertown, or a street in your neighborhood, data you collect can make a difference locally and globally. If you’re interested in learning about how Adopt-A-Beach data has been used, please watch [Understanding Great Lakes Plastic Pollution How Adopt a Beach Data Makes a Difference](#) by Tim Hoellein, an Associate Professor at Loyola University Chicago and a leading researcher on plastic pollution in the Great Lakes. He shared how Adopt-a-Beach data has informed his research and shared insights into the plastic pollution problem in the Great Lakes region.

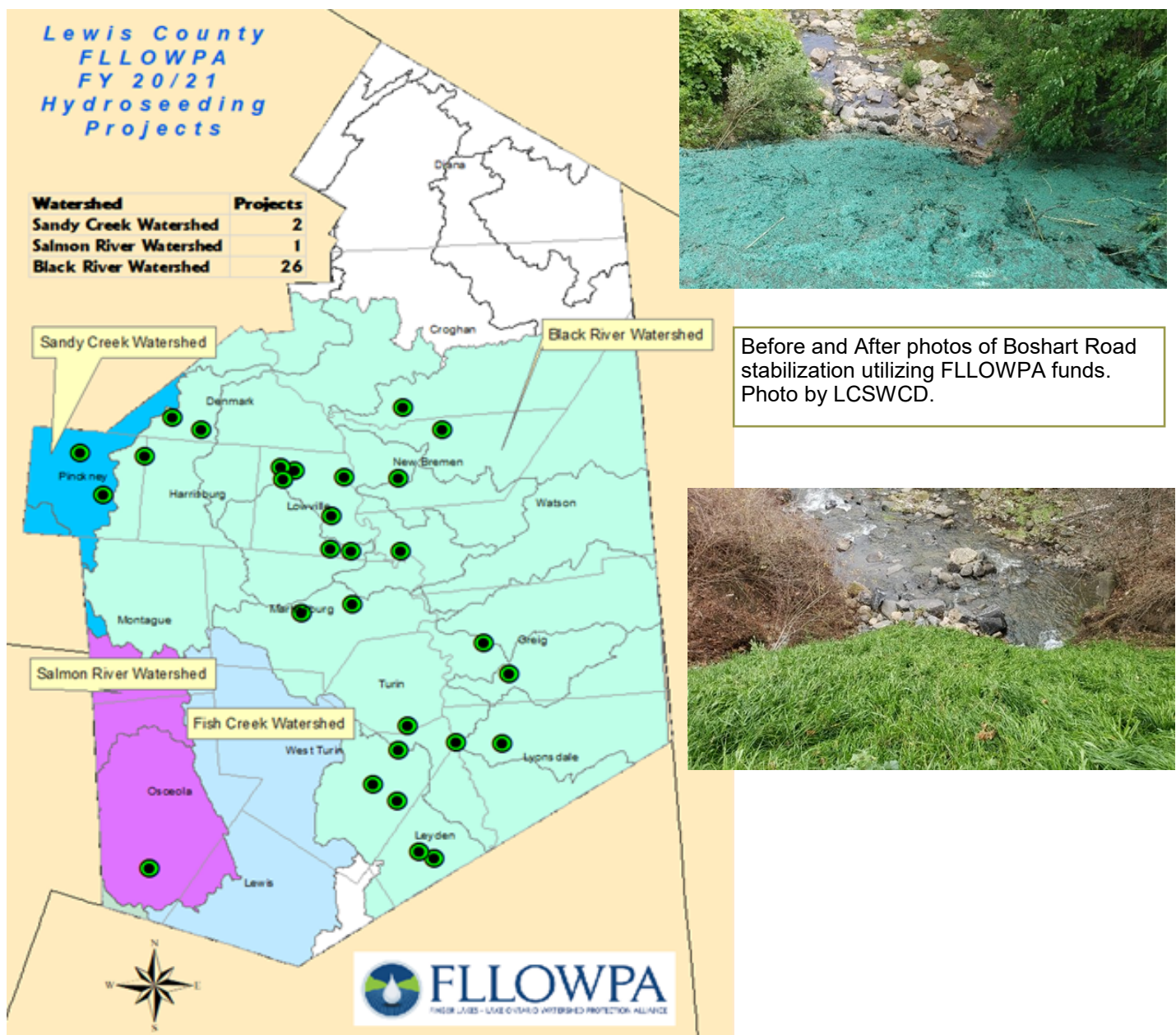


Lewis County Water Quality Coordinating Committee’s Annual Trash Bash.

Exciting Projects Underway in Lewis County

Implementing Erosion Control Practices: Hydroseeding

The Lewis County Soil and Water Conservation District provided hydroseeding services to 14 municipalities and organizations, at 26 individual sites, to reduce erosion and sedimentation in our surface waters. Establishing ground cover stabilizes soil on the ground preventing soil from eroding eliminating sedimentation in our streams. Sediment delivers pollutants to surface waters and serves as a pollutant itself, smothering fish eggs and reducing successful trout spawning. The District stabilized soil vegetating 20.8 acres on 26 sites in the Black River, Sandy Creek and Salmon River Watersheds assisting 14 municipalities and organizations in stabilizing soils with the purpose of protecting water quality and fish populations in Lewis County watersheds. The projects utilized funds through FLOWPA.



More Exciting Projects Underway in Lewis County

Invasive Species: Japanese Knotweed Control Project

The Black River Watershed has an overwhelming population of Japanese knotweed calling for site specific management, as opposed to complete eradication in the watershed, in order to reduce the impacts of the species on the banks of the river. The District identified an area on the Black River that runs parallel to the Pine Grove Road that has become a public hazard as the plant has grown up the bank, through the guard rail and into the pavement. The towering infestation is not only affecting the structure of the riverbank, but the guardrail and the pavement as well. The traditional practice of the highway was to mow it to keep it down. The District worked with the highway department and landowner to prevent mowing and allow the elimination of the Japanese knotweed from this site through stem injection. In order to be able to perform stem injection, the District technicians became certified pesticide technicians through the NYSDEC certification process.

Unfortunately, the summer mowing staff was not made aware of the need to keep this site from being mowed. Despite this setback, stem injection was performed on 25 percent of this knotweed infestation with 90-95 percent success in eliminating viable plants with limited re-growth. Some plants had stems that were too small to inject and were foliar sprayed. Overall, a 150 foot by 16.5 foot section (or 2,457 square feet) of streambank was treated and knotweed eliminated. The entire site would have been treated, however, due to herbicide volume limitations this project will take four years to treat the entire bank and completely eradicate the invasive species.



Top: Google earth photo showing dense knotweed growth.

Left: Photo of lush knotweed growth after accidental mowing (photo credit LCSWCD).

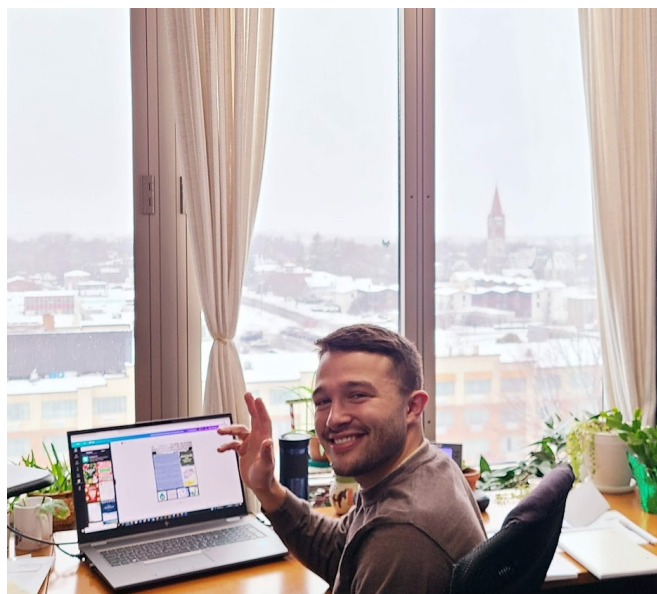
Right: Photo after treatment with stem injection of herbicides by LCSWCD.



Tug Hill Commission Welcomes New Project Specialist

Gabriel Yerdon joined the Tug Hill Commission in early November 2022 as a Project Specialist focused on natural resources and watershed work. Gabriel was raised in Sandy Creek, NY and has strong family connections to the Northern NY region. He is eager to work with the Tug Hill Commission and its stakeholders to preserve and improve the region's natural resources, culture, and economy. Gabriel is already working on the Black River Adaptive Modeling project (BRAM), Black River Trash Bash, Jefferson County and Lewis County Water Quality Coordinating Committees, and the Jefferson County Stormwater Coalition. Gabriel is a 2020 alumnus of Tufts University, with a bachelor's degree in biology and environmental science.

Prior to beginning at Tufts, he participated in the inaugural year of the 1+4 Bridge-Year Service Learning Program, where he lived in Southern Brazil for 8 months while living with a host family and volunteering at a wildlife rehabilitation center. Post-graduation, Gabriel worked as an Environmental Scientist contracted with the Environmental Protection Agency Region 1 (New England). This past summer he returned to the area as a seasonal Environmental DNA Project Technician with The Nature Conservancy's St. Lawrence Eastern Lake Ontario Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (SLELO PRISM) program in Pulaski. He collected water samples for an aquatic invasive species eDNA study throughout much of Tug Hill and beyond to the Adirondacks and the St Lawrence. The Black River Watershed was one of five watersheds of focus for the study.

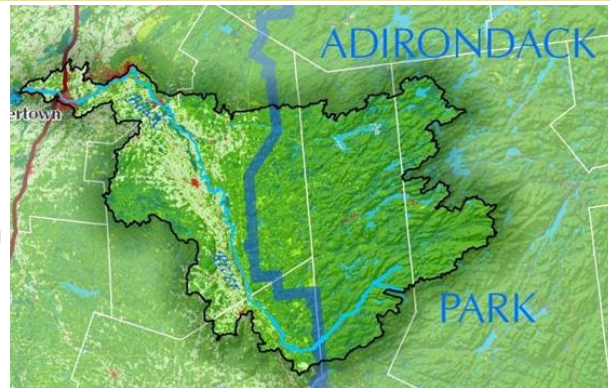


Gabriel working in the Tug Hill Commission office on a snowy day. Photo by NYSDEC.

In his spare time Gabriel enjoys all things outdoors including hunting, hiking, and downhill and water skiing. He also loves to travel and spend time on his family farm with his border collies, sheep, goats, alpacas and other critters. Gabriel is very excited to bring his passion for the Tug Hill region and its natural resources to his new position and he looks forward to promoting clean water and healthy ecosystems within the Black River watershed. To connect with Gabriel, email: gabriel@tughill.org

Black River Initiative

The Black River Initiative is a multi-pronged approach to protect and improve the water quality, recreational opportunities and communities along the Black River. The Black River Watershed Management Plan (2010), Black River 9 Element Plan (2016) Black River Blueway Trail Plan (2007) and Black River Trail Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan (2012) provide the foundation to advance existing efforts and new projects that enhance and improve all aspects of the Black River. This annual newsletter highlights recent developments in the Black River Initiative, connects with stakeholders, and promotes collaborative, ecosystem based management efforts to achieve goals. For more information, visit: www.tughill.org/projects/black-river-projects/



Black River Watershed boundary.
Graphic courtesy of Bergmann and Associates.

Thank you to all of the organizations that contributed to this newsletter!



For more Information contact:

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Tug Hill Commission jennifer@tughill.org

Emily Fell; Eastern Great Lakes Watershed Coordinator
DEC Great Lakes Program, in Cooperation with Cornell Water Resources Institute emily.fell@dec.ny.gov



Coordination for this newsletter supported by the NYS Environmental Protection Fund; Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Act.



Black River Trail. Photo by Emily Fell.



Waterfront view in Croghan. Photo by Emily Fell.

Information on recreation in the Black River is available at www.blackriverny.com