

FISH CREEK UPDATE

Approximately 40 people attended the October 12, 2023, meeting of the East Branch of Fish Creek Working Group, held at the West Leyden Fire Department in West Leyden, NY. 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, Bluesource Sustainable Forests Company (BSFC), The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Tug Hill Commission.

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)

Mike Giocondo reviewed that the DEC's role is to oversee the conservation easement on fee lands owned by TNC and BSFC, which includes public recreational rights and the restrictions of the easement. Currently there are 23 miles of road open for public motorized truck/car access and 29 miles of road/trail open for snowmobile access. Snowmobile access was one of the main reasons this group was formed, and the importance of the snowmobile corridor was noted, as well as working partnerships with the clubs. Incidentally, Michael reported that the Southern Tug Hill snowmobile club, through Volunteer Stewardship Agreement, recently brushed



a part of Joe's Road, improving access on the road and trail. Non-motorized access includes mountain biking, horseback riding, and walking. There are 35 miles of road/trail currently open for mountain biking and about 28 miles of road/trail for horseback riding. There are eleven miles of hiking trails in the area, on a combination of conservation easement, state forest, and wildlife management area lands.

Over the last year, road maintenance, including grading and improvements, were made on the EBFC south property, Camp Four Road (also added gravel to improve road conditions on hills), Camp Five Road, New Mountain Road, Tin Shanty East, Joe's Road, Michigan Mills Extension, and the G&W Causeway on the north end of property. This year featured routine maintenance and no big projects.

Work on the Tug Hill Traverse Trail continues and is being led by Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust (Bob McNamara) and Black River Chapter of Adirondack Mountain Club (Cindy Stewart). The idea for this trail was born out of this EBFC Working Group. Ten miles of trail have been completed. The trail runs from Beech Street on the Wildlife Management Area just north of the conservation easement property south through the EBFC State Forest, across Michigan Mills Road bridge, and then south towards Little Roaring Brook, where it currently ends. Crossings are still being worked on and brushing continues. The goal is to continue the trail through the southern part of the easement.

Rain events prevented work on the Fall Brook Access project. The work will be rescheduled for the spring of 2024. During 2020-2021, the bridge was replaced. Work scheduled in 2024 includes improving the right-of-way for public access from North Osceola Road and creating a parking area near Fall Brook. This project will provide a new parking area next summer to provide access to the western side of the property.

DEC staff changes include Forest Ranger Maxwell, the new ranger covering EBFC South (everything south of the G&W). Acting Lieutenant Snyder covers the G&W road and points north. Both will cover the entire EBFC area. Forester Dora Faber will be taking over easement responsibilities for the DEC.

DEC also released the final [Tug Hill East Unit Management Plan \(UMP\)](#) this week. The UMP includes the detached forest preserve parcels, the East Branch of Fish Creek State Forest, and the Tug Hill Traverse Trail, but not the conservation easement lands, which are managed under a different plan. One of many recommendations is for the East Branch of Fish Creek State Forest to be classified as “high value conservation forest” due to its watershed protection value. Watershed protection for the city of Rome drinking water supply was another reason this working group formed. There is also an accessibility project scheduled for East Osceola State Forest that aims to increase motorized access for people with disabilities.



Bluesource Sustainable Forests Company (BSFC)

Shawn Hagan is the Regional Director for BSFC and calls home in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Most of his 30-year forestry career has been set in the Great Lakes region, but his time with BSFC and work in New York is less than 12 months.

Formed in 2021, BSFC’s goals are to manage forests with a focus on carbon sequestration to generate income with carbon credits, complimented with timber harvests to help maintain healthy forests and biodiversity. BSFC purchased the property from Molpus in 2021. The property is third-party certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, under BSFC’s Group Certification. The focus for 2023-2024 is operational inventory work to better understand where the timber is, to include more plots on the ground with closer spacing. He and the LandVest foresters will be looking into road maintenance needs, especially as they are tied to beaver activities. Issues Shawn has been made aware of include ATV use – a balancing act between economic activity and damage to roads and trails, noise; access issues to the great lots area; and the 480a program. There were some questions from attendees about the merits of selling forest carbon and property assessments on 480a properties in Osceola. General concerns related to inconsistent property assessment increases, reductions in stumpage tax payments on 480a properties if managing for carbon results in reduced timber harvesting, and benefits or lack thereof to the local economy. Other comments from attendees were focused on hunt lease timing and rates.

The Nature Conservancy

Brian Roat reported that the ten-year PILOT agreement is up for renewal this year. TNC has every intention of continuing with PILOT payments as long as the taxing jurisdictions are agreeable, and a new agreement is put in place. TNC has made no new land purchases in the last few years. Access changes and problems on the G&W Road are ongoing, and TNC is conducting a hydrologic study to determine where the flooding is coming from, specifically looking at beaver dams. Nuisance trapping permits are being executed cooperatively with lessees where infrastructure is being threatened; Fairchild Road was one location specifically mentioned. ATV trails are not open to the public on TNC lands and no snowmobiles are allowed. Brian introduced Mary Ripka from TNC, who will be more involved with TNC's hunting program and will be at future meetings. Leases on TNC properties help fund the PILOT program. There is no timber harvesting being done on TNC property right now. The DEC's map does not show private holdings outside of the easement.



Tug Hill Commission

The commission will send these notes out to everyone on the EBFC Working Group email list. Jennifer Harvill reported that the commission is hosting two educational workshops. On Saturday, October 28th, Charley Sweredoski will be presenting a historical workshop about the G&W Railroad. On Tuesday, November 14th, Scott Steiger and his students will present their research findings about their Lake Effect Electrification Study. Please [click here for more information](#) about both presentations.

Contacts

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Tug Hill Commission, Katie Malinowski, katie@tughill.org, Jennifer Harvill, jennifer@tughill.org, 315-785-2380

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.