

Northern Oneida County Council of Governments Annual Meeting

The Northern Oneida County Council of Governments (NOCCOG) held their annual meeting Thursday, October 24, at the Woods Valley Ski Area in Westernville. Over 70 local government officials attended the event, including Senator Joe Griffo and Mike Furner, representing Assemblymember Marianne Buttenschon. Also present from the Tug Hill Commission were commissioners Gerry Ritter and Bob Keller, associate director of community and regional projects, Jennifer Harvill, project specialist Jillian Lee, and municipal advisor Heidi Tompkins. Oneida County Sheriff Rob Maciol and Oneida County Legislator Steve DiMaggio attended as well.

The keynote speaker was Steven Smith, executive director of the Mohawk Valley Economic Development District (MVEDD). One of nine federal economic development districts in NY, MVEDD has been serving Fulton, Herkimer, Montgomery, Oneida, Otsego, and Schoharie counties since 1966. Mr. Smith spoke on many of the services MVEDD provides and offers to the communities in the group's six county region.

Also recognized was long time NOCCOG director and former chair, John Doiron. Mr. Doiron is stepping down after serving on the board of directors for 14 years.

The slate of officers elected for 2025 were: Robert Sauer, Camden, chair, Thomas McDonald, Remsen, vice chair, Betsy Mack, Trenton, fiscal officer, and Lawrence Mierek, Western, director.



In This Issue

- NOCCOG Annual Meeting
- Civic Service Student Activity Program
- THTLT Awarded Grant
- Turin Fire Department Awarded Grant
- BUILT Nonprofits Grant
- The Little Voices Webinar
- National Grid's Upstate Upgrade
- Federal Grants for Energy Projects
- Large Forests Grant Funding
- Mitigation Bank Fund
- Call for Citizen Scientists
- OSC Upcoming Webinars

Commission Kicks Off Civic Service Student Activity Program

The Tug Hill Commission hosted the first Civic Service Student Activity Program (CSSAP) day on Thursday, October 24, at the Howard G. Sackett Technical Center in Glenfield. CSSAP's purpose is to develop and support students and future leaders in their exploration of leadership opportunities in public and government service and workforce development. The program's vision is to foster an environment where communities develop a clear path for the next generation of leaders. The commission recognizes the need to involve younger community members to fill board and volunteer positions throughout the Tug Hill region. Many conversations regarding this took place within the River Area Council of Governments (RACOG), leading to this first event.

(cont. on page 2)

Civic Service Student Activity Program

CSSAP is designed to engage future leaders through a two-day course of student activities. The first day includes activities related to real-life scenarios that might occur in local government. Civic service mentors (CSM), who are municipal officials, government employees, professionals, and volunteers, mentor each student group to provide real-life experience. The second day of activities includes field trips to government offices, essential service sites (e.g., water treatment plant, fire department, etc.), and administrative facilities to show students different careers available in their area.

The first CSSAP event was offered to school districts served by the Howard G. Sackett Technical Center. On October 24, 11 students participated from Beaver River, Copenhagen, and Lowville schools. Four CSMs mentored these students: Anna Platz, deputy director of Lewis County Community Services; Heidi Lehmann, mayor of the village of Castorland; Yvonne Boliver, board member for the town of Croghan and vice chair for RACOG; and Patrick Shumate, Lewis County Search and Rescue.



The day started with students learning about the CSMs' careers, their impact on their community, and the program's purpose. Students then split into two groups and completed three different activities. The first two activities required each student in the group to have a role: town supervisor, town clerk, board member, and concerned citizen. The first activity proposed a solar energy development in a theoretical town on agricultural land. Students needed to approve or deny that the solar facility could be built. In order to make this decision, they were asked to consider environmental, economic, and community impacts.

In the second activity, students were given \$2 million dollars to create a town budget for various aspects such as roads and transportation, public safety, employee salary and benefits, drinking water and sewer system management, maintenance, community services, and town savings. The theoretical town also wanted to build a new park, fix roads, and purchase a new vehicle, so they also needed to consider those aspects. The third activity had student roles set as a town highway superintendent, town water manager, and workers to clean up a toxic waste spill. They worked together using five pieces of rope and two bicycle tire tubes to dump one coffee can of the waste into a clean can to "clean" the toxic waste.



Both groups found success in each activity while approaching each one differently. The students said they enjoyed the real-life scenario activities because they relate to actual problems and questions the villages and towns need to address. They also enjoyed learning about the careers they could have without leaving the area. Each student received a certificate awarding them five hours of civic participation credit for the NYS Education Department's Seal of Civic Readiness. The Seal of Civic Readiness is recognition a student can receive to show they attained a high level of proficiency in terms of civic knowledge, skills, mindset, and experiences.



The commission would like to thank the CSMs for taking time out of their day to mentor the students, RACOG for financially supporting lunch, Jeremy Kelly and his team for supplying lunch through the Culinary Arts Cooking program, Kathy Grenier and Jeff Ginger for their support for this program to be held at the Howard G. Sackett Technical Center, the guidance counselors for student engagement, and most importantly, the students for taking the time to participate.



The next CSSAP day will be in May 2025 and will include field trips around the RACOG area. The locations of the field trips are still being planned. Students who attend schools served by the Howard G. Sackett Technical Center can contact their guidance counselors if they are interested in participating. Mickey Dietrich and Jillian Lee facilitated the program on behalf of the commission. If you have any questions about CSSAP or expanding to other regions, please contact Jillian Lee at jillian@tughill.org or 315-785-2406 or Mickey Dietrich at mickey@tughill.org or 315-681-5023.

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust Granted \$360,000 for Forest Conservation

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has awarded Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust two grants totaling over \$360,000 to support conservation efforts in Herkimer and Oswego counties. These projects aim to enhance biodiversity, promote sustainable forestry, and protect critical habitats in the Tug Hill region.

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust will receive **\$222,550** to purchase a 268-acre conservation easement in the town of Boylston, Oswego County, adjacent to Stave Mill State Forest. This forest is characterized by northern hardwood species and includes areas of old growth designated as an “important habitat area and significant natural community” by the town of Boylston. The property also features sections of Pine Creek, recognized by the NYS Natural Heritage Program as containing a rare, largely undisturbed hemlock-hardwood swamp, which is also designated as a Special Area by the town of Boylston under the [Tug Hill Reserve Act](#).

Additionally, THTLT will receive **\$139,250** to purchase a 190-acre conservation easement adjacent to Hinckley State Forest and West Canada Creek in the town of Russia, Herkimer County. This area has been identified as a priority for conservation due to its ecological significance. The easement will facilitate sustainable forestry practices and help mitigate the impacts of climate change while preserving the region’s rich biodiversity and habitat for threatened and endangered species.

These grants are part of a broader initiative funded through the Environmental Protection Fund, which allocates resources to support climate change mitigation and conservation efforts across New York State. By investing in these projects, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust is making significant strides toward safeguarding the natural beauty and ecological integrity of the Tug Hill region for future generations.

Turin Volunteer Fire Department Awarded V-FIRE Grant

The Volunteer Fire Infrastructure and Response Equipment (V-FIRE) grant program is a new NYS program with \$25 million in funding for FY 2024. The first round of 88 grant awards were announced on Friday October 25, to improve facilities and response capabilities by ensuring that fire stations are safe and structurally sound and meet building codes and by supporting safety, health and wellness of firefighters by providing adequate and up to date equipment.

The Turin Volunteer Fire Department, Inc., with help from Tug Hill Commission staff, submitted a grant request to complete several upgrades to their fire station, including a new heating system, new doors and windows and a new floor. The grant request was approved, and the fire department was awarded approximately \$244,000 to make these improvements. There were several other awardees from the four Tug Hill counties including Constantia Fire District #1, Harrisville Volunteer Fire Department, Inc., Lowville Fire Department, Inc., Mexico Fire Department, Inc., Richland Fire Department, and West Amboy Volunteer Fire Department. Congratulations to the Turin Fire Department and all the other awardees on their successful applications.

The grant award announcement, including a YouTube video of an award event, can be found on [Governor Hochul’s website](#). The full list of grant recipients can be found on the NYS Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services [\(DHSES\) website](#).

U.S. Department of Energy BUILT Nonprofits Grant

The Building Upgrades Inspiring Local Transformation (BUILT Nonprofits) funding opportunity will support nonprofit building improvement projects that reduce energy use, lower carbon emissions, and generate short- and long-term energy cost savings, allowing operational dollars to be redirected toward mission-critical work. Eligible participants are 501(c)(3) organizations that own and operate their own buildings. BUILT Nonprofits will provide awards of up to \$100,000 each, with a 20% cost-share requirement.

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is launching the BUILT Nonprofits program as part of its Renew America’s Nonprofits initiative, funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). This \$50 million program aims to reduce energy costs and emissions in nonprofit buildings, ultimately enhancing their community impact. A total of \$2 million is available for community-based 501(c)(3) nonprofits, with each organization eligible to apply for grants up to \$100,000 for energy efficiency upgrades.

To qualify for the grant, applicants must contribute 20% of the project costs, which can be monetary or in-kind. The types of projects funded include equipment and installation for various energy efficiency improvements, such as HVAC systems, water heaters, weatherization materials, and energy-efficient lighting.

Organizations interested in applying should develop a detailed energy upgrade plan that outlines potential energy and cost savings and justify the proposed upgrades with energy audits or similar assessments. Additionally, they need to describe how energy savings will benefit the community, aligning with the Justice40 Initiative. The application deadline is November 12, 2024, at 11:59 p.m. EST. More information [here](#).



The Little Voices by Lee Wasmuth



TUG HILL'S FORGOTTEN AUTHOR

Tuesday, November 19, 2024
6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
via Zoom



ABOUT

Portraying daily life and a burgeoning romance set in Tug Hill Country, *The Little Voices* depicts the mostly-autobiographical life of Lee Wasmuth, a Tug Hill native whose early childhood was spent in the Page community along the Glenfield & Western Railroad. Starting in Fall of 1933, twenty-five segmented chapters of *The Little Voices* were printed in installments of the Watertown Daily Times. In the telling of Wasmuth's story, the reader is invited to experience familiar names and places on the core forest of Tug Hill and Black River Valley through the lens of the fictional protagonist, Allan Hargrave.

Learn more about Wasmuth, *The Little Voices*, and life on Tug Hill through Jill Markham O'Hara, Wasmuth's great niece.

REGISTRATION

Attendance is free, but pre-registration is required. To register, use the following link:

<https://tinyurl.com/tughilllittlevoices>

Or call the Tug Hill Commission office at (315) 785-2380.



National Grid's Upstate Upgrade Jefferson County Info Session

National Grid currently has projects underway in Oswego, Jefferson, Lewis, Oneida, St. Lawrence, Genesee, Monroe, Herkimer, Montgomery, and Chautauqua counties, necessary to meet state and federal requirements for utilities corporations to better facilitate the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) guidelines. On October 29, in Jefferson County's legislative chambers, town and county officials heard a presentation by representatives from National Grid to learn more about the pending [Upstate Upgrade](#) project. The scope of this meeting pertained to affected towns in Jefferson County.

Upstate Upgrade is a large-scale transmission project whereby existing double-circuit transmission lines will be replaced with two single-circuit lines, comprised of galvanized steel and twice the number of wires per phase and conductors per circuit. To accommodate needed setbacks from the poles, the existing utility easements will generally need to be widened from 100 feet to 165 feet. The proposed rebuilds of the Black River—Clay 115kV line (± 62.2 miles) and Black River—Porter 115 kV line (± 86.8 miles) are part of National Grid's efforts to update 400 miles of line throughout the state. Driven by the CLCPA, the project aims to increase the reliability and grid capacity needed for NYS to meet its energy goals moving into the future.



Both lines are partially located in Jefferson County.

Approximately 22.3 miles of the Black River—Clay line traverses the towns of LeRay, Rutland, Rodman, Worth, and Lorraine; approximately 14.2 miles of the Black River—Porter line crosses through the towns of Rutland, LeRay, Champion, and Wilna. A new substation is also being proposed in Rutland, adjacent to the pre-existing substation.

National Grid is expected to submit its proposal to the Public Service Commission by December of 2024. This will trigger the Article VII permitting process, which includes the notification process for municipalities and all affected landowners. Landowners and municipalities will have the opportunity to become an "interested party" and be included in further mailings. Once submitted, the application will be available in full, and stakeholders will be able to comment at public meetings organized by the Public Service Commission as the permitting process commences.

The permitting process is expected to take approximately one year. The estimated construction timeline is from Spring 2026 to Winter 2027.

Federal Grants for Energy Projects that Reduce Business Costs

The Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA) has been awarded a \$137,000 technical assistance grant from USDA Rural Development to launch REAP ADK+, a new program aimed at assisting small businesses and farms navigate a federal grant program (REAP) regarding renewable energy and energy efficiency projects. ANCA aims to assist with securing funds for at least 36 businesses in their North Country service area over the next three years, which includes all four Tug Hill counties. REAP ADK+ will provide free application preparation and support services, as well as free assistance determining an applicant's eligibility.

WHO: Agricultural producers (an entity wherein 50% of their gross income comes from agricultural operations), small businesses, cooperatives, rural electric utilities and tribal corporations are eligible to apply.

WHAT: REAP provides grant funding for high-efficiency and renewable energy projects like the installation of heat pumps, insulation, solar panels, and energy-efficient lighting. The program reimburses up to 50% of the costs of each project.

WHERE: For more information visit ANCA's website, www.adirondack.org/reapadk/.

Potential applicants should contact Jon Ignatowski, ANCA's Manager of Food Systems Business at jignatowski@adirondack.org or 518-891-6200 x124.

New Grant Funding to Establish Large Forests

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) recently announced that \$4.5 million is now available through the Establishing Large Forests (ELF) grant program for private landowners to establish new forests. ELF expands on NY's popular [Regenerate NY](#) forestry cost share grant program and is designed to support the creation of new forests crucial for mitigating climate change, providing wildlife habitat, protecting air and water quality, and supplying timber, an important renewable resource.

Under the new grant opportunity, private landowners (or their representatives) with five or more acres of unforested land in New York State may apply for a minimum of \$30,000 up to a maximum of \$750,000 to reimburse costs for establishing new forests. Eligible projects include but are not limited to preparing sites and planting trees and associated forest vegetation, removing competing or invasive vegetation interfering with seedling establishment and growth, and protecting new plantings from deer browsing with fencing. Additional consideration will be given to applications with projects that cover large areas.

Applicants must work with a forester or a qualified natural resource professional to develop their projects and must agree to maintain the new forest for at least 15 years. ELF is managed by DEC's Division of Lands and Forests. DEC will host a webinar on Thursday, November 14, from 9:00 - 11:00 a.m., to provide information and answer questions about this new funding opportunity. Visit DEC's [website](#) for more information. A recording of the webinar will be posted on DEC's website when available.

Applications will be accepted until 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 7, 2025. Applications must be submitted through the [SFS Grants Management System](#) (SFS). Those wishing to apply need to establish an account in SFS. Once registered, search SFS for "Establishing Large Forests" or "ELF." For more details about the grant opportunity, including application and scoring criteria, visit DEC's website or email largeforests@dec.ny.gov.

Draft Regulatory Proposal for Endangered and Threatened Mitigation Bank Fund

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has proposed a regulation to establish a mitigation bank fund aimed at offsetting negative impacts on endangered and threatened species during construction of renewable energy and transmission projects.

The proposed regulation is open for public comment until January 15, 2025. Two virtual hearings are scheduled for January 8, 2025, at 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Comments can be submitted via email or mail, More information on the [DEC's website](#).

- This regulation stems from the Accelerated Renewable Energy Growth and Community Benefit Act of 2020 and the RAPID Act of 2024. These laws mandate the creation of the mitigation bank fund as an alternative for large-scale energy projects to address potential adverse impacts on endangered species.
- If a project is expected to negatively affect endangered species, applicants must work with the DEC and the Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES) to assess and minimize impacts. If avoidance is not possible, offsite mitigation may be pursued, including habitat creation and threat reduction. The DEC will determine the necessary payments to be made into the Fund based on the specific impacts and conservation needs.
- The funds collected will be utilized by the DEC for management actions that enhance the status of the affected species, either directly or through partnerships with other organizations.

Call for Citizen Scientists: Join NYS DEC Wildlife Management Initiatives

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is seeking wildlife enthusiasts to participate in various citizen science projects focused on river otters, ruffed grouse, and whitetail deer hunting. These initiatives aim to engage the public in wildlife management and contribute valuable data for future conservation efforts.

Otter Management Focus Groups

If you're passionate about river otters, consider joining a focus group organized by DEC, which will help shape a management plan for river otters in New York for the next decade. Participants will share their thoughts on potential management proposals and identify important information to include in the plan. Meetings will take place in November and December in locations such as Canandaigua, Utica, and New Paltz. Each session will last about two hours, and participants will receive \$30 along with light refreshments. Interested individuals can complete a [screening questionnaire](#) to join. For more details, contact William Siemer at Cornell University, wfs1@cornell.edu.

Ruffed Grouse Monitoring

For over a decade, DEC has been collecting data on ruffed grouse populations through hunter reports. Despite long-term declines in grouse numbers due to habitat loss, some areas, like the Adirondacks and Catskills, still show relatively high populations. DEC has developed an interactive dashboard to track trends in grouse flush and drumming rates, which will be updated annually. Upland hunters are encouraged to participate in the [Grouse and Woodcock Hunting Log](#) and [Drumming Survey](#) to assist in ongoing monitoring efforts. View the [Interactive Grouse Dashboard](#).

Gut Pile Ecology Project

Deer hunters are invited to contribute to the "Gut Pile Ecology" project during the 2024-25 season. This project collects data on scavenging rates at deer gut piles, focusing on how quickly scavengers find them and their persistence in different habitats. Hunters are asked to place a trail camera at their gut pile after harvesting a deer and record the location and details. Volunteers can use their own cameras, or DEC can provide a limited number for loan. Participation will not alter normal hunting practices, ensuring the study remains valid. Sign up to participate [here](#).

Upcoming Webinars from the Office of the Comptroller

The NYS Office of the Comptroller Academy for Local Officials no cost accounting related webinars. Click [here](#) for more information.

November 6, 10:00 - 11:00 a.m., [Accounting for Capital Assets](#)

A municipality's inventory of capital assets often represents its most significant investment of resources. This session will cover the proper accounting for these valuable assets. We will also discuss best practices to ensure these assets are properly safeguarded from theft or loss.

November 13, 10:00 - 11:00 a.m., [NYSLRS Record of Activities - Elected and Appointed Officials](#)

This webinar will explain how the New York State and Local Retirement System (NYSLRS) determines service credit for Elected and Appointed Officials. Officials, who are not in a time-keeping system, are required to keep a Record of Activities (ROA). The purpose of an ROA is to establish an Official's service credit in NYSLRS. During this training, we will go over what is required on an ROA, as well as walk you through how to complete an ROA utilizing a template, available on the NYSLRS website.

November 20-21, 8:45 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., [Introduction to Governmental Accounting](#)

This multi-day school is designed to familiarize participants with the basic concepts of governmental accounting and give them a working knowledge of basic bookkeeping procedures such as understanding debits and credits, a discussion of the modified accrual system of accounting, the practice of maintaining the books and records, developing and accounting for the annual budget, as well as the year-end closing process.

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For upcoming trainings, grant deadlines, and meetings, view our [calendar](#).