

FISH CREEK UPDATE



Approximately 30 people attended the October 3, 2024, meeting of the East Branch of Fish Creek (EBFC) 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 provided by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and Aurora Sustainable Lands via email from Shawn Hagan.

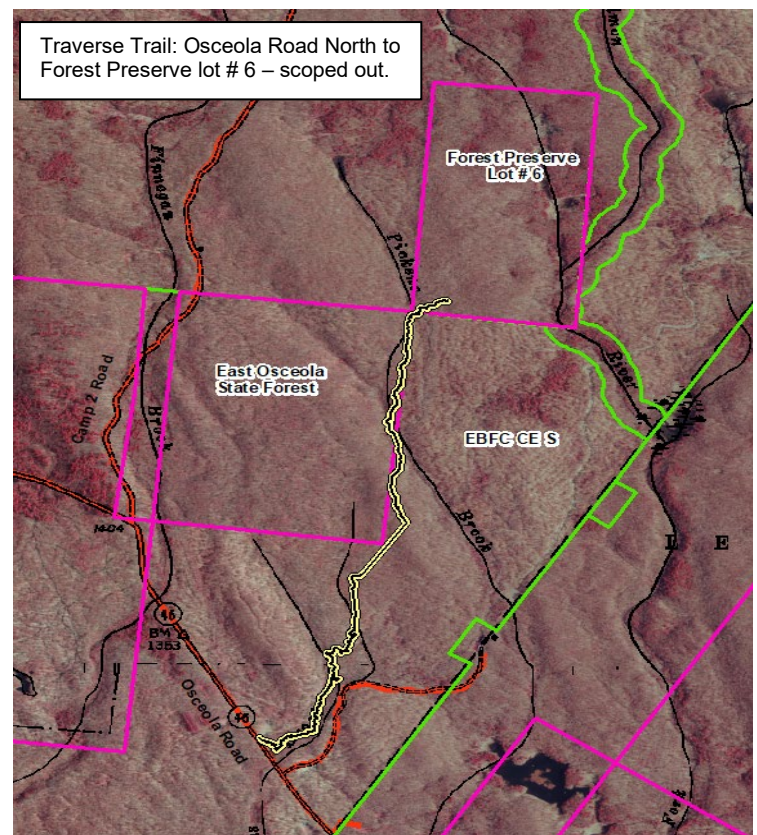
NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

There are currently about 23 miles of road open to the public for motorized truck/car and about 29 miles of road/trail open for public snowmobile access. Additionally, there are currently about 35 miles of road/trail open for mountain biking and about 28 miles of road/trail open for horseback riding.

Over the past year, road maintenance grading and improvements activities included pothole work and brushing on the G&W Road, and tree removal and maintenance are scheduled on the Hydrant Road.

An article 24 Freshwater Wetlands permit application was completed and approved for a culvert replacement on Camp Four Road. The increased pipe size will allow for high water flow and will decrease negative outwash effects to the road surface. The culvert replacement is anticipated to be completed in 2025.

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. Twelve miles of trail have been built so far, with a new one-mile section of trail from Roaring Brook to F-86 Road opened this summer, from the EBFC State Forest to the EBFC easement south. An approximately 45-foot bridge crossing over Roaring Brook will be needed on this section. Another section of trail (pictured right) is being scoped out from Osceola Road North to Forest Preserve Lot #6. This section is approximately two miles long and runs along the East Osceola State Forest line.





Work is also being done on the west side of the EBFC south easement to access Fall Brook. This includes a right-of-way for public access from North Osceola Road, and a parking area and kiosk near Fall Brook. A soft opening is scheduled for fall of 2024, with an official opening in the spring of 2025. Once completed, this project will improve access to the western portion of the southern easement

The NYSDOT bridge on the G&W Road has been reopened open to public use and camp owners with a three-ton weight limit and a 10-mph speed limit. Public access was limited this summer by a gate, due to a NYSDOT inspection flag for issues with abutment scouring. Options for a permanent fix are being evaluated. A replacement will not be rescheduled until 2026 at the very earliest.

Forest Ranger Maxwell, who covers EBFC South and EBFC North, said a few words and encouraged people to get in touch with him if they see anything unusual or have any questions.

The Nature Conservancy

Brian Roat reported that the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreement between all the taxing jurisdictions (four towns, three school districts and Lewis County) has been renewed for ten years. TNC is working with the University of Vermont to evaluate their lands in the EBFC area for climate adaptation, with a goal to promote improved forest structure and increase tree species diversity. For more information see [//www.forestadaptation.org/adapt/tug-hill](http://www.forestadaptation.org/adapt/tug-hill). Brian also stated that the results of the spatial analysis of the flooding issues on G&W Road showed that the dam on TNC property has no effect on water levels that far upstream (i.e. where the road flooding occurs), and there are numerous other dams in between. The main problem appears to be how low the road sits, which leaves it vulnerable to some seasonal flooding regardless of beaver activity, though the dams do exacerbate the effects.

Aurora Sustainable Lands

An October 3, 2024, email from Shawn Hagan stated that Aurora's efforts continue to focus on stand level cruising with a goal completing over 12,000 acres this calendar year. The crews are approximately 42% complete and from those acres cruised, two potential timber sales have been identified and are going through the review process. If approved, Aurora anticipates presale work to start this year and sales to potentially be sold/active in 2025.

Beaver control continues to be an ongoing effort. Aurora appreciates being alerted to issues and thanks those who have assisted with the control. Aurora is also reviewing the possibility of a couple of easement exchanges that would benefit both parties for forest management and timber harvest purposes and will follow-up with NYSDEC regarding the particulars to each request to ensure they would be compliant with the conservation easement.

Lease rates on Aurora's property went up significantly this year as a result of market studies completed by Aurora. No decisions have been made about future rate adjustments, but one idea that has been discussed is the possibility of longer-term leases that would bring a bit more certainty to lease members. There may be more to come on this topic in the coming months.

Shawn will be retiring later this year, so in time there will be a new person to guide the management and work with the various stakeholders very soon. In the meantime, questions can be directed to Shawn or Jack Santamour at LandVest.

Concerns from Clubs

Concerns were raised by several different clubs over the raising of lease payments by Aurora Sustainable Lands. Some clubs saw their annual lease payments double. Some expressed that Tug Hill lands are not as productive for hunting as other parts of the state or country and weren't sure how Aurora came up with the increasing assessments. All paid their dues, nonetheless.

Tug Hill Commission

The commission will send these notes out to everyone on the EBFC Working Group email list.

Contacts

LandVest (manager for Aurora Sustainable Lands), Jack Santamour, 315-376-2832, jsantamour@landvest.com

NYSDEC Dora Faber, dora.faber@dec.ny.gov, 315-376-3521, Michael Giocondo, michael.giocondo@dec.ny.gov, Forest Ranger Maxwell (jacob.maxwell@dec.ny.gov) - EBFC South, and Acting Lieutenant Snyder (jennifer.synder@dec.ny.gov) – EBFC North

The Nature Conservancy, Brian Roat, broat@tnc.org, Mary Ripka, mripka@tnc.org, 315-387-3600

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.