

Register for the Tug Hill LGC, March 31-April 1, 2025

Registration for our 34th annual Tug Hill Local Government Conference (LGC) is now open, and flyers are in the mail. The full day of sessions will be on Tuesday, April 1, 2025, from 7:30 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. at Turning Stone Conference Center in Verona. There is a fantastic lineup of sessions for town and village boards, planning and zoning boards of appeals, clerks, assessors, and anyone else involved in municipal government. Topics include fire protection in your community, regulating cannabis, understanding the equalization rate, lessons learned from the Chaumont solar facility battery fire, regulating short-term rentals, and much, much more.

Register [online](#) or by mail with the downloadable form by February 28, 2025, to receive the regular registration rate for April 1 sessions of \$90.

Additionally, on Monday, March 31, 2025, from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. we are offering two focused sessions for an additional registration fee of \$25 when registered by February 28, 2025:

1. Budgeting and Accounting for Small Communities Mini-Course with Laird Petrie and the NYS Society of Municipal Finance Officers
2. Tackling Vacancy, Blight and Housing in Small Towns & Rural Communities with the NY Conference of Mayors

Lastly, the LGC reception will run from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. on Monday, March 31, 2025, and is a great opportunity to mingle with exhibitors, sponsors, speakers, agencies and other conference attendees. The cost is \$20 if registered by February 28, 2025.

Find all this information and more, including details about hotel reservations, at www.tughill.org/localgovernmentconference. We look forward to seeing you there!

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Front from left: Jennifer Harvill, Heidi Tompkins, Taylor McKinney, Gabriel Yerdon.
Back from left: Gwen Decker, Jillian Lee, Mickey Dietrich, Chris Barboza, Angie Kimball, Katie Malinowski, Maria Covey, Matt Johnson, John Healt, Paul Baxter, Felicia Passino.

TUG HILL COMMISSION 2025 MEETING SCHEDULE

Date	Day	Location	COG
January 27	Monday	Parish	Salmon Rivers
March 17	Monday	Harrisburg	CTHC
May 19	Monday	Annsville	NOCCOG
June 16	Monday	Champion	RACOG
September 22	Monday	West Monroe	North Shore
October 9 or 16	Thursday	TBD – Annual Dinner	
December 8	Monday	Watertown area	

Commission Awarded DOE Voucher for Agrivoltaics Project

In early November, the Tug Hill Commission (THC) was awarded a competitive Department of Energy (DOE) voucher as part of the Clean Energy Demonstration Project Siting/Permitting Support initiative. This voucher supports a six-month project focused on identifying barriers and solutions to the adoption of agrivoltaics, the integration of solar energy with agricultural land use. Agrivoltaics allows land to be used for both solar energy production and agriculture, maximizing land use efficiency by generating electricity while growing crops.

The voucher matched the THC with the American Farmland Trust (AFT), which will lead the project on behalf of the commission. The project will explore how solar development can coexist with farming practices in the Tug Hill region, with THC playing a supportive role. AFT will conduct roundtables and interviews with key stakeholders, including agricultural producers, advisors, municipal officials, and solar developers, to address challenges and opportunities in agrivoltaics adoption.

The project will engage at least 50 participants in four roundtable discussions and conduct interviews with producers, advisors, and developers. The goal is to identify **social, technical, and economic barriers** to agrivoltaics implementation and generate recommendations for future research, policy, and educational resources. These insights will inform a final report, as well as educational materials, including a PowerPoint presentation, fact sheets, and a 1–2-minute video. These resources will be shared widely with stakeholders, including policymakers, and made available on AFT's website to support future agrivoltaics projects in New York State and beyond.



Photo credit ClearPath Energy.

The project aims to identify specific barriers to agrivoltaics adoption, such as zoning issues, environmental concerns, and technical challenges. It will also explore ways to integrate solar energy with agricultural practices, offering farmers and landowners opportunities to diversify income while maintaining agricultural use of their land. The findings will help shape recommendations to overcome barriers and promote sustainable, community-centered solar development, and hopefully inform local and state policies and encourage greater collaboration between agriculture and solar energy development in the future. The project will run from **February to August 2025**, with final products and findings available in late 2025.

ARPA Funding Obligation Deadline Approaches

The [State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds](#) (SLFRF) (also known as American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds or COVID funds) are approaching an important deadline on December 31, 2024. That is the date that the SLFRF funding must be obligated in order to be used, or it must be returned to the federal government. An obligation is defined by the U. S. Treasury in the 2023 Interim Final rule as “an order placed for property and services and entering into contracts, subawards, and similar transactions that require payment.” This means that any SLFRF funds must have been used to either order property/ equipment or you must have entered a contract to use the funds for a project to meet the definition. Municipalities have until December 31, 2026, to complete the expenditure of these obligated funds. Merely having internal plans for how you intend to spend these funds does not meet the standard – you must have an actual order placed or a contract signed.

As a reminder, SLFRF funds can be used for eligible costs incurred from March 3, 2021, to December 31, 2024. A recent [webinar on the subject](#) is located on the U. S. Treasury’s State and Local Recovery Funds webpage and the [slide deck](#) from that webinar is available as well. The [SLFRF FAQ](#) is on the same webpage and the section on obligations is section 17 which starts at page 94.

Regardless of the approaching deadline to obligate funds, the next annual report for Non-Entitlement Units (NEUs) on their spending of the SLFRF is still due on April 30, 2025. All the towns and villages in the Tug Hill region are defined as NEUs, which are local governments serving less than 50,000 people. The U.S. Treasury’s reporting portal will not even open for annual reporters until around April 1 of 2025, and the reporting process will remain the same as in the past few years.

RACOG Student Board Created

In October, the Tug Hill Commission hosted the inaugural Civic Service Student Activity Program, designed to help students explore leadership opportunities in public service, government, and workforce development. As a result, students were motivated to contribute to their community and formed a student board. The purpose of the student board is to give youth a voice, allowing them to share their thoughts, concerns, questions, and ideas for improving their communities in the River Area Council of Governments (RACOG). The student board will work together to design and implement a project to benefit their community, with plans to present it later in 2025.



The first student board meeting occurred in November, with participants from Lowville Academy Central School District, a homeschooled student, and a freshman from Jefferson Community College. The students discussed their community, identifying what they liked, such as small businesses, community support, and local playgrounds. When asked about activities for friends, all students said there were not enough. Safety ranked as the top priority, followed by community events, shopping, activities for all ages, and parks. They suggested improvements like more events year-round, a bookstore, a roller-skating rink, and better community aesthetics. On December 16, the students met again to decide on the next steps, including creating a survey to gather further input from their peers. Once they gather the survey data, they will develop a plan to move forward and design a project. Tug Hill Commission staff are mentoring the students as well, offering guidance and support as needed.

The student board is looking for more students from the RACOG region to be involved. If you are interested, please contact Jillian Lee at jillian@tughill.org or (315) 785-2406. You can also contact Mickey Dietrich at mickey@tugill.org or (315) 681-5023.

OSHA Accepting Post Hearing Comments

The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) related to its [emergency response standard](#) for fire brigades earlier this year. An informal public hearing was held November 12, 2024, through December 4, 2024 and OSHA is currently accepting post hearing comments. Post hearing comments can be submitted through January 17, 2025, [here](#).

Volunteer organizations have expressed some concerns about portions of the new standard which could apply to volunteer fire-fighters. From the OSHA website, “OSHA has received comments in response to the NPRM from many stakeholders, including volunteer emergency responders, fire chiefs, trade organizations, and members of Congress, which raise serious concerns about the economic feasibility of the proposed standard for volunteer fire departments. OSHA takes these concerns seriously. The comments submitted to the rulemaking docket provide crucial information that the agency did not have earlier in the rule-making process. This new information will help the agency make the necessary determinations about whether the proposed standard is feasible for volunteer organizations. OSHA is committed to taking steps in any final standard, consistent with the rulemaking record, to assess and minimize detrimental effects on volunteer fire departments. If supported by the record, this may include excluding voluntary emergency response organizations entirely based on these feasibility concerns.”

\$15 Million Available for Urban Reforestation Projects

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) recently announced \$15 million in funding through the new [Community Reforestation \(CoRe\) grant program](#). This initiative supports Governor Hochul's 25 million trees by 2033 goal and aims to expand, restore, and create urban forests to improve climate resilience and community health.

The program will provide \$12 million to municipalities, Indian Tribes and Nations, and non-profits to create new forests or restore areas impacted by invasive species. An additional \$3 million will support state agencies and educational institutions in expanding forests on state lands. Eligible projects include tree planting, site preparation, and protection from deer browse. Priority will be given to projects benefiting disadvantaged communities or those with low Tree Equity scores.

The application deadline is **2:00 p.m. on March 12, 2025**. Applications must be submitted through the [SFS Grants Management System](#). A webinar will be held on **January 9, 2025**, to provide more information. Register and find details on the DEC website. For further inquiries, contact urbanforestry@dec.ny.gov.

The DEC is also offering \$4.5 million through the [Establishing Large Forests \(ELF\) grant program](#) to support private landowners in creating new forests.

DEC Encourages Beaver Trappers in Oswego County to Happy Valley WMA

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is urging beaver trappers in the region to visit the Happy Valley Wildlife Management Area (WMA) during the upcoming trapping season, which runs until April 7, 2025.

Beaver populations have been increasing significantly in this area, causing challenges in managing water levels on ponds, marshes, and impoundments, which have led to damage to roads, trails, and other features. Trapping in the Happy Valley WMA, located across the towns of Albion, Parish, Williamstown, and Amboy, is encouraged as part of the DEC's efforts to address these issues.

For more information about trapping opportunities in Oswego County or other areas, contact your [DEC Regional Wildlife Office](#).



Two hunters holding beaver by Eric Riegel, courtesy of NYS DEC.

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust Events

2025 Tug Hill Bird Quest: May 19 - May 23, 2025

Bird enthusiasts, get ready for the **Tug Hill Bird Quest**, an annual region-wide bird watching event happening during the third week of May. This event is a fantastic way to learn more about the birds in your area while contributing to a multi-year record of bird sightings in the Tug Hill region. The Bird Quest is open to schools, homeschools, youth groups, families, and individuals interested in observing birds.

[Register until December 31, 2024](#), as an early bird and receive fun birding tips and activities from January to March. Teams can also register by March 31, 2025, and will get daily emails with bird identification tips throughout April and May. Participants will observe their bird feeders from May 19 - 23, 2025, and submit their tally sheets by June 6, 2025, for a chance to win a fabulous prize.

2025 First Day Forest Walk: January 1, 2025, 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Start the new year off right with a first day forest walk at the Joseph A. Blake Wildlife Sanctuary. This casual, family-friendly event offers a chance to explore the winter woods and experience the tranquility of nature in the new year. Whether you enjoy hiking, snowshoeing, or cross-country skiing, this walk is the perfect way to kick off 2025. Well-behaved dogs on leashes are welcome to join the adventure.

These events offer wonderful opportunities to connect with nature and the community! More information and registration available on [Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust's website](#).

Contact Us

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To request our newsletter electronically please email gwen@tughill.org.

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