

RPTL 480-a Regulatory Changes Open for Public Comment

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) been working on regulatory changes to related to Real Property Tax Law § 480-a (RPTL 480-a) since 2022. The current proposed regulatory changes were released last month and are open to public comment until 5:00 p.m. on Monday, January 27, 2025. DEC will host two virtual public comment hearings on January 21, 2025, at 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Attendees wishing to make comment at the virtual hearing must register no later than 4:00 p.m. on January 20, 2025. The public is encouraged to submit comments in writing to: NYSDEC Private Lands, Utilization, and Climate Section, Bureau of Forest Resource Management 625 Broadway, Albany , NY 12233-7254 or by email to: bslmregs@dec.ny.gov no later than January 27, 2025. More detailed information on the changes can be found [here](#).

RPTL 480-a and the implementing regulations were initially adopted in 1976 to encourage the long-term private ownership of woodlands to produce forest crops and thereby increase the likelihood of a stable forest economy. The law accomplishes this by providing financial relief to the forest owner in the form of a reduction in land assessment during the relatively long timeframe necessary to produce a profitable woodlot.

The regulations have not been significantly updated since their adoption 50 years ago. The proposed amendments are intended to improve and sustainably manage New York's forest resources while lessening the administrative burden placed on participating landowners and DEC staff.

(cont. on page 2)

Updated Forest Tax Law Exemption (480-a) Issue Paper

The Tug Hill Commission has updated its issue paper titled "[The Forest Tax Exemption and Impacts on Municipal Budgets.](#)" Originally written in January of 2021, the November 2024 update includes more recent data from Jefferson, Lewis, and Oswego Counties and highlights the impact this well-intentioned state exemption has on the rural towns in the state. One of the primary take-aways from the revised paper is that the reimbursement to taxing jurisdictions for property tax shifts should be addressed on a statewide basis. With that in place, other potential changes to the law that have been discussed over the years, including reducing the exemption amount, lowering the minimum acreage required to enter the program to discourage subdivisions and reimagining the program around private "open space" lands to be managed for forestry, wildlife and watershed protection would be locally more palatable. The proposed regulatory changes currently under consideration do not address property taxes, as there is no legislative authorization for DEC to address the property tax issue.

In This Issue

- NRPTL 480-a Regulatory Changes
- Forest Tax Law Issue Paper
- Welcome Maria
- Salmon River COG
- Housing Planning and Zoning Webinar
- Little Voices Webinar
- Happy Valley WMA
- 2025 Wildlife Action Plan
- Poult Survey
- DOS Winter Webinar Series
- Hazard Mitigation and Water Resource Webinar
- Barrier Removal Grants
- Adirondack Diversity Initiative Symposium Held

Welcome Maria Covey

Maria Covey joined the Tug Hill Commission this week as the newest staff planner. Maria is a graduate of the University at Albany's planning department with a degree in urban planning and geography and a minor in sustainability. She has worked for the past year for the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY) as an environmental affairs specialist, focused on the state environmental quality review act (SEQR).

Maria is originally from Dexter, Jefferson County and is happy to be moving back to the area. Her hobbies include crocheting and spending time outdoors in her hammock. She is very excited to begin this new position and to have the opportunity to work with the many unique communities in the Tug Hill region.



480-a Regulatory Changes (cont. from page 1)

The proposed changes include, but are not limited to:

- Broadening the definition of merchantable forest crop to allow for wood-based commodities unnamed in the regulations and to not include non-wood forest products, such as carbon credits;
- Extending the period an approved forest management plan would cover from 15 years to 20 years and requiring fewer plan updates;
- Providing more flexibility to enrolled landowners to complete forestry treatments by changing the work schedule from year-by-year deadlines to a 10-year work window;
- Strengthening forest sustainability requirements on enrolled lands, such as requiring efforts to establish adequate forest regeneration and explicitly banning high grading (removing most of the commercially valuable trees at the expense of future growth and future financial return, often leaving a forest in poor condition); and
- Establishing a training requirement for consulting foresters working with Forest Tax Law clients to help set clear expectations and standardize Forest Tax Law administration across the state.

For a complete list and text of the proposed changes, [click here](#).

Salmon River COG Meeting Held

The growing Salmon Rivers Council of Governments (SRCG) held a meeting at the Albion-Altmar Municipal Building on Wednesday, November 27. The meeting was well attended, with representatives from each member community of SRCG present.

Austin Wheelock, from Operation Oswego County (OOC), attended the meeting to provide updates on economic development programs. He encouraged Oswego County communities to leverage OOC's resources for development and infrastructure funding.

Regular business items were also addressed, including updates to the council's Intermunicipal agreement, bylaws, and budget. Paul Baxter and Heidi Tompkins discussed the transition plan in place for Paul's upcoming retirement

A notable highlight of the meeting was the proposal from the town of Richland to join SRCG. After discussion, the board voted to approve Richland's membership, and the onboarding process is already underway. The town of Richland, located in the heart of the Salmon River corridor, is a valuable addition to SRCG, sharing many of the challenges and opportunities faced by other member communities.



Photos below: A one-week transformation of the North Branch Salmon River

Housing Friendly Planning and Zoning Webinar December 10

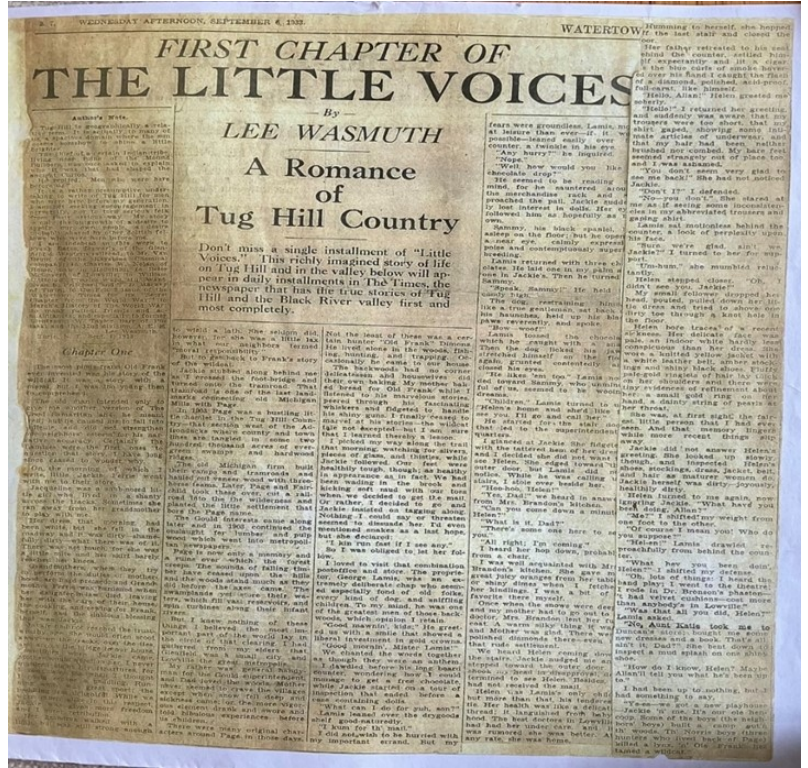
Join the Northern Forest Center for the next webinar in the [Building the New Forest Future](#) series on December 10, from 12:00 p.m.- 1:30 p.m. The webinar, Considerations for Housing Friendly Planning and Zoning, will address the critical lack of lower- to middle-income housing as a threat to the vibrancy of Northern Forest communities. This webinar will explore some barriers to new housing development that may be present in your towns' planning and zoning, as well as tools and techniques that communities have utilized to address these barriers. Registration is free but required, [here](#).

A Romance of Tug Hill Country: The Little Voices Webinar Well-Attended

On Tuesday, November 19, Jillian Markham O'Hara presented "The Little Voices by Lee Wasmuth: Tug Hill's Forgotten Author" with the aid of the NYS Tug Hill Commission via Zoom. Shedding light on the serialized novel that appeared in the *Watertown Daily Times* nearly a hundred years ago and providing insight into the life of her great-uncle, O'Hara peeled back the curtain on a bit of lost Tug Hill history. The workshop garnered a total of 53 registrants, with 30 attendees online at the time of the presentation, including past presenters and fellow local history enthusiasts Leona and Peter Chereshnoski, Peter Hayes, and Bob Sauer.

Without spoiling the novel's ending, O'Hara invited attendees to the historic logging settlement of Page, both as it was portrayed in the novel and through primary sources like restored photographs, letters, and oral interviews. O'Hara thanked Peter Hayes, Constableville historian, and Charley Sweredoski, a local G&W Railroad expert, for their assistance behind the scenes in providing greater insight into the settlement of Page and lending photos from their collections. Drawing parallels between the fictional protagonist, Allen Hargrave, and the book's author, Lee Wasmuth, history and historical fiction blended to create a vivid picture of 20th-century Tug Hill. Through O'Hara's analysis of the novel and its ongoing meaning in her family history, Wasmuth's earnest wish – to typify the people of Tug Hill – was beautifully realized.

For those who were unable to attend, would like to re-watch, or share to friends, links to the presentation recording can be found on our YouTube page [here](#). The slide deck from the presentation and the manuscript transcribed by Jillian can also be found on the commission's "Past Presentation" website page [here](#).



The cut-and-paste book from O'Hara's grandmother, Evelyn, that preserved the family's copy of the novel.



The Wasmuth family, not many years after settling in Page, as seen in the PowerPoint.

Fifty-eight Acres Added to Happy Valley WMA

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has acquired 58 acres, expanding the Happy Valley Wildlife Management Area (WMA) to 8,956 acres. Located in the towns of Albion, Williamstown, Parish, and Amboy in Oswego County, this WMA features flat terrain, diverse habitats, and an average annual snowfall of 125 inches.

Popular activities at Happy Valley include hunting, trapping, hiking, and wildlife viewing. The area is home to northern hardwoods, softwoods, and fields in various stages of succession. Access is provided by town and maintenance roads for hunting during favorable months. More information and maps available at dec.ny.gov/places/happy-valley-wildlife-management-area.

The DEC manages the area with techniques like mowing, prescribed burning, and timber stand improvements to benefit wildlife. Happy Valley also hosts a long-term grouse habitat improvement study, contributing to ongoing conservation research.

Public Input Needed for NY's 2025 Wildlife Action Plan Update

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is updating its Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) for 2025 and invites the public to participate. The SWAP identifies species of greatest conservation need (SGCN), species at risk of further decline without conservation efforts.

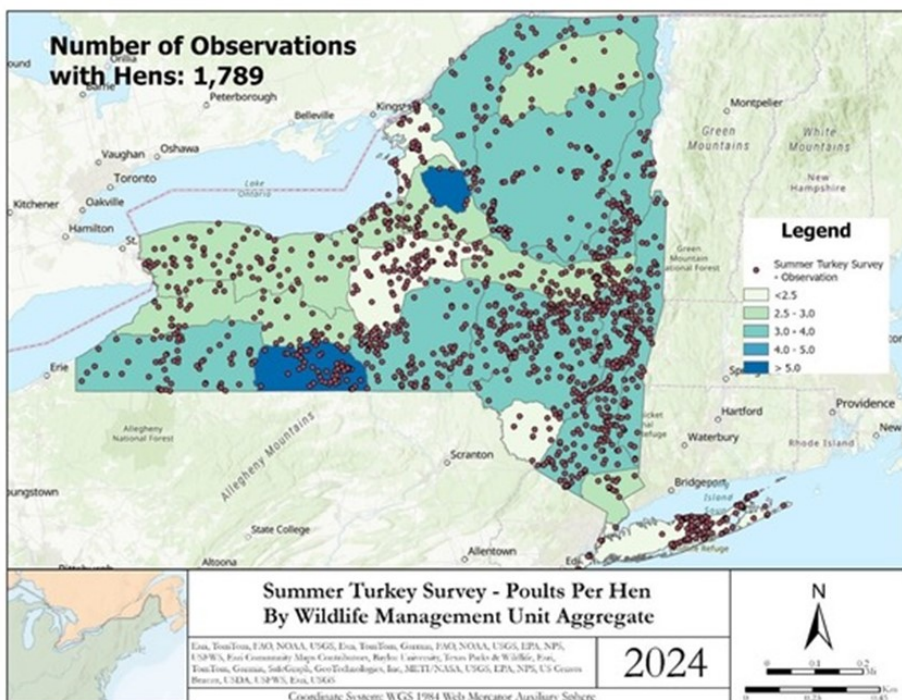
The draft list of potential SGCNs and updated species status assessments (SSAs) are now available for public review. Comments are encouraged, particularly those supporting or proposing changes to the SGCN list. Input should include detailed, science-based information on species' status, threats, and necessary conservation actions.

Submit comments by **January 14, 2025** via email or mail. More information on the update and how to participate is available [here](#).

Poult Survey Results and Fall Turkey Forecast

This past August, community scientists from around the state reported nearly 1,800 observations of hen turkeys and poults to help DEC estimate productivity of turkeys (e.g., the number of poults per hen). Productivity this past summer was the highest documented since 2013 and the third highest since the survey began in 2005! According to DEC, the good productivity was likely the result of a dry and warm nesting season. The late June rains do not appear to have negatively impacted turkey (and other ground nesting gamebird) productivity. To explore trends in harvest and summer surveys, visit the new, interactive [Fall Turkey Harvest and Productivity Dashboard](#).

The Central Tug Hill Wildlife Management Unit (WMU 6N) had an average of 3.3 poults per hen, while the Tug Hill Transition WMU, 6K, had an average of 3.06 poults per hen as an average of 2005-2024 survey results. Public participation in essential for wildlife population forecasting and management in New York.





Division of Local Government Services

2024-2025 Winter Webinar Series

When:

Monday evenings in December 2024 and January 2025.

Where:

Attend on WebEx from wherever you are. You will need a computer with speakers or a mobile device.

Courses:

Farmland Protection & Agricultural Viability, Floodplain Regulation for Local Review Boards, Planning Board Overview, Zoning Board of Appeals Overview.

Who:

Planning Board Members, Zoning Board of Appeals Members, Governing Board Members, Planning Staff, Code Enforcement Officers, Other Local Officials.

Training Schedule:

<https://dos.ny.gov/local-government-training-schedule>

To Register:

Click on each course below that you want to attend to register.

Once registered, you will receive a confirmation email from WebEx with instructions for joining each session.

December 9, 2024

Farmland Protection & Agricultural Viability
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
2 hours training credit

December 16, 2024

Floodplain Regulation for Local Review Boards
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
2 hours training credit

January 6, 2025

Planning Board Overview
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
2 hours training credit

January 13, 2025

Zoning Board of Appeals Overview
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
2 hours training credit

December 16 Hazard Mitigation and Water Resource Plans Webinar

With constant development, ever-changing future conditions, increasingly stressed infrastructure, and growing financial pressures, integrating hazard mitigation and water quality-focused resource management is becoming critical to the success of water systems. Finance and budgeting are often considered a last step in developing a project or program, but incorporating a financing strategy early on in any planning process can help ensure long-term project success.



Join the Environmental Finance Center Network on Monday, December 16 from 1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m. for a no cost webinar which will provide strategies for incorporating funding and financial strategies into integrated plans, and explore various solutions for how local communities can pay for water resource projects. The webinar will cover funding and financing strategies that are likely to apply to most jurisdictions, and move communities from planning to implementation. Discussed will be how to develop a balanced funding and financing strategy that incorporates cost reducers and varied revenue streams. Also covered will be case stories of other communities that have adopted these strategies to mitigate flooding and tackle a number of other local issues.

For more information, or to register, click [here](#)

Restoring Fish Passage through Barrier Removal Grants

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is providing up to \$75 million to support fish passage projects that remove dams and other in-stream barriers. This funding will help reopen migratory pathways and restore healthy habitats for fish, supporting the recovery of threatened species and benefiting local communities.

In partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), projects will be led by local organizations to restore fish habitats. Grants range from \$750,000 to \$8 million, with typical awards between \$3 million and \$5 million. Proposals are due February 10, 2025.

For more details, visit [NOAA's website](#), or contact: Fish.Passage.Grants@noaa.gov

2024 Adirondack Diversity Initiative Symposium Held November 12

The Adirondack Diversity Initiative (ADI) hosted its 2024 ADI Symposium, *Creating Inclusivity in North Country Communities*, on Tuesday, November 12, at Paul Smith's College Visitor Interpretive Center. ADI is part of the Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA). They were established in 2015 and became part of ANCA in 2019 when they received funding for a director position. ADI's mission is "existing at the intersection of environmental and transformational justice, the ADI works to make the Adirondacks a welcoming and inclusive place for residents and visitors while ensuring a vital and sustainable Adirondack Park for future generations."



The symposium featured several panels throughout the day that focused on the challenges and benefits of living in the North Country as an LGBTQI+ and/or person of color, visitor use management in the Adirondacks, creating more welcoming and inclusive workplaces, insights and experiences while working for North Country Public Radio and the Adirondack Explorer, maintaining towns and communities that support and keep young adults in the Adirondacks, and how North Country representatives serve their communities.

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

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