

2024

Black River Initiative

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER



Moose River, Lyons Falls, NY. Photo by NYS THC.

2024 in Review: Collaborative Efforts for a Healthier Black River Watershed

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Black River Coalition of Districts Formed

LEWIS, JEFFERSON, ONEIDA, HAMILTON, AND HERKIMER
COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

The Black River Initiative was initially led through various NYS Tug Hill Commission (THC) planning efforts and continued with the assistance of county Soil and Water Conservation Districts and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and other partners. The Black River Watershed has undergone 15 years of watershed improvement projects based on recommendations initially outlined in the Black River Watershed Management Plan of 2010 that was developed through the NYS Department of State's (DOS) Coastal Resources Program funding. The Town of Greig, the Lewis County Soil and Water and the THC collaborated on this planning effort. Also, the THC included an additional groundwater study, socioeconomic analysis, and additional stakeholder engagement to coincide with the project and worked on the Black River Blueway Trail Plan. More information on these projects is available on the Black River Initiative website: tughill.org/projects/black-river-projects/.

Since the plan's inception the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has outlined nine specific elements that a watershed management plan must have in order for its implementation projects to be eligible for federal funding. One item missing from the original DOS plan was a monitoring component. The Tug Hill Commission and DEC have worked closely with the Districts on the Black River Adaptive Modeling (BRAM) Plan to evaluate data gaps needed to assess watershed issues and implement water quality monitoring that will inform the steering committee of water quality needs. The year-long sampling program is now complete and the analysis can now begin.

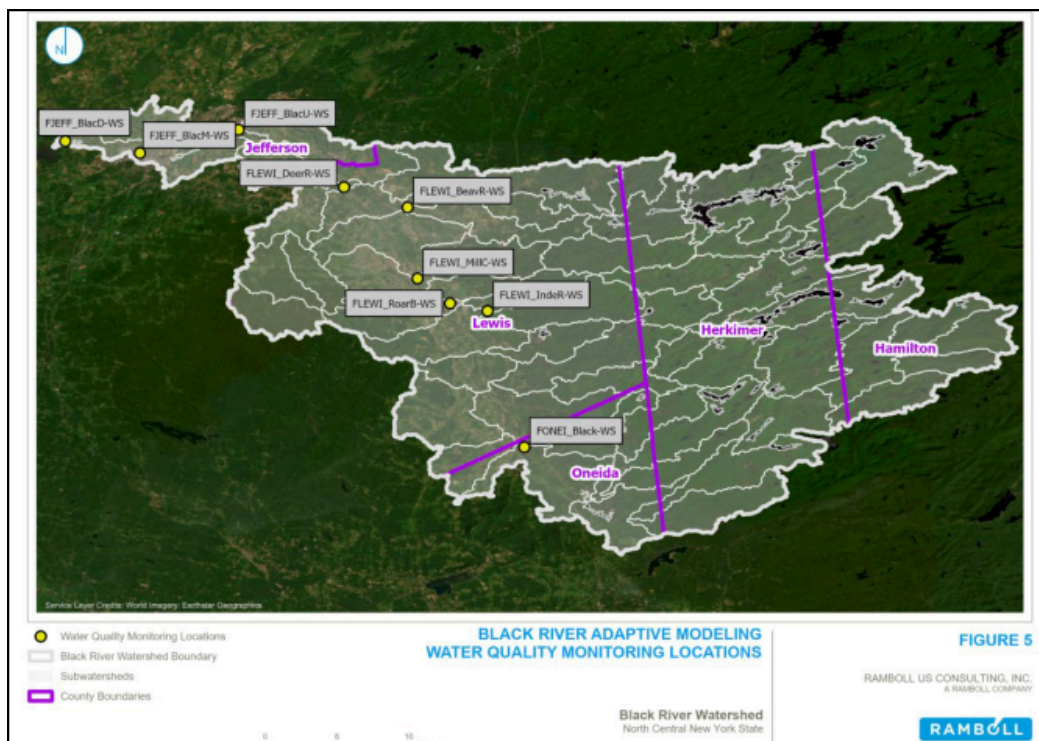
So what is next for the watershed? The Black River Watershed Coalition (BRWC), a collaborative effort among five County Soil and Water Conservation Districts including Herkimer, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lewis and Oneida County, has been formed. This more formalized relationship among the five Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee will strengthen watershed efforts to protect natural resources. The newly established coalition has elected their executive board consisting of President, Nichelle Swisher (Lewis County), Vice-President Sarah Trick (Jefferson County), and Secretary Katie WhitKovits (Hamilton County). The mission of the BRWC is to educate the community about watershed management initiatives and to cooperatively implement conservation within the Black River Watershed to improve natural resources. The coalition has formalized their by-laws and is in the process of putting collective project ideas together, while the final water quality analysis is in process from the Upstate Freshwater Institute laboratory. Once the analysis is complete, the list of projects will be matched where the greatest amount of watershed protection is needed. The BRWC looks forward to working more closely in solving natural resources issues and improving environmental quality for everyone in the watershed.

Black River Adaptive Modeling: Data Summary and Gap Identification Report

DEC, with support from Ramboll, Upstate Freshwater Institute (UFI), Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and Tug Hill Commission, finalized the Black River Adaptive Modeling (BRAM) Data Summary and Gap Identification report in May of 2024. The report compiled and analyzed Black River watershed and water quality data and identified data gaps to build a shared understanding of current conditions and available data, evaluate additional data since the 2016 Nine Element Plan was developed, and track outcomes of plan implementation, while also giving Black River Watershed stakeholders a sense of information needed to support decisions for additional modeling efforts, management plan updates, and best management practices.

Based on the findings described in the report, Upstate Freshwater Institute (UFI) is coordinating with Hamilton, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, and Oneida County Soil and Water Conservation Districts to gather additional water quality data in 2024 and 2025. As results from the water quality monitoring effort are shared, the Black River Watershed community may consider new or additional best management practices. For more information and to access the report, visit: tughill.org/projects/black-river-projects/watershed-initiative/.

In addition to the report, DEC also developed a new online, interactive tool that allows Black River Watershed stakeholders to cross reference the Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUC) (or sub watershed boundaries) at the HUC 11 and the HUC 12 scale, to help with planning and evaluating watershed management actions. The tool can be accessed from the Black River Initiative webpage: tughill.org/projects/black-river-projects/watershed-initiative/.



Water Quality Improvement Projects Awarded in the Black River Watershed

In 2024, several significant projects aimed at improving water quality in the Black River Watershed were funded through the DEC's Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) grant program and the Consolidated Funding Application. These projects will reduce pollution, enhance aquatic habitats, and increase resilience to flooding and climate change. Below are some key projects awarded this year:

1. Hamilton County Roadside Stabilization Program

Awarded: \$148,970

The Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District will implement a countywide roadside stabilization program, addressing erosion along approximately 20 acres of roadsides and ditches. Using methods like hydroseeding, check dams, and erosion control matting, the project will reduce sedimentation and erosion in the Black River and Upper Hudson River watersheds, ultimately improving water clarity and protecting aquatic habitats.

2. South Branch Moose River Reconnection

Awarded: \$566,310

Trout Unlimited Inc. will replace six high-priority stream culverts in the Town of Arietta, reconnecting over eight miles of critical habitat for native brook trout in the South Branch Moose River Watershed. This will enhance fish migration, restore important spawning grounds, and support the overall health of the river's ecosystem, ensuring better biodiversity and long-term sustainability.

3. Town of West Turin Salt Storage Facility

Awarded: \$487,800

The Tug Hill Commission worked directly with the Town of West Turin on a grant that will construct a new salt storage facility, replacing the existing undersized building and covering salt piles that were previously uncovered. This new structure will help protect the region's groundwater and the Sugar River from the harmful effects of salt runoff. By properly storing road salt, this project will reduce the impact on both local water quality and surrounding aquatic life.

Additional Noteworthy Consolidated Funding Application Awards in the Watershed:

- **Lewis County** has been awarded a **\$215,280 Department of State Smart Growth Comprehensive Planning Grant** to support sustainable development across the county, promoting environmentally responsible planning practices.
- **Kraft Heinz** received a **\$3,750,000 NYSERDA Commercial and Industrial Carbon Challenge Grant**, enabling the company to reduce carbon emissions by 92%. This is a significant step toward sustainability in the region's industrial sector.

Learn more about the WQIP program, and the 2024 awardees at dec.ny.gov/get-involved/grant-applications/wqip-program

Beaver River Reconnection Report

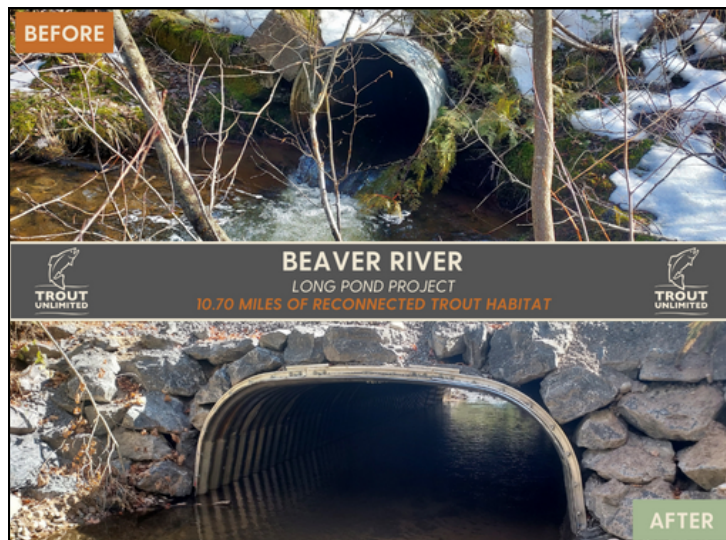
TROUT UNLIMITED

Trout Unlimited's Northeast Coldwater Habitat Team has defined a pattern and utilizes a long-term strategy for success in reconnecting wild trout habitat across New York. With funding provided by the Beaver River Advisory Council in 2021, Trout Unlimited (TU) began assessment work to identify all physical barriers to trout migration within many branches of the Black River Watershed. More specifically, the project aimed a lens directly on culverts of the Beaver River and South Branch Moose River. Staff members trekked through several counties and tremendously varied landscapes to collect proper calculations on hundreds of old pipes and drainage structures across the watershed. Occasionally, in the remaining daylight hours, the team would stop to cast a fly, or to admire the iconic speckled brook trout found swimming in the icy cold streams of the Adirondacks.



Of the culverts and barriers assessed, TU staff selected and prioritized two severe barriers on Beaver River tributaries found in Lewis County. The Beaver River is fed in many parts by smaller tributary streams as it flows west through parts of Hamilton, Herkimer, and Lewis Counties before joining the Black River near Castorland. Funding for these survey efforts was provided by the National Fish & Wildlife's Sustain our Great Lakes Program as well as DEC's Water Quality Improvement Program. Local partnerships are critical to TU's success in reconnection. The Beaver River culvert replacements were a collaborative effort with the Towns of Croghan and New Bremen, along with Lewis County Soil & Water Conservation District.

(Cont. on next page)



Beaver River Reconnection Report - Continued

As a result of replacing these two structures in 2024, TU and their partners can now celebrate a total of 12.66 miles of unlocked trout habitat in the Beaver River, but this is only the beginning! On the heels of another successful field season, TU has set their sights on a monumental goal before 2030 that they're calling Mission 30/30. Mission 30/30 is TU & DEC's South Branch Moose River reconnection goal of 30 barriers to be replaced that will unlock an additional 30 miles of formerly fragmented wild trout habitat, all by 2030!



Article and photos by Jesse Vadala and Jacob Fetterman, Trout Unlimited

Trout Unlimited is committed to partnering with local suppliers and contractors that can help execute their unique structural replacement designs and habitat improvement features that focus on sustainability and long-term habitat stability for wild trout.

Culvert replacements outlined above were directed by TU staff and executed in collaboration with Hodge Creek Earth & Site Development. Their efforts have been orchestrated in harmony with their partners at National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, Water Resources Institute at Cornell University, DEC, and supported by Trout Unlimited's New York State Council and local volunteers.

To learn more, follow @TU_Northeast on Instagram and Facebook.

Tree Watertown Volunteers Promote Invasive Species Awareness and Appreciation for Urban Forests

Tree Watertown is a volunteer group of community citizens which serves as the Street Tree Advisory Board to the City of Watertown in support of the City's Tree Ordinance (Chapter 287 of the City code). Tree Watertown advises the city on policy issues, makes recommendations regarding grant applications and works with the City Planning Department in the development of the city's annual tree planting program. In addition, Tree Watertown serves the community through the development and presentation of educational initiatives and tree planting projects throughout the year. The group had been active for over 20 years, and is always welcoming new members with an interest and passion for trees. *(Cont. on next page)* →

Tree Watertown - Continued

Accomplishments of Tree Watertown in 2024 included working with the City of Watertown and the Watertown Housing Authority to secure \$550,000 in funding from the DEC Urban and Community Forestry Grants and \$4,000 from the NYY Community Foundation to support Urban Forestry Management, community engagement and tree planting events. An Arbor Day tree planting celebration event was held honoring Charlie Nevin, a former DEC Forester, for his invaluable contributions to Watertown's green initiatives, beginning in the mid-1990's. Jefferson County Stormwater Coalition also spoke about the benefits of trees for improved stormwater management and achieving minimum control measures for the City's Municipal Separate Stormwater Sewer System Permit.



Arbor Day ceremonial tree planting event. Photo by Emily Fell, Tree Watertown.

Tree Watertown and the City of Watertown have been engaging in efforts to replace ash trees impacted by the Emerald Ash Borer. A volunteer tree planting event was held on April 27th to replace 50 ash trees on Ives St, promoting a diverse urban forestry and engaging with students. This will also help absorb stormwater that would otherwise be captured by the sewer and discharged to the Black River. Tree Watertown partnered with SLELO PRISM to host an Arboretum Walk and Talk to promote awareness of urban forest pests and other invasive species in June, while also highlighting the benefits of the city's trees and how they can be protected by community members. Native flowers were planted by members to create native pollinator habitats in the arboretum and in front of the State Office Building, which will protect the street trees from damage and offer beautiful flowers to see in the spring. The annual fall volunteer tree planting event was held November 2nd at Starbucks Elementary, and over 40 volunteers helped plant 50 trees at the school and along Grant and Seward Streets, which will reduce runoff to the Black River and provide shade to cool the streets. If you would like to learn more and get involved with Tree Watertown, you are encouraged to attend a monthly meeting every second Thursday at 4:30 pm. Reach out to Tree Watertown's secretary at easheridan84@gmail.com to be added to the email list, and/or follow Tree Watertown on social media at: www.facebook.com/TreeWatertownDowntownArboretum.

Youth Macroinvertebrate Workshops

JEFFERSON COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

In 2024, Jefferson County SWCD partnered with Save the River to expand the District's hands-on educational outreach activities. Using funds from the Finger Lakes-Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance (FOLLOWPA), local underprivileged youth were able to interact with environmental professionals, learning about viable career paths while developing a better understanding of their local environment. Wanting to engage youth in hands-on water quality monitoring, the District decided to focus these events on macroinvertebrates. Macroinvertebrates are small stream organisms without backbones such as crayfish, mayflies, stoneflies, and freshwater snails. Stream scientists are able to calculate stream health based on the presence and abundance of certain macroinvertebrates according to their pollution tolerance.

Participants from the Watertown SoZo Teen Center sampled Kelsey Creek, which lies within the Black River Watershed. Using kicknets, ice trays, and magnifying glasses, teens had fun with science: catching crayfish and practicing their identification skills using dichotomous keys.

Participants also conducted chemical sampling, taking flow, temperature, pH, and nutrient level samples. Differences between the conclusions that can be drawn from chemical versus macroinvertebrate samples were then discussed. This discussion illustrated the benefits and drawbacks of each sampling method. Namely, that chemical sampling shows a snapshot of the current stream conditions and measured loads, while macroinvertebrate sampling can show long-term trends that may otherwise be missed by traditional sampling "snapshots."

For example, if a chemical spill occurred near the site several weeks ago, traditional water sampling may come back as normal, as the contaminants have already been flushed downstream. Macro sampling, on the other hand, would still show indications of a pollution event as pollution-sensitive organisms would be missing.



Photos provided by the Jefferson County SWCD.

Lake Monitoring Program

HAMILTON COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

2024 marked the 31st year of the Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District's Lake Monitoring Program. With great foresight, elected officials recognized the need to protect the county's vital water resources, and the Board of Supervisors contracted with the Conservation District in 1993 to conduct a comprehensive lake monitoring program. Hamilton County residents, economy, and ecosystem depend on clean water for drinking, recreation, and flourishing flora and fauna. Decades of consistent lake data collection is essential to the effective analysis of long-term trends. Taxpayer dollars are saved when a water quality problem is detected and remediated in its early stages.



Lake monitoring equipment.
Photos provided by Hamilton County SWCD.



District Technician Katie WhitKovits uses a Kemmerer Water Sampler to collect lake water for analysis.

This year, staff completed lake monitoring rotations May through October on 20 priority lakes. Study lakes within the Black River Watershed include Fourth, Fifth, Limekiln, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth lakes. A contracted, ELAP-certified lab completed lake water quality testing for calcium, sodium, chloride, nitrogen, total nitrate-nitrite, total phosphorus, alkalinity, and dissolved organic carbon. A YSI ProDSS Multiparameter Meter was used to collect profile data for the following parameters: pH, temperature, depth, dissolved oxygen, conductivity, and chlorophyll. Data is validated by the DEC for quality assurance and quality control, and reports and raw data are available at hamcoswcd.org/Lake-monitoring/. This program is supported by FLOWPA.

A New Conservation Gem: David E. Ramsey Independence River Public Conservation Area

TUG HILL TOMORROW LAND TRUST

The Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust (THTLT) is excited to announce the donation of 103 acres in the Town of Greig, Lewis County, now named the David E. Ramsey Independence River Public Conservation Area (PCA). This generous gift from Robert and Carol Keller will enhance ecological protection and recreational opportunities in the Tug Hill region.

The property features the Independence River, a Class C(T) waterway critical for water quality and wildlife habitat. Forested buffers along the river filter pollutants, control sediment, and regulate water temperatures, supporting a healthy watershed. Located near Otter Creek and Independence River State Forests, the land connects key habitats and complements a nearby 250-acre THTLT easement.



Photos provided by Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust.

With its established trail system, the David E. Ramsey PCA will soon invite visitors to explore its natural beauty while protecting vital resources. THTLT extends heartfelt thanks to the Kellers for their dedication to conservation and looks forward to sharing updates on the THTLT website as the site is opened up to the public! Learn more at tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org/

768-Acre Conservation Easement to Protect Water Quality in the Black River and Mohawk Watersheds

DEC, THE NATURE CONSERVANCY AND
TUG HILL TOMORROW LAND TRUST

In the first days of 2025, DEC and The Nature Conservancy announced the acquisition of a 768-acre conservation easement in Herkimer County, marking the largest purchase to date through the state's Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) program. The property will play a crucial role in maintaining water quality and enhancing wildlife connectivity between the Tug Hill region and the Adirondack Park.

The conservation easement, funded by over \$500,000 from the WQIP, is focused on protecting Hinckley Reservoir, an important drinking water source for over 125,000 New Yorkers. The property lies along the West Canada Creek, which feeds into the reservoir, and includes more than 2,500 feet of shoreline and 6,500 feet of Conklin Brook. The easement also covers a portion of the Black River Watershed headwaters, near Little Black Creek. This area, primarily covered by wetlands and mixed forests, acts as a natural filter, safeguarding the water quality by preventing pollutants from entering through runoff or flooding.

Beyond its water quality benefits, the land also serves as an essential piece in maintaining wildlife connectivity. The land protected by the easement helps maintain ecological corridors that connect important wildlife habitats, facilitating safe movement for species between the Adirondack Mountains and Tug Hill forest region. These connections are vital for maintaining biodiversity and supporting wildlife populations that rely on undisturbed landscapes for survival.



Photo provided by DEC.

The project aligns with New York's 30x30 initiative, aiming to protect 30% of the state's lands and waters by 2030. This easement also supports broader national and international conservation goals, contributing to both local water security and regional biodiversity. Through this collaborative effort, the Black River and Mohawk River Watersheds benefit from strengthened resilience to climate change while enhancing natural habitats for future generations. Read the press release at dec.ny.gov/news/press-releases/2025/1/dec-and-the-nature-conservancy-announce-768-acre-conservation-easement-to-protect-water-quality-in-the-black-river-valley

Septic Replacement Fund Success due to Priority Waterbody List Expansion

LEWIS COUNTY PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Lewis County was allocated funding through New York State’s Environmental Facilities Corporation’s (EFC) State Septic System Replacement Fund Program which provides funds to replace substandard septic systems located on or near waterfront properties. This includes systems that were designed to dispel directly into the water body and systems that do not meet the current setback standards that could cause water quality impairments.

Funding was awarded to Lewis County in 2021, however, it was limited to the Beaver River, Lower, and tributaries. In the two years following, Lewis County had only one payable application each year, disbursing \$5,063.73 out of the \$275,000 available. Extensive outreach efforts were made, including direct mailers to eligible parcel owners, radio ads, social media posts, and monthly in-person septic information station sessions.

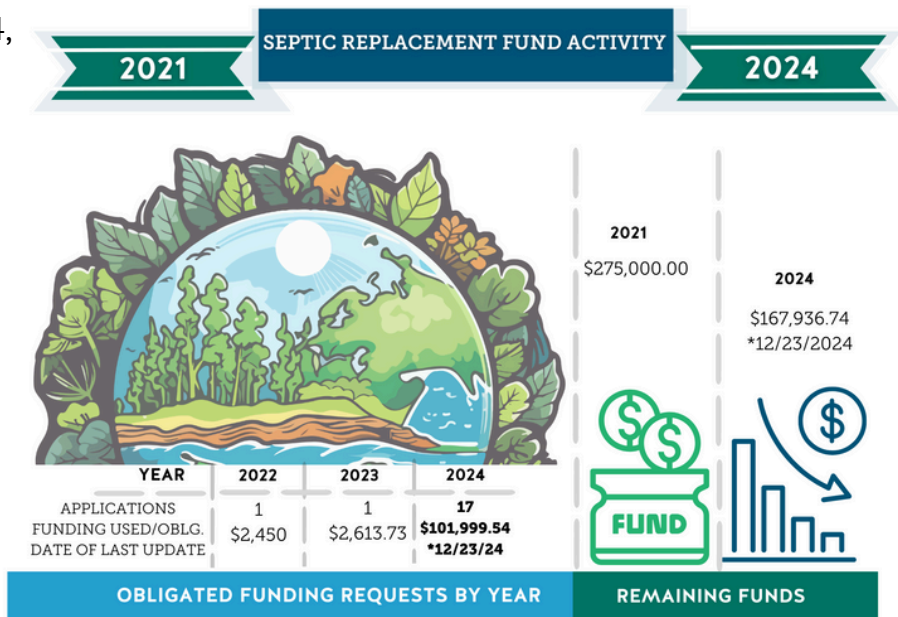
In 2024 EFC expanded the eligible waterbodies list based on updates to DEC’s priority waterbodies list (PWL), and Lewis County went from having one priority waterbody to 19. Since the addition of priority waterbodies, Lewis County has received 17 eligible applications in 2024, obligating roughly \$102,000. More information on the PWL is available at efc.ny.gov/septic-replacement.

Since 2021, nineteen substandard septic systems situated within 250’ of the priority waterbody have been replaced in Lewis County with immeasurable water quality improvements. There are a few waterbodies that the Lewis County Water Quality Coordinating Committee would like to be added to the PWL

such as the connecting waterbodies upstream of the Beaver River, Lower, and tributaries.

The septic replacement funding provides reimbursement of 50% of costs, up to \$10,000, for the design and installation of a new septic system and will be available until funds are exhausted. To apply for the program complete and return the application form which can be found at lewiscountyny.gov/departments/planning-and-community-development/septicfund/. On the website is an interactive mapper of which you can search your property address and determine if any of the PWL intersect your property.

Property owners with aging or substandard septic systems located along or near any priority waterbodies are encouraged to apply to help improve water quality.



Japanese Knotweed Treatment

HERKIMER COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

The Herkimer County Soil and Water Conservation District (Herkimer County SWCD) has been treating Japanese knotweed since 2017. In 2024 District staff treated and monitored 14 different sites within the county. Japanese knotweed outcompetes native species and poses threats to both soil and water resources. With its shallow root system, it causes erosion on stream banks and culverts. In an attempt to contain knotweed, District staff focus treatment in the Black River Watershed where the invasive species is less established in hopes of preventing it from spreading further. Staff prioritize these sites based on water quality concerns.

In order to treat Japanese knotweed on private property, landowners are required to sign an agreement each year. District technicians treat Japanese knotweed using multiple methods. The most used treatment is chemical. Herkimer County SWCD uses a horticultural vinegar and an organic weed killer. These chemicals are used in a foliar spray or a stem injection. Larger plants receive a stem injection while the smaller plants are sprayed. Another treatment method District staff use is mechanical, where each plant is cut below the last node. Cut plants are then bagged and left to completely dry out before they are properly disposed at the landfill.

A large part of Herkimer County SWCD's Japanese knotweed program is outreach. District staff are always willing to answer questions and provide information packets with the hope that increased public knowledge about the invasive character and negative ecological impacts of Japanese knotweed will lead landowners to treat and remove plants on their own.

You can find more resources and information at herkimercountyswcd.com/invasive-species-project. Information on knotweed identification and management at nyis.info/species/japanese-knotweed/

Before - 2017



After - 2024



An example of a successful project at a site located on the bank of a blue-line stream.
Pictures provided by the Herkimer County SWCD.

New SLELO PRISM Director and 2025 Invasive Species Symposium

ST. LAWRENCE EASTERN LAKE ONTARIO PARTNERSHIP FOR REGIONAL INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

The St. Lawrence Eastern Lake Ontario Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (SLELO PRISM) has a few announcements. After 14 years, Rob Williams retired from his position as the Director of SLELO PRISM. Moving into this role on January 4th is Brittney Rogers who, for over five years, has been acting as the Aquatic Restoration and Resiliency Coordinator with SLELO. Brittney is deeply committed to furthering the SLELO PRISM mission, which includes projects in the Black River watershed. With this transition, SLELO PRISM is looking for a new staff member to fill her prior role. The job opening was announced on January 6.

Next on the horizon for SLELO PRISM is the upcoming **Eastern Lake Ontario Invasive Species Symposium** which is planned for **June 12, 2025**. This year's theme focuses on Adaptive Approaches for Terrestrial and Aquatic Invasive Species Management, emphasizing Traditional Ecological Knowledge, climate change, and biodiversity restoration. In conjunction with the symposium, on June 11, 2025, two workshops will be held at the SUNY Oswego Rice Creek Field Station. One workshop will include an opportunity to learn about and participate in SLELO's emerald ash borer biocontrol monitoring project; the second workshop showcases their Water Protectors Program and will provide a hands-on experience to learn about and view live native and aquatic plants. The Symposium is open to the public at no cost. SLELO encourages their partners and field professionals to consider presenting and exhibiting at the symposium. A call for abstracts and exhibits is planned to be released in early 2025, and registration will open in early spring so stay tuned! View Past Symposium Speakers & Agendas at www.sleloinvasives.org/links-resources/eastern-lake-ontario-symposium-resources/



Brittney Rogers pictured collecting samples for an environmental DNA project. Picture credit: Jason Hunter.

Beyond the Classroom: The 2024 Oneida County Envirothon

ONEIDA COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

This past spring, the Oneida County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) held the 26th Oneida County Envirothon at the Utica Zoo. This annual event has been a cornerstone of environmental education in the county, fostering a deeper understanding of environmental conservation.



Over 160 students from across the county registered for the event!

Students tackled tests on soil science, aquatics, forestry, wildlife studies, environmental current events, and a presentation on solar power implementation and logistics. Experts with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Ramboll and the Utica Zoo helped elevate this event in assisting in the creation of the tests and providing presentation feedback. It was a truly great learning opportunity for the participating students. Another valuable addition this year was the college station. Teams were given a “passport game” to interact with environmental departments and admissions staff from local colleges and universities. Every team in attendance participated fully and made the most of this new station.



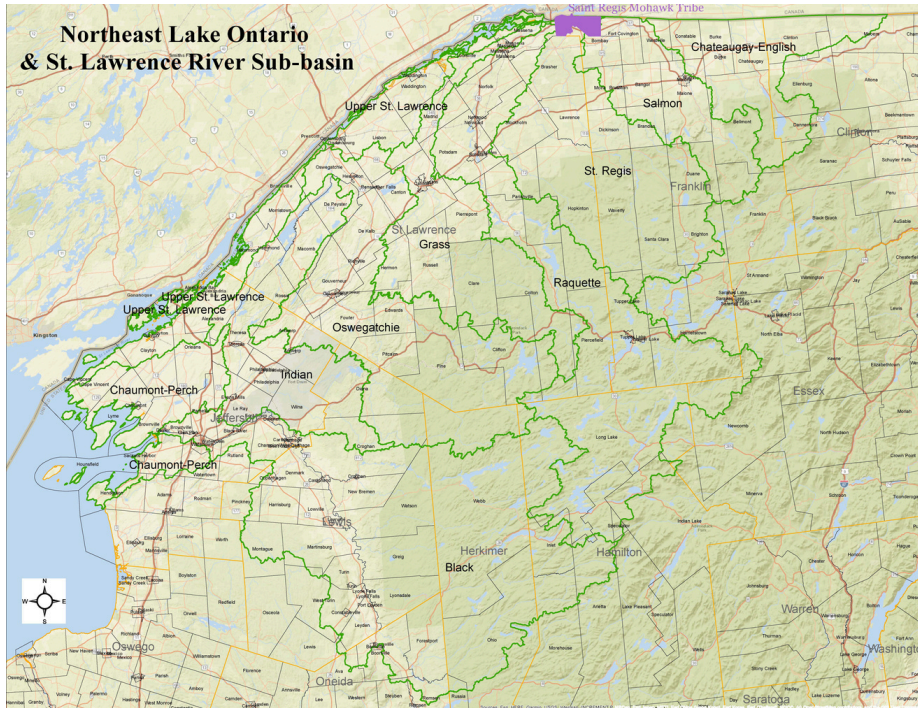
The District offered the fourth round of Ted Wilson scholarships to support further education to the top three placing teams.

Pictures provided by the Oneida County SWCD.

Work Group Meetings Support Great Lakes Action Agenda Implementation in the Black River Watershed

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION'S (DEC)
GREAT LAKES PROGRAM

DEC's Great Lakes Program has been engaging work group members in the Northeast Lake Ontario (including Black River) and St. Lawrence River Sub-Basin to facilitate collaborative implementation of New York's Great Lakes Action Agenda (GLAA) in support of the following goals:



NELOSLR sub-basin map with towns and Nations.

1. Reduce or eliminate releases of persistent toxic substances
2. Control sediment, nutrient, and pathogen loadings
3. Prevent and control invasive species
4. Conserve and restore native fish and wildlife and their habitats
5. Enhance community resiliency and ecosystem integrity
6. Revitalize local communities through sustainable management

Meetings held in Gouverneur and Ogdensburg provided a unique opportunity for work group members from diverse organizations and agencies to connect and learn how the Baseline Conditions Characterization will help inform work planning and decision making. Work group members shared important updates on projects and programs and shared their perspectives on conditions in the sub-basin. Updates were shared for the Black River Initiative, State of the Great Lakes Report, Lake Ontario Lake Wide Action and Management Plan, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Algonquin to Adirondack Initiative, and New York's Reforestation Plan. Conditions in the sub basin were discussed around salt and mercury impacts to waterways, preventing and combatting invasive species, addressing hazardous low head dams, and the need for more awareness around climate change risks and impacts.

To learn more and get involved in these work groups, email Greatlakes@dec.ny.gov, participate in a [short survey](#), or sign up for updates at: dec.ny.gov/nature/waterbodies/lakes-rivers/great-lakes

2024 New York State Association of Conservation Commissions Conference on the Environment

NEW YORK STATE TUG HILL COMMISSION

The 2024 NYS Association of Conservation Commissions (NYSACC) Conference on the Environment was held Wednesday, September 18, to Friday, September 20, with the theme “using a grassroots approach to engage, support, and assist community actions that balance conservation and rural development.” Wednesday included a virtual day of presentations and a social hour at Woodland Farm Brewery in Boonville. Speakers were from state agencies, nonprofits, and academia and they spoke on renewable energy, natural resources economy and opportunities, the environment, and recreation and tourism. A grant writing workshop and student career panel were followed by NYS DEC and NYSERDA presentations on NYS’s 30x30 and 70x30 plans.

Thursday was filled with field trips throughout Boonville and Lyons Falls. In the morning, some attendees visited Keller Mohawk Hill Public Conservation Area (pictured right) to learn about conservation efforts in the Tug Hill region and went on an educational hike at Black River Environmental Improvement Association’s (BREIA) Jackson Hill Sunfield Trails. Other attendees visited the Black River Canal Museum and Constable Hall to learn about the history of Tug Hill.



Thursday afternoon, attendees took field trips to Humblebee Farms and Black River Valley Natural, where they were educated on cutting-edge vegetable, microgreen, flower, and herb growing techniques and how a micro-creamery and small-batch artisanal foods facility is run. Other attendees went to Agers Falls via the Moose River Trail to hike, explore, swim, and enjoy Tug Hill’s natural beauty. Thursday evening combined the Tug Hill Commission Annual Dinner and the conference reception.

On Friday, attendees toured Brookfield Renewable’s hydroelectric facility in Trenton (pictured right) and were treated to a beautiful view of Trenton Falls. The conference was a great way to bring together environmental professionals and enthusiasts from all over New York State to recognize the diverse work being done in the Tug Hill region and understand how it relates statewide.



Photos provided by NYS Tug Hill Commission.

About the Black River Initiative

The Black River Initiative is a multi-pronged approach to protect and improve the water quality, recreational opportunities and communities along the Black River. The Black River Watershed Management Plan (2010), Black River 9 Element Plan (2016), Black River Blueway Trail Plan (2007), Black River Trail Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan (2012), and the Black River Adaptive Modeling Project (2024) provide the foundation to advance existing efforts and new projects that enhance and improve all aspects of the Black River. This annual newsletter highlights recent developments in the Black River Initiative, connects with stakeholders, and promotes collaborative, ecosystem based management efforts to achieve goals. For more information, visit:

www.tughill.org/projects/black-riverprojects/

Thank you to all of the people and organizations that contributed to this newsletter!

Looking Ahead to 2025 and the Milestone 15th Annual Black River Watershed Conference!

The 14th annual Black River Watershed Conference was held on June 13, 2024, with over 80 attendees at the View Arts Center in Old Forge. Participants included representatives from various agencies, government levels, nonprofits, and engaged citizens. Seventeen presenters delivered a full day of informative sessions highlighting projects across the watershed. Attendees also enjoyed the venue's grounds, art installations, and food.

The planning committee hopes attendees left with enhanced knowledge of watershed issues and renewed dedication to improving water quality, ecological conditions, research, and public access in the Black River watershed. Presentations are available at tughill.org/black-river-watershed-conference-2/. Save the date for the 15th annual conference in June 2025!

For more information please contact:

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Emily Fell
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Eastern Great Lakes Watershed Coordinator
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Watertown Dam. Artist credit William Christopherson

