



Councils of Governments Model: A Unique Way to Share Services

Local Capacity Building Using the Circuit Rider Approach

Katie Malinowski, Executive Director, NYS Tug Hill Commission
Angie Kimball, Circuit Rider, Cooperative Tug Hill Council



Coe Named Tug Hill Director

Benjamin P. Coe, Schenectady has been named executive director of the Temporary State Commission on Tug Hill, by State Assemblyman Edward F. Crawford, R-C, Oswego, commission chairman.

The commission, established by the State Legislature in 1972, is to study and report on the ecology, economy, social organization, and cultural resources of the Tug Hill Plateau, an area of almost one million acres east of Lake Ontario in Lewis, Jefferson, Oneida, and Oswego counties.

Coe, a licensed professional engineer, who formerly worked for General Electric in the silicone products department in Waterford, is currently vice president of the Volunteers in Technical Assistance Inc., a private, non-profit corporation, which uses volunteers to deliver technical assistance to economic



Benjamin P. Coe

and social development projects in the United States and abroad.

Coe is a graduate of Bowdoin College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Introducing the Commissioners

Edward F. Crawford, Chairman - Oswego	Sidney T. Cox - Turin
George E. Carle, Sr., Vice Chairman - Camden	Joseph A. Goetz - Rome
Richard E. Mark, Secretary - Constantia	Urban N. Karcher - Castorland
John F. Colvin - Copenhagen	Livingston Lansing - Boonville
	A. Milain Smith - Watertown

Commission members were appointed; three by the Governor, three by the Temporary President of the Senate, and three by the Speaker of the Assembly. All of the Commissioners live in the four Tug Hill counties and serve without pay.

They bring to the Commission a wealth of experience and a variety of interests ranging from labor, government, education, real estate, agriculture and meteorology to forestry and outdoor sports.

The Approach of the Commissioners

The Commission has met in full session nineteen times between April 3, 1973 (the first meeting) and December 1, 1973. Progress on the study is reflected in a description of its work as seen this first day of December.

Origins of the Tug Hill Commission

- Temporary State Commission on Tug Hill, 1972
- Assemblyman Crawford and Dr. Richard Mark were the architects
- Then Senator Barclay introduced the legislation in the senate
- Established to follow natural boundaries and called for a study of the area *“which shall include, but not be limited to, the conservation and development of the natural resources of the region, notably the flora, fauna, scenic beauty and environmental purity, the strengthening of cultural resources social organization, economy and general well-being of the rural communities.”*



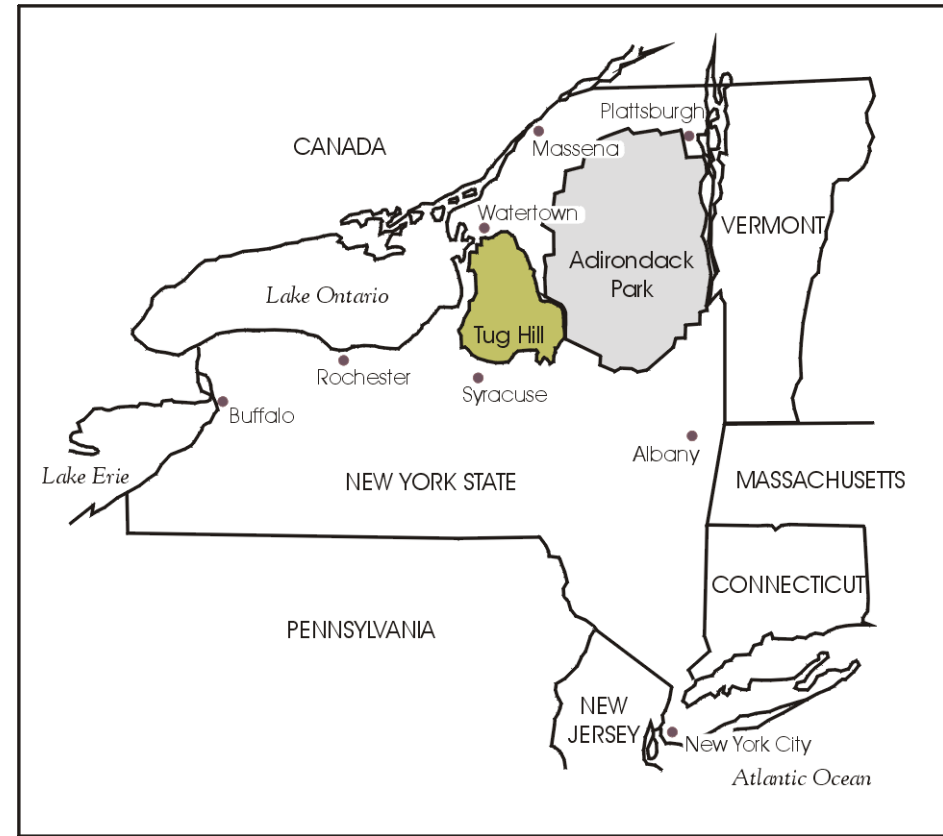
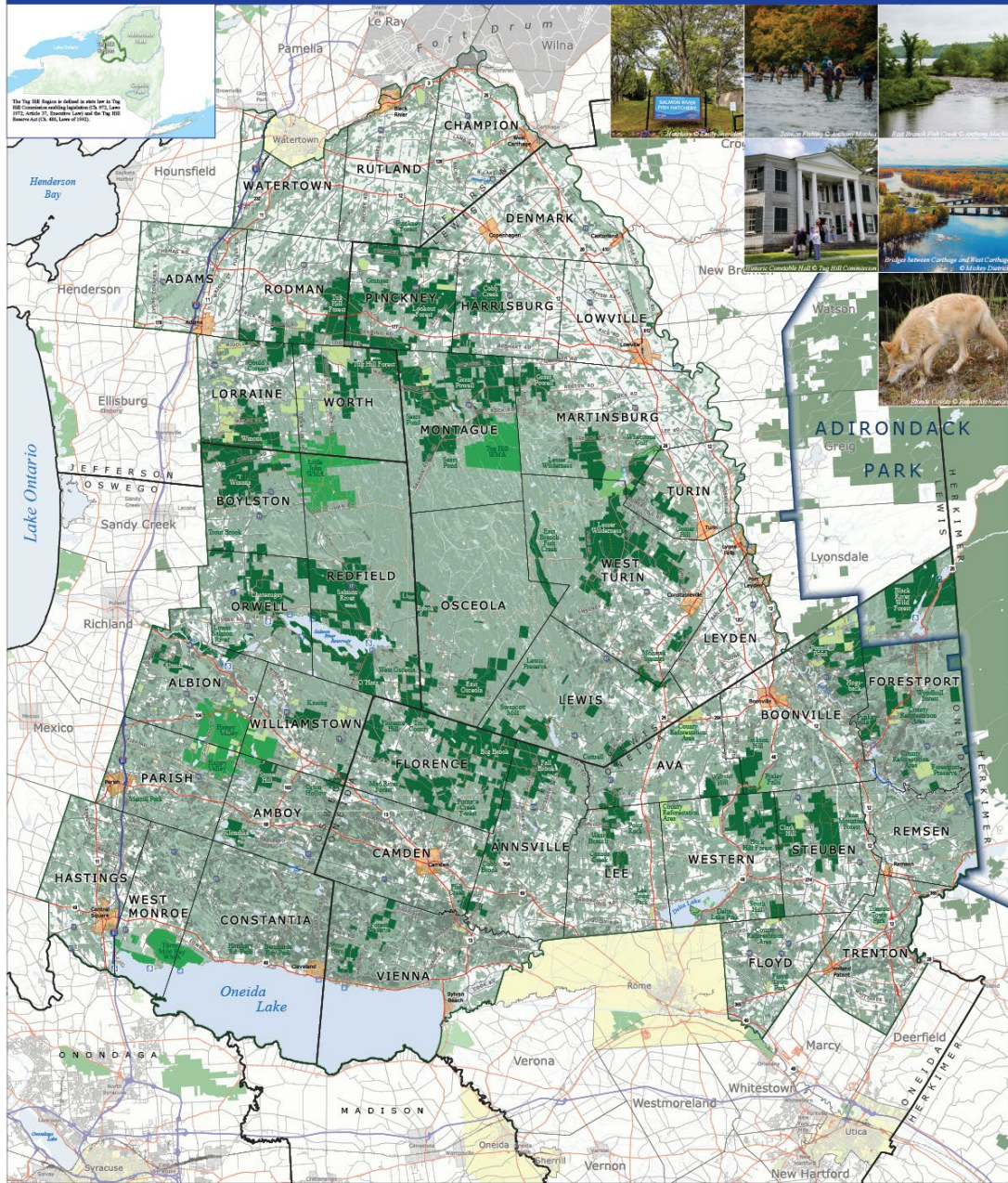
Today's Tug Hill Commission

- A non-regulatory state agency with a mission **“to enable local governments, private organizations, and individuals to shape the future of the Tug Hill region, and to demonstrate and communicate ways that this can be done by other rural areas.”**
- In 1998, Article 37 of Executive Law reaffirmed the commission, became an executive agency, administratively tied to the NYS Department of State
- No regulatory authority; grassroots, locally driven
- Governed by a board of 9 unpaid volunteers who must be residents of the region
- Staff of 15 serving a region of 41 towns containing 18 villages, plus, with a combined population of ~100,000 people, 50 people per square mile
- Provide day-to-day assistance to local governments, and in turn leverage conservation and sustainable development that benefits the region and state



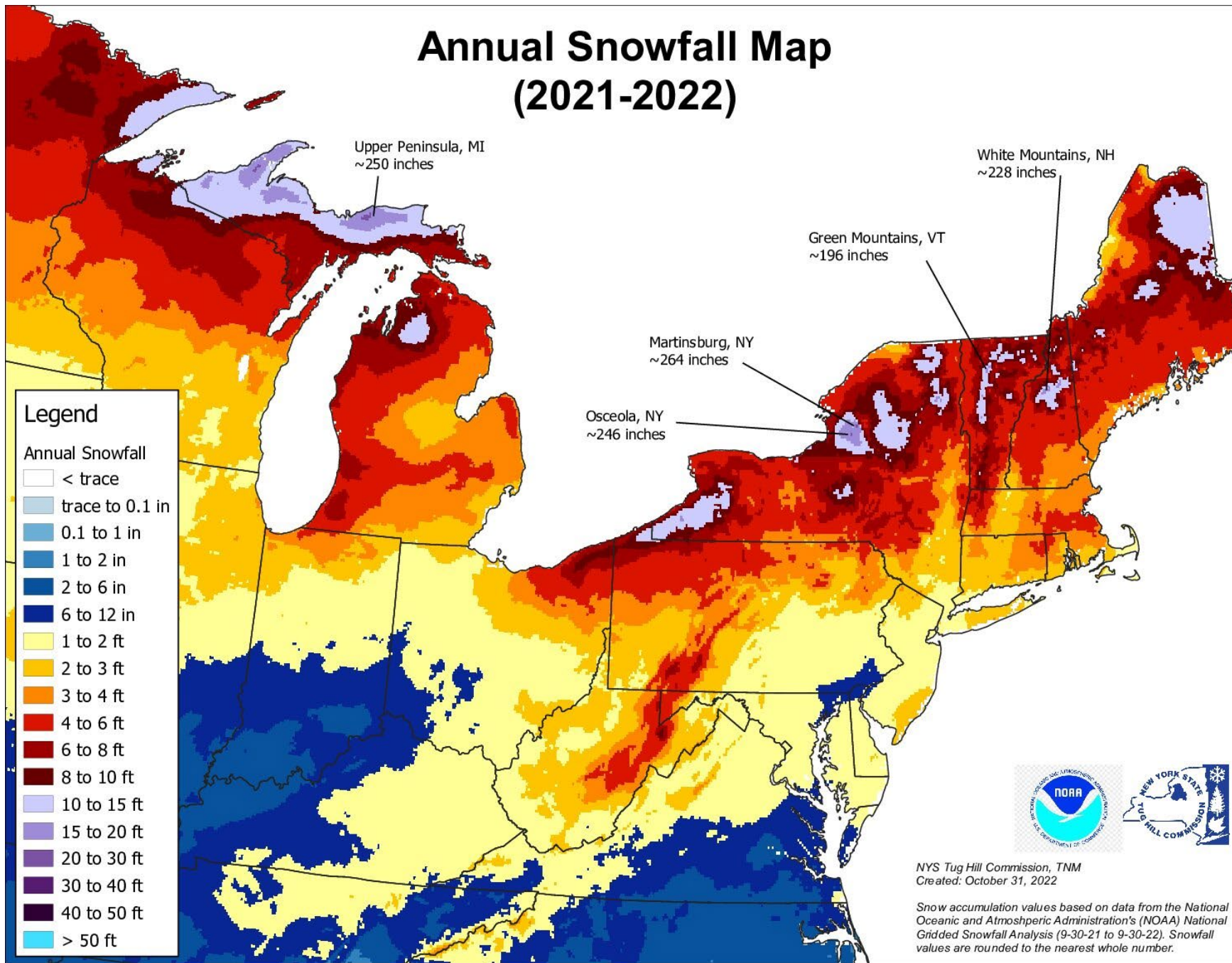
Carl Heilman II

TUG HILL REGION OF NEW YORK STATE



Tug Hill region of New York covers 2,100 square miles between Lake Ontario and the Adirondack Mountains.

Annual Snowfall Map (2021-2022)





Forestry

Farming





Outdoor Recreation





Solar array, photo courtesy Lewis County Planning Dept.

Renewable Energy



THE TUG HILL MODEL - COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENTS

The Circuit Rider Concept:

Meeting the Need of Rural Communities Governed by Part-time Public Officials

by BENJAMIN P. COE

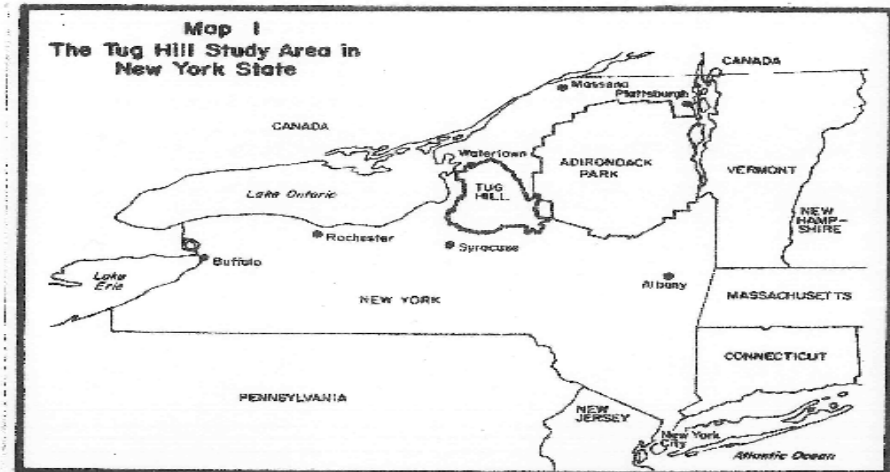
New York is a state of small governments. Of the 931 towns and 555 villages, 1,130 have population totals under 5,000, based on 1980 census figures reported by the New York State Office of the Comptroller. While the majority of the population in New York State is urban and suburban, the majority of governments serve small population groups and are mostly rural in nature. Indeed, New York State has the sixth largest rural population in the country.

The mixture of rural and urban interests is often a surprise for those persons who are not familiar with the state. Within the state itself, this mixture leads to complex intergovernmental relations for officials at the local, county and state levels of government. Unlike Vermont, for example, where all local governmental policy is rural policy, there is a tension in New York State between urban and rural governmental philosophies. The perception in New York local government is that the urban orientation usually dominates—in spite of good intentions—since most of the

state lawmakers and most of the state employees who make and carry out local government policy live in cities.

Rural areas often experience a feeling of isolation, alienation and helplessness in the face of governmental problems. Local officials frequently are confronted by powerful outside forces, be they from developers or from state and federal mandates—laws, rules or regulations requiring facilities to undertake functions, to apply complex regulatory procedures and the like. These small governments are staffed by part-time local officials who receive limited compensation and who have limited time or expertise to apply to the growth in governmental complexity. Citizen expectations are increasing, infrastructure items such as bridges and roads are deteriorating, at the same time, new demand makes the installation of water and waste disposal facilities imperative. Isolation in rural government is a real factor. The greater distances between governmental offices increase travel and communication costs for local officials seeking answers from state and county officials or for public officials who are seeking to exchange ideas with their peers.

Local governmental isolation is compounded in New York and in many other states by the fact that our strong, centralized structures of government have little or no



The Tug Hill region of upper New York State is an intensely rural area wedged between the western shore of Lake Ontario and the Adirondack State Park. The area served by the Temporary State Commission on Tug Hill consists of 39 townships and 20 villages in a 2,006-square-mile area.

regular linkage to local officials. The very limited local governmental assistance units found in some New York State agencies are underfunded and understaffed. Many of the state's counties do provide assistance to towns and villages through the county planning departments. County action does sometimes serve to bring the word to local governments on new requirements or opportunities for grants, but most counties do not have a formal technical assistance function in place to assist town and village governments. Fewer still have any regular outreach to local public officials.

I submit that such an outreach role should be played by more county governments in New York State and in other states. Not only do small communities need this kind of help, but such a support service with no strings attached could also benefit counties. Many counties would, I believe, benefit from the employment of local government circuit riders to provide technical, administrative and

planning assistance to small town and village governments. The Tug Hill Commission's experience indicates to me that the towns and villages would be grateful and supportive to this idea.

Background on Circuit Riding

The circuit rider concept has been an important part of the history and of the development of our country. Historically, circuit riders were judges and preachers, who made the rounds of a judicial district or of a parish on horseback, bringing law and religious services to a dispersed, largely rural, population.

Different levels of assistance can be provided by circuit riders. There are basically three different types of circuit riders:

- An advisor who provides technical assistance in the form of general advice on policies and programs. Advisors do not usually engage in writing or research.

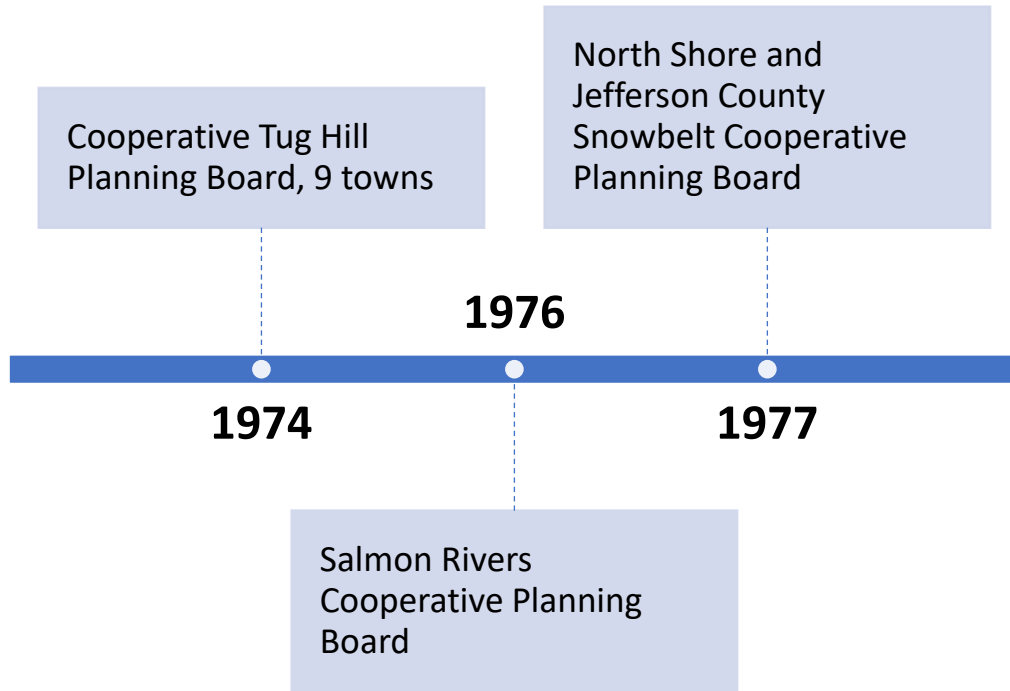
So, what is a Council of Governments (COG)?

- Cooperative of municipalities formed based on a common factor such as regional planning goals, watersheds, natural features or identity
- Independent units of government which operate based on Inter-Municipal Agreements (IMAs) allowed under General Municipal Law Article 5G
- Have bylaws, policies and procedures which further define operation including objectives, goals, membership, officers, finances etc.

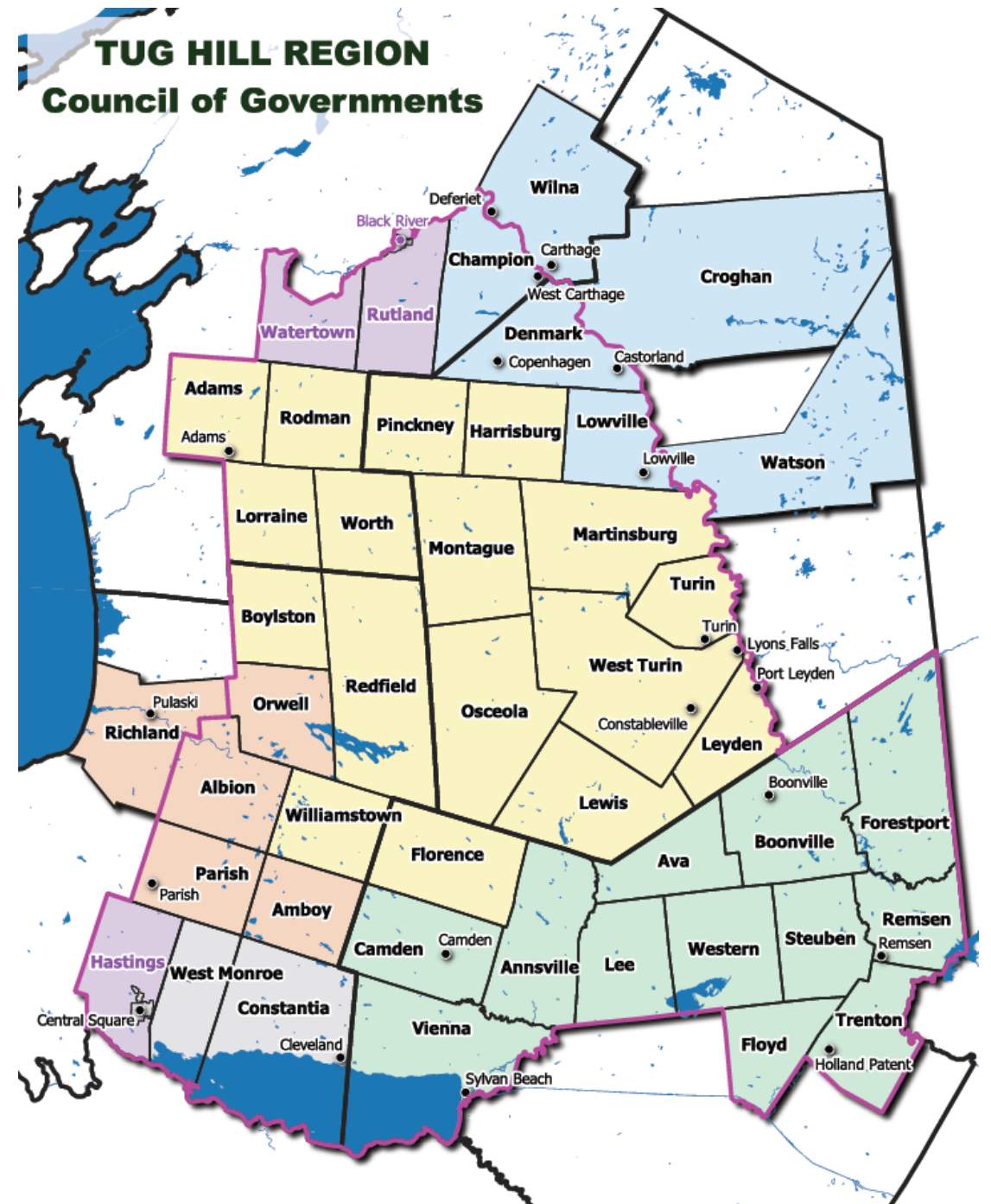
So, what is a Council of Governments (COG)?

- Funded by municipal dues and supported by Tug Hill Commission staffing
- Have a designated fiscal officer/municipality who handles financial matters at the approval of the COG membership
- COGs are valued as:
 - **Representative** of their member municipalities and citizens in their communities;
 - **Responsive** to the needs of their communities and the people they serve;
 - **Responsible** for their self-governance and in establishing policies and priorities for their work; and,
 - **Regional** in recognizing that they have commonality with all communities in the Tug Hill region and strive to acknowledge the ties that bind them.

Cooperative Planning Boards



Council	Communities Served
Cooperative Tug Hill Council	17 Towns 5 Villages
North Shore Council of Governments	2 Towns 2 Villages
Northern Oneida County Council of Governments	12 Towns 5 Villages
River Area Council of Governments	6 Towns 6 Villages
Salmon Rivers Council of Governments	5 Towns 2 Villages



So, what is a Circuit Rider?

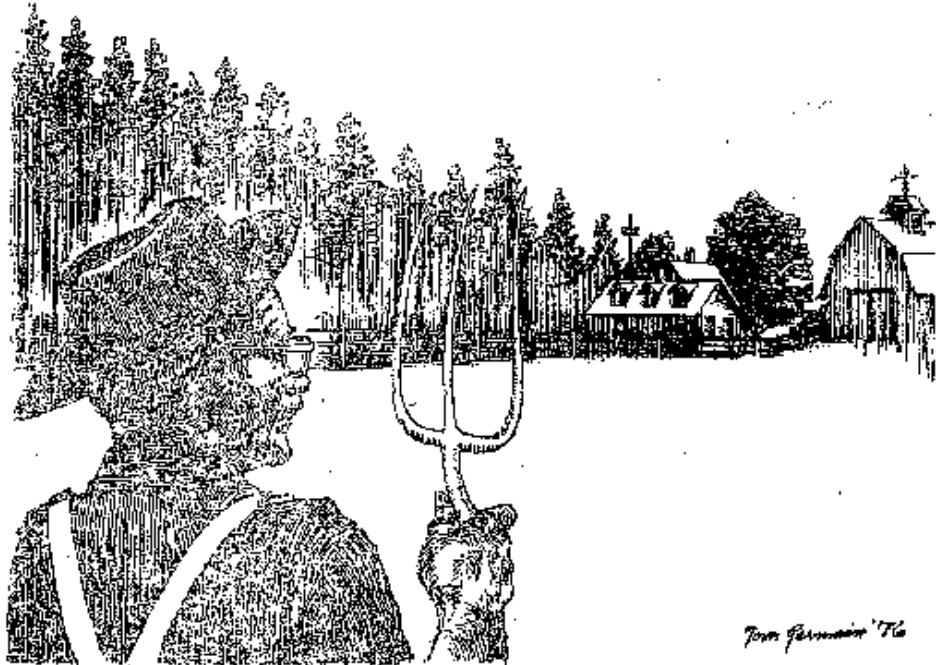
The Circuit Rider Concept:

Meeting the Need of
Rural Communities
Governed by Part-time
Public Officials

by BENJAMIN P. COE

- An advisor who provides technical assistance with general advice on policies and programs
- A consultant who can conduct research, prepare proposals, prepare grants, find answers
- A facilitator to help local officials assess their needs and offer advice and assistance specific to problems
- The link between local officials, municipalities and the Tug Hill Commission's office staff – the "feet on the ground"
- Each Council of Governments (COG) has a Circuit Rider assigned to them

TUG HILL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN



COOPERATIVE TUG HILL PLANNING BOARD - 1976

Foundations of the Circuit Rider Program

- CIRCUIT RIDERS: 1977 – First Circuit Rider hired
- PLANNING: 1976 – First Tug Hill Resource Management Plan produced
- TRAINING: 1980 – First Local Government Conference, 125 attendees
- Cooperative Planning Boards become Councils of Government

Today's Tug Hill Commission Circuit Rider Facts

- Attend town & village meetings to share information and gather requests for technical and planning assistance (the four Tug Hill Circuit Riders cover over 1,000 meetings per year!)
- Provide opportunities for intermunicipal communication and cooperation
- Listening for:



- **Recurrent themes/concerns**
- **Need for assistance with process/procedures**
- **Need for assistance with training**
- **Funding sources for projects**
- **Opportunities for collaboration/service sharing**

ORIGINS OF THE COOPERATIVE TUG HILL COUNCIL

- Formed in 1974 as the Cooperative Tug Hill Planning Board
- Originally, nine towns in four counties
- Focus on comprehensive planning
- Response to development threats such as Horizon Corporation, and creation of the Temporary State Commission on Tug Hill
- Fear of another situation like the Adirondacks – “It’s zone or be zoned.”
- 1988 name and structure changed to Cooperative Tug Hill Council
- Program expanded to also include training, community development, grant writing, etc.



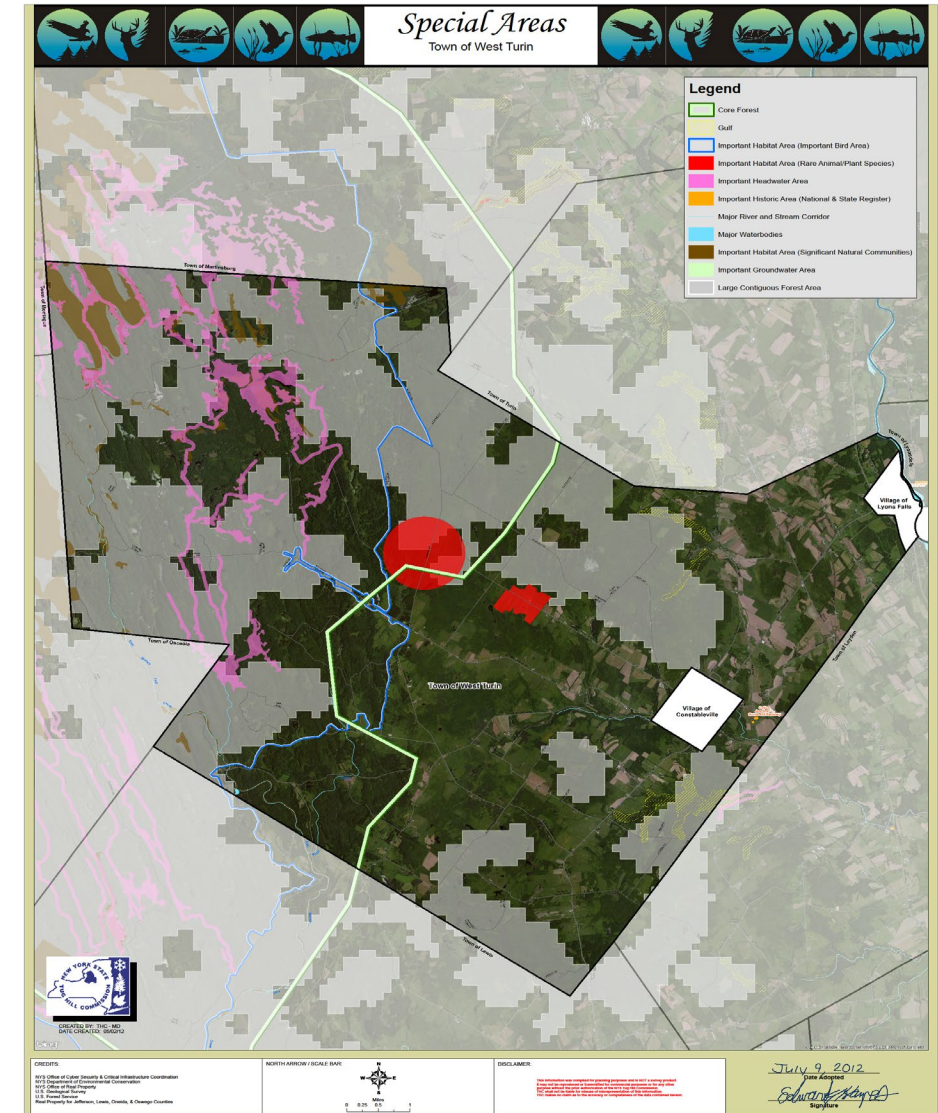
TUG HILL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

- Recognized shared natural resources – watersheds, forests
- Originally approved in 1976
- Common interests overcame jurisdictional boundaries
- Towns best to decide their future
- Working together created strength in numbers
- Implementation costs less with joint action
- Set regional goals and blueprint for individual codes
- Last updated in 2017



PLANNING ACCORD FOR TUG HILL

- Work began in 1990 in response to a landfill proposal by a government agency
- Designed to alert governmental agencies of a comprehensive plan and to preserve special areas as designated by the local government in a local reserve plan
- Consultation requirement
- Led to passage of Tug Hill Reserve Act by State Legislature (Chapter 486 of the Laws of 1992)
- The act recognized the region as having natural resources of statewide and national significance and allowed for the protection of areas by local reserve plan by a Tug Hill Council of Government



SALMON RIVERS COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

- Formed in 1976 as the Salmon Rivers Cooperative Planning Board and later restructured as a council of governments
- Over the years has contained 5 towns and 3 villages, lost one village to dissolution and one town to a different COG. Recently added a town and a village
- Currently 5 towns and 2 villages located in Oswego County along the Salmon River corridor
- Traditionally has had a special interest in Salmon River issues such as water quality, water level management, waterfront access, fishery issues and economic development potential related to be riverfront communities
- Home of the Salmon River, Salmon River Reservoir and Salmon River Falls, a NYS Fish Hatchery and the Happy Valley WMA



NORTH SHORE COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

- Formed in 1977 as the North Shore Cooperative Planning Board and later restructured as a council of governments
- Over the years has consisted of 4 towns and 2 villages. One town moved to a different COG and one withdrew
- Currently 2 towns and 2 villages located in Oswego County along the north shore of Oneida Lake
- Traditionally has had a special interest in Oneida Lake issues such as water quality, water level management, waterfront access and economic development potential for lake front communities



NORTH SHORE COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS SHARED PROJECTS

In preparation for a large proposed chip factory in the area:

- Economic Resiliency and Recovery Plan
- NYS Rt. 49 traffic study
- Potential regional wastewater project



Prepared by:

MRB | group

Prepared for:

 **NorCOG**
The North Shore Council of Governments

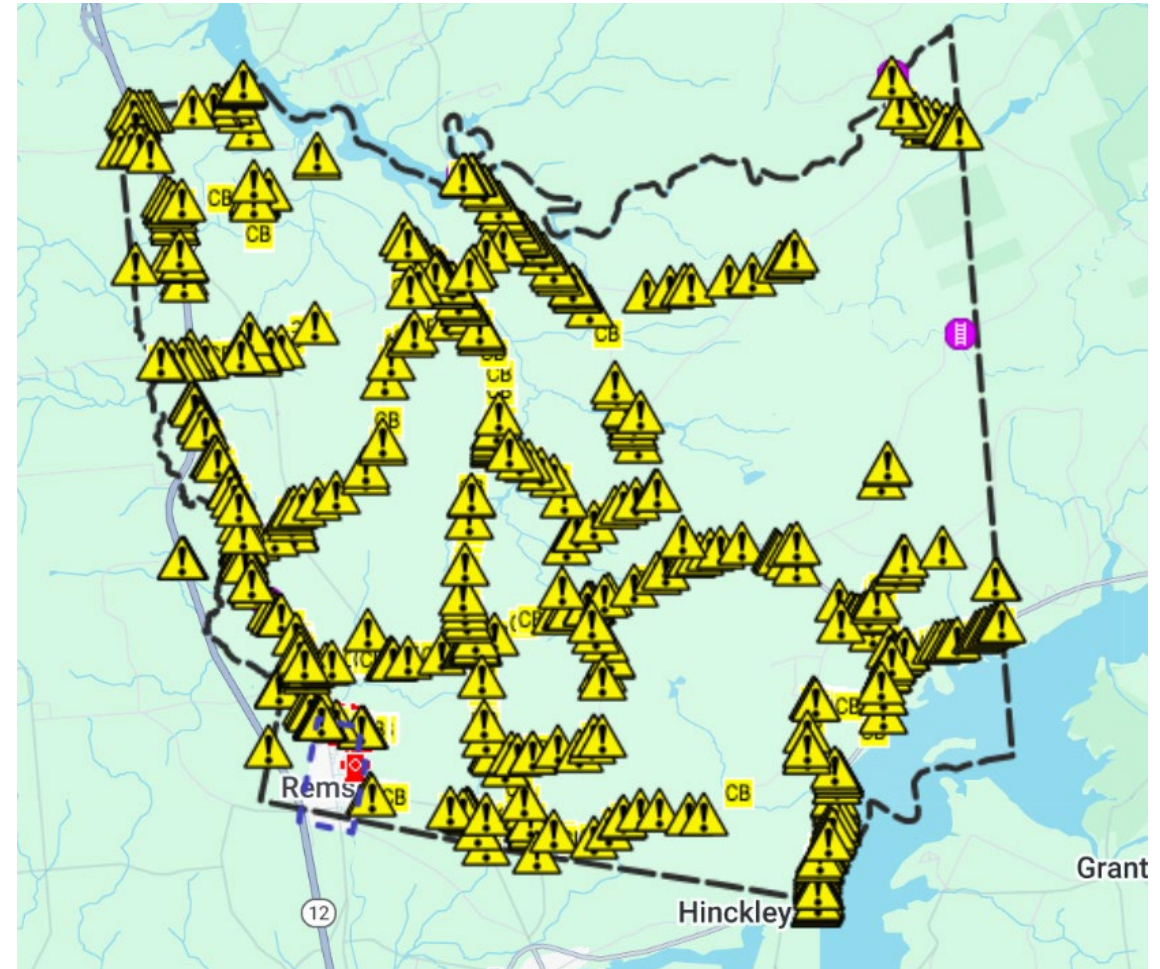
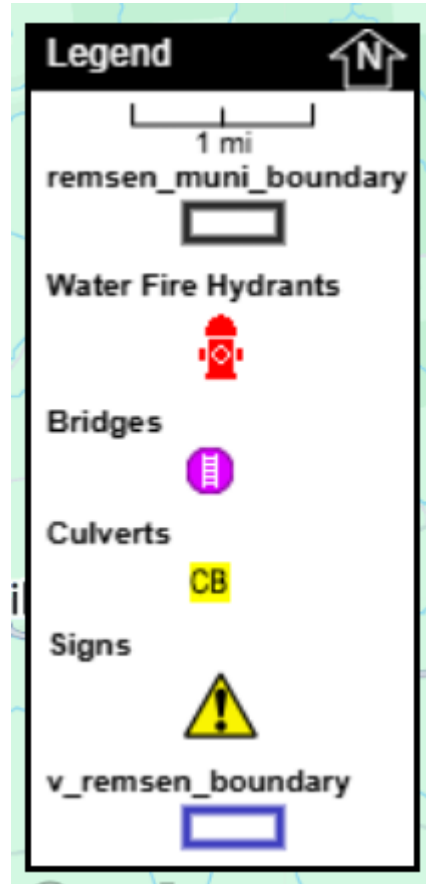
NORTHERN ONEIDA COUNTY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

- Formed in 1981 as a council of governments for the smaller and more rural communities in northern Oneida County
- Currently consists of 12 towns and 5 villages and over the years has lost 3 villages to dissolutions
- Located in the southeast side of the Tug Hill Plateau and is the most populous of the Tug Hill COGs
- Provide a collaborative voice on critical issues and help the communities protect what they value through a home rule approach



NORTHERN ONEIDA COUNTY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS SHARED PROJECTS

- Have purchased GPS units and provide staff to help member municipalities locate and map their infrastructure
- Have also completed multi-municipality archives grants, digitizing vital records



RIVER AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

- The youngest of the Tug Hill COGs formed in 2000 in response to economic concerns associated with the closing of two major industries in the original towns and villages
- Originally 2 towns and 2 villages in Jefferson County
- Currently 6 towns and 6 villages located along the Black River corridor in Jefferson and Lewis Counties
- Mission is to identify opportunities for cooperation that will enhance quality of life and improve service delivery within their municipalities



RIVER AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS SHARED PROJECTS

- Annual economic visioning sessions
- LED streetlight conversion and Smart City Technology project
- COG hosted municipal websites
- Promotional video highlighting the communities
- Online community resources maps

A vertical graphic titled "ACCOMPLISHMENTS (Since 2018)" for the River Area Council of Governments (RACOG). The graphic features a dark blue header with the RACOG logo and the text "RACOG RIVER AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS". Below the header is a list of 15 accomplishments, each accompanied by a small circular image. The images include a woman in a camouflage jacket, a person in a blue kayak on a river, a street with modern LED lighting, a lighthouse on a riverbank, and a scenic view of a river and trees. The background of the graphic is a collage of these images.

RACOG
RIVER AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

ACCOMPLISHMENTS
(Since 2018)

- RACOG Economic Visioning Summit
- CGI Regional Promotional Video & Banners
- Friends of the Black River Community Group
- Black River Navigation Mapping (22 Miles)
- Eight Municipal Shared Website Services
- Fort Drum Internship Program
- Monroe Community College Remote Intern Program
- LED Street Lighting Conversion
- Incorporation of Smart City Technology
- Complete Street Projects Partnership with Jefferson-Lewis BOCES
- Clean Energy Communities
- Community Choice Aggregation
- NY Alerts Implementation
- Online Community Resource Map
- RACOG Growth (Since 2017, RACOG has added 6 municipalities.)

Providing Necessary Services in Rural Areas

Cooperation within and between Councils of Government

Member Municipalities

- **Zoning**
 - Cooperative Zoning Boards of Appeal – currently 3 operating in the region, with administrative assistance provided by circuit riders
- **Fire and Emergency Medical Services**
 - Shared ambulance corps
 - Shared fire protection districts
- **Highway Departments**
 - Shared highway labor through shared service agreements – road maintenance, trucking, as well as shared purchasing of materials and equipment through intermunicipal agreement
 - Road maintenance agreements on border roads
- **Other shared municipal officers**
 - Combined town clerk/tax collectors
 - Assessors
 - Dog control officers
 - Code enforcements officers
 - Zoning enforcement officers

Providing Necessary Services in Rural Areas Cooperation within and between Councils of Government Member Municipalities

- **Planning**

- Shared town/village planning boards
- Multi-municipality comprehensive plans
- Shared solar overlay and prime ag land zones and definitions

- **Justice courts**

- Two court consolidations under Uniform Justice Court Act 106b (one combined court-one judge) involving five towns
- Two legislation changes to residency requirements allowing shared justice from neighboring towns within the county



Town and Village of Lowville
Comprehensive Plan 2022

Date: October 20, 2022



NEW YORK STATE

TUG HILL COMMISSION

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Thank You!