

2025 BLACK RIVER WATERSHED CONFERENCE



**THE BLACK RIVER WATERSHED STEERING
COMMITTEE WELCOMES YOU TO THE
15TH ANNUAL BLACK RIVER WATERSHED
CONFERENCE**

**Hilton Garden Inn, Watertown, NY
June 2-3, 2025**

NYS Tug Hill Commission
Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Hamilton | Herkimer | Jefferson | Lewis | Oneida

Funded by the Black River Advisory Committee

AGENDA

DAY 1

Evening Reception, Monday, June 2, 6:00–8:00 pm

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

NICOLE RICE

Speaking of Water: How Stories Can Shape Our Climate Future

DAY 2

Full Day, Tuesday, June 3, 9:00 am–4:00 pm

| TIME | TOPIC |
|-------------------|--|
| 9:00–9:05 AM | Welcome & Opening Remarks |
| 9:05–9:25 AM | Lewis County: Cover Crops in the Black River Watershed Nichelle Swisher |
| 9:25–9:45 AM | Hamilton County: Aquatic Invasive Species Survey of Limekiln Lake Katie Whitkovits |
| 9:45–9:50 AM | Herkimer County: Hydroseeding in Herkimer County Alexis Sprague and Gabrielle Lewosko |
| 9:50–9:55 AM | Oneida County: Urban/Municipality Forestry Program Jessica Armstrong and Payton Reese |
| 9:55–10:00 AM | Jefferson County: AEM Cost Share Program Justin Bach |
| 10:00–10:45 AM | Culvert Replacements with Trout Unlimited Jo-Anne Humphreys |
| 10:45–11:00 AM | Break |
| 11:00 AM–12:00 PM | Understanding Lake Recovery from Historical Acidification: The Important Role of Browning Dr. Kevin Rose |
| 12:00–1:00 PM | Lunch |
| 1:00–1:20 PM | Black River Water Quality Sampling Results Andrew Brainard |
| 1:20–2:35 PM | Watershed Needs Breakout Session Moderated by Sunita Halasz |
| 2:35–2:50 PM | Break |
| 2:50–3:35 PM | Invasive Species - Spotted Lanternfly, Box Tree Moth, and Regulated Plants Thom Allgaier |
| 3:35–3:55 PM | How Winter is Changing in the Tug Hill Region Jillian Lee |
| 3:55–4:00 PM | Closing Remarks |

**Post-Conference
Survey**



KEYNOTE SPEAKER

NICOLE RICE



Nicole Rice is a communicator and creative strategist with recent experience supporting NOAA's mission through compelling storytelling, public engagement, and interagency collaboration. At NOAA's Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory, she led initiatives to translate complex scientific work into accessible, meaningful narratives—bridging the gap between researchers, decision-makers, and the public.

Her work at NOAA combined communications planning, visual storytelling, and digital content development to highlight critical environmental research on issues such as climate resilience, freshwater health, and coastal ecosystems. Nicole collaborated across disciplines to promote understanding of NOAA's science and its real-world impacts on communities across the Great Lakes and beyond.

Passionate about civic engagement and transparency, Nicole continues to drive initiatives that foster trust and collaboration between government entities and the public.

Originally from northwest Ohio, Nicole now lives in Saline, Michigan with her husband and their dog. Deeply committed to public service, she serves as a city councilor, where she works to strengthen local government through inclusive policymaking, environmental stewardship, and community-centered leadership. Her Midwest roots and passion for civic life continue to shape her dedication to building stronger, more connected communities.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES



KRISTY LAMANCHE

Consultant/Grant Writer
KL Consulting Services



Kristy LaManche is the Program Coordinator of the Finger Lakes - Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance which is an alliance of 25 counties within New York's Finger Lakes - Lake Ontario drainage basin focused on preserving and protecting freshwater resources by implementing projects that address local water quality concerns and support State priorities. Ms. LaManche is an alum of the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry and enjoys spending time with her family outdoors when she is not in the office.

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Department of
Environmental
Conservation



CONFERENCE PRESENTERS



NICHELLE SWISHER

District Manager
Lewis County Soil and Water Conservation District



Nichelle Swisher has been the District Manager of the Lewis County Soil and Water Conservation District since 2006 and has served as the Chairperson for the Lewis County Water Quality Coordinating Committee since 2008. She is a native of Lewis County, has her Master's Degree in Biology-Aquatic Ecology (SUNY Brockport) and has over 25 years experience in soil and water and natural resource conservation. Mrs. Swisher served as the Project Manager for the Black River Watershed Management Plan, serves on watershed steering committee assisting in organizing the Annual Black River Watershed Conference and newly appointed President of the Black River Watershed Coalition of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

KATIE WHITKOVITS

District Technician
Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District



Katie began working with Conservation Districts as a summer intern at SUNY Oneonta in 2012. She went on to work for the Herkimer County Soil and Water Conservation District from 2017-2022 until she finally happily landed here in Hamilton County! Katie has experience with education and outreach, invasive species programs, and an array of field work. At Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District, she currently runs the Hamilton County Water Monitoring Program. She holds a Certified Pesticide Applicators License and conducts invasive species inventories annually. She loves kayaking, camping, and anything else she can enjoy out in the Adirondacks with her husband and dogs.

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ALEXIS SPRAGUE

Natural Resource Conservation Technician
Herkimer County Soil and Water Conservation District



Alexis Sprague is the newest Natural Resource Conservation Technician for Herkimer County Soil and Water Conservation District. She graduated from SUNY Cobleskill with a bachelor's in Environmental Management. She will be running our hydroseeding program, educational events, and helping run the invasive species management program. Alexis is working towards becoming a certified pesticide technician.

GABRIELLE LEWOSKO

Natural Resource Conservation Technician
Herkimer County Soil and Water Conservation District



Gabrielle Lewosko has been working for the Herkimer County Soil and Water Conservation District since October of 2021 as a Conservation Aide and was later promoted to Natural Resource Conservation Technician. She has been the lead of the Invasive Species Management program as a certified Pesticide Technician, hydroseeding, and educational events. She also works with our Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) program

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JESSICA ARMSTRONG

District Manager
Oneida County Soil and Water Conservation District

Jessica Armstrong graduated with her Bachelor's in Environmental Science from Paul Smith's College in 2018. While working at the Oneida County Soil and Water Conservation District, she went on to complete her Master's Degree in Environmental Law and Policy from Vermont Law School in 2020. Jessica has had 7 years at the Conservation District, plus a summer internship. She started at the District in 2018 as the Water Quality Specialist. After 3 years of work on stream stabilization projects, flood mitigation action, landowner assistance, and completing the County Hazard Mitigation Plan Update, she became the District Manager in 2021. Since becoming manager, her involvement in all aspects of the district (agriculture, forestry, streams, grant writing, financial) has grown significantly. In 2023, Jessica became the NYS Conservation District Employee Association (CDEA) Vice President. This position of Vice Presidency has broadened her knowledge and created professional relationships with District Employees and other agencies statewide.



PAYTON REESE

Water Quality Specialist
Oneida County Soil and Water Conservation District

Payton Reese is the Water Quality Specialist with Oneida County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and has held that role for two years. With a Bachelor's in Biology from SUNY Geneseo, Payton got into the field as an intern with Oswego and Onondaga County SWCDs working on water chestnut management and hydroseeding. With the District, Payton works on stream stabilization projects, organizes the Envirothon, and recently was certified to teach the NYS DEC endorsed 4-Hour Erosion and Sediment Control course.

CONFERENCE PRESENTERS



JUSTIN BACH

Jefferson County SWCD Executive Director,
Certified Nutrient Management Planner (CNMP)



Justin joined the Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District in 2023, bringing with him a strong background in agriculture. He grew up on his family's dairy farm, which he later co-managed with his father and brother. Prior to his current role, Justin spent nine years in private farm planning. He is a Certified Crop Advisor with seven years of experience and has been a Certified Nutrient Management Planner for six years. At the District, Justin leads the Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) program, where he works closely with farmers across Jefferson County to develop both Conservation and Nutrient Management Plans.

JO-ANNE HUMPHREYS

Stream Restoration Specialist
Eastern Region, Trout Unlimited



Jo-Anne has been a Stream Restoration Specialist for Trout Unlimited's Northeast Coldwater Habitat Program since 2019. She primarily works on reconnection and restoration projects throughout New York. Since starting with TU, she has worked with project partners and TU staff to design over 40 culvert replacement projects. Prior to joining TU, she spent over 20 years with the Oneida County Soil and Water Conservation District where she helped manage the Community Environmental Management (CEM) program. Through the CEM program, she worked closely with municipal officials, agency partners, landowners, and watershed stakeholders to address stormwater, hazard mitigation, and stream restoration issues at the local level.

CONFERENCE PRESENTERS



DR. KEVIN ROSE

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Associate Professor & Frederic R. Kolleck '52 Career
Development Chair in Freshwater Ecology
Acting Director, The Darrin Freshwater Institute
Director, The Jefferson Project



Dr. Rose received his Ph.D. in Ecology, Evolution, and Environmental Biology from Miami University studying the causes and consequences of variation in ultraviolet radiation in aquatic ecosystems. Following his Ph.D., Dr. Rose went on to a postdoctoral fellowship at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, an AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellowship at the U.S. National Science Foundation, and a postdoctoral appointment at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dr. Rose joined Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 2015 as the Frederic R. Kolleck '52 Career Development Chair in Freshwater Ecology. As of 2022, Dr. Rose is the Director of the Darrin Freshwater Institute and the Jefferson Project, a partnership between RPI, IBM Research, the Lake George Association, and the Chautauqua Institution. When he isn't working, Dr. Rose is chasing after his kids, fixing something around the house, getting into the outdoors, or volunteering in his community.

ANDREW BRAINARD

Director
Upstate Freshwater Institute



Andrew Brainard is the Executive Director of the Upstate Freshwater Institute (UFI) located in Syracuse, a non-profit research institute focused on advancing water quality research and freshwater science. Andrew received his PhD from SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF) in 2018. At UFI, Andrew has been involved in research projects spanning many different lakes and watersheds across New York State, from Lake Ontario, the Finger Lakes, to small community and residential ponds.

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SUNITA HALASZ

Project Coordinator
Adirondack Climate Outreach and Resilience Network



Sunita Halasz is an ecologist and Climate Strategy Advisor for Adirondack Research Consortium and Project Coordinator for ACORN. She is a Regional Leader for NASA Earth To Sky and mentors the teen-led North Country Climate Club. She is a board member of the Adirondack Center for Writing and helps guide local nonprofits in strategic planning. Sunita was formerly with the APA working with local governments, on EPA wetland projects, and State Land UMP review. She co-coordinates North Country Homeschooling and was a member of the Gag Reflex Improv Comedy group.

THOM ALLGAIER

Invasive Species Coordinator
NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets



Thom Allgaier is the Invasive Species Coordinator for the NYS Dept. of Agriculture & Markets. With over 20 years of public service between federal and state positions dealing with invasive plant pests. Prior to his public service he worked in various landscape construction, garden center and greenhouse positions. Thom holds an associate's degree in Ornamental Horticulture from Farmingdale State University, a Bachelor's of science from Empire State College where he studied Environmental Biology, and a Master's of Science degree from University of North Carolina - Wilmington where he studied Environmental Science.

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JILLIAN LEE

Project Specialist
NYS Tug Hill Commission



Jillian is a Project Specialist with the New York State Tug Hill Commission, focusing on natural resources, she provides assistance and education about environmental and climate-focused programs, as well as supporting community development initiatives. She has previously worked with California's State Water Resources Control Board and Stantec, focusing on wildfire mitigation, water quality, and watershed planning. Jillian is passionate about translating complex data and information into accessible, actionable strategies for diverse audiences. She holds a Master of Science in Water Science and Policy from the University of Delaware and a Bachelor of Science in Meteorology from SUNY Oneonta. In her off time, Jillian enjoys taking her horse, Casanova, on trail rides, photography, and going on new adventures with her husband.

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING OUR CONFERENCE!

Please take a moment to fill out our **post-conference survey** to help us plan for next year's conference!
The QR Code is here →
A paper copy is also available.



Scan with your phone

See you next year!

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RIVER AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS



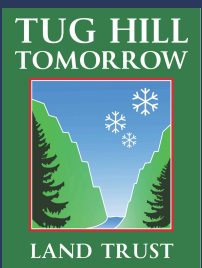
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RACOG's mission is to identify opportunities for cooperation, that will enhance the quality of life and improve service delivery in the Towns of Champion, Croghan, Denmark, Greig, Lowville, Watson and Wilna and the Villages of Carthage, Castorland, Copenhagen, Croghan, Deferiet, Lowville, and West Carthage, through the analysis, study, and recommendations with respect to organizational and administrative barriers to economic growth and fiscal stability that might exist in and between our communities.

THANK YOU TO OUR EXHIBITORS!



The **St. Lawrence-Eastern Lake Ontario (SLELO) Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM)** is in cooperation with The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and more than twenty-three regional partner organizations. Our mission is to protect native habitats, biodiversity, natural areas, and freshwater resources by using a collaborative and integrated approach to invasive species management with emphasis on prevention, early detection, rapid response, education, and outreach.



Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust is a regional nonprofit organization that works with landowners on a voluntary basis to permanently protect open space, and promotes appreciation of the region's natural and cultural heritage for present and future generations.



**Department of
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DEC's Great Lakes Watershed Program works with partners to protect and restore water quality and ecosystem integrity in NY's portion of the Great Lakes and their lands and waters, as guided by NY's Great Lakes Action Agenda.