

FISH CREEK UPDATE



Approximately 40 people attended the October 2, 2025, meeting of the East Branch of Fish Creek (EBFC) Working Group, held at the West Leyden Fire Department in West Leyden, NY. The group was formed in the mid-1990's in response to the sale of the Lyons Falls Pulp and Paper lands in southern Lewis County. After attendee introductions, updates were provided by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), LandVest (for Aurora Sustainable Lands), and The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

Dora Faber, Forester, kicked off the presentations. There currently are ~23 miles of road for truck/car access and ~29 miles of road/trail for snowmobile access (public motorized access). There are currently ~35 miles of road/trail for hiking/mountain biking and ~28 miles of road/trail for horseback riding (public non-motorized access).

Work Completed in the Past Year

The Fall Brook Access project is now complete. It is located off North Osceola Road and leads to a parking area near Fall Brook (pictured right). Roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile in length, it includes a graveled right-of-way for public access.

A new 42" W X 29" H X 30' L squash culvert was installed on Camp 4 road, located just South of the Camp 5 road intersection. This was a shared cost project with Aurora Sustainable Lands.



A new cattle gate (pictured right) was installed at the southern end of North-South Road. The previous gate was damaged during grooming last winter.



Other completed work included:

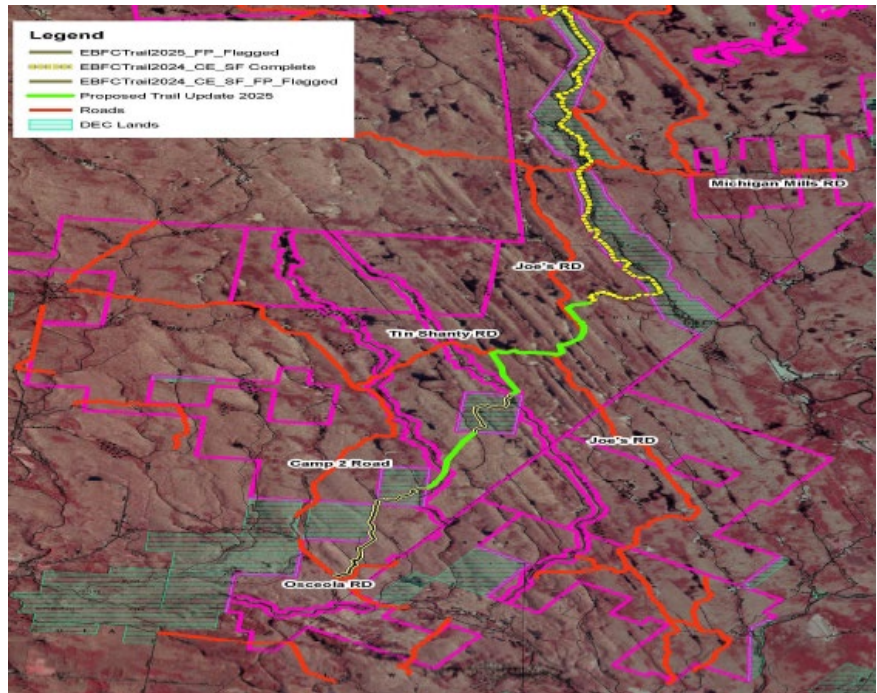
- Heron Brook Foot Trail was brushed out
- Blowdown resulting from the June 22, 2025, storm event was removed from Camp 2 and Camp 4 Roads. (Motor vehicle accessible portions of the road.)
- The G&W Road was graded
- North-South Road was mowed

Upcoming Work

The NYSDEC plans to replace a culvert on Tin Shanty Road, located just East of the West Fork of the Salmon River. The increased pipe size will allow for better high water flow and will stop the road from washing.

The NYSDEC plans to upgrade the Beaver Meadow Brook Bridge. NYSDEC engineers have already measured the existing bridge structure, cataloged existing stream characteristics, and dug depth to groundwater soil test pits.

The **Tug Hill Traverse Trail** (pictured right), being constructed with the Black River Chapter of the ADK Mountain Club and the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust now has 13 miles completed. In the fall of 2025, a section was rerouted so that the trail avoids thick ground vegetation. Scoping work is now underway for multiple new sections of the trail:



- Traverse Trail – Forest Preserve (FP) Lot #5
 - Section of trail scoped through FP Lot #5
 - Runs through FP Lot #5 and intersects East Fork of Salmon River
 - Approximately 1 mile
- Traverse Trail – Forest Preserve Lot #6
 - Trail scoped from Osceola Road North through FP Lot #6
 - Runs along East Osceola State Forest line and passes through FP Lot #6 where it meets the West Fork of the Salmon River
 - Approximately 3 miles
- Detached Forest Preserve Lots #5 & #6
 - Follow Forest Preserve guidelines
 - Lots were purchased by NYS prior to the enactment of the Hewitt amendment (1931). Before the Hewitt amendment passed, all lands bought by NYS within the 12 forest preserve counties were deemed forest preserve.
 - Existing Traverse Trail footprint through FP lots is in the approved Tug Hill East UMP
 - Create Forest Preserve workplan and post on the Environmental Notice Bulletin and on DEC website
 - Public Review (30 days)
 - Reviewed and approved by FP working group

- Trail work can start within Detached Forest Preserve lots

Recreation Management Plan Update (RMP) and Timeline

The RMP covers both East Branch Fish Creek North and South Conservation Easements and all the recreational attributes associated with them under NYSDEC's jurisdiction. This plan is scheduled to be updated every 10 years. An update should be written this winter season with the following timeline:

- Write draft update (winter 2025/2026)
- Draft plan review internal and public
- Summarize, address and respond to comments
- Finalize RMP update
- Tug Hill Traverse trail work can start on scoped section from Osceola Road North to Forest Preserve Lot #5

Update on G&W Road EBFC Bridge

The NYSDOT “red flagged” the bridge due to scouring and abutment crack issues. This was reviewed by NYSDEC engineers, and they are working on repairs to correct identified issues. Michael Giocondo, Supervising Forester for Region 6, further explained that all bridges open for public motorized use are inspected by NYSDOT for safety. It was the NYSDOT annual inspection that led to the red flag issued for abutment scouring of bridge, which led to DEC having to close the bridge. NYSDEC engineering staff are working on a solution to add additional scour protection and repair abutments. This will postpone the need for replacement of the bridge. NYSDEC will coordinate with TNC, Aurora Sustainable Lands, and adjoining landowners once additional information is known.

There will be new additions to EBFC Conservation Easement North and the Lesser Wilderness State Forest. The EBFC Conservation Easement North includes an easement modification to include an additional Lyndaker parcel. Michael Giocondo explained that a transfer of jurisdiction between NYS Parks and NYSDEC has been completed, which will change management of the Whetstone Reservoir and parcels around it (except for the dam area) from NYS Parks to NYSDEC. New signage will be installed and NYSDEC will start a review of property this winter.

The Nature Conservancy

Brian Roat reported that Seth Jones, Stewardship Programs Manager, is the new TNC contact for hunting and leases. He can be reached at seth.jones@tnc.org or (518) 576-7244. Wagon Wheel Road at the North Branch Mad River crossing is closed and gates will be installed this fall. Paul Jensen, wildlife biologist and adjunct faculty at SUNY ESF, has installed four trail cams (pictured right) along the north side of the G&W Road. Four to six more will be installed next spring for a wildlife survey. An update on TNC's tree planting project is available at www.forestadaptation.org/adapt/tug-hill. Trees are doing well!



Aurora Sustainable Lands

Jack Santamour from LandVest, which manages Aurora's lands, reported that Aurora's Forest management plan is completed. It still needs a final review and approval from NYSDEC, but he is hopeful that it will be completed and official by early 2026. Aurora/LandVest worked with the NYSDEC to replace a large culvert that was collapsing on Camp 4 Road. Aurora purchased the culvert and the NYSDEC installed it. Aurora replaced two culverts that were collapsing on Camp 2 Road. NYSDEC and Aurora also worked together to remove several beaver dams/plugged culverts on the Camp 2/Tin Shanty Road. At the request of Aurora, the NYSDEC replaced the gate on the south end of the North South Road. Aurora issued two temporary right-of-way agreements to facilitate harvesting on adjoining properties. Aurora also issued a temporary use agreement to allow a bicycle event to use North South Road. LandVest dealt with several known invasives infestations including glossy buckthorn and Japanese honeysuckle.

Aurora is planning an approximately 200-acre harvest for 2025-2026 to stay in compliance with 480-a certificate of approval. They will continue road maintenance as needed and they will install more cement blocks at gates to prevent ATV trespass.

Concerns and Questions from Clubs

Would DEC install a kiosk on Camp 2 Road as done on other roads? Response – NYSDEC is working to locate a parking area on Camp 2 Road and plans to install a kiosk in that area once complete.

One attendee asked if there were any plans to open Heron Brook Road. Response - NYSDEC advised that it is secondary road where a culvert was washed out and that there are currently no plans to complete repairs. The road will remain closed to vehicles but open to non-motorized uses.

One attendee commented that the G&W Road is the "best it's been in 50 years."

Tug Hill Commission

The commission will send these notes out to everyone on the EBFC Working Group email list.

Contacts

LandVest (manager for Aurora Sustainable Lands): Jack Santamour, 315-376-2832, jsantamour@landvest.com

NYSDEC: Dora Faber, dora.faber@dec.ny.gov, 315-376-3521, Michael Giocondo, michael.giocondo@dec.ny.gov, Forest Ranger Maxwell (jacob.maxwell@dec.ny.gov)

The Nature Conservancy: Brian Roat, broat@tnc.org, Seth Jones, seth.jones@TNC.org or (518) 576-7244

Tug Hill Commission: Katie Malinowski, katie@tughill.org, Jennifer Harvill, jennifer@tughill.org, 315-785-2380

Shared Goals of the East Branch of Fish Creek Working Group – April 1997

1. To maintain a high-quality, sustainable environment for the health, safety and enjoyment of our children, our children's children, and successive generations.
2. To provide for the protection of the core forest's long-term timber productivity, water quality, and overall natural resource and habitat health, as well as traditional hunting, trapping, fishing, and recreational uses.
3. To provide for resource protection in a way that avoids a shift in the property tax burden to local taxpayers, prevents a negative impact on local job availability, and sustains the economic viability of area communities.
4. To help spread the costs of protection over the many beneficiaries at the local, regional, and state level.
5. To maintain mixed ownership of most of the eastern core forest and find ways to provide for recreational access in a way that does not threaten natural resource quality or adversely affect private property rights.
6. To encourage continued private land stewardship through voluntary compliance with environmental standards and methods, such as timber harvest guidelines.