

2025

Black River Initiative

Annual Newsletter



Whetstone Gulf State Park
Photo by the NYS Tug Hill Commission

2025 Year in Review

Black River Initiative

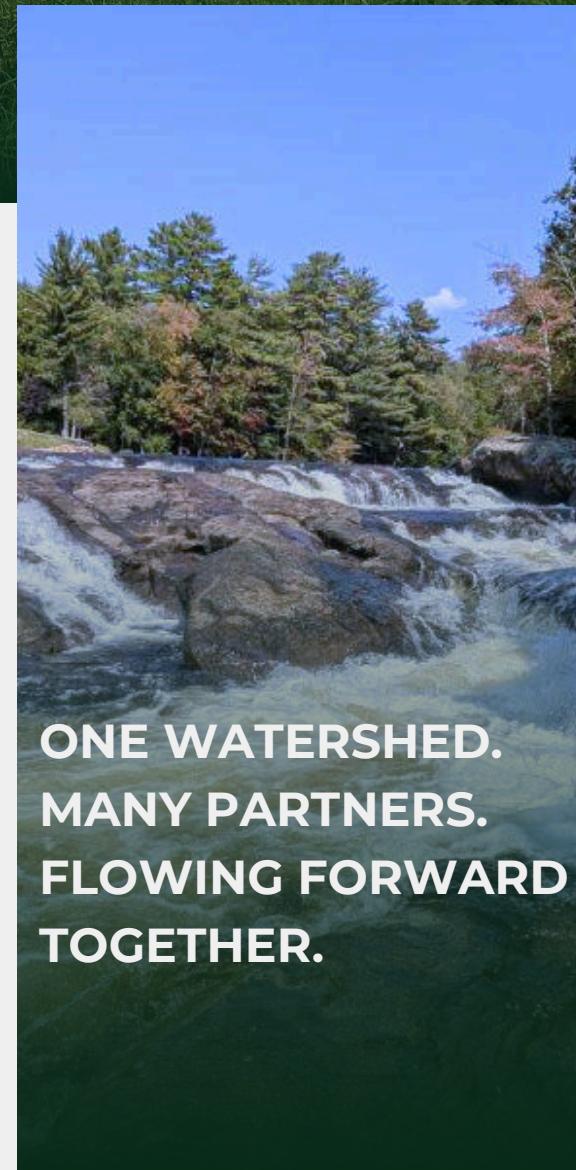
The Black River Initiative is a multi-pronged approach to protect and improve the water quality, recreational opportunities and communities along the Black River. The Black River Watershed Management Plan (2010), the Black River 9 Element Plan (2016), Black River Blueway Trail Plan (2007), and Black River Trail Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan (2012) 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 within the Black River Initiative, showcases connections with stakeholders, and promotes collaborative, ecosystem-based management to advance shared goals.

A map of the Black River Watershed is on the next page of this newsletter.

For more information, visit:

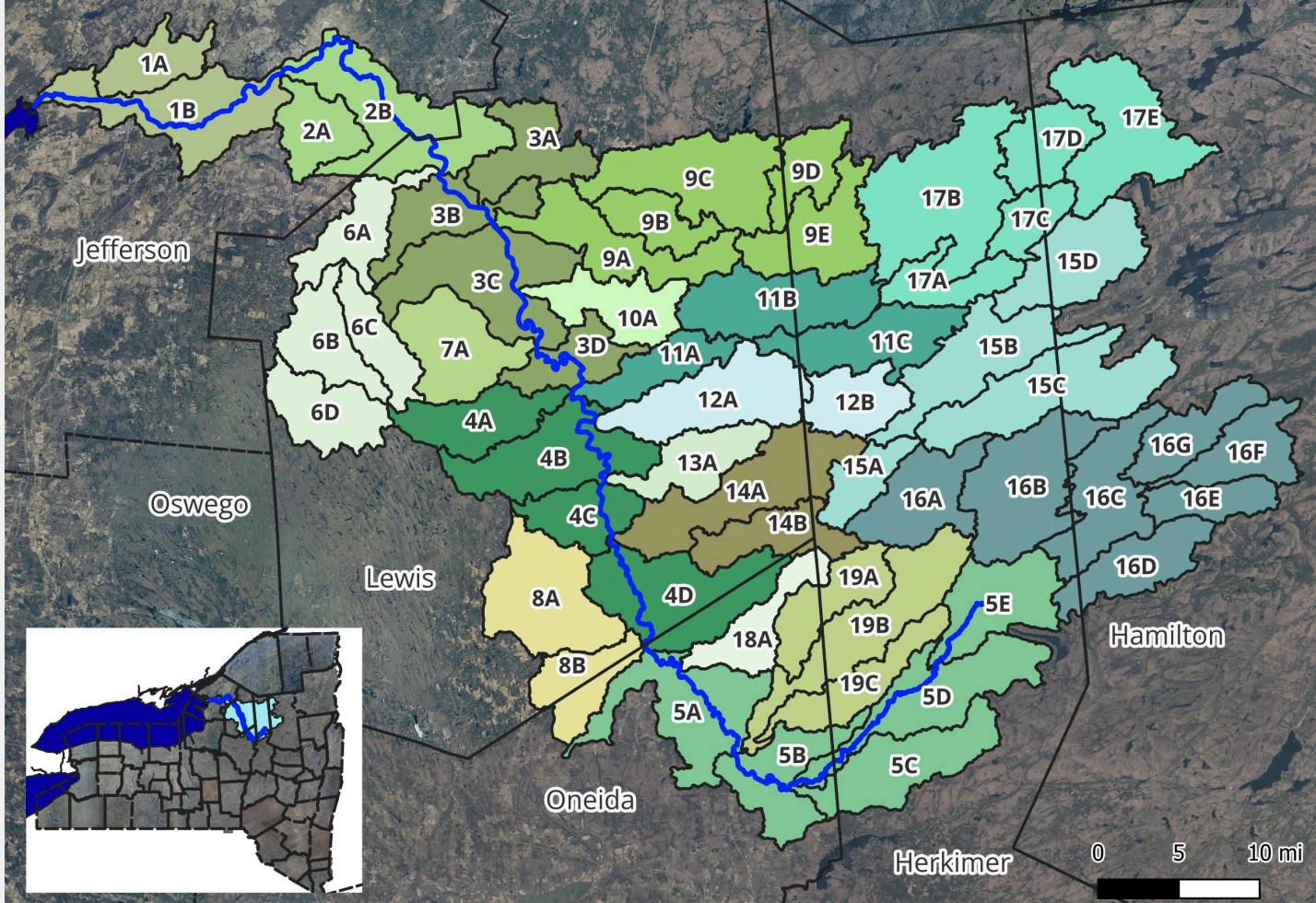
<https://tughill.org/projects/black-river-projects/>



**ONE WATERSHED.
MANY PARTNERS.
FLOWING FORWARD
TOGETHER.**

Black River Watershed

St Lawrence



Map Key

Black River

Subwatersheds

- Lower Black River
 - 1A Philomel Creek
 - 1B Kelsey Creek-Black River
- Lower Middle Black River
 - 2A White Creek
 - 2B Pleasant Lake-Black River
- Middle Black River
 - 3A Swiss Creek
 - 3B Stony Creek-Black River
 - 3C Capidon Creek-Black River
 - 3D Harvey Creek-Black River
- Upper Middle Black River
 - 4A Roaring Brook-Black River
 - 4B Whetstone Creek-Black River
 - 4C Mill Creek-Black River
 - 4D Fall Brook-Black River
- Upper Black River
 - 5A East Kent Creek-Black River
 - 5B Pine Creek-Black River
 - 5C Little Black Creek-Black River
 - 5D Twin Lakes Stream-Black River
 - 5E North Branch Black River-Black River
- Deer River
 - 6A Lower Deer River
 - 6B Middle Deer River
 - 6C Mud Creek
 - 6D Upper Deer River

7A Mill Creek

Sugar River

8A Sugar River

8B Moose Creek-Sugar River

Beaver River

9A Black Creek-Beaver River

9B Murmur Creek

9C Balsam Creek-Beaver River

9D Alder Creek

9E Beaver Lake-Beaver River

10A Crystal Creek

Independence River

11A Lower Independence River

11B Middle Independence River

11C Upper Independence River

Otter Creek

12A Otter Creek

12B Big Otter Lake-Otter Creek

13A Fish Creek

Moose River

14A Pine Creek-Moose River

14B Twin Sister Creek-Moose River

Middle Branch Moose River

15A Okara Lakes-Middle Branch Moose River

15B Lake Rondaxe-North Branch Moose River

15C Fulton Chain Lakes-Middle Branch Moose River

15D Constable Creek-North Branch Moose River

South Branch Moose River

16A Nicks Creek-South Branch Moose River

16B Limekiln Creek-South Branch Moose River

16C Red River-South Branch Moose River

16D Indian River

16E Otter Brook

16F Bradley Brook-South Branch Moose River

16G Sumner Stream

Stillwater Reservoir

17A Twitchell Creek

17B Beaver River-Stillwater Reservoir

17C Terror Lake

17D Alder Creek-Beaver River

17E Shingle Shanty Brook-Beaver River

18A Cummings Creek

Woodhull Creek

19A Bear Creek

19B Stonybrook Creek-Woodhull Creek

19C Little Woodhull Creek



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2025 Collaborative Efforts for a Healthier Black River Watershed

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Black River Watershed Coalition Update

The Black River Watershed Coalition (BRWC) was formed in 2024 as a collaborative effort among five County Soil and Water Conservation Districts, including Herkimer, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lewis, and Oneida counties. This more formalized relationship among the five will strengthen watershed efforts to protect natural resources. The BRWC's executive board consists 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 its bylaws, compiled collective project ideas, and is formulating a needs assessment for the watershed. All five counties attended the Vermont Rivers and Roads training, demonstrating methods to make roadways more flood resilient while protecting and enhancing natural resources. The group applied for a grant to replicate the program in New York and awaits grant ranking.

The group previously worked with the Upstate Freshwater Institute (UFI) laboratory on a water quality data gap analysis, including tests for total suspended solids, total nitrogen, total phosphorus, total dissolved phosphorus, temperature, pH, specific conductivity, turbidity, and dissolved oxygen. The list of projects will be prioritized based on the greatest need for watershed protection.

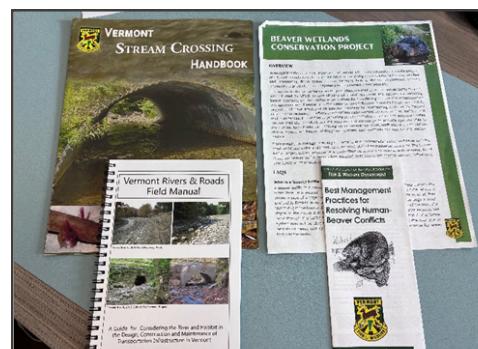
Most recently, the BRWC met with Sunita Halasz, a clean water community advocate from the Adirondack Council, to prioritize needs and identify strategies to protect water quality and natural resources in the watershed. The BRWC looks forward to working more closely to solve natural resources issues and improve environmental quality for everyone in the watershed.



Herkimer and Hamilton County technicians collecting fish species that were sampled using electrofishing equipment.



Oneida County's Payton Reese examining fish that were retrieved from the stream.



Vermont Rivers and Roads handouts



Stream tables simulating undersized culverts and practices that protect our roads.



Planting With Purpose: Growing Forests for a Better Future



Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District

In 2019, New York (NY) passed the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (commonly referred to as the Climate Act). Among other ambitious goals, the Climate Act calls for NY to be carbon neutral by 2050. This means the state should be sequestering as much carbon dioxide (CO₂) as is released across all economic sectors.

In support of these efforts, NY has announced the [25 Million Trees by 2033](#) initiative. Beyond creating valuable wildlife habitat, trees help slow and absorb stormwater, improve air quality, and store carbon in their leaves, roots, and trunks. This carbon remains stored until the tree decomposes or burns. This means sequestered carbon continues to be stored, even after timber is harvested and refined into lumber, fence posts, or furniture.



Jefferson County SWCD staff in front of their planted trees.



Tree planting process.

In 2024, The Nature Conservancy partnered with the Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to pilot some of their new reforestation demonstration projects, including Tapping Your Land's Potential and Planting With Purpose. These programs aim to establish new forest communities on vacant lots and retired farmland while sequestering carbon and improving local ecosystems.

Landowners willing to plant over two acres are eligible for the Tapping into Your Land's Potential program, which includes free tree planting and five to seven years of maintenance and monitoring services in exchange for agreeing not to cut or disturb the seedlings for ten years.

Plantings between 0.2 and 2 acres are eligible for Planting With Purpose. In this program, landowners plant their own trees, working with SWCD staff to develop a customized planting plan based on soil type. A maximum deposit of \$250 is required from the landowner before Jefferson County SWCD can order the trees, tree tubes, and stakes, but funds are returned to the landowner once planting is completed. Trees will be delivered to the SWCD office for pickup during its annual tree sale in April.

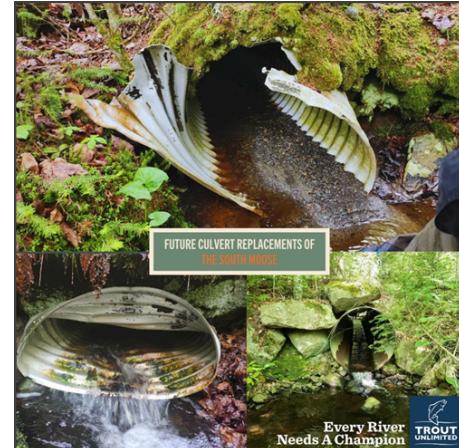
Through these two programs, 30 acres of trees were planted in Jefferson County in 2025. At a rate of 500 trees per acre, that is 15,000 new trees providing Jefferson County residents with cleaner air and water, while expanding new-growth forest habitat for songbirds and other wildlife.

South Moose Watershed Reconnection Report

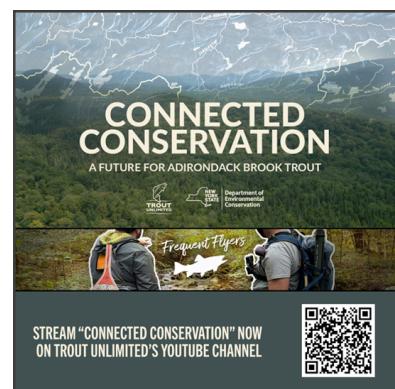
Trout Unlimited



Trout Unlimited's (TU) Northeast Habitat Team is proud to report on some exciting progress for cold water and wild trout conservation in the Tug Hill and adjacent Adirondack Park regions. In 2024, TU and its partners replaced two failing culverts, reconnecting a total of 7.5 miles of trout habitat in the Beaver River. Since that time, the TU team has been working diligently with partners at NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to strategize and advance remediation of a complex web of barriers within the South Moose watershed. Funding for this project was provided by New York State's Environmental Protection Fund as administered by NYS DEC Great Lakes Program.



After two years of data collection and prioritization, a 2024 plan of “30 Culverts by 2030” has now expanded to a total of 59 structures to be removed or replaced by 2030. TU has created a seven-phase plan with phase one set for Spring 2026 that will include initial project implementation as well as design and permitting for removal and replacement. TU's Jo-Anne Humphreys states that “replacements of these structures require consideration of trout passage, capacity, channel dimensions, and improving alignment to the natural course of the stream.”



To illustrate the story of the future goals and challenges ahead of TU and DEC in the South Moose, the team partnered with an independent film crew to create an inspiring short film called “Connected Conservation: A Future for Adirondack Brook Trout.” Keep an eye on [TU's YouTube page](#) for upcoming episodes in this series!

TU and DEC partnered with fellow wild trout enthusiasts at Trout Power, to collect important genetic data. After spending time in the winter to develop a monitoring plan, Trout Power's force of volunteer anglers and citizen scientists camped out in the South Moose with DEC and TU biologists to collect DNA samples in support of this effort. These unique findings will help inform our efforts to reconnect and improve habitat conditions for the future of these unique salmonids. To read more, check out Trout Power's 2025 Mid-Season Journal.

For those interested in learning more about Trout Unlimited's efforts for wild and native trout recovery as well as volunteer and citizen science opportunities across the Northeast, you can follow “TU_Northeast” on Instagram and Facebook or send an email to northeastconservation@tu.org.



32 Years of Lake Monitoring: Protecting Hamilton County's Water Resources



Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District



District technician Katie Whitkovits uses a Kemmerer Water Sampler to collect lake water for analysis.

This year marked the 32nd 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 District in 1993 to conduct a comprehensive lake monitoring program. Hamilton County's residents, economy, and ecosystem depend on clean water for drinking, recreation, and flourishing flora and fauna. Decades of consistent lake data collection are essential to the effective analysis of long-term trends and watershed resiliency. Taxpayer dollars are saved when a water quality problem is detected and remediated in its early stages.

The Lake Monitoring Program satisfies quality assurance requirements through staff's completion of a Quality Assurance Project Plan and Data Usability Analysis Report, which are reviewed and approved by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). District staff adhere to DEC-approved sampling methods, sample handling, and data management protocols, ensuring that our resulting data can be used with confidence for multiple purposes by lake associations, colleges and universities, and research institutes.



Lake monitoring equipment



District manager, Caitlin Stewart, conducting lake monitoring efforts.

This year, staff completed lake monitoring rotations May through October on 19 priority lakes. Study lakes within the Black River Watershed include Fourth, Fifth, Limekiln, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth lakes. This winter, a contracted ELAP-certified lab will complete water sample analysis for lab pH, lab conductivity, true color, colored dissolved organic matter, alkalinity, nitrate, total nitrogen, ammonia, chloride, total phosphorus, dissolved organic carbon, total calcium, total sodium, and chlorophyll a. A YSI ProDSS Multiparameter Meter was used to collect profile data for the following parameters: pH, temperature, depth, dissolved oxygen, conductivity, and total algae – phycocyanin.



For more information, visit hamcoswcd.org/programs/. This program is supported by the Finger Lakes – Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance (FLLOWPA) (www.fllowpa.org/). Funding for FLLOWPA is provided by NYS's Environmental Protection Fund as administered by NYS DEC.

Septic Replacement Program Gains Momentum

Lewis County



Lewis County's fight for cleaner water is paying off—big time!

Thanks to funding from NYS's Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC), Lewis County has been replacing outdated and failing septic systems near lakes, rivers, and streams. These systems—some of which once discharged directly into the water—pose serious risks to water quality. Now they're being upgraded, one property at a time.

Slow Start, Big Turnaround

When the county first received \$85,000 in 2021, the program was limited to just the Beaver River and its tributaries, a NYS-designated priority waterbody. Outreach was strong—radio ads, mailers, social media, and in-person info sessions—but only two applications came in over two years, totaling just over \$5,000 in reimbursements. In 2022, available funding grew to \$275,000. However, with the limitation to one priority waterbody, the county submitted a letter of request to NYS to expand the eligible priority waterbodies in Lewis County.

Scoring BIG in 2024

EFC expanded the list of eligible waterbodies from one to 19. The result was a surge in interest. Seventeen applications were submitted that year, totaling over \$102,000. In 2025, another ten applications have already been approved to date, with \$61,617.28 in funding obligated.

More Waterbodies, More Impact

The Lewis County Water Quality Coordinating Committee (WQCC) is pushing to expand the list of eligible waterbodies even further, including upstream connections to the Beaver River system. More coverage means more opportunities to protect local water quality.

22 Systems Replaced—and Counting

Since the program began, **22 failing septic systems have been replaced**, helping protect Lewis County's most impaired waterways. One more system funded in 2024 was completed this year, and **there is still about \$113,772 left—enough to fund around 11 more projects at the maximum reimbursement level.**

How to Apply

Homeowners with aging or substandard septic systems near priority waterbodies can get up to 50% of their costs reimbursed—up to \$10,000—for system design and installation.

Steps to Apply:

1. Check Eligibility: Use the interactive septic eligibility map to see if your property is near a priority waterbody.
2. Complete the Application: The application form is available on the [Lewis County Planning and Community Development website](#).
3. Submit the Application: Follow the instructions on the application form for submission.
4. Act Quickly: Funding is limited and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

Contact Information: Megan Krokowski, Community Development Specialist
Email: megankrokowski@lewiscounty.ny.gov
Phone: (315) 376-5423

GLAA Sub-Basin Work Group Meetings Support Black River Coordination

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

With approximately 50 attendees (both in-person and virtual) at two meetings, the Great Lakes Action Agenda (GLAA) Northeast Lake Ontario - St. Lawrence River (NE) sub-basin work group meetings in spring and fall of 2025 offered valuable opportunities for collaboration within the Black River Watershed.

The spring meeting, held in May 2025 at the Lewis County Cornell Cooperative Extension in Lowville, featured project partner highlights from the [Adirondack Climate Outreach and Resiliency Network](#) and the Black River Initiative.

Presentations included The Nature Conservancy's [road stream crossing stakeholder survey](#) and its regional approach to promote climate friendly stream crossings, as well as an update from NY Sea Grant on the [MyCoast app](#).

The fall meeting, held in October 2025 at the Sackets Harbor Union Hotel, featured a presentation from Talking Rivers on their [Listening to Nature toolkit](#) and a presentation and walking tour from NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation on the history, cultural use, and management of the Sackets Harbor Battlefield State Historic Site.

Both work group meetings included updates from DEC's Great Lakes Program on funding available through NYS and partnerships with the [NY Sea Grant Small Grants Program](#) and the [NYS Water Resources Institute Research and Outreach grant program](#). Updates also included an overview of a framework to support coordinated work planning and a review of the Sub-Basin Priority and Outcome Tracker, including the opportunity to beta test the tool.

Sub-basin work group members and other attendees, including local representatives from towns, villages and counties, discussed collaboration and funding opportunities to address flooding and stormwater management concerns, stabilize streambanks, coordinate invasive species management priorities, enhance recreation, and engage with youth and the public in climate action. We thank the local communities and organizations that agreed to host these well attended meetings.

If you are interested in getting involved in work groups, looking for more information, or have any questions, please reach out to Emily Fell (Emily.fell@dec.ny.gov), Eastern Great Lakes Watershed Coordinator with DEC's Great Lakes Program in partnership with the NYS Water Resources Institute.



Attendees learn about the SPOT tool at the NEWG meeting in Sackets Harbor. NYSDEC

Exploring Knotweed Treatment Methods and Returning to Glyphosate



Herkimer County Soil and Water Conservation District

The Herkimer County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has been treating invasive Japanese knotweed since 2017.

Japanese knotweed was originally brought to the US as an ornamental and has quickly become one of the most persistent invasive species in New York's landscape. Due to its extensive underground rhizome system, it is extremely hard to dig up completely, making it next to impossible to get rid of.

When the program first started, glyphosate (a broad-spectrum herbicide) was injected into knotweed stems. However, due to the health risks of glyphosate, the SWCD decided to explore alternative chemicals for treatment methods. In 2023, they switched to Green Gobbler, 20% horticultural vinegar, and Avenger organic weed killer.

Throughout the season, treated sites were closely monitored to evaluate plant response and long-term control. Through trial and error, it was found that the Green Gobbler caused short-term leaf burn; however, the knotweed would

quickly regenerate. There were similar results from Avenger as well, which caused temporary damage to the foliage, but ultimately did not reduce the plant's population at treated sites. By the next treatment season, Herkimer County SWCD was seeing 100% regrowth in treated areas, with some sites even having heavier growth than the previous season. **Because the organic treatments were ineffective, the SWCD will be returning to controlled glyphosate applications. This remains the most reliable method for managing knotweed and preventing its rapid regrowth.**



Pesticide technician, Gabrielle Sirkо treating Japanese knotweed



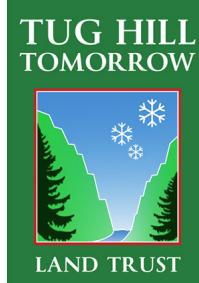
Pesticide technician, Gerry Smithson treating Japanese knotweed

Read more about their Japanese knotweed project here:



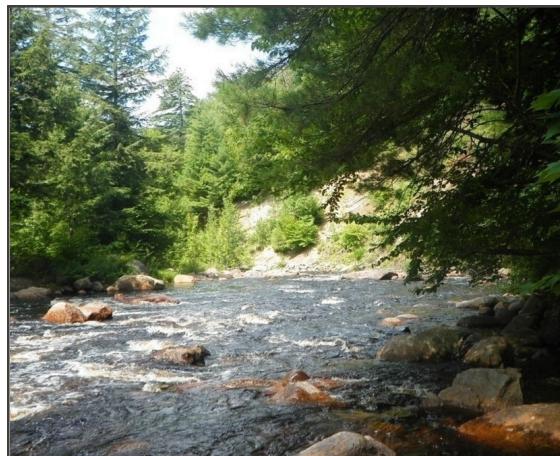
Land Trust Protects and Stewards Multiple Watershed Properties

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust



For more than 25 years, the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust (THTLT) has been working to protect an extraordinary rural landscape in upstate NY—protecting Tug Hill into the future. They work closely with landowners, farm families, partner organizations, towns, and villages to protect the lands they cherish the most.

A conservation easement is an individually negotiated, legally binding agreement made between the landowner and Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust that extinguishes the development rights on the property. This is done to protect the natural, agricultural, scenic, or historic values inherent to the farms, forests, and wildlands of Tug Hill. The following highlights provide updates on three conservation areas.



David E. Ramsey Independence River Public Conservation Area

David E. Ramsey Independence River Public Conservation Area, Lewis County, Town of Greig

This newly acquired 103-acre forest now hosts an entrance sign for visitors, and trails have been freshly marked for clear navigation. In October, THTLT and Ramsey family members gathered for a bench dedication and outing as well. The entrance will not be plowed this winter, though visitors who wish to park on the road are welcome to hike or snowshoe on the trails.



Scan to learn more about this area.

David S. Smith Public Conservation Area, Jefferson County, Town of LeRay

This 410-acre property is now easier to find thanks to a newly installed roadside sign. Visitors can scan the QR code to access [the trail map](#) of the one-mile loop trail that begins on a mowed path that winds through grasslands and into shaded woodlands, offering a peaceful place for walking, wildlife watching, or simply soaking in nature. This summer, the trail was used for both recreation and outdoor education.



Scan to learn more about this area.



David S. Smith Public Conservation Area

(Cont. on next page)

Land Trust Protects and Stewards Multiple Watershed Properties

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust



David S. Smith Public Conservation Area, Jefferson County, Town of LeRay (cont.)

The acreage contains a combination of hay and crop fields, old agricultural fields returning to grassland and shrubs, a small area of forested wetland, and forests that serve as summer roost habitat for endangered bat species. The land serves a partial headwater for Philomel Creek, which ultimately contributes to the Black River near Glen Park.

This fall, THTLT began removal of approximately 17 acres of invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle between grassland and forest habitats. The cuttings will be treated in the spring, and native growth will be encouraged as 2026 progresses. Plans are in the works to establish a parking area that will make it easier for school children, families, and the Fort Drum community to experience this land, creating space for discovery, connection, and the healing power of nature close to home.

Keller Mohawk Hill Public Conservation Area, Lewis County,

Town of West Turin

The Keller Mohawk Hill Public Conservation Area is an agricultural field restored by Ducks Unlimited to native grassland, wetland, and forest habitats, and transferred to land trust ownership a few years ago for permanent protection. THTLT has featured this property on its Facebook and Instagram pages throughout 2025, with weekly field trip reports featuring a wide range of observed plants, insects, amphibians, birds, and mammals.

Exciting plans are taking shape to construct a new two-level wildlife viewing platform at this site on Croniezer Road, south of Constableville. The platform is in the early design stages, with one level designed to be wheelchair accessible, ensuring everyone can enjoy the remarkable views of grasslands, wetlands, and the birds that call them home. Construction is anticipated to begin in 2026 with fundraising efforts underway.



Keller Mohawk Hill Public Conservation Area



Scan to learn more about this area.



If you are interested in learning more about conserving your land, check out THTLT's free eBook called **12 Steps to Conserving Your Land**.

Watertown Cares for Trees



Tree Watertown

Tree Watertown engages volunteers in Watertown in annual education initiatives and volunteer planting events. In 2025, Watertown celebrated 25 years as a Tree City, USA at the Arbor Day Ceremony held at Thompson Park on April 25, 2025, where Phil Sprague was honored for his volunteer efforts with the Watertown community.

Two volunteer tree-planting events were held this spring and fall, planting nearly 120 trees and engaging over 80 volunteers at Thompson Park and the Watertown Fairgrounds.

Outreach activities to engage volunteers and promote the benefits of trees included Earth Day at the Zoo, where they handed out potted seedlings (black cherry, white spruce, black walnut) for residents to plant. Tree Watertown also held outreach at Juneteenth, The Race to End Poverty, Boo at the Zoo (where candy was handed out and volunteers talked about scary forest pests, like spotted lanternfly). An outreach meeting was also held at Meadowbrook Apartments to engage residents in decision-making about tree planting in their community.

Tree Watertown estimates hundreds of interactions across these various events and have found that residents care about the trees in our community and want to help steward them. They also supported the city of Watertown's \$550,000 DEC Urban and Community Forestry Grant award, which will plant trees in disadvantaged

communities and engage community members in decision-making throughout the city.

Meetings are held every second Thursday of the month at City Hall in Watertown to discuss plans for outreach and tree planting. If you are interested in getting involved, please reach out to Tree Watertown's secretary at easheridan84@gmail.com. To learn about the city's Urban Forestry Program, scan the QR code below or email city forester, Daniel VanKouwenberg at dvankouwenberg@watertown-ny.gov.



Volunteers gathered at Watertown Fairgrounds were welcomed by the city of Watertown's forester, Dan VanKouwenberg.

Become a Water Protector: Join AISLE in 2026!

**The 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) wrapped up the second successful year of their Aquatic Invasive Species Learning Experience (AISLE). They are not just celebrating what has been accomplished—they are looking ahead and inviting YOU to be part of the next wave of Water Protectors! **The AISLE is more than a learning program—it is a call to action. It empowers everyday people to protect our freshwater ecosystems by learning how to identify aquatic invasive species (AIS) and champion native aquatic plants that support biodiversity and clean water.**



Why Volunteer with AISLE?

- Make a Real Impact: Over 100 participants have already joined AISLE, contributing to the health of our waterways through hands-on workshops, field activities, and digital resources.
- Adopt a Waterbody: Through their Water Protectors initiative, volunteers “adopt” a local pond, stream, or lake—monitoring its health and reporting valuable data that supports regional conservation. Efforts are showcased on an interactive Water Protector dashboard!
- Build Community: Join a growing network of community members who care deeply about protecting our waters.
- Gain Knowledge & Skills: Learn to recognize invasive species like hydrilla, fanwort, and water chestnut, and discover how to preserve native aquatic plants.

Help Us Grow in Year 3

SLELO PRISM is gearing up for AISLE 2026—and they need passionate volunteers like you! Whether you are an experienced environmentalist or just curious about your local waterways, AISLE offers a welcoming space to learn, connect, and take action. By becoming a Water Protector, you will not only help detect and prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species—you will become a steward of your favorite waterbodies.

Sign Up Today

Ready to dive in? Sign up now to receive an invitation to join AISLE in 2026 and be part of a movement that is making waves across our region. Learn more about the AISLE program and sign up to receive announcements for next year's training on their [website](#). Together, we can protect our aquatic ecosystems for generations to come. Let's make next year their best program series yet!

Monitoring Stream Levels for Emergency Management

Lewis County Soil and Water Conservation District

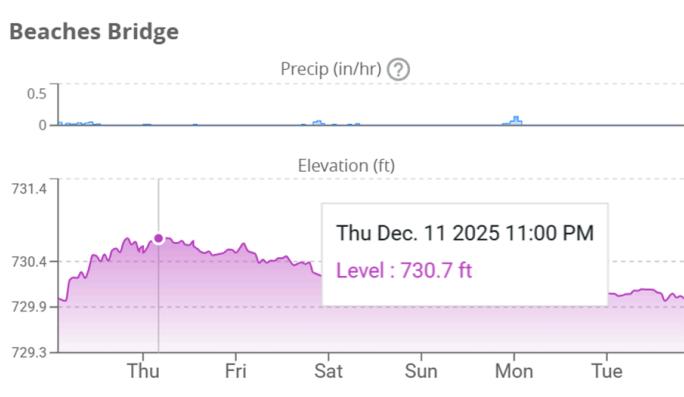
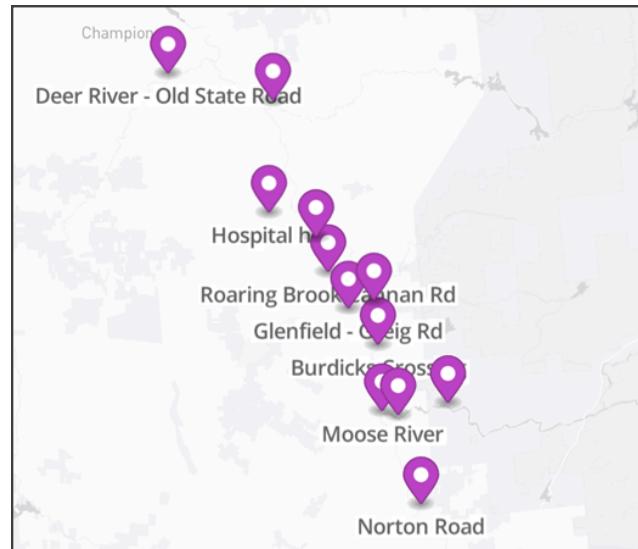


New technologies are helping Lewis County keep a better eye on its floodwaters in the Black River Watershed. The Lewis County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is working with Hyfi, a company headquartered in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to monitor their waterways for flood response, stormwater management, and safe recreation.

The Hyfi group wrote a grant through the Great Lakes Protection Fund to pilot community monitoring of their water infrastructure. After discussions with the Lewis County emergency management committee, Lewis County SWCD requested to be considered for a pilot monitoring project with

Hyfi and was chosen as a recipient of a no-cost pilot project to explore how water level sensors and artificial intelligence could transform stormwater and sewer management. **Currently, 12 sensors are out on rivers and streams in the Black River Watershed, with six to eight more to be added soon.**

So, what exactly are they monitoring with these gauges, and where are they located? Water levels are recorded at mean sea level every ten minutes and pushed to the website every hour. Water level rise can be monitored at each site and compared with historical flood data. Water level peaks can also be measured in the rate of rise between level gauges to predict how quickly a peak flood is travelling downstream. Also noted on each station's graph is the precipitation at that location in inches per hour (sourced from the National Weather Service's Multi-Radar Multi-Sensor (MRMS) system).



Example of water levels at Beaches Bridge on December 11, 2025.

To view local water levels, follow this link or scan the QR code below:

www.lewiscountysoilandwater.com/river-stream-levels

Click Lewis County Black River Watershed River Levels.

More exact flood warning alerts for each location will be added at a later date.



Scan to see water level data

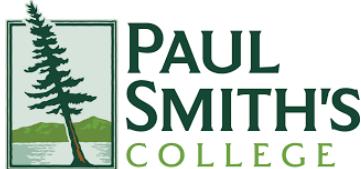
Planting the Seeds of Rural Climate Resilience in the North Country

Adirondack Climate Outreach and Resilience Network

The Adirondack Climate Outreach and Resilience Network (ACORN) was created to support rural North Country communities facing accelerating climate impacts with limited resources and capacity. ACORN strengthens climate resilience by centering people, building relationships, and growing solutions from the ground up.

ACORN is a partnership of Paul Smith's College, The Wild Center, and the Adirondack Research Consortium. The initial community outreach through the 14-county region of Northern NY was funded by grants from NYSERDA and the Adirondack Community Foundation.

ACORN emerged for two primary reasons. First, many rural organizations in the North Country found it difficult to compete for state and federal funding. Second, there was a need to build a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities posed by climate change for rural communities spread across a region that encompasses nearly 40 percent of New York State and includes the remote Adirondack Park.



ACORN listening session in Lewis County on January 30, 2025.

ACORN focuses on helping rural communities build the skills, knowledge, and connections they need for resilience. This includes community-led conversations, identifying shared goals and values, and finding practical solutions that make sense for the unique region. At the heart of this work is social cohesion - strong relationships among neighbors - which research shows helps communities better withstand disasters and recover faster. In the North Country, looking out for one another is already a way of life, and ACORN builds on that strength.

Over a six-month period, ACORN convened 12 community listening sessions, largely organized by watershed to reflect the region's shared connection to water as a source of identity, livelihood, and culture. In total, 320 individuals from 65 towns and villages participated, along with 99 local, regional, and state leaders through focus groups, supplemented by an online survey. Participants included students, elders, town highway staff, hospital administrators, school leaders, elected officials, and community volunteers.

(Cont. on next page)

Planting the Seeds of Rural Climate Resilience in the North Country (cont.)

Adirondack Climate Outreach and Resilience Network

The insights gathered through this outreach were compiled into the North Country Rural Resilience Roadmap. Region-wide findings included widespread concern about:

- flooding and failing culverts,
- loss of seasonal predictability,
- severe affordable housing shortages,
- lack of emergency responders, and
- a persistent feeling that rural voices are missing from decision-making.

Locally specific concerns included:

- invasive species,
- wetland loss in communities outside the Adirondack Park,
- renewable energy siting, and
- gaps in health and human services such as transportation, mental health care, and food access.

ACORN continues to hold regional forums based on the Roadmap findings, including a regional Climate-Ready Workforce Roundtable in October 2025, where state agencies, industry, higher ed, non-governmental organizations, students, and others came together to discuss regionally specific economic development.

In December, they held a Community-Higher Ed Connections Collaborative Workshop on Rural Climate Resilience, and coming up in 2026, ACORN will work with communities on flood resilience planning at the local level.

For more information visit:
www.adkwatershed.org/acorn





Beyond the Classroom: The 2025 Oneida County Envirothon

Oneida County Soil and Water Conservation District

This past spring, the Oneida County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) held the 27th 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.

The Oneida County Envirothon idea is simple: combine the proven concepts of hands-on education with the excitement of a good competition and the fun of spending a day in the outdoors. The result is an effective educational tool that will help our state's schools to nurture environmentally aware students. The Envirothon is a series of hands-on contests in which teams of high school students compete to solve environmental issues. The event works much like an athletic competition, and the winners of the event get the chance to compete at the New York State Envirothon.



Students work together during the Envirothon.



Students connect with local colleges and environmental organizations.

This year was successful with 195 students signed up from 11 different school districts. 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 by assisting in the creation of the tests and providing presentation feedback.

It was a truly great learning opportunity for the participating students. Another valuable component this year was the “passport game,” which allowed students to interact with environmental departments and admissions staff from local colleges and universities, as well as environmental-based organizations. Every team in attendance participated fully and made the most of this by asking great questions and learning about education and jobs available to them.



Students learn about invasive species with Megan Pistolese from SLELO PRISM.



To learn more about the Oneida County SWCD Envirothon, go to www.oneida-swcd.org/envirothon or scan the QR code.

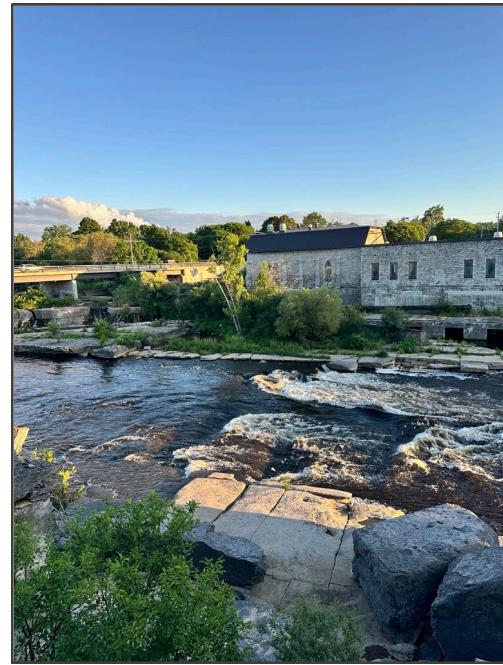
Major State Investment Secured for Water Infrastructure Improvements

City of Watertown

The city of Watertown has been awarded \$36.7 million in NYS funding to support three major water infrastructure projects that will strengthen drinking water quality, improve system reliability, and reduce stress on aging sewer infrastructure. These awards were announced by Governor Kathy Hochul as part of a broader [\\$453 million investment statewide](#) to help communities modernize critical water systems.

Watertown's funding includes:

- \$24.3 million for the Watertown Water Treatment Plant Improvement Project, which will modernize treatment processes and enhance the facility's ability to reliably deliver safe, high-quality drinking water to residents.
- \$7.4 million for inflow and infiltration reduction in the Western Outfall Trunk Sewer, a project aimed at reducing excess groundwater and stormwater entering the sewer system, improving system efficiency, and lowering the risk of overflows.
- \$5 million for the construction of a new drinking water storage tank and transmission main, storage capacity, and overall system resilience.



View of the city of Watertown's water treatment plant from Marble Street Park Foot Bridge

These grants were secured through the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation's (EFC) [Community Assistance Teams \(CAT\) program](#), an initiative launched in 2023 to help municipalities navigate the complex planning, engineering, and funding processes associated with water infrastructure projects. The program is designed to support small, rural, and disadvantaged communities that often lack the staff capacity and technical resources needed to advance large-scale infrastructure improvements.

In this round of funding, nine municipalities across the state that worked directly with CATs successfully secured grants, demonstrating the program's impact in helping local governments move critical projects forward. By providing hands-on technical and administrative support, CAT helps ensure communities can compete for and access state and federal funding opportunities.

Investments like these not only protect public health and the environment, but also support regional economic stability and long-term watershed health within the Black River Watershed. Watertown's projects represent a significant step toward modern, resilient infrastructure that will benefit residents for decades to come.

NY Sea Grant wants to bring the AdaptTable to you!

NY Sea Grant



Building strong communities requires thinking through complex systems and understanding the ways in which weather events – like intense rains or windstorms – act as threat multipliers to everyday land use planning decisions. It is often difficult to incorporate this sort of thinking into routine land use decisions at the local level, particularly how localized decisions may have farther-reaching watershed impacts.

NY Sea Grant created the AdaptTable as an opportunity to help local stakeholders and decision-makers think through these complex interactions and build capacity to consider unintended consequences and weather hazards when making land use planning or siting decisions. The tool can be used in various training and planning process contexts to build conversational and complex decision-making capacity.



AdaptTable being used in a planning exercise.

This year, the exercise was brought to the Lewis County Water Quality Coordination Committee to try out, which led to many ideas for using it in planning exercises, watershed meetings, and local government meetings. One of the participants, Jillian Lee of the Tug Hill Commission, had this to say: "This is a great tool that allows communities and organizations to talk and strategize together about future planning. It offers a collaborative discussion and excellent visuals to help communities think through challenges they may face. I'm excited to see others use this more in the future."

Learn more about NY Sea Grant at www.nyseagrant.org/ and email SGAdapt@cornell.edu to bring AdaptTable to your community!



15th Annual Black River Watershed Conference a Success

Black River Watershed Steering Committee



The 15th Annual Black River Watershed Conference was held on Monday, June 2, and Tuesday, June 3, 2025 at the Hilton Garden Inn, Watertown. The conference began on Monday evening with a reception and a keynote speaker, Nicole Rice. She spoke about the impacts of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory, including its efforts to connect and communicate with communities, and the importance of data in informing decision-making.

Day two started with the soil and water conservation districts providing updates about their programs. Lewis County spoke about cover crops, Hamilton County discussed aquatic invasive species surveys, Herkimer County provided an update on their hydroseeding program, Oneida County shared insight into their urban and municipal forestry program, and Jefferson County concluded with their agricultural environmental management cost-share program.

Jo-Anne Humphreys from Trout Unlimited provided a detailed examination of culverts and culvert replacements. Dr. Kevin Rose from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute educated everyone about lake browning in the Adirondacks. Andrew Brainard spoke about Black River water quality sampling results. Sunita Halasz from the Adirondack Climate Outreach and Resilience Network moderated the breakout session, which provided a space for interdisciplinary collaboration and discussion. Attendees worked together to identify the most significant challenges facing the Black River Watershed and potential solutions to mitigate them. Thom Allgaier from the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets spoke about invasive species, specifically the spotted lanternfly, box tree moth, and regulated plants. The day concluded with Jillian Lee from the Tug Hill Commission presenting on how winters are changing in the Tug Hill region with warming air temperatures and more unpredictable winters.

The conference was a huge success, and the Black River Watershed Steering Committee would like to extend its gratitude to everyone who presented and attended. An additional thank you to the conference



Monday's evening reception with guest speaker, Nicole Rice.



Conference attendees listen to Jo-Anne Humphreys from Trout Unlimited.

sponsors: AES, River Area Council of Governments, GYMO Architecture, Engineering, & Land Surveying, DPC, and BCA Architects & Engineers, and the exhibitors: Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, St. Lawrence Eastern Lake Ontario Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management, and DEC's Great Lakes Watershed Program. **All presentations are available on the commission's [website](#).**

Looking Ahead to 2026

Keep an eye out for the Save the Date for the 16th Annual Black River Watershed Conference in June 2026!

The Black River Initiative will continue to focus efforts on making the Black River Watershed the healthiest it can be!

If you have any questions about this newsletter or the Black River Initiative, or would like to get involved, please contact:

Jillian Lee

NYS Tug Hill Commission

Project Specialist

Jillian@tughill.org



Emily Fell

NYS DEC/Cornell Water Resources Institute

Eastern Great Lakes Watershed Coordinator, Great Lakes Program

emily.fell@dec.ny.gov



**Department of
Environmental
Conservation**

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

