



January 16, 2026

NYS TUG HILL COMMISSION | DULLES STATE OFFICE BUILDING | 317 WASHINGTON STREET | WATERTOWN NY 13601 (315) 785-2380 | www.tughill.org

Flowing Forward Together: The 2025 Black River Initiative Newsletter

The 2025 Black River Initiative Annual Newsletter showcases a year of meaningful progress driven by collaboration, innovation, and shared stewardship across the Black River Watershed. Spanning five counties and uniting local, state, nonprofit, and community partners, the Black River Initiative continues its multi-pronged approach to improving water quality, strengthening communities, and expanding recreational and ecological opportunities throughout the watershed.

The newsletter features articles about collaborative watershed planning, on-the-ground conservation projects, water quality monitoring, climate resilience efforts, community education and engagement, and major investments in water infrastructure—all working together to protect and enhance the health of the Black River and the communities that depend on it. Highlights are included from the five soil and water conservation districts within the Black River Watershed Coalition, Trout Unlimited, Lewis County, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, Tree Watertown, the St. Lawrence-Eastern Lake Ontario Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management, the Adirondack Climate Outreach and Resilience Network, City of Watertown, and NY Sea Grant.

The newsletter can be read [on our website](#), or scan the QR code to directly access it. If you have any questions, please reach out to Jillian at jillian@tughill.org.



ATV Workshop Well Attended

On January 8, at the Boonville Municipal Building, Tug Hill Commission staff and the Northern Oneida County Council of Governments (NOCCOG) delivered a presentation on the commission's newly updated issue paper concerning all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). The workshop walked through the paper's methodology and contents,

presented a living map and dataset developed to help identify ATV trails and roadway connectors in the Tug Hill region, elaborated on the last 20 years of legal changes and court cases, and highlighted key takeaways and best practices for municipalities.



The workshop was well attended, with approximately 30 people in the audience from various municipalities. Attendees were each given a copy of the *ATV Recreation: Considerations for Municipalities* [paper](#). Audience engagement was lively with an active question-and-answer section, and several discussions were held informally amongst attendees and staff following the closing of the workshop.

If you require technical assistance or have questions about the issue paper, your community's local law history, or trails or highway segments in your area, please contact Taylor McKinney at taylor@tughill.org or (315) 785-2606.

In This Issue

- 2025 Black River Initiative Newsletter
- ATV Workshop Well Attended
- Bulk Energy Storage Projects Webinar January 21
- Newly Elected Official Training January 28
- Forest Tax Law Changes Effective March 1
- Winter Wildlife Webinar January 29 Emerald Ash Borer
- Attending the Local Government Conference? Mail Early!
- Commission Board Meeting January 21
- New York Power Authority Releases Renewables Updated Strategic Plan
- Non-Profit Bootcamp Session #4-Effective Board Meeting Management February 5
- National Zoning Atlas: A Tool to Demystify Zoning
- Upcoming Workshops from Cornell Cooperative Extension

Bulk Energy Storage Projects Webinar January 21

The NYS Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) is hosting a webinar on Wednesday, January 21 from 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. for local governments that may be hosting proposed bulk energy storage projects. Educational information on energy storage technologies and critical fire safety considerations, key details and timelines for NYSERDA's 2025 bulk energy storage solicitation, and resources available to support local governments navigating energy storage in their community will be provided. The webinar is free, register [here](#).

Local governments play a key role in evaluating and regulating energy projects in New York, including energy storage technologies. Through this webinar, municipal leaders in communities that may host projects participating in the *2025 Bulk Energy Storage Solicitation* can expect to learn and ask questions on topics including:

- Energy storage technologies, including but not limited to battery energy storage systems (BESS)
- NYSERDA's 2025 Bulk Energy Storage Solicitation: context, timelines, and other details
- Planning and zoning considerations for BESS
- Fire safety considerations, incl. the 2025 Fire Code of New York State, national safety standards, and the Peer Review process
- Resources for Local Governments, incl. NYSERDA's *BESS Guidebook for Local Governments*

Newly Elected Officials Training Webinar January 28

Experts from the NY Association of Towns will lead an online webinar for newly elected local officials on Wednesday, January 28, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. This free training opportunity is designed to help prepare newly elected officials for their new roles. Topics to be covered will include conflicts of interest, code of ethics and boards of ethics, financial disclosure requirements, typical town offices and their roles, oath of office, and preparing for your first meeting. Current officials are also welcome to attend. Register at ti-nyurl.com/2026newlyelected.



This webinar is sponsored by the NYS Tug Hill Commission and the region's five councils of governments: the Cooperative Tug Hill Council, Northern Oneida County Council of Governments, River Area Council of Governments, North Shore Council of Governments and Salmon Rivers Council of Governments.

The evening's speakers will be Sarah Brancatella and Lori Mithen-DeMasi. Sarah has been with the Association of Towns for 12 years and is currently the deputy director. Prior to that she served as legislative director and counsel. Sarah leads the Association of Towns' advocacy efforts pertinent to local governments at the state and federal level, assists municipal officials on multiple different issues, and presents and publishes extensively on municipal matters. Lori has been the organization's chief counsel, and a member of their legal staff since 1993 where she provides training and legal assistance to town officials and works with the legislature and state agencies to improve town governance and efficiency.

Forest Tax Law Changes Effective March 1

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) recently announced the finalization of **regulation changes** to the Real Property Tax Law Section 480a, also known as the Forest Tax Law. The goal of the overhaul of the 50-year-old regulations is to streamline processes and reduce administrative barriers on participating forest landowners, while strengthening sustainable timber management on enrolled lands.

The state enacted the [480a Forest Tax Law](#) in 1974 to encourage long-term management of forested land. The law provides a property tax incentive for private forest landowners who commit to managing their woodlands sustainably under an approved forest management plan. The [revised regulations](#):

- lower administrative and compliance burdens for landowners and consulting foresters by extending the period that an approved forest management plan covers from 15 years to 20 years and requiring fewer plan updates;
- provide greater flexibility in forest management work planning by moving away from an annual schedule;
- Strengthen sustainable forest management on enrolled lands by requiring efforts to establish adequate forest regeneration and explicitly banning harvest practices that remove most of the commercially valuable trees at the expense of future growth and future financial return; and
- standardize program expectations, administration, and compliance by establishing a training requirement for consulting foresters working with enrolled and prospective landowners.

DEC released the draft regulations in 2024 and received 260 public comments from 33 separate organizations and individuals. A [responsiveness summary document](#) is available on the DEC website.

WINTER WILDLIFE WEBINAR SERIES

Join us for a series of webinars throughout the winter, highlighting flora and fauna of the northeast.

SESSIONS

**Emerald Ash Borer -
Ash Tree Restoration**
January 29

Wolverines
February 26

**Pollinators & Native
Flowers**
March 26

Owls
April 30

**Webinars will run the last
Thursday of each month at
7 pm**



<https://tinyurl.com/WWWRegistration2026>



Attending the Local Government Conference? Mail Early!

Local officials planning to attend the 2026 [Tug Hill Commission Local Government Conference](#) should pay close attention to registration mailing deadlines, particularly as U.S. Postal Service (USPS) operational changes may affect how postmark dates are applied. To qualify for regular registration rates, mailed registrations must be postmarked on or before March 20, 2026. Registrations postmarked after are double the regular registration rate, and refunds are not available after March 20. Given the USPS operational changes, conference attendees who plan to register by mail are encouraged to send materials well in advance of the March 20 deadline, request a manual postmark, send via certified mail or use the online registration option.

While USPS has stated that it is not changing its postmarking practices, adjustments to USPS transportation operations may result in some mail not arriving at originating processing facilities on the same day they are mailed. As a result, the postmark date applied at USPS processing facilities may not match the date a customer dropped mail in a mailbox, handed it to a letter carrier, or left it at a retail location. For time-sensitive materials, this discrepancy could mean a postmark dated later than expected. To ensure a postmark reflects the actual date of mailing, visit a USPS retail location and request a manual postmark at the counter. Manual postmarks are applied free of charge and provide clear documentation of timely mailing.

Commission Board Meeting

Wednesday, January 21 at 10:00 a.m. at the Lowville Municipal Building, 5533 Bostwick Street, Lowville, NY 13367.

The public is welcome to attend.

New York Power Authority Releases Renewables Updated Strategic Plan

The New York Power Authority (NYPA) released its [Renewables Updated Strategic Plan](#) on December 9, 2025, describing how NYPA will operationalize its new renewables work. The 2023-24 state budget authorized the expansion of NYPA's authority under the Power Authority Act. Along with building renewables, NYPA was directed to work with other agencies to establish a program to provide bill credits to increase renewable energy affordability, invest in workforce training, and cease fossil fuel generation at its small natural gas power plants by the end of 2030, as conditions allow. To advance their goals, one of the operating models that NYPA suggests is a co-development scenario. In this instance, NYPA would jointly develop, construct, own, and operate a renewable energy project with a developer. NYPA would acquire a majority stake in the development company prior to the project's commercial operation date, helping to secure permits, support interconnection contracting, and more throughout the process. While NYPA's legal authority does not require that they build a specific amount of generation, they are directed to supplement private sector energy development to ensure that New York's clean energy transition is faster, more affordable, and more equitable. This may be challenging going forward due to the elimination of federal tax credits for all wind and solar projects with a capacity of 1.5 MW or greater that have not begun physical work by July 4, 2026, or completed work by December 31, 2027.

Below is a list of NYPA projects that are proposed in and near Tug Hill. For more detailed information, begin on page 49 of the [NYPA Renewables Updated Strategic Plan](#).

Project Type	Location	Project Ownership	Potential Generating Capacity (MWac)
Solar	Watertown & Hounsfield – Jefferson County	Co-Development w/ Borex	140
Solar	Croghan & Wilna – Jefferson and Lewis County	Co-Development w/ AES	125
Solar	Rutland – Jefferson County	Co-Development w/ New	100
Solar	Lyme & Brownville – Jefferson	Co-Development with AES	100
Wind	Pinckney & Harrisburg – Jefferson and Lewis County	Co-Development w/ Avangrid	100
Compressed-Air Energy Storage System	Croghan – Lewis County	Co-Development w/ Antelope Energy Storage LLC	500*

**Storage capacity*

NON-PROFIT BOOTCAMP



Session #4

EFFECTIVE BOARD MEETING MANAGEMENT

Strong meetings lead to strong boards. Join us for the fourth session of our Nonprofit Bootcamp Series, focused on practical tools and best practices for running effective nonprofit board meetings. This virtual session will cover key topics such as setting clear meeting agendas, understanding and using Robert's Rules of Order, taking effective meeting minutes, and supporting thoughtful decision-making.

FEBRUARY 5, 2026

Thursday | 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

Virtually via Zoom

TOPIC HIGHLIGHTS

- ✓ Meeting Agendas
- ✓ Robert's Rules
- ✓ Decision Making
- ✓ Running Effective Meetings

EXPERT

 **Barbara Paxton - Director,
BoardStrong**

BoardStrong, Inc. works to create a vibrant and healthy nonprofit sector by strengthening and improving the governance and management of nonprofit organizations. We are an affiliate of the New York Council of Nonprofits, Inc. (NYCON)

REGISTER



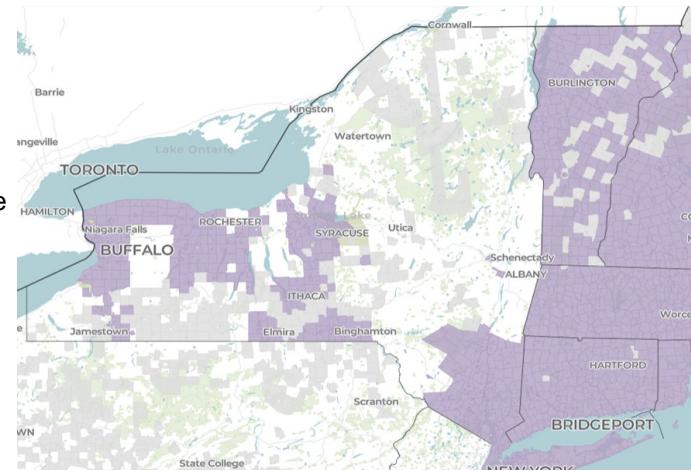
Northern New York
Community Foundation



National Zoning Atlas: A Tool to Demystify Zoning

Zoning is a topic that can be confusing to many. The National Zoning Atlas (NZA) is working to change that. First launched in 2021, the National Zoning Atlas currently shows 8,900 jurisdictions across the country, including some in the Tug Hill region. This interactive map is meant to make zoning easier to understand. After selecting a region of interest on the map, users are shown a variety of information, including the primary zoning use in the area, minimum lot sizes, and more. Users can also toggle filters to have the map display where people can build different types of structures as a principal use. Those interested in exploring the tool can access it [here](#).

The NZA is an ongoing project. Communities interested in having their zoning codes added to the map can reach out [here](#) to see if there are ongoing projects in their area. There is also an option to jump the queue and [commission a jurisdiction](#), which requires funding. Once the information is added, the National Zoning Atlas is free and accessible to the public.



Upcoming Workshops from Cornell Cooperative Extension

Tri County Coop Congress January 29, 9:45 a.m. - 3:00 p.m., \$25, Carthage Elks

Register [here](#). Speakers and topics include:



- Joe Lawrence; Dairy Forage Systems Management w/ Pro Dairy: *Silage Management & Managing forages after a drought season*
- Dr. Quirine M. Ketterings; Professor of Nutrient Management, Cornell University/ Juan Carlos Ramos Tanchez w/ Nutrient Management Spear Program: *Value/Power of Manure*
- Dr. Vipan Kumar; Associate Professor/Extension Weed Specialist w/ School of Integrative Plant Science, Cornell University: *Update on Integrated Weed Management in Field Crops*
- Mike Hunter; Field Crops IPM Coordinator w/ Cornell Integrated Pest Management: *Update on Insect Pests in Field Crops*

Maple Sector Energy Efficiencies, January 29, 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., free, online

Join CCE of Columbia and Greene Counties, the Cornell Maple Program, and Ag Energy to learn about energy efficiencies for maple production, for both small and large producers. Information on equipment upgrades and recommendations for maple energy efficiency will be provided, and a maple producer who successfully implemented custom modifications will share their experience. Register [here](#).

Ag and Food Producers Academy 2026-2027

The Tri-County CCE Team (Jefferson, St. Lawrence, and Lewis) is offering a business incubator program for farmers and food entrepreneurs January-March 2026 and January-March 2027. It includes

- seven theme topics with multi-session online webinars
- In-person field trips at the close of webinars
- Local Food Fair in 2027 for entrepreneurs to meet new customers

To increase accessibility and reach, these themes are held as webinars, taught January through March- the off season for most local producers. Assisted by access to the Harvest Kitchen at CCE St. Lawrence, a shared-use commercial kitchen, this program is open to all farmers and food producers in northern New York and aims to launch local products into the marketplace. Find more details [here](#).

Contact Us

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Sign up to receive our [newsletter](#) electronically.

For upcoming trainings, grant deadlines, and meetings, view our [calendar](#).