



2026 BLACK RIVER WATERSHED CONFERENCE



THE BLACK RIVER WATERSHED STEERING
COMMITTEE WELCOMES YOU TO THE
16TH ANNUAL BLACK RIVER WATERSHED
CONFERENCE

Tug Hill Estate, Lowville, NY
June 3, 2026

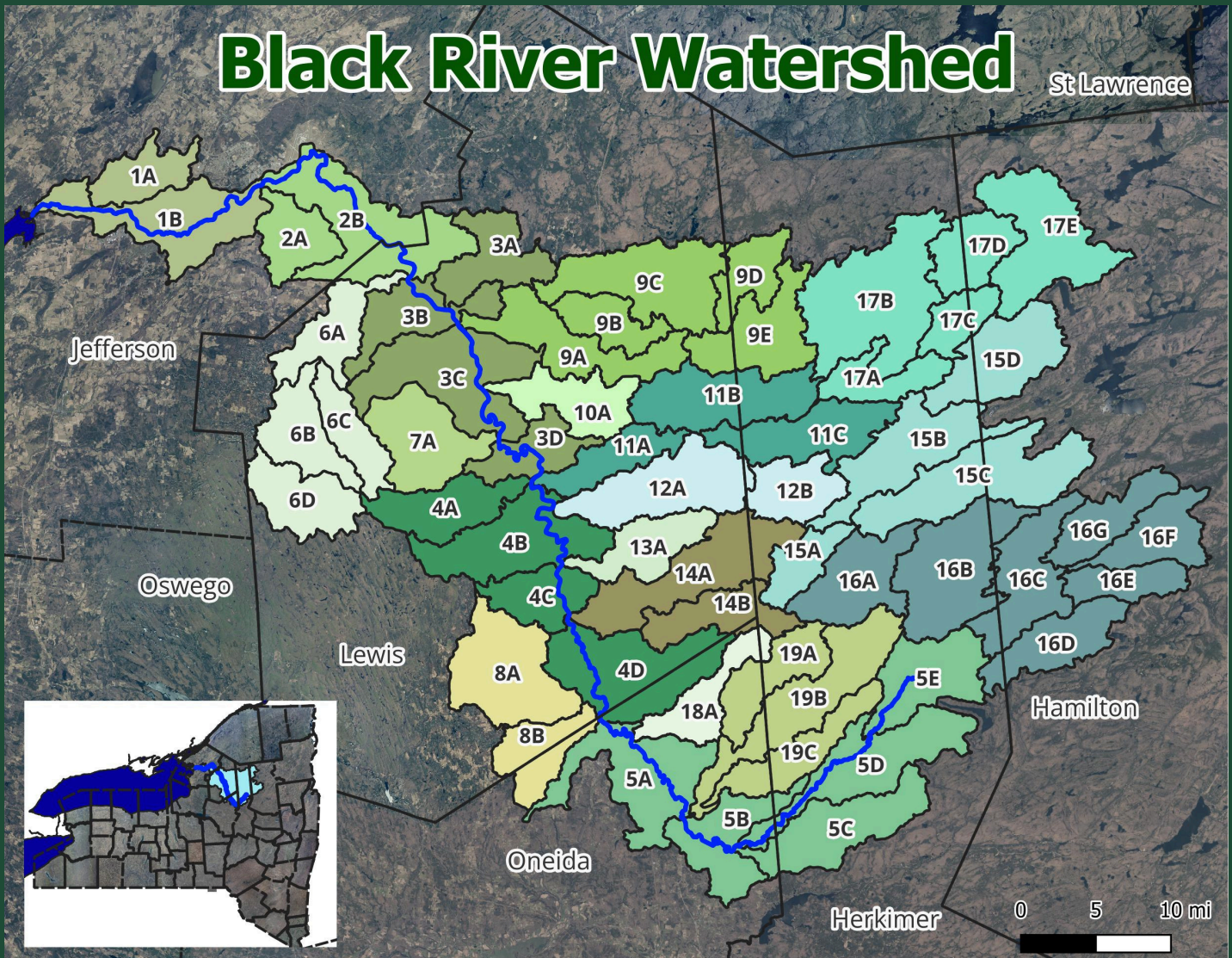
NYS Tug Hill Commission
Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Hamilton | Herkimer | Jefferson | Lewis | Oneida

Funded by the Black River Advisory Committee



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 Summer 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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AGENDA

Wednesday, June 3, 8:30 am–4:00 pm

TIME	TOPIC
8:30–8:35 AM	Welcome & Opening Remarks
8:35–9:15 AM	Keynote Speaker: Dr. Zachary Labe Bridging Weather and Climate Communication Through Data Storytelling
9:15–9:35 AM	Lewis County: Emergency Response: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly! Nichelle Swisher
9:35–9:55 AM	Hamilton County: Restoring Shaw Brook Caitlin Stewart
9:55–10:05 AM	Oneida County: Agricultural Best Management Practices Jessica Armstrong
10:05–10:15 AM	Jefferson County: Tree Planting Pilot Programs with The Nature Conservancy Sam Anderson
10:15–10:45 AM	Soil & Water Conservation Districts: Building Partnerships Across the Landscape
10:45–11:00 AM	Break
11:00–11:30 AM	From Ridge to River: Invasive Species Challenges and Collaboration in SLELO and the Black River Watershed Adrien Owens
11:30 AM–12:00 PM	Lewis County Culvert Assessments: Inventory and Application Cody O'Donnell
12:00–1:15 PM	Lunch
1:15–2:15 PM	Panel Discussion: Deicing Salt: Road Safety versus Runoff - Finding the Right Mix <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chris Navitsky, Lake George Waterkeeper• Nichelle Swisher, Lewis County SWCD• John Reed, Lewis County Highway
2:15–2:30 PM	Break
2:30–3:00 PM	Snapshot NY: A Community-Based Statewide Wildlife Monitoring Project Joelee Tooley
3:00–3:45 PM	Interactive Session - Flowing Forward: A Conversation About the Black River Watershed
3:45–4:00 PM	Closing Remarks

Post-Conference Survey



KEYNOTE SPEAKER



DR. ZACHARY LABE

Climate Scientist at Climate Central



Dr. Zachary Labe is a Climate Scientist at Climate Central, where he explores the intersection of climate risk, future climate change scenarios, extreme weather, early warning predictions, and data science tools. He is an author in more than 40 peer-reviewed publications. Beyond his research, he is passionate about improving science communication, accessibility, and outreach using storytelling and engaging data visualizations.

He holds a B.Sc. in Atmospheric Science from Cornell University and a Ph.D. in Earth System Science from the University of California, Irvine. Prior to joining Climate Central, he was a Research Physical Scientist at NOAA's Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory. He was selected as a Kavli Frontiers of Science Fellow by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, and his science communication work is featured in dozens of local to international media outlets each year. He also maintains an active presence on social media, where he shares accessible climate data visualizations that are widely used by journalists, educators, and decision-makers. Learn more about Zack's work here: <https://zacklabe.com/>



Climate Resources from
Zack and Climate Central

MASTER OF CEREMONIES



CAITLIN STEWART

District Manager
Hamilton County SWCD



Caitlin has been part of the Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District crew since 2003, first as an intern, then educator, and now, manager. Educational credentials include a MS in Geoscience, UMass Amherst, and a BS in Environmental Science and Geography, SUNY Oneonta. She serves as president of the St. Lawrence River Watershed Project and secretary of the New York State Invasive Species Advisory Committee. Dogs Artemis and Hurricane and husband Matt fill her life with joy and adventures in wild Hamilton County.

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Thank you to this year's conference
sponsors and exhibitors!



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.

JESSICA ARMSTRONG

Executive Director
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.

CONFERENCE PRESENTERS



SAM ANDERSON

Forester
Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District



Sam grew up in the Lake George area, spending his free time hiking and working as a rescue guide at a high ropes course. He studied Forest Resource Management at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, graduating in May of 2025 with his bachelor's degree. Over the summers, he interned in Maine and the Adirondacks with industrial forestry companies. In September of 2025, he joined the Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District as the District Forester. He manages 5,500 acres of county forest for lumber and recreation and works with The Nature Conservancy on multiple tree planting programs. On his weekends, he enjoys fishing, canoe camping, cross-country skiing, and painting with watercolor.

ADRIEN OWENS

Aquatic Restoration and Resiliency Coordinator
SLELO PRISM



Adrien Owens is the Aquatic Restoration and Resiliency Coordinator with the St. Lawrence Eastern Lake Ontario Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (SLELO PRISM) with The Nature Conservancy. In this applied scientist role, she leads early detection and rapid response efforts to address the challenges of invasive species within priority freshwater conservation areas using a regionwide management approach. Adrien holds an M.S. from the University of Washington and a B.S. from the University of New Haven, bringing expertise in aquatic science, invasive species management, habitat restoration, and community engagement.

CONFERENCE PRESENTERS



CODY O'DONNELL

Deputy Highway Superintendent
Lewis County Highway Department



Cody O'Donnell serves as the Deputy Highway Superintendent for the Lewis County Highway Department, where he assists with the daily operations of the county's transportation infrastructure system, including highway operations, equipment coordination, asset management, and workforce development.

He has helped support the implementation of programs such as ArcGIS Field Maps and NOVO work order management to improve organization, documentation, and long-term planning within the department. Cody also implemented the department's CDL training program, allowing employees to receive training and assistance in obtaining their CDL licenses internally.

He is passionate about operational efficiency, public safety, and using practical, data-driven approaches to improve county infrastructure and services.

Years with Lewis County: 11

JOHN REED

Highway Superintendent
Lewis County Highway Department



John Reed serves as the Highway Superintendent for the Lewis County Highway Department, where he oversees the county's highway operations, infrastructure maintenance, capital projects, and long-term transportation planning. John works closely with local municipalities, contractors, engineers, and county leadership to maintain and improve Lewis County's roadway and bridge network while ensuring projects are completed safely and efficiently. He has been a strong advocate for preventive maintenance, employee safety, workforce development, and investing in equipment and technology that improve the department's operations and long-term sustainability.

Through his leadership, the department continues to focus on practical, cost-effective solutions that maximize taxpayer value while maintaining reliable infrastructure for the residents of Lewis County.

Years with Lewis County: 27

CONFERENCE PRESENTERS



CHRIS NAVITSKY

Lake George Waterkeeper



Chris Navitsky is the Lake George Waterkeeper, which is in its 24th year, and works with his parent organization, the Lake George Association. Chris' program applies research science, engineering principles, and compliance with existing laws for water quality protection as well as protection initiatives such as Low Impact Development, sustainable winter management, algae biomonitoring, and septic system management. Chris has been recognized as Conservationist of the Year by the Adirondack Council, received the Linn H. Enslow Memorial Award from the New York Water Environment Association, and served on the Governor's Adirondack Road Salt Task Force. Chris is a licensed professional engineer and is a graduate of the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse. He lives in Sabbath Day Point on Lake George with his wife and daughter.

JOEELE TOOLEY

Research Support Specialist & Snapshot NY Coordinator
Cornell University



Joelee Tooley is a research support specialist with the NY Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Cornell University, and the Coordinator for the Snapshot NY project. She graduated from SUNY ESF with a Bachelor of Wildlife Science in 2020 and a Master of Professional Studies in Fish and Wildlife Biology and Management in 2022. She has focused her collegiate and professional career on the conservation and management of mammals and other wildlife and hopes to share some of her passion with the Snapshot NY community! Prior to working at Cornell, she held a variety of technical positions including working for the National Parks Service and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.

Black River Initiative

Scan for the 2025
Black River Initiative Newsletter here:



tughill.org/projects/black-river-projects/

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.

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.

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!
Scan the QR Code here →

See you next year!



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A photograph of a river flowing through a dense forest. The water is dark and turbulent, surrounded by lush green trees and foliage. The image is used as a background for the BCA advertisement.

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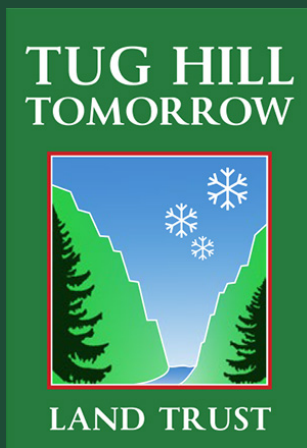


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Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust is a regional nonprofit organization that works with landowners on a voluntary basis to permanently protect open space, and promotes appreciation of the region's natural and cultural heritage for present and future generations.



www.tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org



The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Great Lakes Program works to protect and restore water quality and ecosystem integrity in the NYS portion of the Great Lakes and their lands and waters. Guided by the NYS Great Lakes Action Agenda, this program works with partners to:

- Facilitate community engagement and stewardship
- Coordinate science and adaptive management
- Provide research, education, training, and watershed planning tools
- Educate the next generation of Great Lakes stewards
- Provide and identify grant funding

To learn more and get involved email greatlakes@dec.ny.gov

