



Tug Hill Times

Tug Hill Times is published semimonthly by the Tug Hill Commission for its board members, staff and associates, and the local representatives on the region's councils of governments.

DEC SEEKS INPUT ON BLACK BEAR MANAGEMENT

The Dept. of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has scheduled a series of public meetings to provide an overview of the natural history and current status of black bears and to seek public input on future management.

While the bear population in NYS has rebounded in recent years, the DEC feels that there are areas of the state where there are human/bear conflicts. The DEC is reaching out to the public to continue a dialog on black bears and seeking input on what management options may be available to DEC. These meetings will also provide information on common bear-human interactions and steps people need to follow regarding bears.

November 8, 2007

- 7 p.m., SUNY Institute of Technology
Kunsela Hall A-112
12 North-Horatio Street, Utica, New York

Bears reside in all four Tug Hill counties, and in recent years the number of pioneering or transient bears has been on the rise in portions of Tug Hill. While wild black bears typically pose little risk to and will generally avoid people, as with any animal, interactions and issues can arise when numbers grow.

More information on New York's bear management program is available at the DEC Black Bear Management page at: www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7215.html.

Contact Steven Heerkens, at DEC, (315) 793-2556, or e-mail: r6info@gw.dec.state.ny.us with questions.

TUG HILL REGIONAL ATLAS MAPPER RENOVATIONS & IMPORTANT NOTICE

The Tug Hill Regional Atlas Mapper website (www.thram.org) is undergoing some changes to better serve our communities. The Starter Kit program will be renamed to the Tug Hill Regional Atlas Mapper. The homepage will be changed to Tug Hill GIS Services, but this will not affect the web address. We will also be incorporating a link for consultants working for our communities. This will provide them with the necessary paperwork and steps to attain access to datasets for our communities they are working with. We are also setting up a map service for consultants to view data and a new map service for the Sandy Creek Watershed project. More changes will be taking place and we will provide information on those at a later date.

Access to the THRAM website will be affected starting November 14 and may continue for a few weeks. We will be adding extra memory to handle future dataset and map service additions.

Thank you for your patience and we hope that these changes will better allow us to serve our communities in the future. If you have any questions feel free to contact Mickey Dietrich at (315) 785-2389 or mickey@tughill.org.

LARGE TURNOUT FOR NOCCOG ANNUAL DINNER

The Northern Oneida County Council of Governments (NOCCOG) held its annual dinner this Thursday at the Franklin Hotel in Rome. 92 people attended dinner, with representation from 18 out of 19 of NOCCOG's member municipalities. Oneida County legislators Les Porter and Mike Waterman were in attendance and

Assemblyman David Townsend and Senator Joe Griffo also stopped by the event.

Members adopted the 2008 NOCCOG budget and elected their executive committee for the coming year. Re-elected to office for 2008 are Bob Sauer as Chairman, Arnie Talgo as Vice Chair, and Mark Scheidelman as treasurer. After the business meeting, NOCCOG staff presented a slide show highlighting the municipal buildings, recent projects, and community events over the past year in each of the NOCCOG municipalities.

LOCAL LEADERS INSTITUTE MEMBERS MEET WITH LAND TRUSTS

This year's class of the Tug Hill Local Leaders Institute met at Salmon Hills Outdoor Adventure Center this week to learn more about environmental issues affecting farm and forest land in the region. Linda Garrett from the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust and Michelle Peach from the Nature Conservancy—along with staff from the Commission's Natural Resources team—discussed various strategies for preserving the region's rural character; the role of land trusts in those efforts; and the economic value of preserving the region's working landscape and important watersheds.

CARTHAGE, WEST CARTHAGE, & LOWVILLE FOCUS ON PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENTS

In early October, design and engineering consultant Mark Fenton—a nationally recognized pedestrian advocate—visited the villages of Carthage, West Carthage, and Lowville to help them identify strategies for making their communities more pedestrian friendly. (Mr. Fenton was the keynote speaker at the 2007 Local Government Conference). Community walkability has broad implications for the pedestrian appeal and economic viability of downtown business districts; is a significant factor in providing safe routes to school for children; is key to connecting commercial and residential areas; and can enhance the experience of local residents who like to walk for fitness and enjoyment.

Mr. Fenton began his first morning touring the villages of Carthage and West Carthage. In the afternoon, he met with representatives from the recreation committee, village boards, planning boards, the local hospital wellness program, the school, and other interest groups to share some of his observations, lead them through an exercise to identify new projects, and

presented various strategies for making the villages more walkable. In the evening, he gave a public presentation on the health benefits of walking and bicycling and led a public discussion on some of the community specific issues identified earlier in the day. On Day 2, he gave an early morning "leaders breakfast" presentation with his recommendations for implementing programs, policies, and projects to achieve the community's goals. These included strategies for street crossings, shared-use roadways, community trail connections, and safe-routes-to-schools programs. He then proceeded to Lowville where he repeated the two-day format.

Participants from all three villages were inspired by Mr. Fenton's visit and felt he helped them develop a better focus and left them with practical ideas for moving forward with pedestrian improvements in their respective communities. The project costs were covered by funding from the River Area Council of Governments (RACOG), Village of Lowville, and funding from a Quality Communities grant (through the Town of Champion) for the Fort Drum Area Growth Management Program. Fenton will be visiting the Village of Adams in January.

PLANNING BOARD TRAINING OFFERED

Many municipal Planning Board and ZBA members still need to complete the required four hours of annual training for Planning Board and ZBA members. This is a new state requirement this year unless local municipalities have taken steps to opt out of the requirement.

Northern Oneida County Council of Governments and the Tug Hill Commission are pleased to be offering 2 hours of training for Planning Board members and ZBA members. The presentation will be by the Tug Hill Commission's Director of Planning, Phil Street. The topics covered will be:

- *Planning Board Basics*
- *Site Plan Review and Special Use Permits.*

The training will be offered on **Tuesday, December 4, 2007, 6:30 p.m. -8:30 p.m. at the Boonville Town and Village Offices, 12149 State Route 12, Boonville.** Please contact the Tug Hill Commission at 1-888-785-2380 by Friday, November 30 to register for this training session.

This training is a great opportunity for local officials to meet the annual training requirement.

TELECONFERENCES SCHEDULED

The NYS Office of the State Comptroller is sponsoring a fall teleconference series for local government officials in November and December. NOCCOG is a member of the Local Government Education Committee of Herkimer and Oneida Counties that will be serving as one of the host sites for this series. The teleconferences will be held at Kunsela Hall at SUNY IT, in Marcy. Scheduled are:

Cyber Security

Thursday, November 15, 2007

This program will be designed for all local government officials responsible for maintaining and protecting information assets. This teleconference will examine lessons learned from previous cyber security incidents, risk factors and procedures to secure electronic information. Jeanne M. Brown, Digital Towpath Cooperative Program Coordinator, will be a panelist during this teleconference.

Confused about bail? - Let us bail you out!

Monday, December 3, 2007

Cosponsored by the Office of Court Administration – This program will be designed specifically for town and village justices as well as justice court clerks. This teleconference will address issues regarding the bail process, classification of bail, poundage and non-cash bail.

Just elected - What do you do now?

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Cosponsored by the Association of Towns of the State of New York – This program will be designed specifically for newly elected and appointed town officials. This teleconference will cover a wide array of responsibilities for newly elected town officials. Mark Scheidelman, Town of Trenton Supervisor and NOCCOG Fiscal Officer, will be a panelist during this teleconference.

Check in for the teleconferences is at 6:15 p.m. and the presentations will run from 6:30 p.m. to 8:45 p.m. The program will include a short break. There is a \$15 charge per person and registration deadlines are one week prior to the teleconference.

Registration forms and additional details can be found at the LGEC web site at WWW.LGEC.ORG

MUNICIPAL HEALTH INSURANCE SURVEY

The Commission recently sent out a survey to the region's 62 chief elected officials to gain a better

understanding of the health insurance options that our municipalities elect to use. The survey is intended to gauge interest in seeking cost saving opportunities through group plans and to gather some basic information for future use by Tug Hill communities. Approximately half of the surveys were returned and of those 75 percent were interested in exploring the issue further.

The survey also revealed that 73 percent of municipalities use a private insurer, with only three percent of those participating in an insurance pool with other municipalities. Half of respondents noted that annual premium cost per employee was over \$7,000, 17 percent between \$5,000 and \$6,000, 20 percent between \$3,000 and \$4,999, and 10 percent less than \$3,000. Precisely half of municipalities responding to the survey have a unionized workforce.

The majority of the survey respondents have policies offering coverage for the employee's family (83%) and about half of employees contribute to their own health care costs. Municipalities are highly variable in the area of method and amount of this required employee contribution, some based on length of employment and most requiring a percentage of the premium that ranged from 5 to 40 percent. Co-payments are mandatory for 63 percent of respondents and about half of policies cover dental and vision. Most municipalities do not offer a before tax savings plan (70%) and only four percent offer health savings accounts, cafeteria plans, or flexible benefit plans.

This short survey was prepared in response to local discussion inspired by the notification of the Shared Municipal Services Incentive (SMSI) category for consolidation of health benefit plans offered by two or more municipalities, which may be useful for further study of community needs and offering possible alternatives on this topic. The grant would pay 90 percent of fees to contract a consultant or to offset the cost to create a consortium. The grant application deadline is December 14th. Notice will be given for a public forum to be held in the near future to address municipal health insurance issues and the possibility of submitting an application.