

HEADWATERS

NEW YORK STATE TUG HILL COMMISSION

2006 NEWSLETTER - 2005 ANNUAL REPORT - Issue 44

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“The More Things Change, The More Things Remain the Same”

- Alphonse Karr (1808-1890)

This past year we have experienced a lot of change at the Commission and throughout the region. We have had several staff changes, and I hope many of you have had the opportunity to meet our new Community Development colleagues Carla Fowler and Emily McKenna. We had the appointment of our ninth commissioner, David Reader of Parish, so we now have a full board of commissioners.

The region has experienced the development of the largest wind farm east of the Mississippi and the closing of the East Branch of Fish Creek conservation easement. This past year also had the kick-off of three major watershed planning efforts in the Salmon River, Black River and Sandy Creeks watersheds. These will be substantial over the next few years and should position our communities to better take advantage of federal and state resources as programs shift substantially to efforts based on watersheds.

Over the past year, we have also helped our communities obtain over \$5.2 million in state, federal and nongovernmental grant funding for everything from sewers to parks. Each effort helps our communities enhance their quality of life and economic viability. We

thank our funding partners and look forward to working with our communities as these projects move forward.

Through the balance of this year we will inevitably see more change. In this election cycle we will see changes in several statewide offices. We'll also see changes in local elected officials. Through it all we commit to stay the course with those programs and services you have told us are important to you. We remain committed to our mission areas in planning and technical

Change is inevitable, whether it be Commission staff or changes in a regional or global economy that affect our communities. The commissioners and staff will do everything we can to help you navigate these changes so that your communities can best take advantage of opportunity or manage change beyond your immediate control. All you have to do is ask. Our goal is to be responsive to your needs



Tug Hill Commissioners, left to right: Roger Maciejko, Leona Cheresnoski, Michael Yerdon, Anne Schuler, Ken Vigus, Arnie Talgo, David Reader, Tim LeVan, Dave Stone.

assistance, community development and infrastructure and in helping you manage the natural resources that sustain the traditional recreational and working landscapes that are the foundation of much of the region's economy.

and responsible in delivery of the services and programs you tell us are your priority. We look forward to working with you in the coming year.

Meet the Tug Hill Commission Staff

Commission staff provide support to Tug Hill councils of governments in community and economic development, land use planning, natural resource management, geographic information systems (GIS) and related fields.

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“Helping local governments and citizens shape the future of the Tug Hill region”

Low Volume Roads

Education on the low-volume road issue has continued this past year with several Tug Hill towns expressing interest. Low-volume roads are defined as roads in a rural town with less than 400 average daily trips. New York State does not have a uniform local roads design and classification standard for rural local roads, and standards must be adopted locally. Model laws and standards for use by local governments were prepared in 1997 by the Local Roads Research and Coordination Council, and are available from the Commission. Other model standards have been prepared by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

The Commission has encouraged towns to classify low-volume roads by local law. Additionally, towns may designate little used roads as minimum maintenance, thus

significantly reducing unforeseen financial liabilities for expensive road upgrades and maintenance. This both reduces town liability and allows town officials to effectively manage the road system budget. It often allows towns to retain little used, poorly maintained roads on their inventory in hopes of future upgrades when local budgets and needs allow, without the need to prematurely abandon them.

The Commission has supported state legislation to strengthen the authority of town governments to adopt low-volume road design and classification standards, and allow minimum maintenance roads. The Commission has hosted roundtables and meetings of interested state and county officials, and members of associations representing highway interests and local governments, in an effort to further legislation in this area. In the past year, two

bills were proposed to recognize low-volume road classification on a state-wide basis, but neither bill

assisting several communities in mapping their official road systems, and clarifying the status of



Minimum-maintenance road in the town of Lorraine, Jefferson County.

succeeded in being adopted into law.

The Commission has prepared papers on both the process for designating low-volume roads and minimum maintenance roads, as well as a question and answer paper for local officials and the general public. The Commission has also been

road jurisdictions and previous abandonments. Several Tug Hill Towns, including Martinsburg, West Turin, Pinckney, Montague, Florence and Ava have adopted low-volume roads laws and have designated minimum maintenance roads.

Focus on Watersheds

The Commission is working with multiple partners on three watershed projects covering approximately two-thirds of the region: the Salmon River Watershed Natural Resources Assessment, the Black River Watershed Plan, and the Sandy Creeks Ecosystem Based Management Initiative.

For two years the Commission has been working with New York Natural Heritage, The Nature Conservancy, Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and others on the Salmon River Watershed Natural Resources Assessment to provide information helpful in local planning. In June 2006, Natural Heritage completed the resource assessment and identified 61 different occurrences of rare species and significant natural communities within the entire watershed. Their analysis highlights the Mad River sub-watershed as having the most intact landscape and least human disturbances.

The next planning phase begins in September 2006 and Commission staff has been attending town boards and councils of government meetings to keep all updated and involved in the process. This phase involves working with natural resources experts and community leaders in identifying natural resource targets; identifying threats to those targets; and developing strategies that various entities might take to protect these resources from identified threats. The

Commission is seeking to actively engage local leaders and interested citizens, as local input is key for identifying strategies that will be considered acceptable in Tug Hill communities.

The Black River Watershed spans portions of five counties and includes

about 30% of the Tug Hill region. The town of Greig received an \$80,000 EPF grant in August 2006 to begin a watershed wide plan for the

area, and the Commission received a \$75,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to commence the plan. The goals are to improve water quality, provide resources to communities to improve water quality, improve the economic picture for watershed communities, make the watershed communities sustainable, and educate communities and citizens on the importance of water and their role in maintaining its quality. A consultant will be hired to organize the plan by November 2006, with one of the first goals to be outreach to the communities and formation of a local steering committee to represent all stakeholders in the watershed.

Lastly, the Commission has been working with the Coastal Division at the Department of State (DOS) on the Sandy Creeks Ecosystem Based Management (EBM) Initiative. In August, Governor Pataki signed the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem



Town of Greig deputy supervisor Tom Gunn (left) and Randy Kerr (right) accept a check from Secretary of State Christopher Jacobs, for Black River Watershed Plan.

Conservation Act, and within it an Eastern Lake Ontario project (i.e., Sandy Creeks) is identified as one of two pilot demonstrations projects. The EBM approach recognizes the importance of both ecological integrity and economic viability of communities within the watershed.

Working with multiple partners (DOS, DEC, The Nature Conservancy, and local communities) we have received \$380,000 in grants to begin the process. The grant will characterize the watershed and develop a strategy to complete an EBM, as well as fund demonstration projects on invasive species (swallowwort and purple loosestrife), forest best

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About Headwaters

Headwaters is the newsletter annual report of the New York State Tug Hill Commission.

The Tug Hill Commission is a state funded, regional agency overseen by a board of nine unpaid commissioners - two each from Jefferson, Lewis, Oneida, and Oswego counties, and one at-large.

Commissioners are appointed for five year terms: three each by the Governor, State Senate and State Assembly. The Commission has an administrative link to New York State's Department of State.

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Oneida County

Vice Chairman

Kenneth W. Vigus
Oneida County

Secretary

Anne C. Schuler
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David J. Reader
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SAVE THE DATE:
Tug Hill Local Government Conference
Thursday, March 29, 2007

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RACOG News

The River Area Council of Governments (RACOG) continues to advance the multi-year/multi-pronged planning initiative to enhance and expand waterfront parks along the Black River in the villages of Carthage and West Carthage. Linked to "downtown revitalization," the Black River Watershed Plan, Olympic Scenic Byway, Black River-Blueway Trail Corridor and development of a pedestrian/recreational trail system, attention is directed to acquiring key waterfront parcels in the village of West Carthage through the 2005 Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). The town of Champion has also received \$32,000 through 2005 EPF to construct a gazebo, restroom facilities, benches, picnic tables, and historic playground at the "Village Green Park" as part of the NYS Plan to preserve and protect open space.

As part of the overall revitalization initiative, cooperative efforts to improve the uniformity of development controls within the four communities, are in the second phase of a three-step land-use review process. Assisted by the Tug Hill Commission and Jefferson County Planning, the RACOG Planning Committee is working to standardize zoning and subdivision review criteria to guide future development that will enhance opportunities to attract sustainable development.

In an effort to increase efficiency and effectiveness in developing an experienced Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), the towns of Champion and Wilna and

village of Carthage appointed a five-member Joint (ZBA) in 2005. Members of the ZBA meet monthly to review requests and receive training from the Tug Hill Commission upon request.

Changes at NOCCOG

Northern Oneida County Council of Governments (NOCCOG) continues to experience a period of transition in 2006. Long-time circuit rider Steve Hunter retired in 2005 and Maria Fibiger was appointed to the full-time circuit rider position. Maria brought to the position a variety of experiences from both the private and public sector, and brought to the position energy and enthusiasm. Maria decided to move on to other opportunities in February 2006. THC and NOCCOG wish her continued success in her future endeavors.

Gerry Ritter was selected by the NOCCOG Executive Board to be the full-time circuit rider in March. Gerry, a life long resident of Forestport, is well-known in the NOCCOG area with her 12 years experience as a part-time circuit rider. Harlan Moonen continues as a part time circuit rider, covering meetings in the western section of Oneida County.

NOCCOG has and continues to experience success in the application and administration of local government records management grants. In July, NOCCOG successfully completed a NYS Archives grant project to organize existing files and create electronic indexes for the planning and zoning records for eight NOCCOG municipalities. Additionally,

NOCCOG was able to partner with SUNY-IT and Digital Towpath to create a content management software tool that provides an archive section for the indexes.

NOCCOG will soon be undertaking a new cooperative records management grant funded through the NYS Archives involving the Taberg Fire Department in the town of Annsville and the Floyd Fire Department in the town of Floyd. The goal is to implement a new active records filing system and inactive record storage system. According to recently passed NYS law, local fire districts will be audited by the Office of the New York State Comptroller in the future and easily accessible records will be a valuable asset.

The villages of Boonville, Sylvan Beach, Remsen and Holland Patent as well as the towns of Boonville and Vienna continue work on preparing or updating their comprehensive plans, holding informational meetings and working with community residents to plan for long-term goals that will incorporate each community's unique characteristics. Many areas in the Tug Hill region are experiencing unprecedented growth in the number of seasonal homes and the NOCCOG area is no different. Several communities, including the town of Forestport and the town of Remsen, are also working on subdivision laws to develop clearer and more consistent regulations to deal with changes their communities are experiencing.

NOCCOG staff has also worked closely with its member communities on the development of the county-wide Hazardous Mitigation Plan and has set up training for the National Incident Management System which focused on the duties and responsibilities for local officials in the time of local emergencies.

NOCCOG continues to thrive with the full support from all 19 member municipalities. At the 2005 annual dinner, it was unanimously passed to increase the annual dues by fifty dollars per year. NOCCOG's current officers are: Robert Sauer from Camden, chairman; Mark Scheidelman from Trenton, fiscal officer; and Arnie Talgo from Steuben vice-chairman.

NorCOG Increases Intermunicipal Cooperation

The North Shore Council of Governments has continued its regular meetings with the Central Square Central School District. It also participated with the Tug Hill Commission in a presentation to Oneida County local governments and school districts on the benefits of increased communications and cooperation between different municipal and public service entities.

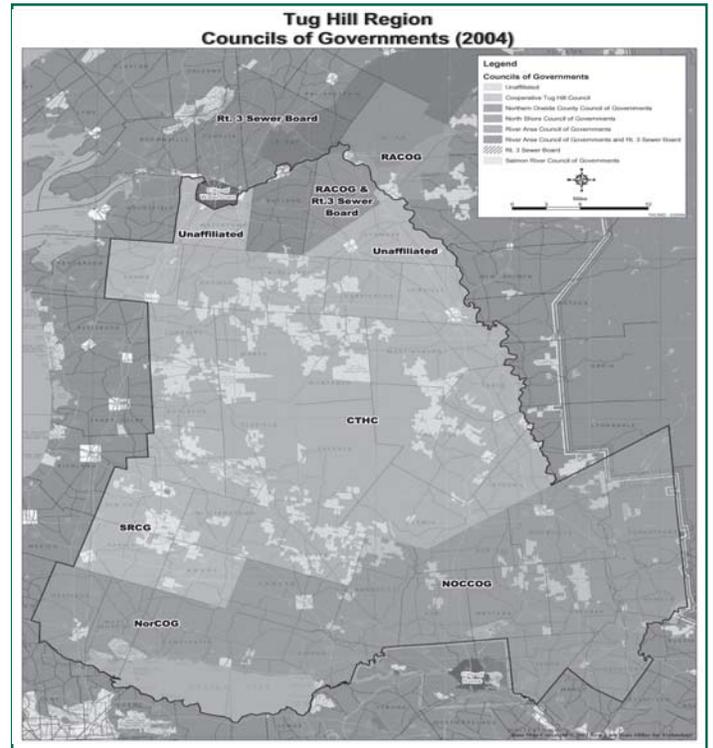
The village of Central Square experienced a train derailment in November 2005 involving hazardous materials. The emergency response was greatly aided by the recently development community emergency

management plan, developed in conjunction with the town of Hastings with major assistance from the Oswego County Emergency Management Office. Development of a community emergency management plan involves all the entities and resources which might be involved in managing an emergency, and in this case, cooperation between the town, the village and the Central Square Central School District was key to the successful handling of this incident.

The towns of Constantia and West Monroe moved forward on a possible joint water district, with the town of Constantia commissioning a feasibility study. The two towns conducted surveys of potential water district customers to determine the level of interest and to help in establishing district lines. Both towns have conducted public information meetings to get information out about the project. The next step in the process will be the circulation of petitions to form the respective districts in each town.

The village of Cleveland held several referendums to receive voter approval on the financing construction of a new village hall. The village is also continuing to make progress on its Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan. Once completed, the village will be eligible to apply for funding to implement projects in the LWRP.

The project to dispose of the millions of waste car and truck tires in the town of West Monroe has moved forward with the design, construction and initial steps to put a shredding operation in place on the Pinnacle Road tire site. The tire remediation project is being operated under the authority of the New York



State Department of Environmental Conservation, and plans are for shredded tires to be trucked off site for use in state projects elsewhere.

Salmon Rivers Explores Special Area Designation

The Salmon Rivers Council of Governments requested and received a presentation from the Commission on designation of special areas in the Salmon River corridor. The Salmon Rivers area is currently included in the Salmon River Watershed Natural Resource Assessment (see page 3).

The town of Amboy completed a community survey to help make decisions about implementation of the comprehensive plan adopted in 2003.

CTHC Annual Meeting Highlights

The council has voted to hold its annual meeting in May of each year, rather than September, as they had previously. This will allow January-appointed town representatives to the council to have a longer term and more input in the workings of the council.

Highlights of this year's meeting included a presentation from Tug Hill Commission's GIS staffer, Mickey Dietrich, on the Commission's new web-based GIS. All council towns can avail themselves of GIS services by joining the NYS GIS 'clearinghouse'. The council also got its first look at the almost complete Resource Inventory done by the Commission at the

Continued on page 8

Blueway Trail Plan Nearly Complete

A “Blueway Trail” is a small boat and/or paddling route along a waterway that combines recreation and environmental awareness while linking communities and land-based attractions. In June 2005, Governor Pataki designated the Black River as a “Blueway Trail” and awarded a \$27,000 Environmental Protection Fund grant to support consultant services for development of a strategic plan to improve and promote the Black River as a regional recreation resource. The Town of Martinsburg is administering the grant on behalf of the 37 municipalities along the 114-mile river from its headwaters above Forestport, along Tug Hill’s eastern edge, all the way out to Lake Ontario.

To date, the consultants have inventoried and mapped cultural,

historical, natural, and recreational resources along the river corridor. Three public workshops have also been held to solicit local input in identifying significant resources, needs, and opportunities related to realizing the full potential of the river corridor. In addition to prioritizing access improvements along the river, the plan will also include promotional strategies and a signage plan. The plan should be completed in October 2006.

Once completed, the Black River Blueway Trail Plan will be used to support grant applications to implement its recommendations. In fact, thanks to ideas already generated by the planning process, Martinsburg submitted a new EPF grant application earlier this year that, if successful, will jump start efforts to promote the river and improve access. The pending application proposes to install signage and several kiosks along the river corridor; create a new brochure to promote the river; and improve access in Lyons

Falls, Turin, and Dexter. By themselves, the three access improvement projects would not have been very competitive. However, as part of an overall project united by the Blueway Trail Plan, they will have a better chance of getting funded.

Black River Scenic Byway

Paralleling the Black River Blueway water route for much of its length is the Black River Scenic Byway, one of fourteen scenic road byways in the Adirondack North Country Region (ANCA), which includes Tug Hill. A scenic byway connects communities along a common theme, encouraging automobile travelers to follow the route through communities they might not otherwise visit.

ANCA is responsible for overseeing the development and promotion of the North Country scenic byway system and has contracted with the Tug Hill Commission to develop the Corridor Management Plan for the Black River Scenic Byway. As

west toward Lake Ontario, the Black River Scenic Byway heads north along Route 812 to Ogdensburg.

The Corridor Management Plan (CMP) will utilize public input to identify cultural, historic, recreational, scenic, and architectural resources along the byway. It also will identify potential projects that enhance these resources and contribute to the traveling experience. Once completed, the CMP will support funding applications for signage and a variety of community revitalization projects, historic preservation efforts, and recreational enhancements along the corridor. The process is extensive and the final CMP is scheduled for completion in late 2007.

Two Counties Hire Trail Coordinators

Recreational trails — both motorized and non-motorized — contribute to local economies throughout Tug Hill and the entire North Country region. As many local officials know, maximizing the benefits of such activity while minimizing the nuisance and safety issues is a delicate balancing act that demands much attention. To that end, the Jefferson and Lewis County legislatures have each recently created their own trail coordinator position. Both trail coordinators will be responsible for developing a comprehensive trail plan for their respective counties that identifies and prioritizes the need for county resources or legislative actions necessary

currently designated, the Black River Scenic Byway follows the historic Black River Canal along Route 46 from Rome to Boonville. There, it meets up with the Black River Blueway Trail and parallels the river along Route 12. Near Lowville, where the Black River itself turns



Tug Hill Sages at Commission annual dinner in Rome. Left to right: Harold Petrie ('93), Robert Sauer ('03), Randy Kerr ('03), Beverly Harden ('06), Courtney Winn ('93), Neil Harden ('06), John Mahaffy ('06), Neil Wright ('96), Charlie Gallo ('06), Louis Hodkinson ('06), Ray Cheresnoski ('06).

to effectively manage trail activities. These county plans will also provide a basis for coordinating the activities of the many clubs and user groups – both motorized and non-motorized. The trail coordinators are now in the process of reviewing existing plans, visiting trail systems outside the region, and soliciting input from the various trail groups. The Jefferson County Trail Coordinator is Scott Burto (782-2749, scott@trailjeffersoncounty.com). The Lewis County Trail Coordinator is Robert Diehl (376-5422, bdiehl@lewiscountyny.org).

East Branch of Fish Creek Conservation Easement

Local efforts to protect a tract of nearly 45,000 acres in the heart of Tug Hill, once

owned by Lyons Falls Pulp and Paper, was finalized on February 28, 2006. On that day, The Nature Conservancy conveyed a conservation easement protecting its 14,000-acre holding to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. December of 2005 saw a conservation easement agreement protecting GMO Renewable Resources' 30,300 acres, and the outright ownership of a strip of land buffering the main East Branch stream corridor (south of the G& W Road), transferred to the state.

The East Branch of Fish Creek Working Group, established in 1995 and convened by the Tug Hill Commission to include all those with a special connection to and interest in this unique part of Tug Hill, worked diligently over the past 11 years to ensure that the diversity of needs expressed, from sportsmen, local elected officials, conservationists, recreationists, landowners, and many others, were heard.

This group will continue in an advisory capacity for the land and easement holders for the foreseeable future.

The Tug Hill Commission was pleased to be able to facilitate the creation of an addendum to a PILOT agreement between The Nature Conservancy and the towns of Montague, Martinsburg, Osceola, and West Turin, and Lewis County this year. It became apparent, once the original PILOT agreement was in place, that the property tax impact felt in these towns was more severe than anticipated. Additional funds from The Nature Conservancy will ensure that no town in the East Branch of Fish Creek will suffer more than a 0.5% shift in revenue as a result of TNC land purchases.

The new East Branch of Fish Creek State Forest will be managed according to state regulations already in place for all State Forest lands. The East Branch of Fish Creek Conservation Easement Lands, however, will be managed according to both

the terms of the easement agreement, and a recreation access plan developed by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Release of a draft recreation access plan for public review is expected. For more information about the East Branch of Fish Creek State Forest and Conservation Lands, please contact the NYSDEC's Lowville office at 315-376-3521.

Local, Regional Trends to be Tracked for Local Decision Makers

With greater capabilities in mapping technology and increased development pressure on Tug Hill communities, the Commission is moving forward with an effort to track key measurements over

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Commission Programs and Funding

Tug Hill Commission's budget for the fiscal year that ended March 31, 2006, was about \$1 million. Most of this funding came from the Commission's annual state appropriation. A small amount came from grants, and revenues such as registration for our Local Government Conference.

Commission expenditures equal its funding, again about \$1 million this past year. Eighty-four percent of Commission expenditures are for staff salaries. The balance

covers operational costs such as postage, office equipment, car expenses, etc. The Commission employs 18 staff, including four full-time circuit rider positions for Tug Hill Councils of Governments (COGs). COGs use their revenues from member communities to help fund part-time circuit riders and other costs.

Commission funding has remained almost unchanged, except for cost of living adjustments, over most of the past decade.

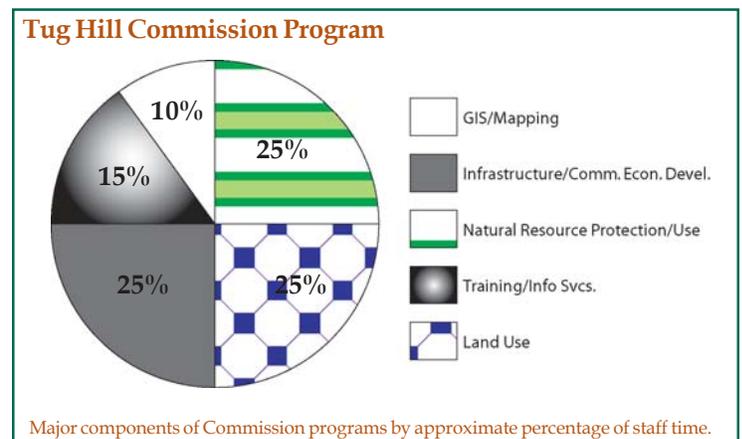
One way to gauge the value of the Commission's budget is to look at what it brings back to the region. The Commission usually helps Tug Hill local governments

and organizations raise four to ten times the Commission's annual budget in a given year.

Another way to gauge value is by what gets done in Tug Hill communities. Annually, the Commission works with some 20 local communities on revisions to land use

codes, and works on some 70 other projects from watershed protection to Main Street revitalization and business development, especially in the areas of forest products, farming, and tourism and

Continued on page 8



Watersheds continued from page 3
management practices, stream bank stabilization and restoration in agricultural areas, and fish habitat restoration through dam removal. Much more significant local outreach on this project will begin this fall now that the state legislation has been signed.

CTHC continued from page 5

council's request. They also welcomed several new town representatives and a new executive board member. Merianne Shelmidine, Lorraine, replaces Hugh Quinn of Osceola who has served for many years. Many thanks to Hugh for his dedication.

Council towns can also take advantage of this year's CTHC Community Development Grant by applying to the board via the coordinator, Jane Jones. Grants are available, up to \$2,000, for projects directly benefiting the whole community. Some projects

funded last year include landscaping at the Williamstown Community Center, renovations to the Florence Town Hall, signage in Turin and West Turin and various other projects councilwide. The deadline for this year's applications is the September council meeting.

The council continues to monitor and participate in many on-going projects around the hill such as the Black River Blueway/Byway, Salmon River Natural Resource Inventory, East Branch of Fish Creek and various community planning and technical assistance activities.

Indicators continued from page 7

time that will help local officials and citizens identify and understand trends, think systematically about their communities, and see how trends may link together. The trend information can then be used to evaluate what types of changes may be needed, prioritize those changes, and

develop consensus on what must be done and why in a well-informed, conscientious manner. The trend information would be maintained and regularly updated by the Tug Hill Commission, and be readily available to planning, town, and village board members.

This summer, Melissa Young, a graduate intern studying at SUNY ESF in Syracuse, has been interviewing local officials and area residents to find out what types of measurements or perceptions they use to judge whether or not things are going well in their communities. Ms. Young will compile a summary of her work for the Commission, from which a more detailed regional survey will be developed. Grassroots responses will be tabulated and reviewed in order to then identify reliable, measurable data that is meaningful to Tug Hill residents, and provide important input for local land use and planning decisions.

Commission Programs continued from page 7

recreation.

The Commission anticipates a growing demand for assistance in land use planning and natural resource protection as communities struggle to manage growth and development around the region. As indicated by other articles in this newsletter, we are also seeing increased emphasis on regional projects that focus on corridors and watersheds and involve multiple partnerships.

September 2006

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