

HEADWATERS

NEW YORK STATE TUG HILL COMMISSION

2010 NEWSLETTER - 2009-10 ANNUAL REPORT - Issue 48

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PLACE, LIFE, MEANING . . .

Tug Hill is a unique place, a 2,100 square mile region of New York State larger than Delaware or Rhode Island. The region is one of the most rural and remote sections of New York State and the Northeast. The uniqueness of the Tug Hill region and its natural resources have been recognized in New York State Law through enabling legislation establishing the Tug Hill Commission in 1972, the Tug Hill Reserve Act in 1992, and in codification of the Commission in the State Executive Law Article 37 in 1998. Congress has recognized the region as an integral part of the Northern Forest area, and New York State has passed legislation encouraging the use of conservation easements on key working forest lands in the region.

Tug Hill is a place where just over 100,000 people, about 50 people per square mile, call home. It is a place of valued traditions of hard working men and women and families. It is a place comprised of 41 towns and 21 villages who value community and quality of life above all else.

The region's economy is dependent upon its rich and abundant natural resources. The region's future is dependent upon how these local leaders, landowners and residents steward these natural resources and how they draw upon their local, state and federal resources in managing those resources. The mission of the Tug Hill Commission is to enable local governments, private organizations, and individuals to shape the future of the Tug Hill region. The Commission's grassroots approach to help create a sound environment and economy for this special, rural place has taken a life of its own over nearly four decades. This approach is viewed by many as a model for fostering environmental protection and appropriate rural economic development.

To live on Tug Hill and to work for the Tug Hill Commission is a life style and life shaping commitment. It would be easy to classify the Commission employees, past and present, as just bureaucrats in the wheels of government, but as Commissioners our experience with the communities they serve and the lives they touch has proven that it is much more than a mere job or paycheck. The Tug Hill Commission does not rest on its laurels of successful plan-

ning and technical assistance to local governments and individuals in the region (as well it could). The Commission prides itself on its connectedness and responsiveness to the place and people they serve. In its legislation, the Commission is required to survey the region's local leaders once every five years as to the effectiveness and acceptance of the programs and services it provides. No other state agency has the degree of local accountability to the constituents it serves. As Commission Members, we believe this helps to give the Commission meaning. It means that the Commission adapts and is responsive to local circumstances and needs. It also means that in the end, the Commission is accountable to this place and the lives and livelihoods of its people. That is the way it has been, is and should be.

As we go to print for this 49th issue of "Headwaters," the Executive Budget proposal for State Fiscal Year 2011-12 proposes \$0 funding for the Tug Hill



Commission and to "dissolve the Tug Hill Commission" and region through repeal of its enabling legislation. New York State is in dire financial circumstances and undoubtedly in need of incredible restructuring and reform. But we, the Members of the Tug Hill Commission, believe that this proposal is misguided and threatens the very **place, life and meaning** of Tug Hill. This nevertheless is a proposal which now goes through a very quick process leading to the eventual adoption of a state budget by the New York State Legislature. Whatever fate this process yields for the Tug Hill Commission we hope that it reflects the will of the people of this special place and the actions of the elected state officials these Tug Hill residents have sent to Albany.

Thank you, Tug Hill, for the opportunity to serve this place, to share in the lives of Tug Hillers and to bring meaning to the past, present and future of this region.

Tug Hill Commission Members - Chairman Mike Yerdon (Redfield), Vice Chairman Leona Cheresnoski (Lorraine), Secretary Tom Boxberger (Watertown), Jan Bogdanowicz (Montague), Roger Maciejko (Turin), David Reader (Parish), Arnie Talgo (Steuben), Kenigus (Boonville).

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”

COMMISSION PLACES PRIORITY ON TRAINING

Over the past year, Commission staff has refocused on the high priority local government officials place on training opportunities, not just at the annual Local Government Conference but throughout the year in a variety of ways and venues. A total of 23 small, regional workshops have reached over 600 local officials, providing a total of 44 hours of training opportunities.

Topics have ranged from the budget process for both villages and towns, planning board basics, GIS, and farmland protection. Commission staff purposefully chooses topics based on needs articulated by local town and village boards, as well as planning boards and zoning boards of appeals.

The Commission also offers a variety of technical and issue papers on topics impor-

tant to Tug Hill municipalities. Those papers are available online and in hard copy from circuit riders or mailed from



Attendees at a training session receive instruction from the NYS Office of the State Comptroller.

the Watertown office.

In 2010, staff wrote, reviewed or updated ten of the twenty-seven papers currently offered on the Commission’s website, www.tughill.org. Those new/updated papers include:

- Adopting and Amending Zoning by Local Law

- Conservation Easements
- Forming a Not-for-profit Corporation in NYS
- GIS Resources for Local

Governments

- Harnessing the Wind on Tug Hill
- How to Appropriate Un-anticipated Revenues
- Open Burning Regulations in NYS
- Prior Written Notices
- State Land Tax Payments on Tug Hill

- Why Prepare a Comprehensive Plan?

Commission staff is always open to new ideas on workshops or issue/technical papers that would be valuable to Tug Hill communities.

Please contact your circuit rider or call the Commission office toll-free in the region 888-785-2380 for more information.

If you would like to receive *Headwaters* electronically, or would like to be removed from our mailing list, please contact us at tughill@tughill.org or toll-free in the region, 888-785-2380.

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

When Town of Denmark Highway Superintendent Pat Mahar first heard about asset management, he knew it would make a big difference in his small, rural community. "Our roads and public infrastructure are our most expensive and important assets. Keeping track of our assets and projecting budget figures for their replacement is crucial in these economic times," Mr. Mahar noted.

Highway expenditures account for an average of 56% of all town budget expenditures in the Tug Hill region. This is quite high, compared to the average of 25% of the average town budget across the entire state. To that end, the Commission has been working with the town of Denmark, along with other communities in Lewis, Jefferson and Oneida Counties to help them in areas related to highway management.

Inventorying town roads and assets, adopting official road maps, and beginning to utilize asset management software are all ways the Commission is helping towns and villages ensure that municipal resources are used as effectively and efficiently as possible. Tug Hill Commission staff have been working with 19 communities in the Northern Oneida County Council of Governments (NOCCOG) to record GPS data for all municipal roads. This information is then placed on an official road map, which can be adopted by the municipal board. This process resolves any confusion about whether a road is abandoned, if a road is only seasonally maintained, owner-

ship questions, etc. Moreover, the adopted map provides the municipality with a legal documentation of its assets and responsibilities. In conjunction with the development of official road maps, the Commission has also been working



Data is collected for the JIMI project using a highly specialized van owned and operated by Transmap.

with communities on Tug Hill to identify low-volume roads that have minimal traffic and could perhaps benefit from an official low-volume designation. Such a designation helps communities to not only reduce the cost associated with maintaining that road, but also reduces the liability associated with the road.

The Joint Infrastructure Management Initiative (JIMI) is another project that Commission staff have undertaken to assist local communities with implementing asset management. Spearheaded by Superintendent Mahar, the project quickly grew to include two counties, ten towns and three villages. The project specifically involves Lewis and Jefferson Counties; the towns of Adams, Alexandria, Champion, Clayton, Croghan, Denmark, Leray, Lowville, Martinsburg, and Philadelphia; and the villages of Lowville, Philadelphia, and West Carthage.

With Lewis County serving as lead agent, the group was

awarded \$638,059 through the 2009-2010 Local Government Efficiency Grant Program. These grant funds are being matched with local funds from each participating community for a total \$708,954 shared highway service project. En-

hancing opportunities for greater efficiencies and effectiveness through the highway departments, the joint effort will save local taxpayers over \$1 million in the first year with additional savings accruing annually through the budget process.

The first step of the project has been to collect baseline data on all of the communities' assets including roads, signs, hydrants, manholes, and culverts, to name a few. This information then forms the basis for a digitized inventory of community assets. Using an asset management software program, each of the participating municipalities will have readily accessible information to assist in the day-to-day operations and management of their highway departments, annual budget process and capital planning initiatives. The project is expected to be complete by Fall 2011.

**THE ROAD TO SUCCESS
continued on page 8.**

ABOUT HEADWATERS

Headwaters is the annual newsletter 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.

Chairman

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Oswego County

Vice Chairman

Leona M. Cheresnoski
Jefferson County

Secretary

Thomas E. Boxberger
Jefferson County

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RACOG NOTES 10TH ANNIVERSARY

Local officials from Champion, Wilna, Carthage and West Carthage formed the River Area Council of Government (RACOG) 10 years ago to help improve the local economy. Located in the Black River watershed, blueway corridor, along multiple scenic byways and adjacent to Fort Drum, RACOG is project-driven and explores and advances shared service opportunities to minimize cost while maximizing resources.

For example, the West Carthage/Carthage Shared Police Options Report was completed by the Rochester Center for Governmental Research this fall. Funded through the 2008-09 Local Government Efficiency grant program, it outlines existing police service, alternative options, cost/benefit analysis, recommendations and implementation strategies to guide next steps.

Cooperative efforts to standardize zoning regulations with ongoing technical assistance and support from the Commission have recently been renewed with a planning committee meeting in September. The group outlined a scope of work to standardize zoning amendments, to the degree possible, based on work over the past decade to develop special use & general/specific site plan review criteria and develop and approve a preliminary Comprehensive Plan.

Funded through the EPF, the villages advanced recommendations outlined in the "Destination: Blueway, A Waterfront Plan for the Villages of Carthage and West

Carthage" that will serve to interconnect the downtown and Black River waterfront areas while preserving historically significant resources. The town of Champion completed enhancements to the historic Champion Village Green Park that features an open air gazebo, field stone fireplace, picnic tables, benches and handicapped accessible rest areas. Additionally, the town of Wilna is working to acquire property in Natural Bridge to develop a public park.

COUNCIL APPROVES DRAFT FIVE YEAR PLAN

The Cooperative Tug Hill Council held its annual meeting on September 30, 2010, at The Alpine restaurant in Constableville. The proposed 2011 budget was presented and approved by the membership present. It should be noted that the Council dues for the upcoming year will remain at \$600. The coordinator and associates have done a good job at keeping expenses to a minimum. In addition to the 2011 budget, representatives approved the draft five year plan. Highlights of the plan include the continuing work on Special Area identification, assisting with updating and revising the Working Lands publication, and the eventual update and re-adoption of the Tug Hill Reserve Act. The "Special Area" work in our communities is moving very slowly and the executive committee and chairman have urged folks to take a serious look at this project and begin to move in the direction of redesignating these areas. Circuit riders and Commission staff are ready

to assist.

The plan also calls for the adoption of a succession plan for the coordinator position due to the upcoming retirement of the Council's full time circuit rider. The executive committee will begin the search for a replacement soon by advertising for the position. Anyone interested should contact Council Chairman Roger Tibbetts for more information.

ROAD MAPPING AVAILABLE TO NOCCOG TOWNS AND VILLAGES

Over the last year, all Northern Oneida County Council of Governments (NOCCOG) towns and villages that had not already developed and adopted an official municipal road map, have asked the Tug Hill Commission for assistance in working on this project.

An official road map is a valuable tool for municipalities to make sure credit is received for every mile of town road or village street, as well as ensuring roads are properly classified and the proper legal steps followed for any roads/streets that have been abandoned. Circuit riders from NOCCOG proposed the initiative to individual towns and villages in early summer and interested communities then contacted the Tug Hill Commission for assistance.

The first step in creating an official highway map is to have Commission Planning Director Phil Street develop a "first draft map" using the highway inventory information submitted yearly to the state by highway superintendents.

The next step is to meet

with the individual highway superintendents so a visual inspection of the map can be made for accuracy based on the superintendent's knowledge of the road system. Discrepancies or changes that need to be made are noted at that time. Mickey Dietrich, the Commission's GIS specialist, then meets with the highway superintendent to address any remaining problems by using the Commission GPS unit to do actual on-site measurements. Once completed, the official road map will need to be approved by resolution of the governing board.

The maps will serve as the baseline of information to be used in the day-to-day operations and management of the highway departments. Mapping is currently underway for the towns of Annsville, Boonville, Camden, Floyd, Lee and Steuben. The town of Trenton completed their official road map in 2008 and the remaining 18 communities are moving forward with this project. Northern Oneida County Council of Governments (NOCCOG) continues to receive support from all 19 member communities.

At its 2010 annual meeting in October, the 2011 budget was adopted and annual dues will remain the same for 2011. Also at the annual meeting, local officials from represented municipalities adopted an amendment to the bylaws to increase the size of the Executive Board from three to five members. Mark Trnchik from Annsville and John Doiron from Ava are the two new directors. The current executive board officers, Robert Sauer, chairman; Mark Scheidelman fiscal officer; and Arnie Talgo, vice-chairman were reelected for 2011.

NORTH SHORE COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS UPDATE

The village of Central Square is working on a project which would bring additional senior citizen housing to the community.

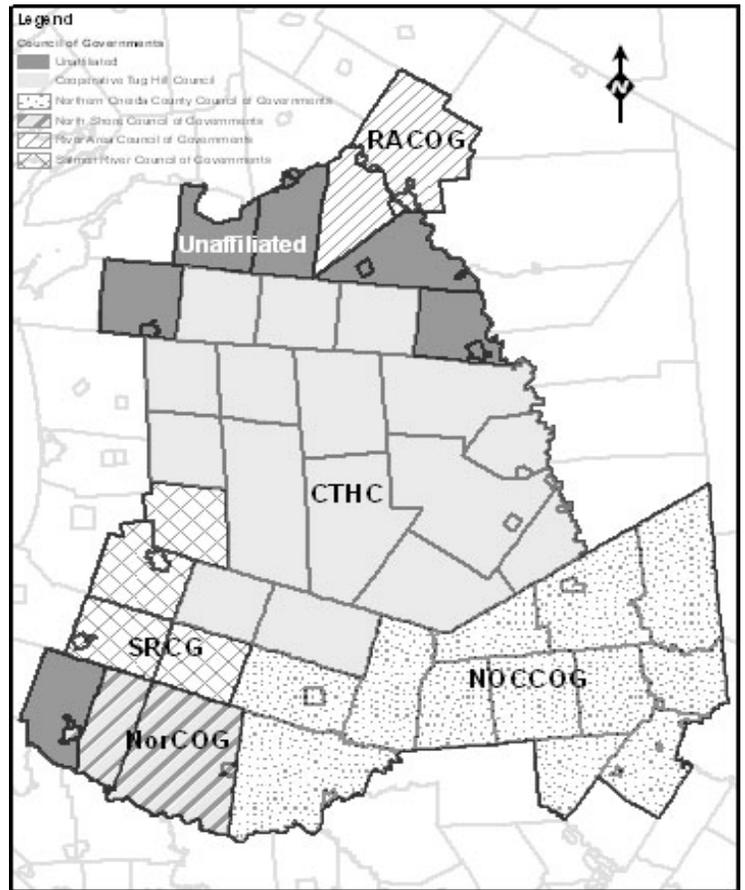
The town of Constantia completed construction of a salt storage structure for the town highway department. Construction of the town of Constantia and the town of West Monroe joint water district began, with the installation of water mains and hydrants. Nearly all necessary easements have been obtained.

As a followup to the adoption of the update of the town of West Monroe's master plan the town created a number of committees with the purpose of further exploration and specific implementation of issues identified by the master plan. Those committees include community development, infrastructure, zoning, assessment policy, and parks and recreation.

The village of Cleveland started hosting a community market in the village hall parking lot during the summer months.

SALMON RIVERS COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS UPDATE

The town of Orwell completed improvements to its water system to meet current standards and requirements. Also, the Stillwater Bridge in the town of Orwell reached a



point of structural deficiency where the county deemed it necessary to demolish the bridge. The bridge had been closed to all traffic for years prior. The town is working with other interested parties and the Tug Hill Commission to evaluate potential options for replacement, which would not include automotive traffic.

The village of Parish completed major improvements to its wastewater treatment and disposal system funded by a grant of over \$600,000 from a Small Cities Block Grant application. Improvements included rehabilitation of grinder pump stations in the village's wastewater disposal system and upgrades of other operating equipment, which should also increase energy efficiency.

The village of Parish is also working with engineers to ascertain the feasibility of

public water for the village.

The town and village of Parish are also working to determine the extent of public interest in high speed Internet townwide, while a citizens' committee is conducting a door-to-door survey on the subject. High speed Internet has been identified by the joint town-village Economic Development Task Force as a priority in improving the business climate of the town and village.

EMERALD ASH BORER THREATENS ASH TREES IN NEW YORK STATE

Over the last year, New York State has been looking for any hint of the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) within its boundaries. The state has been virtually surrounded by EAB occurrences over the past two years, including one identified less than ten miles north of the St. Lawrence River in Ontario, Canada, at varying levels of infestation.

The EAB is a small but destructive emerald green wood-boring beetle that infests and kills North American ash trees, including green, white, black, and blue ash species. Complete eradication of ash trees in New York State and, indeed, the U.S., is anticipated unless an effective treatment can be developed. Removal and chipping of infested trees is the only known treatment for infestation at this time. There are no known significant native predator species to control EAB populations, and winter cold does not kill the larva or pupa growing inside the bark. Over 7,000 purple sticky traps were distributed throughout the state this year in order to survey for the insect.

New York adopted regulations in 2008 that ban untreated firewood from entering the state and restricts intrastate movement of untreated firewood to no more than a 50-mile radius from its source (www.dec.ny.gov/animals/28722.html). Firewood movement has been the primary way EAB has spread. The Department of Environmental

Conservation is increasing its enforcement efforts to prevent the movement of untreated firewood into and around New York State.

EAB occurrences have so far been recorded in Cattaraugus, Genesee, Greene, Livingston, Monroe, Ulster and Steuben counties (www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7253.html). Counties west of Cayuga County in western New York are now under full quarantine, as are Ulster and Greene counties. Counties under quarantine cannot import or export firewood or logs unless treated.

COMMUNITIES EMBRACE ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND RENEWABLES

The Commission assisted nine communities this past spring submit applications to the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) for energy efficiency upgrades and renewable energy installations at their municipal facilities.

The funding was available through NYSERDA's Implementation for Small Municipalities program, administered in conjunction with funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Of those, four were funded and are now underway:

- The town of Rodman's solar power installation at the town hall (\$174,120);
- The town of Osceola's energy efficiency upgrades to the Osceola Community Center (\$8,076);
- The town of Trenton's

energy efficiency upgrades at their municipal building (\$15,000); and,

- The town of Steuben's solar power installation at the town hall (\$39,174).

Several towns, including the town of Rodman, which received grants for solar power installations, worked together to reduce materials expenditures by ordering as a group.

CONNECTING TUG HILL AND THE ADIRONDACKS FOR WILDLIFE

Maintaining connections between large forested areas like Tug Hill and the Adirondacks is critical for many wildlife species that require large ranges for survival. The



Adirondack-Tug Hill Habitat Connectivity Project is a collaborative undertaking by Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, Adirondack Nature Conservancy, Wildlife Conservation Society, Tug Hill Commission and others to identify areas of the Black River valley that seem optimum for wildlife movement between the two

regions. Over the past three years, current knowledge of wildlife needs, computer modeling and on-the-ground data have been used to identify areas of special interest regarding wildlife movement.

Two priority areas have been identified through the work so far, one of which is the mostly forest and farm area in Northern Oneida County. Implementation of some measures has begun in the southern linkage (the towns of Ava, Boonville, Forestport, Remsen, Steuben, Trenton, and Western) to maintain and improve the landscape for wildlife habitat.

Implementation involves three primary approaches: working with towns on local land use planning; partnering with state, county, and town transportation/highway departments on ways to make roads easier for wildlife to cross; and engaging interested

private landowners in land protection efforts. The towns of Trenton, Forestport, and Boonville have each completed or almost completed comprehensive plans that incorporate the concept of

WILDLIFE
continued on page 8.

TUG HILL TRIVIA - FIRST EDITION

1. What two towns were added to the Commission's territory in 1991?
2. What community's fire department is named "Defiance"?
3. What is the oldest Tug Hill town?
4. How much land on Tug Hill is in state ownership?
 - (a) ~5%
 - (b) ~10%
 - (c) ~15%
 - (d) ~20%
5. What local official has served the Tug Hill region the longest – in what capacity and for how long?
6. How many Tug Hill Sages are there?
7. What COG has the most member municipalities?
 - (a) River Area Council of Governments
 - (b) Salmon Rivers Council of Governments
 - (c) Cooperative Tug Hill Council
 - (d) Northern Oneida County Council of Governments
8. What town or village in Tug Hill holds the record for the most snowfall in a year?
9. What is the longest running weekly newspaper in the region?
10. Who is the most famous ghost on Tug Hill?

Answers on Back Page

COMMISSION PROGRAMS AND FUNDING

The Tug Hill Commission's budget for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, was about \$1.2 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 funding has remained unchanged and level with the previous year's funding for three years in a row.

Commission expenditures equal its funding, with 84% of Commission expenditures going to staff salaries. The balance covers operational costs such as postage, office equipment, car expenses, etc. The Commission employs 17 staff, including four full-time

circuit riders for Tug Hill councils of governments (COGs). The COGs use revenues from member communities to help fund part-time circuit riders and other costs.

One way to gauge the value of the Commission's budget is to look at what it brings back to the region. Historically, the Commission helps secure more money for Tug Hill local governments every year than the Commission's annual appropriation. Another way to gauge value is by what gets done in Tug Hill communities.

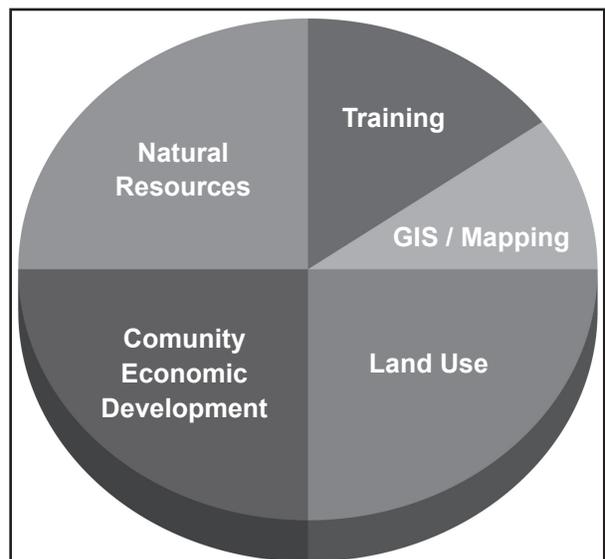
Annually, the Commission works with some 20 local communities on revisions to land use codes, and works on some 70 other projects from watershed protection to Main Street revitalization and business development, especially in the areas of forest products, farming, tourism, and recreation.

The Commission anticipates growing demand for assistance in land use planning and natural resource protection as communities work to manage growth and development around the region.

As seen throughout this newsletter, there is an increased emphasis on regional projects that focus on corridors and watersheds and involve

multiple partnerships.

As we continue to deal with these challenging fiscal times, staff will look for ways to deliver fiscal savings while sustaining vital services. The Commission will also work with communities in savings of their own through efficiencies and sharing of services where communities want it.





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**THE ROAD TO SUCCESS
 continued from page 3.**

Additionally, the Tug Hill Commission has been working with the region's State legislative delegation and the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources on adoption of legislation providing for Low Volume Roads and Minimum Maintenance Roads. At the request of our communities, we have been working with our legislators on developing a statute which would codify standards for low-volume local road design, construction and maintenance, as recommended by the Local Roads Research and Coordination Council back in 1992. While many of our communities are now acting under municipal home rule law to classify and manage their low-volume roads, they unanimously agree that a state statute

providing clear authorization would be helpful in supporting practices which they are now engaged in.

As funding becomes tighter, and proposals for property tax caps are seriously debated, it is more important than ever to address this issue. Considering that the costs of roads is one of the largest parts of our towns' budgets, and that clear guidance on road design, construction and maintenance could be a vital tool in controlling these costs, we consider this issue to be one of our highest priorities. This is particularly true with regards to the proposed authority to designating "minimum-maintenance" roads in remote, rural areas. Designating roads as "minimum-maintenance" would help alleviate the unduly expensive and unnecessary costs

of upgrading and plowing little used roads providing access to remote forest, agricultural and recreational lands.

**WILDLIFE
 continued from page 6.**

"wildlife connectivity" in their language. The towns of Ava, Steuben and Western are working through some mapping exercises to identify important areas in their towns in anticipation of working on comprehensive plans over the next several years.

NYS Department of Transportation has been involved in considering options on State Route 12 for low-cost wildlife barrier mitigation that can be incorporated in regularly scheduled maintenance. Field work will take place this winter to identify animal movement across key road segments to refine implementation plans. Future work will focus on

partnering with local highway departments to inventory potential areas that could benefit in similar ways. Additionally, conservation organizations are working with several willing landowners on either conservation easements or land purchase to protect important wildlife habitat areas.

- 1. Remsen & Forestport
- 2. Altmar
- 3. Floyd, enacted March 4,
- 1796.
- 4. (c) 15%
- 5. Remsen Highway
- Superintendent George
- Worden on his fifty years
- of service to the town of
- Remsen.
- 6. 26 as of 2008
- 7. (d) NOCCOG
- 8. Montague
- 9. Boonville Herald
- 10. Tug Hill Annie, Sears
- Pond/Montague area

Answers to Tug Hill Trivia