

2C1Forest - A Network of People Creating a Network of Conserved Lands

Tug Hill: Embracing sustainability, conservation and connectivity



Located between Lake Ontario and the Adirondacks is a beautiful area known as Tug Hill. Home to over 100,000 people inhabiting four counties, this 2,100 square mile (3,379 km²) rural and remote region of New York State is an inspiring example of cooperative work that embraces conservation and sustainability.

Separated by farmlands and towns, Tug Hill's wilderness (800 square miles (1 287 km²) and the Adirondacks Park (9, 375 square miles (15,087 Km²) are core conservation habitat in the Northern

Appalachian/Acadian ecoregion. The Tug Hill region is heavily forested, receives the heaviest snowfall in the eastern United States and hosts the headwaters of several major rivers. Ensuring connectivity between Tug Hill and the Adirondacks is the reason 2C1Forest identified the Black River Valley area as a priority landscape linkage.

2C1Forest is working to advance connectivity in this region by developing our relationship with groups that are working collaboratively to ensure that the area retains its special quality of life for future generations. The Tug Hill Commission (the Commission) and the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust (THT) demonstrate the success of collaborative work and are at the forefront of advancing conservation and sustainability in the region.



The Tug Hill Commission

The Tug Hill Commission was created by the New York state legislature in 1972. The Commission uses a grassroots approach, a model fostering environmental protection and economic development, to help create a sound environment and economy for the Tug Hill region. It provides technical assistance in the areas of land use planning, community economic development, and natural resource management to local governments, economic development organizations, and other local groups. The Commission utilizes a model "circuit rider" program and fosters inter-municipal cooperation in part by making its computerized (GIS) mapping system available to local governments.

The nine members of the Commission use a "home rule" approach that ensures that decisions are in the best interest of Tug Hill residents and empower individual communities to respect and respond to the needs of the entire region. Another important feature of the Commission's success is the wide array of partnerships it has built to deliver programs and services. The Commission partners with various state agencies, development authorities, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, universities, local governments and small business enterprises. It also partners extensively with corporations and not-for-profit organisations.

Although the Commission has historically focused on the environmental and economic features of traditional infrastructure, such as water and transportation, and helped communities finance projects, like highway corridors and public parks, it is now moving towards integrating green

infrastructure principles in its services and training. In its 2005-2009 strategic plan, the Commission recognizes that “the region’s green infrastructure as much defines the region as does other physical infrastructure and we need to plan for, manage, and sustain the use of this green infrastructure no less than we do for our built infrastructure. It, too, underlies the economic engine of our region”¹. Green infrastructure can be described as an “interconnected network of green space that conserves natural ecosystem values and functions and provides associated benefits to human populations”². In essence green infrastructure integrates conservation values in land development, growth management and built infrastructure.

The Tug Hill Commission balances a variety of interests in the region including working forest management, recreation, tourism, agriculture, energy development, and public health. Ensuring a place for conservation among these interests requires embracing the benefits of habitat and wildlife protection in careful local planning. To this end, the Commission has recently focused research into the region’s conservation potential and the economic realities of current activities. It has also recently created the Tug Hill Local Leaders Institute. Several times a year local leaders in government and civic organizations meet to receive intensive training that takes an in-depth look at the Tug Hill region. The Local Leaders Institute develops participants’ meeting, conflict resolution and leadership skills.

The Commission has long recognized that to fully understand what is happening within the region, it must consider the forces and circumstances beyond the region. As such, it continues to maintain good working relations with partners beyond Tug Hill, implements an “Outside Region Policy” and engages with partners on new cross-border connectivity initiatives.



The Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, one of the Commission’s partners, has been advancing conservation in the region and beyond into the Black River Valley linkage. THTLT is a regional, private, not-for-profit organization founded in 1990 by a group of Tug Hill residents. With public lands scattered over a tenth of the region, THTLT works with landowners of the remaining privately owned forests, farms recreation lands and wildlands to advance conservation.

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust increases awareness and appreciation of the Tug Hill region through educational efforts, and seeks to retain the forest, farm, recreation and wild lands of the region through voluntary, private land protection efforts. THTLT’s educational efforts include organizing field trips and events, and issuing publications on local research and initiatives, teaching materials and presentations. THTLT works to conserve a wide array of its local landscapes including the region’s core forest, numerous pristine wetlands, streams, and rivers, and its 17 gorges. Land protection efforts include an informal arrangement through their Land Registry program which empowers local land owners to monitor and report on special natural features of their properties through a voluntary agreement with THTLT. This initiative encourages residents to be actively involved in land protection and can influence landowners to consider more permanent forms of land conservation, such as conservation easements.

THTLT currently has some forty conservation easements throughout the Tug Hill region. Many of these easements have been achieved through some form of collaboration. The Trenton Greenbelt 2,000 acre (809 hectares) is a result of THTLT’s active efforts to bring both public and private interest to agree on land protection. THTLT also contributed to the success of The Nature Conservancy – Central & Western New York Chapter’s efforts to establish the 45, 000 acres (18, 210.85 hectares) East Branch Fish Creek Watershed working forest conservation easement.



Mile Creek easement in
the Black River Valley
Linkage

Going beyond conservation easements, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust's efforts also helped include connectivity as criteria for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Regional Open Space plan. This is an important success as the plan sets out the department's land protection priorities. THTLT also took a lead role in engaging the Adirondack chapters of The Nature Conservancy and the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Tug Hill Commission, and the New York State Departments of Transportation and Environmental Conservation in a collaborative effort to implement new initiatives that will advance connectivity in the Black River Valley priority landscape linkage. This local collaboration used spatial modeling to identify where to work on connectivity in this linkage. This resulted in the development of a strategic plan focused on land protection, reducing impacts of roads, and informing local land use planning. The Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust is a very valuable member in this strategy and is one of the most active organizations working on land protection in the Black River Valley.

Beyond the Region-Algonquin to Adirondacks

Ensuring connectivity beyond the Northern Appalachian/Acadian ecoregion is an important element of ensuring the ecoregion itself does not become the last stronghold for certain species. A neighbour of the Tug Hill region is trying to do just that. The Algonquin to Adirondacks Conservation group (better known as A2A) is working collaboratively with multiple stakeholders in the Ontario-New York border region to restore connectivity from the Algonquin Park in Ontario to the Adirondacks Park in New York. With a mere 49.8 miles (80 kilometres) stretch of land left that can be considered wild in this heavily populated area, A2A is establishing connections with its counter parts in New York state. 2C1Forest applauds these cross-border initiatives and looks forward to working with Tug Hill and its neighbours to further connectivity in this region.

For more information, please visit:

Algonquin to Adirondacks Conservation Group
<http://www.a2alink.org/>

The Nature Conservancy Adirondacks Chapter
<http://www.nature.org/>

Tug Hill Commission
<http://www.tughill.org/>

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust
<http://www.tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org/>

Wildlife Conservation Society Adirondacks Chapter
<http://www.wcs.org/>

This is the seventh edition in a series of profiles describing the network of people and organisations working together to establish a network of conserved lands in the Northern Appalachian/Acadian Ecoregion.

Please visit the 2C1Forest website (www.2c1forest.org) to learn more about us and conservation work across the ecoregion.

To Unsubscribe to this listserv: Contact [Chantal Gagnon](#)

¹ Tug Hill Commission, 2005-2009 Strategic Plan, page 5, Accessed on line July 22, 2009
<http://www.tughill.org/Final%20draft%20of%20THC%20Strategic%20plan%202005-09.pdf>

² Benedict, Mark. A., McMahon, Edward T., 2002, *Green Infrastructure: Smart Conservation for the 21st Century*, Renewable Resources Journal, Autumn 2002, pages 12-18, Accessed July 22 2009,
<http://www.alleghenybasin.org/Benedict%20and%20McMahon%202002.pdf>