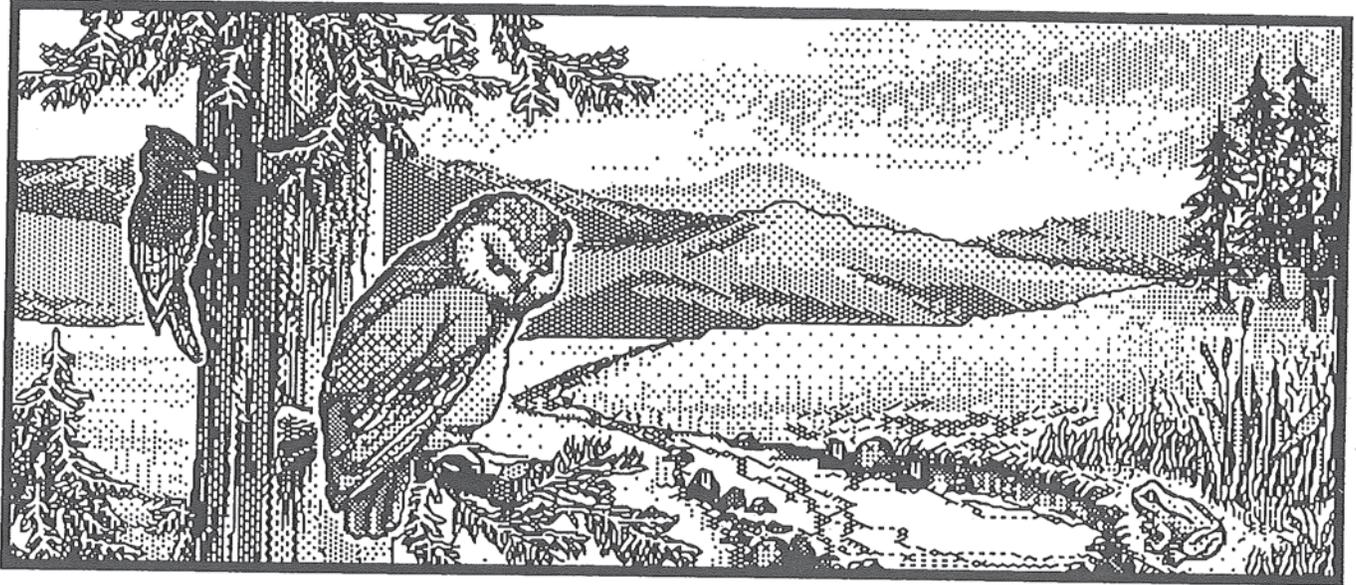


Tompkins County Environmental Management Council



Annual Report 1990

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Tompkins County
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Ithaca, New York 14850
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April 1, 1991

James Mason, Chair
Tompkins County Board of Representatives
Tompkins County Courthouse
Ithaca, New York 14850

Dear Mr. Mason:

It is my pleasure to submit to the Tompkins County Board of Representatives the 1990 Annual Report of the Tompkins County Environmental Management Council.

1990 was a busy year for the EMC. In addition to completing two major studies-- the Unique Natural Areas Study and the Underground Storage Tanks study-- the EMC continued to work closely with elected officials in order to identify, study and respond to environmental issues before they developed into major problems. We are proud of our 19 year history of providing the leaders and citizens of the County with the information and technical assistance required to keep Tompkins County in the forefront of environmental policy making.

On behalf of the Tompkins County EMC, I would like to thank the Tompkins County Board of Representatives for their continued support in 1990. As the need for environmental information continues to grow I am confident that the EMC will continue to be an important part of the Tompkins County government in helping to maintain the integrity of our environment.

Respectfully Submitted,

Donald L. Barber, Jr.

Donald Barber, Jr.



1990 Annual Report

I. Council Organization:

The Environmental Management Council (EMC) together with the Tompkins County Planning Department (TCPD) have primary official responsibility at the County level for studying and providing advice on issues affecting the environment of Tompkins County. Both agencies are under the jurisdiction of the Planning Committee of the County Board of Representatives. The EMC Coordinator is a member of TCPD staff and operates as a liaison between the two agencies. In this way there is a close working relationship between the Planning Department and the EMC.

The EMC is funded by the County Board of Representatives, with a portion of this funding reimbursed by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation through their Local Environmental Assistance Program.

The Tompkins County EMC was established by a Resolution of the Board of Representatives on May 10, 1971, which recognized that such a Council could aid in the "preservation and improvement of the quality of the natural and man-made environment within the County of Tompkins....(which) is of increasing and vital importance to the health, welfare and economic well-being of the present and future inhabitants of the County."¹

The objectives of the Council are:

1. To identify environmental issues facing the County; to research, deliberate and recommend action on those issues to County government.
2. To assist in the coordination of activities, data and expertise in matters of environmental concern.
3. To act as a public forum and provide educational materials and information to foster a broader understanding of environmental issues and their possible solutions.

Members of the Council are appointed by the County Board of Representatives

¹Tompkins County Board of Representatives Resolution No. 103 passed May 10, 1971.

for two year terms. The Council is composed of a representative from each city, village and town Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) or, if no CAC has been formed, from each unit of local government (16 positions). In addition, at least twelve At-Large members are appointed to ensure broad-based representation. Six non-voting, ex-officio members are appointed as well.

II. Council Achievements in 1990

In 1990, the EMC continued to serve the County and the public by conducting a wide variety of studies, public forums, and project reviews related to the quality of our environment. The following pages summarize the major projects completed or in progress in 1990.

A. Council Organization and Effectiveness

Enabling Legislation: Modifications to the EMC enabling legislation were completed and approved by the County Board of Representatives on December 18, 1990. The majority of the modifications are related to the membership and attendance policy of the Council and were designed to encourage more active participation by Council members.

Education Committee: A special committee responsible for planning and implementing educational forums was created. Zebra mussels, gypsy moths, and solid waste issues are possible topics for upcoming educational forums.

Conservation Advisory Councils (CAC): The Town of Ithaca and the Village of Lansing both formed Conservation Advisory Councils this year. This brings the total of CAC's formed in the County to four. The EMC has been working on ways to better coordinate activities with the local CAC's. The Chair of the EMC has met with the CAC's in the County to explain how the EMC works and where it would be appropriate to provide assistance and guidance to the CAC's. It was agreed that there would be an exchange of minutes and other types of documents of mutual interest. The Administrative Affairs Committee of the EMC will act as a liaison with the CAC's.

B. Education/Public Forums

State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR): The EMC continues to review County initiated SEQR actions as part of the SEQR review procedure. In 1990 the EMC worked with municipalities and the public to inform them and help them comply with the law. To accomplish this, the EMC conducted a SEQR workshop for all government officials working with SEQR, along with other interested parties. With a number of significant SEQR reviews under way in the County, the Council felt that there was substantial need to provide an educational

forum outlining appropriate guidelines and procedures under the SEQR law. The workshop was held in two sessions. Approximately 50 people attended the first session, and over 70 people attended the second.

Earth Day: The EMC helped to plan and participated in the 3-day long Earth Day festivities held in Ithaca. Council focused its efforts on educating the public about wetlands and household hazardous waste, through displays and pamphlets. In celebration of Earth Day, the EMC accomplished a major cleanup of the shoreline around Dryden Lake.

C. Solid Waste

Bag/Tag System: The EMC continued to play an important advisory role to the County Board with respect to the development of Solid Waste Management Plan, and has monitored various solid waste programs. An example is the County's bag/tag system in which residents pay their tipping fees for the landfill by attaching a tag to their garbage in order for it to be picked up. The EMC has noted two problems as a result of this system: illegal dumping, and the requirement that volunteer groups cleaning up garbage must also pay tipping fees. The EMC was asked to make a recommendation on bag/tag exemptions for charitable organizations who are involved with the pickup of garbage, such as projects to clean roadways. A proposal was submitted and is being considered by the Board of Representatives.

Waste Management Council: In 1990 the EMC worked closely with the Division of Solid Waste and passed a resolution supporting the establishment of a Waste Management Council. The purpose of the Waste Management Council is to advise the County Board of Representatives on the development of a Solid Waste Management Plan and other solid waste issues affecting the County. The membership of the Waste Management Council will consist of members selected from advisory and citizens groups, including the EMC, who have knowledge about solid waste issues.

DR-7 Natural Resources: The EMC-sponsored vegetation survey for the proposed DR-7 landfill site has been completed and is being incorporated into a report to make recommendations on management of the natural resources at the DR-7 site. A buffer zone will be defined to include the most environmentally sensitive portions of the site. The area has been mapped into plant community types in order to provide the necessary information to properly manage the site to preserve the very high biological diversity of the site.

D. Land Use and Transportation

Airport Development Plan: The County is proceeding with the implementation of the County's Airport Master Plan. Runway extension and a new terminal design are the first phases of the plan to be implemented. The Council will continue to advise the County Board regarding the overall impacts on the surrounding land uses and other possible environmental impacts. Major concerns are the amount of traffic generated by an expanded terminal and related developments in and around the adjacent Cornell research park.

Hog Hole and Cayuga Trail: The EMC has joined the City of Ithaca CAC in asking that the DEC reclassify the Hog Hole as a wetland protected under the state's Freshwater Wetlands Act. The Finger Lakes Parks regional office is proceeding with its environmental review of the marina development and its impacts on Hog Hole and adjacent environs.

Dryden Town Park: A site plan for the proposed town park adjacent to Dryden Lake was reviewed. Several suggestions for modification of the plan including the reduction or elimination of camping, and sporting activities were made by the EMC in the form of a resolution. The Council urged that the plan provide an adequate buffer zone to the natural area surrounding the lake. Dryden Lake is a unique county resource that supports diverse populations of resident bird and animal life, and serves as a resting place for many varieties of common and unusual migrating land and water birds. It is also a DEC regulated freshwater wetland and provides a diverse complement of habitat types from marsh to upland.

Below Regulatory Concern Waste: A resolution was proposed by the Council and approved by the County Legislature to continue to regulate radioactive wastes defined in the National Regulatory Commissions proposed rule change as "Below Regulatory Concern." The resolution asked that Congress readdress this issue and that the local laws regulating solid waste be amended to include hazardous and radioactive materials.

E. Plant and Animal Life

Wetlands: The EMC reviewed the proposed DEC revisions of the New York State Freshwater Wetlands Act to comply with the federal wetlands policy. The Education Committee is tentatively planning a wetlands conference for government officials and interested citizens for 1991.

Zebra Mussel: Information on zebra mussel impacts in the Great Lakes and their inevitable threat to the Finger Lakes has been received. Posters and

pamphlets with information on how boaters can help slow the spread of the mussel have been prepared and will be distributed to marinas and boating establishments in early 1991.

Unique Natural Areas: The final editing of the database for the survey was completed. Over 160 sites have been described in the County and entered into a computer database which will easily permit periodic updating with new information on the sites as it becomes available. The report, over 800 pages in length, was printed and distributed to all municipalities and the following County offices: Assessment, Board of Representatives, County Clerk, and County Library. The intended use of the report is in planning and in the review of sit plans. Volunteers of the EMC are presenting each municipality with ideas on how they might best use the study to protect the most sensitive areas. In recognition of the quality and significance of the Unique Natural Areas Survey, the Tompkins County EMC was presented with an Award of Achievement at the New York State Association of EMC's 1990 Conference on the Environment.

Smith Woods: A severe wind storm last fall felled a number of mature trees in the Smith Woods natural area. This stand represents one of the few remaining undisturbed northern beech communities. A logging operation was planned to remove about one-third of the timber on the site. Much discussion ensued as to the development of a more protective development scheme of this unique area. A number of unusual plants and animals exist on the site. A draft resolution was discussed on how to protect the woods from intrusions, such as the logging that occurred in 1990. The EMC initiated an ongoing dialogue with the private board which manages the site.

F. Air and Water Quality

Underground Storage Tanks Study: A consultant was selected to carry out a pilot study to assess the population and risk of buried tanks to ground water within the County. The study was statistical in nature and intended to provide policy guidelines to the County Board for regulation of buried tanks. The authors of the study concluded that an active prevention program can significantly reduce environmental risks and may return a substantial economic benefit to the owner. It is estimated that the average life expectancy of bare steel tanks in Tompkins County is 15.5 years, primarily due to soil conditions and soil moisture. The EMC is formulating recommendations to be presented to the County Board on this matter.

SPDES Permits: The Air and Water Quality Committee is investigating the cumulative effects of SPDES permits on the Inlet Valley waters. The County

averages about 500,000 gpd discharge in permits annually. County Health Department officials have been invited to meet with the Air and Water Quality Committee to discuss this issue. The Council has also raised the question with the DEC on whether there is any estimate or upper limit determined on the number of SPDES permits that should be issued in a watershed. Council is concerned that there is no apparent consideration of the cumulative effect of issuing permits over time.

Route 13 Air Quality: The Air and Water Committee is investigating how air quality can be routinely monitored in the City. There is concern that air quality is deteriorating with the increasing traffic on Rte. 13, especially on days when inversions occur. The Boyce Thompson Institute (BTI) of Cornell University established an air monitoring station in downtown Ithaca. The station functioned for 6 weeks in the summer of 1990. The Air and Water Quality Committee will be meeting with BTI to discuss the results of the 1990 monitoring.

EMC ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 1990

Resolutions presented by the TCEMC:

Protection of Smith Woods
Protection of Malloryville bog and surrounding Unique Natural Areas
Protesting Federal deregulation of Below Regulatory Concern Radioactive Waste
Resolution promoting the establishment of a Waste Management Council
Resolution supporting proposed Dryden Lake Town Park

Publications:

Tompkins County Unique Natural Areas Inventory
An Evaluation of Risks Associated with Underground Storage Tanks in Tompkins County

Workshops/Presentations:

Presented UNA study to municipalities
SEQR workshop for local officials