



*Tompkins County  
Environmental  
Management Council*

**1992 ANNUAL REPORT**  
**and State of the Environment**

# ***EMC Members and Staff***

## **At-Large Members**

Donald Barber, Jr.  
Robert Beck  
Ed Cope  
Herb Engman  
Kurt Jirka  
Matthew McDonald  
Marjolein Schat  
Carol Sisler  
Byron Unsworth  
Nicholas Vandam  
David Weinstein  
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## **Municipal Members**

Donald Brown, *Town of Newfield*  
Dan Decker, *Town of Danby*  
Richard Fischer, *Town of Ithaca*  
Bara Hotchkiss, *City of Ithaca*  
Dooley Kiefer, *Village of Cayuga Heights*  
Lowell Korb, *Town of Caroline*  
Lynn Leopold, *Village of Lansing*  
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Tom O'Brien, *Village of Groton*  
Barbara Page, *Village of Trumansburg*  
Bard Prentiss, *Village of Dryden*  
Lyle Raymond, *Town of Groton*  
Dennis Swaney, *Town of Dryden*

## **Ex-Officio Members**

John Andersson, *Tompkins County Department of Health*  
Paul Bonaparte-Krogh, *Tompkins County Cooperative Extension*  
James Hanson, Jr., *Tompkins County Commissioner of Planning*  
William Mobbs, *Tompkins County Commissioner of Public Works*  
Robert Mulvey, *Tompkins County Attorney*  
Nancy Schuler, *Tompkins County Board of Representatives*

## **Staff**

Mary Smith, *EMC Coordinator, Environmental Planner*  
Loretta Bernal, *EMC Secretary*

## *Message from the Chair*

The Tompkins County Environmental Management Council (TCEMC) is the official advisory committee on environmental matters to the County Board of Representatives. Because the County is authorized by the State of New York to establish the EMC, the TCEMC also may advise on state and even national concerns.

Wetlands protection, transportation alternatives, state forest use planning, pesticide usage, road salt practices, water quality, solid waste issues, and unique natural areas are just some of the topics the TCEMC worked on this year and which are described in this report. The TCEMC also reviews the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) statements produced for county government projects as well as many state and local undertakings.

As can be seen on these pages, the volunteers who make up the voting membership of the TCEMC devote a great deal of time and expertise to environmental matters. In fact, as a twelve-year member, I believe this to be the most talented EMC ever. Together with excellent staff from a supportive Tompkins County Department of Planning, the receptive County Board of Representatives has an invaluable resource to which to turn.

Even so, there is more environmental work than can be handled by the current TCEMC. As described elsewhere in this report, we welcome associate members to the TCEMC -- those who would like to work on issues, but don't wish to spend the energy or time attending meetings and voting on EMC recommendations. Those who would be interested in associate membership should contact me at 255-2536 or Mary Smith at 274-5560.

With current and new volunteers and staff support, I fully expect that this year will be even more productive than the 1992 accomplishments reported on these pages.

Herb Engman, EMC Chair

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# Waste Disposal and Resource Recovery

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## How Should Tompkins County Pay for Solid Waste?

This question is on the minds of policy makers and citizens alike in Tompkins County. It is also on the minds of EMC members, who are concerned that some solid waste funding scenarios could remove the incentive for recycling in Tompkins County.

The County started investigating alternatives to solid waste funding when it became clear that funding solid waste programs solely through the trash tag program was resulting in a deficit in the solid waste budget. Out-of-county hauling of solid waste by some area trash haulers, prompted by higher county tipping fees than at area landfills, created a shortfall of solid waste revenue. To make up this shortfall, either the tipping fee would have to increase (which would most likely further increase the deficit) or other funding sources would need to be identified.

As an advisory board on environmental matters to the County Board of Representatives, the EMC, through their Waste Disposal and Resource Recovery Committee, reviewed the solid waste funding alternatives under consideration by the County. The EMC supports the use of trash tags to the extent that they raise consumer awareness regarding the true cost of disposal and effectively encourage recycling. However, unintended environmental impacts such as illegal dumping and burning have increased under this system.

After much deliberation, the EMC passed a resolution in support of the proposal to partially fund solid waste programs temporarily through the addition of an annual fee, along with the continued existence of a cheaper trash tag and tipping fee. The EMC feels that the continued existence of the trash tag will provide an incentive for waste reduction and recycling. The resolution also stressed the need for waste-reduction education, urged the County to plan for the removal of hazardous waste from its solid waste stream, and supported the establishment of a Solid Waste and Recycling facility to allow for more cost effective recycling programs.

As the County plans to revisit the solid waste funding scheme for the 1994 County budget, the EMC will continue to monitor this situation.

## Protecting Natural Resources at a Landfill

Protecting natural resources was but one of the recommendations made by the EMC in their 1991 report entitled "The DR-7 Natural Resources Management Plan". Although the DR-7 site has been officially abandoned, the EMC spent a considerable amount of time in 1992 trying to implement this plan.

The Natural Resources Management Plan was the idea of EMC members who believed that a county landfill could be more of a resource to communities, human and non-human, than just a place to bury waste. The idea behind the plan was that

*"A natural area, adjacent to the grassy mounds that will mark the resting place of solid waste, can be created on the remainder of the parcel. Its future character and usefulness can be shaped by decisions made now, even before the two-decade active life of the landfill begins. By the end of those two decades it can be an important part of the county's educational and recreational resources."*

The EMC endorsed this idea and set to work on preparing a natural resources management plan for the DR-7 site. The main goals of the plan were to:

- 1) protect and enhance the biological diversity of the site;
- 2) assure, in the long-term, conditions which provide and maintain a healthy environment for residents adjacent to the site; and,
- 3) provide the general public and area residents with recreational use of the buffer (non-operational) area of the site.

In 1992, efforts by the EMC to implement the Plan ceased when the Board of Representatives placed a freeze on all DR-7 landfill planning activities. Although the DR-7 site has been officially abandoned, it is likely that the County will need to consider in-county landfilling as a future waste disposal option. At that time, the EMC will be ready to assist with the preparation and implementation of a natural resources management plan for that future site.

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# **Plant and Animal Life**

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## **The Unique Natural Areas Inventory: What to Expect in 1993**

Is there life after the release of the EMC's Inventory of Unique Natural Areas in Tompkins County? The answer is definitely yes!

The 800 page Unique Natural Areas Inventory, completed in December of 1990, was distributed to all municipal offices in the county, as well as to the Tompkins Public Library, the County Clerk, and Assessment office. The inventory is widely used as a trusted resource for data on sensitive environmental areas in the county that provides essential information for project reviews and the preparation of municipal master plans.

In 1993, the EMC Plant and Animal Life Committee plans to make the inventory even more useful to local governments and landowners. To answer such question as, "How can I tell if and how a project will impact a unique natural area?", and "What options are available to local governments who want to protect unique natural areas?"; an instruction manual will be developed.

The manual will be designed for use as a companion document to the Inventory. In addition to providing information on protection techniques available to landowners and municipalities, readers will learn how to assess potential impacts to unique natural areas. Guidelines for the creation of buffer areas will also be presented.

Local municipalities provided the motivation for this project by seeking more information from the EMC regarding mechanisms available for protection of unique natural areas. Unfortunately, the Inventory was not designed to supply this information. In addition, the boundaries identified within the Inventory were not intended to indicate where human activities would or would not impact a sensitive area. Instead, the boundaries were only meant to alert the landowner that care should be taken in maintaining these areas and that any alterations of the landscape should be carefully considered and planned. It is the goal of the EMC that by developing a set of guidelines in the form of a manual, local planning boards will be able to determine the impacts, if any, of a development activity on a unique natural area.

The end product will be a manual that is publicly available and sent to each municipality in the county. Look for the manual this fall!

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# Membership Notes

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## Volunteers Needed!

As this annual report indicates, the interests and concerns of the EMC span a wide range of environmental matters in the county. Frequently those working on a particular topic will go outside the group to draw upon the experiences and volunteer help of others in the community. This makes it possible for those outside the EMC to work on a particular project along with members of an EMC committee without taking the time required to attend our regular meetings.

Anyone who is interested in volunteering their time to become an "associate member" to work on a specific project of the EMC is invited to contact Mary Smith, the EMC Coordinator, at 274-5560.

## Attention all Freeville Residents:

The EMC has twenty-eight voting members, each appointed by the County Board of Representatives. Since each Town and Village in the county has a voting seat, sixteen of these members are "municipal representatives". This designation has been made to insure that environmental concerns from all areas of the county will receive adequate attention.

Currently, the Village of Freeville seat is vacant. We urge any Freeville resident who is interested in the activities and interests of the EMC to contact Mary Smith, the EMC Coordinator, at 274-5560. She can provide you with the additional information necessary for you to decide whether this is a volunteer opportunity which you would like to pursue.

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# Land Use and Transportation

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## Protecting the Michigan Hollow Wetland

One of the most important functions of the EMC is to respond quickly to local environmental threats. One such threat surfaced in 1992 when the New York State Department of Health, in conjunction with the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), proposed a study of the effectiveness of three pesticides, *Bacillus thuringiensis*, Abate, and Altosid on mosquito larvae in the Michigan Hollow Swamp. The proposed project was to focus on the effectiveness of mosquito larvicides as an alternative to broadcast application of insecticides used to minimize the disease risk of Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE). There have been two confirmed human cases of EEE in Central New York since 1971.

The Michigan Hollow Swamp, located in Danby, is recognized as one of the most pristine wetlands of its kind in New York State. The swamp contains a large number of plant communities, such as yellow birch swamp, rich fen, alder thicket, emergent marsh, maple-beech forest, and oak-beech-hickory-pine forest. According to the Unique Natural Areas Survey of Tompkins County,

*"The swamp forest is certainly an exemplary occurrence. The whole site is very species-rich-- both for plants and animals, with many rare and scarce species. The swamp may be the most species-rich forested wetland in New York State."*

While the EMC did not oppose the stated objective of the pesticide experiments, the Council felt that the Michigan Hollow site was a poor choice for the experiment location for the following reasons: one of the pesticides to be used, Abate, is known to be toxic to birds and fish; project objectives were not well defined; the project description failed to indicate the pesticide concentrations to be used; no notification to adjacent landowners or to local governments of the experiment was given; and finally, given the uniqueness of Michigan Hollow Swamp and its value as a research site if left in its pristine condition, the EMC felt that the experiment should be conducted in a wetland of lesser value.

The Council was successful in spearheading a campaign among concerned residents, scientists and environmentalists to lobby the DEC and the DOH to temporarily suspend the study at Michigan Hollow. The EMC will be ready to take action again should the threat to Michigan Hollow Swamp resurface.

## Salt and Pesticide Use in Tompkins Co.

Salt and pesticide use is the topic of a survey that the TCEMC has recently sent to municipalities and schools in Tompkins County. The Land Use and Transportation Committee, leading this effort, is investigating practices used by municipalities and schools 1) to remove snow and ice, and 2) to manage pests. The committee hopes to get a handle on the quantity and type of road salt and pesticides used by municipalities and public and private schools and universities in the County.

The responses to the survey will be used as the basis of a written report on current pesticide and salt practices and options which will be issued to all Tompkins County municipalities and schools. If there is enough interest, a roundtable discussion of these policies may also be organized. Guest presenters may be invited from other communities to share experiences with alternative snow removal and pest control practices.

The survey is an outgrowth of an initial road salt study completed by the EMC in 1991. At that time, the Land Use and Transportation Committee conceived of the idea of encouraging a uniform salt use policy among municipalities in the County, as practices are thought to vary widely. The current wider study will help determine the possibility of such a policy.

## Sharing the Road

Ever dreamed of a place where you could ride your bike on roads built with cars *and* bikes in mind? Some members of the Tompkins County EMC have, and they, along with the Tompkins Coalition for Bicycle Transportation (TCBT) are working to make this dream a reality in Tompkins County.

The EMC started their work on bicycling issues in 1991, when the Land Use and Transportation Committee initiated a policy paper on ways the County could encourage bicycling as an alternative form of transportation. As this work progressed, the EMC learned of other organizations in the County which were planning for and implementing projects to facilitate safe bicycling. These groups joined forces and became the TCBT.

The TCBT is an informal group of bicycling advocates, many of whom have professional planning experience. To date, the TCBT has completed a plan of recommended bicycling routes in the County, along with a list of suggested improvements for each road segment. Two EMC representatives have contributed significantly to this effort -- in riding the proposed routes to document existing conditions and in producing a map of the proposed routes.

TCBT is hopeful that under the new federal transportation act, ISTEA, there will be funds available to assist with implementation of their recommendations. To that end, TCBT has recently presented its report to the Ithaca-Tompkins Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The MPO is the body responsible for approving all local projects that are eligible for state and federal funding.

## Cantharellus infundibuliformis?

In case you haven't guessed, *Cantharellus infundibuliformis* is one of the many species of fungi found in the Danby State Forest and one of the hundreds of species catalogued as part of an ecosystem inventory of the Danby State Forest.

The Danby State Forest encompasses 7,100 acres of diverse habitat. Although much of this land is mixed woods of mostly oak, beech, hemlock, maple, and white pine, there are a number of areas that make the Danby State Forest a unique and interesting place. For example, the Forest contains a small field that attracts many species of birds, a gorge shaded by hemlocks, a sand pit left by glaciers that carved the valleys, a rock quarry, Thatcher's Pinnacle (one of the highest points in the County), and the Michigan Hollow Swamp.

Inventorying the whole Danby State Forest ecosystem is a new approach that a group of volunteers decided to undertake when it was learned that the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) planned to develop a ten-year management plan for the forest. Previously, all the information that existed on the forest were several aerial photographs and a 1980-85 inventory of breeding birds.

In an effort to provide the DEC with the most comprehensive species information possible, volunteers set out to inventory birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles, plants, fungi, and slime molds. The EMC entered the picture when we were asked to compile the lists and review the inventories for rare or scarce species which may be present in the forest. The Plant and Animal Life Committee is currently working on this, and will make management recommendations if any such species are found. The EMC will review the DEC plan to recommend the best uses for the Danby State Forest and hopes that this work may serve as a model for other forest management plans in New York State.



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# Air and Water Quality

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## Water Quality Planning in Tompkins County

Most people don't think about water quality until they're confronted with a pollution problem. That's certainly the case here in Tompkins County, where we enjoy relatively clean water and many water resources, such as Cayuga Lake. There are some folks on the Tompkins County Water Quality Steering Committee (WQSC), however, who are interested in *avoiding* future water quality problems, primarily through education and information sharing.

The WQSC was formed in 1991, in response to the state-implemented non-point source pollution program established by the Environmental Protection Agency. Each county in the state will set forth guidelines, known as a water quality strategy plan, for the prevention of non-point source pollution. In Tompkins County, high water quality is integral to preserving the character of the County, and to maintaining one of the main tourist attractions in the County. Perhaps most importantly, over 50 percent of Tompkins County residents obtain their drinking water from three major water bodies in the County: Cayuga Lake, Fall Creek and Six Mile Creek.

Just as water quality problems differ from county to county, so too will the water quality strategy plans. The Tompkins County Plan, which was approved by the Board of Representatives in June of 1992, focuses on information and education. As a result, the TCEMC will play an integral role in this effort. EMC members are active participants on the WQSC and on the Monitoring and Education Task Groups that have been formed to help implement the Water Quality Strategy Plan.

Currently, the Monitoring Task Group is compiling a bibliography regarding research on water quality and watershed management. The group is also collecting maps of watershed boundaries, soils, inactive dump sites, water intakes and water suppliers.

The Education Task Group has been equally busy. They are preparing for a rural well-water clinic, scheduled for May 12th, and for water quality education at the Boyton Middle School. The group also hopes to supply water week information to area teachers.

Stay tuned for more news about this active committee!

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# State of the Environment

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## Land

Tompkins County is fortunate to have an abundance of unique natural resources within its boundaries. But, like many other rural areas, as both the year round and visitor populations increase, there are continued pressures on the land resources of Tompkins County. Difficult choices must be made to keep growth and development in balance with preservation of open space of all types, from farmland to parks and other natural areas. Throughout 1993, the EMC will be continuing its work on several important land use issues in the County. Among them are:

**Wetlands** — The EMC continues to give its input to the Tompkins County Board of Representatives on several projects which involve wetlands, including the Tompkins County airport runway extension. This involves an Army Corps of Engineers-mandated wetland compensation project of 4 acres to replace a 2.6 acre wetland being filled in as part of the construction. The EMC would like to help the County set an example among rural counties both in wetlands resource protection, and in wetland mitigation.

**Solid waste** — Tompkins County very recently decided to abandon work on siting a landfill in the County and to ship non-recoverable solid waste to landfill sites outside the County over the next several years. The EMC will continue its past efforts to gather information and provide advice to the County on developing a responsible, equitable, and environmentally sound solid waste disposal policy in the coming year, both through its very active representative on the Solid Waste Advisory Council, and through the EMC's Air, Water, and Waste Committee.

**Transportation** — Tompkins County recently qualified to establish a metropolitan planning organization (MPO) which will be responsible for transportation planning in the Ithaca Urban area. The EMC will assist with the planning efforts of the MPO as needed and will advocate for alternative forms of transportation which are less polluting and more environmentally friendly than the private automobile. Along these lines, the EMC is contributing to the Tompkins Coalition for Bicycle Transportation's efforts to establish a network of safe bicycling routes throughout the county, linking the City of Ithaca with the surrounding rural areas in order to promote bicycling as a transportation alternative. Expanding and encouraging mass transit and carpooling, along with such alternative modes of transportation as bicycling, will become increasingly important to maintaining air quality in Tompkins and surrounding counties.

In addition to these ongoing land use topics, the EMC, through its Land Use, Transportation, and Energy Committee, will be ready to respond to new issues that arise. The EMC continues to work with the county government, planners, and concerned citizens to ensure that our environmental quality is maintained in a fair and sustainable way.

## Air and Water

The air quality in Tompkins County remains quite good, although it is important that the County continue to be concerned with increasing emissions of ozone, nitrogen oxides, and hydrocarbons from automobile exhaust, especially in light of any new transportation projects planned. Excessive levels of these compounds can have deleterious effects on both local and regional ecosystems. The concentrations of most of these emissions in the Tompkins County area are currently unknown. The EMC considers this an important area to address in the future.

Tompkins County has a large area of surface water within its boundaries, and is fortunate that water quality remains quite good in most of our streams, lakes, and wetlands. There are, however, many potential threats to water quality which can be expected to increase as land-uses within the County change and population and industrial development increase. Examples of some threats to water quality in Tompkins County that the EMC has been concerned with include: spills and leakages of hazardous chemicals from industrial use and storage facilities, discharges from septic systems and sewage treatment plants, and control options for invasive species like zebra mussels.

In addition to examining such specific, point-source problems, the County has begun to take an integrated approach to preserving water quality in the county by developing a Water Quality Strategy Plan (WQSP). Task groups working on the WQSP are focusing on projects at the watershed scale (a concept that is becoming recognized nationally as an effective way to consider and protect water resources). This approach has a strong educational component which promotes awareness among residents that "we all live downstream" and that land-use, development, and waste disposal practices anywhere within the county can individually or cumulatively affect the whole county by degrading water quality.

## Public Awareness

Tompkins County is very fortunate that it has a large number of citizens and organized groups concerned with a variety of environmental issues, as well as two major educational institutions with a wide range of expertise on environmental topics. Public interest and participation in events such as Earth and Arbor Day celebrations, cleanups of natural areas like Dryden Lake and Trumansburg Creek, and attendance at conferences and workshops dealing with environmental topics continue to increase as our County (and our society) recognizes that economic and environmental sustainability go hand-in-hand, rather than being competing concerns. As the environmental and economic issues facing the County continue to grow and become more complex, it is essential that Tompkins County has an environmentally informed citizenry. The EMC is committed to helping provide the community with objective information on environmental issues of concern within the County. Led by its Education and Outreach Committee, the Council is developing an education program. The Committee will work in conjunction with other public and private groups within the County which currently devote some or all of their effort to the environment, in order to enhance rather than duplicate environmental awareness efforts. Some of the important topics on which the EMC plans to focus its information and outreach projects are: wetlands and habitat preservation, Cayuga Lake and its associated watershed, alternative transportation, energy conservation, and solid waste reduction.

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# Education

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## Conservation Advisory Council Update

Does your town or village have a Conservation Advisory Council (CAC)? Do you know what your CAC does? For more information, read on!

Four municipalities in Tompkins County have CACs -- the Villages of Lansing and Trumansburg and the City and Town of Ithaca. Representatives of these four groups and the EMC recently met to share common concerns and project updates. Brief histories of community involvement were presented.

The City of Ithaca CAC has nine members and has been in existence since 1982. It enjoys a good working relationship with the City's Common Council. The City of Ithaca CAC reviews many State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) actions each year. Recently the CAC received a citation from the EMC for its brochure on handling the removal of exterior lead-based paint, distributed through local paint and hardware stores.

The Town of Ithaca CAC is three years old and has seven members. It dedicated two years to compiling a comprehensive (and controversial!) Open Space Inventory. (When a CAC is formed it is required by the State to prepare an open space inventory for its municipality.) This CAC has agricultural and environmental review subcommittees.

The Village of Trumansburg CAC, with five members, was established in 1989. A major accomplishment of this group has been the incorporation of SEQR review as standard operating procedure in the Village. The members have participated in the development of new zoning regulations and the Village Master Plan. The CAC recently organized a Trumansburg Creek Clean-up Day.

The Village of Lansing CAC was formed in 1990 and has seven members. The CAC has been very involved with tree planting in the Village, and has recently coordinated tree planting along Triphammer Road. Reviewing the landscaping plans of all commercial development in the Village is another activity that keeps this CAC busy. Their next major project will be to assist with the Village of Lansing Greenway Plan.

The EMC would like to encourage the twelve other municipalities in the County - including the Towns of Dryden, Groton, Danby, Newfield, and Caroline - to establish CAC's. A CAC serves in an advisory capacity to promote preservation and improvement of the quality of the environment in conjunction with economic vitality and public welfare within a community. A member of each CAC is appointed to the EMC.

For more information on how to form a CAC, please call Mary Smith at 274-5560.