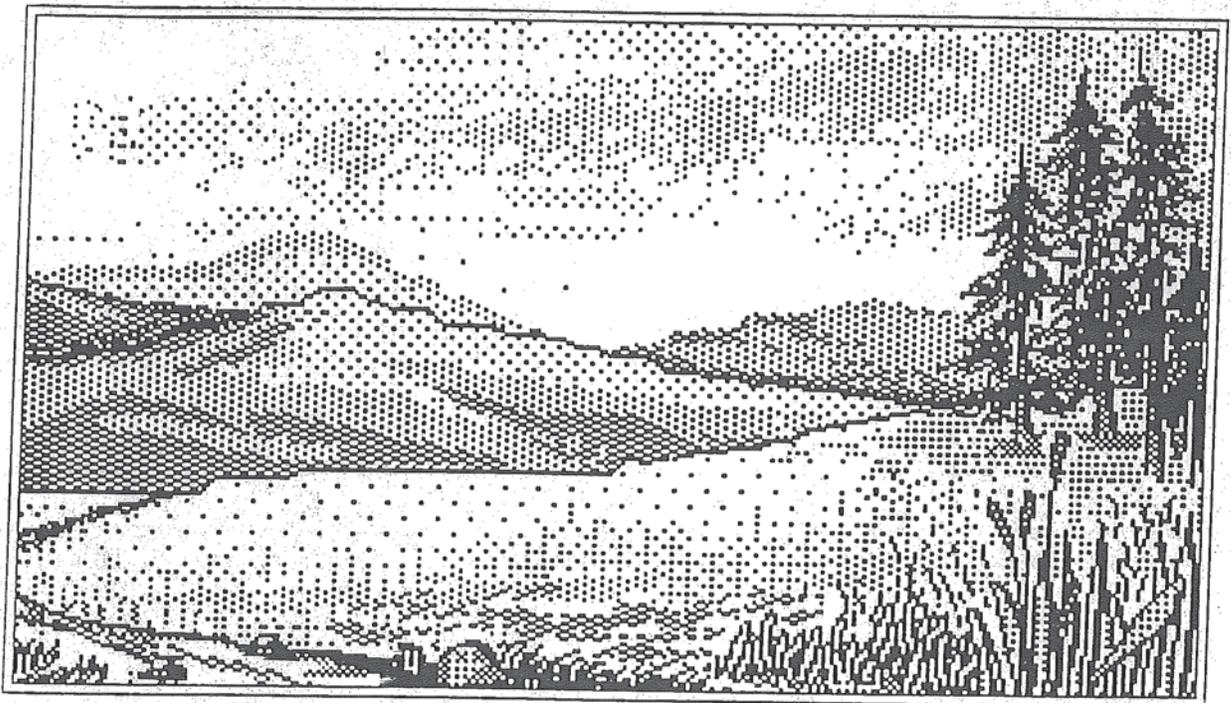


*Tompkins County
Environmental Management Council*

1993 Annual Report



**and
State of the Environment**

Tompkins County
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

121 East Court Street
Ithaca, New York 14850
Telephone (607) 274-5560
FAX (607) 274-5578

March 31, 1994

Stuart Stein
Chair, Tompkins County Board of Representatives
Tompkins County Courthouse
Ithaca, NY 14850

To the Honorable Stuart Stein:

I am pleased to submit to the Tompkins County Board of Representatives the Environmental Management Council's 1993 Annual Report and State of the Environment.

During 1993, the EMC continued to provide technical assistance and advice on local environmental policy. Formal resolutions and recommendations were made to the Board of Representatives on the following issues: solid waste management, state environmental conservation law, county SEQR procedures, transportation planning, hazardous materials incidents reporting, and comprehensive planning.

The EMC also spent time and energy on its own reorganization this past year. As a result of a day-long retreat, the Council identified areas where the EMC could be more effective and better utilize the time and efforts of its members. The reorganization of the EMC, and the energy of many new members, have combined to create a revitalized and energetic EMC with many new projects scheduled for 1994. This focused, project oriented approach of the EMC should make for a productive year, and a better environment for Tompkins County.

The EMC looks forward to increased communication and collaboration with the newly restructured County Board of Representatives. We are eager to assist the Board in its efforts to examine the environmental impacts of all aspects of county operations. As usual, the 1994 EMC has a talented membership, with a wide diversity of environmental interests and expertise. We will work to provide the County Board with the best possible environmental advice, so that the Board is able to protect and enhance the natural environment of Tompkins County.

Respectfully submitted,

Ed Cope

Ed Cope
Chair, Tompkins County EMC

1993 EMC Membership Roster

Municipal EMC Members:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Municipality</u>
Barbara Hotchkiss	City of Ithaca
Dooley Kiefer	Village of Cayuga Heights
Bard Prentiss	Village of Dryden
Vacant	Village of Freeville
Thomas O'Brien	Village of Groton
Lynn Leopold	Village of Lansing
Barbara Page	Village of Trumansburg
Lowell Korb	Town of Caroline
Daniel Decker	Town of Danby
Dennis Swaney	Town of Dryden
Ronald Beloin	Town of Enfield
Lyle Raymond, Jr.	Town of Groton
Richard Fischer	Town of Ithaca
Bradley Griffin	Town of Lansing
Donald Brown	Town of Newfield
Roxanne Marino	Town of Ulysses

At-Large EMC Members:

Donald Barber, Jr.	Robert Beck
Susan Brock	Edward Cope
Herbert Engman, Chair	Kurt Jirka
Matthew McDonald	Marjolein Schat
Byron Unsworth	Nicholas Vandam
David Weinstein	Richard Yager

Ex-Officio EMC Members:

Nancy Schuler	Board of Representatives Liaison
John Andersson	Rep. for the Commissioner of Health
Paul Bonaparte-Krogh	Cornell Cooperative Extension
James Hanson, Jr.	Commissioner of Planning
William Mobbs	Commissioner of Public Works
Robert Mulvey	County Attorney

EMC Staff:

Mary Smith / Katherine White	EMC Coordinator
Loretta Bernal / Karen Simpson	EMC Secretary

Planning Committee Members:

Stuart Stein, Chair	
Timothy Joseph	Barbara Mink
Frank Proto	Nancy Schuler

Tompkins County Environmental Management Council

1993 Annual Report

ORGANIZATION AND OBJECTIVES

The Tompkins County Environmental Management Council (EMC) was established by a resolution of the County Board of Representatives on May 10, 1971. The resolution states that the purpose of the Council is to "identify problems, propose priorities and promote coordination of activities in the development and management of our natural resources and to provide a public forum for the discussion and resolution of these problems and completion of proposed projects."

The EMC is funded primarily by the County Board of Representatives, with a portion of its funding coming from the New

York State Department of Environmental Conservation, through its Local Environmental Assistance Program.

In Tompkins County, the EMC is housed in the County Planning Department. A close working relationship exists between the two organizations, with shared staff and joint office space. Both the EMC and the Planning Department study the environment of the county, and advise the Board of Representatives on issues involving the environment. During 1993, both agencies reported directly to the Planning Committee of the Board of Representatives.

SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

Solid waste management continues to be a critical issue facing Tompkins County, although the issue made much less news this year, following the county's decision to send trash for burial outside of the county borders. The EMC urged that the County Board take a long-term perspective when planning for solid waste management. The position promoted by the EMC was that the county should ultimately be responsible for its own solid waste. Specifically, the EMC urged the county to make contingency plans to develop a county or a regional landfill, and adopt plans for the removal of hazardous waste from the waste stream.

Several EMC members reviewed the proposed changes to Part 360 of the Solid Waste Regulations. EMC comments were primarily directed at the general provisions, and sections on landfilling, composting, incineration, land application of sludge, and disposal of construction and demolition waste.

The EMC considered a resolution in support of a county Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day. It was proposed that it would be a one-shot cleanup of recyclable household hazardous wastes (primarily oil, paint, and batteries). The members felt that the day was needed to build upon the last collection day, which was held in 1991.

They stressed the need for this service in light of the fact that the permanent facility for household hazardous wastes will not be operational until 1996. In response to the EMC discussion, the County Solid Waste Division wrote a letter explaining the pros and cons of a recyclable household hazardous waste collection day. The EMC intends to study the issue in more detail in the future.

An EMC student intern completed a report analyzing the chemical hazards which exist in the county. Out of this analysis came the decision to focus on improving responses to emergency chemical incidents in the county. A recent chemical spill in the county spurred the EMC to discuss the subjects of disaster response, spill reporting processes, chemical storage, and public education on chemical spills.

The EMC gathered background data and information from the County Health Department, the Fire, Disaster and EMS Coordinator's Office, and past resolutions of the EMC. The Air, Water and Waste Committee of the EMC reviewed the county's draft "Emergency Response Plan for Hazardous Materials Incidents." The committee prepared recommendations, and met with the local Fire, Disaster and EMS Coordinator to make sure that the

committee's recommendations were understood and incorporated into the document. An educational pamphlet regarding proper procedures for spill reporting is now being produced by the EMC.

The EMC passed a formal resolution in support of the County Board of Representatives asking the Commissioner of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to add the Statewide Hazardous Materials Spills Hotline telephone number to the "Other Emergency Numbers" section of all NYS telephone books. The County Board subsequently passed a resolution in support of adding the telephone number, and sent a copy of the resolution to DEC Commissioner Thomas Jorling.

The EMC intern also undertook a project, in cooperation with the local fire department, to contact owners of warehouses and businesses which may store hazardous chemicals, and to encourage them to comply with the reporting provisions in General Municipal Law 209-u. Compliance with this law would allow emergency squads to fight spills more safely and effectively. The intern is continuing his work on this project in 1994.

SEQR REVIEWS OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

The review of projects falling under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR) remains a key job of the EMC. Often, construction activities are proposed that will cross town borders or strongly impact a municipality other than the one directly experiencing the development. In these cases, as well as many others, the EMC fills an essential role in voicing any and all countywide environmental concerns. The goal of the EMC is to identify and promote the least environmentally damaging option of any necessary development. The Council brings a wide variety of

perspectives to bear on its reviews of projects. Through this diverse perspective, the Council tries to enlighten the members of our communities, and their managing officials, as to the possibilities for producing environmentally sound development.

Several EMC members reviewed the Department of Transportation's (DOT) environmental assessment of the realignment of the intersection of Routes 13 and 96/34, known locally as Shady Corners. The Council had serious reservations regarding the DOT's preferred option. There

was concern over a nearby fen, which is a designated Unique Natural Area, that may be indirectly impacted as a result of the project. In addition, the realignment would require the loss of several acres of prime agricultural land. Finally, the EMC felt that the accident data did not clearly indicate that the geometrics of the road were the root cause of the accident problems at the intersection, as only 2.5 years of accident data were included in the analysis.

The EMC also reviewed the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation's proposed Draft Master Plan for the Allan H. Treman State Marine Park. One slip would be added to the marina to accommodate forty additional boats. In addition, the park roadway, the parking lot, and the picnic area would all be expanded. EMC members felt that this version of the plan was an improvement over the first proposal that was issued, and commended State Parks for the amount of information they supplied to interested parties. However, concerns still existed regarding the size of the parking lot, encroachment on the Hog Hole wetland, and the general over-development of the site.

The EMC and the county's four Conservation Advisory Councils held a joint meeting to discuss the DEC's proposed changes to the state SEQR regulations.

Their comments were summarized and sent to the DEC in June.

The EMC prepared comments about the Tompkins County Recycling and Solid Waste Center facility to be located in Ithaca. In addition, comments were prepared on Cornell's Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a proposal to create a Special Land Use District for a portion of Cornell University. The EMC also prepared comments on a DOT proposal to widen Route 13 to four lanes, and reconstruct two bridges on Route 13. Finally, the EMC participated in the scoping sessions for the proposed Wal-Mart store to be located in Ithaca.

The EMC was involved with the Tompkins County Planning and Public Works Departments in re-evaluating the county SEQR process. A flow chart was produced showing the proposed process changes, and the EMC passed a resolution in support of those changes. The main changes were: 1) to involve the EMC and the Planning Department earlier in the county's review process, and 2) to give the EMC fifteen days (opposed to the current five days) to review unlisted actions. The Board of Representatives passed a resolution endorsing the proposed changes at the end of the year.

WETLANDS

Tompkins County is blessed with a wide variety of wetland ecosystems. With this blessing comes a responsibility for proper management of these areas so that they can continue to provide habitat for a multitude of plants and animals, many of which are either rare or endangered within the county. Consequently, the EMC continued in 1993 to focus attention on the use and misuse of these wetlands.

The EMC reviewed a draft Wetlands Creation Plan for the airport runway wetland mitigation, which replaced a 2.6 acre

wetland lost to the runway extension with a 4 acre site in the town of Dryden. The EMC sent a list of concerns to both the County Public Works Department and the Public Works Committee of the Board of Representatives. The EMC arranged to meet with Barbara Bedford, a wetlands expert at Cornell University, to review the plan for the EMC. Both her comments and those of the EMC were sent to the various county officials involved in the project. Additionally, Dr. Bedford received a Faculty In-Service Grant from Cornell to monitor the wetlands mitigation project for the EMC.

The grant enables her to supervise four students to do independent monitoring, to help the EMC learn more about the processes involved in the creation of wetlands. The grant pays for all costs associated with the monitoring, and contributed \$500 to the EMC, as the sponsoring agency, for the purchase of informational material on wetlands mitigation. The EMC Coordinator continues to facilitate the work of the students.

The EMC participated with the Town of Ithaca Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) in a workshop with Diana Ellis, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service enforcement officer for wetlands regulations in Tompkins and Cortland Counties. The workshop was part of a County Planning Board meeting which focused on the environment. The workshop covered reporting and enforcement procedures, and designing of wetlands ordinances. Ms. Ellis also clarified the role of the U.S. FWS in regards to wetlands in the county.

In November 1992, the DEC issued a negative declaration for a mining operation adjacent to the Malloryville Bog, a designated Unique Natural Area located in Dryden. A successful protest was mounted against the issuance of the negative declaration. Letters from many concerned citizens were sent to the DEC regarding the unique aspects of the bog and why mining may substantially degrade the bog. Malloryville Bog is but one element of a complex, interconnected and interdependent web of wetlands in eastern Tompkins County, and threats still remain to the wetlands system. One possible threat comes from a potential gravel operation in nearby Woodwardia Woods and Bog, a unique woods containing many rare plants, and the best example of this type of wetland in our region. The EMC continues to keep a watchful eye on this area.

UNIQUE NATURAL AREAS

Although Tompkins County contains a wealth of pastoral and natural landscapes, pressures are still brought to bear on these open spaces. Choices must be made to keep development in balance with preservation of open space, farmland, and natural areas. These choices can best be made when information on the value of each resource is widely available.

Towards this end, several years ago the EMC produced and distributed an 800 page document entitled, "Unique Natural Area Inventory of Tompkins County." This inventory lists nearly 200 places of special environmental quality within the county, and is currently being widely used as a resource for data on sensitive environments. It was, however, always conceived of as a "living" survey, requiring continued updating and alteration. In 1993, much effort was put into improving the inventory and increasing its use and usefulness throughout the county.

The Plant and Animal Life Committee worked on a procedure to notify the landowners of Unique Natural Areas (UNA) that their property contained unique areas, and to describe for them the reasons for this special designation. A series of meetings were held between the committee and the County Planning Department to work to on a link between the UNA database and the assessment database, to yield the landowners' names and addresses. It was discovered that the accuracy of the UNA database needs to be improved before that link can be established. Additionally, the committee developed a procedure to monitor and update the database in the future. Members of the committee are proceeding to correct erroneous or incomplete information contained in the inventory.

After the release of the Unique Natural Areas Inventory, the EMC began

receiving requests from landowners and municipalities concerned with protecting these sites. Many of the inquiries were concerned with what kinds of development activities were safe to allow on or near a UNA, and what type of buffer zone should be left around these areas. Several local municipalities also expressed interest in protecting areas designated as unique in the inventory. It soon became clear that some guidelines for the wise use of the inventory were needed.

To address this need, in 1993 the EMC worked to develop a users manual to be used in conjunction with the Unique Natural Areas Inventory. It is hoped that this manual will serve as an instruction guide to planning groups who wish to address the issues involved in protecting unique natural areas. The intention is that the manual will help planners to set boundaries of UNAs, create buffer areas around UNAs, choose proper methods for protecting UNAs, and adopt appropriate techniques for involving land owners in the decisionmaking process. Additionally, the manual could be used as a general reference, to help planners determine whether a proposed development would significantly impact a UNA. The questions which the manual will address include: 1) How do you

establish a buffer zone, 2) How does a town play an advocacy role in protection, and 3) What protection mechanisms are available?

In developing the manual, the Plant and Animal Life Committee worked closely with an EMC intern, who researched various protection mechanisms which have been implemented in other locations in the past. The intern produced a report entitled, "Study of Potential Methods for Protection of Unique Natural Areas in Tompkins County, New York." The report outlines and analyses three case studies, and provides extensive background material for inclusion in the users manual. The scope of the intern's research is presently being expanded. Creation of the manual is a large task, and work continues in 1994.

Finally, the Plant and Animal Life Committee also advised an EMC student intern on his work researching the current science on biological corridors and greenways. He produced a final report for the EMC entitled, "Habitat Corridors in Tompkins County: A literature review and recommendations to county planners." This report has been distributed to interested EMC members, as well as the Tompkins County Greenway Coalition.

LAND USE, TRANSPORTATION AND ENERGY

Air and water quality remain quite good in the county, but the constant growth in emissions by transportation and industry pose a threat to this quality. In 1993, the EMC acted as advocates for several alternative, less polluting, forms of transportation.

The creation of the new Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), with responsibilities for transportation planning and development in the City of Ithaca and its surrounding areas, provided one opportunity for advocating environmentally friendly transportation methods. After reading and interpreting the MPO's boundary guidelines,

the EMC's Land Use, Transportation, and Energy Committee prepared a resolution encouraging county policymakers to define the MPO boundary as the entire county (and not just a small fraction of the county, as was proposed by some policymakers). The EMC also advocated the development of more pedestrian and bicycle trails within the county, by passing a resolution in support of the local New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation's application for transportation enhancement funds (available through the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991) to execute a multi-use trail project

connecting the four major state parks in Tompkins County.

The EMC is strongly in favor of the County Comprehensive Planning efforts. After being updated on the efforts of the plan's steering committee, the EMC passed a resolution in favor of the Board of Representatives funding the development of the comprehensive plan.

After suffering through one of the most severe winters in years, the community of Tompkins County is very aware of the large quantities of salt used on its roads during and following winter storms. In addition, spring brings a rapid growth of greenery to the roadsides, which is kept in

check through the use of pesticides. In an effort to compile accurate data on pesticide and salt use in the county, a survey was prepared by the EMC and sent to local governments and area institutions for their completion.

Another important role of the EMC is recognition of the achievements of local Conservation Advisory Councils. The EMC passed a resolution commending the Village of Trumansburg CAC for its outstanding work in creating an educational pamphlet entitled, "Application Procedures for Changes to Land and Buildings: Guide for Public Use."

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT STAFFING PROPOSAL

The Tompkins County EMC advocated county funding of a Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) technician. In order to educate municipalities on the services a technician could provide, and to gauge the level of support for the position, EMC municipal members presented their local governments with a list of possible services a technician could provide, and asked them to select the services they would most likely request of a

technician. The results of these surveys, along with a brief analysis of the results, were sent to the County Board of Representatives, as well as to local representatives of the Farm Bureau and the Soil Conservation Service. Additionally, the Chair of the EMC spoke to the County Board, recommending funding of the SWCD position. The position was funded, and is expected to be filled in early 1994.

ADMINISTRATIVE REORGANIZATION

1993 was a time of planning, reflection, and change for the EMC. A new committee structure, which gave each committee several general environmental issues to study, was implemented at the beginning of the year. The 1993 standing committees were: Air, Water and Waste; Plant and Animal Life; Land Use, Transportation and Energy; Education and Outreach; and the ad-hoc SEQR Committee.

In an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of its standing committee structure, and to determine whether it was

adequately serving the environmental needs of the county, the EMC decided to hold a day-long retreat. Much of the EMC's energies went into planning, conducting, and evaluating this first-ever EMC retreat, which was held at the Cayuga Nature Center on Saturday, November 20, 1993. With the help of a professional facilitator, the membership evaluated the priorities and functions of the EMC, and discussed possible organizational structures which would best allow the EMC to meet its goals. At the end of the day, two committees were

formed to draft proposals on structure and priorities for 1994.

The EMC discussed the draft proposals and established its priorities for the upcoming year. The structure was changed to better focus the energies of its members, and specific task committees were established to focus on the new priorities. The new structure includes less frequent general meetings, a less powerful Executive Committee, and more active, task-oriented working committees. The first task committees formed in 1994 were: the County Long Range Plan Committee, the Environmental Summit Committee, the Media Connection Committee, the Environmental Directory Committee, the Unique Natural Areas Committee, the CAC Support Committee, and the SEQR Committee.

Due to a high turnover in EMC membership, much discussion centered on ways to revitalize the EMC. The category of associate members was formalized to allow for more participation on special issues from interested members of the community. Associate members are not required to attend general meetings, although they must actively participate as part of a task committee, or as a liaison for the EMC to another county advisory group. Additionally, the Chair of the EMC wrote a letter to the Board of Representatives, asking that the Board help the EMC in its efforts to fill two At-Large seats on the Council with people who might better represent the environmental concerns of minority groups in the county.