



EMC News

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Chair's Report

The EMC News is beginning its 6th year of production with this first issue of 1999. It began as consequence of my struggle to figure out how to keep the information and communication flowing among EMC members between meetings. At the time, the EMC was experimenting with a schedule of meeting only bimonthly. The EMC news has expanded to be another way that we can communicate with the Board of Representatives and County officials. More communication with the Board of Reps is always appreciated, as was brought out at our discussion with Representative Lane at January's EMC meeting. Another way to use these pages is for Committee Reports. Since our meetings become quite full, it is often difficult to allow much time for reports from the committees. This is unfortunate, since the committees is where much of the EMC work is done. Using the EMC News for full committee reports helps to mitigate this injustice.

Submitted by Ed Cope

Environmental Review Committee Report

The Environmental Review Committee met on Tuesday, January 26, and looked over the Short Environmental Impact Statement on the Paleontological Research Institute's proposed 15,000 square foot addition, "The Museum of the Earth." The committee delegated Barbara Ebert to determine if the Town of Ithaca was interested and willing to serve as lead agency in the ongoing review (instead of the State Dormitory Authority), and compiled a short list of SEQR concerns.

The committee reappointed Barbara Ebert as chair for the 1999 year.

The Army Corps of Engineers permit application regarding the recovering of an exposed gas pipeline in Buttermilk Creek was reviewed and it was decided to reiterate the comments prepared by the Tompkins County Planning Department, noting the lack of alternatives presented and the UNA status of Buttermilk Creek, and to ask Dan Karig for additional assistance in evaluating the proposal.

The committee worked on a draft of a letter to the State Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Conservation regarding the Lake Source Cooling Project, as authorized by the full EMC at its January meeting. This letter was prepared for subsequent review by the Executive Committee.

Finally, the committee heard a presentation by Kara Hagedorn regarding the South Hill Swamp and the proposed development on that site, including the proposed Town of Ithaca park.

Submitted by Barbara Ebert

County Towers Committee Report

The County Tower Committee met on January 20, 1999, with County personnel responsible for developing the proposal for the emergency communications towers. Representative Barbara Blanchard also attended as a member of the BOR's Public Safety Committee, which is overseeing the project at this stage. Through this meeting and follow-up communications, we have learned the following:

The County currently has 7 towers, plus dishes/antennas that are co-located on various buildings. Under the proposed system, the County will end up with 9 towers, plus co-located antennas on one building.

Of the existing 7 towers, 5 will be abandoned and new, much taller towers will be built elsewhere. One existing tower will stay in place but will be made 100 feet higher. That tower will then exceed the FAA's threshold of 200 feet for lighting requirements and will have to be lit day and night. One tower will stay in place at the same height.

All of the above means the County will be constructing 7 new towers at 7 new locations and the new towers will be significantly taller than the old ones. Most of the new towers will be 180 feet. (For a point of reference, the new Frontier Cellular tower in Ulysses is 195 feet.) The old towers to be abandoned range from 65-140 feet. One cellular provider has expressed interest in co-locating on 2 of the proposed new towers.

The network of proposed towers was designed by Motorola, which is the only vendor capable of building a system to the County's specifications. Motorola also has proposed to manage and market the new towers to wireless communication providers. There could be a perceived conflict of interest on Motorola's part, since Motorola stands to gain financially with increased numbers and heights of new towers. We believe the County should hire an independent consultant to run computer propagation studies to verify the numbers and heights of towers, and we are working towards that end. The projected timetable for the project has the towers being built this year, so we expect quite a bit of activity in the upcoming months.

Submitted by Susan Brock

Announcements

In January, seventeen members of the Tompkins County Keeping Track Group traveled to Burlington, Vermont for a two day workshop with Keeping Track founder, Susan Morse. Keeping Track is a community wildlife monitoring program that trains volunteers to detect, identify, interpret and record animal tracks to provide information that can be used by regional boards, courts, developers and scientists to make informed decisions about wildlife and habitat stewardship. Eventually the group will establish study areas, called transects, throughout Tompkins County which will be surveyed four times a year, once each season. With GIS and GPS technology the possibilities of mapping and using wildlife data are very exciting!

Exploring the foothills of the Green Mountains, Susan showed us the fundamentals of tracking. We learned, for example, how to tell a canine print (coyote, fox) from a feline print (bobcat, cougar), and how to distinguish branches broken off by bears, from those snapped off by porcupines. We learned how to use a walking stick to smell urine, if its skunky, its fox, if musky, coyote. We learned to look not only at the size of a print, but its depth in the snow. She showed us bear sign-marker trees with deep scratches and bites, babysitting trees and feeding trees with piles of branches stacked up in the crown. She taught us how to tell which direction a deer was facing when it took a rest.

The hikes both days were physically challenging for many of us who had never walked in snowshoes. And everyone learned to get on their butts and slide. The terrain was steep in many places and the snow, wet and heavy. The first day we caught brilliant sunshine and blue sky. The second day, 40 mph winds with intermittent rain. But still, everyone stayed in good spirits, sharing clothes and food. Hiking from one habitat to another we began to notice how the coyote were often in pairs, preferring openings and edges in the forest, compared to the solitary bobcat that preferred the rocky areas. Deer almost always chose to lay under conifer trees whose interlocking needles offered more protection from the snow or up on ridges where they could watch for predators. We dropped down to a beaver pond and saw the delicate tracks of a weasel and compared them to the much larger muddled tracks of the fisher that we'd seen in the deep forest.

It was refreshing and fun to be with people of diverse ages and backgrounds, all with the common goal of learning to recognize animal signs so that we can collect wildlife data in Tompkins County. The Keeping Track training will continue in March when Susan Morse comes to Ithaca for two days. She will return next winter for another two days to complete the course. To complement her trainings, many members of the TC Keeping Track Group also participate in the local Tracking Club which organizes monthly outings. With each step through the forests, valleys and gorges of

Tompkins County we are learning to tune in to the animals that share it.

Submitted by Kara Hagedorn

Coordinator's Report

No Report Submitted

Unique Natural Areas Committee Report

No Report Submitted

Executive Committee Report

No Report Submitted

Education Committee Report

No Report Submitted

Env. Directory Update Committee Report

No Report Submitted