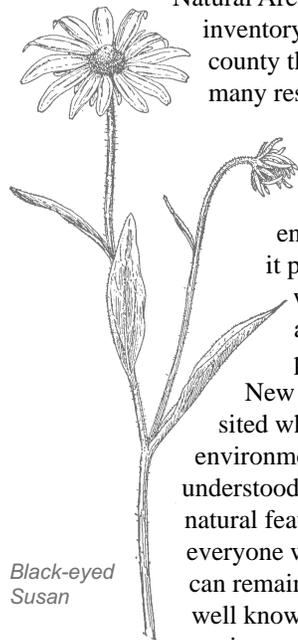


Background

Tompkins County is a very special place to the nearly 100,000 people who live here, as well as countless others who spend time in the Finger Lakes region.

Besides providing a diverse and attractive place for residents to live and work, Tompkins County is blessed with some of the area's most spectacular scenery. From the shores of Cayuga Lake to the gorges, waterfalls, fields, and forests of the area, the natural beauty of Ithaca and the surrounding towns continues to draw people here.

As growth and development continue, more of the open space in the county will likely be changed. As a guide to landowners, municipal governing, and town planning boards, the Environmental Management Council of Tompkins County created the Unique Natural Areas (UNA) inventory. This inventory identifies areas in the county that are special, and, in many respects, contain one-of-a-kind natural features.



Black-eyed Susan

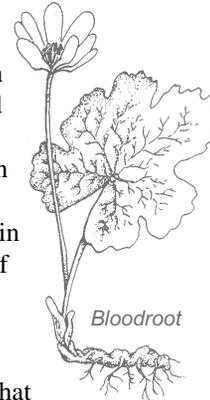
Economic development is compatible with environmental awareness if it proceeds thoughtfully, and with complete information about the biological and physical features of a site.

New development can be better sited when the potential environmental impacts are understood. By preserving the unique natural features of the county, everyone will benefit. The county can remain the attractive place it is well known to be, *and* the environment can be protected.

What a UNA is.....

A Unique Natural Area is a part of the landscape that has outstanding environmental qualities. This broad designation may include special natural communities, or plants and animals that are rare or scarce elsewhere in the county or region. The UNA inventory is an information tool to help people make the wisest choices possible in protecting the rural character and natural beauty of Tompkins County.

The UNA inventory was started in 1973. It was greatly expanded and updated in 1990, and it recently has been revised. Currently, within Tompkins County there are 192 UNAs. These sites were included in the inventory based on the work of ecologists, botanists, animal scientists, geologists, and wetland specialists who surveyed many of these sites on foot. Other parcels that were not field-visited were surveyed from the road or adjacent parcels, or by using topographic maps and aerial photography.



Bloodroot

Characteristics of a UNA fall into at least one of these categories:

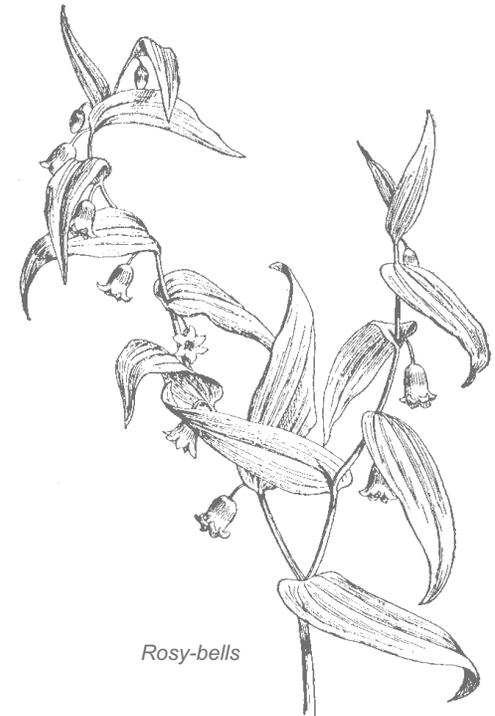
- Important natural communities (state-designated wetlands, old forests, diverse plant and animal populations)
- Quality of example (best representatives of natural communities or resources in the county)
- Rare or scarce plants or animals (identified at the global, state, or local level)
- Geological importance (unique formation or paleontological site)
- Cultural significance (outstanding scenic beauty, historic or archeological significance, recreational values)

What a UNA is not.....

A UNA is *not* a regulatory designation, and it does *not* provide legal protection for an area.

What's in the UNA report?

- *Location of each UNA* (municipality, latitude and longitude, USGS topographic quad and tax parcels)
- *Map of the UNA*
- *Site and vegetation descriptions* (general characteristics)
- *Reasons for selection* (Why is this a UNA?)
- *Special land-use information* (land-use or legal designations, water resources information)
- *Conservation information* (adjacent land use, sensitivity of site to visitors, evidence of disturbance, management)
- *Physical characteristics of each site* (slope, elevation, soil types, geological features)
- *Biological characteristics* (ecological communities, plant and animal species present)



Rosy-bells

How will people use the UNA inventory?

The UNA inventory has three main purposes:

- To identify and describe areas in the county with outstanding environmental qualities
- To promote the conservation and/or preservation of UNAs for the benefit of future generations
- To help people make informed choices about development in or near these areas

The site plan decisions of municipal boards are guided by many issues, including soils, drainage, Department of Environmental Conservation wetland designation, slope of a site, access to roads and other structures, proximity to flood plains, etc. Even without a UNA designation, many of the parcels in the UNA inventory may not be developable because of existing constraints. The UNA inventory is another piece of information that should be included in responsible land-use decision making. The report is also tailored to help people prepare State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) forms.

Sometimes landowners find out too late that a portion of their property may have been inappropriately logged or that some interesting plant or animal was once, but is no longer, found there. The information in the UNA document should help each landowner to become better acquainted with his or her own property.

UNA designations do not change the nature of private property. Public access to privately-held land is entirely up to the individual landowner. Of course, landowners have every right to post the property and enforce no-trespassing laws. On the other hand, some landowners may wish to share access to their UNA for the sake of public education. Always ask for landowner permission before visiting a UNA.



Walking fern

To view the complete Unique Natural Areas document

Visit the Tompkins County Public Library, your community library, or your local government office. You may wish to call these offices in advance to set up an appointment.

Caroline 539-3395 (Town Supervisor)
539-6400 (Town Clerk)

Danby 277-4788 (Town Clerk)

Dryden 844-8622 (Town Clerk)
844-8122 (Village of Dryden Clerk)
844-8301 (Village of Freeville Clerk)

Enfield 273-8256 (Town Clerk)

Groton 898-5035 (Town Clerk)
838-3966 (Village of Groton Clerk)

Ithaca 274-6550 (City of Ithaca Planning)
273-6570 (City of Ithaca Clerk)
273-1721 (Town of Ithaca Clerk)
257-1238 (Village of Cayuga Heights Clerk)

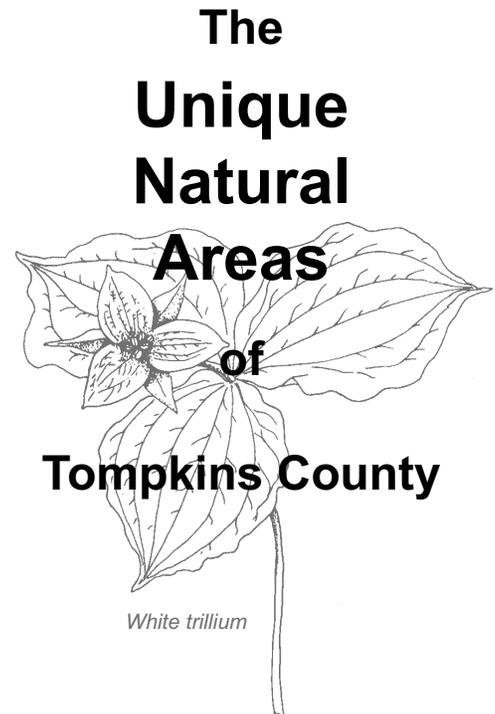
Lansing 533-7054 (Planning and Zoning)
533-4142 (Town Clerk)
257-0424 (Village of Lansing Clerk)

Newfield 564-9981 (Town Clerk)

Ulysses 387-5767 (Town Clerk)
387-6501 (Village of Trumansburg Clerk)



Wild leek



White trillium

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