NYSDEC Water Quality Improvement Land Acquisition Program: Protecting Land in Rensselaer County

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NYSDEC Water Quality Improvement Program Land Acquisition Grant

Grantor: NYSDEC Division of Water
Grantee: Rensselaer Program - Agricultural Stewardship Association, Rensselaer Land Trust, Rensselaer Plateau Alliance
$1.5M for program; 25% landowner match
2017-2022 grant
Grant Service Area

- Tomhannock Reservoir Watershed
- 50%+ of Rensselaer County gets water from Tomhannock
- Municipalities: Pittstown, Schagticoke, Hoosick Falls
Land Protection Program vs. Project

Compare with other WQIP acquisition grants statewide: mostly projects elsewhere

Program = Voluntary Land Acquisition Strategy and Recruitment + Educational Components

Landowner Recruitment vs. Single Parcel; determined in advance

DEC looking to Rensselaer Program grantees for program development and land selection
Land Protection Tools

- Conservation Easement, Fee Simple Acquisition
- Mostly undeveloped woodlands, agriculture, open space
- Acquisitions require DEC approval
- Fee simple public access available with approved DEC plan
- Municipal approval required
Education Component

Website: www.tomhannockruralland.org; see resources page

Collaborate with Rensselaer County Soil and Water Conservation District

Residential and agriculture water quality best management practices info on website

Follow-up outreach on BMP implementation anticipated
Prospect Recruiting

Eligibility: landowners in watershed on reservoir shore (300 ft) or tribs (100 ft)

- 220 residential or ag landowners with 20+ acres located on reservoir or tribs that feed it
- Outreach to landowners with marketing/communications firm (Water Words That Work)
- Monthly postcards to watershed landowners with 20 acres+
Acquisition Status

2 fee simple acquisitions committed – Pittstown (82 and 38 acres); 0 CEs

10 current prospect parcels (7 landowners), all CEs, 4 residential, six ag (400+ acres)
Observations

- Landowners have limited connection to Tomhannock since they do not get water from it
- Lengthy transaction periods
- For AG: Competing with NYS Ag & Markets farm protection program
- For Ag: Water quality goals not always consistent with farm practices
Next Steps

- Close on current transactions
- Determine viable prospects and proceed with transactions
- Continue water quality education
- Assess program for DEC