

WARREN COUNTY 2040: OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION

Warren County's natural environment is organized into three sections: Water, Land, and Air Resources. These three facets of the natural environment identify many of the key characteristics that make Warren County a great place to live and recreate.

From the top of Gore Mountain to the rushing waters of the Hudson River to the sparkling depths of Lake George, the beautiful landscape of Warren County is the product of complex set of factors that have interacted over thousands of years to create the varied and beautiful setting of the region. Our mountains, lakes, rivers, and our natural environment overall are world class assets. From our working forests to our wild forests and wilderness areas and everything in between—our natural environment offers diverse habitats for a wide range of species—and supports our human needs in many ways.

This document provides a brief overview of some of the key issues and opportunities associated with the County's environmental setting. In addition to the reports and plans referenced herein, this document considered input from the prior community outreach efforts, including stakeholder interviews, survey results, and related plan reports. It is intended to encourage the PAG's exploration of these issues and opportunities as a foundation for framing an overall set of objectives and priorities related to the Natural Environment element of the Comprehensive Plan.

THE COUNTY'S ROLE

There is no natural resources or environmental management department in the County government; however, several Warren County departments have a supporting role. It is worth noting that the County provides financial support to the Warren County Soil and Water Conservation District and works closely with that organization on a wide variety of initiatives. County Departments engaged in natural resource management or planning include:

Planning and Community Development supports environmental planning at the County level, including area-wide/resource-based planning projects, providing GIS services to many organizations/efforts and collaborates with partner organizations to advance programs to protect the natural environment. Programs include the Climate Smart Task Force and the participates as a member of the Water Quality Strategy Committee organized by the Warren County Soil and Water Conservation District. The department operates targeted programs supported with grant funding, including the Lakeshore Septic Replacement Grant Program, Invasives Species Management, and the First Wilderness Heritage Corridor, a waterfront revitalization and recreation program uniting New York's Upper Hudson River communities from Corinth to North Creek. The department maintains a robust geographic information system that is deployed County-wide in response to a broad range of environmental planning and natural resources management and conservation projects.

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Public Works manages several divisions, including:

- **Parks, Recreation and Railroad** oversees numerous parks, boat launches, trails, and other recreational sites around the County. Other activities include the Warren County Fish Hatchery in Warrensburg.
- **Engineering** participates in environmental planning projects. The division guides the County's role in addressing future solid waste and recycling needs. Related activities include annual household hazardous waste collections and the ongoing review of whether Warren County will have the resources to create a countywide composting facility.
- **Office of Natural Disaster & Civil Defense** works with the State Office of Emergency Management to coordinate planning, response, and mitigation in the event of a catastrophic incident and works to comply with State and Federal mandates and assists in Local Emergency Planning activities.

STAKEHOLDER/PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Warren County is fortunate to have a series of organizations and stakeholders with intense focus on the importance of protecting the natural environment. Several of these organizations are pointed to as beacons of resource protection doing world class work.

- The **Warren County Soil and Water Conservation District (WCSWCD)**, provides natural resource management and technical assistance to residents and municipal governments in the County. While technically a separate entity from the County, the WCSWCD receives a substantial source of its operating budget from the County. The district staff work County-wide to protect and improve the lakes, rivers, streams, soils, and other natural resources through locally led conservation projects and programs.

District staff lead and participate in watershed management and revitalization planning and fund and complete environmental restoration projects in collaboration with municipalities, private landowners, and property managers addressing a wide range of needs. These include water quality improvement projects (e.g., installation of green infrastructure along roadside ditches), flood damage prevention, wildlife preservation, best management practices for stormwater management, and erosion control to public education activities regarding invasive species identification and management practices.

They provide technical leadership to a wide variety of organizations and citizens groups focused on lake protection and water quality, addressing invasive species as well as natural resource protection. The District is also Warren County's designated MS4 Stormwater Management Coordinator, providing inspection and reporting services.

- **Lake Champlain-Lake George Regional Planning Board** has a planning focus on watershed, lake, and stream corridors that helps ensure the long-term health of the region's waterbodies. They are a conduit for a wide variety of watershed planning funds and serve at the region's point of contact for the Lake Champlain Basin Program and the Champlain Watershed Improvement Coalition of New York. The

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organization also provides other related services, including preparation of drinking water source protection plans, among other activities.

- **Lake George Land Conservancy** has protected over 12,000 acres on and around Lake George since its founding in 1988 and has several initiatives, including additional land conservation and invasive species management/mitigation, among others.
- **Lake George Park Commission** is a NYS Agency authorized to carry out a wide array of programs aimed at protecting Lake George and the safety of the recreating public. Program areas include invasive species prevention and management, stormwater management, stream corridor protection, Septic System Inspection Program, and New Wastewater Regulations.
- The **Lake George Association (LGA)** is a not-for-profit agency focused on protecting Lake George through advocacy, research and public education. The Fund for Lake George recently merged with the LGA and includes the Lake George Waterkeeper program. The **Jefferson Project** is a collaboration of the LGA with the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) and IBM bringing "world-leading technology and science" to collection and analysis of water chemistry data to inform decision making with respect to policy...
- **Cornell University Cooperative Extension** provides programs based on the needs of the County using research-based information from Cornell University to improve lives and communities, increase economic vitality, and enhance environmental quality. Cooperative Extension offers programs addressing community health; natural resources and water quality; wise energy use and 4-H youth development through real life, hands-on learning. The organization is well-known for its focus on agriculture and natural resources, with programs to promote stewardship of our natural resources.
- **New York State Department of Conservation**, in consultation with the **Adirondack Park Agency**, prepares unit management plans (UMPs) to help guide the uses of State-owned Forest Preserve, State Forests, Wildlife Management Areas, and Lands under Conservation Easements. The agencies identify opportunities for public use and recreation that are consistent with the classifications of these lands and consider the ability of the resources and ecosystems to accommodate such use.

There are many other important partners that are too numerous to fully mention. In addition to the various local governments and agencies, some of these other non-governmental organizations include (in no particular order) the Adirondack Mountain Club, the Queensbury Land Conservancy, SUNY Adirondack, the Freshwater Institute, the Adirondack Council, the Nature Conservancy, Open Space Institute, Adirondack Watershed Institute, the various Lake Associations, etc.

WATER RESOURCES

The Hudson River, Lake George, Brant Lake, Loon Lake, Friends Lake, Glen Lake, the Schroon River. Warren County is home to some of the most beautiful and accessible water resources. Our region's waters have shaped our settlement patterns, location of industry, and our economy, providing world class recreation and fishing, as well as some of the finest quality drinking water. Lake George, "the Queen of American Lakes," and this resource's

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influence on Warren County and its value cannot be overstated. Crystal clear waters, scenic beauty, place in history, recreation and tourism driver, and economic impact have shaped the region. The protection of Lake George's water quality and land conservation efforts are looked to as a model. Similarly, the Hudson River and its place in history and importance to indigenous population, the development of New York State and Warren County is unrivaled. North Creek, Warrensburg, Lake Luzerne, and Glens Falls all were settled along the Hudson and developed mills/industry reliant on the river's power.

The drainage patterns of the County are based in part upon the geologic events that occurred over millions of years that shaped and changed the bedrock formations in the County. As the Ice Age was ending and the glacier retreated from south to north across what is now Warren County, that powerful event shaped virtually every square inch of the County landscape and influenced almost every aspect of our natural history as it relates to our water resources, establishing two distinct watersheds. These watersheds are part of the larger regional systems that feed two of our nation's most important river systems —the St. Lawrence (via Lake George-Lake Champlain and their tributaries) and the Hudson. Warren County's unique topography has a watershed divide that establishes this pattern.

CURRENT ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES & TRENDS

The information provided in this section builds on data from several recent water resource related studies including the 2023 [*Lake George Watershed Action Plan*](#), the 2022 [*Lake George Harmful Algal Bloom Action Plan*](#), the LCLGRPB and partner's 2020 [*Upper Hudson Watershed Revitalization Plan*](#), and their 2018 [*Lake Champlain Non-Point Source Pollution Subwatershed Assessment and Management Plan*](#), among others.

Recent plans that address water quality issues in the County established priorities for action based on assessment of water resources and potential threats. These include:

1. **Stormwater runoff** from both developed and undeveloped lands can have impacts on waterbodies by carrying sediment and other pollutants.
2. **Erosion and sedimentation** can impact water flow and increase nutrients in the waterbody, which reduces dissolved oxygen and decreases water quality.
3. **Water supply and wastewater treatment** resources can be threatened by pollutants from a number of potential sources including failing septic systems, out-of-date wastewater treatment systems and illicit disposal of hazardous waste.
4. **Road salt** has numerous long-term impacts on our ecosystems and waterbodies and can be retained by the local ecosystems for decades.
5. **Invasive species** are a threat to the biodiversity of waterbodies and land areas and threaten water quality and clarity, degrades habitat for native species and, in some cases, can preclude human activities such as swimming and fishing.
6. **Disconnection of proper hydrologic connectivity** in rivers and streams due to barriers or improper road crossings can inhibit fish migration and spawning habits and impact flooding.
7. **Climate change** is impacting water quality, native ecosystems, and infrastructure.

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Warren County is rich in water resources, much of which is in relatively great shape thanks in large part to the work of partner organizations to address threats to water quality. Threats to water resources (and water quality) regionally include excessive (or inappropriate) development, non-point source pollution (salts, fertilizers/nutrients, sediment) and the incidence of aquatic invasive species. Aged and failing septic systems, as well as overuse of our water bodies through fishing and recreational threaten these resources. The County is fortunate to have a series of partner organizations, as noted above, focused on natural resource and water resource protection. The Lake George Park Agency, an executive branch of NYS government, highlights the importance of this work.

Invasive species are a threat to the biodiversity of waterbodies and land areas and threaten water quality and clarity, degrades habitat for native species and, in some cases, can preclude human activities such as swimming and fishing. Eurasian milfoil, curly leaf pond weed, Asian clam, and the spiny water flea as examples. are found in many of our water bodies. Warren County's partner organizations are at the forefront of water ecology and water quality monitoring, public education, and intervention measures to address these issues.

Road salt management has been an important concern, and the Adirondack Road Salt Task Force has included leadership from the Warren County Department of Public Works. The County, along with other public works/town highway partners, have been leading the way to minimize the impact of road salt to help protect water resources. A systematic approach, including improved plowing and deicing technology and knowledge sharing with other professionals, are contributing to significant reductions in the amount of salt applied to participating jurisdictions. This will be of continual importance, as the impact of salt will still need to be considered and mitigated over the long term.

Stormwater management has made great strides since the Clean Water Act Phase I Stormwater regulation in 1990. The USEPA as implement by the NYSDEC currently requires stormwater management be incorporated into land development activities disturbing more than one acre. The Lake George Park Commission has taken further measures to address the impacts of land development.

The County has above average precipitation, and the amount of precipitation is only increasing with climate change. With atmospheric conditions drawing moisture from sources near and far, the County receives more precipitation on average

Warren County has

**64
waterbodies
over 20 acres
in size**

**that are either partially or
entirely surrounded by
privately owned land.**

**4,570
residential
parcels**

**in the County rely on private
sewer (septic) and lie closer
than 250 feet to a waterbody
over 20 acres—and 1,233 of
these parcels are less than
10,000 square feet in size.**

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(ranging from about 38-47 inches annually) than the average precipitation across the continental U.S. (at about 30 inches annually). In just the past year (between September 2022 and August 2023), Warren County was among the list of New York counties where precipitation from was measurably greater—at 51.5 inches (about 9.5 inches above average)—compared to the average annual precipitation from 1901 to 2000. Total annual volume of rainfall in Warren County is about 2.2 million acre-feet – almost equal to the entire volume of Lake George (2.4 million acre-feet).

Large storm events, which are increasingly prevalent in Warren County, cause the greatest impact. These larger storms that produce huge volumes of runoff in a brief period of time can adversely impact water quality much more than typical storms that produce more runoff in total, but less intensively. These impacts are not only sedimentation and excessive nutrient loading to water bodies but also to culverts, bridges, and other important infrastructure.

Water resources management will be an increasing challenge. Limited resources, multiple jurisdictions, overlapping programs. The increased impacts of major storms on our waterbodies and infrastructure, the introduction and prevalence of invasive species that comes with climate change will continue to impact our natural resources, environmental health, and the local economy.

Collaboration and Public Private Partnerships are the way forward. Warren County is home to world class organization leading water resource protection efforts. Land conservation efforts by the Lake George Land Conservancy, the Jefferson Project, the West Brook Conservation Initiative, Warren County is a proving ground for the much-needed acceleration of environmental management solutions for our fragile planet. There is an opportunity to leverage the public educational benefits documenting the collaboration and accomplishments among these partners to make the County and region an even more powerful force in advancing sustainable natural resource conservation practices for our benefit and that of others across the country facing similar challenges.

LAND RESOURCES

Our land resources, including our forests, farms, soil, and below-ground minerals have shaped our settlement patterns and our economy. Our glacial/natural history has shaped our settlement patterns, with virtually all of the older settlements of the County—the hamlets, the villages and the City of Glens Falls each were developed along waterfront areas of well-drained, relatively gentle terrain formed by the unconsolidated deposits (sands, gravels, etc.) left behind during the glacial retreat. Our land resources are cultivated through farming, logging, and mining. The rolling and mountain landforms provide part of

YOUR TASK

Protecting water quality is an important activity upon which many in the county are engaged.

What is your vision for our water resources in Warren County?

Looking ahead where should we focus our attention?

Are we in agreement with our priorities from recent plans?

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our unique scenic and recreation environment and are home to diverse plant and animal habitats.

CURRENT ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES & TRENDS

The information provided in this section considers from several recent land use and land resources-related plans and studies including the 2023 *Lake George Septic Inspection Program* by the Lake George Park Commission/NYSDEC, the *Warren County Hazard Mitigation Plan Update 2023* and a summary of *Natural Environment Recommendations from Warren County Local Comprehensive Plans*, among others.

Of the County's land area, 37% is publicly owned conservation or recreation land plus even larger areas of privately owned forest land. Forests cover 88% of the County's total area, with an additional 1.3% covered by herbaceous and woody wetlands. Only about 2% of the County's land area is considered developed. As a result, the County is in a relatively outstanding position in terms of our natural resources and the ecological services provided by our natural landscape. Benefits include helping keep the surface water runoff clean through natural processes that buffer rainfalls, reducing erosion and helping keep the rates and volumes of runoff manageable through the existing natural landscape. Forests also provide an environmental service for air quality and climate resilience, beneficially absorbing massive amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Strong local interest exists in conservation and connection to resources. Virtually all local comprehensive plans reflect this opportunity. There are so many wonderful and unique habitats in the County. To celebrate just a few randomly selected examples, these include the oxbows and floodplain habitat along the Schroon River, the ice meadows habitat along the Hudson River, the numerous vernal (spring) pools and seasonal wetlands, and the thousands of acres of hemlock-pine-northern hardwood forests throughout the County. Private land management is a key to conservation. Continued stewardship and wise management of the privately owned land in the County will be an important aspect of maintaining the high quality of the natural resource base that contributes to the quality of life in Warren County.

Scenic resources are important both locally and from a tourism and economic perspective. Many of the local comprehensive plans highlight the importance of visual resources. In addition, State/Federally designated Scenic Byways, like NYS Route 28 through the Town of Johnsbury, is of particular importance as "representative of a region's scenic, recreational, cultural, natural, historical or archeological significance." Leveraging these assets for promotion of local economic/tourism development presents an ongoing opportunity that is being explored in the County's ongoing Outdoor Recreation Economy Strategic Plan.

YOUR TASK

What are two or three ideas that can help expand awareness of these amazing places and what are some additional/expanded ways the county and local municipalities can collaborate to keep our natural areas . . . well, natural?

CASE STUDY: SARATOGA COUNTY

In 2003, the Saratoga County Board of Supervisors established the Saratoga County Farmland Protection and Open Space Preservation grant program to aid farmers in meeting the required local match to the New York State Farmland Protection Implementation Grant Program (FPIG), which enables the purchase of development rights (PDR) on eligible farmland. The program has been expanded to provide funding for lands containing natural areas, wildlife habitats, natural parkland, preserves, and other important open spaces within Saratoga County.

Eligible open space projects may include lands that offer a unique recreation opportunity for a community, such as natural parkland, preserve, nature trails, or bikeways, or a project that provides a trail connection or access to a waterway or waterbody. The Saratoga County Green Infrastructure Plan provides a comprehensive overview of unique open space resources eligible for County funding and which may receive a high project ranking during the application review process.

County municipalities, not-for-profit land trusts, and conservation groups are eligible to apply for this program with a letter of support from the host municipality. Eligible projects include conservation easements, trail easements, and fee title land acquisitions.

Transactions acquired through full donation, purchase by full compensation, or bargain sale (partial donation / partial compensation) are eligible for this funding. Transactional costs are also eligible.

Timber harvesting is a very important part of managing sustainable forest resources.

Logging and the County's history are deeply intertwined, from ingenuity and technology of papermaking and other forest products development to community growth and patterns of settlement. Today, the forest sector in the North Country region represents nearly 5% of the area's total economic output and employment. Forest management, including timber harvesting, is of great importance to the diverse mix of forestland owners—from small woodlot owners, to the expansive holdings of timber/resource management companies. Economic value is added to the resource base—from forest management planning, to timber sale and harvest, to the manufacture of wood products from saw timber, veneers, pulp and paper to manufacture of furniture, construction materials and other value-added processing. Continued refinement and expanded development of wood products—from high-valued paper products to state-of-the-art construction materials like cross laminated timber (CLT) could all offer promise for sustainable economic future in the region for this important and renewable resource.

Our mineral resources have also always been a key element of the County economy.

From a geologist's perspective, most of the County lies within the Adirondack physiographic province except for the southeastern corner of the County, which lies in the Ridge and Valley province. Historically, these rock formations have been mined for a number of important minerals. With the Adirondacks providing minerals like graphite, iron ore and garnet and the sedimentary rocks in the Ridge and Valley providing limestone and dolostone for aggregate and cement manufacture. The County's mining history is still alive with many active operations. Most facilities focus on the sand and gravel deposits left

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behind in huge quantities 10,000 years ago from after the glacial retreat. Recognizing the County's extensive mineral resources, its access to transportation systems and pressures in more populated areas to limit mining activity, there may be increased pressure toward expanding operations to address continuing/expanded demands.

We rely heavily on soil to treat wastewater through septic systems—and many of these systems are outdated/not performing well. While our sandy and gravelly soils can provide great stormwater absorption, excessively drained soils can be problematic for septic systems sited close to a lake or pond as nutrients and pollutants may not be sufficiently absorbed or filtered before reaching the surface waters. Heavier, compacted soils formed from glacial till, may also present another set of challenges for septic systems in terms of poor absorption capacity. A recent study of septic systems by Lake George Park Commission found that approximately half of the septic systems inspected in year 2023 were failing, needed repairs or are substandard. It would not be surprising, given the similar soil conditions for other water bodies around the County, that this may be an issue of larger, long-term concern.

AIR RESOURCES

Sometimes we take our clean air for granted—though visitors from the larger metro areas frequently let the locals know how much they appreciate it. Visitors from larger urban areas typically face greater risks of adverse public health impacts due to poor air quality. Rural upstate communities have historically served as a clean air refuge for those living in highly developed urban areas. Clean air, clean water and a healthy natural environment are some of the primary drivers of the county's economic base.

CURRENT ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES & TRENDS

The information provided in this section builds on data from several recent air/climate resource related studies including *Air Pollution and Your Health, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences*, the 2022 *New York State Climate Action Council Scoping Plan* and the *Annual 2023 National Climate Report*.

The County is not immune from distant pollution sources. While the region still enjoys relatively clean air, the County's communities are not immune from local challenges. Our historic industrial base centered around Glens Falls has experienced air quality issues related to manufacturing that has been of concern to area residents. In addition, the area is impacted from pollutants coming in from other sources and other regions. Vehicle emissions, fuel oils and natural gas to heat homes, by-products of manufacturing and power generation, particularly coal-fueled power plants, and fumes from chemical production are the primary sources of human-made air pollution.

Sadly, these sources can also contribute to water pollution too, as the atmospheric-borne transport can bring these pollutants to our surface waters. These can include acid rain and heavy metals like mercury that can come from industries and power plants in the Great Lakes region and carried by the prevailing westerly winds.

Climate change is both an environmental and economic concern. These impacts are challenging because they affect the natural environment, our economy, and our quality of

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life—and mostly not in a good way. Some examples of these impacts in Warren County include ski areas struggling to maintain snow cover; impact to income and employment with the decline in winter-based tourism and loss of income for people engaged in winter road maintenance/snowplow activities; and increasing costs to repair roads, culverts and other infrastructure damaged by increasingly powerful storms.

YOUR TASK

In what areas are County residents, businesses, and government services vulnerable to the future aspects that climate change may bring—what are we not talking about/thinking about, that we should be?

Climate change is considered a threat multiplier. For example, more frequent heat waves combined with heavy rainfall can cause temperatures to rise in receiving waters which can impact the survival of some native species. Reduced winter snowpack/snow melt and warmer runoff can increase pond and lake temperatures, creating habitat more suitable for invasive species to grow and increase the threat to stressed native populations.

The County and its partners continue to work together to plan ahead to be in a good position to be responsive for hazardous events. In June 2019 the Warren County Board of Supervisors adopted the New York State Climate Smart Communities Pledge to help set the stage for continued planning and place the County in a good position to secure technical support and funding to help address climate related concerns. A climate smart task force was assembled at the County level, and many of the local municipalities have been active as well. Warren County has also, most recently, prepared a Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2023, which was approved by FEMA, and was an update of the County's previous (2017) plan. Climate and weather-related events were identified as top hazards of concern. While identifying these hazards is an important step, addressing it is another challenge; by its very nature, we cannot fully predict any of the specifics of these changes.

OTHER FACTORS

NY Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) & Scoping Plan: In 2019, New York State enacted the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), which outlines goals of greenhouse gas reduction and "net zero" carbon emissions by 2050. At the end of 2022, a council that was assembled under the CLCPA finalized the Scoping Plan, which is to act as a roadmap for implementation of the CLCPA. Overall themes in the Scoping Plan, as well as related and parallel legislation that has been proposed in the New York State Legislature, include an aggressive shift to electrification; mandates for new construction, requiring that buildings be equipped as all-electric, without dependence on fossil fuels; implementation of more reporting on and use of systems to promote energy-efficiency. The Scoping Plan sets standards and targets across several sectors, including Transportation, Buildings, Electricity, Industry, Agriculture and Forestry, and Waste. The Plan continues to emphasize Smart Growth principles and will seek to promote land use policies that directly affect carbon emissions, sequestration, and storage. These priorities are expected to be supported through technical guidance and direct grants to municipalities to include reforestation, farmland protection and clean energy siting in municipal comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances. A lot of these efforts will be made at the local

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government level, but Counties will be needed to help coordinate efforts, define and share best practices, and track collective progress towards the State's targets.

County and Municipal Action on Climate. Some needs and opportunities for the County and its municipalities include recognizing the opportunity to take advantage of "low hanging fruit" to secure grant funding for projects municipalities and county want to do in the short term. (For example, NYSERDA currently has funding available--mostly for energy-efficiency related projects.).

The County Board of Supervisors adopted a [Climate Smart pledge](#) a few years ago. It would be advantageous from a grant funding perspective to officially restart the County Climate Smart Committee to conform with State guidelines and secure Climate Smart Community certification points. Relatedly, initiating a climate action plan may be worthwhile initiative including conducting a county-wide greenhouse gas inventory. A County effort could be conducted in addition to/in coordination with local plans. Interested municipalities could be added in to a County initiative (as in the Warren County Hazard Mitigation Plan).

Strategic funding opportunities for multiple benefit projects could be a product of such an approach. For example, a watershed may be prioritized for climate resilience investment due to the presence of highly erodible soils to reduce increased nutrient loading to a lake. This could be coupled with infrastructure investments for upgrades to roadway drainage structures. Nearby forests and wetland complexes could be considered for priority land conservation projects to preserve forest cover and flood protection.

CASE STUDY: TOMPKINS COUNTY

In 2016 Tompkins County developed an Energy Roadmap—a plan and action program to evaluate local energy resources and develop scenarios to reach the county's 80% greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction goal and project energy needs through 2050. Since the implementation of this plan, several actions have been taken to move towards these goals. These include the adoption of an updated Comprehensive Plan and adoption of the Tompkins County Energy Strategy.

The Energy Strategy was broken down into an internal and external focus. The internal side focuses on the County's operations, while the external focuses on the greater Tompkins County community. Utilizing the guidance written in the County's plans, operations have seen a 42.81% reduction in GHG emissions since 2008.

Tompkins County is the highest scoring county in New York State's Climate Smart Communities Program and in 2023 received Silver Climate Smart Community status, the highest distinction in the program. Tompkins County is currently one of only nine silver certified communities. The County earned the certification by documenting accomplishments and ongoing efforts, including decreasing energy use, shifting to renewable energy, and enhancing community resilience to climate change.

The County and local governments have received millions of dollars in funding to support both the planning and implementation of this program, including projects ranging from sidewalk construction to facilitate pedestrian mobility to culvert replacements to create more resilient stormwater management facilities.