Final Report to the Town of Saranac, New York

The *Wireless Clearinghouse* project

Funded by a New York State

Department of Environmental Conservation

Smart Growth grant

Submitted by Howard Lowe, Project Manager, SUNY Plattsburgh

Plattsburgh
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

On behalf of the Research Foundation of SUNY and
The Adirondack North Country Association

THE RESEARCH FOUNDATION
The State University of New York

July 18, 2011

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Executive Summary

The purpose of the *Wireless Clearinghouse* project was to:

1. **Create an inventory** of existing structures that are suitable sites for cell phone and/or wireless broadband antennae and facilities.

2. **Develop a plan** that identifies suitable transmit sites that also have minimal visual impact. A key component of the *Wireless Clearinghouse* strategy is to minimize pressure to construct new towers.

3. **Inform and engage** participating Adirondack Park communities about the relevance and value of cell phone and wireless Internet services to the economic growth and sustainability of their communities, including potential revenue opportunities for the municipalities.

4. **Improve the capacity** of communities to sustain successful economic development through creation of an asset that will assist with implementation of cell phone and wireless broadband services. The *Wireless Clearinghouse* project will create a web-based, interactive telecommunications resource for all Adirondack Park communities and agencies, and cellular and wireless service provider companies.

Staff from SUNY Plattsburgh's Technical Assistance Center implemented the project, and led the project team, which also included the Adirondack North Country Association and Fountains Spatial Inc.

Smart Growth funding has created a new resource for wireless carriers and Adirondack Park municipalities to aid them in identifying existing structures that may be suitable for telecommunications antenna installations.

Twenty eight Adirondack Park municipalities participated in the *Wireless Clearinghouse* project during its implementation from August 2010 to June 2011. Efforts were made to identify potential sites in all municipalities in the Park and, using tax parcel data, sites were identified in 81 of these municipalities. All Adirondack Park municipalities were invited to review, modify, and add sites using an innovative web application based on Google Maps.

The *Wireless Clearinghouse*, though it has a number of limitations and is not intended as a single definitive resource for siting telecommunications equipment, provides a valuable resource in the site identification and review process.

The *Wireless Clearinghouse* was recognized by the New York State Wireless Association in this statement: "The *Wireless Clearinghouse* is potentially a game changing tool for site selectors to use in seeking existing transmission sites within the Adirondack Park."

The website showing all known viable structures may be viewed at www.giswebhosting.com/wirelessclearinghouse. Project funding will allow Fountains Spatial to maintain the website through December, 2011. The Department of Environmental Conservation will have to determine how long it wants to leave the website active after that date, which will require making arrangements for continued hosting of the site.

Introduction

In 2007, the Town of Saranac applied for a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Smart Growth grant. The Town's application was based on a proposal developed by the Technical Assistance Center (TAC) at SUNY Plattsburgh, the college's economic development office, in partnership with the Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA). TAC staff was, at that time, developing projects to improve broadband availability in the region. The Town of Saranac, through its (then) supervisor Joe Gerardi, offered to sponsor an application which proposed to create an on line database of existing tall structures in the Adirondack Park that might be suitable as sites for wireless telephone and broadband transmission facilities. The idea was that this would be a useful resource for wireless communications companies and that it would encourage them to expand service in the Adirondack Park, and contribute toward sustainable economic development for Park communities. ANCA's role was to create and distribute communications to keep Adirondack Park municipalities informed and engaged.

A Request for Proposals to provide GIS and mapping services was issued, and the contract was awarded to Fountains Spatial of Schenectady, NY (FSI). Project implementation began in August, 2010.

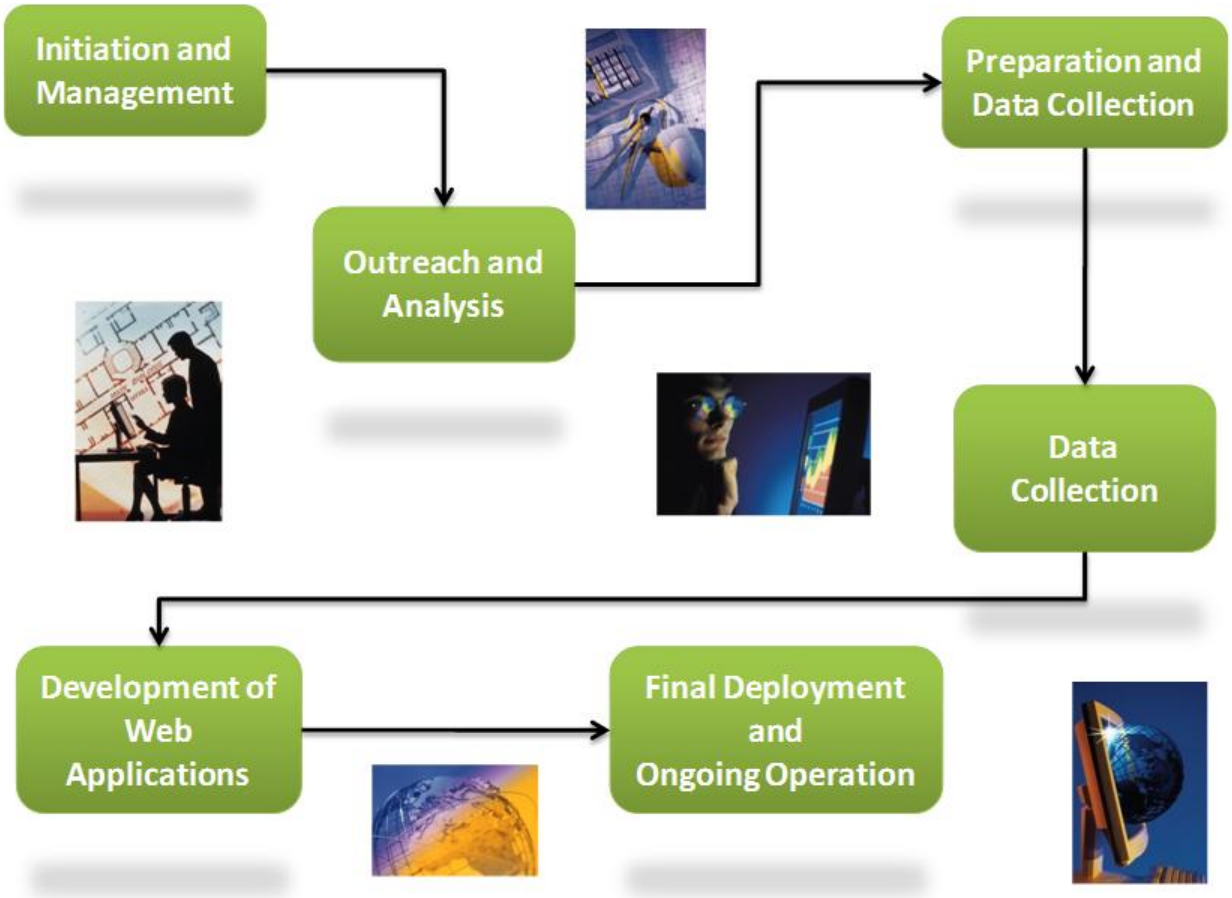
The primary deliverable for the Smart Growth grant is an on line GIS database of potential sites, accessible through Google Maps software. The website address is: www.giswebhosting.com/wirelessclearinghouse, and is incorporated by reference into this report.

The *Wireless Clearinghouse* is not intended as a single definitive resource for siting telecommunications equipment, but it provides a valuable resource in the site identification and review process.

SUNY Plattsburgh assessment and data manager Howard Lowe was the project manager, and he worked closely with FSI vice president Austin Fisher and ANCA executive director Kate Fish to implement the *Wireless Clearinghouse*. Lowe, Fisher, and Fish comprised the core project team. Lowe provided overall project management and coordination and liaison with DEC and wireless companies, FSI provided database development, mapping, and website creation, and ANCA provided outreach and communication with Adirondack Park municipalities and the media.

Methodology

This graphic illustrates the process flow used to develop the Wireless Clearinghouse:



Fountains Spatial Inc. (FSI) was the company subcontracted by the Research Foundation of SUNY to design and implement the database of sites and provide the mapping application.

As an initial step in the development of the tall structures inventory, FSI analyzed the tax parcel data using the New York State tax assessor real property data that was available for each town, and selected potential sites that may be candidates for locating a telecommunications antenna. The site selection was based primarily on property class descriptions found within the Assessor's Real Property System database. Tax parcels with property class codes such as churches, public services, and government structures were deemed likely to contain tall structures and were therefore selected. Any tall structure within the town, whether privately or publicly owned, may be considered as long as it meets the desired criteria and the property owner is willing to have it included

in the inventory. This provided the first group of potentially viable sites, including publicly owned structures that are often the most accessible to wireless carriers.

Pilot communities

In order to present the most accurate database possible, it was important that the process for local review and site identification by the towns be reasonably simple and user friendly. Four towns were invited to serve as pilot communities - reviewing, revising, and commenting on earlier versions of this site - so that the towns' input process could be field tested. Those towns were Brighton, Chester, Long Lake, and Saranac. Members of the project team met with the town boards of each town to explain the *Wireless Clearinghouse* and their role as a pilot community. All of towns agreed to serve as pilot communities. By early June, each community had reviewed the database of sites for its town and provided feedback.

- Initially feedback was to be requested from each municipality via survey form emailed in PDF format.
- Working with the Pilot Communities, it became clear that this process was somewhat awkward and limited.
- An interactive Municipal Feedback Site was developed based on a customized version of Google Maps.
- Each municipality has their own login, providing access to potential sites identified in their community.
- Feedback has been requested to assess the viability of each potential site, refine site locations, provide supplemental information (e.g., road access, structure height, etc.), and add additional sites.

Input from the New York State wireless industry

Lowe and Fisher invited three site selection specialists who represent wireless carriers who provide service in the Adirondack region to review the methodology and criteria for the *Wireless Clearinghouse*. Two of these individuals accepted, and conference calls were held with each of them during which the database was viewed using Google Maps. Their input was very helpful and their suggestions were incorporated into the development of the database. Further, Douglas Dimitroff, president of the New York State Wireless Association, invited Lowe and Fisher to present the project at the New York State Wireless Association (NYSWA) annual conference in Bolton Landing on May 12, 2011. Subsequent to the conference the NYSWA said: "The Wireless Clearinghouse is potentially a game changing tool for site selectors to use in seeking existing transmission sites within the Adirondack Park."

The following criteria are considered important by wireless service providers when selecting a suitable site, and were provided to the participating towns to use as guidelines in identifying potential structures:

- Existing electrical
- Structure height
- High site elevation
- Easy road access
- Good line of sight visibility
- Availability to be leased.

In the original Smart Growth grant application, it was proposed that visits would be made to potential sites to assess their viability, primarily by SUNY Plattsburgh Geography Department students. This method turned out to be impractical and unnecessary for the following reasons:

1. New on line resources became available after the grant application was submitted that allowed the project team to identify many potential sites. This included National Broadband Map and New York State Broadband Map data. This supplemented existing data that the Adirondack Park Agency shared with the project. The Federal Communications Commission was also a source of data for existing structures used for telecommunications.
2. Fountains Spatial made it possible, through the Google Maps software, for municipal officials, who best know their communities, to easily review and modify the preliminary database.
3. The compressed timeline for completing the project did not align well with the SUNY Plattsburgh academic calendar, making student availability uncertain. For example, fine tuning the database took place after school ended in May and June, 2011.

Google Maps was selected by FSI as the application for viewing the site database because of its versatility and ease of use.

In addition to the four pilot communities, all of the municipalities within the Park were invited to participate by reviewing pre-selected sites for suitability and submitting additional sites that may be viable. Efforts were made to identify potential sites in all municipalities in the Park and, using tax parcel data, sites were identified in 81 of these municipalities.

Municipal officials accessed the site directly and could modify the data for structures in their town using the innovative Google Maps web application. As of June 30, 2011, 28 towns have participated by reviewing and modifying the structure data (see Appendix A).

Project Objectives

The *Wireless Clearinghouse* application stated the following:

"The *Wireless Clearinghouse* is a comprehensive plan with several objectives:

1. **Create an inventory** of existing structures that are suitable sites for cell phone and/or wireless broadband antennae and facilities.

2. **Develop a plan** that identifies suitable transmit sites that also have minimal visual impact. A key component of the *Wireless Clearinghouse* strategy is to minimize pressure to construct new towers.

3. **Inform and engage** participating Park communities about the relevance and value of cell phone and wireless Internet services to the economic growth and sustainability of their communities, including potential revenue opportunities for the municipalities.

4. **Improve the capacity** of communities to sustain successful economic development through creation of an asset that will assist with implementation of cell phone and wireless broadband services. The *Wireless Clearinghouse* project will create a web-based, interactive telecommunications resource for all Adirondack Park communities and agencies, and cellular and wireless service provider companies."

Each of these objectives was achieved.

Objectives 1 and 2

The first step was identifying and assessing overall availability of wireless service in the Adirondack Park, and identifying communities that lacked service. This information was accessible on line from new sources that were not available at the time the Smart Growth grant application was submitted. These were the U.S. Department of Commerce National Broadband Mapping Initiative (funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), and New York State's Critical Infrastructure broadband mapping resource, also funded by ARRA.

Ideally, comprehensive field surveys would have been conducted to physically identify all potential structures, but this was impractical due to the compressed timeframe for the project work, and the unavailability of students, as reported above. However, an online tool was developed so that local officials, who best know which sites in their communities are potentially viable, could easily provide input for each site. To create

this online tool, Fountains Spatial developed an initial inventory based on tax assessor information available for each community. These are structures having "promising" property classes, e.g., schools, churches, water towers, hospitals, municipal buildings. The point locations for each of these properties, plus privately owned structures, were available for use in the mapping application. This baseline of existing structures was augmented with data from the Federal Communications Commission.

Over 1,500 potential sites were identified for all but a few of the towns in the Adirondack Park.

Objective 3 was accomplished by meeting with the boards of supervisors of four Adirondack towns, presenting the Wireless Clearinghouse at the 2011 annual meeting of the Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages, with news releases that were published in local newspapers and websites, and sent via email messages to each town supervisor.

Objective 4 was realized through the Wireless Clearinghouse website that can be found at www.giswebhosting.com/wcmfs.

- Feedback from the municipalities was incorporated into a master database.
- A publically accessible *Wireless Clearinghouse* application is ready to be launched.
- This Google Maps application will allow the user to view, query, and filter the final set of potential sites.
- At DEC's option, the *Wireless Clearinghouse* Municipal Feedback Site may be left in place and continuously updated, as changes are made at the local level.

Project Communications

Either Lowe or Fish (or both) attended town board of supervisor meetings in Chester, Brighton, Long Lake, and Saranac to brief the officials about the *Wireless Clearinghouse* and to invite their participation as pilot communities.

Informing the New York State wireless industry

Lowe and Fisher demonstrated the *Wireless Clearinghouse* database and mapping tool to Douglas Dimitroff, president of the New York State Wireless Association, on April 14, 2011. As a result of this event, Mr. Dimitroff invited Lowe and Fisher to make a presentation at the New York State Wireless Association's annual conference in Bolton Landing on May 12, 2011, a session that Mr. Dimitroff moderated.

Lowe and Fisher also demonstrated the *Wireless Clearinghouse* to Jeffrey Davis, an attorney with Hiscock and Barclay, a firm that represents one of the major wireless carriers in New York State. Mr. Davis provided valuable input on how the *Wireless Clearinghouse* could be of greatest use to wireless site location specialists.

Informing Adirondack Park towns

- Lowe presented the *Wireless Clearinghouse* to the annual meeting of the Association of Adirondack Towns and Villages on June 6, 2011.
- ANCA issued news releases in May 2011 that were carried by the *Adirondack Almanac,* the *Adirondack Express*, and the *Tug Hill Express*. See Appendix D.
- ANCA sent two email blasts to municipal officials in May and June, 2011, informing them about the project and inviting their participation.
- ANCA carried articles about the *Wireless Clearinghouse* in two of its newsletters, February 3 and May 18, 2011.

Conclusion

There are many challenges to expanding broadband access in the Adirondack Park.

The *Wireless Clearinghouse*, though it has a number of limitations and is not intended as a single definitive resource for siting telecommunications equipment, provides a valuable resource in the site identification and review process.

It has been endorsed by the New York State Wireless Association as a useful site selection tool for companies seeking to provide service in the Adirondack Park.

The Department of Environmental Conservation should consider whether to leave the website up for public review, and if so, for how long.

Appendix A

Adirondack towns that participated in the *Wireless Clearinghouse* as of June 30, 2011

Arietta
Bellmont
Black Brook
Chester
Dannemora
Edinburg
Fine
Franklin
Hadley
Hope
Horicon
Lewis
Long Lake
Mayfield Village
North Hudson
Ohio
Otter Lake
Parishville
Port Henry Village
Saranac
Speculator Village
Thurman
Ticonderoga
Tupper Lake Village
Warrensburg
Webb
Wells
Willsboro

Appendix B

Wireless Clearinghouse email invitation sent to Adirondack municipalities

Dear Town Supervisor:

Please help us gather information about your town for the *Adirondack Park Wireless Clearinghouse* project. The purpose of the *Wireless Clearinghouse* project is to encourage the expansion of wireless broadband service in the Park by creating an inventory of existing tall structures that may be appropriate sites for a telecommunications antenna. The inventory will be made available online and will be accessible to local communities in the Park, private telecommunications providers and the public, with the intent of providing a cost-effective way to assess potential transmission sites. In addition, the database could be used for emergency services planning and planning for county-wide projects requiring wireless capabilities. Preliminary feedback from the wireless industry indicates that the *Wireless Clearinghouse* will be a helpful tool in their site selection process.

We estimate that it will take several hours to complete the information for your community, and that you will find it time well spent! We suggest that you gather a handful of people who enjoy working with on line maps and data to get together to complete this work. We guarantee that it will be an interesting diversion from your regular work! All municipalities that participate will be entered into a drawing to receive Fountains Spatial's new MuniMapper product, a Google Maps based online parcel viewer application customized for your community, including web hosting (an approximately $2,250 value). See this link as an example of how the Town of Canandaigua uses this service, and please see the attached description for more information.

We must receive input from your community by June 17. We will publicly recognize all the communities that provide data for this survey.

The project is funded by a Smart Growth grant to the Town of Saranac from the Department of Environmental Conservation and is being administered by The Research Foundation of SUNY and SUNY Plattsburgh, with assistance from Fountains Spatial, Inc., a Schenectady-based Geographic Information Systems (GIS) consulting firm and the Adirondack North Country

Association. Three communities within the Park – the Towns of Brighton, Long Lake and Saranac – volunteered as pilot communities for the project and have already reviewed potential sites and submitted additional sites to the database. We are now inviting all of the communities within the Park to participate by reviewing pre-selected sites for suitability and submitting additional sites that may be suitable.

As an initial step in the development of the tall structures inventory, Fountains Spatial has analyzed the tax parcel data and selected potential sites in your community that may be candidates for locating a telecommunications antenna. The site selection was based primarily on property class descriptions found within the Assessor's RPS database. Tax parcels with property class codes such as churches, public services, and government structures were deemed likely to contain tall structures and were therefore selected. Any tall structure within the town, whether privately or publicly owned, can be considered as long as it meets the desired criteria and the property owner is willing to have it included in the inventory.

INSTRUCTIONS

Fountains Spatial has created an online Google Maps viewer which contains the pre-selected sites for your community. We are asking for your assistance in reviewing the sites to determine their suitability for locating a telecommunications antenna. Using the URL, username and password information below, you may log on to the site to review the data for your community.

Website: http://giswebhost.org/wcmfs/

Username: (Town name)
Password: (Unique password provided)

When you first login to the website, you will see a list of **undetermined** sites for your community in the Table of Contents on the right hand side of the map. The website uses familiar Google Maps functionality, and allows you to view terrain maps, street maps, aerial photography, or view the site in Google Earth. Next to each site, you may click on the Details link to zoom into the site and get initial information regarding the site. When you would like to edit the site, click on Edit to

open a form where you may provide additional information regarding the site. Note that the site marker may not fall on the exact location of the building; if you would like to move the site marker, you may do so easily by dragging it to a new location with your mouse.

Please take a few minutes to review each site and determine its suitability. **If the structure is not viable for a wireless installation,** please specify it as **nonviable**, and if possible, provide a reason (structure is not tall, site does not have easy access, etc). If the structure is considered to be a **viable** site, please complete the form to provide any available additional information about the site (such as presence of electrical power, site visibility, etc). You may also submit any additional sites that you feel are viable in your community by selecting a location on the map and completing a short form with additional information (property owner, type of structure, etc). The following criteria are considered important by wireless service providers when selecting a suitable site:

- Existing electrical
- Tall structure height
- High site elevation
- Easy site access
- Good line of sight visibility

As you review and edit sites, they will move out of the **Undetermined** list and into the **Nonviable** or **Viable** lists, depending on how you mark them. You may revisit a site at any time. If you are unable to complete the entire list of Undetermined sites at one time, the website will remember your work and you can login and finish your review later. You may also add sites at any time by following the directions in the **Add** section of the table of contents. Please visit the website to view help videos with more detailed instructions.

We thank you in advance for your participation in this important project. We must receive input from your community by May 31. When the project is completed, we will notify you of the launch of the *Wireless Clearinghouse* public access website. As you proceed with the review and submission of sites to the database, please feel free to contact Howard Lowe or me with any questions or comments, or Jenny Smith for technical support with the application. Our contact information is below:

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Sincerely,
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Building Vibrant Rural Communities and Resilient Local Economies

Appendix C

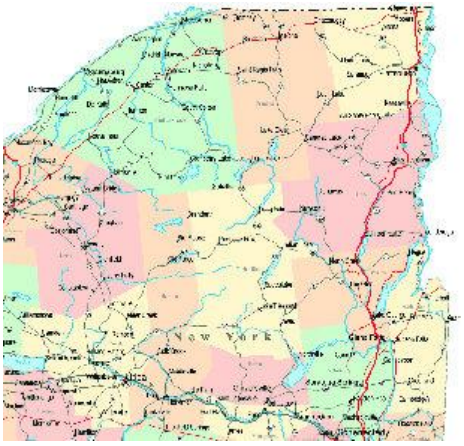
Wireless Clearinghouse News Releases

Opportunity to expand broadband service in the region

Wireless Mapping Project Seeks Communities' Participation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 11, 2011 - Adirondack towns and villages have a unique opportunity to be included in an exciting project that seeks to improve wireless cell and broadband availability in the Adirondack Park. But they must act now!



The goal of the *Wireless Clearinghouse* project is to create an inventory of existing structures in Adirondack Park towns that are suitable for housing a wireless antenna. The database will be a resource for private wireless companies, with the goal of encouraging them to expand wireless telecommunications across the region, a key to economic development. The inventory produced will be a significant planning asset that will be available through a secure website and will feature a GIS database with maps and images.

Right now, municipal officials are being asked to respond to an email sent by the Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA) that contains instructions for listing their community's structures in the online inventory. **All communities who provide feedback by May 31 will be publicly acknowledged when the final results of the project are published and will be entered in a drawing to win a free customized online mapping application.**

Fountains Spatial Inc., a GIS consulting firm based in Schenectady, has been contracted by SUNY Plattsburgh and ANCA with project methodology, data collection, and development of an interactive web-map application to access the data collected in the project.

The data being collected this month will identify existing tall structures within Adirondack Park municipalities, such as churches, water towers, and other tall structures. To start, Fountains Spatial combed tax parcel data for information on property class codes such as churches, public services and government structures that could be considered suitable sites for a telecommunications antenna. The State's new broadband mapping tool has also been a big help.

The project is due to be completed this summer. In the process, one of the goals is to inform community

leaders of the opportunities provided by these technologies.

"DEC, SUNY Plattsburgh, Fountains Spatial and ANCA hope that the *Wireless Clearinghouse* database will encourage wireless carriers to provide service in additional Park communities. People today want to stay connected 24/7 using their mobile device or computer, and better wireless service will support municipal services, and benefit year round and seasonal residents, and visitors may stay longer," said Howard Lowe, project manager.

Project partners are the Town of Saranac, SUNY Plattsburgh, Fountains Spatial and ANCA. The Wireless Clearinghouse project is funded by a Department of Environmental Conservation Smart Growth grant.

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Appendix D

Wireless Clearinghouse articles in three newspapers

Adirondack Express and the Tug Hill Express, May 17, 2011

Wireless mapping project needing participation from the community

Adirondack towns and villages have a unique opportunity to be included in an exciting project that seeks to improve wireless cell and broadband availability in the Adirondack Park.

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adirondack almanack
Culture, Politics, History, and the Environment

Monday, May 16, 2011

Potential Adirondack Wireless Locations Sought

by The Almanack Staff

Adirondack towns and villages have a unique opportunity to be included in a project that seeks to improve wireless cell and broadband availability in the Adirondack Park.

The goal of the Wireless Clearinghouse project is to create an inventory of existing structures in Adirondack Park towns that are suitable for housing a wireless antenna. The database will be a resource for private wireless companies, with the goal of encouraging them to expand wireless telecommunications across the region, a key to economic development. The inventory produced is expected to be a significant planning asset available through a secure website and featuring a GIS database with maps and images.

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