

RESOLUTION NUMBER 89 OF 2007

MOTION BY COUNCILMAN RIEGER

SECONDED BY COUNCILMAN CARPENTER

Washington County Grassland Habitat Protection Plan

Whereas:

The Town of Fort Edward wishes to conserve it's rural character, maintain and balance it's tax base, provide opportunities for land owners to continue in farming activities and environmentally appropriate development, conserve wildlife habitat, and welcome new environmentally friendly economic activities to the Town, and;

Whereas:

The agricultural lands of Washington County have been identified in the New York State Open Space Conservation Plan, 2006 (page 181, resolution 15 and page 314, project #134 and page 292, project #64 ...protect wildlife habitat in the river corridor.) as a critical component of the state's efforts to conserve open space, providing agricultural products, scenic open space and vital wildlife habitat, and;

Whereas:

Audubon New York has identified a significant part of the Washington County farmlands (covering parts of the towns of Fort Edward, Argyle and Kingsbury) as a state Important Bird Area, specifically for grassland birds, whose numbers are in sharp decline in the country and in New York State, and;

Whereas:

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) has identified specific farmland areas of Washington County as a special grassland bird focus area, making the area eligible for federal and state Open Space and Landowner Incentive Program funds to encourage land owners to manage these lands to conserve grassland birds while remaining in active farming, and;

Whereas:

NYSDEC has developed a grassland bird habitat protection plan to conserve these Washington County farmlands to protect the Short-eared owl, an endangered species, and other species at risk, including but not limited to, Northern Harrier, Upland Sandpiper, Henslow's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark, and;

Whereas:

The NYSDEC plan identifies some core grassland habitats used by bird species that could be protected by state fee purchase or conservation easement land acquisition, it also identifies surrounding private agricultural land as buffer areas on which farm management practices should be encouraged and continued, modified by agreement with

the state to protect grassland bird and other wildlife habitat as appropriate. Town participation in the unique grassland bird habitat protection plan to conserve farmland could have financial benefit for individual landowners; help to maintain tax revenue for the Town; help to protect the Town's scenic resources and wildlife habitat; encourage ecotourism and nature education; and perhaps stimulate development of alternative agricultural uses to include horse farms and horse trails, all of which could result in an additional agri-tourism benefit to the Town and landowners, and;

Whereas:

NYSDEC and Audubon New York have outlined the major components of this plan at public meetings in Fort Edward (on October 11, 2007) and Argyle (on November 13, 2007); where they stated that projects in the Open Space Conservation Plan, including the Washington County Grassland Bird Habitat Protection Project, only allows the state to purchase land in fee or conservation easement from "willing sellers", and, it is anticipated that the Environmental Protection Fund will be the source of state revenue used for the project and those funds can only be spent on a land acquisition project that is without objection from the affected town; thus making community support and landowner participation essential to the implementation of this unique grassland bird habitat protection plan, and;

Whereas:

Implementation of the Washington County Grassland Bird Conservation Plan can only be satisfactorily implemented with support of the affected Towns and implementation of the Plan would meet the Towns interest in preserving its rural character and important farmland for grassland bird habitat;

Now therefore, be it resolved:

The Town of Fort Edward supports the Washington County Grassland Bird Conservation Plan as a priority project under statewide farmland protection in the New York State Open Space Conservation Plan and; the Town will cooperate with the State of New York, Department of Environmental Conservation, Audubon New York, and other private agricultural and conservation organizations in pursuing the development of the Washington County Grassland Bird Conservation Plan and; conceptually the Town supports implementation of the Plan through land acquisition from "willing sellers" and; The Town will encourage the active involvement of the Washington County Agricultural Stewardship Association to ensure that the local farming perspective is represented in all aspects of this plan and its implementation and; the Town wishes to participate in an active partnership with local landowners, other local governments, state agencies and private non-profit agricultural and conservation interests in the decision making involved in the implementation of the Washington County Grassland Bird Conservation Plan.

DATED: December 31, 2007

Councilman Rieger- AYE
Councilman Carpenter- AYE
Supervisor Pulver- AYE
Councilman Dangelico- ABSENT
Councilman Orsini- ABSENT