

Office of the NEW YORK STATE
COMPTROLLER

Special Report: North Country Region Economic Profile



New York State Comptroller
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Executive Summary

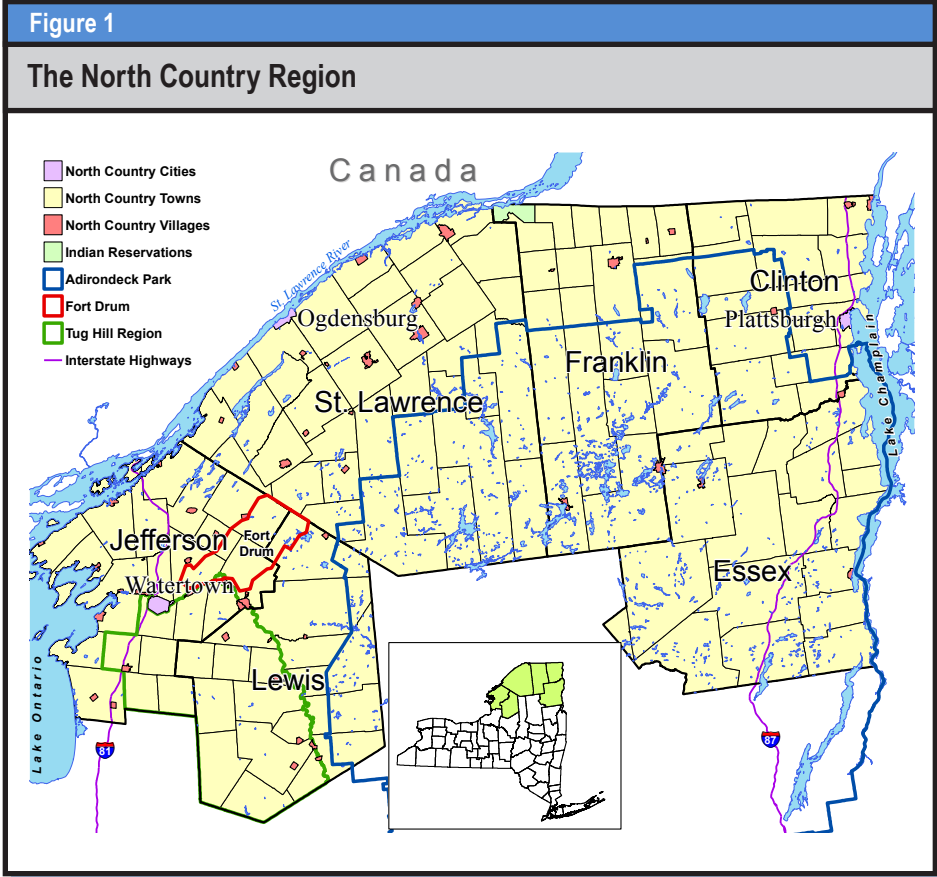
- The North Country Region includes Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties, and shares an extensive border with Canada. It also contains the cities of Ogdensburg, Plattsburgh and Watertown, a large portion of the Adirondack Park and the U.S. Army's Fort Drum military base.
- The area's natural features – the Adirondack Mountains, the St. Lawrence Seaway, the Tug Hill, Lake Ontario and Lake Champlain, as well as its long and snowy winters – have defined much of its human activity. The Region is home to just over 2 percent of New York State's population.
- Until the middle of the 20th century, the North Country was almost entirely rural, with very little development. The siting of military bases in the 1950s, along with substantial State investments in SUNY campuses and correctional facilities in the 1970s and 1980s, transformed some of the Region's local economies. Agriculture, health care and outdoor recreational activities are also important economic contributors.
- The Region has many small communities with some pockets of wealth and other areas of poverty. In general, these small communities have aging populations, but in places with colleges, such as Potsdam and Canton, there are younger populations.
- Unemployment rates are higher than in the State as a whole, as are child poverty and housing vacancy rates. Legacy manufacturing and mining industries in the Region have declined over recent decades. However, job growth in other sectors – e.g., accommodations, food services and health care services – helped mitigate unemployment after the recent recession.
- Much of the North Country's economic activity is concentrated in two distinct areas: Watertown-Fort Drum and greater Plattsburgh, defining the western and eastern corners of the Region. More densely populated than the rest of the Region, these centers are located near major highways and support a variety of industries and colleges.
- State and local leaders are trying to boost economic development by investing in and promoting community-based projects to expand tourism, improve workforce talent and spur growth in agriculture and manufacturing. Leaders have also focused on planning for the future through infrastructure modernization – including upgrading water systems and wastewater treatment facilities – and combating the effects of climate change.

Geography

East of Lake Ontario and west of Lake Champlain, the North Country covers the State's northern frontier with Clinton, Franklin, Jefferson and St. Lawrence counties bordering Canada.¹ (See Figure 1.) As the largest geographical region in New York State, the area has a storied, frontier heritage. Rich with natural resources, and dominated by mountains, lakes and rivers, it is a destination for many seeking sanctuary and adventure.

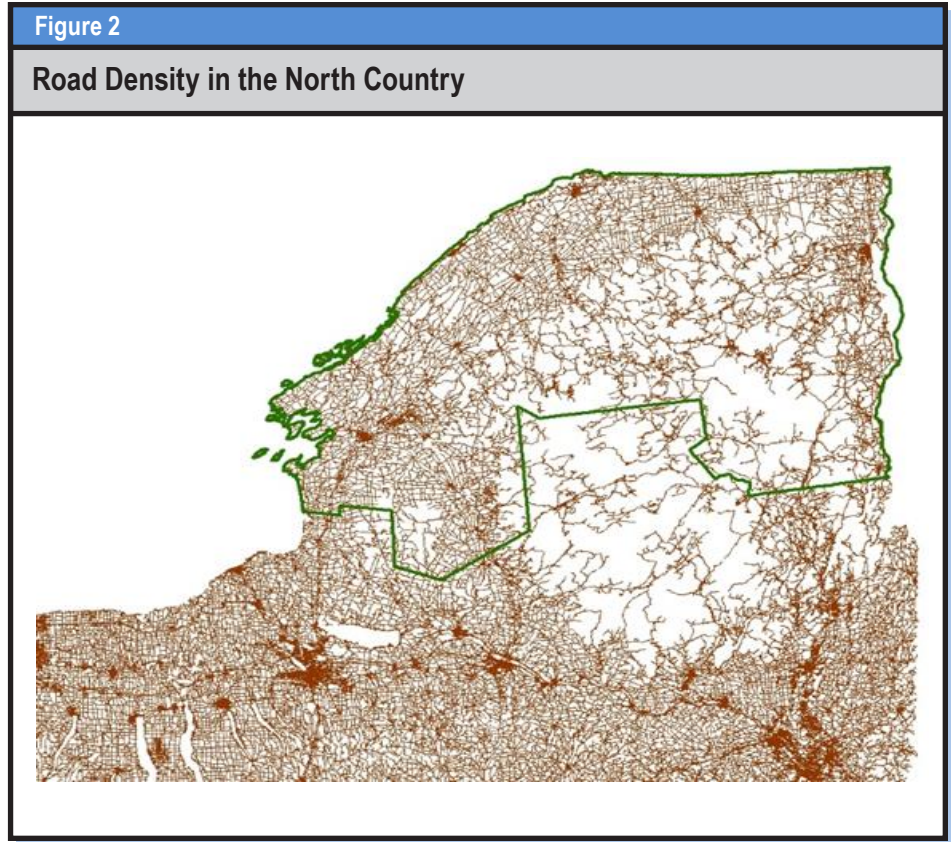
The St. Lawrence River flows northeast out of Lake Ontario, separating Jefferson and St. Lawrence counties and the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation (Franklin County) from the Canadian Province of Ontario. To the east, Franklin and Clinton counties border Quebec, while Clinton and Essex counties share a border with Vermont along Lake Champlain. The Region has a significant number of freshwater wetlands and waterfront communities, while a large portion of the mountainous Adirondack Park is located within five of the six counties – Jefferson County being the exception. The Adirondack Park, the largest park in the lower 48 states, covers an area larger than Yosemite, Yellowstone, Glacier, Grand Canyon and the Great Smoky Mountains national parks combined.²

The Tug Hill area covers portions of Lewis and Jefferson counties and extends into adjoining Oswego and Oneida counties. This area has extremely heavy snowfalls, and features large tracts of unbroken hardwood forests and pristine wetlands.³ The U.S. Army's Fort Drum occupies 25.2 square miles just north of the 125-mile long Black River, between the Adirondack Mountains to the east and Lake Ontario to the west.



Transportation

The Adirondack Northway, part of Interstate 87, runs through Essex and Clinton counties, connecting the North Country to New York City and Montreal. Interstate 81 runs up from New York's Southern Tier to Watertown, ending at the Thousand Islands Bridge on the Canadian border. The road density in the Region is generally much lower than in the rest of the State, and there are no roads at all in parts of the Adirondacks. (See Figure 2.)



The North Country's three cities – Ogdensburg, Plattsburgh and Watertown – are all near major highways and large neighboring municipalities across the Canadian border, making them regional hubs for retail and industrial activity. Each has a county-owned airport in close proximity that provides limited passenger service.



Demographics

Population

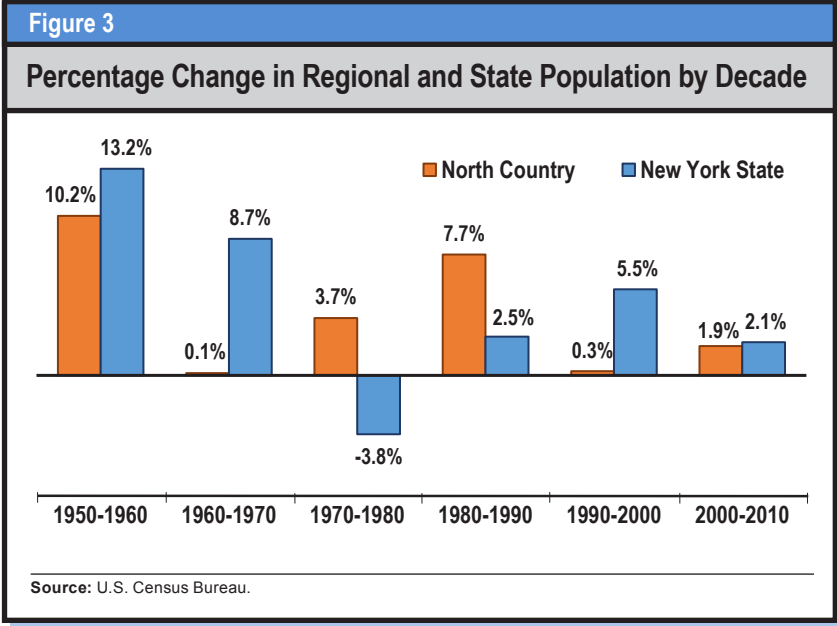
Residents of the North Country (420,493 in 2016) represent just over 2 percent of New York State's overall population, with the highest concentrations in Jefferson (114,006) and St. Lawrence (110,038) counties, home to Fort Drum and residential colleges, respectively. Lewis County has the smallest population, with 26,865 residents.⁴

Overall population growth has fluctuated over the past several decades, primarily as a result of military bases in the Region (see Figure 3). From 1950 to 1960, the North Country's population increased by 10 percent, mostly due to the establishment of the Plattsburgh Air Force Base in Clinton County in 1954.⁵ From 1980 to 1990, the population grew another 7.7 percent, mainly as a result of the reactivation of the U.S. Army 10th Mountain Division in Fort Drum in 1985.⁶ However, from

1990 to 2010, overall population growth slowed to 2.1 percent: Clinton County (where Plattsburgh Air Force Base closed in 1995) shrank by 4.5 percent and St. Lawrence County saw no growth.

Furthermore, many small municipalities are shrinking. Fifty towns and villages have populations under 1,000. Most of these have lost population over the past few decades, particularly those in Lewis and Jefferson counties.⁷

The median age in the North Country varies widely with Essex County at 45.9 years and Jefferson County at 31.8 years (fluctuating due to Fort Drum deployments).⁸ Many residents live in the Region on a seasonal basis and leave the area during the winter months.



Other Demographic Factors

Median household income in every county of the Region is below the State median of \$59,269 (see Figure 4). Essex County has the highest and St. Lawrence County the lowest. Meanwhile, child poverty is well above the State rate (22 percent) in Franklin and St. Lawrence counties. (For demographic indicators, see Figure 5.)

Median home values are also relatively low in the Region, though higher-priced housing is scattered throughout, with many second homes (Essex County includes the

attractions of Lake Placid and Lake Champlain, while Jefferson County is home to the Thousand Islands). Housing is therefore generally relatively affordable – just over a quarter of homeowners spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing, compared to 38 percent in the State as a whole.⁹ However, the percentage of owner-occupied housing units is relatively low for upstate New York, especially in Jefferson County, with its transient military population, and Essex County, with its large number of vacation homes.

At 88 percent, the Region's high school graduation rate is slightly better than the State as a whole (86 percent). However, the percentage of people with bachelor's degrees or other advanced degrees is relatively low, particularly in the counties of Franklin and Lewis.

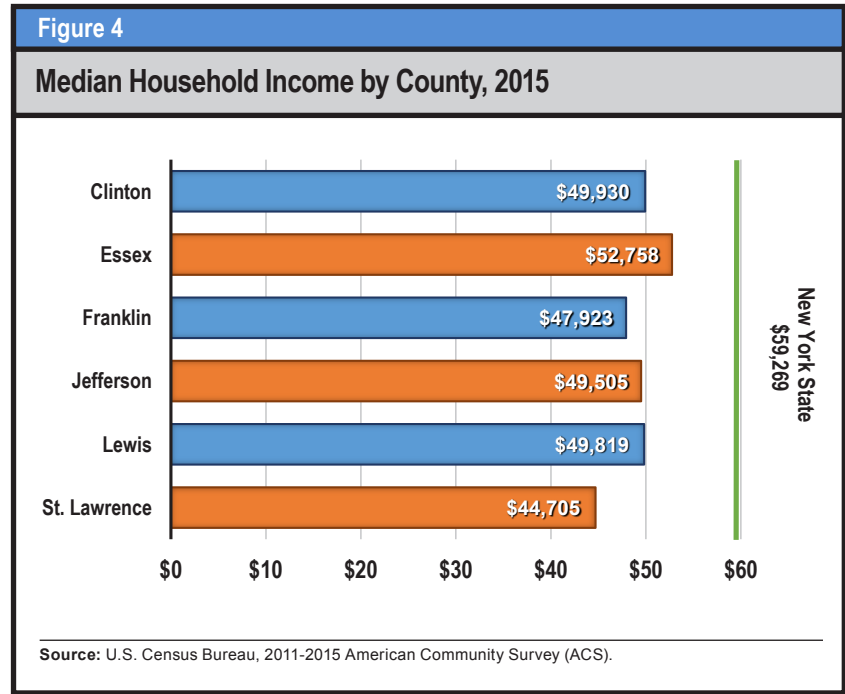


Figure 5

Demographic Indicators, North Country Region Counties

	New York State	Clinton	Essex	Franklin	Jefferson	Lewis	St. Lawrence
Population*	19,745,289	81,073	38,102	50,409	114,006	26,865	110,038
Population growth 2000-2010**	2.1%	2.8%	1.3%	0.9%	4.0%	0.5%	0.0%
Population growth 2010-2016*	1.8%	-1.2%	-3.0%	-2.4%	-2.2%	-0.7%	-1.6%
Persons per square mile*	419	78	21	31	90	21	41
Median age	38.1	39.4	45.9	39.8	31.8	41.4	37.8
White persons	64.6%	91.5%	93.0%	83.0%	86.4%	96.8%	93.1%
Black persons	15.6%	4.3%	3.1%	5.6%	5.5%	0.9%	2.2%
Asian persons	8.0%	1.3%	0.6%	0.4%	1.5%	0.4%	1.0%
Persons reporting two or more races	2.9%	1.4%	1.6%	2.1%	4.2%	0.9%	1.9%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin	18.4%	2.7%	3.0%	3.3%	6.9%	1.7%	2.2%
White persons not Hispanic	56.8%	90.3%	92.2%	81.9%	82.7%	95.9%	92.2%
Foreign-born persons	22.5%	4.5%	3.7%	3.8%	3.9%	1.7%	4.4%
Languages other than English spoken at home	30.4%	6.0%	6.1%	7.0%	7.2%	2.5%	8.1%
Median household income	\$59,269	\$49,930	\$52,758	\$47,923	\$49,505	\$49,819	\$44,705
High school graduation rate	85.6%	85.7%	88.8%	84.9%	89.4%	89.0%	88.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher	34.2%	22.1%	24.2%	17.7%	20.7%	15.2%	22.3%
Owner-occupied housing units	47.7%	60.5%	43.9%	55.1%	42.0%	52.9%	56.7%
Housing units in multi-unit structures	50.8%	22.7%	13.3%	15.6%	24.9%	9.1%	16.5%
Persons per household, average	2.63	2.32	2.37	2.36	2.54	2.54	2.42
Median value of owner-occupied housing units	\$283,400	\$124,200	\$145,100	\$101,600	\$141,000	\$117,300	\$87,600
Vacancy rate of housing units	11.1%	11.2%	40.5%	24.3%	24.3%	30.9%	20.6%
Owner costs exceeding 30% of income	38.2%	25.2%	26.5%	25.9%	28.6%	23.4%	27.1%
Renter costs exceeding 30% of income	53.9%	53.4%	49.4%	51.1%	46.3%	52.2%	54.7%
Child poverty rate	22.2%	22.1%	15.6%	29.9%	22.3%	17.2%	27.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, all data are from the 2011-2015 American Community Survey, except as indicated.

* 2016 Population Estimates

** 2000 and 2010 Census

Local Governments

Entities

The North Country has three cities, 122 towns, 52 villages and 59 school districts, as well as 73 fire districts and over 600 special districts. (See Figure 6.)

Forty-eight of the Region's towns and seven of its villages are located wholly or partially in the Adirondack Park. These municipalities must adhere to certain regulatory programs and local land use controls established by the State's Adirondack Park Agency (APA). The APA also makes policy, issues permits and authorizes optional programs proposed by municipalities for land use and development planning and control.¹⁰

Figure 6	
Local Governments and Districts in the North Country Region	
General Purpose Local Governments (Municipalities)	
Counties	6
Cities	3
Towns	122
Villages	52
Special Purpose Local Governments	
School Districts	59
Fire Districts	73
Districts	
Town Special Districts	595
County Special Districts	1
Independent Special Districts	3
Soil and Water Conservation Districts	6
<small>Source: Office of the State Comptroller (OSC), December 2016. For notes and definitions, see www.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/datanstat/entitytable.htm</small>	

These controls and regulations do not apply to the Tug Hill region, which is located just outside of the Adirondack Park and includes 18 of the North Country's towns. Local governments in Tug Hill receive economic development, environmental conservation and effective governing assistance from the State's Tug Hill Commission. The Commission, established in 1972, aims to achieve sustainable development through these non-regulatory means.¹¹

In recent years, some North Country municipalities have increased efforts to share services and consolidate to make government more efficient. For example, the villages of Hermon, Herrings and Port Henry dissolved in the past year, and two more village dissolutions are currently under review.¹²

Fiscal Stress

The Comptroller’s Fiscal Stress Monitoring System identifies local governments and school districts that are in fiscal stress, defined as having challenges in maintaining budgetary solvency. The three levels of fiscal stress are (highest to lowest): Significant, Moderate and Susceptible. Of the 242 entities examined in the North Country, seven entities are currently classified as being in some level of fiscal stress. (See Figure 7.)

The System also examines environmental factors that influence local revenue-raising capabilities to help identify the external challenges that communities may be facing. These indicators include changes in property values, population trends, and unemployment, graduation and poverty rates. Of the seven entities in fiscal stress, only St. Lawrence County, the City of Ogdensburg and the Clifton-Fine Central School District showed elevated signs of environmental stress.

Figure 7			
Fiscal Stress in the North Country Region			
Class	Local Government/ School District Name	County	Designation
School District	Clifton-Fine	St. Lawrence	Moderate
County	Franklin	Franklin	Moderate
City	Ogdensburg	St. Lawrence	Moderate
Town	Constable	Franklin	Susceptible
School District	Indian River	Jefferson	Susceptible
School District	Salmon River	Franklin	Susceptible
County	St. Lawrence	St. Lawrence	Susceptible

Source: OSC; The fiscal stress scores cited are for fiscal year ending 2016 for municipalities and fiscal year 2016-17 for school districts. For more on the Fiscal Stress Monitoring System and the latest scores for local governments, please see www.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/fiscalmonitoring/index.htm.



Taxes

Estimated median property tax bills for homeowners are relatively low throughout the Region, even in St. Lawrence and Clinton counties, where tax rates are relatively high compared to the statewide rate. (See Figure 8.)

Large-scale alternative energy projects, like the decade-old Maple Ridge Wind Farm in Lewis County, have had a beneficial effect on property taxes in some communities. This is particularly true in Tug Hill, which has some of the highest wind velocities in the eastern United States.¹³ Revenues from these projects, in the form of payments-in-lieu-of-taxes, have helped to lower the property tax burden on homeowners.¹⁴ However, some residents of these communities oppose wind farms, contending that they decrease property values and cause visual pollution. Proposed State legislation would restrict further development near Fort Drum, reflecting concern that turbines may be detrimental to the military base's current and future operations.¹⁵ Officials and stakeholders continue to discuss the best ways to take advantage of the Region's wind resources.

The sales tax rate throughout the North Country is 8 percent, the prevalent rate in upstate New York. This is less than the State's aggregate rate (8.45 percent), which reflects higher rates in downstate regions.

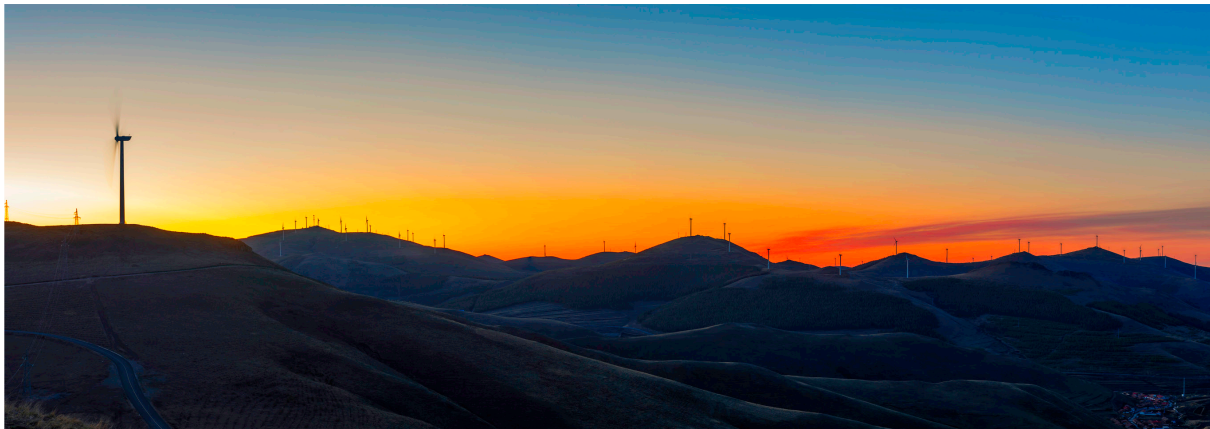
Figure 8

Sales Tax Rates, 2016 and Effective Property Tax Rates and Median Bills, 2015

County	Sales Tax Rate	Effective Property Tax	
		Rate per \$1,000 Full Value	Median Bill
Clinton	8.00%	\$31.06	\$3,858
Essex	8.00%	\$18.78	\$2,725
Franklin	8.00%	\$24.22	\$2,461
Jefferson	8.00%	\$20.48	\$2,888
Lewis	8.00%	\$26.12	\$3,064
St. Lawrence	8.00%	\$34.79	\$3,047
Statewide	8.45%	\$28.84	\$8,173

Notes: County sales tax rates are a combination of the State's 4 percent rate and the local rate of 3.5 or 4 percent imposed by each county. Statewide sales tax rate is the weighted average of all counties and cities, including New York City. The effective property tax does not include New York City.

Source: OSC; New York State Department of Taxation and Finance; U.S. Census Bureau, ACS; The Sales Tax Clearinghouse.



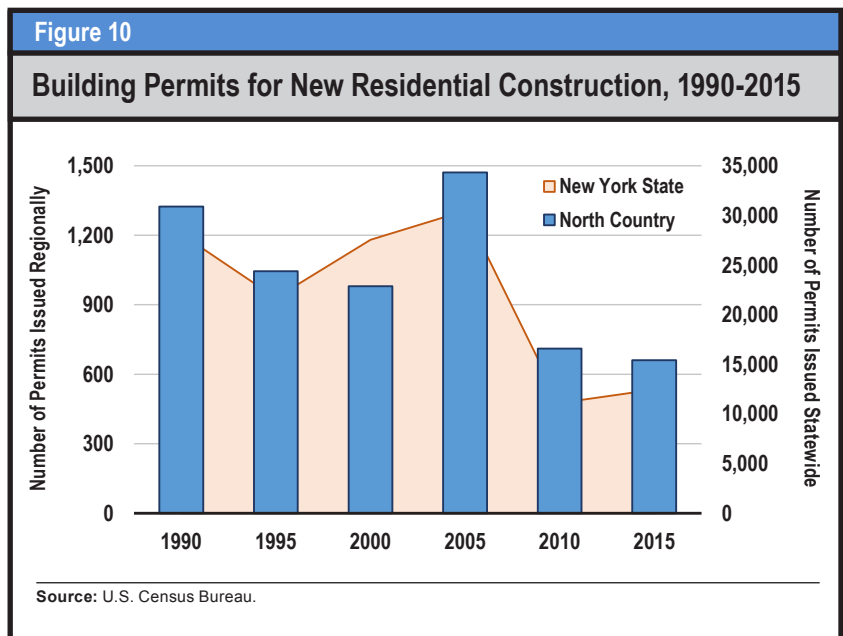
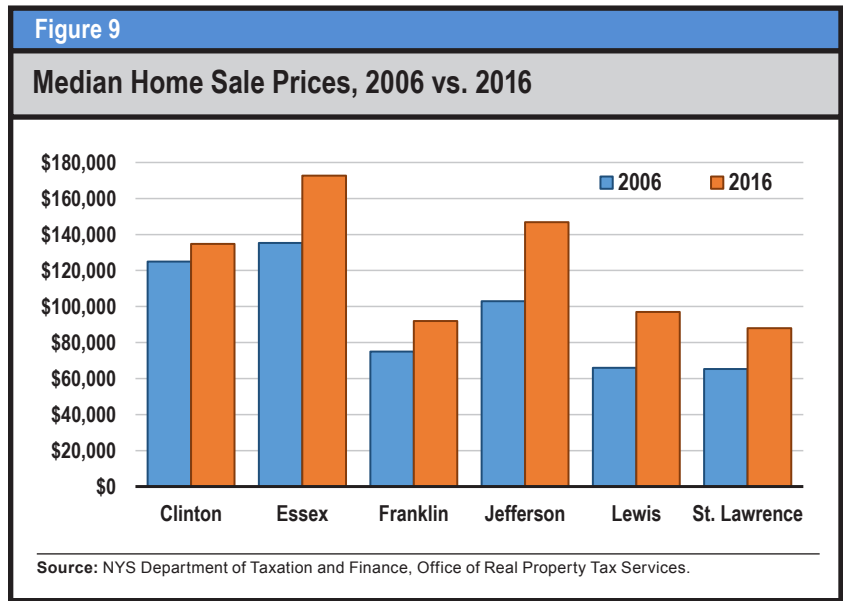
Economy and Labor Market

Housing Conditions

Home sale prices increased from 2006 through 2016 in all regional counties – especially in Jefferson and Essex. (See Figure 9.)

In 2015, the number of new building permits issued regionwide was 50 percent lower than in 1990, after having spiked in 2005 due in part to a large housing project at Fort Drum.¹⁶ Statewide, the housing bubble and ensuing recession produced a similar pattern. However, between 2010 and 2015, new permits issued in the Region dropped 7 percent, while permits issued statewide increased 12 percent. (See Figure 10.)

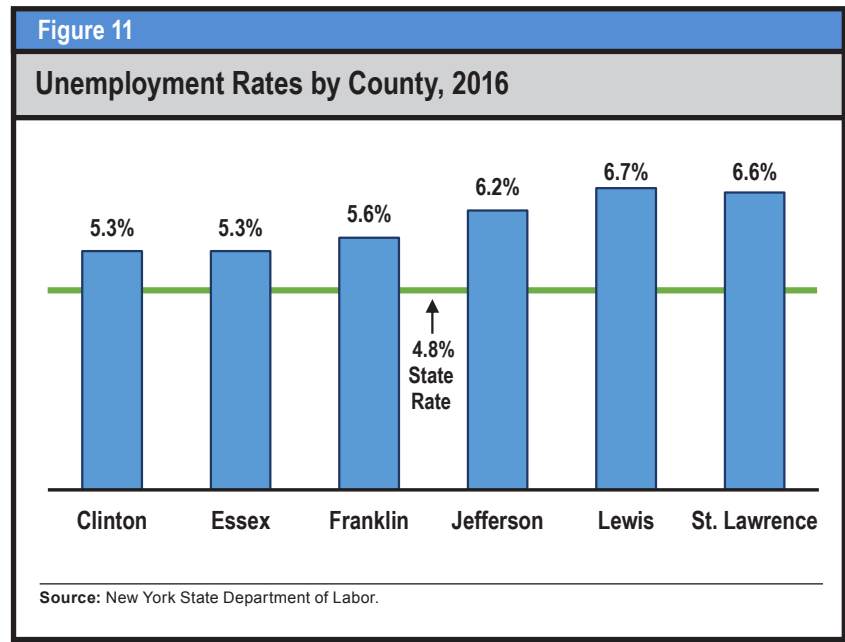
Housing vacancy rates in many communities are above the statewide rate of 11 percent and are significantly higher in the counties of Essex (41 percent) and Lewis (31 percent).¹⁷ Contributing factors likely include population decrease, a large number of second homes and seasonal outflow of residents. On the other hand, foreclosure rates are low compared to the State as a whole: only 0.7 percent of total housing units were in foreclosure in 2015 compared to 1.1 percent for the State.¹⁸



Employment and Unemployment

Since 1990, the North Country has had a higher annual unemployment rate than the State as a whole in almost every year. In 2016, the Region had an annual unemployment rate of 6.0 percent, compared to the statewide rate of 4.8 percent. As shown in Figure 11, at the county level, Lewis had the highest unemployment rate, while Clinton and Essex counties had the lowest rate. In August 2017, the Region's unemployment rate was 5.6 percent and the statewide rate was 4.9 percent.

The North Country's annual unemployment rate has declined by 3.8 percentage points since the end of the last recession. However, its labor force fell 10 percent during the same period, from a high of 193,900 in 2008, to a low of 173,900 in 2016. The Region's overall labor force participation rate (50.7 percent in 2016) is also much lower than in the State as a whole (60.4 percent), with both following the national trend of gradual decline since 2008. However, the labor force does not include active duty military service members at bases like Fort Drum.¹⁹



Major Industries

In 2016, the North Country's total employment was 150,595, with an average annual wage of \$40,763.²⁰ All employment numbers and projections in the following discussion are based on New York State Department of Labor (DOL) estimates.²¹

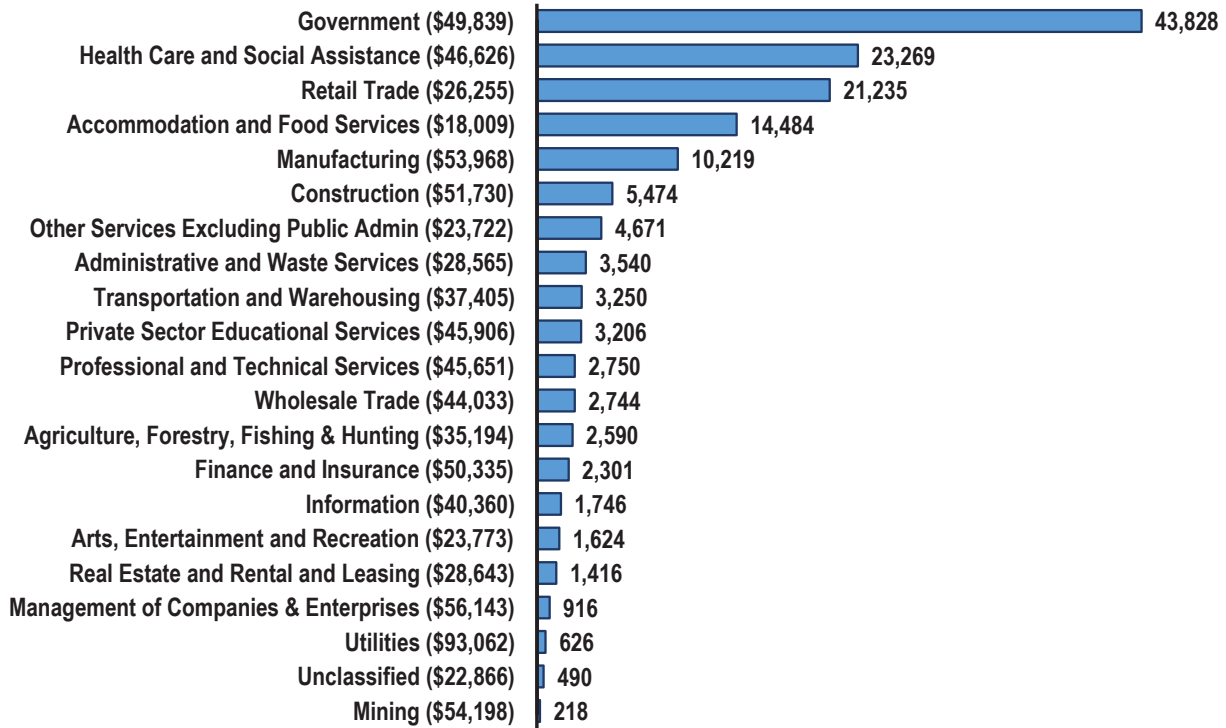
Government – federal, State and local – is the largest industry sector in the North Country, with nearly 44,000 employees, or 29 percent of total employment. The government workforce includes teachers, public administrators, firefighters, police and civilians employed at Fort Drum (but does not include active duty military service members, as discussed previously). Also included are employees of the 12 State correctional facilities located in the Region.²² State and municipal government employment contracted during the most recent recession, and DOL expects a slight decline over the next several years.

Health care and social assistance is the second largest sector, employing over 23,000 people. This includes some of the largest private employers in each county. Outside of Fort Drum, Samaritan Medical Center (Jefferson County) employs the most people in the Region. However, Canton-Potsdam Hospital (St. Lawrence County), Adirondack Medical Center (Franklin County) and Champlain Valley Medical Center (Clinton County) are also major employers. In recent years, some hospitals have had financial difficulties and are implementing cost saving measures such as consolidating services with larger health care networks. However, despite these struggles, DOL is projecting increased demand in all health care occupations over the next decade.

Education is an important source of jobs in the North Country. There are nearly 19,000 employees in the field, including both private sector educational services and public education. (Public education employment is included in the government sector in Figure 12.)²³ The Region's three comprehensive SUNY colleges – Canton, Plattsburgh and Potsdam – employ over 2,800 full-time or part-time teachers and staff.²⁴ In addition, the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry has campuses in Essex and St. Lawrence counties. There are also three SUNY community colleges: Clinton Community College, Jefferson Community College and North Country Community College in Essex County. Three private colleges – St. Lawrence University, Clarkson University and Paul Smith's College of Arts and Science – employ a combined teacher/staff workforce of over 2,000.²⁵ At the elementary and secondary level, public school districts provide a large share of the overall employment in some counties. Malone Central School District is one of the largest employers in Franklin County, with 470 employees.²⁶ In Jefferson County, the Watertown City School District has a workforce of over 800.²⁷ Job growth in the education sector mostly hinges on demographics and budgetary constraints, but DOL expects it to continue over the next few years.

Figure 12

Industry Sectors in the North Country Region by Number of Employees (150,595) and Average Wages (\$40,763), 2016



Source: New York State Department of Labor, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2016. Data for the North Country Region include Hamilton County and are preliminary and subject to revision.

Manufacturing activities are important to a number of North Country communities, employing over 10,000 workers regionwide. However, the sector has declined significantly, down 7,600 jobs, or 43 percent, since 2000. Alcoa Incorporated in St. Lawrence County is the largest manufacturing company in the Region, while International Paper Company and Kraft Foods are the largest private employers in Essex and Lewis counties, respectively.²⁸ DOL anticipates that employment in some manufacturing subsectors (such as transportation equipment and aerospace manufacturing) will grow substantially in the near future, even while the overall sector continues to contract.

The retail trade sector and the accommodations and food services sector employ almost 36,000 people regionally, up over 2,300 jobs since 2000. They support tourism related to outdoor recreation, which is a major economic contributor in the Region. Popular destinations include:

- Lake Placid, sometimes referred to as “The Olympic Village,” hosted the 1932 and 1980 Winter Olympics and remains a major attraction for sports enthusiasts year-round. The New York State Olympic Regional Development Authority was created to manage the sports facilities used during the 1980 games. It also operates many facilities, including the Village’s Olympic Sports Complex and Whiteface Mountain in Wilmington.²⁹
- Lake Ontario and Lake Champlain are destinations for fishing, boating and other leisure activities, as well as whitewater rafting on nearby rivers. The Thousand Island Park is a national historic district located on the St. Lawrence River and includes preserved resort architecture from the late 19th century.
- The North Country National Scenic Trail (NCT) runs through the Adirondack Park, starting at the Crown Point State Historic Site in Essex County. Stretching 4,600 miles from New York to North Dakota, NCT is the longest Congressionally–authorized trail in the United States.

Over the next few years, DOL expects employment growth in the food services and drinking places subsector, in particular, to be higher than growth in the Region’s overall economy.

The Adirondack Park

The Adirondack Park, which is partially located in the North Country, contains a number of iconic landmarks and attractions, including:³⁰

- The Adirondack High Peaks – Many hikers aspire to climb all 46 of these mountains, which are between 3,800 and 5,400 feet.
- Adirondack Great Camps – These sprawling lakeside properties were built by wealthy families in the 19th century to enjoy the beauty of nature in comfort and style. They often have guest houses, boat houses and other structures in addition to a grand main house. Some have been transformed into summer resorts.
- Keene Valley – This area includes Chapel Pond and several high peaks trails, and is very popular with rock climbers, hikers and anglers.
- The Wild Center – Located in Tupper Lake, the Center offers science-based exhibits, programs and experiences with nature, such as an elevated trail across treetops and guided canoe trips.
- Adirondack Experience – This museum on Blue Mountain Lake offers 121 acres of exhibition space to explore.

Centers of Economic Activity

Watertown-Fort Drum

The Watertown-Fort Drum metropolitan area (Jefferson County) is the largest population center in the North Country. By one measure, it is among the most affordable housing markets in the nation.³¹

Fort Drum is the largest single-site employer in northern New York and is widely considered the economic engine of the western part of the North Country – Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties. In 2016, the military base reported a total economic impact of \$1.2 billion, which included \$980 million paid to a combined military and civilian workforce of 19,000 and over \$200 million in contracts for community development, construction, education, medical and other services that benefitted soldiers and families on the base and surrounding communities.³² Fort Drum’s payroll is down from the peak year of 2011, mostly due to declines in deployments.³³

Fourteen miles southwest of Fort Drum is the City of Watertown, with a historic downtown district, many tourist attractions and a population of almost 26,000 – by far

the largest municipality in the North Country. Local leaders have undertaken an effort to use the Watertown International Airport, Jefferson Community College and nearby Fort Drum to drive increased private investment and industrial expansion in the City.³⁴ Recently, the State awarded the City \$10 million for downtown revitalization projects.³⁵

Figure 13

Demographic Indicators, Fort Drum and Watertown

	Fort Drum	City of Watertown
Population*	13,985	25,900
Population growth 2000-2010**	6.9%	1.2%
Population growth 2010-2016*	8.0%	-3.6%
Persons per square mile*	554	2,871
Median age	22.2	30.6
White persons	69.3%	83.7%
Black persons	13.4%	7.2%
Asian persons	2.3%	1.9%
Persons reporting two or more races	7.4%	5.1%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin	19.3%	7.6%
White persons not Hispanic	58.1%	79.8%
Foreign-born persons	7.3%	4.6%
Languages other than English spoken at home	16.8%	7.8%
Median household income	\$41,966	\$41,414
High school graduation rate	95.6%	88.7%
Bachelor's degree or higher	23.5%	21.0%
Homeownership rate	0.6%	35.2%
Housing units in multi-unit structures	60.8%	51.3%
Persons per household, average	2.94	2.30
Median value of owner-occupied housing units	N/A	\$125,500
Vacancy rate of housing units	3.7%	11.6%
Owner costs exceeding 30% of income	N/A	22.9%
Renter costs exceeding 30% of income	57.8%	43.2%
Child poverty rate	19.5%	37.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; all data are from the 2011-2015 American Community Survey, except as indicated.

* 2016 Population Estimates (not available for Fort Drum; 2015 Population Estimates were used to calculate the percentage change in population from 2010 to 2016.)

** 2000 and 2010 Census

A proposal currently circulating in Washington calls for a new round of military base realignment and closures in 2021.³⁶ If Congress approves the proposal, and if Fort Drum is selected for closure, it could have a significant impact on the local communities and businesses surrounding the military base, including Watertown.

However, the U.S. Missile Defense Agency is conducting a review of its missile defense systems in order to determine the best site for a new system. New York’s national, State and local leaders have advocated for the selection of Fort Drum, which could create hundreds of new jobs. This review is expected to be complete by the end of the year.³⁷

Greater Plattsburgh

The City of Plattsburgh and the surrounding Town of Plattsburgh make up the greater Plattsburgh area, which is the center of much of the economic activity in the eastern part of the North Country.

Just southeast, across Lake Champlain, the services available in Burlington, Vermont, supplement those in Clinton and Essex counties.

Located within the City of Plattsburgh is SUNY Plattsburgh, a four-year public college with a total enrollment of 5,520.³⁸ There are also multiple health care centers and a downtown area anchored by local businesses. Last year, the State awarded the City \$10 million for downtown revitalization projects.³⁹

The greater Plattsburgh area’s tourism and retail industries receive an economic boost from Canadian visitors. In addition, the export of goods to Canada is significant to local manufacturers. However, the impact of Canadian trade can vary annually, depending on the currency exchange rate.

Figure 14

Demographic Indicators, Greater Plattsburgh

	City	Town
Population*	19,780	11,877
Population growth 2000-2010**	6.2%	6.1%
Population growth 2010-2016*	-1.2%	0.3%
Persons per square mile*	3,941	259
Median age	28.9	43.4
White persons	88.6%	94.6%
Black persons	4.3%	2.0%
Asian persons	2.7%	1.5%
Persons reporting two or more races	2.5%	1.0%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin	3.7%	2.0%
White persons not Hispanic	86.7%	93.8%
Foreign-born persons	6.9%	4.1%
Languages other than English spoken at home	9.9%	4.6%
Median household income	\$37,346	\$53,980
High school graduation rate	88.7%	86.9%
Bachelor's degree or higher	31.5%	25.1%
Homeownership rate	32.7%	71.3%
Housing units in multi-unit structures	57.3%	13.0%
Persons per household, average	2.11	2.32
Median value of owner-occupied housing units	\$142,900	\$130,800
Vacancy rate of housing units	12.1%	7.2%
Owner costs exceeding 30% of income	17.3%	27.6%
Renter costs exceeding 30% of income	55.0%	60.2%
Child poverty rate	31.1%	15.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; all data are from the 2011-2015 American Community Survey, except as indicated.
 * 2016 Population Estimates
 ** 2000 and 2010 Census

The Plattsburgh International Airport is located just south of the City on the former Air Force base in the Town of Plattsburgh. It is the largest passenger airport in the North Country, offering several flights to the southeastern United States, including multiple destinations in Florida. The airport calls itself “Montreal’s U.S. Airport,” because it is just one hour south of Montreal and a majority of its passengers are Canadian.⁴⁰ In January, the State awarded \$38 million to the airport for operation and safety improvements.⁴¹

On the eastern side of the old airbase, the Plattsburgh Airbase Redevelopment Corporation operates a 1.2 square mile industrial development complex. The area includes 195 parcels for lease to tenants in various fields, including manufacturing, warehousing, engineering, pharmaceuticals and aerospace.

Just south of the complex, overlooking Lake Champlain, is Clinton Community College. The college received \$12.7 million from the NYSUNY 2020 program to construct the new Institute for Advanced Manufacturing (IAM), which officially opened in September 2017. IAM is intended to help foster a better relationship with nearby higher education institutions, improve the college-to-work environment for students and provide training space for local manufacturers.⁴²



Planning for the Future

Economic Development

The North Country Regional Economic Development Council (NCREDC) was established in 2011 in order to develop a long-term strategic plan for the Region. The Council includes local experts and stakeholders from business, academia, local governments and nongovernmental organizations. From 2011 to 2016, NCREDC secured nearly \$200 million in State competitive grant awards for 445 regional projects to support a total investment of approximately \$932 million. To date, nearly 2,300 jobs have been created. For 2017, NCREDC has proposed 21 additional projects at a total value of \$145 million, creating 255 jobs.⁴³ (See Figure 15 for examples.)

Seven Industrial Development Agencies (IDAs) also pursue economic development goals in the North Country. IDAs can offer financial assistance to encourage businesses to locate and expand in a specific county, town or city, and to create or retain jobs. In 2015, North Country IDAs reported supporting 117 projects, 26 percent of which were manufacturing projects, with a total value of \$1.8 billion.⁴⁴

The Development Authority of the North Country (DANC) is a public benefit corporation established and operating under the State’s Public Authorities Laws in order to institute a comprehensive, coordinated program of economic development in Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties. DANC has worked with NCREDC on specific projects, as well as with the Region’s IDAs.

Figure 15

The Five Proposed Priority Projects with the Highest Estimated Jobs Created, 2017

Project	Location	Total Estimated Cost (in Millions)	Total Estimated Jobs Created	Project Details
Plattsburgh International Airport Hotel	Plattsburgh, Clinton County	\$11.7	138	Construction of an 80-room hotel on airport grounds to provide travelers with full-service options when flying in and out of the airport.
27 Broadway Renovations	Saranac Lake, Franklin County	\$2.2	36	Renovation of the former Dew Drop Inn in Saranac Lake's downtown district to establish a "food experience" business.
Lake St. Lawrence Resort Event Center	Louisville, St. Lawrence County	\$6.6	17	Construction of an affordable 64-room lodging resort on Lake St. Lawrence to include a conference center, docks, fishing pier and ferry launch.
War Canoe Spirits Distillery	Crown Point, Essex County	\$3.5	6	Construction of a craft spirits and hard cider distillery manufacturing operation with tasting, dining, retail and event space.
Machinery and Equipment Upgrade	Willsboro, Essex County	\$0.5	6	Investment in equipment modernization technology at General Composites Incorporated in order to hold a competitive advantage in the global market.

Source: North Country Regional Economic Development Council, 2017 Progress Report. Excludes projects in Hamilton County.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure planning is a key aspect to achieving long-term industrial and commercial growth in the Region. DANC focuses much of its efforts on the planning and development of infrastructure needs in its service area, and some of NCREDC's priority projects have included infrastructure upgrades and improvements for local communities.

Much of the North Country's water infrastructure is older and needs extensive repairs or upgrades.⁴⁵ Together, grants made through NCREDC's Municipal Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Fund and the State's Water Infrastructure Improvement Act have helped several local governments finance water and sewer improvements. Some of the latest water-related projects proposed by the Council are located in Dexter, Hounsfield, Lowville and Ogdensburg. The total value of these projects is nearly \$63 million.⁴⁶

The improvement of aging transportation infrastructure is another big challenge. The U.S. Department of Transportation has determined that 31 percent of the North Country's 882 local bridges, with an average age of 45 years, are structurally deficient or obsolete.⁴⁷ In January, the Governor announced \$17.3 million in funding to rehabilitate and replace 14 bridges and culverts.⁴⁸

Limited telecommunication infrastructure has long been an issue in parts of the Region, hindering economic development in local communities. As a way to get these areas connected, the State recently granted regional Internet service providers \$31.5 million to expand broadband to homes, schools and businesses in Clinton and Essex counties.⁴⁹ DANC is also making efforts to increase Internet connectivity in the western North Country by expanding its own fiber optic network.⁵⁰

Extreme Weather and Climate Change

Historically high water levels in Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River earlier in 2017 caused flooding and substantial damage to many waterfront commercial and residential properties. Before that, flooding and high winds accompanying Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee wreaked havoc in 2011, damaging both housing and infrastructure in the Region.

State and local leaders and educators are actively pursuing solutions to tackle the effects of extreme weather that threaten public health and safety. This past April, SUNY Plattsburgh, in partnership with nearby higher education institutions, hosted the third annual North Country Climate Reality Conference to help make the Region a model for climate solutions. Around the same time, the State awarded \$238,000 to farms in Essex and Jefferson counties to help them better prepare for extreme weather.⁵¹

Ten local governments from the North Country have adopted the New York State Climate Smart Communities agreement, implementing a 10-point resolution to help combat climate change by supporting reductions in community energy use and developing green technologies, as well as informing and inspiring the public to implement their own climate-friendly measures. By adopting this pledge, these communities have partnered with the State to build a resilient, low-emission future.⁵²

Looking Ahead

The North Country's rural landscape and natural resources provide both opportunities and challenges for future growth. State and local leaders have developed a regional strategy that focuses on helping local economies grow by promoting and enhancing tourism, financing various industrial projects and improving critical infrastructure.

Workforce development efforts underway, including on education and training, will be an important component in the Region's economic success. Additionally, ongoing efforts to deliver government services efficiently and effectively will support North Country growth. Finally, community stakeholders across the Region will make the most of the unique combination of State, federal and Canadian interests to best position the area for the prosperity of future generations.



Notes

- ¹ There are various definitions of the North Country of New York State; for this report, it is defined as Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties.
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- ³ The Nature Conservancy, *New York: Central & Western: Tug Hill*, www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/newyork/places-preserves/central-tug-hill.xml.
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- ⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, *Decennial Census*; National Park Service, *Historic American Engineering Record, Written Historical Summary: Plattsburgh Air Force Base*, 2000, p. 6. cdn.loc.gov/master/pnp/habshaer/ny/ny1800/ny1864/data/ny1864data.pdf.
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- ⁹ Housing expenditures that exceed 30 percent of household income have historically been viewed as an indicator of a housing affordability problem. The threshold evolved from the United States National Housing Act of 1937. See Mary Schwartz and Ellen Wilson, "Who Can Afford To Live in a Home?" "A look at data from the 2006 American Community Survey," U.S. Census Bureau, www.census.gov/housing/census/publications/who-can-afford.pdf.
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- ¹⁶ United States Army Garrison Fort Drum, Plan, Analysis, and Integration Office, "Fort Drum Economic Impact Statement: Fiscal Year 2005: Oct. 1, 2004 – Sept. 30, 2005," www.fdrlo.org/images/economic-reports/FY05_EIB.pdf.
- ¹⁷ The U.S. Census Bureau defines a housing unit as vacant if no one is living in it at the time of the interview, unless its occupants are only temporarily absent. In addition, a vacant unit may be one which is entirely occupied by persons who have a usual residence elsewhere. County vacancy rates are shown in Figure 5.
- ¹⁸ Office of the New York State Comptroller, *The Foreclosure Predicament Persists*, August 2015, www.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/pubs/research/snapshot/foreclosure0815.pdf.
- ¹⁹ Unemployment, employment and labor force data are not seasonally adjusted and are taken from the New York State Department of Labor's Local Area Unemployment Statistics Program with calculations by OSC. Members of the armed forces are excluded from the Quarterly Census Employment and Wages data. For more information, see U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Coverage, Employment Exclusions*, www.bls.gov/cew/cewover.htm.

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- ²³ This number, as calculated by the Department of Labor in its *Significant Industries* report, combines public teachers, which are included in the Government sector, and private teachers in the Educational Services sector.
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- ²⁷ Enlarged City School District of the City of Watertown, Jefferson County, New York, *\$12,572,147 General Obligations Bond Anticipation Notes*, 2017, p. 12.
- ²⁸ County of Essex, New York, *\$9,215,000 General Obligations Public Improvement Serial Bonds Official Statement*, 2016, p. 8; County of Lewis, New York, *\$8,590,000 General Obligations Public Improvement Refunding (Serial) Bonds*, 2015, p. 11; County of St. Lawrence, New York, *\$9,500,000 General Obligation Revenue Anticipation Notes Official Statement*, 2016, p. 11.
- ²⁹ New York State Olympic Regional Development Authority, *About ORDA*, www.orda.org/corporate/.
- ³⁰ Lake Placid, *The 46 Adirondack High Peaks*, www.lakeplacid.com/do/outdoors/summerfall/hiking/46-high-peaks; Adirondack Experience, *Adirondack Great Camps*, www.adirondackexperience.com/discover/adirondack-historic-sites/adirondack-great-camps; Adirondack.net, *Keene Valley and High Peaks, NY*, www.adirondack.net/towns/lake-placid-region/keene-valley/; The Wild Center, *Visit*, www.wildcenter.org/visit/; Adirondack Experience, *The Museum on Blue Mountain Lake, Visitor Information*, www.theadkx.org/visiting-the-experience/visitor-information/;
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