

# Schuyler County joins class action lawsuit against U.S. Department of Interior

Watkins Glen, NY—Schuyler County has successfully opted into a class action lawsuit against the federal government to recover payments in lieu of property taxes on federal lands within the county.

According to Schuyler County Attorney Steven Getman, the county was notified Friday (August 31) that its claim had been accepted in the *Kane County, Utah v. United States* class action lawsuit to recover federal Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) underpayments for fiscal years 2015 through 2017.

The County Legislature voted August 13 to authorize Getman to file papers joining the lawsuit.

The United States Court of Claims has held that underpayments by the Department of Interior on federal PILT programs in Kane County and other local governments may have occurred during 2015 to 2017, Getman explained. The PILT Act is intended to compensate local governments for tax revenues lost from federal lands in their jurisdictions, and the costs of providing services to those lands, Getman said.

That could include the part of the Finger Lakes National Forest in the Town of Hector, Getman said.

“If court determines the county was underpaid under PILT agreements for lands in the National Forest, the county can recover additional money” Getman said. “There is no cost to participate in the lawsuit and no disadvantage to the county to do so.”

According to County Administrator Tim O’Hearn, “any money collected would go to the county as direct revenue to offset the cost of services to the forest and lost tax revenue, in order to reduce the local tax burden.”

“Given the fiscal stresses placed on local governments by state and federal mandates, county officials have a duty to make sure that any funds due Schuyler County taxpayers come back to Schuyler County to pay for necessary services,” Getman noted.

County Treasurer Harriett Vickio has reported that the County received payments for the affected years as follows: 2015, \$16,526.00; 2016, \$17,244.00; 2017, \$17,091.00.

Any additional amounts for those years obtained from the lawsuit would be calculated by the court, Getman said.