

# Shawangunk WATCH

Friends of the Shawangunks and The Shawangunk Conservancy

SPRING 2019

VOLUME 24 NUMBER 1

## UPDATE

New Parcel  
Acquisition

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## THREATS

in the Southern  
Shawangunks

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Spring  
Blossoms II

*Spring on  
Dickie Barre*

Photo: John Hayes

PROTECTING OPEN SPACE IN THE SHAWANGUNKS SINCE 1963

# Private Trails

by Jean Lerner

## HAMILTON POINT CARRIAGEWAY

Mohonk Preserve and Minnewaska State Park have been rigorously restoring their historic old carriage roads over the past several years. This is a terrific improvement for the weekend biker and tourist visitor to the Gunks. But for the hiker who is looking for some quiet and solitude, well... improvement can be a subjective thing.

I first “discovered” the Gunks in the mid 80’s, while sharing a summer rental with a group of friends. The future of the Minnewaska area was in limbo, with a huge battle over plans for massive development around the lake. The carriageways and trails were mostly in a state of benign neglect. That summer we hiked every weekend to Lake Awosting along the Lower Awosting Road. We knew no other way. In mid August I had some vacation and began exploring the many other routes to the lake. One hot day I hiked back along the Hamilton Point Carriageway. At that point I really felt like an explorer because the HPC had been virtually abandoned, and was more trail than road in places. There was a long stretch along a narrow path which was totally overgrown with sweet fern up to my elbows. The views were wide open for almost the entire length, across the mysterious ravine of the Palmaghatt to Gertrude’s Nose and on past to Sky Top. I hadn’t yet been to the Nose, and as I walked I kept trying to see how to get there from here. The road eventually led me from bright sunshine into a dim, moist, primeval-like forest of giant mossy hemlocks where the white cliffs on the far side of the Palmaghatt came together with the ledge that I was walking on. Forgive me, I dubbed it Gertrude’s Crotch.

Over the years since that summer the views were gradually obscured by the regrowth of shrubs and trees, and the experience on the HPC became much like walking in any woods with occasional views. More recently, the Park has opened what I call “windows” to the vistas, and the restored surface underfoot is weedless and smooth. But sadly, the old-growth forest of the Palmaghatt now contains a

large swath of skeletal dead hemlocks, done in by the woolly adelgid. A visitor new to Gertrude’s Crotch can still be impressed by the few big trees that remain standing, but the insect has done its worst: the canopy is open, letting in the sun; the trees are dying, their tops broken off; rotting trunks riddled with woodpecker holes litter the ground. Despite the restoration, the road is still less traveled than the parallel Castle Point Carriageway, since casual visitors to the park are often under the impression that higher is better.

## OLD MINNEWASKA TRAIL (AND AROUND) FROM SPLIT ROCK

This was once the main road between the Minnewaska and Mohonk resorts. But it has been neglected for so long that in most places it has devolved into a trail, and it takes some imagination to even think of it as anything else.

I love this trail. I like to loop from Split rock to the junction with Laurel Ledge, around by Overcliff, then down the Shongum Path back to Split Rock. Or the same in reverse. Sometimes I mix it up by taking Undercliff instead of Overcliff. These are all nice walks, but my favorite part of the route is always the stretch ascending from Split Rock.

It seems like every time I hike this trail I find treasure. Once a coyote trotted past along a rock slab, giving me a passing glance. Once I almost stepped on a stick insect, thinking it was a sprig of pine needles. On close examination it seemed made of burnished metals—brass, bronze, copper.



Northern Walking Stick  
Photos by the author



Snow Fleas

One spring morning I came upon what looked like small puddles of blackest oil in the rocky path. They turned out to be swarms of snow fleas, probably doing what most animals do at that time of year. These odd, tiny insects, a species of springtail, are often seen in the winter forest jumping around on top of the snow. Actually, they’re technically not insects. Or fleas.

Many times I’ve been startled by very long black snakes basking in the warm spring sun. And it seems like the blueberries on this slope ripen at an impossibly early date. Oddly, there are also several clumps of normally shade-loving lady’s slipper orchids on some of the most sunny stretches of Overcliff.

At the top of the pass where Overcliff crosses from the Rondout side of the ridge to the Wallkill Valley side, there’s a nondescript vernal pool. If you happen by at just the right time in the spring you will be nearly deafened by wood frogs, tiny animals with a very big voice like ducks quacking. They are also doing that spring thing. (There’s another, much larger and exceedingly beautiful vernal pool off a turn on Overcliff a mile or so further south.)

On a stifling summer day a friend and I sweated up the long, shady, airless slope from the Rhododendron Bridge to this pass. As we turned the corner and emerged onto the open cliffs we were struck with the wide open



Lady's  
Slipper Orchid

view of the Catskills and a simultaneous gale of cool air. A very graphic example of how different the weather can be on the two sides of the ridge.

One early spring day I left the noisy wood frogs behind and rested on a sunny rock, still partly glazed with ice. I heard a very small sound—a trickle of water running under the ice, dripping onto the moss below.

I’ve been happy to see the old carriage roads restored one by one, but I’ll be sad when this happens to “my” favorite old trail, and the weekend crowds discover it.

## Keith LaBudde

It is with deep sadness that we convey the news that Keith LaBudde, our friend, board member, and former president of FOS passed away on March 16. As we received the news too late to provide a proper tribute for this issue, we will be remembering Keith more fully in our next issue of *Shawangunk Watch*.

## SMALL PARCEL ACQUISITION UPDATE

We are excited to report that through The Shawangunk Conservancy, we are in the homestretch in our efforts to save a vital seven-acre plot of land on the ridge that we have dubbed parcel “B.” Thanks to a number of loyal donors, including two of whom made overwhelmingly generous contributions, we raised the necessary funds in record time.

The boundaries are surveyed, the title is clear, and our environmental investigation came up clean. The next step is the signing of legal documents.

Our team has identified a number of other small parcels that play a significant role in preserving the biodiversity and beauty of the ridge. We are gradually filling in “holes” in the preserved landscape to protect the ridge for generations to come.

If you were considering a donation specific to the purchase of parcel “B,” please make it a donation towards unspecified land purchases instead. Please donate to The Shawangunk Conservancy, FOS’s land trust affiliate, or to FOS with a note that your gift is for land purchases. And take satisfaction and pride in knowing that your contribution will insure that the Gunks remain in its natural state.

Wait for the big reveal in our next newsletter, when we will be able to tell you exactly where parcel “B” is!



“B” is somewhere in this image!  
Photo: John Fischer

## TILLSON LAKE DAM UPDATE

From the agenda prepared for the Palisades Interstate Park Commission’s meeting of February 11, 2019

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has approved moving ahead to engage an engineering consultant to update the design concepts and repair estimates that would bring the dam into compliance. Staff is using the funding OPRHP has already provided for removal of the dam. This engineering work will likely take about six months and will result in more definitive and updated cost estimates for repair. In the meantime, Staff continues to monitor the dam and remains prepared to drain the lake if weather events require.

As a result, the process of revising the Minnewaska State Park Preserve Master Plan as it pertains to Tillson Lake, as well as the State Environmental Quality Review process for removal of the dam, are currently on hold.

# Threats Continue in the Southern Gunks

By Susan Erny

**"SEVEN PEAKS" RETURNED** to Mamakating's Planning Board in November 2018! You must remember the 553-acre property atop the Shawangunk ridge and just above the Basha Kill, where developer Shalom Lamm had intentions of creating a 49-lot subdivision. Mr. Lamm has totally revamped his vision for Seven Peaks. On November 13 Christine Himler, an engineer representing Lamm, appeared before the Planning Board with an updated Seven Peaks concept. Instead of 49 lots, just three lots would be created: 272 acres, 164 acres, and 117 acres. On the smallest plot there is an 8,500-square foot house that was previously built as the "model home" for the original subdivision. The extremely long driveway that was created for said residence would serve as the access road to the other parcels. Ms. Himler noted that water tests for storm water management were done earlier and ought to be sufficient. Mamakating's attorney pointed out that town code requires a new water management plan, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) would also be required of each property owner. The Board stressed that issues with the steep slope and erosion from previous construction would have to be mitigated. Board member Stosh Zamonsky asserted that consideration of the Shawangunk Ridge Trail should be factored into any future plans, including conservation easements, public access to the trail, regard for the viewshed, and restrictive covenants emphasizing the need for open space. These stipulations would comply with the 2016 NYS Open Space Conservation Plan which calls for: "protection of the southern Shawangunks in Orange and Sullivan Counties as a priority for recreation, watershed protection, biodiversity conservation, and completion and buffering of the Shawangunk Ridge Trail".

No time frame was provided for this project and the developers have not appeared before the Board since November. Due to the subdivision, another public hearing will be required. What to watch for: Will the Town permit new homeowners to further subdivide these huge tracts of land? Will the Town put a limit on the maximum development? Stay tuned.

**IN NOVEMBER 2018, Dragon Springs Buddhist, Inc. (DS)**, the 393-acre complex on the western ridge of the Shawangunks in the Town of Deerpark, finally turned in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for their proposed expansion. (DEC required DS to complete this process several years ago.) A public hearing was scheduled for Wednesday, February 13th. Because the Planning Board expected a large crowd, the meeting was slated to be held in the Deerpark Senior Center, which was a larger space than the Town Hall. The turnout was amazing! Reporters, cameramen, representatives from Deerpark Rural Alliance (DRA), Basha Kill Area Association (BKAA), Friends of the Shawangunks, and Dragon Springs poured into the hall till it swelled to the gills! Two professional consultants had come from Long Island and one from New Paltz to represent DRA and BKAA in their opposition to the DEIS proposals. At precisely 7:00 pm, Deerpark Attorney Glen Plotsky solemnly made an announcement that they were cancelling the meeting since the number of people present greatly exceeded the fire code. Planning Board Chairman Robert Vicaretti explained that they would have to find a larger venue, and would discuss rescheduling the hearing at their next meeting. The audience was visibly disappointed. It was a major letdown to DRA and their consultants, who had travelled so far. And it would cost DRA and BKAA for their presence even though they were not able to speak. Engineer Steve Schneider summed up the scene with this comment, "Isn't it ironic that they couldn't hold a meeting because it didn't meet their codes?!"

The following paragraphs highlight the main concerns regarding Dragon Springs' DEIS, thanks to conversations with Grace Woodard of DRA, Paula Medley of BKAA, and Andrew Willingham, P.E. These ideas can be used to write letters of opposition to the Deerpark Planning Board or as speaking points at the next public hearing.



**A WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT (WWTP)** is in the DS expansion plans with proposed processing of 100,000 gallons of sewage per day. Considering all the stormwater violations and muddy plumes into the Basha Kill from Dragon Springs' property in the past years, it does not seem likely that DS will responsibly monitor such a huge processing plant. DS lack of adhering to DEC standards is becoming legendary. This sewage plant will greatly impact the Basha Kill and Neversink Rivers as the receiving waters. The WWTP is thus an unacceptable threat to these waters.

**HABITAT/ENDANGERED SPECIES** DS is required by the DEC to submit a habitat report and an endangered species report for the proposed construction. These were not present in the DEIS appendices, raising the issue of whether the DEIS is complete.

**CONSTRUCTION ISSUES** A planned music hall holding 920 people will require major fire protection. Does DS have the kind of equipment that will be capable of handling fires in such a huge hall? Will there be adequate road access to the new hall by DS fire staff and equipment? Does DS have the appropriate apparatus to safely service their tall buildings? To date, we understand that DS has not coordinated with the Cuddebackville Fire Department for inspections and the basics for DS fire and emergency safety plans and practice. DS was fined in Town Court for the construction an illegal wood-framed 8th story built atop a rehearsal hall, which still stands. The Planning Board and the Town engineer must go back and closely scrutinize the old plans to make sure that past work that had problems is not buried and forgotten by new construction plans.

**SAFETY/ROADS/POPULATION** Regarding the expansion, DS plans to have at capacity 500 students, 200 residents, and 2,000 visitors per day, which may or may not include the audiences in the proposed

920-seat music hall. Such heavy vehicle traffic will overwhelm the narrow, winding roads to DS and adversely affect the air quality of the area. An accurate count of the current DS population has never been provided. We ask, What other plans does DS have for future buildout? What is the Town's limitation?

**IN SUMMARY**, the huge Dragon Springs complex is changing the character of the Town of Deerpark and the whole environment of the Shawangunk Mountains. The DS complex is an urban center in a very rural habitat. Notably, DS owns an additional 400 acres in nearby Mount Hope. This massive growth is not conforming to Deerpark's Master Plan. The Town does not have the infrastructure (such as sewers and highways,) to cope with this enormous complex. Therefore, Friends of Shawangunks, in solidarity with Basha Kill Area Association and Deerpark Rural Alliance, stands in opposition to this proposed DEIS; **it is incomplete and must not be approved.**

*Tax-deductible contributions to DRA's efforts to combat Dragon Springs' degradation of the Shawangunk Mountains and DS's disregard for the local laws which protect the environment, can be made to Basha Kill Area Association. Mail checks to Basha Kill Area Association, P.O. Box 1121, Wurtsboro, NY 12790. Please write "DRA" on the memo line of the check.*

*Susan is a former FOS board member and is a member of BKAA and DRA.*



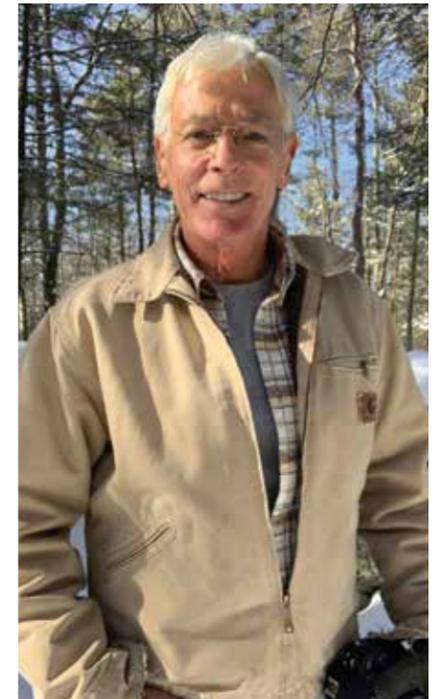
Photo: Thanks to DRA member Frank Ketcham

## FOS HAS A NEW PRESIDENT

John Hayes has become the new president of Friends of the Shawangunks. John, a resident of High Falls, has been a member of FOS for over twenty years and a board member since 2013. He has been hiking and photographing the Shawangunk ridge from a young age. Hayes is a lifetime member of the Mohonk Preserve as well as a volunteer there since 2001.

John is a dedicated environmentalist and conservationist with a deep caring for our fragile ecosystem, and is dedicated to watchfulness of threats to the ridge.

"I am eager to continue doing the work of my predecessors: maintaining vigilance against threats and taking action when necessary to protect our beautiful but vulnerable landscape," John says. "I am also looking forward to providing guidance in keeping safe those smaller strategic parcels along the ridge that might otherwise be left to be exploited or scarred. This is a great privilege and responsibility. I hope I can live up to the decades of commitment of my two indefatigable immediate predecessors, Keith LaBudde and Neil Zimmerman."



## YOU'RE INVITED!

Join Us to Hike A Hidden Corner of the Shawangunk Ridge Please join members of the FOS Board for a memorable walk in the unmatched beauty of the Shawangunks! This special gathering will provide a wonderful opportunity to meet and mingle with fellow FOS members and like-minded protectors of our beloved ridge!

The hike will start on Saturday, May 18th at 1:30pm sharp, at the home of Board member Elaine M. Laffamme and her husband Bob Anderberg - 94 Lawrence Hill Road in Accord. We'll return to our starting point by 3pm for a little feast in Elaine and Bob's beautifully restored barn. You are welcome to skip the hike and join us at 3pm for food and fun.

Don't miss this rare chance to gain access to a hidden corner of the Shawangunk Ridge across private land, led by the always inspiring Bob.

R.S.V.P. for one or both events at FOSandTSC@gmail.com. Directions provided upon request.



# Blossom-Time Returns

by Roger Roloff and Barbara Petersen

**A PERENNIALY ENGAGING WAY** to appreciate the Shawangunks is discovering where its wildflowers bloom, but we believe your pleasure can be magnified by taking along a hand lens. For instance, this basic equipment is needed to see Bishop's Cap's tiny April blossoms clearly, on their mossy islet in the Kleine Bontikill, near Clearwater Road on the Mohonk Preserve. Under the lens each white flower, only 1/8-inch wide, reveals five delicately fringed petals above two opposite, three-lobed leaves in the middle of their upright, foot-long stem, which may have as many as ten blossoms. *Mitella diphylla* (or Miterwort, its other common name) thus offers many excuses to practice using that hand lens. The cap or miter refers to the shape of Miterwort's fruit, says the National Audubon Society's *Field Guide to Wildflowers* (2001 ed.).

Another white or pinkish blossom in the Ayres Swamp section of Clearwater Road is Toothwort, like Miterwort a native and blooming by late April. Its four petals make a small bell shape—usually one of several in a terminal cluster—and its two nearly opposite stem leaves have three leaflets, somewhat like those of poison ivy; their toothed

edges give the plant its English name. Nowadays in Latin it's not *Dentaria diphylla*, but *Cardamine diphylla*.

The unique blossoms of Dutchman's Breeches look like the creations of a miniature toy shop. Up to 12 tiny white pantaloon-like flowers may dangle from a leafless stalk or raceme, their "clothesline." A very large patch of *Dicentra cucullaria* lives at the far eastern end of Clearwater Road; a much smaller but more accessible patch blooms by Brook Farm Pond in Mohonk Preserve's Foothills. Note also the lacy, feathery leaves, appearing before this native April flower blooms—all parts deserving scrutiny with a hand lens.

Colorful, bold flowers along the River-to-Ridge trail deserve a hike to see them in mid-May. Scattered along the banks of the Wallkill as you leave New Paltz are the purple, pink, or white blooms of Dame's



Rockets (*Hesperis matronalis*), a European import widely naturalized in the U.S. Its showy, fragrant flowers, often mistaken for Phlox, have four petals to Phlox's five.

To see large swaths of a remarkable five-petaled flower, walk past the Testimonial Gateway of the Foothills in mid-May. There, between the oak allée and Gatehouse Road, the meadow will likely show off countless pink Ragged Robin blossoms, each petal divided into four lobes, looking raggedy. Like Dame's

Rocket a non-native, *Lychnis flos-cuculi* invites close inspection, but be careful, since the meadow hosts many hardy plants of that dangerous native, poison ivy.

Let us instead—while delighting in the Ridge view, with Skytop Tower—fly on the magic carpet of words to a special part of that landscape, Rhododendron Swamp. Windflowers (*Anemone quinquefolia*) display their white blossoms by May, trembling with the slightest breeze: their special ability. That attention-getting movement of Wood Anemones (another common name) may well draw your eyes, or a pollinator's, to the five petal-like sepals on thin stems, perhaps eight inches tall.

Hopping onto that magic carpet again, we'll ride the western wind to Bonticou Crag's base along the Northeast Trail. There by mid-May Gaywings or Fringed Polygala will be exhibiting their three tiny petals forming a tube, with two sepals for wings and a fringed crest (its "propeller"): all in pink or purple save the crest's occasional white or yellow. No other flower looks like *Polygala paucifolia*, which resembles a wee model airplane ready to take off from its launchpad of oval leaves.

Detouring briefly on the Table Rocks Trail just past Slingerland Pavilion, we'll see examples of Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*), whose bell-like, pale green or whitish flowers hang from leaf axils and can often be hidden under alternate leaves on their foot-long arching stem. False Solomon's Seal or, as we prefer to call it, Solomon's Plume (*Smilacina racemosa*), has alternate leaves on an arching stem with a panicle of small white flowers on the stem tip: striking and easy to spot.

Returning to the Northeast Trail around Bonticou Crag's backside, we'll take a moderate uphill to join the Bonticou Ascent Path to its first or second rock outcrop, where by mid-May Pink Lady's Slipper orchids are usually blooming. Occasionally called Moccasin Flower, these plants—with two large, wide, veined basal leaves—can reach heights of 18 inches. To us *Cypripedium acaule*'s "slipper," about 2½ inches long, strongly suggests the human female's vulva, which makes lovely evolutionary sense. The orchid, while not rare, is occasionally browsed by deer,



resists transplanting, and should not be picked. Just why many Moccasin Flowers live on or near rock outcrops is a question Barbara has theoretically answered: they are "planted" by means of deer hooves, as they transport the flowers' dust-like seeds to the edges of outcrops, which are also deer yards.

Near one large outcrop about halfway to Clearwater Road along the Northeast Trail, greenish-white flowers of Star or Bastard Toadflax bloom. *Comandra umbellata*'s 1/8-inch wide blossoms definitely require a hand

lens if you wish to see clearly the star shape of five sepals in each compact, terminal cluster on stems up to a foot tall. The plant is photosynthetic and parasitic, feeding on roots of shrubs or trees, perhaps accounting for its "bastard" common name.

But the reputation of Quaker Ladies is unblemished. The flowers of *Houstonia caerulea* or Bluets (another of its several common names) have four bluish, symmetrically opposite flat lobes enclosing golden yellow centers. These small, grass-like beauties grow in patches in open fields along Mohonk Preserve's Table Rocks Trail, on the nearby Ski Loop, and even in the Coxing Trailhead's parking lot.

Waiting for us back in the Ayres Swamp along Clearwater Road are large, ribbed, bright-green leaves of False or White Hellebore and long, slim leaves of Turtleheads. We don't need hand lenses for these plants yet, only more time for their blossoms—and summer's impressive bounty of blooms—to appear. Meantime we wish you happy flower-watching on Shawangunk Trails.



# GUNKS BOOK CORNER

by Steven Jervis

Guy and Laura Waterman's *Yankee Rock & Ice* (1993) is available in a new edition. Four new chapters by Michael Wejchert bring the story up to date. The Shawangunks are again a major feature. Readers will be familiar with some of the changes in the 25-year interval. The cliffs are much more crowded now. I can recall when 50 climbers meant a big weekend. Now you see many more even in the middle of the week. And of course, climbing standards have gone way up, as they have around the country. Difficult routes of one day become moderates the next.

Of special interest to our readers: The Gunks crags have been marvelously protected. This is due in part to the creation of the Mohonk Preserve, without which the area might be cluttered with roads and houses. The cliffs themselves have been carefully tended. Years ago climber safety was provided by soft metal pitons hammered into cracks, where they remained for future ascents. But when pitons became harder and more expensive, they were often hammered back out. The cracks that held them could be badly disfigured. (Climbers: a good example is the first belay stance on "Sixish.") Fortunately, removable devices like cams and nuts enabled a clean climbing revolution.

But then came expansion bolts. They are hammered into a hole that must be drilled into the rocks. Unlike pitons, they are indifferent to natural features of the rock. They are usually reliable, but they sure don't look nice. They are sometimes very prominently placed, just a few feet from a crack that would accommodate removable protection, like a nut. Not in the Shawangunks where, as Wejchert writes, "new bolts, alteration of the rock, or tree-cutting" are prohibited. Only at rappel points have bolts been installed, in order to protect trees from the stress of climbers' ropes. There are lessons to learn from this custom, and from this book.

Of further interest: another Waterman book, *Forest and Crag*, will have a 30th anniversary re-issue this spring, with new prefatory material. It will feature hiking here in the Shawangunks, as well as in many other places.



Photo: John Hayes

## JOIN US! DEVELOPMENT THREATENS ALL PARTS OF THE SHAWANGUNKS. JOIN OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP.

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- PATRON \$100**
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I would like to make an additional contribution to The Shawangunk Conservancy for land acquisition.

**AMOUNT \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

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# Shawangunk WATCH

is the publication of Friends of the Shawangunks and its companion organization, The Shawangunk Conservancy. This issue was edited and assembled by Friends board members.



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Friends of the Shawangunks, Inc. is a not-for-profit organization working to preserve open space in the Shawangunks.

The Shawangunk Conservancy, Inc. is a not-for-profit land conservancy.

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The latest financial report of Friends of the Shawangunks and The Shawangunk Conservancy may be obtained by writing to the Office of the Attorney General, Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271, or by writing to us at the above address.



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