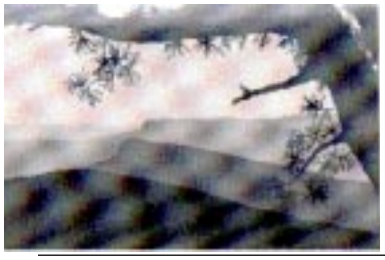


SHAWANGUNK WATCH

Winter 2010 Preserving Open Space in the Shawangunks Volume 15 #2

Friends of the Shawangunks & The Shawangunk Conservancy

Discovering the Northern Preserve

The Northern Preserve is very much in the Shawangunk spotlight as new parcels are acquired by the Mohonk Preserve, Open Space Institute and Wallkill Valley Land Trust. Some of the finest Shawangunk landscape is now, or soon will be, accessible to recreationists which poses questions of how the transition from private to open space land will be responsibily managed. There is no better person to tell a portion of this colorful and complex history than Steve Larsen, longtime landowner and steward of the land. (Editor)

Stone Mountain Farm

By Stephen Larsen

The lands that are now called Stone Mountain Farm have always invited mythical speculation. A Northern Shawangunk valley bounded on the east and west by 200-foot conglomerate escarpments, with waterfalls, meandering streams, forests of old oak and hemlock, the land has seemed to embody the very term "hidden valley." Paleo-Indian artifacts, abundant stone walls and pre- and post-revolutionary stone ruins attest its essential habitability over the centuries. Legend has it that the shy local Native American groups hid out in its caves and talus from marauding Delaware and Iroquois war parties. Some say that during the early part of the century a house of ill repute and a speakeasy occupied the 19th century farmhouse that was the only building on the property when we purchased it in 1968.

Locals warned us that the valley was "fulla pizenous snakes," but the occasional copperheads and rattlers have never bitten anyone but an incautious goat who didn't realize the copperhead was doing it a favor by eating the woodrats that were competing for its grain. We do have lots of deer and coyotes, an occasional bear, foxes, and there have been a couple of cougar sightings. Falcons, red-tailed hawks, eagles, and turkey vultures seem to like our sheer cliffs for takeoffs.

The southern end of our approximately 250 acres reaches toward the north end of Bonticou and the area that used to be called the Virginia Viney Smiley Preserve. The northern end touches the old limestone mines and kilns now owned by the Town of Rosendale. Stone Mountain Farm consists of forests, meadows, escarpments, streams and ponds, five of which we put in ourselves, originally with federal assistance and guidance from the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

We found the farm during a weekend on which we decided to go real estate shopping instead of climbing, and purchased it six months later, in June of 1968. My wife Robin and I had been married about four years, and were living in the East Village of New York City. We had met as climbers in the "Gunks," and our dating was often on the cliffs, camping at "Split Rock," or holing up at the "Appie cabin," a rustic little wooden building, now the refurbished VanLeuven Cabin in the Trapps Hamlet. We were considered part of a loosely-affiliated,

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Steve Larsen

A view of the Northern Preserve cliffs and meadow at Stone Mountain Farm

occasionally rowdy, group of climbers called "the Vulgarians," who actually were mostly university students or faculty, or young professionals. I basically retired from climbing after 1970 to immerse myself in farm and family obligations.

When we first bought the farm the only building was the old farmhouse, which is said to date to the 1870s. The large parcel, with its natural cliff-girdled boundary had been assembled from around 20 smaller parcels in the early 20th century. One of the tasks now is to see how all these pieces of the pie actually fit together. Our property touches Marbletown, Tillson/Rosendale, and New Paltz. We pay taxes to Kingston School District, our Post office is New Paltz, and the phone is Rosendale. We are a strange kind of hybrid creature!

Land Protection

Over the years we have tried to help ensure the intactness of the northern portion of the Mohonk Preserve. We have talked with neighbors about adding all or a portion of their property to the Preserve, as we have done. Most recently, we have been working with a neighbor Jack Dionisio, regarding a transfer of a major part of his property to Open Space Institute (OSI); this transaction may have taken place by the time this newsletter is mailed. It was favorably reviewed by the Rosendale Planning Board in November. It is gratifying to see the Preserve gradually expanding to encompass some ot these lands.

We have too often observed destructive woodland practices, e.g., a virtual clear cut by a logger who took virtually everything marketable and left shattered and splintered the few remaining trees.

As for our own land, twenty-two years ago we joined the "Fisher Forest Act," program, now usually referred to as "480 (a)." Tax relief of up to 80% is offered on land taxes for committed acreage, in our case about 177 wooded acres. Working with DEC and private foresters, we cull trees, harvest soft- and hardwoods in such a way that our forests are sustainable and productive at the same time. Our forestry work

continued on Page 6

The Smiley Road: A Reasonable Approach

By Marc B. Fried

The new master plan for Minnewaska State Park Preserve and the Nature Conservancy's Sam's Point Preserve master plan both contain stated goals and principles that will guide the restoration and maintenance of historic carriage roads in their respective jurisdictions. Additionally, the Minnewaska plan includes specific proposals regarding the Smiley Road (or "Smiley Carriageway"), which runs from the Berme Road Park in Ellenville diagonally up the mountain to Lake Awosting. Much of the lower section of this road passes through the Sam's Point Preserve, though Minnewaska maintains a right-of-way, originally acquired by the Smileys when they built the road in 1900-1901. A small portion also runs through Forest Preserve land under the jurisdiction of the DEC. Close cooperation with the DEC and Sam's Point Preserve is thus envisioned for these sections.

The Smiley Road is unique among Minnewaska carriage roads for two reasons: first, the Village of Ellenville and Town of Wawarsing have a strong interest in enhancing the role of this road as an access point to the park, to promote tourism and its positive economic impacts. Second, the Smiley Road, during the first 60 years or so of its existence, played an unintended role that far overshadowed its original purpose as a means for transporting hotel guests between the Lake Minnewaska resort and Ellenville rail station: it served as the lifeline for a dynamic chapter in our area's folk history, the wild huckleberry industry. Several major berrypickers' encampments sprang up along its length as soon as the road was constructed. These constituted summertime villages, each with dozens of berrypickers' cabins and often one or more little stores. The road provided access both to berrypickers and the outside buyers who serviced these communities, buying the berries and transporting them down the mountain by horse and wagon or pickup truck, to be marketed in the mid-Hudson region or loaded onto rail cars bound for the markets of the New York metropolitan area. The huckleberry history of the Smiley Road is uncovered in detail in the first 109 pages of my 1995 book, *The Huckleberry Pickers*, the latter part of which describes the Sam's Point encampments.

Since this road lacks much of the spectacular scenic beauty that characterizes other Minnewaska carriage roads, I submit that its primary value is as a "walk through history." Historical tourism—in a wilderness setting—rather than purely recreational/scenic enjoyment, is potentially its primary attraction to park visitors, if this unique resource is not devalued by an overly ambitious and insensitive reconstruction project. Preservation of historic and archaeological resources and enhancement of the experience of history along the lower five miles of the seven-mile road is thus of paramount importance. Unlike at Sam's Point, berrypickers' cabins here are no longer extant. It is primarily the weathered roadbed itself that speaks of the passage of time and imparts a feeling of history. Preservation therefore must extend not only to the immediate proximity of the road on either side, but literally to the road surface itself.

During the April, 2008 wildfire, the two mile section between Lake Awosting and the Five-Mile Post (Stony Kill crossing) suffered massive disfigurement from bulldozers scraping and widening the road to create a firebreak and make a safe staging area for firefighters. In September of '09, I walked part of this section and was disheartened by the devastation created, not by fire, but by fire control vehicles (ironically, the blaze itself never reached to the Smiley Road west of the Fly Brook). A bit west of the Stony Kill crossing, the bulldozers left the road and created a new firebreak running northeastward down the mountain, parallel to the Stony Kill. I remember the joy I felt at seeing the original, undamaged road surface continuing west toward Ellenville from this point—the rocky old roadbed that suddenly came alive again with a feeling of history.

And this brings me to the crux of the matter: the master plan calls for reconstruction and maintenance of the Smiley Road to permit emergency access during fire and to provide for biking, cross-country skiing and horseback riding. But the road surface itself is a historical and archaeological resource that needs to be respected. It would be a huge and expensive mistake to envision restoring the road surface to what it looked like in 1901. The aging and weathering of this former carriageway and automobile road is essential to the sense of elapsed time, to the experiencing of history. This experience would be lost forever in the event of too ambitious a project. Portions between about 1100 and 1300 feet in elevation are so eroded that they no longer even look much like a road, and I would have no problem with major reconstruction in this section, especially as a means of facilitating emergency access. But in most other parts of its first five miles, the old road surface should remain undisturbed. The Park should focus its restoration efforts on the eastern two miles, bulldozed during the fire, parts of which were turned into hardly more than a series of mud holes.

I seriously question the need to make this road bikeable: there is already a plethora of bicycling routes in the park, with more planned, and this is unlikely to be a popular route, since it does not form a loop. Horseback riding and cross-country skiing should be possible without major reconstruction, except in the two sections I've mentioned.

Some further suggestions:

To enhance its usefulness as a firebreak and fire access and to obviate the kind of emergency bulldozing experienced in the '08 fire, consideration should be given to controlled burns along the length of the Smiley Road to reduce fuel loads.

The proposed pedestrian bridge at the Fly Brook crossing should utilize the original stone bridge abutments (same with any bridge that might be planned for the Stony Kill crossing). This would restore the original route and enhance historical continuity.

Some removal of post-1970 trash should be attempted under the supervision of an archaeological professional, but berrypicker-era artifacts should remain undisturbed.

Signage should be installed to mark the major historical sites. Personally, I favor a minimalist approach that stimulates curiosity but leaves room for the imagination. For one example, something like "Site of TWO-MILE POST Berrypickers' Community" should be sufficient. Additional signs should advise visitors to leave archaeological resources undisturbed. A more elaborate interpretive display might be appropriate for the road's entrance at the edge of Ellenville and possibly for the Lake Awosting end as well. As an incidental thought, I can envision the former canal office on Berme Road as a possible future Berrypickers' Museum, staffed by volunteers on weekends during the warmer months, providing a suitable introduction to visitors beginning the Smiley Road experience.

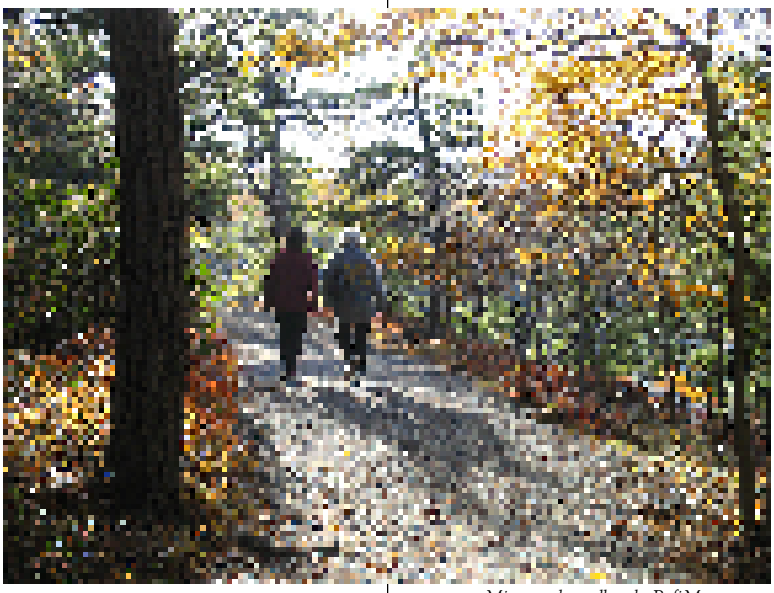
Finally, if and when specific plans begin to be formulated for restoration of the Smiley Road, I would welcome the opportunity to walk the length of the road with state park and Nature Conservancy planners and officials to identify places of historical importance, suggest signage and point out areas of special sensitivity.

The Smiley Road can be developed as a historical resource that will benefit Ellenville and Wawarsing as well as provide a unique experience to park visitors. Hopefully, the Park will avoid turning it into an expensive, overly "restored" and little-used trail that will be of limited value to visitors and provide little positive economic impact to the local community.

New Map For Minnewaska Park

By Tom Nozkowski

A new full-color map of Minnewaska State Park Preserve is now available at the park gatehouse. Unfolded, this attractive map measures a substantial 16" x 20". On the reverse there is a small map of the area around Lake Minnewaska and various texts, including park rules and regulations and a description and history of the park. No cartographer is listed but the layout and text are credited to Jillian Koehnken of the New York State OPRHP. It would appear that this map is aimed at the occasional visitor to the park—rather than the more serious Shawangunk walkers who are unlikely to give up the standard Trail Conference map set. It is certainly useful to have a map available at the park and this one is far superior to anything offered before, albeit going from a free giveaway to a cost of $4. It is printed on tyvek or some similar material and can take a lot of abuse. So far I have been unable to tear or damage it.



Minnewaska walkers by Rafi Magnes

The map appears to only be available at the park and there is no mention of it online at the New York State Parks site.

Not the least of this new map's virtues is that it includes the entire park: delineating a rectangle from a point about a mile southwest of Sam's Point, to Tillson Lake on the southeast, to Lawrence Hill on the north east and to Foordemore Road at the Mine Hollow on the northwest. The great assemblage of land acquisitions of the last few decades creating the park are shown here as a conceptual whole and that is just thrilling! Seeing the newest property acquisitions, The Mine Hollow and the former Awosting Reserve areas as part of the park is very satisfying.

In concept this is an excellent addition to Shawangunk maps. Unfortunately the execution of the map itself leaves much to be desired. It is deeply flawed both in what was included and what was left out.

Maps carry the information their makers want to let out and there is always the question of what should be included. Questions of access and control are inherent in all maps. No one should be surprised, for example, that Rock Pond (aka Hidden Pond) has been truly hidden on this map, given the Park management's great reluctance to admit there are several well-known paths leading to it. There are arguments to be made on both sides concerning the addition and subtraction of map elements. Danger, environmental fragility and use management are all issues that have to be carefully considered.

If a map is meant for practical use, however, it is commonly thought that it should not hold any surprises. On the one hand, it should include all major landforms, structures, trails and roads; and on the other, what is included should actually exist on the ground. I checked several mapped trails this summer—paths that didn't jibe with my memories—and discovered errors ranging from trivial to the possibly dangerous.

Take the Mine Hollow area for an illustration of these mapping problems. I believe one of the trails included on this map is imaginary—at least I have been unable to find it. The trail from the parking area to Point Lookout is clear enough—although an inexperienced hiker might be befuddled by the three unmapped woods roads that intersect with it! Beyond Point Lookout the trail is mostly imaginary. It's hard to understand how this got included on the map. Was it wishful thinking? It's a nice idea for a trail although I have tried and never been able to bushwhack down the rock faces and talus in this immediate area! It is necessary to continue much further south to connect with Jumping Brook (unmapped here) and follow that down and back out to the Mine Hollow Road. I think a day hiker looking for a short and simple loop walk could get into real trouble here. Just as strangely, the Mine Hollow Jeep Road—a great, historic access route to the top of the ridge for sixty years—has been demapped. Imagine the poor hiker, lost after trying to find the way down from Point Lookout stumbling upon this very well defined road and not knowing that it could lead him south to the Smiley Road at Napanoch Point or north back to Foordemore Road.

I have only been able to sample bits of the map, but each time I do, something odd turns up. There is a road shown on this map, running between Routes 44/55 and the Trapps Trail half way between the Peter's Kill Park Office and the Coxing Kill. It simply doesn't exist.

On the reverse, the small inset map of the area around Lake Minnewaska is especially irritating with half of its trails designated in an almost invisible yellow on green. Most map-using park visitors, I would imagine, will be focused around the lake and I think they could use a bigger and clearer map. Both sides of the map indulge in a bit of symbol overkill. If there is only one area that allows scuba diving and only one dam on Lake Minnewaska, then you don't need graphic symbols for these—or a key to explain what the symbols are for! The five symbols shown at the Peter's Kill area (Telephone, Information, Parking, Toilets and Rock Climbing) manage to obscure exactly where the red loop trail starts.

There's nothing wrong with this map that a little field checking and some conceptual clarity wouldn't improve. We should all buy one—support Minnewaska State Park and Preserve—and do the field work, pass on our corrections to the Park staff and make this map a useful tool and a real asset.

Tom Nozkowski is a longtime member of the Board, a High Falls resident and a prominent contemporary artist. He knows the woods and trails better than most any hiker.

The Miniature World of Moss

Shanan Smiley

Mysterious and little-known organisms live within reach of where you sit. Splendor awaits in minute proportions... E.O. Wilson

Have you ever stopped and really looked at a large patch of moss? If you haven't you should try it some time. There are so many different textures, shapes and colors. Some cascade over the cliffs like a green or reddish-black waterfall. Some form cushions, others look like miniature ferns or pine seedlings.

I recently had the pleasure to spend time with a bryologist—someone who looks at moss at their scale to get the big picture of the forest. I got a peek into Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer's world of the small. Robin is a professor of environmental and forest biology at SUNY-ESF. Her passion for mosses was infectious, and her knowledge and perspective expanded my fascination with the natural world.

David Johnson

Dr. Kimmerer tells the story of moss best. I will share excerpts (in italics) from her book ***Gathering Moss***:

Moss is the most primitive of land plants. Remarkably, they have no roots, vascular system, flowers, fruit or seeds. They are the most simple of plants, and in their simplicity, elegant. The type of chlorophyll in their leaves differs from their sun-loving counterparts, and is fine-tuned to absorb the wavelengths of light that filter through the forest canopy.

Mosses inhabit the small space where earth and atmosphere first make contact known as the boundary layer. Air seems insubstantial, but it interacts in interesting ways with the things it touches, much as moving water interacts with the contours of the riverbed. As moving air passes over a surface like a rock, the surface changes the behavior of the air. Without obstacles, the air would tend to move smoothly in a linear path. But as the air encounters a surface, friction tugs at the moving air and slows it down. Down toward the surface, the air becomes progressively slower and slower until, immediately adjacent to the surface, the air is perfectly still, captured by the friction with the surface itself. This nearly motionless air acts as an insulating layer, with a much different climate than just six feet above.

Sphagnum moss by David Johnson

The boundary layer traps not only heat, but water vapor as well. By being small, mosses can live like a floating greenhouse hovering just above the rock surface. The boundary layer can also hold gases other than water vapor. The fungi and bacteria at work decomposing logs release carbon dioxide, which is also trapped in the boundary layer. The boundary layer can contain ten times the amount of carbon dioxide than the ambient atmosphere. Carbon dioxide is the raw material of photosynthesis, and is readily absorbed into the moist leaves of the mosses.

Moisture is the key. Mosses must be awash in moisture in order for the alchemy of photosynthesis to occur. A thin film of water over the moss leaf is the gateway for carbon dioxide to dissolve and enter the leaf, beginning the transformation of light and air into sugar. Without water a dry moss is incapable of growth. Lacking roots, mosses can't replenish their supply of water from the soil, and survive only at the mercy of rainfall.

Annie O'Neill

Many mosses can tolerate wide swings in moisture, with a suite of evolved adaptations known as poikilohydry. This means that the water content of the plant changes with the water content of the environment. When moisture is plentiful, the moss soaks up the water and grows prolifically. But when the air dries, the moss dries with it, eventually becoming completely desiccated. Mosses may lose up to 98% of their moisture, and still survive to restore themselves when water is replenished. Even after forty years of dehydration in a specimen cabinet, mosses have been fully revived after a dunk in water.

Moss plants almost never occur singly, but in colonies packed as dense as an August cornfield. The nearness of others with shoots and leaves intertwined creates a porous network of leaf and space which holds water like a sponge. The more tightly packed the shoots, the greater the water-holding capacity. Tree leaves are covered with a thin layer of wax, a barrier to water entering by absorption or leaving via evaporation. But moss leaves have no barrier at all, and are only one cell thick. Every cell of every leaf is in intimate contact with the atmosphere, so that a raindrop soaks immediately into the cell.

These moss colonies exhibit the same kind of structure, and function as the rain forest. Like the rain forest, the animals of the moss forest are interconnected in complex food webs: herbivores, carnivores, and predators. The patterns clearly transcend the vast difference in scale. The interior of a moss clump can be heavily colonized by algae, making it look like a moss-draped rain forest in miniature. Threads of tiny liverworts coil around the stems like vines on a tree trunk. Clinging to the rhizoids of the moss are colorful spores and pollen grains, evoking the pattern of pastel orchids. The moss forest even has its equivalent of bromeliad tanks. The water-filled pocket in a moss leaf can support unique species of rotifers, invertebrates that know no other home but the tiny pool among the moss leaves. Some insects frequent the dry open top of the clump, while others like springtails burrow deep in the damp rhizoids at the bottom. Predators lurk in the moss forest, too. Pseudoscorpions conceal themselves among the dead leaves and dart out on rippling rows of legs to sting their prey. Carabid beetles, hard shelled and shining, patrol the moss turf with their enormous pincers and take small invertebrates wherever they find them. Predaceous larvae lie like snakes in the branches.

HOW DO LARGER ANIMALS MAKE USE OF MOSS? *Just before entering the winter den, black bears may eat a large quantity of moss, which so binds up their digestive system that it blocks defecation through the long winter sleep. Bears will also bring moss into their dens for insulation.*

Mosses are woven into birds' nests of many species, from the velvety cup of a winter wren to the hanging basket of a vireo. Mosses are also used for nesting material by flying squirrels, voles, chipmunks, and many others. The native Lenape also packed mosses into the cracks of their longhouses, in their mittens and boots, as well as diapers, and wound dressings.

HOW DO OTHER PLANTS USE MOSS? *Towering trees and tiny mosses have an enduring relationship that starts at birth. Moss mats often serve as nurseries for infant trees. A seed falling to the bare ground might find itself pummeled by heavy raindrops or carried off by a scavenging*

continued on next page

ant. The emerging rootlet may dry in the sun. But a seed falling on a bed of moss finds itself safely nestled among leafy shoots which can hold water longer than the bare soil and give it a head start on life. Mossy logs are often referred to as "nurse logs." The remnants of that nurture can be seen in the straight lines of hemlocks sometimes found in the forest, a legacy of seedlings who shared a beginning on a moist log.

Moss was indeed among the first plants to grow on the ridge at glacial recession. Sediment cores taken from Rhododendron Swamp, in addition to Mohonk and Minnewaska Lakes by Mohonk Preserve Research Associates Drs. Dorothy Peteet and Kirsten Menking have dictated plant succession on the ridge for the last 14,000 years. The Shawangunk Mountain ridge is believed to have been "free of ice for at least 2,000 years before the ice fully retreated from the valleys below." (Eisenberg, 1978) This provided a travel corridor where seeds from the plants of the coastal plains could be deposited on the ridge. After the colonization of moss on the bare conglomerate, other seeds carried by wind and native or animal travelers could establish themselves in the beds of moss, and eventually we got the forests of today.

The forests of this ridge are very unique. The Shawangunks are in a pivotal position where the northern boreal vegetative species (hemlock, spruce, sugar maple, beech and birch) intermingle with the southern Carolinian species (oaks, hickories, pitch pine, tupelo, and tulip tree), with some of the most interesting and rarest plants being glacial relicts. (Huth, 1987) This is true not only for vascular plants, but was found to be true for mosses as well.

Some bryologists who have spent time in the Shawangunks taking an inventory of the species of mosses were Michael Corey, Bill Town and Marilou Pudiak in the early 1990s. What they found was quite exciting. With Paul Huth as a guide, they visited 19 wetland sites over a five-year period. A total of 37 species of Sphagnum moss were found. Five of these are considered rare in New York State, fourteen species were new records for Ulster County, and several are considered coastal plain endemics (with the species occurrence here on the ridge the only inland locations ever recorded). There were 37 other mosses in which two are considered rare and one a new record for the state! For several species, the Northern Shawangunk Mountains are either the northern or southern edge of their range limit.

You can broaden your horizons and experience, and deepen your connection with this landscape by learning more about what is around you. The next time you are out among the moss, take a moment to get down to their level and get a glimpse into the world of the small.

This article is dedicated to a dear friend of the Daniel Smiley Research Center, Bill Town (1942-2010). His description of his experience in the Shawangunks: "This is one of the few places you can visit that isn't disturbed by litter, foot traffic or roads. Any change in the environment is natural."

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Who Owns the Cliffs?

by Keith La Budde

Does it really matter? You can't do anything with them, except climb them. Or can you? Of the commonly recognized Shawangunk climbing areas, the Trapps, Bonticou, Lost City, and Outback Slab are totally within the Mohonk Preserve. Sky Top is owned by Mohonk Mountain House. But major portions of the Near Trapps and Millbrook, and all of Bayards, are in private hands! Deeds for the properties that

include these cliffs typically cite the "high point on the ridge," as the rear boundary, so these properties may extend well back from the cliff edge. As noted in the article on page **8**, it is only recently that a portion of Millbrook was finally acquired by Open Space Institute, with the intention of transferring it to the Preserve.

Most of the owners of property that extend to the top of the ridge have been supportive of the Preserve, and of climbing on "their" cliffs. (A few did choose to have the Millbrook Ridge Trail relocated off their property when the Preserve informed them of their right to do so.) But climbers who have always assumed they could climb on any of these cliffs had a rude awakening last year. One individual whose property includes the northern-most part of the Bayards—a climber, no less—posted his land to prevent climber access, and convinced another property owner whose property includes a portion of the Near Trapps to do the same. The latter posting effectively prevented climbers from accessing a major part of the Nears.

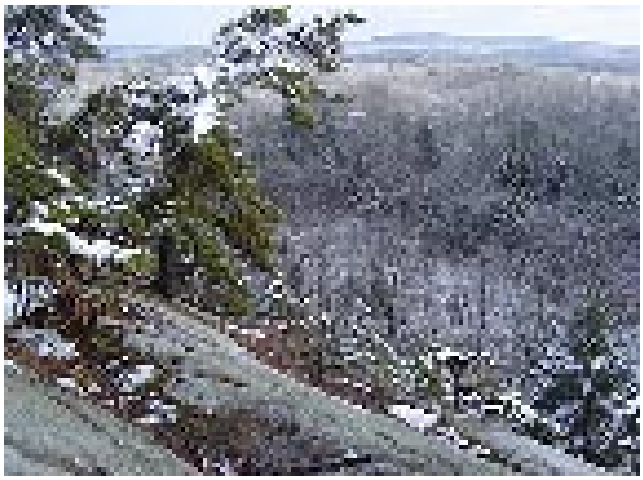
While it has long been a goal of Friends of the Shawangunks, Mohonk Preserve, and Open Space Institute to acquire the cliff and talus of the Near Trapps, Bayards, and Millbrook cliffs, very little progress has been made. The northern part of the Near Trapps came into Preserve hands at the same time as the Trapps, many decades ago. The only other successful effort to protect Near Trapps, Bayards, or Millbrook cliff and talus occurred in 1993 as the result of a joint effort of The Shawangunk Conservancy (Friends' land-protection arm), Access Fund, and Mohonk Preserve. About 30 acres, including 1,000 feet of the southern portion of the Nears, Smede's Cove (the gap between Near Trapps and Bayards), and the adjacent talus and land on top of the ridge was protected.

This effort was successful only because, when The Shawangunk Conservancy learned that the owner was subdividing his property into three pieces, it convinced him to redraw the proposed boundaries so that one of the parcels consisted of the talus, cliff face, and ridge-top land. He was amenable to this suggestion since this parcel could not be developed and was therefore of little interest to a prospective buyer. The Conservancy entered into a contract to purchase this parcel, and then—since it didn't have sufficient funds to close the deal—approached Mohonk Preserve for assistance. The Preserve in turn contacted Access Fund (an organization dedicated to protecting access to climbing areas) that provided the Preserve with the needed $30,000.

Much remains to be done if all of the cliff and talus is to be protected. If history is any indication, achieving this goal will definitely require a great deal of patience.

continued from page 1

has allowed our forestland to become more open, diverse and yet yield occasional commercial harvests. The woods also supply abundant deadfall and trees to feed our own bandsaw mill and firewood needs. Our meadows house a variety of gardens that supply organic produce through the local community, and even down into tand have remained free of commercial fertilizers for 40 years, and yield hay for our Stone Mountain Stables and Boarders, an equine community cooperative.



Center for Symbolic Studies

Years ago our family decided this land was too beautiful not to give access to people who wanted to explore its terrain. Under the auspices of our not-for-profit Center for Symbolic Studies (CSS), we allow people to pay a minimum annual fee ($35 per person, $50/family) to hike, bike or ride horseback on our several miles of trails. The fee supports programs with youth at risk, the developmentally disabled, climbers, circus and trapeze artists (see trapezeclub.org), dancers (the Vanaver Caravan), and outdoor fantasy games (see wayfinders and newmoongirls). Our for-profit enterprise (and default economic engine for the not-for-profit) is Stone Mountain Counseling, PC, where we offer drug-free therapies for children with attention deficit disorders, autistic spectrum disorders or other neurodevelopmental problems. We also work with children and adults with head injuries (TBI), fibromyalgia and post-Lyme neurological symptoms. These activities, by definitition, are generally "light on the land" and we have built, wherever possible, sustainably. CSS has hosted alternative building programs including cordwood and cobb construction. Our administrative office is largely solar-powered, and the majority of our buildings are heated by wood, heat-pumps, and passive solar.

The Rail Trail

A thorn in our side all these years has been the rail trail which passes through about a half-mile of our property. When we first moved to the farm there were still railroad trains running. After Walkill Valley Railroad, and then Conrail,closed the railroad, the roadbed was sold to a Rosendale resident. He had grandiose ideas about the rail-trail, but actually did very little to keep it up or regulate its use, and it became a major nuisance. Un-muffled trail bikes and ATVs blasted down the trail, and into our meadows and forests. A defunct public utility, once acquired by "eminent domain" from the private landowners for the public weal, had become a public nuisance.

We formed an ad-hoc group called the Rosendale Rail Trail Association, who met with the Preserve, Town officials, members of the Walkill Valley Rail Trail Association and the Walkill Valley Land Conservancy, even the National Rails to Trails Conservancy, to see if there was a way the owner could be persuaded to sell or donate the land to a not-for profit group like the Walkill Valley Association. He was unresponsive.

In 2008 we were applying to the Parks and Trails Administration for a $250,000 grant; we also engaged in serious talks with Congressman Maurice Hinchey, who had been very active in sponsoring the Walkway Over the Hudson, and loved the idea of a Walkway Over the Rondout. We had strong guarantees of money and public interest in the project, but the owner never responded to our calls or correspondence. It seems an irony that the following year OSI and Walkill Valley Land Trust were able to acquire the roadbed for back taxes, and the owner got nothing.

For those of us who own properties adjacent to the rail trail, this is the fruition of almost 30 years of dreaming and scheming. It now seems possible that there could be a greenway corridor from Kingston south to Gardiner, and over to meet the Walkway Over the Hudson, and hence to Dutchess and possibly even Orange counties. We have no trouble with appropriate traffic, and it seems that an era of misuse of the rail trail is now over.

Property Taxes

As usual, in the midst of all this blithely wonderful sounding stuff there is inevitably a dark player: property taxes. When we first purchased our land the taxes were $500 a year. The next year, they doubled—still not too bad. The year after that they doubled again—no capital improvements—and the year after that the same thing. It turned out the local tax assessors thought we were "city slickers," and would pay on demand. Soon we were obliged to start a Rosendale Taxpayers for Fair Assessment group; our research showed that the assessors had singled out certain people for serious tax escalations—and spared all their buddies. We protested, but still the taxes kept going up. In the late '70s we got a letter from the Ulster County Real Property Office telling us that there was good news: an aerial survey had been conducted of the whole county and our farm was not 250 acres, it was 350! The bad news, you will be taxed accordingly. As of last year—and the last few—our taxes had soared to more than $35,000. When we went to sell 125 acres to OSI, for eventual inclusion in the Mohonk Preserve, surveys revealed that the aerial survey was grossly inflated. We actually own more like 250, but have been taxed on 100 acres that we probably don't own.

Right now surveys are being concluded, as we prepare to sell an additional 20-30 acres to OSI. The issue is title—which has to be traced back to the early 1800s. The local tax assessors don't seem to oblige when your holdings are less than their maps say. My concluding remarks to this community who value open space and responsible and sustainable management is: support the "Circuit Breaker" bill that will give relief to landowners, like ourselves, who seek to hold land responsibly and with the public in mind . People should not be forced to leave New York State because of crippling property taxes.

It is gratifying to think that in addition to inhabiting one of the loveliest landscapes on earth, we are taking steps to protect its integrity and beauty for our children's children. It is also nice to know that we dwell in an ecologically attuned and sustainably organized community that inhabits this graceful and essential part of the Hudson Valley.

Stephen Larsen, PhD is Psychology Professor Emeritus (SUNY Ulster), and with his wife Robin, author of A Fire in the Mind, The Life of Joseph Campbell. *He also has nine other books in print. He is director of the Stone Mountain Center, PC that provides drug-free services to children and adults with ADHD, Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Depression and anxiety. See stonemountaincenter.com.*

Photograph of Northern Preserve panorama by Gary Jacobson

Minnewaska Master Plan

by Janet Kern and Patty Lee Parmalee

Editors note: The opinions of individual board members do not necessarily represent the opinion of Friends of the Shawangunks.

For half a year now, there has been an official revised master plan for Minnewaska State Park Preserve. After several public hearings and many written comments (including by Friends of the Shawangunks), a final version was released to the public on June 2.

Revising of the old plan was made necessary partly by the addition of new parcels of land to the Park Preserve, including the former Awosting Reserve. FOS had been very involved in the campaign against a proposed 350-house development there, and we two (Patty and Janet) were also active in Save the Ridge, which was organized specifically to preserve Awosting Reserve in its natural state. Thus we are particularly concerned with plans for those 2,500 acres on the southeast slope of the Ridge, stretching more or less from Gertrude's Nose to Verkeerderkill Falls.

We were very pleased to read that all new parcels will fall under the "Preserve" designation. Minnewaska is not just a state park, it is a state park preserve, which means that human needs for recreation should be balanced with the needs of flora and fauna. But is that designation being complied with?

We do understand that much of the public support for preservation of natural areas comes from people learning to appreciate them by having the opportunity to visit. However, we are dismayed at how far the balance has tipped toward high-impact human use in the plans for Awosting Reserve.

Cutting a 12-mile single-track mountain-biking trail that loops all around the terrain will significantly affect the integrity of the habitat, for the exclusive benefit of one user group. We fought against development in the Awosting Reserve not just to retain a pretty view, but in order to preserve a piece of land large enough for the Park to provide significant habitat for increasingly crowded-out species. Creatures need freedom to roam; they need to be able to move between valley floor and ridgetop without being scared off by people on fast-moving wheeled implements. (Hikers are quite different; they can move quietly, fitting into the landscape rather than changing it — yet the Park proposes to close some of the routes currently available to hikers there and build the adventure biking trail instead.)

In short, we had hoped that the acquisition of a large, comparatively unaltered piece of land running from valley floor to ridgetop would be seen as an opportunity to "let nature take its course," allowing the Park as a whole to become a more functional habitat. It's troubling that desire for extreme sporting opportunity by one organized and vocal user group appears to have trumped the oft-trumpeted goal to preserve this Last Great Place. The ever more constricted critters-in-residence whose well-being depends on the sensibilities of human dominion, and the fragile terrain which is their home on the Ridge, now appear to be low on the list of Minnewaska State Park Preserve plan priorities in this area. It is also a questionable choice to exclude the majority of Park users, for whom recreational time spent in Minnewaska State Park Preserve is focused on natural magic rather than personal best, through the creation of a 12-mile loop for mountain bikers only.

At the top of Awosting Reserve, one can follow a path to Lake Awosting that leads through a lovely, remote and unique spot named (or perhaps misnamed) Spruce Glen. The hemlocks and wetland here nestle against a jumbled rise of huge, jagged, bear-hosting boulders to make a primordial place comparable only to the Palmaghatt Ravine. It has mystery, a special olfactory weight, the visual saturation of color in shade, and topography that keeps snow on the ground into June.It should not be altered.

Unfortunately the plan is to widen its existing path into a carriageway, specifically to encourage more traffic (especially cyclists) up over the top of the Ridge to the other side. How could this possibly be a good idea? An elemental refuge will become just another thoroughfare. We are environmentally, morally and spiritually obligated to preserve the power of this small stretch of trail to stop our hearts with its bigness.

We hope these changes turn out to be unnecessary and the park managers opt instead for benign neglect. It is not always necessary to do something — some places can be, some places should be, just left to themselves.

To read the master plan for yourself, log on to the website nysparks.state.ny.us/inside-our-agency/masterplans.aspx and scroll down to Minnewaska. In the clickable table of contents there, you can choose the text on page 15 of Appendix B, "Trails Plan," and view the maps in figures 2 (AR existing conditions) and 4 (concept of bike trail) in "Trails Plan Figures." You may also want to view the "Final Trails Plan Map."

Patty Parmalee and Janet Kern are board members of Friends of the Shawangunks and active in Gardiner and Shawangunk politics.

A Very Brief Ecological History of the Shawangunks since European Settlement

By John Thompson, DSRC natural resources specialist

The northern Shawangunk Mountains support more than 35 natural communities, including three that are globally rare and eight that are rare in New York State, and 42 state rare species. The unique combination of climate, bedrock geology, soils, and physiography of the Shawangunk landscape gives rise to a remarkable array of species adapted to these conditions. Higher elevations are dominated by ridgetop pine barrens and oak forest, ravines by eastern hemlock. European settlement of the area in the 18th century led to farming of deeper soils for cultivation and pasture, logging in scattered woodlots, and cutting trails to access other natural resources of the area. From the mid-19th to the early 20th century, nearly all land was cleared except for inaccessible talus slopes, cliffs, and remote swamps. The debris left from tree harvesting provided fuel for intense fires that burned over the land. The low yield of this mountainous land was barely able to support the needs of the local people.

The decline of industries and agriculture concurrent with the rise of the resort industry led to less intensive land-use. Resorts provided the first regular seasonal employment for locals, lessening people's reliance on cottage industries. Property values rose as well, and some local people sold out and moved on. These factors and a slackening demand for local products eventually led to expanded tree cover during the latter half of the 20th century.

At the end of the 20th century, two main ecological forces began driving succession at higher elevations: fire suppression and overbrowsing by white-tailed deer. The spatial arrangement of 21st century ecological communities is similar to the pattern of ecological communities that existed before people logged, burned, and farmed the land Today, the "Gunks" are a world-renowned recreational resource for rock climbing and hiking and are an important economic driver for neighboring communities. Changes in forest structure and composition are affected by both past and current processes. Understanding the dynamics of this system will help land managers to make informed decisions about stewardship of this biologically rich landscape.

Our next issue will enlarge on this fascinating history.

Rock Climbers as Environmentalists?

Keith LaBudde

Information in this article was drawn from the files of Friends of the Shawangunks and the personal files of Bob Larsen.

Friends has always credited Keith Smiley of the Mohonk Mountain House with starting the organization in a 1963 letter addressed to "Friends of the Shawangunks" drumming up opposition to a proposal in the U.S. Congress to construct a skyline drive along the top of the ridge. The actual development of the organization owes much to the rock climbing community.

Once the bill to construct the skyline drive was withdrawn, the next organized environmental activity in the Shawangunks (other than the creation of The Mohonk Trust) occurred in 1970, when a letter on Friends of the Shawangunks letterhead was mailed by a "steering committee" seeking support to "save the Minnewaska-Awosting land from being sold for development." The letter identified 37 members of the committee, and was signed by Hans Kraus, James P. McCarthy, and Fritz Wiessner as Co-chairmen. Wiessner is credited with "discovering" the Shawangunks as a rock climbing area in 1935 and starting its development with a small group of climbers from the New York chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club. Kraus joined the group in1940, and he and Wiessner then joined forces to expand climbing in the Gunks. McCarthy had started climbing in 1951 as a student at Princeton, and quickly became the best climber in the area. Almost all of the 37 members of the steering committee were members of the AMC, and most were—or had been—climbers. I was quite surprised to find my name on the list of the steering committee since I had been climbing for only three years. I suspect the "committee" was simply people who had responded to some earlier solicitation. Interestingly, the committee also included one former Friends board member, Bob Larsen, and another current board member, Larry Randall.

Annie O'Neill climbing in 2007

The 1970 letter mentions The Nature Conservancy's negotiations to purchase 6,700 acres of Minnewaska land (successfully completed later that year), expresses concern for protecting the Millbrook Cliff, and urges that recipients of the letter "interested in the future of the Shawangunks quietly and without publicity make contributions to the (sic) Mohonk Trust (Millbrook Fund) for land acquisition in the area." (It is noteworthy that the Open Space Institute made the first acquisition of a portion of the Millbrook Cliff just this year, 40 years after this letter was sent.)

Another letter from the steering committee was sent in 1971, noting "there are a number of small blocks of land in strategic locations that are still in private ownership," and urging contributions to The Mohonk Trust for their acquisition. Clearly, the focus of this early steering committee was on protecting the Shawangunks through land acquisition by The Mohonk Trust (later renamed Mohonk Preserve).

The 1976 filing for bankruptcy by Lake Minnewaska Mountain House caused much concern about what would eventually happen to that property, and resulted in the formation of another steering committee in 1977, chaired by Barbara Rubin (a weekender who had been a climber, along with her partner Bob Larsen, known as "Black Larsen" among the Vulgarians with whom they climbed). The committee consisted of several concerned locals and representatives of the Sierra Club, N.Y. Health Department, Adirondack Mountain Club, Appalachian Mountain Club, and N.Y.-N.J. Trail Conference. (At least one of these representatives had climbed.) This group "decided to activate Friends of the Shawangunks as a permanent, ongoing organization to serve as a private citizens' watchdog." Here the emphasis had shifted from protecting land through acquisition to the broader watchdog mission now served by Friends.

In Bob Larsen's files is a photograph (date unknown) showing a meeting at the Egg's Nest in High Falls of a mixed group of local people, a few climbers, and Phil Gitlen, the attorney retained by Friends in its efforts to prevent the Marriott development at Minnewaska. (Phil is currently our General Counsel, so he has a very long association with Friends.) Was this group acting as a board? Probably not, for during the early years of the Marriott fight Friends was loosely "organized," with Barbara Rubin continuing as chair, and Bob Larsen serving as treasurer. Bob Anderberg of OSI was once a climbing ranger for the Mohonk Trust and after law school joined the Friends board during Marriott days.

Friends had become more formally organized by the early 1980s, when I joined the board. Significantly, every board member—with one possible exception—was a rock climber or had been in the past. Four others were still actively climbing, a couple at a fairly high level. It wasn't until 1989 that a new board member was added, a realtor, not a climber. It is no coincidence that Friends should look for a realtor, for it had just created its own land acquisition organization, The Shawangunk Conservancy. This marked a return to the early concept of protecting the Shawangunks by purchasing land. In subsequent years, as some of the early board members have dropped off the board, climber representation on the board has decreased, until today there are only three, all senior citizens: Annie O'Neill (who was one of the climbers on the board when I joined), myself, and Larry Randall (one of the people on the 1970 steering committee, who started climbing at the same time I did in the fall of 1967).

What was it that drew rock climbers to an effort to protect the Shawangunks? For one thing, climbers tended to become very familiar with the area beyond the cliffs, and came to recognize what a special place this is. There certainly was an early interest in protecting rock-climbing areas (e.g., Millbrook) and adjacent properties through acquisition, but it really wasn't until the Marriott threat at Minnewaska that a core group realized other tactics were required. A few private citizens couldn't raise the money to acquire the threatened land, so it was necessary to challenge the plans, to show they were unworkable, and to convince Marriott of this fact. This approach worked, and is still used by Friends, aided in some cases by the enactment by local municipalities of protective legislation. There still is interest in protecting cliffs, not only for climbing, but, more importantly, as part of a larger ecosystem that includes the talus and adjacent areas.

Keith LaBudde has been a climber for 43 years and president of Friends for 17 years.

Save the Lakes Status Report #2 October 30, 2010

Save the Lakes is continuing to work to stop the development of the Williams Lake project in Rosendale. It is a massive project in a very fragile area. Below are some notes from the group's latest findings and research.

The big question is what's happening with the DEIS? Late in March, Hudson River Valley Resorts (HRVR) submitted to the DEC a 500-page Draft Environmental Impact Statement with about 4500 pages of Appendices. The next step in the environmental review process should be formal acceptance of that document by the DEC for review, after which it will be made available to the public and other involved agencies. That hasn't happened. HRVR has complained in public, through its attorneys, and in a whispering campaign, that the DEC is dragging its feet, unnecessarily delaying their proposed project. Is that really the case? Let's look at the facts:

On April 20th, the DEC advised HRVR by letter that the submitted DEIS was "inadequate for the purpose of commencing public review." They specifically identified as issues "approval of wildlife survey protocols" and "retention of a specialist in the field of karst study," who would review the protocols used by HRVR to "determine whether the work already performed is sufficient to allow determination of impacts to the myriad of issues related to hydro-geology." DEC agreed to proceed to review the submitted material "as preliminary documents."

On July 14, with encouragement from Save The Lakes, the Town Board authorized an expenditure of up to $1000 to hire nationally renowned expert Dr. Ralph Ewers of Ewers Water Consultants in Richmond, KY, to review HRVR's karst study. Karst is a form of porous, irregular limestone geology that makes a determination of water-flow patterns extremely difficult. Knowledge of such patterns is critical to analyzing water supply and wastewater disposal capabilities. (The expenditure was to come from an escrow account established by HRVR.)

On August 11th, the DEC informed HRVR by letter that it had completed its preliminary review and identified numerous "issues regarding the presentation and organization of the document, and on errors, omissions, and inconsistencies."

Does that sound like foot dragging?

On August 13th, the DEC sent HRVR a list of 18 additional minor errors in the DEIS, such as incorrect cross-references, missing Table of Contents entries, missing pages, etc.

On August 27th, the Town provided DEC with 18 pages of comments on the DEIS from the Town Planning Board and Environmental Commission, including:

"The DEIS states that no karst features exist on the site, but the document does not appear to include an explanation of how this conclusion was reached." They advised awaiting the results of the already-contracted outside expert.

Save the Lakes (STL) challenge the assertion that the proposed resort would use only 69% more water than peak days at the former Williams Lake resort.

There are many conclusions stated without explanation as to how they were reached, and the supporting documentation does not appear to justify them.

STL has identified several areas in which the DEIS failed to cover the material agreed to in the Scoping document approved in April of 2009.

On September 14th, Dr. Ewers submitted his much-awaited 7-page report on HRVR's karst investigation. In contrast to HRVR's assertion that "geologic features typical of a karst type terrain (natural caves, sink holes) are not present on the Site," Dr. Ewers, after reviewing the material provided by HRVR, concludes that "it is likely that a karst aquifer or aquifers exist at the site."

In reviewing the methodology used by HRVR, Dr. Ewers observed that "there was a lack of experimental rigor on several counts." He further noted that a scientific instrument HRVR claims to have used is unknown to its purported manufacturer. And he also found that several tests conducted by HRVR were not a valid or convincing tests...."

Finally, in assessing whether the DEIS addresses the requirements of the Scoping document, Dr. Ewers stated, "I find the DEIS insufficient to satisfy the requirements of the Final Scoping Document that are listed below," followed by nine specific points on which the DEIS is deficient.

On September 24th, in response to a question from the DEC regarding the dye-tracing data provided by HRVR, Dr. Ewers responded, "In a word, they are worthless."

So, is the acceptance of the DEIS being unreasonably delayed by the DEC, or does the delay result from HRVR's submission of a document that: does not address the issues defined in the Scope; reaches unsupported conclusions; contains inadequate science; and is replete with organizational errors? You be the judge.

Save The Lakes believes that the outside opinion obtained by the Town with regard to karst represents the tip of a very large iceberg. Only experts are qualified to critically examine much of the data provided by HRVR, and independence of such experts is critical (HRVR's "no karst" conclusion was provided by *their* expert). Expertise required by DEC, as lead agency, will be funded by HRVR, but they believe other areas of the DEIS also warrant greater scrutiny, for which they must provide their own funding. STL thanks those of you who have already contributed, but they still need financial help. Please see the website savethelakes.org

Long Path Gap Filled as FOS Leads the Way

By Neil Zimmerman

Last spring the Open Space Institute (OSI) put out the call: "Help us fill a gap on the Long Path in the Shawangunks" by acquiring the 2.32-acre "Rodriguez" property in Sullivan County. FOS quickly decided to lead the way with a $2,500 inaugural donation. Then we e-mailed our members for help with the remaining $7,500, and this joint OSI/FOS effort was successful within one month. Generously, The Depuy Canal House in High Falls offered a free dinner for two randomly selected donors.

The Long Path is a superb hiking trail that runs from the western anchorage of the George Washington Bridge in New Jersey to John Boyd Thacher State Park outside Albany. This 347-mile ribbon of green, managed, built and maintained by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, has been painstakingly extended by OSI at several points along the way—in Albany, in the Shawangunks and in the Hudson Highlands.

We now had an unexpected opportunity to fill in a important gap in the trail. The parcel, in the Town of Mamakating, is small but critical. We needed to raise the funds by the end of May 2010 and we did!

By acquiring the "Rodriguez" property, we were able to link two large state forests—the Roosa Gap State Forest and the Wurtsboro Ridge State Forest—and permanently protect the trail corridor as it wends its way up the rocky spine of the southern Shawangunk Ridge.

Thanks again to the many e-mail connected members who helped. We did it!

Wildlife Rehab in the Shawangunks

By Annie Mardiney

The Shawangunk Mountains are home to over 1,400 different plants and animals, including over 200 species of nesting birds, birds of special concern such as the Eastern bluebird, red-headed woodpecker and the Coopers hawk, endangered birds such as the peregrine falcon, and hundreds of federally-protected migratory birds. The lucky wild animals and birds have no interaction with the hundreds of thousands of visitors in the Gunks every year, other than perhaps being seen racing across a trail or flying out of sight overhead. However, some orphaned or injured wild critters end up in the hands of local wildlife rehabilitators.

There are about a dozen active NYS-DEC licensed wildlife rehabilitators in Ulster County. Four of these "rehabbers" also hold a special license from the Federal Fish and Wildlife Service to work with migratory birds. Special licenses managed by the NYS-DEC are required for those who wish to rehabilitate rabies-vector species (bats, skunks, raccoons, and sometimes fox). At present, there are no rehabbers licensed to work with rabies-vector species in Ulster County. The NYS-DEC requires special caging facilities for rehabbing bears, and has restrictions on the rehabilitation and transportation of white-tailed deer, due to the threat of CWD (chronic wasting disease). Although there are not enough rehabbers to meet the demand, this area does have rehabbers who specialize in woodchucks, possums, deer, snakes, reptiles, and just about all other native species.

Wildlife rehabilitators are required to pass a written state test, annually document their intakes and results, and allow state or federal officials to inspect their facilities at any reasonable time. Rehabilitators are not allowed to charge for their services, but may accept donations of cash or supplies. By law, rehabilitators are required to either release a wild animal, humanely euthanize unreleasable animals, or give unreleasable animals to licensed wildlife educators (rarely an option).

All but eleven bird species found in NYS are protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. This act prohibits the killing or capture of most birds. It is a federal misdemeanor to collect wild bird feathers. Although nests may be in inconvenient spots, and their hatchlings messy, it's against federal law to remove the nest, eggs or nestlings. Even birds that don't always migrate, such as robins, bluejays, chickadees, bluebirds and herons, are protected by this law. The exceptions are interesting: several non-native species (rock pigeons, house sparrows, European starlings, mute swans); game birds that don't migrate and are managed by the DEC (such as wild turkeys, quail, pheasants, Canada geese, grouse); and certain blackbirds in specific agricultural situations.

As a NYS wildlife rehabilitator and federally-licensed migratory bird rehabilitator, I choose to treat all incoming mammals and birds with the same effort in order to raise them, heal them or ease their suffering. I specialize in birds and rabbits. Although I realize that eastern cottontail rabbits are on the bottom of the feeding pool, I spend hours raising "pinkie" bunnies to about five weeks of age, so they may be successfully released. This is an anchor species that dozens of other species are dependent upon for survival. There is also some concern about a sharp decline in the overall population of eastern cottontail rabbits in the Northeast, which has not yet been explained by researchers. I hand-feed and release dozens of English house sparrows every year, although they are aggressive and voracious. European starlings are a hugely-successful invasive species, and not particularly handsome. However, did you know that they are part of the mynah family, are very intelligent, and can be taught to speak several words? This past year, I rescued a young blind starling from an unlicensed person, and the bird is now living safely at the Forsyth Nature Center in Kingston, where she is being used as an educational bird.

Threats to wildlife in the Shawangunk region are many. Besides unnecessary human intervention, wildlife must deal with collisions with vehicles; collisions with power lines which shatter wings and legs; lead poisoning from fishing weights and bullets; entanglement in fishing lines left by irresponsible fishermen; storms that knock down nests and trees; loggers who inadvertently destroy nests; building contractors who find baby birds in eaves or chimneys; wounds from hunters, lawn mowers and farming machines going over nests; attacks by predators; and capture by domestic and feral cats.

When I tally my records at the end of each year, the vast majority of injured rabbits and birds that I have taken in are injured by pet cats. One puncture wound from a cat will easily kill its victim, primarily due to the bacteria in cat saliva. I liken it to poison. One recent study found there were at least 1.4 million free-raging cats in rural Wisconsin, and that each killed five to six birds a year. That works out to approximately eight million dead birds in Wisconsin alone.

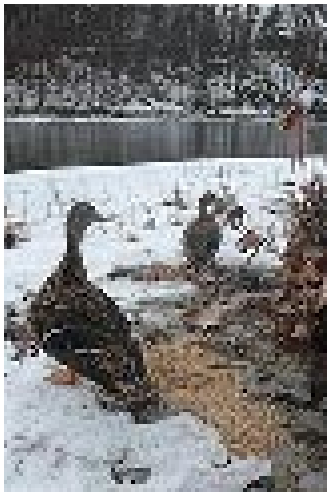
I took in 134 birds and 64 mammals in 2009. Cats injured 35 of them; dogs injured 9; 16 were injured by unknown causes; mowers injured 10; 10 collided with windows or cars; 24 were babies with the whereabouts of parents unknown; 24 were orphaned due to logging or construction, and there were cases of bacterial infections, possible cases of West Nile virus, and a number of unknown cases of illness. I sent one adult rabbit up to the NYS DEC lab for rabies testing (which came back negative).

Every year, some cases stand out from the rest.

Neighbors on retreat at Mohonk Mountain House, happened to be in one of the sitting rooms when they heard a rustle in the unlit fireplace. Upon closer look, turns out it was a fallen nest of six fledgling chimney swifts.Due to the rarity of unlined brick chimneys in the Northeast, chimney swifts are rapidly declining in population. A Mohonk staff person, not knowing what else to do, decided to put the nest of babies outside. Luckily, my neighbors took responsibility, drove the fledglings down the mountain to me, left a note, and went back to their retreat. Chimney swifts require housing that resembles a brick chimney so they learn to roost correctly. They eat live meal worms by the fist full (well, by the tweezers-full), with great gusto and tremendous ruckus, all day, dawn to dusk. This batch of swifts thrived, and were successfully released in northern Pennsylvania in the early fall.

Earlier this summer I received a call from a veterinarian near Newburgh, NY. Someone had brought them a nestling green heron, who was unable to balance and walk, but had no fractured bones or any other obvious injury. They didn't know what to do with her, and so I took her in. It's possible she had a congenital problem, or lead poisoning. She had private quarters in one of my outdoor aviaries, where I taught her to catch feeder fish in a large rubber pool, supplemented by hard-boiled eggs, meal worms and freeze-dried shrimp and krill. Over time, she grew into a beauty, and learned to walk, perch and fly. I released her in the late summer at a large golf course at the base of the Shawangunks, where there are, interestingly, many healthy pools and small swamps.

A year ago, I took in a starving young fisher found in Tillson. Because I choose not to raise predators on my poultry farm, I transferred him to another rehabber. He quickly put on weight and learned to hunt. The rehabber first tried to release him back where he was found, but he approached people, so he was taken in for more "training." A couple months later he was successfully released at the base of the Shawangunk Mountains.



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Early this fall, I received a call from staff at Minnewaska State Park Preserve. While cleaning litter from roadsides, staff found an injured porcupine. In fact, they had found it the day before, but assumed it was dead because it wasn't moving. Luckily, someone took a closer look, found that it was indeed alive, and contacted me. Another rehabber ended up with the poor animal, and found that it was suffering from a bullet wound. Unfortunately, it did not survive.

This past spring, a concerned citizen driving down a road saw a fawn laying motionless in the ditch. He decided to "save" the fawn, as it's mother was no where in sight. He walked into the post office where I work with the "orphaned" fawn. Too late to return him to his mother, I transferred him to another rehabber who already had a stable of four other "orphaned" fawns. All have since been successfully released into the woods and fields in the Shawangunks. A fawn's instinct is to lay completely motionless wherever it's mother puts it. The mother is always nearby, watching, and will feed the fawn after dark. Fawns behave in this manner, in part because their hooves do not harden for a week, making it difficult to walk or run any distance.

I have spent hours searching for or trying to capture evasive injured animals. I've gotten better over the years at capturing them, but take no chances with my own safety. Except for that one time last winter when I finally chased a mute swan with an injured leg around and across a frozen lake, until I simply wore her out! It was my third attempt, and I wasn't coming back again!

Another particularly trying event involved the search for an injured hawk that a concerned driver passed by the hairpin turn on Rte. 44/55 last fall. The bird was seen sitting in the middle of the road as cars raced by. With specific road signs as markers, my oldest son and I drove up to the site during a wicked thunder and lighting storm, with flashlights, special 18-foot nets, and mud boots, and searched for an hour on foot for the bird. Alas, it must have been just stunned and flown off. The ride home was no fun, as the shortcut down Clove Road was closed by a fallen tree.

2010 seemed to have an unusual number of cases of mange in raccoons, coyotes and fox. It was also a banner year for flying, red and gray squirrels. I took in a large number of cedar waxwings, chimney swifts, red-tail hawks, bluebirds, swifts, swallows, wrens and bunnies.

For more information about becoming a licensed rehabilitator, go to the NYS DEC web site and look under "special licenses." Useful information may also be found on the web sites for the NYS Wildlife Federation and the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association (NWRA) All of these organizations keep lists of active rehabilitators. Most area veterinarians, pet stores and local and state police have contact lists of rehabilitators. The annual NWRA symposium is being held on February 22-26 in Albany, NY. Anyone is welcome to attend and take the many hands-on workshops. For instructions on how to break your cat's outdoor habits, go to abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/ or birding.about.com/od/birdconservation/a/catsandbirds.htm.

Feel free to contact me for help with injured or orphaned wild animals, or if you are interested in becoming a licenses wildlife rehabilitator: amardiney@hvc.rr.com or 845-658-3467.

Annie Mardiney is a board member of Friends of the Shawangunks. She has been a wildlife rehabber for five years, has a real job, raises chickens, and walks in the woods whenever possible.

Rescued Wildlife found in the Shawangunks

Top to Bottom: Flying Squirrels who fell out of their nest; fledgling chimney swifts released end of summer; wild rabbits released one month later; Redtail Hawk that hit wires while targeting prey paralyzed both legs and had to be euthanized. ***Photos by Annie Mardiney***

Top Left:American Black Ducks being released on the Rondout River.

Friends Goes Online

www.Shawangunks.org

Check out Friends of the Shawangunks website at **www.Shawangunks.org**

It has a back issues of our newsletter *Shawangunk Watch,* links to dozens of Shawangunk sites, updates on ridge projects and threats, and more than 80 photos showing natural features of the ridge. The site also provides an easy way to join Friends, contact us, or send a donation using a credit card.

Xmas Idea: Give a Friends Tee Shirt

From now until the end of 2010 our tee shirts will be $15, and that includes shipping.

Our new shirt is 100% cotton, and features a portion of the NY/NJ Trail map so you can never be lost if you hike in that area! Go to our website: shawangunks.org to get an order form.

Please Consider a Year-End Contribution

There is still work to be done protecting Open Space and it is critical to be able to do it now!

Thank You For your Support

YES, I want to support your work

q YES, I would like to join

q	Benefactor	$ 250
q	Patron	$ 100
q	Family Member	$ 25
q	Individual	$ 15
q	Other	$ _____

I would like to make an additional contribution of:

q$10 q$25 q$50 q$100 qOther $ _____

Amount to go to The Shawangunk Conservancy Land Acquisition Fund $ _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED $ _____

Please make checks payable to *Friends of the Shawangunks* or *The Shawangunk Conservancy*. Contributions are tax-deductible.

Name (please print)

Street or Road

City **State** **Zip**

q This is a change of address

E-mail address

q This is a change of e-mail

Matching Grants: If the organization for which you work has a matching grant program, just send us the forms and we will do the rest. IBM matching checks must be made out to The Shawangunk Conservancy.

Mail contributions to: *Friends of the Shawangunks*, P.O. Box 270, Accord, NY 12404

FRIENDS of the SHAWANGUNKS
Preserving Open Space Since 1963

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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A copy of FOS and The Shawangunk Conservancy's latest financial report may be obtained by writing to the Office of the Attorney General, Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271, or by writing to The Shawangunk Conservancy.