

Shawangunk WATCH

Friends of the Shawangunks and The Shawangunk Conservancy

APRIL, 2014

Volume 19 Number 1

Sam's Point,
Minnewaska
State Park
Preserve

The Southern Shawangunk Ridge Trail

GREAT NEW LAND ACQUISITION ❖ THE BASHA KILL ❖ BIODIVERSITY

PHOTOGRAPH: HARDIE TRUESDALE

Preserving Open Space in the Shawangunks since 1963

THE LAWN PARCEL: NEWLY PRESERVED IN PORT BEN

Thomas Nozkowski

IN LATE DECEMBER, 2013 the Open Space Institute purchased almost 364 acres of land on the northwestern slope of the Shawangunks in the hamlet of Port Ben, township of Wawarsing. This piece of land, called the Lawn parcel after the family that had owned it since 1970, stretches from a few hundred feet south of the Rondout Creek in Port Ben to about two hundred feet above the Smiley Road near Napanoch Point. The old High Point road starts here just west of Four-Mile Camp. It is a beautiful piece of land.

The Lawn Parcel includes two notable landmarks: a section of the Native American



trail that crossed the Ridge from prehistoric times and the beautiful inner-facing escarpment visible from Napanoch Point. It also provides crucial—and best—access to other natural and historic landmarks like Jacob's Ladder, The Witches Hole with its great waterfall, and the Beaver Brook.

In a way similar to Mine Hollow, immediately to the east, this land drains a large section of predominately rock-capped ridge. The rock holds little water back and so this area is rich in moisture and vegetation. Only patches of pitch pine exist on the Lawn Parcel—no barrens here; they are above us. Last September I walked the old road, parts eroded and parts pristine, to the Inner Escarpment.



The variety of mosses ranged in banks along the road was absolutely extraordinary. The smell of topsoil, fine rot, filled the air. A young rattlesnake warned me away from picking up



the skin he had just shed on a warm ledge. This is one great type of Shawangunk terrain. The Lawn family have been good stewards and much of this land looks untouched.

Not that it is. A hundred years ago this was a vacation spot, site of a large boarding house and “summer home.” The Burton Hill House was built before the Civil War by Reuben Burton. Like many of the older hostelries in the Rondout Valley, it may have been converted from a farmhouse, but we first learn of it as an eight-room structure for travelers and workers on the D&H Canal. It grew larger after the Ontario & Western Railroad came down the valley in 1871. By 1905 it advertised facilities for 45 residents, fresh food and recreation. Marc Fried notes in his book *The Huckleberry Pickers* that the trails

here provided the main entry points to the Ridge for the blueberry pickers of Napanoch and Port Ben. This was the quickest route to Four-Mile Camp on the Smiley Road. The hollow was logged some time ago.

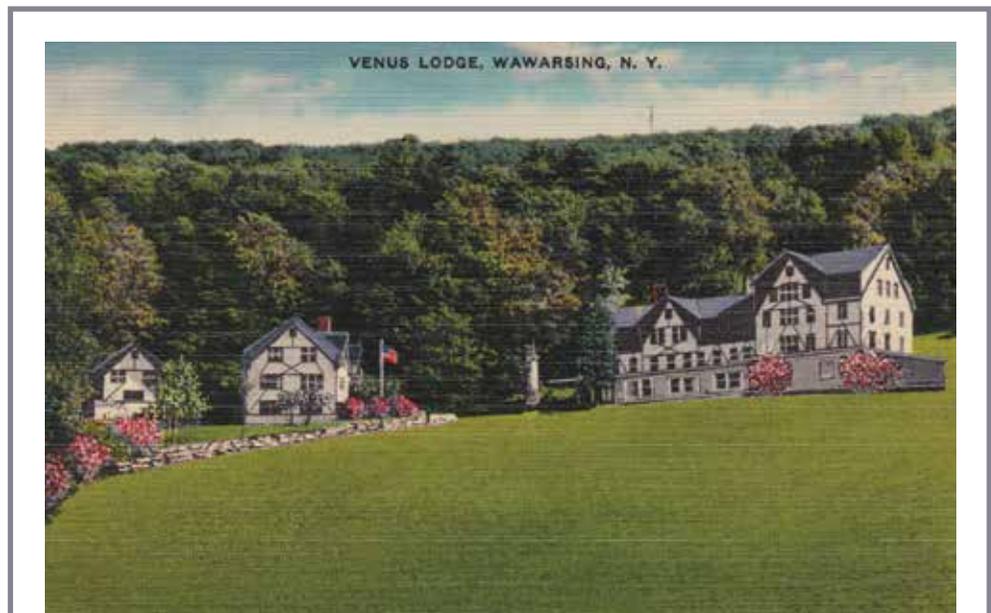
Andrew Lawn dedicated much time and effort to keeping two important old trails marked and open over the years. He should be thanked and remembered for that. The old road and the Indian Path down from Jacob's Ladder could be a magnificent route for the Long Path, leading straight down to the Port



Ben bridge over the Rondout and allowing direct access to the Catskill Preserve via the Vernooey Kill and Lundy Estate.

All of us who love the Shawangunks have another reason to be grateful to our friends at the Open Space Institute for stepping up once again to preserve one more piece of this wonderful land.

Thomas is a board member of Friends.



Venus Lodge was the final version of the Lawn Parcel hotel. In the early twentieth century the buildings acquired layers of stucco and some half-timbering. The kitchen offered German cuisine. The large buildings were still standing in 1970. The small building on the left survives to this day.

Shawangunk WATCH

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This issue was edited and assembled
by Keith LaBudde, Thomas Nozkowski,
Annie O'Neill and Patty Lee Parmalee.*



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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,
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FRIENDS GIVES \$10,000 GRANT TO THE BASHA KILL AREA ASSOCIATION

Paula Medley and Keith LaBudde



THE MISSION OF FRIENDS OF THE SHAWANGUNKS is to protect the Shawangunk Ridge from adverse impacts. We have found that when a threat to the ridge arises, we can often be most effective if we work with a group of citizens from the town in which the threat occurs who are anxious to fight the threat. Outspoken citizens of a town can have a greater impact on town officials than an organization with a broader mission. An example of this is the support provided by Friends for the ad hoc group Save the Ridge in the fight against the proposed Awosting Reserve development. In this case Friends paid 85% of the legal expenses incurred in the successful struggle.

In a similar vein Friends has given Basha Kill Area Association a grant of \$10,000 to assist the BKAA in its opposition to two proposed developments: a housing development know as Seven Peaks and a casino on the old Shawanga Lodge property, both in the Town of Mamakating. Both properties are located on top of the ridge, and as such are obstacles to the Shawangunk Ridge Trail (see article on page 4).

SEVEN PEAKS

Seven Peaks consists of forty-nine 8,500 square-foot mansions (with six bedrooms and seven or more bathrooms) on a 650-acre parcel that encompasses the ridge top and lands extending down both the eastern and western flanks. (There also is a proposal for a future development on another 27 acres.) Two high-gradient tributaries originate on the site and drain into the Basha Kill Wildlife Management Area. Two other tributaries drain the eastern flank into the Shawangunk Kill, a New York State Wild and Scenic River.

Mamakating's planning board is currently reviewing the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Since the board has a new chair, members, attorney, engineer and planner, it may be a while before the FEIS is declared "complete" and released for public input. A special workshop, open to the public, will be scheduled in April. At that time the BKAA and its attorney will need to be ready to address the proposals that would seriously impact the ridge.

SHAWANGA LODGE

Once New York state voters approved casino gambling, the owner of the property, David Flaum of Rochester, New York, came forward with a proposal for a casino on the site. (Flaum has floated a variety of proposed developments for the site in the past.) On February 4 the Mamakating Town Board unanimously endorsed the concept. The site straddles the top of the ridge, again with drainage into both the Basha Kill and Shawangunk Kill. Access to the site is via Exit 114 from Route 17 (eventually to be Interstate 86). Exit 114 provides only a westbound exit; there is no eastbound exit, nor any entrances.

This is the only privately-owned land on the ridge between Routes 17 and 52 (the route over the mountain from Ellenville). On the ridge north of this property are Wurtsboro Ridge, Roosa Gap and Shawangunk Ridge State Forests. Open Space Institute has tried to purchase the Shawanga Lodge property, without success.

At this time the casino is simply an idea. No plans exist.

Paula, a long-time member of Friends, is president of the BKAA. Keith is a Friends board member.

Notes on the southern section of the Shawangunk Ridge Trail

Andy Garrison
and
Jakob Franke

SINCE THE GEOLOGICAL SHAWANGUNK Ridge extends down into New Jersey and even farther, it is an obvious candidate for long-distance through-hiking access as well as preservation of an ecologically significant ridgetop corridor for species survival and migration. What follows is an overview of the route of just such a trail, focusing especially on the southern Shawangunks.

The Shawangunk Ridge Trail (SRT) begins at the Appalachian Trail within High Point State Park in New Jersey. This is the southern extension of the Shawangunk Ridge known as the Kittatinny Ridge. The original reasoning behind the SRT was to provide a backpacking alternative to the Orange County Long Path (LP) route, which contained long stretches of road walking. The idea was that backpackers could take the Appalachian Trail in Harriman State Park, hike south (west) to High Point State Park, and continue north on the SRT to meet the LP again on the Wurtsboro Ridge. This part of the SRT, which was built from 1991-1993, ended originally in Sam's Point Preserve, where it connected with the Verkeerderkill Falls Trail, part of the LP.

Although the SRT has never become popular as the LP alternative that was originally envisioned, it is a fine trail in its own right and has become the focus of a major greenway project along the southern Shawangunks, and a large portion of the original SRT has now been incorporated into the LP following a major reroute of the LP in Orange County in 2012.

In High Point State Park the SRT climbs over the highest point of New Jersey while passing the High Point Monument. Fine views are had here. As you descend north the views continue for some time. The SRT crosses Cedar Swamp on a boardwalk and also passes through Blueberry. After 3.1 miles the SRT leaves New Jersey and crosses into Orange County, New York, in the town of Greenville. The trail leaves High Point State Park and crosses onto private land. It's the largest private holding (500 plus acres) left this far south on the Shawangunk Ridge. For the next 1.5 miles the trail crosses this parcel and

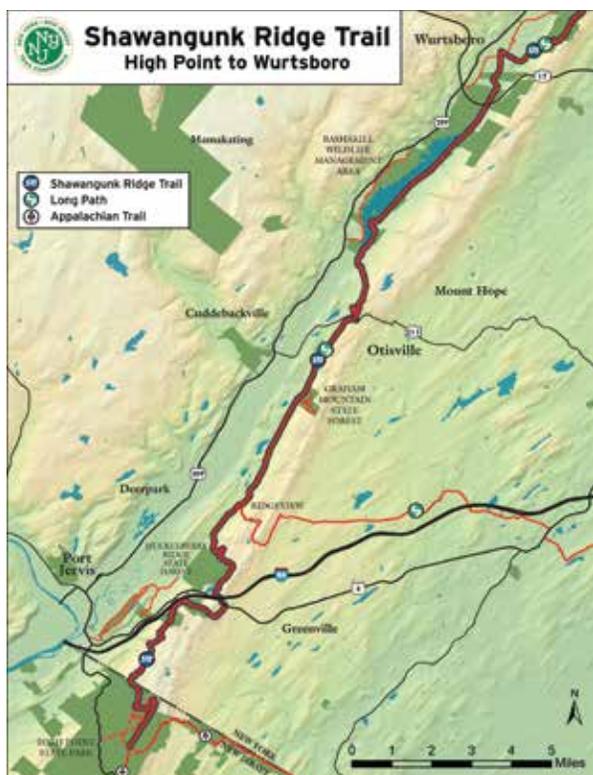


reaches the Greenville Turnpike. For its first 12 years of existence the SRT followed roads in this region to Hathorn Lake. In 2004 we reduced that long road walk when we built a two-mile trail on land acquired by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference (NYNJTC). Several nice views are had along this section. This land has since become part of the Huckleberry Ridge State Forest (HRSF).

Currently Interstate 84 is a significant barrier for the SRT, and the trail follows local roads for about 6/10 of mile before again reaching the woods. HRSF adjoins I-84 on both its north and south sides. A land bridge over I-84 would significantly improve the wildlife corridor here. It could also eliminate I-84 as a barrier for the SRT.

Beyond I-84 the trail passes Hathorn Lake and reaches the woods. Currently the trail goes along the border of the original HRSF parcel on private land. A plan is in place to move the trail onto this preserved parcel, which has nice features and a good view. Beyond the state forest the trail crosses private land on the west side of the Shawangunk Ridge below the main ridge line. The NYNJTC is currently working to preserve some of the parcels on the north side of HRSF. The trail passes through Shin Hollow and west of the recently acquired Ridgeview parcel, and joins the LP here. The LP comes over the ridge through the Ridgeview parcel. Another lower ridge which abuts the Neversink River is to the west of the trail. Shin Hollow east of the railroad tracks is currently an undeveloped area with nothing more than a couple of hunting shacks.

The bridge for Shin Hollow Road over the railroad tracks has been condemned for many years now. Metro North has agreed to rebuild





the bridge at some point in the future and this will be bad for the trail in this area, as it will likely encourage development. As the trail leaves Shin Hollow it crosses a couple of private parcels and reaches an abandoned rail bed, owned by Norfolk Southern. It's the lifeline of the SRT in this region. The rail bed passes through a large landholding of

a local religious group and is our only way through for the trail. We are currently putting together a plan to try to preserve this rail bed.

The rail bed passes through the towns of Deer Park and Mount Hope and brings the trail to Route 211. Following a short road walk the trail climbs to the ridge on the Gobbler's Knob parcel, originally purchased by the Open Space institute (OSI). This land is now owned by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Following that the trail descends back to the road and reaches the Basha Kill, which it follows all the way to Wurtsboro in the town of Mamakating, in Sullivan County. Although the SRT was originally envisioned as a ridge trail, ownership on the ridge in this area was too fragmented to acquire a trail corridor. The rail bed along the Basha Kill has proven to be a very attractive alternative to the ridge, and with the D&H Canal towpath on the west side of the Basha Kill, loop hikes are a real possibility. Currently there are still almost two miles of road walk in Wurtsboro, but we are actively exploring possibilities to eliminate most of this road walk.

Past the Village of Wurtsboro the LP/SRT climbs back to the ridge, and the next 15 miles to Sam's Point offer some of the best vistas in the entire Shawangunks. The trail is here completely on state land, but one of the current drawbacks in this region is the lack of loop hikes. When the proposed Unit Management Plan (UMP) for the Shawangunks becomes a reality, increased parking opportunities and the creation of side trails on both sides of the ridge will undoubtedly help to

popularize hiking in this area.

In 2013 the SRT has been extended all the way the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail by co-blazing existing trails with SRT markers. In Sam's Point and Minnewaska State Park Preserve this includes the Verkeerderkill Falls, Scenic, Rainbow Falls, Jenny Lane, Wawarsing Turnpike, and High Peters Kill trails. In Mohonk Preserve the SRT is co-aligned with the Old Minnewaska, Undivided Lot, Chapel, and Crag trails, and Cedar Drive, Bonticou Path, and the Northeast Trail to Mountain Rest Road. From there it is approximately 4 miles on local roads to the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail, which it will reach about 65 miles from the AT.

The land acquisitions in the southern Shawangunks have been in large part spearheaded by the NYNJTC, with help from OSI and the Orange County Land Trust. A few of the parcels, now part of HRSE, are located below Route 6 in the Town of Deer Park, and contain nearly 10 miles of trails with some fine views. In the near future these trails will get connected to the SRT.

Another small trail system is located in Graham Mountain State Forest, in the Town of Mount Hope. These trails are connected with the SRT but accessibility is an issue and these fine trails are therefore underutilized. With luck the soon-to-be-finished UMP for the Shawangunk Ridge will fix that.

Andy Garrison and Jakob Franke are co-chairs for the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference of both the

For information on the UMP see <http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/93937.html>. And additional information about both long-distance trails can be found in the online version of the Long Path guidebook, on the NYNJTC website: www.nynjtc.org/book/long-path-guide-softcopy.



*Top left: Outside of Port Jervis.
Above top: In the Roosa Gap area.
Above: The Shawangunk Ridge Trail near the Basha Kill.
Below: The Ridge above Wurtsboro.
ALL PHOTOS BY JAKOB FRANKE.
Map opposite is courtesy of the New York New Jersey Trail Conference.*



PARTNERS PRESERVING A ‘LAST GREAT PLACE’

Cara Lee

THE CLIFFS, SUMMITS AND PLATEAUS of the Shawangunks form a unique landscape of extraordinary ecological significance. Conservation efforts over the last one hundred year have resulted in large contiguous tracts of protected and publicly accessible land and a remarkable ethic of land stewardship.

In 1994, conservation organizations managing lands of the Northern Shawangunks—including Mohonk Preserve, Minnewaska State Park Preserve and The Nature Conservancy—formed the Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership to begin a coordinated research and management program. The idea was to provide a scientific basis for conservation actions to protect the biodiversity of the Shawangunks.

The Partnership was made up of scientists, land owners and managers and land protection advocates and included the Mohonk Preserve, The Nature Conservancy, the Open Space Institute, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the New York Natural Heritage Program, the New York State Museum, the Friends of the Shawangunks and the Cragmoor Association, later joined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference. Today, the Partnership remains a successful model of collaboration across a landscape to accomplish conservation not easily achieved by a single organization.

By the 1990s, conservation thinking had evolved from protecting individual rare plants and animals to the understanding that landscape-scale protection was more effective. This approach views the forest as the matrix holding the diversity of species together and calls for working across property lines and the individual missions of a dozen organizations.

At the outset, the Partnership defined a

“study area” stretching from the Rosendale area south to Route 52 below Sam’s Point Preserve, with the Rondout Creek and the Wallkill River as lateral boundaries. With the area defined, the Partnership set about to map the entire study area based on digital orthophotographs. Digital orthophotos combine the image characteristics of a photograph with the geometric qualities of a map so that features are displayed in their



Spring on Dickie Barre

true ground position. This allows for the direct measurement of distance, areas and positions. These maps were the first step in creating “wall-to-wall” vegetation maps for the Gunks in a Geographic Information System (GIS), making it possible to see how the distinctive natural communities and rare species were distributed across the landscape. This was the first project in New York State to use an approach that is now a standard part of the conservation “toolkit.”

Based on extensive field data, the mapping provided the “big picture” of the sensitive resources of the Shawangunks and made it possible for managers to make well-informed decisions about recreational use, land protection and threats to the biodiversity of the ridge. By 2003 the partners used this information to create guidelines and goals for protecting the habitats of the ridge and creating a shared vision for how to achieve those goals. The guidelines recognized that loss of habitat due to encroaching development,

recreational impacts, overabundance of deer and decades of fire suppression were all threats to the biodiversity of the ridge and made recommendations for addressing these problems at the landscape scale.

Today, the Partnership is a successful model of collaborative effort to accomplish conservation not easily achieved by a single entity. Some of the Partnership’s successes are:

- ❖ Many more acres have been protected, buffering many of the most sensitive biodiversity areas and providing more publicly accessible areas;
- ❖ A ridge-wide fire management plan developed by the Partnership and adopted by New York State provides a proactive approach to fire management, protecting the ecology and reducing hazardous fuel loads in the highly volatile Shawangunk environment;
- ❖ Identification of invasive species protection zones that are actively maintained by land managers;
- ❖ Integration of shared goals and actions for ridge protection into the land management plans for Minnewaska State Park Preserve, Mohonk Preserve and Sam’s Point Preserve, the Shawangunk Mountains Scenic Byway Management Plan, the New York State Open Space Plan and the open space plans of many of the “ridge towns.”

CHALLENGES AHEAD

While the Shawangunks have the hallmarks of an enduring landscape, new invasive species, forest pests, development and the impacts of climate change pose different threats and challenges. As we learn more about the ecosystem of the Shawangunks, the Partnership continues to evolve our collaborative approach to protection of our regional biodiversity. Habitat protection, sustaining forest health and resiliency and landscape connectivity are all important concepts and practices that are central to our work going forward.

Cara is the Director of the Shawangunk Ridge Program, Eastern New York Chapter, The Nature Conservancy.

WINTER WONDERINGS

Shanan Smiley



PHOTO: JOHN HAYES

IT SEEMS WE'VE STEPPED BACK in time this winter. Is this winter like the ones in the "good old days"? We've had more days reach zero or below, and more consistent snow pack on the ground late this winter season, than I've seen in the last decade.

Another thing I saw for the first time in a decade was an American Tree Sparrow at my feeder. This species usually only comes this far south during snowy winters. There have also been strange sparrow sightings in the Clove—a Field Sparrow! This may be another species that is extending its wintering range northward. According to Cornell's All About Birds website, Field Sparrows over-winter only as far north as New Jersey. Recent year-round residents like American Robins, Song Sparrows, Eastern Bluebirds, Mockingbirds, Turkey Vultures and Black Vultures have all been seen in good numbers all winter. Feeders have been very busy, popular places with high numbers of Dark-eyed Juncos, American Goldfinches, Purple Finches, European Starlings and Northern Cardinals. Sharp-shinned

and Cooper's Hawks have been enjoying the crowds at the feeders as well!

The Deer are now entering into starvation mode. They are eating things that are unpalatable (pitch pine), or actually toxic to them (mountain laurel). They are wandering far and wide to find enough food. Recently I've seen deer in some pretty strange places: on small cliff ledges; on lake ice, cruising the steep shores they can't usually access; and climbing onto large boulders to eat the Rock Polypody (a small evergreen fern).

This snow pack may be good for the survival of the oak seedlings. If the Deer can't get to them, the seedlings might actually make it to the next growing season. The snow pack will benefit the small mammals, giving them cover from predators like coyotes, foxes, and hawks. Chipmunks have been seen out and about again this year. We'll most likely be seeing many tunnels through the grass when the snow melts.

The consistent snow pack, especially this late in the season, will also benefit

the soil, and therefore the trees especially. The snow insulates the soil, keeping a healthy amount of microbes, which help balance the acidity and nutrients in the soil. Without an insulating layer of snow, the microbes in the soil die, and the roots of trees can also freeze and die. However, some damage might have already occurred in January when there were several days of negative temperatures with very little snow on the ground.

I wonder if the snow pack will also benefit some of the early spring emerging amphibians like the Jefferson Salamander. Their populations have been declining, and I wonder if the lack of snow pack, and therefore lesser snowmelt amounts seeping down deep into the soil where they hibernate, may be hindering their health.

As always in nature, change is the constant. Certain conditions benefit some species, but cause problems for others. It's so interesting to watch the changes constantly occurring on the Shawangunk Ridge!

Shanan has an MS in Environmental Studies.

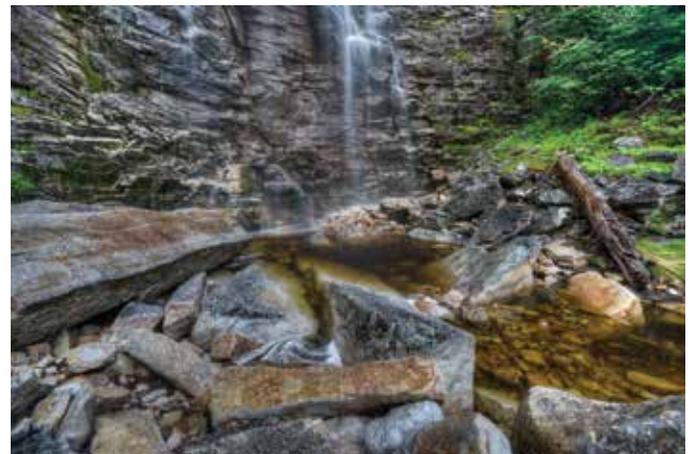


WHERE IS THIS TREE?

This is a fine example of the lengths to which a tree will go to survive. The photo is one of a series created by Nora Scarlett of unusual trees in the Shawangunks.

She has presented her collection in talks at Mohonk Mountain House and Rock & Snow, and we will feature other photos in future newsletters.

PHOTO: NORA SCARLETT STUDIO



THE FOOT OF VERKEERDERKILL FALLS

This is one of three beautiful photos supplied by Hardie Truesdale of the area around Sam's Point for this issue of Shawangunk Watch. We thank him and all the people who supplied photographs for our newsletter.

PHOTO: HARDIE TRUESDALE

This heroic Black Birch can be found at the lower entrance to the Giants Workshop.



PHOTOGRAPH: HARDIE TRUESDALE

SAM'S POINT PRESERVE NOW PART OF MINNEWASKA

THE REMAINING 1,063 acres of the Sam's Point Preserve has been transferred to the State of New York as an addition to Minnewaska State Park Preserve. In 1997 the Open Space Institute (OSI) purchased 4,780 acres from the Village of Ellenville and entrusted management of the property to The Nature Conservancy (TNC), which developed a master plan, constructed a visitor center in 2005 and restored the carriage roads and trails. OSI transferred 3,717 acres of this property to the state in 2005, with TNC continuing

to manage the property. TNC will turn over management to Minnewaska in the spring of 2015.

Since 1987 OSI, along with the Trust for Public Land, has transferred to the state enough land to roughly double the size of Minnewaska State Park Preserve. The state paid a total of \$32 million (out of the Environmental Protection Fund) for land that had been acquired for \$38 million.

OSI and TNC have created an endowment fund of \$3 million to be used by the

state to cover the costs of operating and maintaining the Sam's Point property after 2015. A stone plaque memorializing the role of OSI, TNC, Friends of the Shawangunks and the Cragmoor Association in protecting Sam's Point will be erected at the Preserve in the spring.

For a more complete story of OSI's land protection efforts in the area go to: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/16/nyregion/conservation-group-keeps-buying-land-helping-state-parks-grow.html?_r=0

YES! This is important work and I want to be a part of the effort to save the Shawangunks.

CUT OUT ALONG DOTTED LINE

I WOULD LIKE TO JOIN OR RENEW MY MEMBERSHIP.

- BENEFACTOR** \$250.
- PATRON** \$100.
- FAMILY** \$25.
- INDIVIDUAL** \$15.
- OTHER** \$_____

NAME _____

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I would like to make an additional contribution to The Shawangunk Conservancy for land acquisition.

EMAIL _____ THIS IS A CHANGE OF ADDRESS OR EMAIL

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