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HIGHLANDS JOURNAL

newsletter of the Delaware Highlands Conservancy

Dedicated to conserving the natural and cultural heritage of the Upper Delaware River region in New York and Pennsylvania

ORGANIC FARM AND WILDLIFE CORRIDOR PROTECTED

by Barbara Lewis

Forty years ago, when Gary and Shary Skoloff fell in love with a wild tract of land in the far reaches of northern Susquehanna County, PA, little did they dream that they would ultimately protect their 200 acres, plus an adjacent tract they later acquired in New York State, from subdivision or development. Yet last year that's exactly what the Skoloffs decided to do. They protected their two parcels, totaling almost 300 acres, with conservation easements with the Delaware Highlands Conservancy. The protection of their larger tract, which forms a "corridor" between two PA state gamelands, assures that numerous birds, including flocks of wild turkeys, and other wildlife such as bears, deer, foxes, and rabbits, have access to a huge area of undisturbed woodland.

What the Skoloffs always knew is that they were nature lovers. In the winter of 1968, when they saw an ad in their suburban New Jersey newspaper for a farm in a remote corner of northern Pennsylvania, they decided to take a look. The young couple, their ten-month old baby in tow, came north to hike and camp, and were looking for an acre of land to pitch a tent on, away from crowded campgrounds with "bumper-to-bumper tents." What they found, fell in love with, and decided to buy was 200 acres of farm and woodlands. "It was only 200 times the size we could afford!" says Shary. The Skoloffs agree that a local native they encountered when they went back to hike some of the land, after their initial look with the realtor, was the one who really "sold them" on buying. Red Cook, the last man to take bluestone out of the

local quarry by horse and wagon, took them on a three hour hike around the snow covered land, telling them the history of the area, and "just basically got us so excited", says Shary that Gary called the realtor the next morning and said, "We'll take it!" "And we hadn't even figured out how we'd make the down payment," laughs Shary.



The first three years they lived in a tent whenever they visited the land, and in 1971 they built a modest log cabin, realizing they wanted to spend time there year-round. Almost immediately, they began to develop the potential of the land. The first spring, when they saw how brown and overgrown the fields were, "we decided to get some 'living lawnmowers,'" explains Shary. "We got a few head of cattle and hired someone to live in the old farmhouse and take care of them." Shortly afterward they added some chickens and began to produce eggs.

The garden "evolved" from a small family garden for just the Skoloffs and the people they employed. As they

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Delaware Highlands Conservancy

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Sullivan County
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100 North Street
Monticello, NY

Call us:

Main phone: 570-226-3164
Also: 845-794-3000 ext 3228

Online:

www.delawarehighlands.org
info@delawarehighlands.org

Upcoming Meetings:

Board Meeting Dec. 13
Land Protection Jan. 24

WELCOME MELINDA

Delaware Highlands Conservancy welcomes Melinda Ketcham as our new land protection specialist serving Sullivan and Delaware Counties New York.

A Sullivan County native and resident of Rock Hill, Melinda recently completed a Masters in Environmental Law at the Vermont Law School. In 2007-2008 she completed an internship with the Sullivan County office of Planning where she learned of our position. She completed her degree in August, took a short break to get married and enjoy her honeymoon before starting with the Conservancy on October 1st.



Melinda is based in our New York office, office space provided with generous support from Dr. Bill Pammer, Director of Sullivan County Planning and Environmental Management and the Sullivan County Legislature. Initially she'll be working out of both our Monticello and Hawley locations as we complete some training.

Melinda has hit the ground running. In addition to working with individual landowners on conservation options for their property, she is driving an aggressive outreach campaign to further our work throughout New York State.

We are very pleased to have Melinda on the team. To contact her, you can email her at nyland@delawarehighlands.org or call her at 845-794-3000 ext 3228

The creation of this position was the result of generous donations from several of our members and supporters, as well as a two year, \$28,500. per year grant, from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the Land Trust Alliance. Additional funding was also provided by the Norcross Foundation whose support helped establish the NY office with computer, printer, etc. Thank you one and all.

RETIRING AND RETURNING BOARD

The Conservancy held our annual general meeting in October, and voted in new board members — Carson Helfrich and Adam Rodell, and returning board member Scott VanGorder. Welcome!

After successfully serving two back-to-back terms of 3 years each, Barbara Yeaman and Greg Belcamino stepped off the board. In addition, Jeffrey Moore and Gail Lowden both stepped down for personal reasons. We thank them all for their support and look for their continued guidance in other capacities through the coming year. If you are interested in learning more about getting involved with the board please contact Scott VanGorder, governance committee chair, or any other board member.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Steven and Anita Auerbach, John Hurley, Philip Jacobi, Janet Perper, and Steven Schwartz

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produced a little more, a woman Shary knew at a health food store in New Jersey asked if they could bring her some eggs and vegetables. “That grew...I had a little business.” Shary spent summers on the farm; Gary toted the eggs and produce back to New Jersey on his weekly commute.

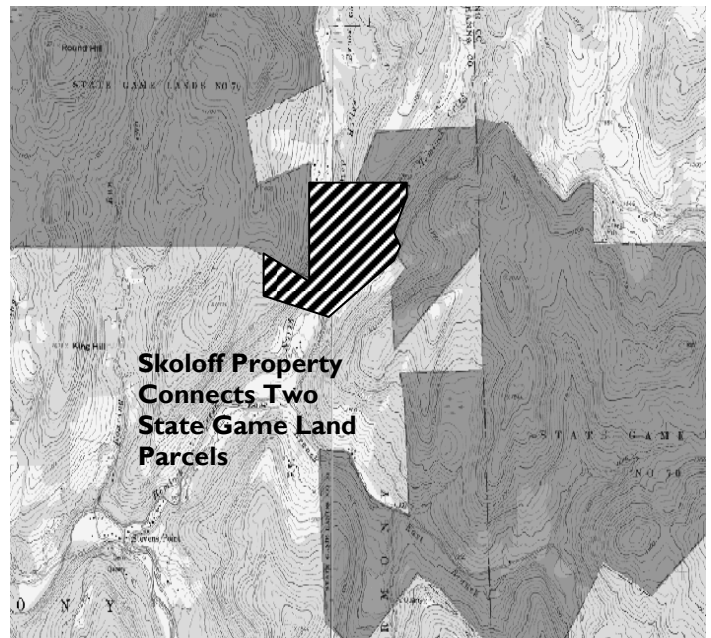
Suburbanites with no farming experience, the Skloffs learned from books, courses, and workshops. “In 1993, we decided that we really wanted to become certified [organic], because it was something that we believed in... and we wanted to support the organic certification program,” says Shary. “Way before ‘organic’ was a household word, we were organic, in the sense of never using chemical fertilizers or herbicides.”

Today the manager of the Skloff Farm takes produce to the Binghamton Farmers’ Market every Saturday, and they supply a local restaurant as well as customers who order online and come to pick up their vegetables. “It’s never been our livelihood, but more a labor of love, and our gift to the earth,” muses Shary.

Through the years Gary and Shary, their two daughters, and now their grandchildren, have enjoyed hiking and riding horses on their woodland paths, picking blueberries from their prolific berry patches, and sometimes climbing to the promontory on the New York State side of their land from which “you can count seven peaks rolling off in the distance. It’s a spectacular view. The land there is eminently ‘buildable’...a developer’s dream...but we would never want to see it chopped up.

So we protected it under the same conditions as the farm, for agricultural and/or educational purposes, and the scenic beauty.”

Shary and Gary Skloff have a true reverence for Nature, have learned what it’s like to live on the land, to develop its potential and to share the fruits of its harvests with others. Their care for the earth has prompted their gift of conservation, and their foresight will help preserve the integrity of their special land for many generations to come.



FLOYD SCHNAKENBERG

It’s with much sadness we pass along the news of Floyd Schnakenberg’s death in October 2008. As you are likely aware Floyd protected his property with a conservation easement with the Conservancy a few years ago. He subsequently sold his property to an adjoining landowner, keeping a small parcel with his home on which to live. Floyd continued to be an active advocate for the Conservancy’s work – passing along information, staffing our booth at the Meadow party, bringing his hybrid vehicle to a earth day program, and generally participating. An avid interest in the natural environment ensured he participated in bird walks, as well as native plant programs Dr. Ann Rhoads led for the Conservancy. Shortly before his death, Floyd helped the Conservancy by lining up geothermal exhibitors for the green earth fair – helping to share what he learned in his own home with others in the region.



Floyd in his solar greenhouse

He will be missed. Yet his legacy will live on in the protection of his land.

ALLIANCE TO KEEP PIKE GREEN ANNUAL UPDATE

Three years ago, the citizens of Pike County passed the Scenic Rural Character (SRCP) Bond to protect Pike's scenic rural and cultural character. The availability of bond funds from the SRCP Bond have made a significant difference in facilitating better planning and preserving natural resources across Pike County.

Since its passage at the end of 2005, the SRCP Bond has made funds available for planning initiatives as well as conservation easements and acquisitions. The \$10,000,000 bond allows County and municipal officials to leverage state and local dollars to maximize and expand over time the amount of money available for planning and open space preservation in Pike County.

Across the County, SRCP Bond funds are successfully facilitating sound plans and planning practices. From 2006 through 2008, nine of Pike County's thirteen municipalities have applied for and received over \$293,000 in SRCP planning funds. Receipt of the bond funds then made it possible for the municipalities to apply for and receive state grants as well.

Bond funds in conjunction with state matching funds have allowed municipal planning initiatives that include updating comprehensive plans, developing open space, greenways and recreation plans, and/or updating land use ordinances. Because of receiving multiple sources of funding, most municipalities were able to undertake these projects using

only minimal contributions from local municipal funds. SRCP successes include the development and expansion of the Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping capabilities in the County planning office. Bond funds were also allocated for the purchase of a conservation easement to protect 450 forest and wildlife-rich acres containing Long Pond Wetlands on the property of Camp Speers-Eljabar. These SRCP funds, combined with funds from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources will allow the Conservancy to protect this vital natural resource in 2009.

All counties have the potential to develop programs similar to the productive and important conservation and planning projects enabled by the SRCP Bond in Pike County. The Conservancy is excited to play an integral role in these and the future successes.



Dr Ann Rhoads explains the impact of deer browse on local forests

WOMEN AND THEIR WOODS

In October, the Conservancy held two successful programs for forest landowners in partnership with the Federal Forest Service at Grey Towers in Milford, PA. Women forest landowners enjoyed the session so much, they scheduled a follow-up session on invasive species in early November.

The group intends to hold sessions on a regular basis through 2009 to address several topics of interest. The next program in March will cover setting objectives for your forest, as well as tips and resources for creating trails. A session in May will focus on invasive identification in the field — both plants and animals. Participation is open to any female landowner in the north east.

Call the Conservancy to find out how you can get involved.



Nancy Pinchot hosted a follow-up session for Women at the Milford Experimental Forest

THE CLOCK IS TICKING ...

September 1st brought not only the start of the school season, but also the start of the one year application review by the Public Service Commission (PSC) on New York Regional Interconnect's application for a new power line from upstate NY to New York City. During the next 12 months the PSC will review documents, hear public testimony and evaluate the application and render a final decision. Local hearings have taken place across the proposed routes and written testimony has been submitted. Barbara Yeaman and Don Downs testified at the public hearings in Callicoon and Hancock.



Barbara Yeaman testifies

Here is an excerpt from the Conservancy's letter to the PSC:

The Delaware Highlands Conservancy is dedicated to sustaining the overall environmental, scenic, and cultural attributes that are vital to the excellent quality of life in the Upper Delaware River region.

If the 200-mile high-voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission line from Utica to Orange County is approved and must be constructed, we ask that NYRI choose a route and construct the power line in the safest, least obtrusive, most environmentally sensitive manner. The plan as it stands now would develop an entirely new swath of land that would disturb thousands of acres of Sullivan and Delaware County green space and natural areas, including numerous environmentally sensitive regions. If PSC approves the need for this line, NYRI must work with local communities, governments, and

organizations concerned with the environmental and economic health of the Upper Delaware Region to develop a route that has the least negative environmental and economic impact. For example, a route along the already developed space of the New York State Thruway is obviously a far better alternative than a route that would damage environmentally sensitive areas and put the health and safety of the Region's natural, cultural, and economic resources at risk.

According to Sullivan County Division of Planning and Environmental Management and Communities Against Regional Interconnect (CARI), NYRI's currently planned route would run through seven New York counties and 38 municipalities. NYRI's application concedes that its line and connection stations would cross or run alongside approximately 170 streams, 87 mapped state wetlands, more than 4,000 acres of potential federal wetlands, 240 archaeological sites, 92 properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places eligible for listing, a National Heritage Corridor as well as various state parks, forests, and forest preserves, agriculture districts, scenic byways, recreational trails, wildlife management areas, lakes, ponds, aquifers, and rivers, including a federally designated wild and scenic river.

The Delaware Highlands Conservancy believes that as a society we must learn to use energy more efficiently and look to renewable sources of energy and conservation measures to reduce the demand on our current energy infrastructure.

The Conservancy insists that if PSC determines electricity demand warrants a new line, NYRI must choose a route like the NYS Thruway route and meet its responsibilities to the environmental and economic health and security of the Upper Delaware Region's communities. If this power line construction goes forward, it needs to go forward in intimate consultation with the region's citizens and local governments and in the most intelligent and environmentally sensitive manner possible.



GREEN EARTH FAIR

On behalf of the Upper Delaware Preservation Coalition and Delaware Highlands Conservancy, thank you for making the 1st Annual Green Earth Fair a success. Thanks to the efforts and donations of many, the attendees at the 2008 Green Earth Fair were provided with items for purchase, information and enjoyment all while they both celebrated and learned how to sustain our quality of life in the Upper Delaware River Region. Your participation helped to make the 2008 Green Earth Fair a success.

We welcome your feedback and suggestions as we plan the 2009 Green Earth Fair for **September 19, 2009**. If you are interested in once again in being an exhibitor for this event or have ideas for next year, please contact the Conservancy.



Bill Streeter explains the role of raptors in the Delaware Highlands



Don Hamilton mixes up solar smoothies

2008 Green Earth Fair Official Sponsors

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Alice's Wonderland
Sigrid Wilshinsky
Photographer David B. Soete

A Special Thanks to Our Dedicated Volunteers

who gave hours of labor, creativity and inspiration that make this event a success.



With gas prices soaring in September, Biodiesel exhibits and questions on alternative fuels garnered lots of attention

SAVE THE DATE TO SAVE LAND

Mark your 2009 calendar for the Conservancy's second annual **Foods of the Delaware Highlands** dinner and wine tasting at The Settlers Inn on **Saturday, April 25, 2009**. Last year's celebration sold out quickly, so be sure to RSVP early.

The evening will feature fine cuisine prepared with locally grown and produced organic ingredients, paired with appropriate fine wines. A live auction of rare vintages from the private collections of Conservancy members will be a highlight of the event.

Invitations and more information about the April 25, 2009 celebration will be distributed early next year. Stay tuned, or email info@delawarehighlands.org to reserve your seat at the table today!



Sue Currier, Barbara Yeaman and Grant Genzlinger at last year's celebration

RIVER ROAD PROPERTY: FOREVER PROTECTED

When neighbors who understand the value of protecting the Upper Delaware River and Region join together, wonderful things can happen. That's what neighbors Louise Washer and Joe Levine and Jane Cyphers did when they placed an easement on their properties fronting the Delaware in Damascus Township. Louise, Joe, and Jane, neighbors of Barbara Yeaman, the Conservancy's founder who also has an easement on her Delaware Riverfront property, jointly protected adjoining parcels totaling approximately 25 acres with a conservation easement.



continues Barbara, "it's wonderful that these neighbors did such an important thing."

The area of the river fronted by the easement is important eagle territory; the magnificent birds nest there and are found there year round. Because the river is shallow eagles, who are not deep divers, easily find the fish prey they need to thrive. This region of the river is also important habitat to dwarf wedge mussels, and federally listed endangered species that is integral to keeping river water clean. Since the Delaware River provides drinking water for millions of residents downstream, these tiny mussels have a big job, and their survival is imperative.



"We started the Land Trust to try to preserve the watershed of the River," states Barbara Yeaman, "and we've been tremendously successful in protecting valuable property in the region, though I'd like to see more easements on river front properties." That is why,

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: MONITORS

Each year the Conservancy visits all properties it protects with Conservation Easements to ensure that the terms of the agreement are being upheld. For convenience and efficiency we work with a team of dedicated volunteers who help us conduct the monitoring visits. The landowners often walk the property with the monitors, so it is a great time to share insights and explore the natural areas with the current 'steward'.

Monitors sign up to do one or several properties through the spring, summer and fall — completing a short report that is recorded in the office. If you are interested in helping out, call the office to find out how you can get involved.

We thank our current monitoring volunteers for their continued help upholding the conservation values we are entrusted with protecting:

Don Downs, Keith and Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, Paul Hiler, Lothar Holbert, Marty Kunstmann, Joe Marassa, Ken Myett, Janet Noble, Bob Pali, Cathleen Patane, Liza Philips, Adam Rodell, Clint Rodell, Donna Rodell, Dave Soete, Arthur Stein, Mike Uretsky, Gordon Wildermuth, Scott VanGorder, Jon Villaume, and Peter Wulforst.



Jack Gearhart and Cindy Wildermuth train volunteers on the use of GPS devices

DELAWARE HIGHLANDS CONSERVANCY MEMBERSHIP FORM

____ **YES!** I want to conserve natural open space and support the Conservancy with my tax-deductible membership donation of:

____ \$35-\$59 Friend; ____ \$60-\$99 Supporter; ____ \$100-\$249 Protector; ____ \$250-\$499 Sustainer; ____ \$500 Conservator; ____ Other

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(PLEASE PRINT)

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CITY: _____ **STATE:** _____ **ZIP:** _____

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____ My check made payable to Delaware Highlands Conservancy is enclosed

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Signature: _____ Phone #: _____

Mail this form and donation payment to: **Delaware Highlands Conservancy, P.O. Box 218, Hawley, PA 18428-0218**

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OFFICE WISH LIST

- Table and chairs for the front porch
- Vacuum cleaner
- Perennial plants and gardening help
- GPS unit for our monitors to use

WHAT'S INSIDE

Organic farm protected
NYRI—we testify
Women and their woods
Green Earth Fair
More river property protected
Alliance to Keep Pike Green



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