TOM SOJA, KEEPER OF THE RIVER

by Barbara Lewis

How Tom Soja, an “escapee” from New York City, became the de facto “keeper of the river” of a long stretch of the East Branch of the Delaware River near Hancock, NY, and then protected much of that land with a conservation easement through the Delaware Highlands Conservancy is an interesting story.

When Tom lived in a landmark apartment building on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, he became involved in a rent strike that lasted 17 years. Soja, who grew up in West Virginia, never liked living in New York City very much, so when a settlement with his landlords was finally reached in 1999, he started looking for real estate in a more rural environment. He and his wife Syble began their search in Bucks County, PA, where they quickly realized that the kind of property they wanted was beyond their means. But, they also realized that they really wanted to live on the Delaware River, and that ultimately led them to Hancock, N.Y., where the East and the West branches of the Delaware River meet.

Tom describes how they came to buy their first riverfront property in “Green Flats,” where they ended up building their house. “Everyone in the town of Hancock had been waiting for that property to come up for sale…and I just happened to show up the very day it came on the market. It was sheer luck,” he says. Or perhaps, fate.

“I’ve always been into cleaning up things, usually messes created before I was born…and whenever I would clean up vacant properties along the river, pretty soon I’d be able to buy those properties. It was a nice thing that was happening,” says Tom. After moving to Hancock, Tom began cleaning up a two mile stretch of river downstream.

Eventually, Tom was able to buy parts of an old railroad corridor adjacent to the river, as well as a stretch of river including an island known as Partridge Island near Fish’s Eddy, which has provided Tom more access to the river for his clean-up efforts. He spends an average of one day a week lugging tires out of the river and carting bags of garbage to his local landfill. Much of his effort focuses on clearing debris dumped over the banks along Old Route 17. At one spot alone, he claims to have taken out “300-400 bags of garbage, dozens of tires, garbage cans, you name it…” His biggest haul was a 200-pound truck tire from Partridge Island, and he has removed “tons of flood debris” from the Big Flood of ’06.

(continued on page 5)
The Delaware Highlands Conservancy proudly announces its 1st Annual golf tournament, to be held Monday, June 15 at The Country Club at Woodloch Springs, near Hawley, PA.

“We are so pleased to partner with the wonderful people at Woodloch Springs,” says tournament chairperson and Conservancy Board Member Cindy Wildermuth. “We’re looking forward to a great day of golf for an excellent cause.”

“The Woodloch family and staff are honored to host the Conservancy’s inaugural golf tournament,” says Kiesendahl. “The event provides an opportunity to join friends in a round of golf while benefiting a worthy cause.”

The June 15 event schedule includes a Shotgun Start at 1:00 PM. To cap a fun-filled day of golf in support of local land protection, cocktails with full open bar, complimentary crudités and a 50/50 raffle are planned 6:00 PM, with a delicious dinner to be served at 7:00 PM. During dinner, tournament chairperson Cindy Wildermuth will share a brief presentation about the Conservancy’s work and accomplishments, and Woodloch’s own John Pillar will emcee a festive evening!

On the Course for Conservation is Captain and Crew format. Cost is $110 per golfer, which includes golf, cocktails and dinner. Conservancy supporters who will not be golfing on June 15 can join in the fun during cocktails and dinner at The Country Club at Woodloch Springs. Cost is $65 per person for cocktails and dinner only.

Sponsorship opportunities are still available. RSVP deadline is May 27.

For more information email info@delawarehighlands.org or call 570-226-3164.

HELP US GO GREEN
Help us be more environmentally and economically conscious. Provide us with your email address and we can keep you up-to-date on events, news and volunteer opportunities. We will not sell your email address and you can unsubscribe at any time. Simply email us at info@delawarehighlands.org or fill in the blank on your membership renewal.

SIGN UP for EMAIL UPDATES and E-NEWSLETTER
KEITH FITZPATRICK: A LOCAL INSPIRATION

When custom carpenter Keith Fitzpatrick and his wife Betsy decided to start a family, they headed north, away from the corporate world of Washington DC where Keith had worked as project manager for a large Arlington, Virginia firm. The Fitzpatricks returned to Keith’s small town roots in the Upper Delaware River region and settled in Barryville where Keith started his own carpentry business, Keith Fitzpatrick Custom Carpentry.

Keith brought home with him his love for the region along with his dedication to strong community values. Keith believes that we all need to participate in sustaining the environmental health of our planet, and that we need to do it on the local level. Inspired by reading John Abrams’ book, The Company We Keep: Reinventing Small Business for People, Community, and Place, Keith decided to find a productive way for his own small business to participate in sustaining the beauty and ecological health of our region.

Keith decided to emulate the mission of “One Percent for the Planet: Keep Earth in Business,” an alliance of businesses financially committed to creating a healthy planet. Founders of “One Percent,” Yvon Chouinard, founder of Patagonia and Craig Mathews, owner of Blue Ribbon Flies, both passionate environmentalists, realized that businesses need to be a force for change if our environmental challenges are to be met. They also realized that it was smart business practice to protect the natural resources that keep them in business. They established “One Percent for the Planet” to encourage local businesses to choose a local conservation organization to which to donate 1% of their yearly income.

“I wanted to do something locally,” Keith explains, “and the Conservancy’s goals suited my goals perfectly. In 2007, Keith approached the Conservancy with his desire to follow the “One Percent” model and donate 1% of his yearly earnings to the Conservancy’s mission to protect the scenic rural character and environmental health and beauty of our region. As Keith’s custom carpentry business has become more successful, his generous donations to the Conservancy have grown as well.

In addition to his contributions to the Conservancy, Keith, who is a member of Pike County Builders Association chapter of the National Association of Homebuilders, also received his Certified Green Professional (CGP) designation.

“Keith is committed to green building practices and high quality energy saving construction. Keith Fitzpatrick is a role model and inspiration,” states Conservancy executive director, Sue Currier, “he is redefining what it means to be a green business man. He embraced leading industry practices for sustainability. And he has added a new imension. He has committed to investing the proceeds of his local business back into our community to ensure that the natural infrastructure – our forests, farms, and waters – will be here for his children and grandchildren.”

The Conservancy is deeply appreciative of Keith’s support. And even more important, we are inspired by Keith’s dedication to our community, by his commitment to being a responsible corporate citizen, and by his desire to sustain the health and beauty of our region as well as the health of the planet for future generations – his children, as well as ours.

For more information on the Conservancy, please call 570-226-3164 or email info@delawarehighlands.org. To contact Keith Fitzpatrick Custom Carpentry, call 845-557-6975 or email him at k_fitzpatrick13@hotmail.com.

Carson Helfrich, Conservancy President, with Keith Fitzpatrick
Spring is upon us. It is time once again to buy, eat, and cook with abundant and delicious locally grown foods from our region’s farms, farmers’ markets, and farm stands. To help you ‘buy local,’ The Conservancy is pleased to announce the publication of the second annual “Shop Local, Save Land” guide to locally produced agricultural products. The “Shop Local, Save Land” guide covering the Monroe, Pike, Wayne County region of PA again joins “Pure Catskills,” the free guide to farm fresh products and local businesses covering the Catskill Mountain region on the New York side of the Upper Delaware, in providing residents and visitors with an excellent and convenient resource for shopping locally. Last year’s “Shop Local Save Land” guide was a tremendous success.

Buying locally grown food is healthy for you and good for our local communities. The further food has to travel, the more nutrients it loses. Locally grown and sold produce, meat and poultry, and dairy products do not spend days on trucks and sitting in warehouses.

This year’s sponsors include Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau, The Settlers Inn, and Clemleddy Construction. Pocono Mountains Visitors’ Bureau supports “Shop Local, Save Land” for the second year as part of its mission to enhance the environmental and economic well-being of our unique region. The Settlers Inn in Hawley, PA understands the importance of local produce to the local economy as well as to delicious food, and uses local products in its exceptional cuisine. Clemleddy Construction, home builders and renovation specialists also located in Hawley, focuses on green building practices, and understands how support of local, environmentally friendly businesses contributes substantially to the overall economic and ecological health of our region. We are grateful to all three of our sponsors as well as to Wayne County Library, the Wayne County Community Foundation, and the John and Helen Villaume Foundation who have supported “Shop Local, Save Land” as well.

We are pleased to be a part of efforts to support local farms and farmlands. All of these efforts – including yours to buy local – will assure that our invaluable farm lands are here for us and for the benefit of future generations. The brochure will be available in June 2009.
The East Branch of the river, which Tom believes is the “true source” of the Delaware and what he calls the “River of Dreams”, differs from the colder West Branch favored by trout fishermen. Its warmer waters make East Branch ideal for swimming and kayaking, but its steep banks discourage extensive real estate development. This body of water and its banks are home to deer, foxes, turkeys, snapping turtles, geese, grouses and numerous other birds, and even bear. According to Tom, the Delaware Highlands Conservancy has done “a fabulous job identifying the trees on the property. Apparently this is a diverse animal and plant species corridor,” he explains.

Initially attracted to do a conservation easement because of the tax benefits, **Tom now has an even greater appreciation for the important protection that action can provide for this precious river.** By protecting his riverfront and river island property, Tom can be assured that these lands will never be developed, denuded of the trees that provide such a valuable buffer for the river, or compromised in the habitat they provide for the wild creatures that thrive there. **Placing his land in a conservation easement has taken Tom’s role of “keeper of the river” to another level.**

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**ALYSSA TOMASKOVIC: 2009 SCHOLARSHIP WINNER**

Alyssa Tomaskovic, a senior at Delaware Valley High School, is the 2009 recipient of the Delaware Highlands/Yeaman Scholarship. In her application she wrote: **“Growing up in the sylvan setting of the Pocono Mountains, I have come to appreciate and recognize the extraordinary beauty in seemingly ordinary natural objects.** The annual migration of Canada geese and the emergence of a pine sapling amongst rocks and bramble are two of the most striking sights I have ever seen. Since I was a child, I have always taken an interest in the environment and conserving our valuable natural resources. **I have developed a sense of awe and respect for the natural world, and I understand its importance to everyday life, which is why it is my goal in life to become nature’s steward.”**

Alyssa has chosen to challenge herself, taking almost exclusively honors and Advanced Placement classes. Her high school activity sheet lists over sixty clubs, projects, competitions and volunteer programs. She has been actively involved in the school’s community service organization, Junior Historian where she works with the Salvation Army to prepare and distribute care packages to local families in need. As master of ceremonies for the annual Veterans Day dinner-tribute, she honors our deserving servicemen and women. For the past two years, Alyssa has been the student representative to the Delaware Valley School District School Board. Right now she is deeply immersed competing in Scholastic Bowl and this year serves as captain.

She is looking forwarding to a challenging yet rewarding four years of school at Lycoming College, where she intends to major in her two passions, biology and environmental science. **The Conservancy is proud to award this scholarship to Alyssa. Lycoming College is anxious to have her become a member of the Class of 2013.**
MORE GOOD NEWS: PIKE EASEMENTS ON THE HORIZON

The Scenic Rural Character Preservation Board is considering for approval funds to forever protect three important properties, in Pike County. These conservation easements will be held by the Conservancy.

The 450 acres containing Long Pond Wetlands on the property of Camp Speers-Eljabar in Delaware Township is pristine forestland laden with natural resources and adjacent to a large block of state game land. Over $700,000 provided by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and additional funds recommended for allocation by the Scenic Rural Character Preservation Board will help make this project a reality.

The 708 acre Polatnick property also consists of healthy forestlands that are adjacent to existing state lands. Polatnick’s forestlands contain a good portion of the headwaters of Mill Rift Creek. The Pike County Scenic Rural Character Preservation Program allocated $1.3 million bond funds towards the total $3.5 million cost of the property. The remaining funds will come from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Bureau of Forestry, and private sources.

The 97 acre Santos Farm property fronts the Delaware River. If approved for funding by both the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Scenic Rural Character Preservation Board, Santos Farm will eventually provide free access to the Delaware River for county residents. This property also has the potential to be used by the Delaware Valley School District for athletic fields and other activities.

As all of Pike County’s municipalities move forward in their planning efforts, the Pike County Scenic Rural Character Preservation Program will continue to support such endeavors and aid municipalities in protecting their identified conservation areas, thereby preserving scenic character across the county. The Scenic Rural Character Preservation Program has already made a tremendous difference in facilitating municipal planning efforts. The positive results are good news for all of Pike County’s residents.
VOLUNTEERS NEEDED
The Conservancy is deeply appreciative of your membership and of your continued support of the Conservancy’s mission: To protect the scenic rural character, cultural heritage, and environmental health of our region. The success of the Conservancy is largely due to our committed force of volunteers. From administrative support in our Hawley and Sullivan County offices to assistance at specific events to monitoring our over fifty-five easements, volunteers are integral to all facets of the Conservancy’s work.

To meet the ever growing demands associated with our ongoing conservation mission, we need your help. Volunteering with the Conservancy means being directly involved with the exciting and innovative endeavors we undertake to meet our conservation goals.

Please join us at our open house (see below) and at one of the following events and learn about becoming a Conservancy volunteer:

Become An Easement Monitor: June 9th, 7:30 at our Hawley office and June 16th, 7:30 in Sullivan County. Get trained to become an easement monitor. Volunteers will be instructed in specific monitoring procedures and responsibilities including GPS use and photography as a means of monitoring land and guidelines on how to interact with landowners.

2ND ANNUAL FOODS OF THE DELAWARE A SUCCESS
MORE TO COME IN NEXT ISSUE....

Almost 100 people joined the Conservancy on April 25th to celebrate foods of the Delaware. The conversation was stimulating, the food delicious and the wine pairing tantalizing.

Overall the dinner garnered over $11,000 in donations to the Conservancy to help us continue our work. Thank you to all who made the dinner a success.

Delaware Highlands Conservancy Invites you to:

“Stewards of the Land: Contributing to Conservation”

A Open House & Volunteer Event
At the Perry Pond Brook Property

The Delaware Highlands Conservancy is hosting a Open House and a Volunteer Orientation at the Perry Pond Brook Property in Lava, NY. Learn how you can help protect the regions rural character and be a good steward of the land. Join us for an educational walk across the 100 acre protected property. Wear your hiking boots! Refreshments will be served.

May 30th 10AM-1PM

This is a great opportunity to learn about the Conservancy, and meet fellow members, volunteers and landowners!

Perry Pond Brook Property is located at: 7698 State Route 52 Narrowsburg, NY 12764

Call the Conservancy to register. Registration is Required
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

NAME: ____________________________________________________________________________________________

(PLEASE PRINT)

ADDRESS: _________________________________________________________________________________________

CITY: _________________________ STATE: ________________ ZIP: ________________________

PHONE_________________________________ EMAIL: ________________________________________________

My check made payable to Delaware Highlands Conservancy is enclosed

I prefer to pay by credit card: ___ Mastercard    ___ Visa   ___ American Express Amount: $ __________

Account #: ____________________________ Exp. Date: ____________________________

Signature: _______________________________ Phone #: __________________________

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

Delaware Highlands Conservancy is a tax-exempt organization as provided by IRS regulations. The official registration and financial information of the Delaware Highlands Conservancy may be obtained from the PA Department of State by calling toll-free, within PA, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

OFFICE WISH LIST

− Table and chairs for events and the front porch
− Perennial plants and gardening help in Hawley
− Industrial stapler and three hole punch
− Volunteers to help paint and finish our ‘upstairs’ — give us room to grow

WHAT’S INSIDE

Legacy Leaders Call for Volunteers Possible Easements in Pike Yeaman Scholarship One Percent for the Planet Shop Local, Save Land Golf Tournament Tom Zoja, Riverkeeper

serving New York and Pennsylvania

DELAWARE HIGHLANDS CONSERVANCY

P.O. Box 218 Hawley, PA 18428-0218
May 22 – Spring Skies Star Watch, Butterfly Barn, PA 8:30 pm
Join local astronomers who will share their telescopes and sky charts to observe deep sky objects and locate the constellations. This program will last about two hours. Bring binoculars, a flashlight and folding chairs if you have them and dress for cool weather.

May 23 – Spring Bird Walk with Barbara Yeaman and Peter Wulfhorst, Butterfly Barn, PA 7:00 am
Join us for a two hour early morning walk. Bring your binoculars and learn to identify birds and their songs. Walk will start at the Butterfly Barn. Call the Conservancy office at 570-226-3164 or Barbara at 570-729-7053 for more details.

May 30 – Open House and Volunteer Training at Perry Pond, Lava, NY, 10:00 am - 1:00 pm
Volunteers, learn how you can help the Conservancy with field work and more. See article on page 7.

Jun 9 – Volunteer Training, Hawley office, Hawley, PA 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm
Come learn about the important roles and responsibilities that the "stewards of the land" have in making the Conservancy a successful organization. New and old volunteers, the current Board of Directors, and the Land Protection Committee members, will learn the technical experience necessary to monitor properties, as well as the policies and procedures of the Conservancy.

Jun 13 – Annual Canoe and Kayak Trip
We will be joining with the Sullivan Historical Society for this canoe trip which will feature a talk by Sullivan County historian, John Conway. The 4 hour trip will begin in Buckingham, PA and end in Long Eddy, NY. Refreshments will be served at the end of the trip at the home of Edie and Don Downs. Bring your lunch for a riverside picnic. Reservations are required. You will be called regarding details.

Jun 16 – Volunteer Training, Location TBD, Sullivan County, NY 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm
Come learn about the important roles and responsibilities that the "stewards of the land" have in making the Conservancy a successful organization. New and old volunteers, the current Board of Directors, and the Land Protection Committee members, will learn the technical experience necessary to monitor properties, as well as the policies and procedures of the Conservancy.

Jul 18 – Weekend of Chamber Music, Eddie Adams Barn, North Branch/Jeffersonville, 8:00 pm
This evening's performance in the Chamber Music Concert Series is sponsored by the Delaware Highlands Conservancy.

Aug 1 – Botany Walk with Dr. Ann Rhoads, PA 10:00 am
Join Delaware Highlands Conservancy members and renowned botanist, Dr. Ann Rhoads of the Morris Arboretum, as we explore the exciting botanical world of Pennsylvania’s forests. For more information, directions, or to reserve your space, call 570-226-3164.
Aug 8 – “Money CAN Grow on Trees!” at Grey Towers National Historic Site – Festival of Wood, Milford, PA 2:00 pm
Visit the Delaware Highlands Conservancy booth at the Festival of Wood at Grey Towers in Milford then join other woodland owners for discussions and presentations regarding the Clean and Green Act, Conservation Easements and Stewardship Plans at the Letterbox for this informative session. **Pre-registration is required.** Please contact the Conservancy to reserve your spot.

Aug 22 – Monarch Program with Ed Wesely, Butterfly Barn, PA 10:00 am
Since 1996 Ed Wesely and Barbara Yeaman have rescued Monarch butterfly eggs and caterpillars from threatened habitats and reared them in the Butterfly Barn. With the help of local school children, they’ve nurtured and released almost 3,000 adult monarchs. Come and learn about the monarch life cycle and help to tag early migrants. For more information check out the website www.butterflybarn.org.

Sept 19 – Green Earth Fair, Lackawaxen Firemen’s Fair Grounds, PA 10:00 am - 5:00 pm
Once again the Delaware Highlands Conservancy is joining forces with the Upper Delaware Preservation Coalition to host the 2nd annual Green Earth Fair. The event promises fun for everyone with live entertainment – including music, wildlife presentations and puppet shows. Displays from regional groups provide information on environmental stewardship, local flora and native birds, fish and animals. Participate in the silent auction, visit the kids’ activity tent or just enjoy an afternoon along the river. For more information visit www.thegreenearthfair.org.

Sept 20 – Earth Day in Autumn at Bethel Woods, Bethel, NY
Stop by the Delaware Highlands Conservancy Corn Maze at Earth Day in Autumn at Bethel Woods on the site of the famous Woodstock Festival. For more information visit www.sullivanrenaissance.org.

Sept 26 – Rural Options for Sustainable Development and Land Conservation, CVI Building, Liberty, NY
The Delaware Highlands Conservancy and Sullivan Renaissance are hosting a seminar with renowned speaker on sustainability and land use planning, Ed McMahon. Time to be determined.

Oct 7 – Financial Benefits of Land Conservation, PPL Environmental Learning Center, Hawley, PA 7:00 pm
Landowners will learn how to keep cherished lands in the family and protect the landscape in perpetuity. Presenters will advise landowners how conservation and agricultural easements are key tools to preserving the natural beauty of the land for future generations.

Oct 16 – Autumn Skies Star Watch, Butterfly Barn, PA 8:30 pm
Local astronomers will share their telescopes and sky charts. Observe deep sky objects and how to locate the constellations. This program will last about two hours. Bring binoculars and folding chairs if you have them and dress for cool weather.

Oct 17 – Annual General Meeting, PPL Environmental Learning Center, PA 10:00 am
Interested in learning more about the Conservancy? Attend our Annual General Meeting. This is an excellent opportunity to hear about our progress, vote for members of the Board of Directors, ask questions of the Treasurer, learn about our future plans, and meet your fellow members.

Oct 24 – Fuelwood Harvesting and Chainsaw Maintenance, Milford Experimental Forest, 8:30 am - 12:30 pm
Join woodland owners for a hands-on look at harvesting fuel wood from your property. “Women and their Woods participants should bring a bag lunch and stay for additional programming regarding planning for 2010. **Pre-registration is required.** Please call the Conservancy to reserve your spot and receive directions.

Oct 28 – Financial Benefits of Land Conservation, Town Hall in Jeffersonville, NY, 7:00 – 9:00 pm
Landowners will learn how to keep cherished lands in the family and protect the landscape in perpetuity. Delaware Highlands Conservancy Executive Director Sue Currier will discuss how conservation and agricultural easements are key tools.

www.delawarehighlands.org
info@delawarehighlands.org
570-226-3164