

November 2011 Highlands Journal

Newsletter of the Delaware Highlands Conservancy

...a land trust dedicated to working with landowners to conserve the natural and cultural heritage of the Upper Delaware River region in Pennsylvania and New York.

Four Generations on the Delaware

by Scott VanGorder, Member and Volunteer

Our father, Don, took my brother Steve and me on an overnight canoe trip on the Delaware in 1961. We started at the confluence of the east and west branches; Dad still calls that place, "the wedding of the waters." With the farmer's permission, we camped around sunset near Callicoon, on the New York side of the river. A curious bear paid us a brief visit, then went on his way. The next morning, we shot the rapids at Skinner's Switch ("don't call it Skinner's Falls!"). My mother picked us up early that summer afternoon at the Big Eddy in Narrowsburg. We were tired, but we were hooked.

Fifty years have gone by, and the river has barely changed. In all the world, it's still the place I love the best. My own children are grown now, and a day on the river has always been a day of wonder for them, too. On a beautiful summer day this past July, a dream came true. My son Max and I took his son, Greg, out on the big river. We'd been talking about it for a long time, but he's only three and we wanted perfect conditions. Well, we got them: golden sunshine, clear water, 2000cfs. It was the best day

his hands to hold pollywogs. No knotweed in sight.

As I stood knee-deep in the water with my son and my grandson, the world around us felt like a perfect place. Indeed, the river has barely changed. Now and then in our lifetimes, we seem able to reach toward a higher understanding; a knowledge of what is truly valuable. To do this, your best bet is to stand in the river. The water that flows by represents all that has happened in our four-county watershed. The river is ground-zero for our quality of life. It is the incontrovertible litmus, the ultimate indicator, the final arbiter of all that happens



of summer 2011. In the middle of the afternoon, we pulled up on the Pennsylvania shore among smooth rocks, high grass, and forget-me-nots. Greg learned how to cup

upstream, along its banks, and in the lands and waters that directly contribute in their diverse ways to its flow. The river is the final page of every story that takes place in the entire watershed. If the river is in good shape, then so are we. We are free to love it, to share in it, to indulge our capacity for wonder as we swim, fish, canoe or hike its banks.

My big questions are these: After fifty more years have flowed by, will my grandson, Greg, stand knee-deep in our perfect river teaching his own grandchild to hold a pollywog? Do we appreciate today our opportunity and understand our responsibility to protect our river and our watershed for the future, for the generations whose lives it will sustain, and who deserve to know its wonder?



This publication is printed on recycled paper.



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Upcoming Meetings:

Nov. 19 Land Protection
Nov. 19 Board Meeting
Dec. 17 Land Protection
Dec. 17 Board Meeting

Conservancy Creates Network for Women



Amanda and baby Zeb with women landowners at the Women and Their Woods Retreat. Photo courtesy of Jim Finley.

On a beautiful fall weekend this October, Conservancy Stewardship and Education Coordinator, Amanda Subjin, with her three month old baby, Zebbin, in tow, headed out to Camp Susque in Trout Run, PA to lead the *Women and Their Woods Educational Retreat*. Amanda along with Allyson Muth, Forest Stewardship Program Associate at Penn State University and Nancy Baker, Pennsylvania landowner, facilitated a four-day educational retreat for twenty-one women landowners from across the state of Pennsylvania and some from as far away as New York state and West Virginia.

Attendees were selected through an application process focused on women who would be willing to attend the Retreat in order to become mentors for other women landowners across their regions. Participants attended workshops with thirteen presenters representing diverse organizations like PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), Penn State University, USDA Forest Service, Oregon State University and the Pennsylvania Game Commission.



Paula Randler (left), Forest Program Specialist, USDA Forest Service and Nicole Strong (center), Forestry Instructor and Women Owning Woodlots Coordinator, Oregon State University, instruct participants in a mentoring workshop.

The women bunked together, shared meals, and learned in group settings through dynamic and fun hands-on workshops. Post-retreat all participants will build on the momentum of their experience and employ the knowledge they have gained to increase education about the value of forest land and sound stewardship practices among other women forest landowners in their communities. "It was a wonderful experience," states enthusiastic landowner Phoebe Shaw, "I rushed back to Heron

Looking Toward the Future

by Greg Belcamino, Board President

2011 has been an eventful year for the Conservancy.

You have probably noticed the symbol of accreditation by the national Land Trust Alliance on your recent issues of the *Highlands Journal*. Pursuing accreditation was a resource and time intensive process, but it was time well worth the effort.

Accreditation is formal recognition that we operate in compliance with the highest standards for financial management, protection of our conservation easements, recordkeeping, and all other aspects of achieving our conservation mission.

This year we added two important new staff positions. We welcome Jake Hendee, who has a Master's degree in forestry, as our Pennsylvania Land Protection Coordinator, and Virginia Kennedy, who is completing her Ph.D. in English and American Indian Studies at Cornell, as Outreach and Development Coordinator. You will be seeing the fruits of Jake's and Virginia's work soon in more acres protected, in a redesigned web site, new educational and outreach materials, and invigorated outreach to the broader community to invest more and more people in the Conservancy's mission.

In 2012, we will relocate our Sullivan County office from the Sullivan County Government Center, where we have been sharing space, to a building located on a beautiful farm property on which we hold a conservation



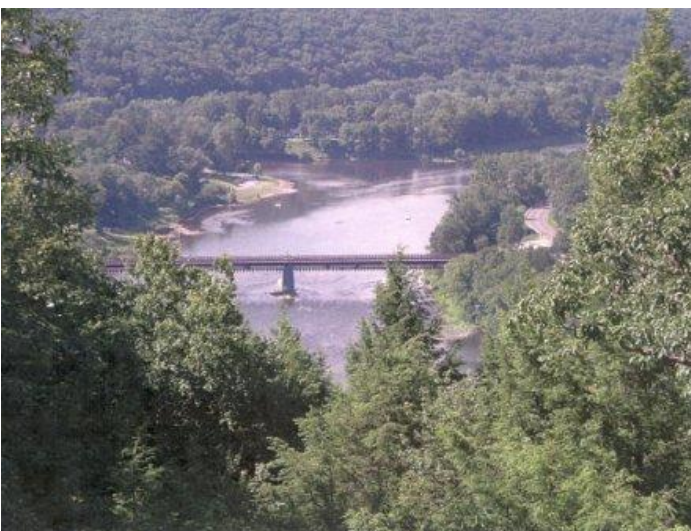
easement. This will put us closer to the center of our New York activities and create amazing opportunities for educational and community outreach. Keep an eye out for some of our big plans for the new office location, like breaking ground for our new community garden and a host of exciting on-site nature walks and forestry and gardening workshops.



Board President Greg Belcamino spending an afternoon fly-fishing.

The Conservancy continues to be engaged in strong partnerships with other regional organizations, both public and private, that share our conservation goals. To give just couple of examples: Shop Local Save, Save Land, in its third successful year, is an initiative connecting consumers to local farm and forest products and educational information in order to support working lands and protect scenic rural character, cultural heritage, and quality of life. The Common Waters Fund, a partnership of public and non-profit organizations, helps forest landowners in the Upper Delaware River region improve the management of their private forest lands in order to support the development of sustainable communities and working landscapes in the watershed.

**Shop Local
Save Land**



View of the Roebling Bridge at confluence of the Delaware and Lackawaxen Rivers.

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Women and Their Woods educational programs, developed in partnership with organizations like the USDA Forest Service, PA DCNR, and Penn State University, teach the growing demographic of women forest landowners how to properly steward their lands and how to mentor other women landowners in their communities. These partnerships and others in which the Conservancy participates foster dedication to the conservation of the Upper Delaware River region's natural heritage and sustainable local economies.



Past and present Board members with Executive Director Sue Carrier.

We have also faced some critical challenges over the past several years. Perhaps the most daunting is the advent of Marcellus Shale drilling for natural gas, which is taking place in central Pennsylvania now and moving steadily in our direction, and which may be coming soon to New York. Other land trusts have responded to the threats posed by gas drilling by adopting policies that countenance gas drilling on their preserved lands while offering platitudes about holding gas companies to high environmental standards. The Conservancy has taken a different approach. We have recently adopted a set of guidelines to inform our land protection efforts that make clear we do not favor gas drilling. We will consider allowing a gas extraction exception only under extraordinary circumstances and to protect lands of exceptional value.

These guidelines have resulted from the dedicated work of a group of volunteers who grappled with this issue for over a year. Our response is not perfect; 'perfect' is a difficult standard to attain with a challenge as contentious and potentially harmful to our lands, waters and quality of life as gas drilling. But we believe that our response is more rigorous and more realistic than the approaches adopted by many other land trusts and environmental advocacy organizations.

Our other main challenge is developing and maintaining a vibrant board and a corps of willing volunteers to help us carry on our important land protection work. We have been here for seventeen years, and in that time have protected over 13,000 acres of land. Our directors, including our founder Barbara Yeaman, who still serves as a director, work without compensation other than the satisfaction that comes from protecting the lands of the four rural counties we serve. At times this service is time-consuming and occasionally difficult, but it is *always* rewarding and invaluable. We are looking for volunteers to serve on our committees (Land Protection, Finance, Personnel, Governance, and Outreach and Development), or to serve as directors.

We are especially interested in having more participation in New York, where we face special challenges with the advent of Marcellus Shale drilling. We view this as both a threat and an opportunity to expand our outreach to New Yorkers who are concerned that the rural character of their communities is threatened by gas drilling and by inappropriate development. If you are interested in serving as a volunteer or director, please get in touch with us in our Hawley or Sullivan County office.

And even if you are not ready to make a commitment to joining us in a formal capacity, please consider this an invitation to speak to any of us generally about our land protection work and all the other things we do to augment that work, to join us for one of our events, or to just drop us a line or stop by. You will find us congenial, committed and welcoming. We look forward to seeing you or meeting you as we move into 2012, inspired and dedicated to our mission to protect the lands, waters, and quality of life in the Upper Delaware River region.



Katie, member Don Down's granddaughter, at a Conservancy monarch butterfly workshop.

Knowing Home

by Jake Hendee

Hello, from the new Delaware Highlands Conservancy Land Protection Coordinator in Pennsylvania! It is my job to work with landowners to protect the valuable acreage of their family farms or working forests.

After a long drive to northeast Pennsylvania from my home state of Kansas, my first conversation began with a terse declaration “Leave this town.” The older gentleman wiping tables at a fast food restaurant in Scranton continued, “Leave this town. Head back to the country.” Whether it was a tinge of Midwestern accent or my car with Kansas license tags filled with suitcases and furniture, it was no secret that I was new to town.

The older man regaled me with stories about the large family farm of his youth: The freedom of wide open spaces, the one-acre vegetable garden, and the ability to live off the land. His family was not rich by any means, but in hindsight, had everything they could ask for. Then he moved to the city.

“And you know what they did with it after that?” he asked me as the passion welled up in his voice. It was an all too familiar story.

“Sold it. Sold the family farm.”

Right then and there, the man who had initiated our conversation by telling me to leave his town could not have more genuinely endorsed my decision to leave the Midwest to work with the Delaware Highlands Conservancy. Here I have the valuable opportunity to work with landowners to protect the lands they love and to conserve the precious ecosystems vital to clean water,



fresh air, wildlife habitat, and the quality of life we *all* value in the Upper Delaware River region.

As the recently accredited Conservancy begins a new chapter as one of only 135 accredited land trusts in the United States, I welcome the opportunity to participate in the continuation of an impressive 17-year tradition of land conservation in Pennsylvania and New York. Drop by and say “hi”, call or send an email. Join us for a Conservancy event. I look forward to working with landowners tasked with stewarding their lands each day, to meeting the Conservancy's members and partners in conservation, and to making this beautiful and unique region *home*.



Jake works with landowners in Pennsylvania. Pictured here at a recent forestry field day which Jake facilitated at Promised Land State Park, Peter Wulfhorst (far right) leads a morning bird walk while Roger Spotts (far left) exhibits ground fauna of the forest.



Our Natural Heritage

by Virginia Kennedy

About four years ago, my daughter and I participated as volunteers in the Delaware Highlands Conservancy meadow party held on the property of Conservancy founder, Barbara Yeaman. Marygrace dished out homemade ice cream; I managed the silent auction. Late in the day after the crowd thinned out and clean up was done, Marygrace and I stood knee deep in the Delaware River looking downstream. We were still and quiet, letting the river refresh our tired feet when 83-year-old Barbara came striding down her lawn carrying her kayak. She dropped it into the river in front of us, climbed in, and moved off into the dusk. My daughter gave me a big smile and said, "That's who I want to be." And I answered her enthusiastically, "Me, too!"

All these years later, I found myself again at Barbara Yeaman's, looking at the river and thinking of the future. This time Barbara and I sat under the long arms of her prize-winning black maple catching sun and watching light sparkle in the water. We discussed plans for the Conservancy's future and how in my new position as Outreach and Development Manager I would work with the rest of the Conservancy staff, the Board of Directors, and the whole Conservancy community to further the Conservancy's mission of protecting the *natural heritage* of the Upper Delaware River region.

As we talked, that phrase, *natural heritage*, struck me as an important one. It implies much more than nature as "resource." It communicates something of much deeper value—a tradition of people living in and from special relationships with our lands and waters; farmers and foresters, hikers, hunters, fishermen, and families who love living where they have room to roam, and where they can share space with deer, bear, and eagles. Our natural heritage is as much the farm and forest products that support our local economies, as it is our pristine waters and healthy woodlands.



Children play around Yeaman's prizewinning Black Maple.



Marygrace Kennedy (center) with Jake Hendee, Barbara Yeaman and the next generation of conservationists.

The quality of life we have here in the Upper Delaware River region comes from our clean waters and natural areas and from the long-term sustainability of our forests, farms, and local economies. The Conservancy's mission is to work with people and communities to protect this quality of life, this natural heritage of which we are a part and for which we are responsible. That mission embraces all of us, people of Barbara's generation, of my generation, and of my daughter's. The natural heritage of this region is unique and invaluable, and we at the Conservancy in partnership with our members and supporters work to assure that this heritage remains healthy, whole, and viable for us now, for our children, and for theirs.



Eagle on the Upper Delaware.
Photo by Dave Soete.

Progress in New York

In the three years since Melinda Meddaugh, Land Protection Coordinator for New York, came on board at the Conservancy, she has been directly involved with the protection of almost 500 acres of farm and forest lands. Though each of these landowners has a different story for exactly why they chose to permanently conserve their private lands, what they have in common is a desire to know that their forests, farms, and waters will always be healthy. "These landowners have all been passionate about protecting their lands for future generations," explains Melinda, "not just for their own families, but because they care about their communities. They understand that the protection of their lands benefits everyone."

Melinda understands from her own engagement in her community of Rock Hill that caring for our environment, our towns, our parks, our forestlands and farms, is a civic responsibility. She is intimately involved with Rock Hill community enhancement and the development of a community farmers' market there. "I work with my town," Melinda affirms, "because I believe that raising awareness, especially for my younger generation, regarding the importance of natural resources and local food and forest economies to the overall economic picture of the region is vital to sustaining what we care about here. I work at the Conservancy because it's an organization that reflects my own values. We need to care, we need to engage, and we need to actively sustain what we love and the quality of life that we enjoy."

The Conservancy is currently planning to move its Sullivan County office to the property of landowner,

Lou Barr, who placed a conservation easement on his family farm. "Lou Barr is an amazing supporter of the Conservancy, and we are truly excited to be able to use his land for our work," states Melinda. "At our new Sullivan County location, we can offer more hands-on experiences that will enable the community and the Conservancy to become even more engaged. Programs and workshops on the property, things like a community garden and forestry workshops and outdoor activities for young people mean many opportunities to get



Melinda Meddaugh (right) monitors the Sherwood easement with property owners Kenna and Walter Levendosky in Delhi, New York.

outside and get involved in interacting with the land. What's even more exciting is that when people see the Barr farm for themselves, they understand how important it is that Lou Barr chose to permanently protect it. They come to know that the work the Conservancy does is much more than just protecting land for an individual landowner or family. It's conserving land for all of us."

Catskills FarmLink Launches Online Land Access Resource

A collaboration of Catskills region agricultural organizations announces the launch of Catskills FarmLink, a free online land listing resource at www.catskillsfarmlink.org. Catskills FarmLink developed in response to increasing inquiries related to land access in the Catskills. The site design promotes the Catskills as a great place to operate a small, diversified farm and seeks to maintain the region's working landscape by connecting farmers with underutilized agricultural land.



Catskills FarmLink compiles user-submitted properties and offers a range of resources: statewide and regional contacts that support the farming community; land lease planning and landowner guides; educational workshops, networking events, classifieds, internships, job offerings, equipment and livestock sales, and distribution partnership/sharing.

The site serves beginning farmers looking to transition to independent farm management, existing farmers looking to acquire or access more land, and landowners interested in making property available for agricultural use. Site users submit listings at no charge. Classified categories include equipment, hay and feed, landseekers, livestock and agricultural services. Visit www.catskillsfarmlink.org to explore land listings and classifieds, or submit your own, and to learn more about farming and land access in the region.

Catskills FarmLink is a collaborative effort of organizations committed to the future of agriculture in the region. These organizations include Catskill Mountainkeeper; Cornell Cooperative Extension of Delaware, Schoharie and Sullivan Counties; Delaware Highlands Conservancy; Farm Catskills; Farmhearts; NYC Department of Environmental Protection; and the Watershed Agricultural Council.

From the Executive Director

The Conservancy's achievement of accreditation means it now belongs to an elite group of only 135 of 1,700 land trusts nationwide who are recognized by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission as having the highest land trust standards and practices. Achieving accreditation honors the dedication to our mission of our whole staff, board of directors, and our committed core of Conservancy volunteers.

The Conservancy has grown as an efficient, successful, and dynamic organization through the support of members who care deeply for our unique and environmentally healthy Upper Delaware River region. Membership investment in our mission to protect the lands, waters, and quality of life here means that the Conservancy has had the opportunity to play an integral part in pursuing common community goals.

These goals have to do with assuring that our local farms can thrive and provide access to healthy foods now and into the future. They have to do with giving forest landowners the tools they need to sustain the forests so important to the protection of our clean water. They have to do with maintaining the ability of community members and visitors to our region to hunt, fish, canoe, and hike in natural areas. And they have to do with sustaining local economies that support families and communities.



To meet these goals, the Conservancy has invested in partnerships like Shop Local Save Land, the Common Waters Partnership, and the Upper Delaware River Roundtable that bring together organizations striving to assure the people of the entire region, both the New York and Pennsylvania sides, can enjoy and maintain our natural heritage and rural quality of life now and for future generations.

I gain incredible personal satisfaction from being part of the Conservancy because of the opportunity I have to give back to my community. As Executive Director, I am proud of what we achieve and proud of and thankful for our members and supporters who make our accomplishments possible.

Conservancy Volunteers Love to Monitor



Jamie Bartholomew, Monitoring Coordinator, truly enjoys visiting properties the Conservancy has permanently protected. "I really enjoy meeting with land owners and hearing what inspired them to conserve their properties," Jamie states, "and working with our volunteers is a true pleasure."

"As a monitoring volunteer, I enjoyed the opportunity to walk through incredibly beautiful lands. Some monitoring visits involve a meeting land owners; people that put land in a Conservancy easement really care about their land and its future." Joe Shatt

This was my first summer volunteering for the Conservancy. Not only did I get to meet some wonderful property owners, walk, and view land not open to the general public, but the highlight for me was realizing at some point that I was walking on the original Route 6 before it was re-routed to its present location. Talk about walking through history! Way cool!" Peggy Emanuel

"There are no negatives. You're outside hiking, exploring new places, learning local history, meeting other community members you wouldn't normally meet, volunteering for a good cause, learning about plants and trees from your staff partner. It's all good!" Dawn Williams



Staff member, Melinda Meddaugh, adds signage to a conserved property during an annual monitoring visit.

**Join the Conservancy as a monitoring volunteer.
570-226-3164 or info@conservancy.org**

(Conservancy Creates Network for Women—continued from page 2)

Hill and shared my information with three fellas who help me on the property. I was a mine of information, just discovered. I'm thankful to all the lovely young ladies for a meaningful retreat. I was happy to meet my Wayne county group."

The Retreat was the culmination of a series of prior workshops. In 2008, the Conservancy realized that due to demographic trends, increasing numbers of women are becoming the owners and managers of forestland. Because women landowners often feel they lack the knowledge to make informed decisions about land, the Conservancy, in partnership with the USDA Forest Service and PA DCNR, began offering conservation education programs targeted to women forest landowners, and *Women and Their Woods* was born.

The Conservancy and Penn State University will continue to provide educational outreach to the women mentors and support them in creating their regional *Women and their Woods* groups. The Conservancy will also be participating in a national effort to research the educational needs of women forest landowners and to develop a curriculum to be used by various educators to enhance the *Women and Their Woods* network. "The *Women and their Woods* program provides a great opportunity for the Conservancy to reach out to a vital group of landowners across PA and the surrounding area," states an enthusiastic Amanda, "We've been very lucky to work with a great group of women landowners who are excited to share their knowledge and love for sustainable forest management with other landowners. We look forward to many more successful programs in the future."



Amanda and Zeb enjoy a quiet moment at the Women and Their Woods Retreat.



Retreat participants braving the weather to learn about prescribed fire from DCNR service foresters.



Retreat participants using modified Biltmore sticks in a forest measurement class.

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, November 15 — Financial Planning for Your Forest, Pike County Conservation District office Route 402, Pike County, PA 6:30-9pm

Join Lloyd Casey of Casey's Forestry Concepts to learn about timber tax, forest finance and estate planning for landowners. Part of the Forestry Field Days program in coordination with DCNR and Pike County.

\$5 per attendee / couple.

For more information visit **www.DelawareHighlands.org**
or find us on Facebook

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JOIN THE TEAM: VOLUNTEER TODAY

The Delaware Highlands Conservancy is always looking for new volunteers — for an afternoon, an activity or for a longer term commitment on one of our committees. Call the office to find out how you can help.

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