

ANNUAL

REPORT

2004

Celebrating
15
Years

*HUDSON
HIGHLANDS
LAND TRUST*



Photo courtesy of Phil Heffernan

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LETTER TO OUR FRIENDS

Dear Friends:

What a year your Land Trust had in 2004! With a new Executive Director and the advancement of our Land Steward to full-time standing, the organization quickly vaulted to a higher plane of land conservation work.

Your Land Trust also celebrated its 15th Anniversary with a memorable dinner in October, where 240 friends and neighbors joined us in celebrating both our past achievements and our plans for the future. We hope you will take time to read about this wonderful evening later in our report.

Of course, the primary mission of your Land Trust is the preservation of open space in the Hudson Highlands. We are pleased to have conserved several important new properties during the year and are working on a number of similar projects throughout the region that we anticipate will result in the preservation of hundreds of additional acres in the coming months. We applaud all of the property owners taking personal action to conserve the national treasure we call our home.

In a year of significant progress, the Board of Directors recognized that the Land Trust's region of the Hudson Highlands should be defined by a host of dimensions beyond our long-established political boundaries, including geological, biological, and historical. With the threat of urban sprawl throughout the region converging with a growing need to provide conservation options to residents interested in protecting the unique character of the Highlands, the Board



**The
Expanded
Hudson
Highlands
Land Trust
Mission
Area**



unanimously approved the formal expansion of the Land Trust's mission and service area (see above map). With this critical decision, we believe that your Land Trust is positioned in the right manner for the future, ready to meet its mission of *preserving the rural character, natural resources and beauty of the Hudson Highlands*.

Of course, this growth to meet the region's conservation needs requires resources. As you will see from the donor lists contained in this report, the support we received in 2004 was unprecedented. We look forward to your helping us exceed this commitment in 2005, so that, together, we can continue to preserve the scenic land of the Hudson Highlands for our children and generations to come.

We both wish you all the best.

Chris Davis
President

Andy Chmar
Executive Director

CONSERVATION

DONATIONS

Land Preservation Agreements Defined and Implemented

To date, your Land Trust has completed a total of 38 conservation easements, protecting 832 acres of land in Philipstown and Putnam Valley. We appreciate the voluntary actions of the conservation-minded residents who have worked with us over the years. Conservation easements are an excellent option for property owners to help preserve the rural nature of the Hudson Highlands, while continuing to retain ownership of the land.

The Conservation Easement is a custom-written agreement between landowner and Land Trust limiting the use of the land in perpetuity. It helps to protect our natural resources and the overall character of the area, and thus benefits both the landowner and the public at large. Often referred to as a Land Preservation Agreement, an easement is a deed restriction that runs with the land, and thus is binding on all future owners. It is crafted to address the wishes of the landowner, balancing practical and often sentimental issues, with the legal requirement of the Land Trust to provide public benefit, e.g. protection of scenic views, natural habitat and rural character. Depending upon the nature of the property, the landowner may

retain the flexibility to allow for very limited future development (often keeping future family generations in mind), or completely preserve the land as it exists when the agreement is signed. The conserved land continues to be on the tax rolls, so local municipalities' revenues are not reduced by the preservation decisions of landowners.

Power in Numbers

Although most easements are on individual properties, neighboring landowners can execute Land Preservation Agreements jointly, which can multiply the benefits for all. As is true in many situations, often one person will pioneer an effort and others follow. Timing may not allow for all neighbors to sign agreements simultaneously, nor will all landowners even entertain the idea at the same time. For this circumstance, Conservation Easement Escrow Agreements exist. When ready and when the time is right for each neighbor, each can execute a Conservation Easement and place it in escrow until enough neighbors have joined in, at which time the agreements will be recorded with the County and begin to take effect. This approach provides assurance that landowners will not be alone in filing their easements, and when enough neighbors have joined, whole neighborhoods can be preserved.

Your Land Trust has been working hard to finalize land preservation agreements. As subdivision and development pressures threaten the rural, scenic and ecological values of our area, our pace quickens. The list below is an indication of our efforts over the last two years.

LAND PRESERVATION AGREEMENTS

◆ *Angell Property*

This 18-acre property, including a farmhouse originally built in the first half of the eighteenth century, was farmed until 1927 when the Angell family took ownership. Close to the Appalachian Trail west of the Route 9 corridor, within the Scenic Area of Statewide Significance as designated by New York State, it is in the vicinity of State Park land on a scenic dirt road and is adjacent to other lands preserved by conservation easement.

◆ *Healy Property*

Landowner Libby Healy continues to be thoughtful about her land and has recently raised the conservation bar on her 160 acres on Lane Gate Road. By removing 5 building lots allowed in her first land preservation agreement and moving one of two remaining ones well away from Lane Gate Road, she has assured that any house built would be all but invisible to passersby.

◆ *Property of O'Donoghue and McGloin*

This 2-acre conservation agreement adjoins Fahnestock State Park and therefore serves as a buffer to the Park, helping to protect its scenic and natural character. A perennial stream traverses the property that feeds into Indian Brook, a tributary to the Hudson River. Preserving this stream will help protect the Hudson River watershed.

◆ *Sprague Property*

These fourteen acres are adjacent to and visible from State Park lands, and are characterized by rugged rock outcroppings, forest, wetlands and scenic views. The property is typical of lands in our Hudson Highlands, which the State, local government and civic organizations consider to be an area of outstanding natural beauty and ecological significance, worthy of protection.

◆ *Ward Property*

The rolling fields of this 28-acre property are adjacent to and visible from State Park lands and land owned by Open Space Institute, and add to a significant swath of conserved properties visible from Route 9D near Castle Rock. Arden Brook, another tributary to the Hudson River, runs through the property.

◆ *Warfield Property*

These eleven acres are within the Scenic Area of Statewide Significance along the Route 9D corridor, close to and visible from State Park lands. The property includes beautiful fields, more specifically an upland meadow habitat, that furthers the natural character and beauty of the Hudson Highlands.

LAND DONATION

◆ *Longstreth Property*

Nineteen acres of spectacular land, representative of rugged lands found in our scenic Hudson Highlands, were donated to the Hudson Highlands Land Trust in 2004. The Longstreth family and the Land Trust intend for the property to be added to adjacent park land owned by New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. It borders the Hudson Highlands State Park, as well as land protected by other conservation easements. It will be used solely for passive recreation by the public, including nature study and hiking. The land has unobstructed scenic views all the way to New York City, and provides habitat for wildlife and plant species that require large tracts of land to survive.

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HHLT

2004

ACHIEVEMENTS

In this, our fifteenth anniversary year, it is fitting that considerable attention be paid to the record built by the Hudson Highlands Land Trust in its first decade and a half. But last year was itself a notable one for your Land Trust, with its own turning points, achievements and challenges.

In the first category, the standout event was the transformation from Director into

Executive Director of Andrew T. Chmar. That this West Point graduate and Philipstown resident is heading the Land Trust at this critical time should be welcome news to all who care about our Hudson Valley communities. That he accepted the position with great eagerness is proof of both the importance of our mission and of Andy's love for a challenge. Last year also saw the accession to the full-time Land Trust staff of Marlo Kovacs, as Land Steward. Marlo had been working part-time for HHLT since moving to Philipstown in 2003.

All four of HHLT major programs scored solid successes last year. Herewith a quick rundown:

❖ **Outreach.** We increased the number of hikes in our Take-A-Hike! program from 7 in 2003 to 20 in 2004, attracting 216 trekkers to this popular program.

❖ **Public Policy.** Land Trust directors and staff advocated against laws that could compromise the rural character of the Hudson Highlands and undercut environmental protections by allowing high density housing in areas that lack supporting infrastructure or by weakening existing constraints on developing steep slopes. We also spoke out for governmental processes that encourage open government by videotaping and telecasting planning board meetings, and that include adopting and following comprehensive or master plans that reflect community values.

❖ **Natural Resources.** We completed the design and fieldwork for a study of four Philipstown streams. Responses from the landowners who volunteered to participate have been collected and are being analyzed.

❖ **Land Conservation.** In addition to expanding the Hudson Highlands Land Trust's service/mission area and accepting a number of new conservation easements, we actively monitored the 38 easements we now hold. We also continued to act as monitoring agents for other easement holders, such as Scenic Hudson Land Trust. We regard monitoring of easements *in perpetuity* as one of our key responsibilities.

Thanks to the initiative of Land Use Consultant Terri Platz, and a host of volunteers, the Beverly Dock Trail has new interpretive signage and is now much more accessible. This trail follows the course of Benedict Arnold's escape from the Beverly Robinson house upon learning that his treason had been discovered upon the capture of Major John Andre.

Finally, while we record with pride that we concluded 2004 with a slight surplus from operations, we must also note that meeting the budget was a major challenge in a difficult economy, and we expect that meeting our budget in FY 2005 will be equally arduous. We are proud of last year's record, and we ask your support in the coming year in order that we may have an equally compelling story to tell in this space next year.



**FIFTEENTH
ANNIVERSARY
DINNER**

Celebrating
15 *Years*

Fifteen years ago, a group of concerned neighbors created the Hudson Highlands Land Trust to help protect the unique character of the Hudson Highlands. On October 22, 2004 over 240 guests gathered at The Garrison in honor of this fifteenth anniversary, which was celebrated in images, as well as words.

During his introductory remarks, Land Trust Board President Chris Davis made a point of recognizing the diversity of support represented by the multitude of attendees, noting that the evening was a thanksgiving as well as a celebration. "Our guests include members of the boards and senior staff from our sister organizations, Open Space Institute, Scenic Hudson and Riverkeeper, financial supporters both large and small, as well as individuals who, through their donations of conservation easements, have personally committed to safeguarding the rural character of the Hudson Highlands. It is a remarkable assemblage of supporters, and we thank you all for your commitment to preserving our one-of-a-kind landscape." Philipstown Supervisor William Mazzuca was among the guests, with State Senator Vincent Leibell and Town of Cortlandt Supervisor Linda Puglisi unable to attend due to conflicts but sending proclamations honoring the Land Trust and its Anniversary.

Continued

ANNIVERSARY DINNER, Continued

The evening was the premiere of *Legacy of the Land: Preserving the Hudson Highlands*, a film by Garrison resident and filmmaker Stephen Ives. Ives brought the Land Trust's mission to life by capturing the admirable and spirited character of three extraordinary women: Nina Abrams, Marie Louise Saunders and Elizabeth Todd Healy. While each tells her individual story, they have a common determination to ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy the land that has meant so much to them.

Steve described the challenges of making a film of this nature, using three remarkable women to illustrate a larger group of dedicated individuals, many represented at the dinner, who recognize the need for long-term preservation and are willing to take personal action to conserve it. The screening of the film brought both laughter and tears from the attendees, and received

sustained applause at its conclusion.

During cocktails and dessert there was a running slide show of wonderful landscape photographs that represent a sampling of the properties where owners have donated conservation easements. Four local photographers - Scott Barrow, Phil Heffernan, Mario Mercado, and Carolyn Smith -



Land Trust President Chris Davis and Executive Director Andy Chmar join conservation honorees Libby Healy, Nina Abrams and Risi Saunders at the Anniversary Dinner.

contributed images to this project, which was put together so effectively by Connie Sullivan.

In addition to allowing the Land Trust to use one of his remarkable watercolors for its invitations, programs and first-ever Land Trust poster, Garrison artist Don Nice also donated a print that was auctioned during the evening to raise funds for land conservation.

Executive Director Andy Chmar summed up the evening in his remarks: "We hope that this dinner helps to highlight our growing organization and the critical role we play in preserving the quality of life enjoyed by all residents of the Hudson Highlands, and that our first 15 years are just the beginning of a long future of dedicated work in the Highlands!"

WHAT'S

AHEAD

IN 2005

Land Conservation

Land preservation agreements remain at the core of your Land Trust's mission. The staff will continue to promote conservation easements with owners who are trying to protect their land, while also working closely with other local conservation organizations to find solutions for larger land tracts.

Winter/Spring Lecture and Discussion Series

Local authorities will join with other experts to address issues of sustainable living and development, including architectural and building practices, energy conservation, biodiversity and local agriculture.

More Popular Hikes

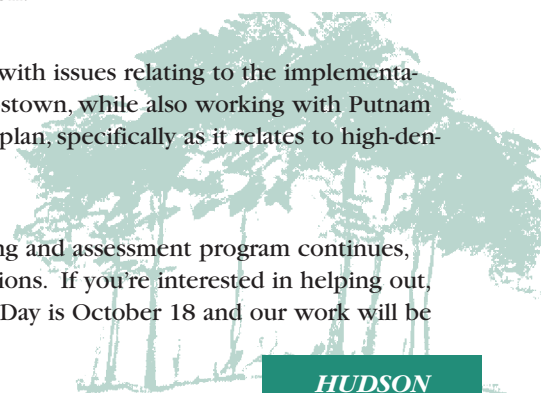
Take A Hike! will be back in operation after the winter, with even more hikes, both on weekends and during the week, including old favorites as well as some new discoveries across the region.

Master Plan Implementation

Your Land Trust will remain involved with issues relating to the implementation of the new master plan for Philipstown, while also working with Putnam Valley as the town reviews its master plan, specifically as it relates to high-density housing.

Stream Assessment

Our volunteer-based stream monitoring and assessment program continues, with expanded stream sampling locations. If you're interested in helping out, let us know. World Water Monitoring Day is October 18 and our work will be part of the larger celebration.



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