

Rail Trail - Progress on Hudson River Valley Greenway and Access



Dozens of ideas were generated by rail trail enthusiasts who attended a workshop to kick off work on our Hudson River Valley Greenway grant. The purpose of the grant is to develop a comprehensive communication and design program

for Albany County's rail trail. The session was led by skilled professionals Scott Lewendon and Dan Mehlman who are volunteering their time to this project as matching funds for the \$10,000 grant.

Five major themes emerged from the dozens of creative ideas and concepts that were generated: Culture/Natural History; Mobility, Transportation and Access; Health and Welfare; Environment; and Community Cohesion and Connections. Besides themes, the group was asked to suggest a possible name for the trail and a tag line to help promote it. Most favored names that related the trail to what it connected, the Hudson River and the Helderberg Mountains. Tag lines were more diverse and recognized the health, historical, and community aspects of the trail.

With all of the ideas captured on flip charts, a smaller advisory committee sat down to discuss the input and propose ideas for a name, logo, and graphic design elements. The advisory group consists of town historians, graphic artists, rail trail volunteers, and community supporters. Once they review a few drafts of designs, there will be another opportunity for the public to provide input. The plan is to have this ready for public review by mid-May.

Meanwhile, plans are being made to open additional segments of the rail trail. Jill Knapp, Scott Lewendon, and Chuck Dollard made a presentation to the New Scotland Town Board at their March meeting. The Town was very supportive of the concept of opening a segment from the Village of Voorheesville to Upper Font Grove Road. The Village is also supportive of the idea. This segment would be approximately 2.4 miles long. An agreement similar to the one signed last year between MHLA, Albany County, and the Town of Bethlehem is being discussed. In addition, the Town of Bethlehem would like to see the trail extended further east from Veterans Park to Mason Road.

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So Why Do Salamanders Cross Roads?

It's not that these little creatures are thrill seekers looking for an EXTREME challenge of crossing busy roads. It's just that often humans have built roads that divide their breeding habitat (wetland pools) from their year-round residence (old logs in the woods.) In the annual migration to breed, and again after breeding when they return to their woodland habitat, many of these little animals lose their lives crossing roads in the dark.

Often these migrations can be predicted by the weather forecast. It's known that many of these amphibian species emerge from hibernation and migrate on rainy nights in March or April when the air temperatures reach 40°F. Volunteer road crossing programs have been set up around the Hudson Valley to act as crossing guards to help move these little animals across roads.

This year seems to have been more of a challenge predicting their movement. While the weather was unusually warm in March, it was also dry. There were few nights when the weather was both warm and wet. So getting the crossing guards out when and where needed was difficult. And one of the unfortunate trouble spots was on Picard Road in Voorheesville. Dan Driscoll who had been checking for salamanders at Thacher Park and didn't see any up there, went down to Picard Road and found the road "alive with various salamander, peepers, little tree or wood frogs and worms..." He sadly reported that many of them had not made it across.



Dan's observation provides further support for our land protection effort -- Saving Helderberg Habitats -- in this area. Our immediate focus is on a few properties from the base of the escarpment across Picard Road and into Vly Swamp. This area has been recognized as a biodiversity hotspot with records of at least 13 bird species and 20 amphibian species listed as *New York Species of Greatest Conservation Need*. Other animals and plants of conservation concern, such as the regional scarce walking fern, are also found in the area. Its importance is magnified by its location at the foot of the Helderberg Escarpment and its proximity to other conservation lands such as John Boyd Thacher State Park and Indian Ladder Farms.

No matter what your interest, wildlife, botany, geology, agriculture or history, this area has something unique to offer. We hope you will join us in the coming months for outings to learn more about these various resources and how we can assure their protection.

Mission Statement

The Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy saves special places by promoting voluntary conservation of farmland and natural landscapes in cooperation with landowners and local governments for the use and enjoyment of current and future generations.

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Message from Lea Montalto-Rook Development Director



Yesterday morning, while driving to the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy offices from my home near Elm Avenue Park, I found myself behind a tractor. Rather than curse my luck for being stuck behind a slow moving vehicle during my morning commute, I found myself marveling once more at the diversity of the Hudson Valley region. A 15 minute drive from my front door can carry me into the heart of the state capital, to a local farm where I can pick my own produce, to bustling restaurants and shopping, or to the beautiful Helderberg Mountains.

When my family was planning our move from Rhode Island last year, we were drawn to the Bethlehem area primarily because of the schools. When we exited the highway at Selkirk for our first visit to the area, we couldn't believe our eyes. My daughter cried out: "Look at the horses!" It was not long before we were living in Selkirk and exploring the wonderful natural resources in our new backyard--many of them owned or saved by MHLC. In our short time here we have already taken advantage of farmer's markets, pumpkin patches, apple orchards, roadside vegetable stands, and hiking. And yet there's so much more to explore!

I joined MHLC as the new Development Director in January. I have spent my career working in marketing and development but this is my first position working with a land conservation organization. I am thrilled to be contributing to an organization with such a laudable mission. During my first few months I have been pleasantly surprised by all of the special places that have been saved during the MHLC's 20-year history. And it has been my pleasure to meet so many dedicated volunteers. I'm looking forward to working with you to preserve more open spaces for future generations.

If you have any questions about your donations or have any ideas for events or other activities, please call me at the MHLC office or e-mail me at lmrookmhlc@nycap.rr.com. I look forward to hearing from you!

20th Anniversary Membership Drive

We are proud that in 2012 the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy celebrates its **20th year of preserving and caring for natural lands, healthy habitats, and clean watersheds** for the benefit of native plants, wildlife, and current and future generations in Albany, Schenectady and Montgomery counties. We would not be here today without *caring and generous members* who have supported MHLC with annual donations. Thank you!

As we enter the 2nd Quarter of our 20th Anniversary year, **we need your help** as much as ever. We have already received a generous response to our membership mailing but we still have a long way to go before we reach our goal for this year. Please help!

- 1- **Please spread the word** about the valuable work that we do to your friends and neighbors.
- 2- Most importantly, **please support MHLC today** by renewing your membership gift or by becoming a member for the first time.

Three easy ways to donate and become a 20th Anniversary Member.

- 1- **Send a check** or money order made out to MHLC to our mailing address.
- 2- Make a **secure online donation** at www.mohawkhudson.org.
- 3- **Donate by phone** by calling our office at 518-436-6346.

Please don't wait. Please send your contribution today and help us save more special places throughout the region for the next 20 years and beyond!

Thank You to Our Business Sponsors!

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In order to open the trail from Voorheesville to Upper Font Grove, some work is needed on a couple of bridges. There is a small bridge across Vly Creek that needs new decking and railings. It is expected that this work can be done by volunteers. The bridge over Rt. 155 will need chain link fencing welded on the the current bridge to protect vehicles below the bridge on Rt. 155. We are optimistic that we will be able to secure sufficient funding to complete both projects once an agreement is signed.



MHLC and its FORT committee members are really excited about all of this activity. After waiting so many years to get legal access to the trail, it is really rewarding to see what our persistence, grass roots activism, and strong volunteer and community support has accomplished!

Welcome New Board Members!

For the first time in nearly three years, we have a full board of 17 members. This is an amazing turn around from 2009 when finding individuals who were interested in serving on our board was one of our toughest challenges. So, we are delighted to welcome a couple of new members.

Carol Ash joined the board in January. Carol is currently the President of the Carey Center for Global Good in Rensselaerville, where she lives. She served as Commissioner of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and served as the State Historic Preservation Officer from 2007 to 2010. Previous positions include serving as Executive Director of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, and as New York State Director of The Nature Conservancy.

Kim Baker joined the board in March. Kim has been employed at The Sage Colleges since 1997 and has most recently served as Program Director of Special Education & Special Education/Literacy. She was a member of New York State Education Task Force from 1998-2008. In addition to her professional experiences, Kim is a long-time resident of Latham and helps broaden the board's geographic diversity and outreach.

Save the Date



Given the scarcity of Sunday afternoons in September, we are moving our annual fall benefit to a Saturday evening in October. Please mark your calendars for **Saturday October 13, 2012.**

This year's event will be "A Night in the Woods." It will be held at the New York State Museum in the Adirondack exhibit. This will provide the ambiance of nature without the worry of rain, ticks, or mosquitos.

We hope you will save the date and plan to join us.

Drawing for a Kayak Package

Once again, Eastern Mountain Sports (EMS) at the Stuyvesant Plaza store is holding a drawing for a kayak package. Tickets can be purchased from now through National Trails Day, Saturday, June 2, 2012 at the store. The proceeds of the drawing will be donated to MHLC.



The package includes a Perception Sport Sound 9.5 Kayak, an Aqua-Bound Sting Ray Aluminum Paddle, and a MTI APF personal flotation device. Tickets are \$2 each or 3 for \$5. The winner will be announced on or around June 9.

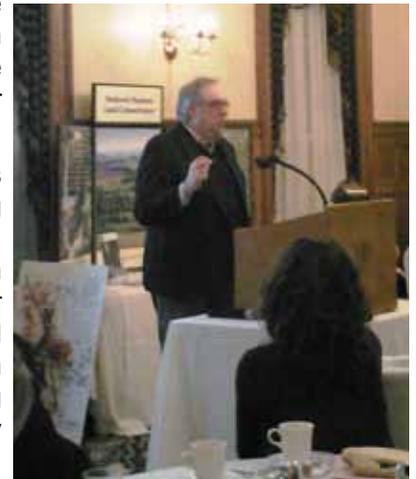
EMS is a great supporter of MHLC. Besides the drawing they have donated numerous gift certificates for our annual fall benefit. Shop staff have also been actively involved with trail work on both our Winn and Bennett Hill Preserves.

Tickets can be purchased at EMS in Stuyvesant Plaza or at our office 1499 New Scotland Road Slingerlands. We hope you will participate in the drawing and support both MHLC and EMS.

Annual Awards Dinner

We had a record attendance for our Awards Dinner on April 3 with over 100 people attending to recognize our award winners.

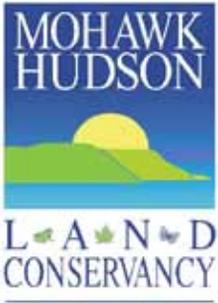
This year Kathy Moser was the recipient of our Saving Special Places Award. This award recognizes an individual for his or her important contribution to land conservation in our region which has made a lasting impact on the area. Kathy certainly meets this criteria. From her role as Northeast



Director of The Nature Conservancy, to her service on our board of directors, and now as Assistant Commissioner, Natural Resources at NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Kathy has made a significant impact on protecting our region's natural areas.

Eric Black from Eastern Mountain Sports (EMS) accepted the Open Space Preservation Leadership Award on behalf of EMS. This award recognizes outstanding contributions of a Conservancy volunteer, who has giving time and energy to advance the mission of MHLC.

We were delighted to have Charles Gehring as our guest speaker. Well known for his research of 17th century Dutch manuscript, Charles recounted the travels of a Prussian geologist who made his way up the Hudson Valley and out through the Mohawk Valley in 1802. The interesting and humorous talk gave a glimpse of the landscape and the significant European impact on the land over two centuries ago.



Saving Special Places

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and
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Coming Events

SPECIAL HIKES TO SPECIAL PLACES, SPRING 2012

We continue our hikes in May with visits to a couple of places we have not previously visited. **Please sign up for hikes at the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy Office by calling 436-6346.**

May 4 (Fri) VAN DYCK SPINNEY PRESERVE: This is soon to be our newest property. Only minutes from Bethlehem High School this property rambles along the Philipin Kill. Come and explore it with us. We will meet at 10 am at the Elm Avenue Park and Ride in Delmar.

May 11 (Fri) HELDEBERG WORKSHOP: This amazing 200-acre gem is located at the foot of the Helderberg Escarpment in the Town of New Scotland. Our leader for the day will be Paul Doyle who is a member of the Heldeberg Workshop's Board of Directors. He will guide us through amazingly varied habitats in "An Adventure in Learning." We will meet at 10 am at Slingerlands Community Church, 1499 New Scotland Ave. to carpool.

GENERAL INFORMATION: We recommended that hikers bring waterproof boots and lunch. These hikes are coordinated by Dodie Seagle, MHLC board member.

Voorheesville Memorial Day Parade

Watch for MHLC and its Friends of the Rail Trail (FORT) Committee in the Voorheesville Memorial Day Parade. This annual event on Saturday, May 26, will help increase awareness of the trail in Voorheesville and New Scotland.

Summer Solstice on the Rail Trail

Wednesday June 20, 7-10 PM

Fairy Tales and Firefiles: Plans are in the works for this fun-filled evening for the entire family. Celebrate the longest day of the year *and* the end of school with a twilight walk and a bit of fantasy on the rail trail in Bethlehem. Events for the very young and the young at heart, are planned.

Visit our website www.mohawkhudson.org for an updated listing as new events are added.