



GAINING GROUND

SUMMER 2025



PRESIDENT'S LETTER



“Summer afternoon. Summer afternoon. To me, those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language.” This quote from Henry James is one of my favorites because it always rings so true. Is there anything more lovely than a summer afternoon? His words conjure up lush fields of flowers in bloom, ripe summer fruits and vegetables and endless days of sunshine (although as I write this we seem to be in a bit of a wet period!). And where better to spend these days than in Dutchess County taking in the very best of nature’s bounty?

One of the many places in the county where nature is on full display is at Innisfree Garden. In this issue, you’ll read about an amazing property that has been preserved by the Kovners through the incredible conservation and gift of their Millprop II property. You’ll also



see fun photos from our Road Rally held this May and co-chaired by Steven Benardete, Olivia Fussell, Ottavio Serena di Lapigio, John Teal and Bob Wilder, which raised more than \$150,000 for conservation efforts. Elsewhere, you’ll learn about our Director of Conservation Erin Hoagland’s journey to Washington D.C. for “advocacy days” and how the DLC participates in conservation efforts across the nation, not just locally. And as always, Julie Hart, our Director of Education offers a fabulous guide to the outdoors in one of her Explorer’s Notebooks (this one on ferns!).

But it is our staff spotlight that means the most to me in this issue because it salutes our beloved Art Collings,

who, after 28 years, is retiring as our Vice-President of Conservation and Stewardship. Art has been at my side for a good portion of my time here at the DLC and I truly can’t imagine what the nearly three decades would have been like without him, nor can I imagine the future without him by my side. From our early days of drawing our conservation maps, to watching him innovate our stewardship program, from closing conservation deals, to constantly seeking his input, from attending national



conservation conferences all over the country, to growing together along with the organization, Art has been more than just a well-respected colleague, he has become a dear and lifelong friend.

But to everything there is a season, and it is bittersweet that Art’s “season” with us is coming to an end. I wish him all the glorious summer afternoons that come with retirement and we will always have a sunny spot waiting for him here, just in case he wants to return.

Fondly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Becky".

Becky Thornton



OUT & ABOUT

A look back at the spring education and volunteer events that brought people outdoors to build new trails and learn about the natural world.

CONNECTING THE LAND

The threat of rain didn't deter a hearty group of volunteers from turning out on a Saturday morning in May to work on trails connecting the popular Dover Stone Church Preserve with the incredible new Seven Wells Preserve. Not yet open to the public, Seven Wells consists of a series of spectacular waterfalls and pools that have been carved out of the rock over the course of millennia. Volunteers moved boulders to create steps up and down steep slopes and crushed stones into gravel to fill in low areas. While the work was hard, the volunteers' enthusiasm for what they were creating amidst such geological wonder helped the time pass quickly. The new trail will be open to the public in the near future for all to experience the labors of these intrepid souls.



THE FLEETING FLOWERS OF SPRING

A brimming crowd of avid flower lovers trekked into the Fern Glen at the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies in May in search of spring ephemerals, the flowers that bloom briefly each year as the soil warms and the sun rises higher in the sky. Guides Julie Hart of the DLC and Mike Fargione of the Cary Institute led guests through the varied habitats of the Fern Glen to find such beauties as Dutchman's Breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*), Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*), and Golden Alexander (*Zizia aurea*). It was a unique chance to view the spectacular short-lived show that nature puts on each spring, one that left wide smiles on the faces of those who were there to see it. 🌿



CONSERVATIONIST'S CALENDAR

The DLC's education and volunteer programs have many exciting opportunities to learn about and participate in the fascinating world around us. Here are just a couple for you to join in the coming months.

FLYING NIGHTTIME CURIOSITIES

The world of moths is a fascinating one and July 22 will be your chance to experience these winged wonders. Lepidopterist Matthew Rymkiewicz will lead guests through the Jesse and Gayle Bontecou Wildlife Conservation Preserve to witness moths in their natural environment and at the time when they are most active. These summer moth walks have become a well-loved tradition that includes black light viewing stations and Matthew's unparalleled passion for these remarkable insects. Be sure to bring along your inquisitiveness and sense of adventure.



BEE INQUISITIVE

The Dutchess Land Conservancy and Plan Bee Farm Brewery proudly present "Pollinator Day" on Saturday August 2nd at Plan Bee Farm Brewery in Poughkeepsie. Along with Fox Farm Apiary, the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Dutchess County, the Poughkeepsie CAC, and the Hudson Highland Land Trust, we will be offering information on land conservation, sustainability and managing land for our pollinators in need. Prizes, giveaways, a craft table to build bee hotels and native seed bombs, live music and a nature walk led by Plan Bee's Emily Watson and Fox Farm Apiary's Chris Layman are among the fun activities for the whole family! 🌿



Visit www.dutchessland.org to sign up for these events and learn about more upcoming education and volunteer opportunities.

EXPLORER'S NOTEBOOK

Learn more about our local ferns from the DLC's resident flora expert, Education Director, Julie Hart.

Ferns are among our most ancient plants. They initially appeared about 400 million years ago, during the Devonian Period, and were among the first vascular plants found on Earth. (Vascular plants have specialized tissues to conduct water and minerals throughout the plant, like the xylem and phloem in trees.) In contrast, the flowering plants we are so familiar with today appeared 145 million years ago, during the Cretaceous Period.

The leaves of a fern are called *fronds*, while the underground growth of a fern is a specialized rootstock known as a *rhizome*. Instead of flowers, ferns use a much older method of reproduction which utilizes wind-blown spores. Look for clusters of tiny spore cases called *sori*, which are found either on the back side of the frond, or on an entirely separate structure called a *fertile frond*.

There are many ferns growing in our area and it's worth getting to know them by the size and shape of their fronds, the presence or absence of fertile fronds, and the arrangement of sori. Here are a few of the most common ferns you may encounter:

SENSITIVE FERN (*Onoclea sensibilis*) grows 1–2 feet tall, is found in moist areas and can grow in either sun or shade. Even from a distance, a wet area of meadow can be easily identifiable when instead of grasses, goldenrods and other common meadow plants, you see a patch of sensitive fern. The fern gets its name due to their sensitivity to frost; all the greenery abruptly turns brown at the first touch of freezing weather. The Sensitive Fern is a species that has separate sterile fronds (the green part) and fertile fronds (the brown stem with the spore-containing sori).

HAY-SCENTED FERN (*Dennstaedtia punctilobula*) is a beautiful feathery fern that grows 1–3 feet tall and is most often found in sunny woods, roadsides and clearings. This fern has a sweet, grass-like fragrance and can form large colonies because they spread extensively by rhizomes, to the point that it is considered invasive in some areas due to its tendency to take over a forest floor, preventing typical understory vegetation such as tree seedlings and saplings from growing. Clusters of sori may be found on the back of the frond and are shaped like tiny cups.

BRACKEN FERN (*Pteridium aquilinum*) grows 2–5 feet tall, is most often found in areas with poor soil, and spreads primarily by rhizomes which sometimes results in the formation of large colonies. While many ferns are smooth and delicate to touch, bracken fern is quite coarse. The growth form of this fern is also distinctive: instead of a single frond per stem, this fern has three separate fronds growing laterally from one stem. From above you will see three triangular fronds, each pointing in a different direction. Sori can be hard to spot, as they are often hidden by the curled-under edges of the tiny leaflets. 🌿



FARTHER AFIELD: D.C. Advocacy Days with Erin Hoagland

The DLC's presence reaches far beyond Dutchess County. Our Director of Conservation took part in a national discussion on land conservation and we asked her about her impressions.

Q: You recently went to Washington for the Land Trust Alliance's Advocacy Days. Can you explain what the Advocacy Days are?

A: The Advocacy Days are organized by the Land Trust Alliance to advance important land trust policy priorities. Land trust staff from all over the country convene in D.C. to meet with members of the 119th Congress and State Senators, and to hear from agency staff, including the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, and Department of Energy, about their priorities, issues, and challenges that address conservation initiatives nationwide.

Q: What do land trusts and conservancies hope to accomplish at Advocacy Days?

A: The goal is to educate our representatives about the impact of private land conservation as well as the conservation issues that matter most to our land trust community. It's important for them to know that, according to the 2020 National Land Trust Census, land trusts have conserved more than 61 million acres – more than all of the land contained in America's national parks, and more than 20 million of these acres are protected through conservation easements. The decisions of our lawmakers have the potential to change the landscape for funding opportunities, landowner incentives, and the rights of private landowners to conserve their properties in perpetuity. This year, our talking points included upholding the recent Conservation Easement Integrity Act which cracks down on abusive transactions that give land conservation a bad name, creation of a federally funded forest conservation easement program to help large forest owners protect their land, supporting continued funding for the Farm Bill, among others. Most importantly, we take the opportunity to share stories of how we provide benefits to real people in their districts and why their awareness and support of this critical work matters. For example, we shared how federal funding from the Farm Bill is helping us to protect 200 acres of farmland and critical habitat in the Town of LaGrange, and why that furthers our mission, helps keep land in agriculture, and supports the farming community.

Q: How often do you personally attend Advocacy Days?

A: The DLC is committed to the work of the land trust community as a whole, and therefore makes a point of attending advocacy events annually, both in D.C. and on the state level. Our land conservation staff also typically attend the New York-based advocacy days organized by the Clean Water and Jobs Coalition and the Alliance for New York's Farmland.



Q: What were the key goals of the 2025 Advocacy Days, and do you feel they were accomplished?

A: Some of our key goals this year included making our representatives aware of how budget and staffing cuts are affecting our work and those who are at risk from it, as well as problematic legislative proposals that undermine the integrity of conservation work. This largely included upholding the Conservation Easement Integrity Act and discouraging legislation that challenges the perpetuity of easements. Also, we are focused on combating large cuts to the Farm Bill, which funds farmland protection. Most importantly, we strive to share the benefits of private land conservation and how it betters the communities that Senators and members of Congress have committed to representing.

Q: How will the DLC's involvement in Advocacy Days benefit land conservation in Dutchess County?

A: It will demonstrate the need for availability of sources of funding that continue to safeguard vulnerable agricultural land and open space. Our involvement will also broaden the awareness of the important work of the DLC and many other land trusts that are conserving our important natural resources and scenic landscapes, making the integrity of meaningful conservation known, and ensuring the ability for landowners in Dutchess County to continue exercising private property rights to protect their land for the future. 🌿

SPRING EVENT: THE DLC'S ROAD RALLY

On Saturday, May 17, enthusiastic drivers and their guests took to the hills of Dutchess County to participate in the DLC's Spring Road Rally and raise more than \$150,00 for land conservation. This spirited event invited drivers to explore the breathtaking countryside, where they were treated to stunning views and unique glimpses of our conservation successes over the past 40 years. More than 200 signs proudly marked 90 Forever Protected properties, showcasing just a fraction of our more than 450 preserved properties. Each sign tells a story of dedication, representing the hard work of our conservation-minded landowners and the enduring impact of the DLC. Driving along two predetermined routes and led by co-chairs Steven Benardete, Olivia Fussell, Ottavio Serena di Lapigio, John Teal, and Bob Wilder, attendees were able to enjoy the magnificent countryside. The vintage route included a pit stop at the Wassaic Project to view their latest exhibition, while the trivia route included a quiz. Both routes met at the Tenmile Distillery, where guests were treated to a delicious lunch with craft cocktails to kick off the DLC's 40th anniversary year. 🌿





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the event such a tremendous success.



PROPERTY SPOTLIGHT: MILLPROP II

Newsletter Editor Georgina Schaeffer takes us on a stroll through Innisfree Garden and preservation of an important adjacent property.

J. Carter Brown, the patrician and populist museum director of the National Gallery of Art, once said: “No one will understand a Japanese garden until you’ve walked through one, and you hear the crunch underfoot, and you smell it, and you experience it over time.” The rolling agrarian hills of Dutchess County of the early 20th century might seem a disparate location for one of the most famous Japanese bowl gardens, and yet, nestled back off Tyrrel Road lies Innisfree Garden. Blending Japanese, Chinese, Modern, and ecological design principles, Innisfree wraps around Tyrrel Lake with a distinctive sloping, rocky landscape, forming a sort of bowl which envelopes the visitor with a sense of intimacy and privacy. Owners Walter and Marion Beck began developing Innisfree in the 1920s based on Chinese and Japanese design principles and the result was a distinctly American stroll garden organized around placemaking techniques or “cup gardens,” as Walter Beck described them. In 1938, the Becks began a 55-year creative collaboration with landscape architect Lester Collins, and under his leadership, Innisfree became a public garden in 1960. Constantly revising and expanding the garden until his death in 1993, Collins created one of the most celebrated gardens in the country. Enjoyed by both local garden enthusiasts as well as international garden aficionados, Innisfree welcomes thousands of visitors each year who stroll the garden, taking in the majestic views of Dutchess County along with the scenic moments of this unique garden.

So, when the Kovners decided to preserve their 257-acre Millprop II property with the DLC, and to donate it to Innisfree Garden, they protected not just the stunning view from the northern shore of Tyrrel Lake, but also expansive woodlands that add to miles of contiguous forest and create a more resilient landscape that will

ensure a thriving habitat for wildlife and native species. “The Kovners dedication to land conservation is not just an act of thoughtful stewardship,” notes Becky Thornton, President of the DLC. “It is a powerful statement about the legacy they wish to leave for future generations. By choosing to protect their land and entrust it to Innisfree Garden, the Kovners are fostering a healthy environment, ensuring that the extensive natural resources that this land provides are preserved and cared for in perpetuity. Innisfree will serve as wonderful caretakers of this land so carefully stewarded by the Kovners.”

Located in a large contiguously forested area in the Towns of Pleasant Valley and Washington, the preservation of the Millprop II property ensures the protection of Tyrrel Lake, vernal pools, wetlands, and nearly a half mile of the Sprout Creek. This in turn will serve to protect the area’s clean water, providing crucial freshwater for countless plant and animal species. In addition, the conserved property is located within a 5,000-acre area that includes land protected by the DLC, as well as land owned by Innisfree Garden, Rockefeller University, and New York State’s Taconic Hereford Multiple Use Area. “We are profoundly grateful to the Kovners for their extraordinary gift of the MillProp II property to Innisfree Garden and for their decision to permanently protect it with a conservation easement held by the Dutchess Land Conservancy,” Sarah Buttrick, President of the Board Innisfree Garden says. “Their vision and generosity have created a wonderful partnership between Innisfree and the DLC—one that safeguards an ecologically vital landscape and protects the natural context that surrounds and supports Innisfree. We are honored to be part of this collaborative effort to preserve the integrity of this special place for future generations.” 🌿



STAFF SPOTLIGHT: ART COLLINGS

After 28 years, Art Collings, the DLC's beloved Vice President for Conservation and Stewardship, is retiring. We sat down with Art to ask him about his decades of service to the organization.

Q: What got you started in land conservation?

A: When I was a kid, I used to entertain myself by drawing maps of imaginary places. They typically started as renderings of little hamlets with small country roads leading away from them. Each would grow and grow as I worked on them to become a megalopolis. Flash forward a few years, and after graduating from Colgate with a Bachelor's in Mathematics in the early 1980s, I bounced around a bit before enrolling at the Conway School of Landscape Design in the Berkshires. During the course of my studies, Joel Russell, a Board Member of the Conway School, gave a presentation on land trusts. It was then that I decided my future would be in land conservation.

Q: When did you start working for the DLC? And what was the organization like at the time?

A: During the summer and fall of 1996, I began networking and knocking on doors seeking opportunities in land conservation. A conversation with the Columbia Land Conservancy led me to Becky Thornton and the Dutchess Land Conservancy. At the time, Becky was creating maps by hand – she had a wonderful reputation for this skill – and needed help as the DLC was constantly adding more easements and projects. Initially, I volunteered for the organization. My first big project was a hand-drafted map of the Bean River Valley. It was 60 by 36 inches and included contour lines, roads, parcel lines, and more. It took three weeks to draft and color render the map.

Now we have GIS (Geographic Information Systems) for map creation and the whole process is speedy. But back then, all of our maps were hand-drawn using rapidographs, which were cartridge-based ink drafting pens. Information for maps came from multiple sources at different scales. Methods for unifying the information required the use of light tables, drafting appliqué, accurate copying, much calculating, and the creation of legends. After a month or two as a volunteer, I was hired on full time, which brought the size of the DLC's staff to four.

Q: How has the DLC grown and changed in the time you've been here?

A: The DLC held about 70 to 80 easements on roughly seven to eight thousand acres when I started. We didn't have work emails or access to the internet, and most of our building headquarters didn't exist; it was just the carriage house and a 600 square foot garage. Now, of course, we have emails and internet access and



digital tools like GIS which make our jobs much more efficient. As the number of easements – now more than 450 – has grown, the DLC's staff has expanded with 13 people working here full time. In 2001, to house the growing staff, we had an old-fashioned barn raising to create the existing structure affectionately known as “the barn.”

Q: What do you think you'll miss the most from your time with the DLC?

A: I'll miss the opportunity to talk and hang out with my colleagues. I've also had the chance to walk some of the most beautiful landscapes in the world. Often during easement monitoring I would say to myself, “This is the most incredible property,” only to find myself thinking, “No, this one is even more incredible,” as I moved to another property later in the day. I'll miss those walks. 🌿



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When Kathleen Augustine joined the Legacy Society she made a provision in her will for the DLC, because she says,
“I’ve seen so many beautiful areas destroyed by a lack of planning. This is the only place I’ve lived where there’s a really active land conservancy working to preserve the rural and agricultural character of this area. Around every corner there is a great little undiscovered bit of paradise, and I want to help keep it that way.”

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Founded in 1985, the Dutchess Land Conservancy (DLC) is a non-profit conservation organization dedicated to preserving the rural character, important resources and open lands of Dutchess County, New York. We encourage sound, well-planned growth, balanced with the conservation of our important natural resources and working landscapes to ensure healthy and vibrant communities for the benefit of all generations.

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