



# GAINING GROUND

Spring 2023



**2022  
CLOSING  
REPORT**



# PRESIDENT'S LETTER



As March begins, with its longer and brighter days, I'm anxiously anticipating what the month, indeed, what our spring season and year will bring. They say March comes in like a lion—which with our first snowfalls, it has—and out like a lamb. Well, we will see. Spring is always full of wonderful surprises here in Dutchess County!

One great surprise is that our Spring Barn Dance is back! We took a hiatus during the pandemic and this year we can finally come together again and that's something we can all dance about! Co-chaired by our devoted newsletter editor extraordinaire, Georgina Schaeffer, well-known board member Tim Bontecou, along with steadfast supporters Simone Mailman, Victoria Love Salmnikoff and Julia



Workman Brown, these residents represent an amazing group of truly devoted community members. Hosted by Honorary Chair John Merryman at Merryfield Farm, I think we can expect a night to remember! Similarly, our Fall Luncheon this year will help

raise funds to support our most notable project of 2022, the Jesse & Gayle Bontecou Wildlife Conservation Preserve. You can read about the Preserve in the 2022 Closing Report.



Photo Credit: Kathy Landman



Last year we closed five key projects preserving some 1,530 acres. Each parcel adds to the protection of this beloved area and you will see the diversity of the DLC's work. Notable for last year was that the majority of land preserved will eventually be available for public access and

education. This, to me, is perhaps the best way for people to understand the importance of our conservation work—to spend time on the land itself and see first-hand what it has to offer!

As I hope you've come to expect in these pages, our expert staff takes you deeper into the natural world with our dual flora and fauna columns. This edition features a Q&A with a personal favorite member of the animal kingdom - the American beaver. Then, our ever-intrepid Julie Hart offers a beginner's guide to animal tracking in the snow and mud, a great way to get outdoors in the spring.

Finally, we highlight some of our new volunteer opportunities. Whether trail clearing or planting trees, we've organized some great activities this spring and we are working on creating even more with some special bird, geology and land history walks, so stay tuned to our social media for updates! We look forward to further engaging you in our work!



Becky Thornton

On the Cover: Downy Woodpecker

Photo Credit: Sarah Blodgett

This page, clockwise from top: DLC President Becky Thornton; the 2019 DLC Spring Barn Dance; morning at Bontecou Lake; trail work at Thompson Pond Preserve.



# PROGRAM NOTES

*By Doug Ohlandt*

The DLC launched a successful volunteer and community science program last year. This new program saw nearly 200 enthusiastic volunteers lend a hand to improve public spaces in their communities and aid local environmental scientists with gathering data. Numerous events brought people together, both in-person and virtually, to learn about the natural world right here in Dutchess County. It was an inspiring inaugural year which brought together conservation-minded citizens to accomplish much needed work. Here's the latest on our program-packed plan for 2023.

**Trail Building Events:** Partnering with The Nature Conservancy and Friends of Stissing Landmarks, we plan to create a new trail to the top of Stissing Mountain in Pine Plains. We're looking for volunteers of all ages and skill levels to come help out on a Saturday morning in April, June or September – or all three if you're feeling ambitious. We need help with trail flagging and construction as we build a new path to this historic peak in northern Dutchess County. This is a great opportunity to learn about sustainable trail development and maintenance.

**Stream Bank Planting:** Riparian areas provide habitat biodiversity and conserve soil. Teaming up in April with the Housatonic Valley Association and the Mid-Hudson Chapter of Trout Unlimited, we plan to plant native trees and shrubs along the Wells Brook in Dover. The brook is an important tributary of the Ten Mile River, which lies within the Housatonic River watershed. If you like planting and don't mind getting your hands dirty, this is a great opportunity to help a crucial part of our local ecosystem. People of all ages and abilities are welcome, and there will be activities for kids.

**Pollinator Day:** Join us at Plan Bee Farm Brewery in Poughkeepsie on May 13 for a celebration of the often-overlooked bees and other pollinators that provide us with the building blocks of a healthy ecology. There will be a craft table where families can build their very own bee hotel, a walk through the wetland, prizes galore and so much more.

**Out & About:** We also have plans in the works for local bird, geology and land history walks and we'll be attending career fairs, Earth Day events and community fairs throughout Dutchess County this Spring. Stop by and say hi as we reach out to more Dutchess County residents for conversations on conservation.

**Volunteers Needed:** We're not just looking for help building trails and planting trees. There are many areas where you can lend the DLC a hand. Whether it's co-leading educational programs, collecting data for scientific use, providing administrative help, taking photos or video, or attending local events to discuss conservation in our communities, the DLC is seeking people like you to help make a difference in Dutchess County. 🌿



Photo Credit: Andrew Pelletier

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*For more information on volunteer opportunities or schedules for upcoming events, please visit our website at [dutchessland.org](http://dutchessland.org).*

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# NATURE OF THINGS



*Paddles the Beaver is the focus of this installment of our beloved fauna column. Our newest contributor, Kara-Lyn Moran, our Grace Year Program Fellowship Intern, sat down with Paddles to ask him some of our most pressing questions.*

**Kara-Lyn:** Hi Paddles! It's nice to see you out of the water. Do you want to introduce yourself and let the readers know what you're up to?

**Paddles:** Hi Kara! I'm Paddles, a beaver, but also known by my scientific name: *Castor canadensis*. You're lucky to have caught me on land because I spend most of my time in the water. All beavers are great swimmers, so the water is where we're most at home. However, sometimes I have to go out to gather materials for food and to build my family lodge.

**KM:** Build the family lodge? Is that what I see sticking out of the water?

**Paddles:** Yeah, I'm so proud of the

lodge my mate and I built for our family. You may have heard beavers referred to as "master builders," and that is from years of experience. The producers of *Bob the Builder* even took some inspiration from me when designing the show! I worked very hard designing a grand lodge for my true love, as beavers mate for life. It has two stories, several rooms and multiple entrances. I know it doesn't look like it from above the water, but we build magnificent homes. The largest beaver lodge and dam in Canada can actually be seen from space!

**KM:** Wow, that is crazy! Sounds like you are a real family man.

**Paddles:** I am! We need to be when our family lives so close together! Sometimes, beavers can get into fights and have territorial disputes, but my mate and I dote on the kits, our lovely but annoying kids. My mate carries a new litter of two to seven kits once a year for about three months. The quiet January and February days make for exciting nights and therefore our kits are born in May or June, and they'll start swimming within a few hours after birth.

**KM:** Oh, my! They grow up so quick!

**Paddles:** Yeah! We work hard to keep them safe from predators - mostly coyotes, fishers, foxes, owls and bears.

**KM:** What else do you do to keep safe?

**Paddles:** I'm glad people think we are cute now. It was hard when European settlers moved here because they loved our water-repellent pelts. They decimated our populations and it took until the 1920's for our numbers to grow strong again. Now, we mostly stay under water for safety. We try and keep away from humans because we are very shy. We ask that if you see us, watch from afar and drive carefully, as we sometimes need to cross the road. I hear my kits going crazy, so I think it's time to head back to the lodge! Goodbye, Kara! 🍃

# EXPLORER'S NOTEBOOK

*Once again, our own intrepid Julie Hart takes us out exploring with her notebook, this time to learn how to track animals in the Spring mud season.*

Sometimes early spring seems like a time when almost everyone can find something to be unhappy about: if you love the snow, it's often melting and not deep enough for skiing or snowshoeing, and if you hate the snow there's still too darned much of it around. It seems like the ground is always covered in the slippery, sloppy, slushy remnants of snow, or a mushy, messy morass of mud.

One thing this time of year is great for, though, is tracking wildlife! Both snow and mud will hold tracks of the animals who have passed through, and by learning to identify them you'll not only discover which animals are nearby, but also recognize the paths they like to follow and tell whether they were walking or running.

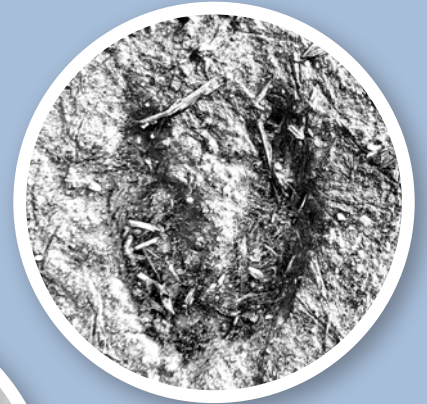
Some tracks, like that of the white-tailed deer, are easy to identify because there is nothing else in our area like them. Except for the occasional wandering moose, the hoofprints of the white-tailed deer are the only tracks you'll see that will be shaped like elongated teardrops.

Another common track to find is that of a dog or other canine. You'll often see tracks from domestic dogs, who tend to meander about quite a bit as they sniff and explore. In contrast, wild canines like coyotes and foxes move more purposefully, in relatively straight lines. Their primary purpose is hunting for their next meal, after all!

Domestic dogs, coyotes and foxes do have some common characteristics in their tracks, though. First, look for claw marks at the tip of each toe. Unlike felines, who have retractable claws, canine claws are always out and will leave a mark with each footstep. Next, check the arrangement of the toe pads and see if you can draw an "X" between the toes of each paw. On most canine tracks you can see an "X" between the toes and the central pad, while with the slightly different arrangement of cat paws you will be able to see a "C" drawn between the toes and central pad.

Tracks that look like handprints, with five long fingers, are likely from an opossum or a raccoon. A track that has a broad palm and closely resembles a tiny human hand is most likely a raccoon, while a print that is somewhat star-shaped and has a smaller palm is probably an opossum.

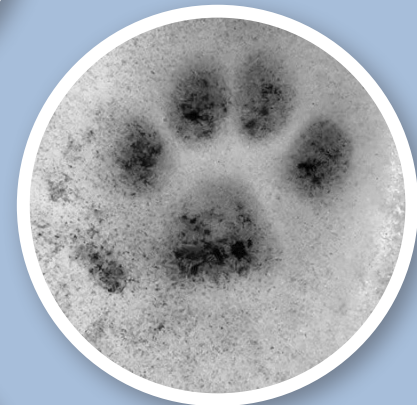
Learning to identify animal tracks can be challenging – front and hind footprints from the same animal are different, closely related species make similar tracks, and it is often difficult to find a clear footprint that shows all the key identification characteristics. But with patience and practice, you can learn to read the signs of animal activity throughout the landscape! 🌿



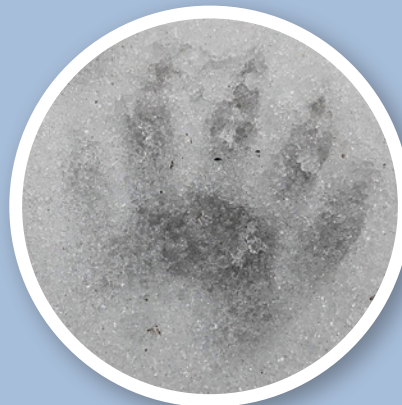
**Deer**



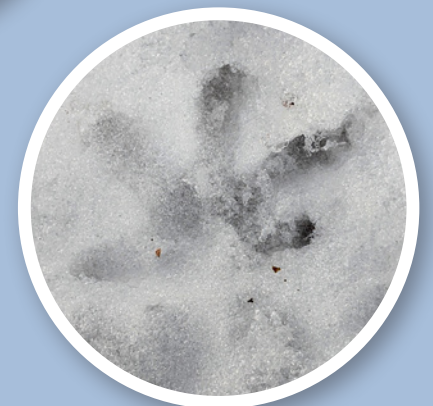
**Dog**



**Bobcat**



**Raccoon**



**Opossum**



# THE DUTCHESS LAND CONSERVANCY

## 2022 CLOSING REPORT

*Last year was a truly sensational year for the Dutchess Land Conservancy as we closed on five projects preserving 1,535 acres! Since our inception in 1985, we have now protected more than 46,000 acres! Three of our 2022 projects were preserved through conservation easements donated by preservation-minded landowners. A key town/DLC partnership led to the acquisition and protection of a magnificent municipal conservation area. Finally, the DLC acquired an inspiring one-of-a-kind property unsurpassed in its majesty and natural treasures.*

*Each newly protected piece of land adds to the beauty, resilience, and sustainability of this beloved area. In the brief descriptions below, you will see the diversity of the DLC's work. While purposes range from preserving viewsheds, tracts of farmland, and important habitat to protecting valuable water resources, each is fundamentally important and valuable beyond its own purpose. Together they stitch together the patchwork of Dutchess County's diverse landscapes so future generations will know the abundance the land provides to each and every one of us.*

*Notable in 2022's closings, is the public access these lands will ultimately provide. As they become open in the future, preserves with trails abounding with opportunities to explore landscapes, witness the seasons, and learn more about nature will become a cornerstone of the outdoor experiences and adventures available in Dutchess County. The remarkably unique Seven Wells property expands on the natural exploration possibilities already available at the popular Dover Stone Church Preserve, while the Jesse and Gayle Bontecou Wildlife Conservation Preserve, owned by the DLC and protected through a Scenic Hudson conservation easement, protects unique wildlife habitats and valuable ecological niches that will benefit us all as we strive for a more climate resilient future. "The essence of the DLC's mission is land preservation and stewardship, and the best way for people to understand and appreciate our work is to experience the land first-hand," said DLC President Becky Thornton. "The ability to visit these preserves will enable future generations to do just that."*

### 1 Anderson, 27 acres, Gallatin

A stunning view of the north slope of Stissing Mountain is the highlight of the twenty-seven acres owned by the Anderson family in Gallatin. Characterized by open farmland, tracts of forested land, streams, and an impressive wetland that serves as vital habitat for numerous migrating birds, the property is representative of the natural beauty of Columbia County. The land contains prime and statewide important farmland soils, as well as federal wetlands. It's location within the Roeliff-Jansen Kill watershed makes the property particularly valuable for conservation. Additionally, the woodlands are part of a contiguous forest and its protection will aid in providing a safe wildlife corridor.



### 2 Seven Wells Preserve, 163 acres, Dover

The spectacular waterfalls and pools of the Seven Wells property in Dover will be forever joined to the Dover Stone Church Preserve and its celebrated geologic marvels. The cool ravines contained within the Seven Wells Preserve provide habitat for an astounding breadth of fauna and flora unique in Dutchess County. Alongside its natural wonders, the expanded preserve will offer the public further opportunities to experience the outdoors in a wonderful and singular setting. We highlighted the Seven Wells property in our Summer 2022 Newsletter, in which DLC President Becky Thornton said, "I have walked a lot of land in my time, and when you find a place as amazing as this, which has been carefully looked after for generations, you have to do all you can to protect it."





**3 The Jesse & Gayle Bontecou Wildlife Conservation Preserve, 1,258 acres, Washington and Stanford**

In late summer, the DLC received one of the most meaningful gifts in its 37-year history with the creation of the Jesse & Gayle Bontecou Wildlife Conservation Preserve in the towns of Washington and Stanford. Landowners Gayle and the late Jesse Bontecou donated more than 1,250 acres of critical wetland and forest habitat, open fields, wooded hillsides, streams and Bontecou Lake. This incredible donation also increases an impressive band of more than 12,000 acres of contiguous protected land, creating a greater, safer corridor for countless species of wildlife. “This gift makes my eyes water with tears of immeasurable joy and gratitude,” DLC President Becky Thornton said in the Fall 2022 Newsletter. “Jesse and Gayle so loved this land and its countless special and unique qualities. I cannot thank Gayle enough for her commitment to seeing through their desire to donate and protect this land as a forever preserve.”



**4 The Orvis Company, 21 acres, Washington**

Majestic sycamores line a tributary to the East Branch of the Wappinger Creek, while towering shagbark hickories and red oaks punctuate the forest surrounding transitional shrublands on the 21 acres owned by The Orvis Company. Preserved forever by a conservation easement in fall 2022, the property adds to an impressive 274 acres previously protected by the Orvis Company. The upland deciduous forest and shrubby oldfield found on the property provide critical wildlife habitat. The property also boasts an impressive array of water resources, including federal wetlands and an important aquifer recharge area.



**5 Pomykala/Williams, 66 acres, Pleasant Valley**

Sweeping views of central Dutchess County with winter vistas stretching as far as the Hudson Highlands are just one of the many amazing attributes of the sixty-six acres belonging to the Pomykala/Williams family. This final property protected by the DLC in 2022 holds farmland that will stay in hay production, keeping agriculture front and center in a part of the county continually threatened by development. The remarkable ecological diversity of the property is stunning: forests, streams, steep slopes, and wetlands can be found here, each offering habitat for a host of species. Most notable is the inclusion of a portion of the Dutchess County Wetlands Significant Biodiversity Area, a network of wetland complexes that provide important habitat for a variety of uncommon amphibian, reptile, and bird species. 🌿



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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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IS BACK MAY 20!**

*Join Host and Honorary Chair John Merryman and  
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Tim Bontecou, and Victoria Love Salnikoff on May 20.*

*Dust off your dancing boots and get ready for a night to remember at  
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