



GAINING GROUND

Spring 2022

**2021
CLOSING
REPORT**

PRESIDENT'S LETTER



As I sit here in the sub-freezing temperatures of deep winter, it is hard to conjure up thoughts of spring. I hope by the time this reaches you that the Earth has begun to thaw in the month of March, but for now the groundhogs have predicted six more weeks of winter. In the following pages, our Education Director, Julie Hart, dedicates her “Explorer’s Notebook” to vernal pools, while Stewardship Manager Lucas Gordon creates his imaginative interview with a black bear in the “Nature of Things” column. I know that soon enough the peepers will peep and hibernating animals will wake from their slumbers and the vibrancy of local fauna will return, but for now the world feels remarkably still and quiet.

We are undergoing a time of transition within the DLC, as we welcome new staff in our education, stewardship, communications and development arenas. As a small staff, we work together closely and it is exciting to add new members to our team. Jackie LaPlante joins us as a Stewardship Associate, Nate Nardi-Cyrus is our new Land Projects Manager, while Brian Straniti comes to us as our Outreach and Engagement Manager. Brian is leading the evolution of our new volunteer program and contributes more details about this exciting development in these pages. We are, of course, in the thick of planning our education and special events

for the year and look forward to sharing more with you about our second annual Road Rally and much more in the coming months.

Most importantly, we present our 2021 Closing Report. Last year we closed on eight projects preserving a total of 800 acres. Each property has its own story and importance to this area, as briefly detailed here by our editor, Georgina Schaeffer. Some are PDRs (Purchase of Development Rights), which often allow multi-generational farmers to keep their land in active agriculture; others are conservation easement donations protecting all manner of habitats not only for animals, but for us. Their woodlands, wetlands and water sources are invaluable. Many of these properties protect important viewsheds, like the ones we see on our daily outings all over this county, driving to work on a scenic country road or taking a weekend hike on local trails. We should never take for granted the beauty of this area or how it was created and is maintained; it is due to the tremendous efforts of the local community that so much land is preserved. But there’s still so much more we can do.

We at the DLC know we are the custodians of these efforts and work hard to honor the wishes of each of our more than 500 landowners; it is a key focus and an honor that we take on with great enthusiasm. Each passing year we are so lucky to find more individuals and families who are willing to find ways to add their properties to this patchwork of preserved land, as well as participate in, and contribute to, the cause of land conservation. It is a banner that I, and in fact our whole team, is proud and happy to carry into 2022.

With thanks,

Becky Thornton



Above: views from the Henze and Rosenthal properties, which were protected in 2021.

ON THE COVER:

A view of the Wappinger Creek on the newly forever protected Megill/Zelman property.

PROGRAM NOTES

By *Brian Straniti*

This spring, the DLC is happy to announce our all new volunteer and citizen science program! We are developing this program, which will provide exciting opportunities for you to engage with the DLC and our work, and provide valuable services to public lands, scientific research, and support our ecosystem and community.

You may ask, “why a volunteer program, and why now?” Well, after many conversations with partners and exploring new avenues for collaboration, the need for a robust volunteer program to improve ecosystem health and support public access became apparent. We are partnering with The Nature Conservancy, Audubon New York, Dutchess County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Town of Dover and the Dover Trails Committee, and Friends of Stissing Landmarks to bring a wide array of program offerings and hope to grow our network of collaborators in the future. The types of volunteers we are looking for specifically are:

Trail development and preserve maintenance: The DLC partners with many organizations who need support across Dutchess County and beyond. Come help build trail infrastructure, maintain ecologically sensitive areas, remove invasives and more – all while learning how outdoor recreation can support an intact and healthy ecosystem!

Program Co-leaders/education support: Work with staff on specific programs utilizing your expertise and experience. The DLC is always looking for educational leaders or highly knowledgeable folks to partner with on group discussions. Group hikes, coffee shop presentations and Zoom webinars; we do it all and would love your support!

Outreach Event Support: Are you outgoing and love talking about conservation? You can attend local events and spread the good word about the work of the DLC and its partners. Engage youth with fun games and prizes and talk to folks of all ages about all things conservation, while enhancing awareness of the DLC.

Citizen Science: Interested in collecting data that has real ecological application? Do you know how to use a smart phone or tablet? We are developing opportunities for individuals to collect data for organizations that can aid in the restoration efforts of land and water.

Photography and Videography: Consider yourself a hobby photographer or do you own a drone you like to shoot video with? We always have a need to visually tell the story of conservation the DLC and its partners are accomplishing.

Administrative Help: Assist with a variety of clerical work including: light office work, packet assembly, data entry, event support, digitizing records, organizing materials and more.



How can you sign up?

Go to the link below and enter some simple information, or follow the QR code. After that, wait for the opportunities to come rolling in. You will receive periodic updates on upcoming opportunities, including training for self-guided citizen science work. If you have more time to dedicate to the program, please email me directly at brians@dutchessland.org. Or, simply keep an eye on our Facebook events page and webpage for events and opportunities.



Volunteer sign-up:

<https://forms.office.com/r/8jDTUdmct2>

Also, we would be grateful if you would respond to our survey regarding this program and beyond. Do you have a specific type of volunteerism not mentioned here? Let us know! Should we be helping a certain community or resource you know is in need? Follow the link!

Dutchess Land Conservancy
Community Feedback Form:

<https://forms.office.com/r/Tu5LADniDN>



Thank you and see you in the field! 🌿



By Lucas Gordon

Q: Please tell us about yourself and what you've been up to lately?

A: Hi, my name's Blossom, a seven-year-old, five-foot-long, 200-pound black bear, *Ursus americanus*, living here in the woods and meadows of Dutchess County. Sorry if I seem a little sleepy today, I just emerged from my den after five months of hibernation; three of which I spent nursing three little cubs! This spring is their first time outside after a busy winter spent growing from eight-ounce, furless, blind newborns to ten-pound, curious, playful cubs.

Q: Congratulations! How's motherhood treating you?

A: I love it but it's not my first time around the block! When I was five, I had two cubs and spent two years raising them. They then ventured off, joining the 2,000 wild black bears roaming southern New York! As an empty nester, I spent my second mating season, last June, with a dashing five-hundred-pound bull named Barry. Because we're solitary animals, Barry and I quickly went our separate ways but maybe we'll cross paths again in our twilight years. By the time I'm done raising our litter, I'll be nine, one year from the average lifespan of a wild black bear.

Q: What kind of things do you feed your cubs?

A: Good question! So far, our time as a "sleuth," a group of bears, has been spent *sleuthing* the forest for food to quench our insatiable appetites! We're omnivores and eat twigs, buds, leaves, nuts, roots, fruit, corn and berries, insects, small mammals, fish, and, true to our mascot Pooh, honey! Flexible and opportunistic eaters, we'll even rummage through your trash or swat at your bird feeder if you leave them out. That's why you should keep these tasty things indoors when we're in the neighborhood. If we find a food source, we'll keep coming back and this can lead to some bad bear-human interactions. That's why it's illegal to intentionally feed bears!

Q: Should I be afraid? What kind of interactions are we talking about?

A: You shouldn't be afraid, just cautious. Black bears are generally shy and gentle but if we feel cornered or think our cubs are in danger we can get aggressive. If you ever feel threatened by a black bear, the safest thing to do is make noise, wave your arms and slowly walk away.

Speaking of cubs, looks like mine are fighting over who gets to eat a beetle! I need to go and make sure those troublemakers don't hurt themselves, but thanks so much for the interview! 🐾

By Julie Hart

Spring is a time of renewal and reawakening, and an invitation to spend more time outdoors observing the changes in our plant and animal neighbors that signal the turning of the seasons. One of the most interesting places to visit at this time of year is a vernal pool! These small wetlands usually dry up in the summer, but from late fall through early summer they fill with water and provide essential habitat for land-dwelling salamanders and wood frogs to lay their eggs in early spring.

When is the best time to visit a vernal pool and see these salamanders and wood frogs? Well, because amphibians need to stay moist, and they prefer to move after dark to avoid predators, your best chance to see one is in the pouring rain, in the middle of the night. Hope you've got some waterproof boots, a good raincoat and a headlamp! But no fear – there are easier ways to find signs that your local amphibians are waking up.

The call of the spring peeper (*Pseudacris crucifer*) is one of the earliest signs of spring and can bring a flood of excitement when you hear it. Bye bye winter! The peeper is a tiny frog with a distinctive "X" pattern across its back. Only an inch in size, they are so well camouflaged that they are virtually impossible to see. You'll have no trouble hearing them, though – their familiar, high-pitched, peeping call can carry for a quarter mile!

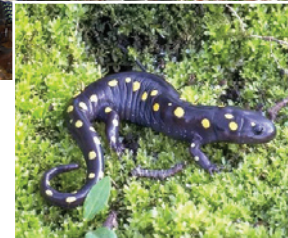
The most common salamander species that reproduces in vernal pools is the spotted salamander (*Ambystoma maculatum*), and you can see why it's called that! Adults can be up to 8 inches long, and are black with bright yellow spots. For most of the year they live in underground tunnels, eating small insects, worms and spiders, which is why most people have never seen one, although they're quite common in our area!

When you visit a vernal pool by day, you may see frog and salamander egg masses in the water, most commonly those of spotted salamanders and wood frogs. Wood frogs (*Lithobates sylvaticus*) are small (1 – 2 inches) and sport a distinctive "robber mask" around their eyes. They often lay their eggs in communal clusters, each mass appearing as a diaphanous blob of hundreds of tiny eggs.

In contrast, spotted salamander eggs are laid in a stiff gelatinous matrix containing between 50 and 250 eggs. Some of the egg masses are opaque white, while others are transparent. Spotted salamanders often lay their egg masses in communal clusters, too, so look carefully! If you see one, there may be others nearby.

Wood frog eggs will hatch in about a month, while spotted salamander eggs take 6 – 8 weeks, and the aquatic larvae of both species must grow quickly into adults so that they can be ready to survive on land before the pool dries up in the summer.

Visit vernalpool.org for more information on the ecology of vernal pools and the wildlife that depend on them! 🐸



This page, clockwise from top: a spring peeper; Julie shows a spotted salamander egg mass; a wood frog; a spotted salamander; exploring a vernal pool; a wood frog egg mass.

THE DUTCHESS LAND CONSERVANCY

2021 CLOSING REPORT

Last year the Dutchess Land Conservancy closed on eight projects preserving a total of 800 acres. Each parcel, large or small, adds to the protection of this cherished area. In the brief descriptions below, you will see the breadth of our projects and the diversity of our work. The tools the DLC uses range from gifts of land, to conservation easement donations, to providing financial incentives to multi-generational farmers. While purposes range from preserving a sweeping viewshed, a large tract of farmland, an important habitat, or protecting part of a valuable water source, each is fundamentally important and valuable beyond its own purpose, stitching together what makes this slice of the world so singular. – Georgina Schaeffer

1 Dutchess Views Farm, 89 Acres, Pine Plains

We profiled Michael Lischin and Anya Sheckley's thoroughbred breeding operation in our Summer 2021 newsletter. Previously owned by Gary and Carol Beller, who built this equestrian facility, Dutchess Views Farm now hosts a top New York State thoroughbred operation. The Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) for the property was funded through Dutchess County's Partnership for Manageable Growth Program (PMG) and the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYS DAM) Farmland Protection Implementation Grant (FPIG) Program.

2 Glendale Farm, 285 Acres, Amenia

Owned by sisters Phyllis Roosa and Linda Caldwell, Glendale Farm has been in their family since 1945, when their parents purchased it just after World War II. The family operated Decker Farm, a dairy and sheep operation, until their father's death. Ray and Desiree Camburn have leased the property for the last 15 years for their dairy operation, Deere Haven. The protection of this land not only helps to ensure its farm capability, but preserves the particularly significant view from Sharon Station Road, Route 343 and the Harlem Valley Rail Trail. Additionally, the preservation of Glendale Farm creates a contiguous area of more than 600 acres of working farms that serve as the eastern gateway into



2

Dutchess County from Connecticut along Route 343. This PDR project was funded by the NYS DAM FPIG Program, Dutchess County's PMG Program and the Scenic Hudson Land Trust.

3 Henze, 100 Acres, Stanford and North East

Another magnificent viewshed was preserved when Nancy and Fritz Henze protected 100 acres of their land, just south of and adjacent to their previously protected 113 acres. This property includes sweeping views of Stissing Mountain, open fields, two streams and woodlands. Located on Carpenter Hill Road, the land straddles the Towns of Stanford and North East and abuts other conserved land in this area.



4

4 Leahy, 48 Acres, Pine Plains and North East

Owned by Tom and Devon Leahy, this picturesque land includes open fields with a tributary to the Webatuck Creek, as well as some important wetlands. The property is located in the Towns of Pine Plains and North East with spectacular views from Winchell Mountain Road. The Leahys donated this easement to the DLC, ensuring the land and its viewshed will be protected in perpetuity.

5 Megill/Zelman, 110 Acres, Washington

The DLC originally accepted a donation of this land several years ago from a generous donor and recently sold it to conservation-minded buyers, Christina Megill and Daniel Zelman, who protected it with a DLC conservation easement. The land's open farm fields, wooded hillside, floodplains and the scenic views from Route 82 in the Town of Washington are forever-conserved, as is a portion of the Wappinger Creek, which bisects this property. The funds from the sale of this land will help to further the DLC's work to protect more land in this area.



5

6 Reese, 42 Acres, Wappinger

Sixth-generation land stewards, Alex Reese and his siblings, donated a conservation easement protecting their Obercreek Farm property. The DLC is currently working with the Reese family to protect the remaining 144 acres of the farm, which surrounds this parcel. The land is near the eastern bank of the Wappinger Creek, and includes open fields and fronts on both Marlerville and New Hamberg Roads. Obercreek Farm is home to a fruit and vegetable Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, a farm stand, an orchard, as well as the Obercreek Brewery.



6



7

7 Rosenthal/Madigan, 56 Acres, North East

Kerry Madigan and Neal Rosenthal protected their land located on County Route 83 in the Town of North East with a DLC conservation easement. The property contains many special and unique wetland habitats including fens, calcareous wet meadows, combined with open water, a marsh and hardwood shrub swamp, making it particularly exciting to conserve. It is also surrounded by other DLC easements, creating a contiguous area of more than 9,000 acres of protected land.



8

8 Rocky Reef Farm, LLC 108 Acres, Stanford

The Blodgett/Cook family donated a conservation easement on a parcel of their land located on Route 82 in Stanford. This gift is particularly valuable as it protects a high open field that is visible when traveling south on Route 82 in Pine Plains. The property abuts the DLC protected Mashomack Preserve Club and is in close proximity to the Audubon Buttercup Sanctuary. Being able to link together protected parcels of land is essential to the preservation of wildlife and many other aspects of the DLC's work. 🌿

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