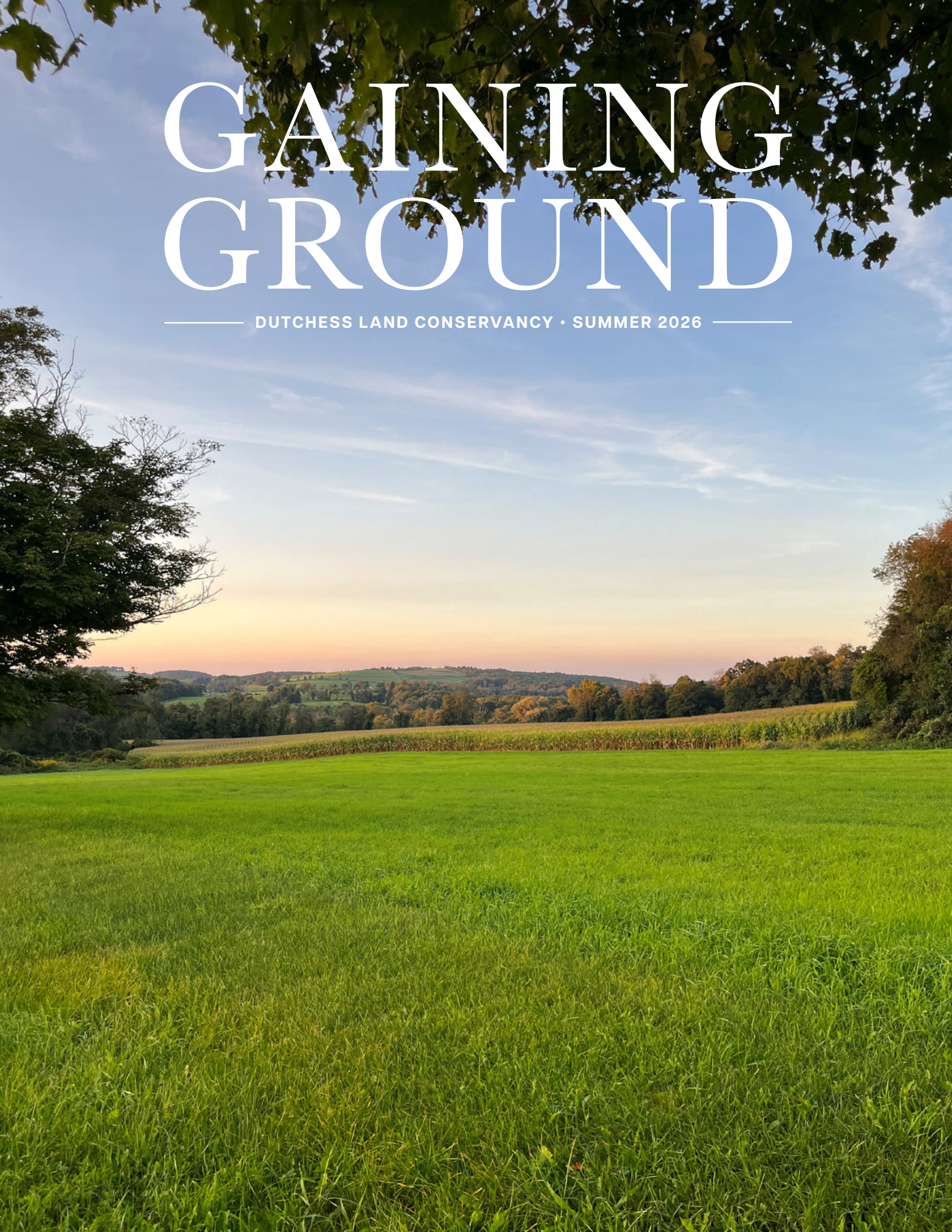


GAINING GROUND

— DUTCHESS LAND CONSERVANCY • SUMMER 2026 —



President's Letter



As the summer settles across the fields, forests, and streams of our region, we are reminded why conserving the lands we love is both a privilege and a responsibility. The longer days invite us outdoors—to hike shaded trails, paddle local waterways, visit working farms, and experience the beauty that defines Dutchess County.

At the Dutchess Land Conservancy, summer is also a season of progress. Thanks to the commitment of our supporters, partners, and volunteers, we continue advancing our mission to protect the natural resources, family farms, and open spaces. In this issue you will read about longtime DLC supporters Helen and Everett Cook who recently preserved Rocky Reef Farm. As we approach a major milestone of 50,000 acres under preservation,

every conserved acre strengthens the health, resilience, and character of this remarkable landscape.

This year, we are especially encouraged by the growing enthusiasm for conservation among younger generations. The “Jockey Committee” brought many new young faces to our Spring Barn Dance this May. Families are exploring preserves together, such as our own Jesse and Gayle Bontecou Wildlife Conservation Preserve. By participating in our education programs, community members of all ages are discovering the value of protected land. These connections inspire hope for the future and reinforce the value of our work.

Conservation succeeds because people care deeply about the places they call home. Whether you have supported the DLC for decades or recently joined our community, your involvement makes a lasting difference. Together, we are ensuring that future generations will inherit clean water, scenic vistas, productive farmland, and thriving habitats. As you enjoy the beauty of the summer, I encourage you to take time to explore the landscapes your support helps protect with us. Attend one of our nature walks, volunteer for one of our conservation projects, or simply pause to appreciate the natural world around you.

Thank you for being an essential part of our conservation community. We wish you a joyful and restorative summer season!

Warm regards,

Becky Thornton, President

ERIN HOAGLAND

Senior Director of Conservation & Stewardship

Protecting Dutchess County's landscapes is more than a profession—it's a lifelong passion rooted in family, community, and a deep appreciation for the natural world for Erin Hoagland. As the Dutchess Land Conservancy's Senior Director of Conservation and Stewardship, she is not only beloved inside the DLC, but also by the many people she helps to conserve their land.

Leading the organization's efforts to preserve farms, forests, and open spaces throughout the county, Erin works closely with landowners to help them navigate conservation options and develop plans that protect their land for future generations. Whether assisting farmers through agricultural preservation programs or advocating for environmental funding in Albany and Washington, D.C., Erin's work is centered on ensuring that the landscapes people cherish today remain protected forever.

Growing up in the Hudson Valley, Erin spent countless hours hiking trails in the Shawangunks, camping in the Adirondacks, and spending time on and along the Hudson River. Her appreciation for the outdoors and her understanding that preserving



natural places requires the dedication of people working behind the scenes, was shaped by her father, a long-time conservation leader in the region.

These passions and the hope of being part of the important conservation work happening in the Hudson Valley led Erin to internships with several land trusts while attending Marist College, including with the DLC in the summer of 2013. Upon graduation in 2014, she joined the organization full-time and has been an integral part of its growth ever since.

During Erin's tenure, the DLC has expanded from protecting roughly 37,000 acres to nearly 49,000 acres and has grown from 365 conservation easements to 458. She says one of the most rewarding parts of her work is earning the trust of landowners who make the deeply personal decision to conserve their properties.

"Knowing people are happy at the completion of a conservation easement is incredibly gratifying," Erin says. "It's a small role we get the opportunity to play in supporting their legacy, and I really appreciate the trust that landowners place in the DLC to do this work and steward their properties in perpetuity." 🌿



ROCKY

REEF

FARM

Amidst the rolling countryside of Stanfordville, where sweeping hayfields meet wooded ridgelines and wetlands nourish diverse wildlife, Rocky Reef Farm has long stood a part of the rural fabric of Dutchess County. Thanks to the vision of Helen and Everett Cook, this remarkable landscape will now remain forever protected.

Rocky Reef is the glue of our family,” begins Helen, who has owned the property for 42 years. “It was always in our mind to preserve it, and now was the right time.” Devoted to the natural world, the Cooks are avid horseback riders, hikers, and enthusiasts of almost all outdoor endeavors. The preservation of Rocky Reef Farm represents more than the protection of open space. It is the commitment to safeguarding active farmland, wildlife habitat, and scenic heritage that continues to shape communities across the Hudson Valley.

The property encompasses more than 400 acres of ecologically and agriculturally significant land. The farmer who leases these fields uses only organic compounds, as has been the tradition of the farmers before him. One of these farmers was the famed Garreth Howard, who was instrumental in the management of Rocky Reef’s beloved pumpkin patch. The patch has long been a favorite destination in the community, including Helen’s own children when they were growing up. Travelers on Route 82 cannot miss the trebuchet rising from one of the fields, a project of Helen’s son, Oliver. Created during his college years, it is used to catapult pumpkins far into the sky, much to the delight of local families. Often found in his workshop, Oliver has created many projects on the property. Of note, the trebuchet, made of four locally acquired telephone poles, has even made it onto sightseeing maps of Dutchess County.

Oliver is hardly the only one with projects around the property. “The more I fell in love with Helen, the more I fell in love with Rocky Reef,” Everett says. “Or vice-versa,” he adds with a wink. This duo is always creating something—whether a sculpture garden in what used to be a parking lot or a new children’s garden for their grandchildren, you are unlikely to find either of them

at rest. Many of the structures on the property, including several barns and the original 1800s farmhouse, have been painstakingly lifted out of the ground, rebuilt with stronger foundations, and renovated. They’ve restored countless ponds, and even the wood silos have been repaired—a feat rarely undertaken anymore. Helen notes, “There isn’t a structure or an acre here that hasn’t been a labor of love.”

The conservation of Rocky Reef Farm creates an increasingly important ecological corridor. It is in close proximity to both the Mashomack Preserve Club, whose nearly 2,000 protected acres represent the DLC’s largest easement, and the Audubon Buttercup Farm Sanctuary. Together, this larger protected area promotes wildlife habitat and plant migration. Undeveloped land filters groundwater, reduces flooding, stores carbon, and protects water



“You can’t help but feel at peace as you see animals grazing in their fields, catching the evening light, or the mist rolling in off the mountaintops like an ocean wave.”



quality throughout watersheds. Conservation projects that connect large tracts of land are particularly vital because they allow wildlife to move more freely across the landscape.

The viewshed at Rocky Reef Farm is its defining feature. A dramatic open field rises toward the horizon, framed by forests and the familiar ridgeline of Stissing Mountain. That view, so emblematic of the area’s rural character, is now permanently protected. These scenic vistas help preserve the identity and sense of place treasured by residents and visitors to the area. “You can’t help but feel at peace as you see animals grazing in their fields, catching the evening light, or the mist rolling in off the mountaintops like

Rocky Reef Farm, via Facebook



an ocean wave,” says Helen.

As Dutchess County continues to evolve, projects like Rocky Reef Farm demonstrate the powerful impacts of conservation. Protecting the farm ensures that it will remain healthy, productive, and recognizable. It highlights the importance for all of us to contribute to local conservation and share in Helen and Everett Cook’s vision for the open spaces of Dutchess County. “It was very important for us as a family to

come together with the DLC and preserve what is significant about this farm and do our part to conserve the area,” says Helen. This landscape feels unmistakably alive, rural, and now, forever protected. 🌿



A volunteer-led restoration project at the Bontecou Preserve is transforming an invasive species site into thriving native habitat.

This May, a dedicated group of volunteers gathered at the Jesse & Gayle Bontecou Wildlife Conservation Preserve with a shared purpose: to continue restoring a one-acre forest plot once overrun by Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), an aggressive invasive tree that can quickly dominate forest edges and crowd out native vegetation. The previously-downed trees were left in “slash piles” to create a habitat for birds, small mammals, and pollinators. Volunteers constructed a deer enclosure around the site earlier in the spring so that young native trees and shrubs were given a chance to establish and thrive. With the groundwork laid, the May planting could begin.

Native seedlings were provided by the Dutchess

County Soil & Water Conservation District, with District Technician Amy Titcomb leading the effort. Titcomb delivered the plants and guided volunteers to pre-selected planting locations within the enclosure. “Species were chosen to match the variability of the terrain—ranging from well-drained upland areas to heavier wet spots,” said Titcomb. “For instance, Elderberry (*Sambucus*) was selected for wetter areas, while Maidenhair fern (*Adiantum*) was suited to shaded zones.” Other plants, such as Dense blazing star (*Liatris spicata*) and Frances Fay daylily (*Hemerocallis*), were chosen for their fragrant flowers, which provide valuable resources for pollinators. Equally important was the inclusion of berry- and nut-producing species like blueberry, raspberry,

ninebark, and hazelnut. These plants not only offer food for wildlife but also play a critical role in stabilizing the soil. Their fibrous root systems help prevent erosion on the site's slopes, reducing runoff and protecting the integrity of the landscape. As these native plants provide food for pollinators, fruit and nuts for birds and mammals, and habitat for a wide range of species, birds, in turn, will disperse seeds of these native species far beyond the fenced one-acre area.

Over time, the combination of invasive species removal, deer exclusion, and targeted planting creates conditions where native plants can outcompete invasives and regenerate naturally. "The first indicators will come within weeks and months," said Titcomb, "as it becomes clear which plants are taking root. In similar projects, a survival rate of about 75 percent is considered successful. If, after six months to a year, more than 100 plants are thriving, it will signal that the right species were chosen and planted effectively." Continued monitoring will help inform future stewardship efforts, ensuring that lessons learned here can be applied across other sites. For landowners inspired by this work, Titcomb offers practical advice: start by understanding your



Amy Titcomb of the Dutchess County Soil & Water Conservation District directs DLC volunteers at the May Native Seedling Planting.

While the science behind restoration is essential, the human element cannot be overlooked. Projects like this rely on community engagement and the enthusiasm of volunteers remains one of the most rewarding and essential aspects of the work.

land. "Soil moisture, sunlight exposure, and existing vegetation all provide clues about which native plants will succeed. Simple observations—such as noting where water collects or what plants are already thriving—can guide planting decisions."

While the science behind restoration is essential, the human element cannot be overlooked. Projects like this rely on community engagement and the enthusiasm of volunteers remains one of the most rewarding and essential aspects of the work. Their efforts—from building deer fencing to planting hundreds of seedlings—will help to restore ecological balance at the Bontecou Preserve, one plant at a time. "The native planting volunteer event is the next step in a collaborative and demonstrative process that we are hoping will lead to a healthier

forested area and improved habitat, while acting as a showcase plot for landowners, municipalities, and everyone in our community of learners," said DLC Outreach and Preserve Manager Brian Straniti. As spring rains gave way to new growth, the May planting stands as both a celebration of what has already been accomplished and a hopeful step toward a healthier, more resilient landscape. 🌱

Hay Down

On the beautiful evening of May 16th, more than 270 DLC supporters gathered at Scot Galliher's stunning Silver Mountain Hay Barn in Millerton to celebrate the DLC's annual Spring Barn Dance. Co-chaired by Mimi Babcock, Juliana Pecchia, and Eliza Thorne, and with assistance from our intrepid Jockey Committee, the evening raised more than \$240,000 with an additional \$60,000 from the paddle raise to specifically support Farmland Protection.

Main Course Catering created festive cocktails and a plated farm dinner, while music by the Luster Kings ignited the dancefloor. We would especially like to thank our generous sponsors: Bank of Millbrook, Harney & Sons Fine Teas, Paula Redmond & Corcoran Country Living, Peter Pennoyer Architects, and Stortz Lighting.





Photos by Sarah Blodgett and Anne Day



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Join us for our annual Fall Luncheon celebrating
conservation in the Hudson Valley amidst the fall splendor
of the Bontecou Preserve – Sunday, October 11.





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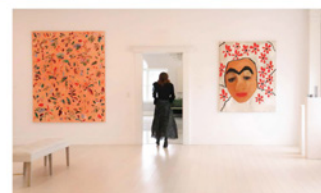
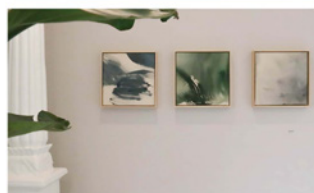
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