

Conservation Advisory Council (CAC), Town of New Lebanon, Columbia County, New York

## **2016 Annual Report** *(Respectfully submitted by David Farren, January 31, 2017)*

Members: Cynthia Creech, David Farren, Jack Lancto, Peg Munves, Craig Westcott

*Monthly meetings* (6:30 – 8:00 P.M. at Samson Environmental Center, Darrow School): Jan 11, Feb 8, Mar 14, May 9, Jun 13, Jul 20, Aug 10, Sep 12, Nov 7, Dec 12 *(minutes posted on town's web site)*

### Overview of activities

The CAC focused throughout the year on a first-ever Natural Resources Conservation Plan for the Town of New Lebanon. We were fortunate to be awarded a grant of \$21,520 by the Hudson River Estuary Program (HREP) of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC). The grant was awarded on November 18, 2015, and the Town of New Lebanon finalized the contract with HREP on January 26, 2016. The grant allowed the Town of New Lebanon to hire Hudsonia, Ltd., based at Bard College, as a consultant and the Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program in Ghent as a subcontractor. Throughout the year, the CAC benefitted from the guidance and instruction of Gretchen Stevens of Hudsonia and Conrad Vispo of Farmscape Ecology Program.

### Natural Resources Conservation Plan (NRCP)

Our first training session for the NRCP came late in 2015, on December 9 at Darrow School. Gretchen Stevens and Claudia and Conrad Vispo set the stage for the remote mapping portion of the project, to be completed during Hands to Work sessions at Darrow every Wednesday from 9:00 – 11:20 A.M. David Farren, Craig Westcott and later Peg Munves attended these Wednesday morning sessions, and usually either Gretchen or Conrad, and often both, instructed us. Craig recruited two Darrow students, Abe Pritzker and Marshal Dong, and science teacher Caleb Corliss to assist the CAC in the project. The first order of business was to download qGIS, an open source GIS program, on our computers. That process took three hours.

At the first Hands to Work session in January, Gretchen and Conrad eased us into qGIS, a complicated program that required much trial and error to master. We decided to identify intermittent streams and woodland pools, small wetlands and ancient forest patches not currently mapped. We divided the town into five sections, with each of us assigned one, and proceeded to carefully analyze topographic maps, both current and historic, paired with aerial photographs, both current and historic. Using qGIS, we could access other maps, such as the hydrography and soil types in New Lebanon. The town does not appear to have many intermittent woodland pools; we did better identifying intermittent streams. Given the town's rich agricultural history, ancient forest patches were often tricky to identify.

To verify whether our remote mapping exercise had been accurate, we commenced site verification visits. For the first three, we explored Darrow's grounds on April 27 and again on May 4 and 11. We found the Darrow forest, rich with spring ephemeral wildflowers, to be especially magical. Large swaths of toothwort yielded sightings of the West Virginia White butterfly (rare in New Lebanon) and we also encountered expanses of blue cohosh, jack in the pulpit, may apple and ramps, all indicators of calcareous (limestone rich) soils. Gretchen Stevens kept a detailed inventory of everything we

encountered. Peg Munves took photographs, the first in an extensive library of images that will offer choices for illustrating the final NRCP report. All photographs will be credited.

Our next site verification visits were to the 483-acre parcel along Hand Hollow Road recently purchased by the Open Space Institute (OSI) from Christine Dreyfus. On June 17, Gretchen Stevens, Cynthia Creech and David Farren explored the south side of Hand Hollow Road and were struck particularly by Hollow Brook running dry for much of its course, like a highway through the forest, while water flowed beneath through hollowed-out limestone. On July 22, Gretchen, Conrad Vispo, David and Craig Westcott explored the north side of Hand Hollow Road, climbing to an expansive old field and confirming a nearby intermittent woodland pool. We also discovered several intermittent streams not currently mapped. The weather was magnificent on both days. Gretchen Stevens kept an inventory of everything we encountered and later wrote a comprehensive report for Charlie Burgess of OSI to help in his stewardship of the land. OSI, a transitional owner, expects to convey the land to NYS DEC. The parcel will be added to Hand Hollow State Forest, doubling its size.

Additional site verification visits, 8 in all, are starred under David Farren in the "Training" list that follows in this report. In 2016, we estimate that we visited roughly 11.5% of the acreage in town and are grateful to landowners for their permission. These landowners were Ginger Delano (September 14), David Himmelstein & Stephanie Woolhandler (September 21), Uli Rose (September 28), Helen Burton (October 5), Jeffrey & Karen Ross (October 12), Bob Weber (October 26), Bob & Rae Gilson (November 12) and Mountain Road School (December 7). In 2017, we will continue with site visits and aim to have explored a quarter of the total 20,995 acres in New Lebanon by the time we complete the project. In writing reports on each visit, David Farren included inventories of trees with selected measurements and other growth.

#### Agricultural lands

For the NRCP, the CAC agreed in December to provide a data base to Hudsonia identifying agricultural uses of farmland in town in broad categories – crops (including hayfields and orchards), meadows (and how frequently bush hogged), and pasture. Cynthia Creech will make the first pass based on her knowledge of farming in New Lebanon. This data base would be the first such ever compiled in town.

#### Outreach

On June 14, Gretchen Stevens presented an overview of the NRCP to the Town Board at its monthly meeting, featuring new maps of natural resources in New Lebanon created by Hudsonia. On December 13, the CAC presented a progress report to the Town Board at its monthly meeting, featuring a number of photographs and delving into details of the remote mapping exercise and site verification visits. Between these two presentations, we submitted articles about the NRCP project, with photographs, to the Grow the Valley and town newsletters. Grow the Valley reached a large distribution list via email and the town delivered a printed copy of its newsletter to every postal box in town. Also, David Farren arranged for Cissy Hernandez, then the clerk for the Building and Planning Departments, to download the complete qGIS files for New Lebanon onto her computer. The files, which include parcel maps and aerial photographs, are now available to the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals as well as to applicants with development proposals.

### Historic landscape photographs

In late August, David Farren worked with Jeannine Tonetti, the archivist for the Lebanon Valley Historical Society, to download digitized images of the historic New Lebanon landscape. With assistance from Shelley Salem and Doug Banker, and after three sessions in the archives, the CAC secured 50 images, many from postcards printed in 1907 and 1908, to help CAC members, guided by Conrad Vispo, determine the possibility and whereabouts of ancient forest patches.

### Prospective work

As the CAC looks forward to 2017, we plan to continue site verification visits and expand outreach to the community. We will create a banner explaining the NRCP to be displayed at the Farmers Market (every Sunday afternoon throughout the summer), the town picnic (late July), at public forums and in Town Hall. The NRCP work plan calls for two public forums. The first, in the spring, will seek input from concerned citizens in response to a revised draft by Hudsonia, based on the CAC's feedback. The second, to present the final draft, will come before the CAC submits the NRCP to the Town Board for adoption by resolution. We anticipate that action in October 2017. We also plan to work with the Town Board, Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals during Tri-Board Meetings to address conservation priorities for the town. Two meetings are anticipated in 2017. The CAC will also respond to proposed zoning regulations for solar energy.

### Recordkeeping

David Farren keeps careful records of all activities related to the NRCP and files quarterly progress reports with the Hudson River Estuary Program. He works with the Town Clerk, Tistrya Houghtling, to complete quarterly financial reports. The town paid Hudsonia twice during 2016 for invoices related to the work of Gretchen Stevens and Conrad Vispo on the NRCP. Tistrya then submitted vouchers to NYS DEC for reimbursement from the grant. The Hudsonia contract has a remaining balance of \$10,342 for work that must be completed by October 31, 2017, the grant deadline.

### Wyomanock Creek designation

State Senator Kathy Marchione succeeded via a joint resolution with Assemblyman Steve McLaughlin in adding the Wyomanock Creek to the list of "designated inland waterways" in New York State. The Corkscrew Rail Trail Association, Shaker Swamp Conservancy, Town of New Lebanon and other town organizations are now eligible to apply for grants dedicated to waterway revitalization and issued through the state's Environmental Protection Fund. Cynthia Creech had worked with Senator Marchione's office in 2015 to introduce the resolution. In November, the Town Board approved a resolution for the Town Supervisor to send a letter of support to the Town of Kinderhook backing their request to add the Kinderhook Creek to the list of "designated inland waterways."

### Budget Line Item

Cynthia Creech attended the budget workshops held during the last fiscal quarter and successfully renewed the CAC's \$2,500 line item in the town's 2017 budget. In December, the town purchased a Verizon Ellipsis tablet with protective cover and tracking software for \$409 and added the CAC to the town's Verizon account at \$39.95 per month for an unlimited data plan. The tablet will prove invaluable

during site verification visits. Earlier, the town reimbursed David Farren for his purchase of Maps-n-Trax for his iPhone, a \$6.99 item.

### Training

#### **Cynthia Creech**

Cynthia participated in 2 site verification visits for the NRCP – June 14 (the OSI’s parcel south of Hand Hollow Road) and October 12 (Karen Ross property in Lebanon Springs). Cynthia also serves as Deputy Town Supervisor and sits on the Recreation Commission and Zoning Rewrite Committee for the Town of New Lebanon. She is also the Court Clerk and the CAC’s liaison to the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals. Cynthia reports on CAC developments at the Town Board’s monthly meetings. Based on her knowledge of farming in town, Cynthia will make the first pass for the NRCP at agricultural uses of farmland in town. In June, the Columbia County Environmental Management Council honored Cynthia with its Good Earth Keeping Award.

#### **David Farren** (*site verification visits are starred*)

Jan 6: CAC Roundtable convened by the Columbia Land Conservancy, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M., Hudson

Feb 16: meeting with Cissy Hernandez of Planning Dept., Town Hall, 1:30 – 2:30 P.M.

Feb 29: Columbia County Trails Task Force, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M., Chatham

Mar 2: lunch with Karen Ross, Blueberry Hill Café, 11:30 A.M. – 12:45 P.M.

Mar 19: nature walk with Claudia and Conrad Vispo, 10:00 A.M. – 12:30 P.M., Art OMI, Ghent

Apr 6: conference call with Land Trust Alliance, 2:00 – 2:30 P.M.

Apr 10: Garden Conservancy lecture, 3:00 – 4:45 P.M., Cary Institute, Millbrook

Apr 11-13: Land Trust Alliance Advocacy Days, Washington, D.C.

Apr 23: Garden Conservancy lecture, 11:00 A.M. – 12:30 P.M., Stonecrop Gardens, Cold Spring

May 3: field inventory with Claudia Vispo, 9:00 A.M. – 1:15 P.M., farm at 149 S.R. 217, Hudson

May 9: WAVE Training, Alene Onion (NYS DEC), 9:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M., Five Rivers Education Center, Delmar (WAVE = Water Assessment Volunteer Evaluator)

May 10: Rensselaer Plateau hikes with Karl Beard, National Parks Service, 8:10 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.

May 18: Columbia County Trails Task Force, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M., Chatham

Jun 8: field inventory with Claudia Vispo, 8:00 A.M. – 12:45 P.M., hayfields newly acquired by Hawthorne Valley Farm, Schnackenberg Road

Jun 8: CAC Roundtable convened by the Columbia Land Conservancy, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M., Philmont

Jun 11: Connectivity Workshop presented by Gretchen Stevens, Hudsonia, and Ingrid Haeckel, Hudson River Estuary Program, 8:30 A.M. – 2:30 P.M., Poestenkill

Jun 14: Presentation to Town Board by Gretchen Stevens on NRCP, 6:45 – 7:30 P.M., Town Hall

Jun 16: Berkshire-Taconic Regional Conservation Partnership meeting, Noon – 3:30 P.M., Pittsfield

\*Jun 17: Site verification visit with Gretchen Stevens and Cynthia Creech, 483-acre OSI parcel, south of Hand Hollow Road, 9:00 A.M. – 1:15 P.M.

Jun 18: Lecture, Spencertown Hidden Gardens, 9:00 – 10:00 A.M., Spencertown Academy

Jun 19: Corkscrew Rail Trail First Anniversary Walk, 1:00 – 3:30 P.M., Stephentown

Jul 15: meeting with Town Clerk to finalize NRCP paperwork, 11:30 A.M. – Noon, Town Hall

\*Jul 22: Site verification visit with Gretchen Stevens, Conrad Vispo and Craig Westcott, 483-acre OSI parcel, north of Hand Hollow Road, 9:00 A.M. – 12:30 P.M.

Aug 11: Sidewalk hearing for Town of New Lebanon, 7:00 – 8:30 P.M., New Lebanon Jr/Sr H.S.

Aug 20: Corkscrew Rail Trail Work Day, 8:00 – 11:30 A.M., Stephentown/New Lebanon

Aug 20: Lecture on honey bees sponsored by Columbia Land Conservancy, 3:00 – 5:00 P.M., Midwinter Farms, Ancram

Aug 25: review of landscape photographs in the archives of Lebanon Valley Historical Society with Jeannine Tonetti, archivist, 10:00 – 11:45 A.M., Town Hall

Aug 25: Green drinks with Columbia Land Conservancy, lecture by National Parks Service, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M., Lindenwald (Van Buren home), Kinderhook

Sep 6: continue review of landscape photographs at Lebanon Valley Historical Society, Jeannine Tonetti and Shelley Salem, 10:00 – 11:30 A.M., Town Hall

Sep 7: finalize review of landscape photographs at Lebanon Valley Historical Society, Jeannine Tonetti and Doug Banker, 3:00 – 4:30 P.M., Town Hall

Sep 9: Solar Energy workshop, 10:00 A.M. – Noon, Town Hall

\*Sep 14: Site verification visit with Peg Munves, 123-acre property of Ginger Delano (Hitchcock House), 9:00 – 11:45 A.M., NYS Rte. 22

Sep 14: Solar Energy workshop, 7:00 – 9:00 P.M., Town Hall

\*Sep 21: Site verification visit with Peg Munves, 144.5-acre property of David Himmelstein and Stephanie Woolhandler, 9:00 A.M. – 12:45 P.M., McGrath Hill Road

\*Sep 28: Site verification visit with Peg Munves, Craig Westcott, 3 Darrow Hands to Work students, and Franz and Rachel Rose, 154-acre property of Uli Rose, 9:00 – 11:45 A.M., Cemetery Road

\*Oct 5: Site verification visit with Peg Munves, 184-acre property of Helen Burton, 9:00 A.M. – Noon, Canaan Road

\*Oct 12: Site verification visit with Cynthia Creech, 217-acre property of Jeffrey and Karen Ross, guided by Karen Ross, 9:00 A.M. – 1:15 P.M., Pool Hill and Bird Roads, Lebanon Springs

Oct 14: Maps-n-Trax activation and training with Conrad Vispo, 10:00 A.M. – 12:15 P.M., Farmscape Ecology Program, Ghent

\*Oct 26: Site verification visit with Peg Munves, 131-acre property of Bob Weber, guided by Bob Weber, 9:00 – 11:45 A.M., Dunham Road

Nov 3: Columbia County Trails Task Force, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M., Chatham

\*Nov 12: Site verification visit with Peg Munves, 77-acre property of Bob and Rae Gilson, guided by the Gilsos, 9:00 A.M. – 12:15 P.M., Salls Road

Nov 18: meeting with Craig Westcott to plan NRCP presentation to Town Board and review possible field equipment, 11:30 A.M. – 12:45 P.M., Darrow School

Dec 5: Woodlands & Wetlands seminar with Laura Heady, Hudson River Estuary Program, and Marilyn Wyman, Cornell Cooperative Extension Service's Agroforestry Resource Center (Acra, NY), 6:00 – 8:30 P.M., Marbletown Community Center, Stone Ridge

\*Dec 7: Site verification visit with Peg Munves, Craig Westcott, 4 Darrow Hands to Work students and one faculty member, 20-acre Mountain Road School property, guided by 5 Mountain Road School 8<sup>th</sup> Graders, 9:00 – 11:45 A.M., Adams Crossing Road

Dec 12: planning session with Peg Munves and Craig Westcott for presentation of NRCP progress report to Town Board, 5:00 – 6:30 P.M., Darrow School

Dec 13: presentation of NRCP progress report to Town Board, 6:45 – 7:30 P.M., Town Hall

Dec 21: pick up new field equipment at Town Hall, meet with Craig Westcott to load software and assemble protective case, 10:00 – 11:00 A.M., Town Hall/Darrow School

Hands to Work sessions at Darrow School (Wednesdays, 9:00 – 11:20 A.M.): Jan 6, 13, 20, 27, Feb 3, 17, Mar 2, 16, Apr 6, 20, 27\*, May 4\*, 11\*, 18 – the starred dates were site verification visits on Darrow's grounds with Gretchen Stevens, Conrad Vispo, Peg Munves, Craig Westcott and Darrow Hands to Work students Abe Pritzker and Marshal Dong, in addition to David Farren. Peg Munves joined the Hands to

Work sessions once she became a prospective CAC member in March, although she did not tackle qGIS, and Craig Westcott, Darrow staff and CAC member, participated in most and Caleb Corliss, Darrow teacher, in some.

On May 9, David participated in a full day of WAVE training in Delmar and is now a certified Water Assessment Volunteer Evaluator. Unfortunately, the summer-long drought suppressed the stream riffles that are necessary for collecting invertebrate specimens.

David serves as Treasurer of the Corkscrew Rail Trail Association, with monthly meetings on the third Wednesday that rotate between New Lebanon and Stephentown. He participates in occasional work days on the rail trail and serves on the Columbia County Trails Task Force (meetings cited above). He is also a Director of the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance (RPA) and attends monthly board meetings on the third Monday in Petersburg. He serves on two RPA committees, Development and Trail Vision.

#### **Jack Lancto**

Jack lined up Bob Weber as host for a site verification visit – on October 26, Bob guided Peg Munves and David Farren through his 131-acre property on Dunham Road in New Britain.

#### **Peg Munves**

Peg joined the CAC in April and has been an active and valued member since. She began attending the Wednesday morning Hands to Work sessions at Darrow in March. On site verification visits, she and David Farren were the usual CAC duo. Peg participated in the 3 site visits on Darrow's grounds in late April and May and in 7 more – September 14 (Ginger Delano property on NYS Rte. 22), September 21 (David Himmelstein/Stephanie Woolhandler property on McGrath Hill Road plus Hand Hollow State Forest), September 28 (Uli Rose property on Cemetery Road), October 5 (Helen Burton property on Canaan Road), October 26 (Bob Weber property on Dunham Road), November 12 (Bob & Rae Gilson property on Salls Road) and December 7 (Mountain Road School property on Adams Crossing Road). In addition, Peg did all of the scheduling save for the Darrow and OSI site visits and sent thank you notes following visits. Peg also took photographs during each site visit and reached out to Howard Elementary School and New Lebanon Junior/Senior High School, inviting students and parents to submit photographs to be considered for the final NRCP report. If chosen, these photographs will be attributed.

#### **Craig Westcott**

Craig arranged for the Hands to Work program at Darrow School to collaborate with the CAC's NRCP project and researched possible field equipment. He submitted the requisition for the Verizon Ellipsis tablet, protective case and tracking software, ordered and received in December. He also created the PowerPoint slides for the progress report the CAC presented at the Town Board meeting on December 13. Craig participated in 2 of 3 site verification visits on Darrow's grounds in April and May and in 3 more – July 22 (OSI parcel north of Hand Hollow Road), September 28 (Uli Rose property on Cemetery Road) and December 7 (Mountain Road School property on Adams Crossing Road), the latter two with Darrow Hands to Work students. A charter member of the New Lebanon CAC, Craig has served since its inception in 2010.