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*Saving Special Places*

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# Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy

## V I S T A S

Vol. 15

2009 Annual Report

### President's Message - Judy Thomson

The Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy is one of the best kept secrets of the capital region. People learn about us through word-of-mouth or discovering a kiosk or sign in their neighborhood. We're local, right here in your backyard. We're a place you can get to by walking, bike riding or taking a short drive. We're close enough to visit when you just have an hour and want to get some exercise and fresh air. We're the vistas you see as you drive from one place to another. And we're protecting your water and air and providing a place for animals, birds and wildflowers to thrive.

Despite challenging economic times, we have made significant progress again this year in conserving land for

future generations. When you walk across our new bridges or read the information on our kiosks, take a minute to think about the labor of love provided by our volunteers and recognize your part in making this possible. Enjoy walking through the preserves and take the time to truly appreciate the views and the solitude. Allow yourself to connect with the environment, and with our mission to preserve it.

This report highlights our recent accomplishments and



we should all be proud of them. Help us spread the word so we can continue saving special places.

Preserving these places requires special people. Thank you to all our volunteers for your time, energy, and commitment! Thank you to Peggy Sherman for her leadership during the last three years and for leaving MHLA well-positioned for continued success. And thank you to Jill Knapp, Helen Smith, and Anne LaSalle who are always looking for better ways to save special places.

### Executive Director's Report - Jill Knapp

Those of you who know me, know I worry a lot. Would we close on all of the easements by the end of year, would the state release the grants funds so we could receive a grant to hire a development director, would the Mosher Marsh boardwalk be built before the grant funding ran out, would the weather cooperate for our fall luncheon? So 2009 was a year that kept me in suspense right up to the 11th hour — literally, when the final easement was delivered to the county clerk's office at 1 PM on December 31.

The year ended with a burst of accomplishments. Once notified of the grant funding, we had a highly qualified person at work within 6 weeks! With good luck, tremendous volunteer and professional support, the boardwalk was completed in November. All of the easements were signed and filed before the expiration of the expanded federal tax benefits on December 31. And we had a better than expected year end appeal and a great fall luncheon.

The trouble with such a good year is we have higher expectations for 2010. Already several promising projects are in the works. Hopefully some of the achievements of 2009 will open new doors and greater opportunities for land protection in the coming year.

Thanks so much to the staff, board members, and volunteers who made all of this work possible! We could not have done it without you!

## Record Year for Land Protection

### *Conservation Easements vs Preserves*

MHLC protects land by holding conservation easements and by ownership of preserves.

#### Conservation Easements

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values.

**The landowner continues to own and use their land, and can sell it or pass it on to their heirs. Easements do not require public access.**

Future owners of the property are bound by the terms of the easement and the land trust is responsible for making sure the easement's terms are followed. An easement may apply to all or only a portion of the property.

#### Preserves

Preserves are properties that MHLC actually owns. We have legal title to these lands. Where possible and as resources permit, we provide public access to these properties for the use and enjoyment of the public.

In 2006 when we developed our strategic plan, our number one priority was to Strategically Conserve More Land. We set a goal of protecting 2500 acres by 2010 and on De-

cember 31, 2009 when we closed on a 162 acre easement, we were within a stone's throw of achieving this milestone!

In 2009 we protected a record 425 acres, bringing

the total of the lands that we have protected to 2190 acres. In 2009 we completed five easements and added four acres to our Winn Preserve in the Town of Knox.



**Brooks Easement** – 72 acres, Town of New Scotland. The easement protects open space, including woodcock habitat. It buffers farmland and protects an area of karst and associated underground water flows to nearby Onesquethaw Creek.



**Baitsholts Bolster Easement** – 112 acres, Town of Berne. The easement protects hayfields, extensive forest, meadows, intermittent streams, and a pond that provides non-fragmented habitat to many species of birds and mammals. It is adjacent to Partridge Run Wildlife Management Area.



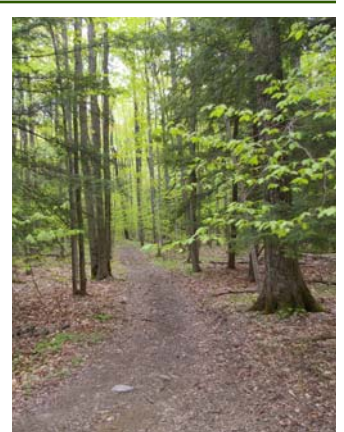
**Baitsholts Goldberger Lone Goose Pond Easement** – 33 acres, Town of Rensselaerville. The easement protects a 5 acre man-made pond and a mix of hemlock woods and hardwoods. It contributes to a corridor of protected land providing wildlife habitat.



**Ward Easement** – 43 acres, Town of Rensselaerville. This easement is contiguous with Huyck Preserve lands and contributes to watershed protection in the 10 Mile Creek. It provides a diversity of habitats, including hay fields that provide important bird habitat.



**Carter Easement** – 162 acres, Town of Rensselaerville. This easement protects many high quality soils with high agricultural value. The property also protects important bird habitats including old hay fields, shrubby old fields, wet meadow, and woodlands.



**Winn Preserve** – 4 acres, Town of Knox. This addition brings the preserve to 155 acres and protects access to the public trails that run through the preserve.



# Thank You Supporters for a Great Year in 2009!

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**Strengthening Our Organization**



In April we completed a detailed assessment of our organization based on the Land Trust Alliance's 88 standards and practices. This pin-pointed both our needs as well as our significant strengths and will provide guidance as we develop a new strategic plan in 2010.

A major recommendation of the assessment was the

need to development management plans for our preserves. This is a priority and seven plans were written in 2009.

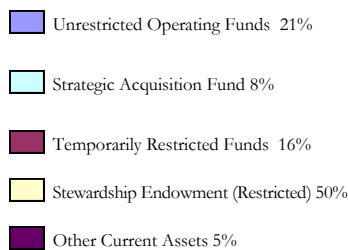
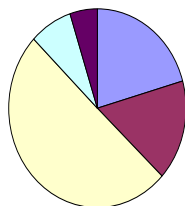
We initiated an Advisory Council and held the first meeting in June, 2009. This group of individuals provides us with a sounding board for ideas as we continue to reach out to our members and the public.

In November we were delighted to hire Anne LaSalle as our Development Director. Her position is partially funded by a grant from the NYS Environmental Protection Fund through the NYS Conservation Partnership Program and the Land Trust Alliance. Anne's part time position brings much needed staffing assistance to the organization.

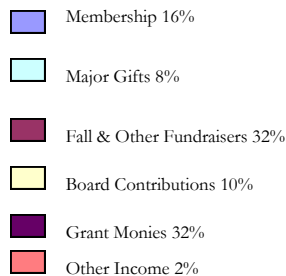
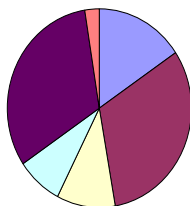
# Financial Report

2009 saw increases in assets, operating revenues, and operating expenses reflecting our very busy year in land protection. Our Stewardship Endowment principal increased by \$27,000 and we received \$37,500 in LTA grants to support our development and land management efforts. Operating expenses increased by 16% due to completing 5 conservation easements, significant stewardship work on several preserves, and an additional staff member to improve our development efforts. Grants received in previous years supported many of these expenses. In 2010 we hope to increase our unrestricted operating revenue as a result of directed staff support to fundraising and outreach activities.

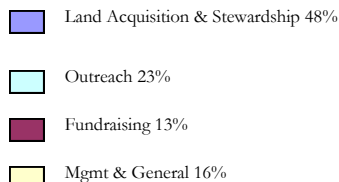
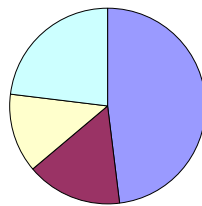
**Current Assets \$447,981**



**Operating Revenue \$133,205**



**Operating Expenses \$156,752**



*“It is an incalculable added pleasure to any one’s sum of happiness if he or she grows to know, even slightly and imperfectly, how to read and enjoy the wonder-book of nature.”*

*- President Theodore Roosevelt*

# Outreach

Judy Thomson continued our series of Wednesday outings, visiting both MHLC preserves, private easements, and other public properties within our service area.

In addition to the Wednesday hikes, Dan Driscoll, working with local yoga instructors, initiated a series of yoga sessions that incorporated hiking at our preserves and yoga exercises. Those attending found these to be very enjoyable.

We hosted an educational series of programs in the spring of 2009 that focused on different values of land protection: the relationship



between natural areas and stormwater management; the impact of land use on

changes in native wildlife species and non-native invasive plants and animals; and the importance of protecting farmland for local food production.

Volunteer Rodger Fink revised and updated our popular hiking brochure to include Mosher Marsh which will officially open to the public in 2010. Rodger also redesigned our website creating a more attractive and user-friendly site, and designed the panels for our new table top display that we

purchased with funds from a Bender Family Foundation grant.

We made numerous presentation on who we are and what we do to groups throughout the region.

Friends of the Rail Trail (FORT), a committee of the Conservancy, was organized in 2009 to raise public awareness and gather citizen input into Albany County’s plan to develop the former D&H rail line into a multi-use pathway connecting Albany and Voorheesville. FORT represented the Conservancy at many events, including farmers markets, parades, and the Altamont Fair, building awareness and support for the rail trail. The

county formally acquired the rail bed on December 30, 2009.

Mohawk River Community Partners (MRCP), a volunteer organization in the Town of Colonie, initiated the legal work to merge with MHLC in 2009. With a mission to identify, preserve, protect and promote the natural, scenic, cultural, historical, economic and recreational resources of the Mohawk River waterfront area in the Town of Colonie we expect the merger of the two organizations to increase visibility of MHLC in that area and provide the volunteers of MRCP with the resources of a staff-supported organization so they can focus their energy on river projects.





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## Stewardship of MHLC Preserves

Significant improvements were made to trails at some of our preserves. Two bridges were built at the Normans Kill West to provide for a more pleasurable hiking experience. Built by volunteers from MHLC, Bethlehem High School, and Eagle Scout Jared Joyce, these provide easy access across a ravine and stream.

Volunteers from SABIC in Selkirk spent a full day putting in a new trail, two small bridges, and a kiosk at the Holt Preserve in New Scotland.

Trail improvements were made at Bennett Hill with

the help of Eagle Scout Griffin Blanchard. His project improved drainage and reduced muddy spots on the trail.

Thanks to volunteer Jeff Leon, a stream crossing and a 200 foot boardwalk were completed at Mosher Marsh. This project was partially funded by a grant from the NYS Environmental Protection Fund through the NYS Conservation Partnership Program and the Land Trust Alliance. Major support was also provided by Schrader and Co. who donated 80 hours of labor, Curtis

Lumber who provided a discount on the lumber, Mike Love who provided additional funding, and many volunteers who helped build the boardwalk and cleaned up an old farm dump on the site.

The inventory and photographs of plants at our Bethlehem preserves was completed. This project was supported by a grant from Whiteman Osterman and Hanna.

Kiosk signage was installed at the Phillipin Kill Preserve and at Indian Ladder Farms.

