



Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy

2011 Annual Report

President's Report Judy Thomson

While 2010 saw the acquisition of additional acreage, 2011 was characterized by results in opening and maintaining land under our care. We developed and clarified policies for managing our preserves and continued to implement improvements at our properties to afford the public an enjoyable visit. We set the stage for future acquisition and easements by focusing our efforts on lands of particular significance. We also determined that our policies and practices are strong and decided we were ready to apply for accreditation.

We initiated a partnership between MHLC, the town of Bethlehem and Albany County that resulted in opening 1.9 miles of the nine-mile Albany County Rail Trail for pedestrian use and paved the way for additional expansion in 2012.

We continued to engage with and value our long-time supporters and worked to build relationships with new people and organizations. Our challenge grant yielded not only additional funds, but also new members. New volunteers joined the "regulars" to build kiosks, bridges and trails at our preserves. We sponsored many hikes that explored the natural beauty of our area. Hikers got good exercise while enjoying nature and good companionship.

Many thanks to:

- Our Executive Director Jill Knapp, financial consultant Helen Smith, and development coordinator Kate Murray;
- Our Advisory Council and Board members;
- Land donors; and
- The many financial supporters and volunteers who have helped save and protect special places throughout our local area.

As the economy recovers, development pressures will likely increase, threatening special places that we take for granted. We need to continue to be vigilant and visionary in saving those parcels that are particularly important for their ecological or scenic value, for maintaining clean air and water, and for providing protection for animal and plant diversity. We look forward to 2012, our 20th year anniversary, as an opportunity to save and care for more special places.



Land Stewardship



Perpetual Protection More Than Acquisition

Acquiring land is sometimes the simplest part of our job. Assuring a land donor that we will protect the parcel's resources in perpetuity is a tremendous commitment. In 2011, with 1400 acres of land protected and more than 500 of those acres acquired in the past 5 years, it became evident what a large responsibility we had assumed!

As the number of protected acres increased, it became clear the Conservancy needed not only to articulate the value of these lands to the community, but also our objectives for the long term protection and stewardship of these parcels. This became a major focus of our program in the first half of 2011.

While stewardship policies had been developed over the years, they were usually in reaction to a specific threat or use. As our properties became more popular, issues popped up more frequently. We clearly needed an agreed-upon set of management objectives that would guide appropriate uses on different properties. We needed a land stewardship policy!

In June of 2011, the board of directors approved the land stewardship policy which provides direction for such things as property identification, monitoring, and enforcement; public access, appropriate uses; volunteer initiated projects (ie Eagle Scout projects, etc.); private use; and economic uses.

This comprehensive policy will provide long term guidance for the management of our current properties. This gives us a much stronger position for protecting our properties as we can justify management decisions based on our protection objectives and approved board policy. It will also guide the appropriate uses of new preserves as we acquire them and write management plans for their protection.

Work on the Preserves

In August of 2011, we closed on two access easements. These were needed to allow for legal public access to our Keleher Preserve on top of Wolf Hill in the Town of New Scotland. With these acquired and filed, we were able to install the kiosk, parking area, and begin to identify a trail system. Once officially opened, this 287-acre property will offer an option to nearby Bennett Hill for hiking and snowshoeing.

The Schiffendecker Preserve on Bender Lane in Glenmont was officially opened on a rainy day in April. Over the summer, volunteers installed a foot bridge and cut nearly a mile of trails. A connecting trail loop was laid out which will be completed in 2012. A Siena College student developed a trail map for the property as part of a fall semester course project. As human activity tapered off in the fall, beaver activity accelerated. Before the end of 2011, several dozen trees had been chewed down and hauled off to an obscure dam!

Fortunately our properties escaped major damage from Tropical Storms Irene and Lee. However, a couple of new formidable sink holes did develop at Bennett Hill after the storms, adding interest to this property.

STEWARDSHIP OBJECTIVES

- *Maintain & improve habitats and ecosystems, while allowing for natural development & succession*
- *Allow natural disturbances to occur except where they may pose threats to site access, human health, safety, & buildings or to rare species or communities*
- *Protect, maintain, & where possible, restore known rare species & significant natural communities*
- *Manage working forests & fields*
- *Protect soil & water quality & other site resources (geologic, cultural, etc)*
- *Promote public use, enjoyment, & environmental awareness.*



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Thank You to Our Supporters for a Great Year in 2011!

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Arlene's Artist Materials
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Backyard Birds
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Bellini's Italian Eatery

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Valoze Nursery
Westmere Beverage Center
Wild Sage
Wine And Spirits
Wolf Creek Farm
Yono's Restaurant

Rail Trail

The opening of a section of the Albany Rail Trail on June 4, 2011 was a great cause for celebration. Sixteen years in the making, this achievement was the result of a new partnership between MHLC, Albany County, the Town of Bethlehem and dozens of dedicated volunteers from MHLC's Friends of the Rail Trail (FORT) committee.

This project has been the catalyst for renewed public engagement in community improvement and has created opportunities for healthy exercise in the middle of Delmar. In April over 50 volunteers of all ages helped remove fallen trees and debris from the trail in preparation for drainage improvements and mowing along the 1.9 mile stretch of the corridor. In November a Trail Ambassador Program was implemented. Over 20 Trail Ambassadors routinely walk the trail checking for problems, picking up litter, and greeting walkers. Late in 2011, MHLC received a grant from the Hudson River Valley Greenway Program to develop a trail theme and design standards for signs and amenities such as benches.



Transitions

We completed a strategic land acquisition plan in 2011 for several of our priority areas. This plan helps us transition our land protection efforts from being mostly opportunistic to more strategic. This will allow us to focus our limited resources on specific lands that are likely to provide significant benefits such as habitat and water quality protection, agricultural productivity, or scenic viewpoints. This plan has provided the catalyst for new land protection efforts near Indian Ladder Farms in Albany County.

Responding to an event that MHLC hosted at Indian Ladder Farms in May, friends and neighbors of the farm organized a committee to help MHLC protect additional lands in the Vly Swamp and Black Creek Marsh area. MHLC's Board of Directors endorsed this effort and committed the Conservancy's resources to this important and significant project in November. This will be the Conservancy's first major strategic land protection effort since it completed the Indian Ladder Farms easement in 2003. MHLC awaits word of a grant to help promote and expand this effort.

Along with a strategic focus on priority properties, we turned our Onesquesthaw Cave property over to the Northeastern Cave Conservancy. Since acquiring this 1 acre property from Albany County in 1997, the Cave Conservancy, with their expert knowledge of the cave's scientific value and dangers, had been managing the property for MHLC. Their ownership now allows them to develop and implement policies for the protection of the cave and the safety of spelunkers without our involvement. This transfer was approved by the Albany County Legislature that retains a reverter clause on the property.

Staff transitioned in 2011 and provided an opportunity for the Conservancy to review its staffing needs. The organization had grown and matured significantly since staff was first hired in the fall of 2005. With Helen moving on to a new position in July, and Kate returning to school to complete her Masters at the end of the year, we were able to realign positions with current needs. While Helen continues to do our financial work on a contract basis, Kate's position was expanded to include some of Helen's former responsibilities. These changes will allow for a part-time land stewardship employee to be hired in the summer of 2012. This was deemed a critical need given the number of properties we now own and the number of trails that have been established over the past 5 years. While volunteers will remain a critical component of our stewardship efforts, this new position will help direct the work of the volunteers and keep our properties in good shape for visitors.





Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy
 PO Box 567
 Slingerlands, NY 12159

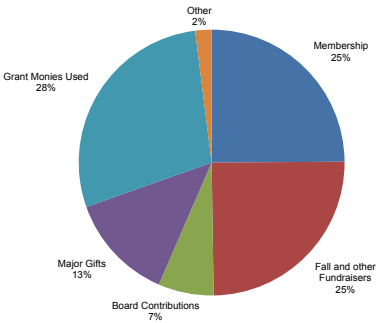
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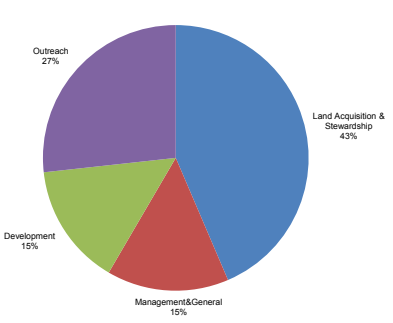


2011 saw increases in assets and operating revenue thanks to the generous support of donors through the challenge and year end appeals. Our Eat for the Environment brought in new funds and helped develop new partnerships with local restaurants. Grants continued to support many stewardship and some staff expenses. We received two grants in 2011 from the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and the New York State Conservation Partnership Program, a collaborative effort with the Land Trust Alliance and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. These grants provided funding to provide access to our Keleher Preserve and to initiate our Adopt a Forest Parcel Program. A grant from The Norcross Wildlife Foundation, Inc. allowed us to purchase some hand and power tools for help with trail maintenance. We continue to work on increasing sources of unrestricted operating funds.

Operating Revenue \$176,614



Operating Expenses \$151,501



Current Assets \$515,011

