



RELC NEWSLETTER

Fall 2009

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Continued on back cover



1885 Covered Bridge at Ashokan Center

Photo by Ashokan Staff

Building Bridges to our Community

Dear Neighbors:

Rondout-Esopus Land Conservancy (RELC) has been working with landowners to preserve special open places for more than 20 years. We have worked to protect more than 3,000 acres of farmland, forest, and creek front property in the valleys of the Rondout and Esopus Creeks through the donation of conservation easements by property owners who share our vision of protecting our region's unique natural resources.

More recently, we have worked with Open Space Institute to protect key areas of farmland to ensure that it is available for agricultural use in perpetuity. We are active in Hurley, Marbletown, Olive, Rochester, Rosendale, Saugerties, and Wawarsing. Our nearly 40 easements include parts of the former Williams Lake Resort in Rosendale, the Ashokan Center in Marbletown/Olive, farmland in Marbletown and Rosendale, open vistas in Hurley, Saugerties, and Rochester and geographically and biologically important creek-front property in Olive, Marbletown, Rochester and Rosendale.

We are proud of our accomplishments and recognize that none of the work we have done in the past 20 years would have been possible without help from members of the community. We encourage you to help our efforts by becoming a member of RELC, discussing options for protecting land that you might own, and by starting a community dialogue on open space preservation in your community.

We hope that you will find the enclosed information helpful and that you will join with us to ensure that the many wonderful natural resources in our region remain unchanged for future generations.

Walter Levy, President
Rondout-Esopus Land Conservancy, Inc.



RELC president Walter Levy addresses the crowd

Annual Meeting and Joint Event with Open Space Institute

On a glorious July afternoon, about seventy members of the Open Space Institute (OSI) and the Rondout-Esopus Land Conservancy (RELC) gathered at the Accord home of Rob and Eileen Rominger. The rolling meadows of their 17th Century farmstead, the bright sunlight and the fresh breezes underscored the purpose of the gathering – to bring together people who are working to save open space in the Rondout-Esopus valley. The event was especially meaningful as the Romingers have indicated their intent to preserve approximately 93 acres of their farmland through a conservation easement – especially valuable in light of the fact that it is adjacent to the recently protected Domino Farm, a 149-acre working dairy farm owned by the Dewitt Family.

The event allowed people from the two organizations to get to know each other better and to share views on land conservation and sustainability. It was wonderful to talk to RELC’s first president and founding member, Jack Schoonmaker, and his wife Alice. Jack reminded us that the empowering tactic for the economic health of the farm community was to “buy local”.

Walter Levy, RELC’s president, made a brief presentation of RELC’s achievements during the past year and goals for the future. These include closer collaboration with OSI and other local land conservancies to increase awareness of our efforts and to encourage an increased dialogue on local conservation issues.

Bob Anderberg, a RELC Board member and long-time OSI executive, displayed a chart of the protected areas in the Rondout-Esopus valley. He told of the effort to prevent the Davis Farm, a large stretch of Route 209 south of Accord from becoming the next suburban subdivision and

big-box mall, with its attendant acres of blacktop parking. The intervention of OSI and RELC saved the farm and allowed the natural character of the valley to remain protected forever.

Joe Martens, executive director of OSI, addressed the group and explained that OSI had until recently been focused on the conservation of wild landscapes, generally along mountain ridges. Working with RELC, they have come to realize that much needs to be done in conserving valleys and farmland as well. Farms are rapidly disappearing, and the values of open space, clean air, plants and local produce need protection from irreversible development.

There were questions about the relative responsibilities of RELC and OSI. RELC was founded 20 years ago to protect valuable open space in a relatively small corner of Ulster County, the Rondout and Esopus Valleys. The partnership with OSI, when appropriate, brings a wealth of services and expertise such as mapping, legal, technical and financial advice that helps RELC fulfill its essential mission.

OSI, a large national organization, in turn, benefits from RELC as local partner to assist in their common goals, since land preservation is usually motivated within local communities (protect my backyard), and local knowledge is hard to obtain by a larger entity.



Cathedral Falls

Photo: Ashokan Staff

How Does RELC Work?

Rondout-Esopus Land Conservancy works with property owners who have contacted us voluntarily who have expressed a desire to protect undeveloped land that they own from future development. Generally, these individuals are people who have a deep affection for their land and its natural beauty and want to ensure that the views and experiences that they have enjoyed are maintained for their children and/or future owners of the property.

Once contacted by a property owner, RELC visits the property to determine if it meets the organization's preservation criteria (see adjacent). If it does, RELC discusses with the owner parameters for future development, which might include the construction of a single new house or expansion of the existing residence. Based on this discussion, a conservation easement document is drafted. This document is an agreement in which the property owner agrees to limit future development on the property by donating development rights to RELC, subject to specified expansion or construction as previously agreed upon. Conditions on future commercial use of the property might also be included. The property owner retains full ownership of the property as well as the right to sell it or pass it on to his or her heirs.

In the case of easements donated on farmland, provisions to allow the future agricultural use of the property is encouraged.

The donor of the development rights might also benefit from income and/or property tax advantages in addition to the knowledge that the property will remain virtually unchanged by development in perpetuity.

Once the property is protected, RELC will visit the property periodically by appointment with the property owner to ensure that the conditions of the conservation easement are maintained. RELC maintains a stewardship endowment to ensure that it is able to fulfill its obligations in perpetuity.

RELC is the largest land conservancy in Ulster County after Mohonk Preserve. We encourage you to contact us if you know of a special place that deserves protection.



Protected farmland in Marbletown



Walking the pines along the Shawangunk Ridge

Twelve Easement Criteria

We are often asked, "how do you decide that a property is worth the long-term investment that RELC must make?" Generally, at least five of the following criteria must apply in order for the Conservancy to consider accepting an easement:

- The property is in, or capable of, active agricultural or forestry use.
- The property buffers agricultural land, wetlands, wildlife habitats, or otherwise sensitive natural areas.
- The property includes important wildlife habitats and/or known migration routes.
- The property is in a relatively natural undisturbed condition.
- The property is visible by the public from roadways, waterways, or recreation areas.
- The property shares a common boundary or is in close proximity with publicly or privately preserved land or other significant open space areas that is likely to be permanently protected.
- The development of the property would diminish scenic views or interfere with views across protected open space.
- The property affects the integrity of significant watershed areas, creek, pond, wetland, river, or other body of water or aquifer.
- The property is of sufficient size that its significant features are likely to remain intact in spite of adjacent development.
- Public access will be permitted for education or recreation on the property.
- The easement would set an important precedent for protecting land in an area of interest to the community.
- The property is of significant historic landscape value.



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Rondout-Esopus Land Conservancy depends upon your support to keep our open country land productive and beautiful.

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