



NEWS

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WINTER
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INSIDE:

- *New treasurer for RELC*
- *Mohonk water study helps set limits to growth*
- *RELC plans a party*



Esopus Gorge Easement Site

Two New Easements Being Prepared

The conservancy is pleased to announce two new easements in the works--each with special features showing how the conservation easement concept is flexible and applicable to many kinds of property.

One of them is in the Esopus Gorge in Olive Bridge, a mile or so south of the Ashokan Reservoir, where Junius and Louise Eddy have been confronting escalating tax and maintenance burdens on a 57.5-acre property that has been in the family since the 1930's. It includes substantial frontage on the lower Esopus Creek along with many acres of pristine piney woods replete with grouse, deer and other wildlife.

The challenge was to craft an easement that would allow the Eddys' growing family to use the property and maybe to build some weekend cabins while preserving the natural integrity of the place. The solution: an easement on a buffer strip 150 feet wide along the creek. Thus any future structures would be out of sight of the creek and their septic systems would be safely distant also.

The Conservancy notes that other property owners in that area also have donated or are considering easements, and it could be possible to substantially protect an entire attractive portion of the Esopus Valley against unwanted development.

Our second easement, also in the town of Olive, is noteworthy for its size. It is a 1.2 acre parcel owned by John and Jane Bierhorst along the Bushkill Creek, a direct feeder into the Ashokan Reservoir.

(Cont. on p. 2)



A Crucial Olive Location

New Easements (Cont. from p. 1)

In addition to its natural beauty, this parcel also is crucial for its contribution to open space in the hamlet. When special factors pertain, small properties as well as large can be appropriate locations for easements. Some dozen factors normally determine whether a proposed easement seems proper for RELC's directors (they are similar for conservancies around the country), and we herewith list them for your guidance:

The factors for determining an easement

- Is the property in, or useful for, agricultural or forestry use?
- Is it adjacent to agricultural land, wetlands, wildlife habitats or other sensitive natural areas?
- Does it include wildlife habitats or known migration routes?
- Is it visible by the public from roadways or waterways?
- Does the property share common boundaries with publicly or privately preserved land or with other significant open space areas?
- Is it close to private land that is already protected or likely to be?
- Would development of the property diminish scenic views or interfere with views across protected space?
- Does the property affect the integrity of a significant watershed area, creek, pond, wetland, river or aquifer?
- Is the property large enough so so that its significant features are likely to remain intact despite adjacent development?
- Will the owner allow public access for education or recreation?
- Would the easement set a precedent for protection in an area the conservancy deems important?
- Is the property of significant value as an historic landscape?

Obviously, few properties are likely to have all those qualities, so RELC directors generally like to have a property qualify on about half the guidelines. There naturally is some subjectivity; each property is unique.

RELC Loses Treasurer, Welcomes New One

Board changes continue at our volunteer-run conservancy: the departure of old blood, not tired, and some invigorating arrivals. Seward Weber, a founder, director and our treasurer, is leaving as he also retires from his post as Executive Director of Mohonk Preserve.

Seward is returning to his permanent home in Vermont, a 200-acre-plus farm outside Montpelier where he plans to dabble in forestry and agriculture.

Seward and his wife Susan plan to do some traveling. And, he says, "I might wind up volunteering for some good causes." Projects in literacy and habitat are two possibilities.

We have enlisted as our new treasurer Helen Chase, a Town of Olive resident, Assistant to the Dean of Instruction at Ulster County Community College and already a volunteer at the Catskill Center, the Catskill Forest Association and the Olive First Aid unit.

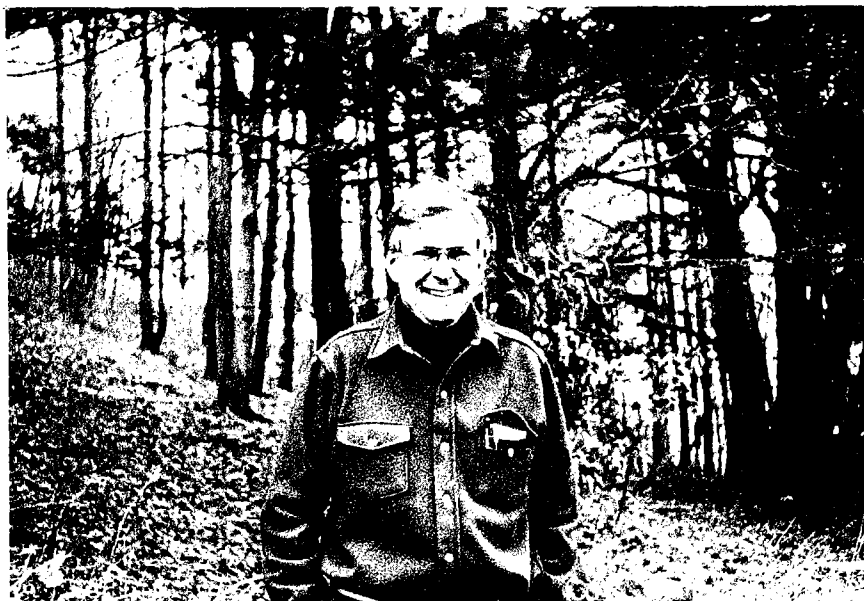
Dave Church, a new director, brings to us valuable skills from his primary job as Director of Planning at the Catskill Center. Ann Crawford, another new director, spent nearly 30 years as a reporter and editorial writer, mostly at the Bergen Record. (She wrote the article on water elsewhere in this newsletter.) Ann and her husband, Vance, live in Boiceville on Traver Hollow Brook.

A Personal Tribute

By Elinor Boice

One day in 1987 three friends walked along the Sanders Kill in Accord. Eric Hertz and Ira Stern had an idea to try out on Seward Weber, executive director of the Mohonk Preserve. He, they figured, had the organizational skills they hoped to draw upon.

As the three followed the stream toward Minnewaska, Eric and Ira broached their notion: forming a land trust for the Rondout Valley. The Sanders Kill, tumbling by, seemed indifferent to the conversation of men. And, Seward, knowing the challenge of creating and sustaining a nonprofit organization, didn't seem all that keen on the idea either.



(Cont. on p. 4)

Seward Weber

*A walk and
a talk and
three new
conservancies*



Drawing By Ilka List

A Personal Tribute (Cont. from p. 3)

But, as they walked and talked, the rushing stream began to seem more and more pertinent to their purpose. They looked where pebbles lining the bottom gave way to smooth tables of rock, and the crystal-clear water became opalescent gray with dissolved minerals. Then they came upon a waterfall, and paused to admire its beauty.

A resolve suddenly took hold of Seward. No question, they really had to do all they could to create a land conservancy to help preserve the Rondout Valley.

Drawing on his contacts and expertise at Mohonk, Seward began organizing key people in the Walkill and Rondout Valleys and in Woodstock. He invited them to a meeting for a presentation by the Trust for Public Land, a national organization dedicated to the preservation of land for public use. A TPL representative explained the basic land trust concept, and they all discussed the feasibility of the concept in their localities.

From the walk and talk on the Sanders Kill, and the meeting that followed, came not one but three land trusts in Ulster County: in Woodstock, the Walkill Valley and the Rondout-Esopus Valleys. Seward served on the boards of both the Rondout-Esopus and Walkill bodies. Now he gives up his post as RELC treasurer while moving of RELC toward retirement from Mohonk.

How could one man make such a difference? Seward leads by example. In an organization that depends on volunteers, he himself is a thoroughly reliable volunteer, with no task too humble. He has been found teetering on a ladder swabbing paint onto our Alligerville building as well as crunching our numbers. The twinkle in his eye betrays his enjoyment of what he does. His vocation and avocation are one.

(Postscript: in 1987, RELC accepted an easement on 120 acres along that same Sanders Kill).

A Winter Social For RELC Supporters

We're planning a little party, with things to munch and sip, on the afternoon of Sunday, February 21, and hope to see our friends and supporters for conversation about what's happening in the Conservancy and around Ulster County. The site: John Novi's historic Depuy Canal House in High Falls, where we have reserved the Cellar Bar from 3 to 6 p.m. We are hoping for a donation of \$10 per person for that event and looking forward to making it a bright spot in the trough of winter. We will be offering locally made bread, wine, cheese and beer.

Water Study Raises Alert

With more than two years of arduous fieldwork on the Shawangunk Ridge finally finished, consultants for Rondout Esopus Land Conservancy and Mohonk Preserve are preparing answers to crucial questions on the future of the Rondout Valley and the mountains that guard it.

The subject: How much water do the region's aquifers hold, and how long will that supply meet our burgeoning demands on it?

That information is vital to forming rational land-use plans as suburbia creeps across our boundaries. No consensus on how we should grow is sensible without hard facts to underlie decisions. That is why RELC and the Preserve agreed in 1989 to jointly sponsor and fund a hydrological study in the Shawangunks.

The scientists who clambered gamely about the Gunks are Donald Coates and Nicolay Timofeeff of SUNY Binghamton and Jonathan Caine of the University of Utah, working during this period at SUNY New Paltz. The Palisades Interstate Park Commission and the Town of Marbletown Environmental Management Commission helped out with grants.

When they began, there already was evidence of limits to the water supply. Early in the 1980s, a Marriott Corp. plan--later dropped--to build a resort complex at Lake Minnewaska raised serious questions about obtaining a sustainable supply for the project. In 1988, naturalists were alarmed to find that as construction boomed in the Shawangunk region streams and springs atop the ridge faltered and dried up.

Obviously hard evidence was needed, and quickly. The scientific team had a tough challenge. In most of the 62-square-mile portion of the northern Shawangunks under study, bedrock is at or near the surface, under a thin layer of soil. The bedrock consists of conglomerate too dense to hold water and deep, irregular faults whose storage capacity is hard to measure.

Drilling test cores every 20 feet over the entire ridge obviously was impractical. But scientists have other tools; to calculate the size and location of underground water supplies, they work from what they *can* see. First, topographical data from aerial, radar and Landsat maps yielded a hydrogeological profile of the ridge.

(Cont. on p. 6)



A new tool for planning



Drawing By Ilka List

Water Study (Cont. from p. 5)

The scientists identified six fracture sets as probable aquifers. Then they developed a "water budget"--showing the rate at which aquifers are recharged by precipitation runoff even as reserves are depleted by all of us showering, washing the dishes and sprinkling the lawn.

Cooperative residents allowed the scientists to conduct pump tests, continuously pumping selected wells while monitoring the effect on nearby wells. The assumption was that wells with similar depletion rates probably are connected to the same aquifer. Depleted wells were watched to compute their recharge rate--how long it took for them to return to their original levels.

In weekly and monthly field trips, the scientists gathered supply information from 28 springs and 37 artesian wells. They set up rain gauges at 13 sites across the ridge and measured the seasonal flows of the ridge's four major drainage streams, the Peterskill, Coxing Kill, Sanders Kill and Stony Kill. They mapped more than 300 residential wells and measured evaporation from a tank at the Mohonk Visitors Center.

The study is too voluminous for general distribution, but RELC and the Preserve hope to be able to make abstracts available to interested parties soon. The implied limitations on future water naturally depend on the rate of development, but the study should be useful now to towns in the region, particularly Marbletown and Rochester.

With water-supply data in hand, they can insist that major development proposals include a site-specific water-resources plan and demonstrate that the development won't deplete or degrade this exhaustible resource.

"This study is the quintessential planning tool in that it quantifies a previously unmapped resource," says Seward Weber, retiring treasurer of RELC.

"Rural planning needs to take into account the limits of resources and how they transcend property lines and political boundaries," Seward explains. Harry Hansen, RELC president, says, "The Conservancy hopes to make this hard-won data available to towns as a guide to protecting the unique natural qualities of the Shawangunk Ridge, as well as the water supply of people living in the area."

By Ann Crawford, with assistance from Ann Guenther, educator at Mohonk Preserve

North Woods Creatures Sound Off On Tape

We have a dandy cassette tape for sale: "Wild Sounds of the Northwoods." This is a 63-minute rendition of field recordings of frogs and toads, mammals and especially birds, 111 species in all, with a 32-page accompanying booklet for information about each. Price \$10, plus \$2 for shipping and handling, from RELC at P.O. Box 345, High Falls, N.Y. 12440. You will enjoy this!

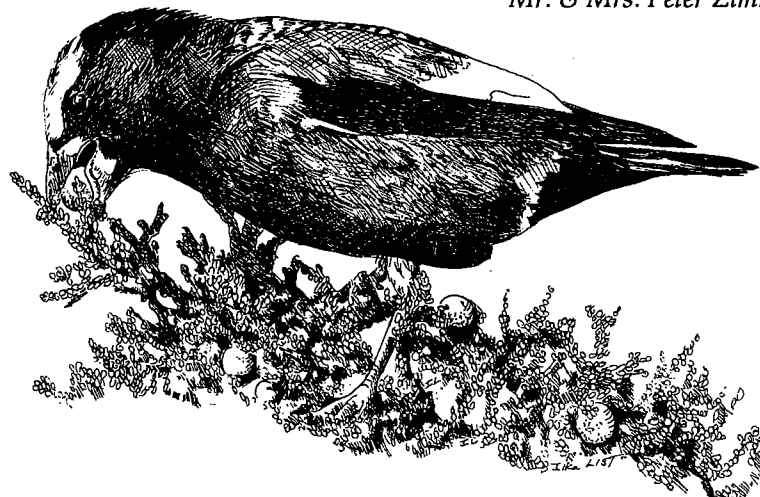
We Thank You!

We are the happy recipients of a \$1,500 grant from the Nichols Foundation to help complete work on our new Alligerville headquarters. We also want to thank the following for contributions and membership renewals:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporter | \$ 50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Citizen | \$ 10 |
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Address _____

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