



on the ground

A NEWSLETTER OF THE OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE

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The Open Space Institute is pleased to share with you our newly redesigned newsletter. *On the Ground* examines current issues and opportunities in the conservation community, and OSI's approaches. The stories told here—covering everything ranging from access to habitat, from stewardship to policy—are all a part of protecting the lands we all love.

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TRAILBLAZING

OSI builds enduring community connections

Known for protecting significant and at-risk landscapes, the Open Space Institute also promotes safe, inviting, and sustainable recreational access to public lands. In New York's Ulster County, these mutual objectives are at the heart of two new projects that will better connect people with the incomparable treasures OSI has protected on the Shawangunk Ridge over the past 30 years.

A new River-to-Ridge Trail will connect the Village of New Paltz and the Walkill Valley Rail Trail to the foothills of the Mohonk Preserve. Farther up the Ridge, OSI is restoring portions of the historic Smiley and High Point carriage roads, improving the connection between lower Minnewaska

State Park Preserve and Sam's Point.

Accomplished with lead support from the Butler Conservation Fund, these projects will deepen the public's connection with stunning landscapes and create a world-class network of interconnected trails.

"The land conservation work OSI and our partners have achieved over the past four decades has permanently protected this marvelous Ridge and surrounding landscapes. These new endeavors will expand the public's recreational opportunities and further connect us to one of the region's main population centers," said Kim Elliman, OSI's President and CEO.

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Our Mission

The Open Space Institute protects scenic, natural and historic landscapes to provide public enjoyment, conserve habitat and working lands, and sustain communities.

OSI conserves diverse landscapes including parks, preserves, working farms and forests, and utilizes climate science to identify critical landscapes for protection.

ON THE GROUND

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PHOTOS: COVER On Lenape Road, the River-to-Ridge Trail (Steve Aaron)

TOP Pine cones (Brett Cole)

RIGHT Moose bull and cow (Hagerty Ryan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

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WELL-BEING

A nexus of open space, economy, health, and community

Kim Elliman, President and CEO

If you're reading this, chances are you believe that by protecting land, we are accomplishing important environmental goals. The environmental benefits of land protection are countless and significant, and they spur many of us to action.

But the case for land protection extends beyond that. Truthfully, the more I learn, the more I find the other benefits just as compelling. Prospering economies, healthy humans, and strong communities—land conservation affects more than the environment.

Two of our economy's largest industries, agriculture and tourism, depend on land protection. In New York State alone, tourism—including outdoor recreation, fishing, and wildlife-related activities—generates billions of dollars in economic activity and thousands of jobs annually. Similarly, agriculture and forestry hinge on protected land and generate economic activity in the billions each year. For local governments, protected land reduces infrastructure costs, ultimately lessening the need for property tax increases on residents.

In terms of physical wellness, exercise and recreation often come to mind when we think about

health and the outdoors. Walking, running, biking, and skiing boost cardiovascular health and contribute to weight control.

For the fresh air we're breathing and the clean water we're drinking, we also have land conservation to thank.

What about our minds? Just being in green space improves mood, reduces stress, and restores mental health. Schools that add more greenery, through landscaping, show a marked increase in test scores for children. Unquestionably, the health of the earth is connected to our own health in profound ways.

When most of us envision ideal communities, we think of trees and green space: parks where we can walk the dog and enjoy picnics, less urban sprawl, and ample opportunities to support farmers nearby. Smart land conservation produces these results, and it's fundamental to strong communities. Parks and protected land are assets and opportunities to close our many digital screens and go into the heart of our communities.

The nexus of open space, economy, health, and community is powerful, and it inspires OSI each day. Thank you for working with us to protect land, forever.

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OSI PLAYS MATCHMAKER

Transborder Fund doing what comes naturally



Many conservation stories follow inspiring but similar patterns: Dollars. Acres. A place people love.

All important details, of course. But when an OSI-funded project gets coined the “Moose Sex Project,” who can resist making a headline out of it?

OSI’s role as go-between to the largest living member of the deer family is taking place in Canada, along a narrow bridge of land called the Isthmus of Chignecto. Linking Nova Scotia to New Brunswick, the isthmus is an internationally recognized corridor for wildlife such as bobcat, bear, the endangered Canada lynx, and moose.

OSI’s Transborder Fund gave grants to the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) to protect critical pieces of this wildlife corridor. NCC playfully dubbed the effort the Moose Sex Project because it provides the only route for large mammals on both sides of the isthmus to meet up, mate, and exchange genetic material. With OSI’s help, the human footprint on the isthmus will

never grow so large that it leaves only a narrow pinch point of natural land, making it impassable to moose.

Wildlife corridors are the rationale for many conservation projects: Wild things thrive when genetic exchange can occur between different populations, and they risk collapse when it can’t. But what makes

What makes OSI’s Transborder Fund unique is its focus on wildlife movement across political boundaries.

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Political borders are imaginary lines on the earth’s surface. But even without border fences, these boundaries can create barriers to wildlife movement. For example, although much of the northernmost United States

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Watershed Moments

A trio of OSI-supported projects that have recently closed in Pennsylvania and New Jersey are the latest successes of ongoing, multiyear efforts to protect Delaware River watershed drinking water.

The properties, all located in pristine forests that purify water for the region's 15 million residents and received grants from OSI's Delaware Watershed Protection Fund, are:

- Mosiers Knob (550 acres; The Trust for Public Land), conserved after a decade-long effort, will become the newest addition to the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area.



Water lilies on Zemel property

- Zemel (473 acres; New Jersey Conservation Foundation), located in the key New Jersey Pinelands Preserve, is situated atop the Kirkwood-Cohansey aquifer—a shallow treasure trove of 17 trillion gallons of fresh water that is the lifeblood of the New Jersey Pine Barrens.
- Gibraltar Hill (234 acres; Natural Lands Trust), once approved for a subdivision, will instead remain a forested hilltop. Allegheny Creek winds around the foot of Gibraltar Hill as it makes its way to the Schuylkill River.

"I've been doing outreach around protecting the Delaware's forested lands for 20 years, but what is significant now is that with OSI's new analysis, we can strategize land protection with water quality in mind," said Bill Rawlyk, OSI's Mid-Atlantic field coordinator.

OSI Welcomes Joe Martens

Commissioner Joe Martens, who spent more than four and a half years serving as head of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, has rejoined OSI's cadre of land conservation experts.

In his new role as a Senior Fellow, Martens will develop strategies to promote the important role smart and effective land conservation plays in mitigating climate change. He will also continue a long-held professional and personal focus on improving and increasing recreational access, particularly in the Shawangunks (see lead story).

"Joe's voice and leadership will be invaluable as our nation takes on growing climate and environmental



OSI Senior Fellow Joe Martens

challenges," said Kim Elliman, OSI's President and CEO. "We enthusiastically welcome him back to the Open Space Institute."

Many Hands Save Farm



A special melon grown in New York

The Hand melon's many fans reportedly include Martha Stewart, the New York Yankees, and the Saratoga racing set. And now the farm behind this celebrated treat has been permanently protected, thanks to an Agricultural Stewardship Association-secured conservation easement funded by OSI and the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, via the state Environmental Protection Fund.

Started in 1908 by the great-grandfather of the current owner, John Hand, the historic 419-acre Hand Melon Farm is a model of responsible farm practice in the region, participating in a number of industry, educational, and research projects with Cornell University and

other partners. Fruits and vegetables from the farm are sold at a popular farmstand, as pick-your-own at the farm, and through local wholesalers to area restaurants and other buyers.

The farm's namesake melon has become synonymous with summer in New York's Capital Region and beyond. After all, according to a 1990 *New York Times* article, "anything else is just a cantaloupe."

Grassroots Growing Stronger



Citizen Action, the Open Space Institute's longest-running program, supports up-and-coming community groups aligned with OSI's central mission of protecting scenic, natural, and historic landscapes. In recent months, OSI-mentored groups have made significant contributions:

- **Honoring the Future** bestowed its inaugural climate change art award at the 2015 Smithsonian Craft Show.
- **Rego Park Green Alliance** designed and rolled out a transportation safety game in Queens.
- **Stuyvesant Pathways** spearheaded restoration of the 19th-century Stuyvesant Depot in Columbia County.
- **Essex Farm Institute**, a farm incubator in the Adirondacks, edged closer to official nonprofit status.



From top: Climate change artwork by Xavier Cortada-Ichthys (Honoring the Future). Leah Evans was the 2015 Smithsonian Craft Show winner (Honoring the Future). Transportation Safety Game (Rego Park Green Alliance)

OSI PLAYS MATCHMAKER

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

has a relatively small human footprint, next door in Canada, population and development are concentrated near their border.

Creating effective cross-border wildlife corridors requires cooperation, but conservation organizations often delimit the work along political boundaries. The Transborder Fund brings neighboring organizations in Canada and the United States together around a common purpose. Another kind of matchmaking, if you will.

The fund was created six years ago with the vision and support of the Partridge Foundation. Today, it is the only private funding source specifically focused on cross-border land protection projects in eastern North America. By the end of 2015, it will have helped conserve 55,000 acres by committing \$2 million to cross-boundary coordinated projects with partners such as NCC and the Vermont Land Trust.

And so we are matchmakers. That's what it takes to protect wildlife corridors that just happen to have a political boundary running through them. Doing so helps ensure that the process of genetic flow among wildlife populations—which long preceded the establishment of the United States and Canada—will continue well into the future.



TRAILBLAZING (CONTINUED FROM THE COVER)

Joining the River to the Ridge

Its name tells only a piece of the story. Although River-to-Ridge will indeed provide a direct link between the Walkill River and the Shawangunk Ridge, the gateway trail's connections and benefits will reach far beyond the trailhead. For years, pedestrians and cyclists from New Paltz and the Walkill Valley Rail Trail wishing to reach the Shawangunk Ridge have been forced to navigate a narrow shoulder

“This is our future! We live in a region with unique and valuable assets: our parks, historic places, and open spaces. That value increases exponentially as we connect those resources. Thank you for having the vision to lead us toward that better future.”

—Tim Weidemann, Kingston, New York

on busy State Route 299. Seeing a need, OSI kicked off a series of specific land preservation transactions in the New Paltz flats, concluding with the Watchtower property in February 2015. The River-to-Ridge Trail will provide

the sorely needed safe and scenic link to the 90 miles of trails and protected open spaces atop the ‘Gunks. True to its name, the new trail will also establish a six-mile loop, accessible free of charge, featuring wide paths of gravel and grass that meander through farm fields and over gently rolling hills, ultimately connecting to a second OSI project: restoring key portions of the Shawangunk’s Victorian-era carriage roads.

Connecting Minnewaska to Sam’s Point

Among OSI’s greatest preservation accomplishments is Minnewaska State Park. Through steadfast commitment and dozens of transactions, OSI has played a leading role in more than doubling the size of this spectacular destination. Building on the successful restoration of the park’s Hamilton Point and Castle Point carriage roads through its Alliance for New York State Parks program, OSI now turns to the ambitious task of rebuilding the High Point carriage road and a section of the Smiley carriage road. The ongoing carriage road restoration work will connect the newly added Sam’s Point Preserve to the main portion of Minnewaska State Park Preserve. Once complete, the River-to-Ridge Trail and Minnewaska carriage road restoration projects will add critical pieces to a destination trail network stretching the length and width of Ulster County, and connecting far beyond.

in conversation



JOHN JUDGE

Inspiring the next generation of environmental stewards

Since January 2012, John D. Judge has served as president of the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), the nation's oldest outdoor recreation and conservation organization. He has spearheaded the nonprofit's efforts to connect more people to the outdoors through urban-centric facilities, dynamic outdoor content, and AMC's youth programs. OSI spoke with Judge about human diversity, land protection, and reaching an urban generation raised on digital devices.

Your love for the outdoors was sparked by a childhood spent playing in the conserved land behind your parents' home in rural Massachusetts. How can the conservation movement reach kids growing up in cities?

Diversity is a huge challenge for the conservation community. We need to create multiple access points in the outdoors to make sure it's open to all. A lifelong continuum of outdoor engagement and learning is key.

AMC's Youth Opportunities Program, started 46 years ago but growing ever more relevant today, trains teachers in outdoor skills and supplies unlimited free use of outdoor gear for their students. This program really works: For instance, four young women of color from Hunter College High School, a participating school in New York City, recently said that thanks to their Youth Opportunities Program experience, they are prepared to take leadership roles in their outdoor clubs at their respective Ivy League colleges. We are excited to be adding extra capacity to this program with our newest outdoor program center, opening summer 2016 in Harriman State Park—greatly expanding our capacity near New York City.

In today's digital age, how can kids learn to power-off smartphones long enough to experience nature?

We're not going to be able to turn digital off as a society. Technology and the sharing economy are an expectation of the millennial age, when the average kid spends six to seven hours in front a screen per day. We want them to step away, but we can also wisely use digital as a tool and hook. The "internet of things" will provide ways to enable kids to use digital connections while outdoors. Tapping into important content on nature or the outdoors, way-finding, and eco-gamification will all be possibilities.

What's the ideal legacy of the Youth Opportunities Program?

I want people to look back and say, This was the turning point, when conservation and outdoor groups advanced dynamic strategies and got a diversity of people active outdoors. We need people of all colors and backgrounds to carry an outdoor ethos as they become trail guides, advisers, CEOs, or boards of directors. This next century will be the century of cities, with 70 percent of humanity living in cities by 2050. We need to lead the way and connect this future world of urbanists to the outdoors and conservation stewardship. If we succeed, we will have generations that are healthy and active outdoors, embrace low-carbon-footprint lives, and take responsibility in stewardship of our natural world.



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Hikers/Eric Krieger.

On a perfect autumn day, OSI staff hiked the newly restored carriage roads at Minnewaska State Park Preserve.