

# Open Space



## A River Runs Through It

Conserving Land Vital to Clean Drinking Water

**V**irtually every poll of U.S. citizens' most pressing environmental concerns ranks water at or near the top of the list. From the millions of people who drink from the tap to the fisherman who depends on it for his livelihood, clean water provides the foundation of good health for all.

Yet the protection of clean water extends beyond our rivers, streams and lakes to the land itself, and that part of the issue is sometimes overlooked.

The Delaware River, one of the East Coast's major sources of clean water, provides drinking water for 15 million people, including half of New York City. Stretching 14,000 square miles across five states, its watershed—the lands that contain innumerable small streams and tributaries that drain into the Delaware—provides critical habitat for endangered and threatened plants and animals, and recreation and economic enterprise valued at \$10 billion in direct wages. (map p.6)

Once beset by industrial pollution that contaminated much of the lower part of the river, the Delaware has rebounded significantly over the past two decades. Water quality standards have raised levels of dissolved oxygen and allowed the return of shad and other aquatic life, and a permit system for discharges regulates most harmful pollutants.

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Carol Collier



## Our Mission

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

Founded in 1974 to protect significant landscapes in New York State, OSI has been a partner in the protection of nearly 2.2 million acres in North America. A leader in environmental conservation, the Open Space Institute leverages its knowledge and attracts resources for strategic investments to make innovative land conservation happen.



Mary Ottaway

Rosendale Trestle

# Reflections on Life & Land

Dear Friends,

Our health is everything. With so many external stressors in our lives and environmental factors affecting our health, how we take care of ourselves has never been more important. Many of us, in fact, now seek wellness instead of just physical fitness.

What does wellness mean? It is what we put into our bodies, first and foremost. It is clean water and healthy food. Yet it is more than that. It is how we spend our time, how we recreate and rejuvenate. It is getting outdoors, breathing fresh air and taking the time to form connections with each other and the world around us.

In this edition of *Open Space*, we first consider clean water. Our most precious resource, clean water is indispensable for plants, animals and humans to be well. Here in the Northeast, development and sprawl constantly threaten our clean water sources. That is why the Open Space Institute is partnering with the William Penn Foundation to make a real difference across a vast watershed that supports some 15 million people, including residents of New York City, Philadelphia and several surrounding states.

We're also thinking about access to nature. OSI creates recreational opportunities that people can and will use, in places where we can make those connections that help make us whole. Whether they are rail trails, neighborhood parks or large preserves, one size doesn't always fit all, and we're working to make the outdoors accessible to everyone.

Conservation has a significant role to play in fostering wellness, and I thank you for your ongoing support of these initiatives. What we do at the Open Space Institute is for all of you.

Sincerely,

Kim Elliman  
President and CEO

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## Places to Play

Access to Local Parks and Trails Encourages Healthy Lifestyles



Anne Coleman

*The Rosendale Trestle in full swing on opening day*

More than 150 enthusiastic hikers, bikers and other outdoors advocates converged on the northern leg of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail in Ulster County, New York, to cheer the reopening of the historic Rosendale railroad trestle in late June.

Once part of the railroad that ferried Ulster County produce to markets in New York City, the 118-year-old trestle fell into disrepair after the rail line closed in 1977. In 2009, the Open Space Institute and its partners at the Wallkill Valley Land Trust purchased 11.5 miles of rail bed, including the trestle, to extend the rail trail from the southern border of the town of Gardiner to the city of Kingston—24 miles in all.

As rail bed improvements were being made, OSI and WVLT took on the restoration of the trestle. Over nearly three years and with the support of a community-driven \$1.54 million fundraising campaign, the trestle received

a makeover: a reinforced superstructure, new railroad ties, railings and an enhanced walking surface.

When U.S. Representative Chris Gibson cut the ribbon to reopen the trestle on June 29, the occasion marked not only the completion of that highly visible restoration effort; it also created unique public access to the outdoors for thousands of people.

In many ways, conservation is evolving as it responds to the public's interest in wellness. OSI and other land trusts are now increasingly focused on recreational access and creating connections to the natural world.

Beyond the preservation of vast expanses in remote places, 21st-century conservation is rail trails, community gardens and pocket parks—places where people everywhere can enjoy the natural world.

*(continued on page 4)*

*“We’re going to have the largest interconnected rail trail system in New York State centered right here in Ulster County – and at its heart will be Rosendale!”*

– Michael Hein  
Ulster County Executive





**Places to Play** *(continued from page 3)*

“Outlets that activate peoples’ bodies and minds are essential in this day and age,” said Rose Harvey, commissioner of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. “People, especially children, need regular exposure to the outdoors, and Open Space Institute has been a tremendous partner in creating opportunities for that exposure.”

Through projects like the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail and the Alliance for New York State Parks campaign to help repair the carriage roads at Minnewaska State Park, the Open Space Institute is giving people places to go near their homes – where they can connect with the natural world while improving their health. Likewise, OSI’s Citizen Action program enables the community groups that advocate for public spaces, tend to urban gardens and promote the upkeep of their local parks.

With a new array of rail trail



Gerg Miller

projects on deck in Ulster County and in the Hudson Valley, the Open Space Institute’s work to give the public places to play continues. And atop the Rosendale trestle, 150 feet above the Rondout Creek and boasting breathtaking views of the Shawangunk Ridge, the wonders of nature are not only on display but open for all to experience.



Katie Hope

*Cutting a ceremonial ribbon to open the restored trestle are, from left, Ulster County Executive Michael Hein, Rosendale Supervisor Jeanne Walsh and U.S. Rep. Chris Gibson.*



Katy Silberger

*The restoration of the Hamilton Point Carriage Road at Minnewaska State Park is underway*

# Land Matters *News & Events*

## Transborder Conservation Milestone

Biodiversity flourishes within the world's largest broadleaf forest, which stretches across four states and three provinces of the eastern United States and Canada. To the moose, black bear, migratory songbirds, Atlantic salmon and many other animals that migrate through the lands and waterways of this ecologically connected region, political boundaries are meaningless. But to the people working to protect the forest's tremendous biological diversity, the international border stands in the way of landscape-scale, strategic conservation—particularly as the climate changes.

It was with the goal of bridging the international barrier while advancing on-the-ground conservation in the Northern Appalachian–Acadian ecoregion that OSI launched the Transborder Fund in 2009, thanks to the vision and generous support of the Partridge Foundation.

The effort recently reached a milestone with 25,000 acres protected, and OSI has published *Transborder Land Protection Fund 2013: Charting a New*



*Course for Conservation in the Northern Appalachian/Acadian Ecoregion*, a report highlighting its achievements in two priority linkages: the northern Green Mountains from Quebec to Vermont, and the forests and headwaters from the Northeast Kingdom and southern Quebec to Moosehead Lake in Maine.

Awarding grants of \$1.3 million so far, the Transborder Fund is supporting 17 conservation transactions in four areas of highest priority in the United States and Canada. With OSI's support, partners have permanently protected 25,000 acres, and projects in the works are expected to protect an additional 8,000 acres. For every dollar invested, this fund has leveraged \$25 in public and private funds.

## Greenbelt Around the Highlands

The Open Space Institute is making plans to augment a greenbelt of protected land it has helped create over the past two decades in the New York-New Jersey Highlands. Weaving a thread between Black Rock Forest, Schunnemunk Mountain and Goosepond Mountain state parks to the north and Sterling Forest State Park near the New Jersey line, OSI has identified a series of large, undeveloped parcels that, if protected, would essentially connect the preserves.

The long-term initiative—drawing on OSI's previous and pivotal role in creating and expanding Schunnemunk and Sterling Forest state parks—would offer new recreational opportunities by opening up miles of hiking trails to the public while also preserving important watershed land.

The lands extend from northern New Jersey through the Highlands, across the Hudson River and into Putnam County, offering a broad range of geophysical features. Such “resilient” landscapes are more likely to remain viable habitat despite the ongoing effects of climate change. Creating corridors for wildlife between the protected blocks of habitat will enhance their biodiversity.

## A 19th Century Hike

OSI's Alliance for New York State Parks has raised \$500,000 to restore the 3.7-mile Hamilton Point Carriage Road at Minnewaska State Park Preserve. On top of the recent \$1.54 million campaign for the Rosendale trestle, OSI has renovated two extraordinary scenic by-ways where people can see and explore the Hudson River Valley.

The Hamilton Point project is already underway, and expected to reopen in the spring of 2014.

The historic carriage roads of Minnewaska and the neighboring Mohonk Preserve were originally built to serve 19th-century horse-drawn buggies. Today, the wide and gentle carriage roads welcome a broad cross-section of hikers and outdoor enthusiasts.

But Hamilton Point, like so many of the carriage roads, was crumbling and in serious disrepair. Drainage patterns needed to be reestablished, retaining walls rebuilt and road surfaces restored.

This OSI project is part of a larger effort, joined by the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, the Mohonk Preserve and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, to rebuild the 83 miles of historic Smiley Family carriage road network in New York State's Shawangunk Mountains.

The Shawangunk Ridge has long been one of OSI's signature landscapes, with some 27,000 acres now protected. The campaign to restore the Hamilton Point Carriage Road continues OSI's commitment to this extraordinary setting.



### A River Runs *(continued from page 1)*

However, years of runoff from agriculture and development still continue to impair the river and its many benefits, leading Philadelphia's William Penn Foundation, the Open Space Institute and other organizations to mount a major campaign to protect it.

The William Penn Foundation—which provided generous support for the Bayshore-Highlands Land Protection Fund that OSI launched in 2011—called on OSI to identify important sites where conservation will protect the natural buffers that filter pollutants and preserve the integrity of the watershed.

“Five percent of the U.S. population relies on the Delaware watershed for drinking water,” said Andrew Johnson, the senior program officer for watershed protection at the William Penn Foundation. “Much is at stake, but our resources aren’t infinite. So, we have to carefully target the places we address and the strategies we support.”

Working with Drexel University’s Academy of Natural Sciences (ANS), OSI conducted research and interviewed leaders from 60 public and nonprofit organizations to understand the needs and opportunities for conservation across the

Delaware basin, ranging from the hilly Poconos and New Jersey Highlands down to the Brandywine Creek area of northern Delaware. For OSI, the move into New Jersey and Delaware is a natural extension of one of its longest-standing New York State initiatives: watershed protection in the Catskills.

Descending westward from New York’s Delaware County through Sullivan and into Ulster County, the Beaverkill River and its largest tributary, the Willowemoc Creek, are among the most famous fly-fishing waters in the country. The 44-mile-long Beaverkill is a tributary of

the East Branch of the Delaware River, and because it sits near the top of the Delaware watershed, the protection of this quiet Catskills fishing stream has broad implications for the William Penn Foundation’s larger focus area.

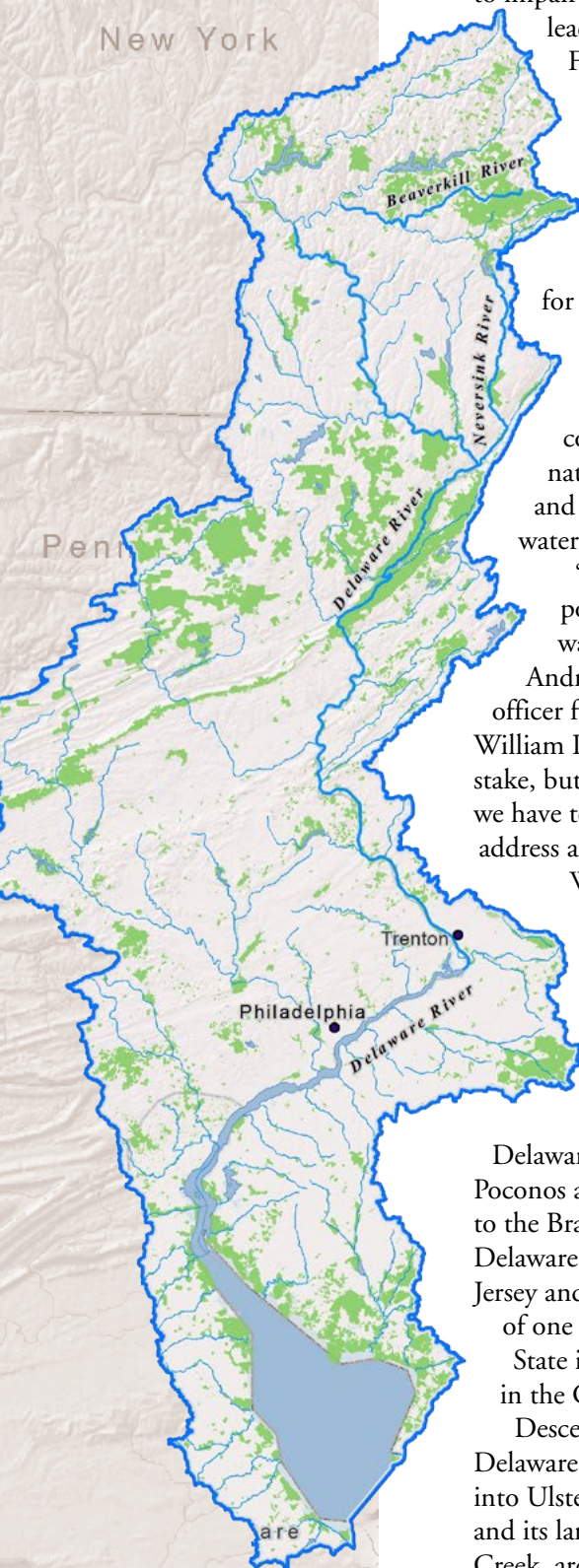
“The headwaters are some of the most important places to protect,” said Peter Howell, OSI’s executive vice president, “and the Beaverkill and Willowemoc are among the most intact sub-watersheds in the basin. We need to make sure those and other high-quality watersheds stay that way, and that we restore those watersheds that are degraded.”

Since 1981, OSI has preserved approximately 20,000 acres in the Beaverkill region of the Catskills, including eight miles of Beaverkill River frontage and many more miles of tributary streams.

Building on those 30-plus years of experience, OSI and ANS are now overseeing the analysis of the eight “subwatershed” areas in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware. That analysis will help the William Penn Foundation form strategies for use across the watershed, including the protection of forested headwaters, improved management of agricultural lands and implementation of best practices for stormwater reduction.

“We selected these areas within the Delaware basin as places that embody where positive change can be made,” said Bill Rawlyk, OSI’s Mid-Atlantic field coordinator. “They include the full range of stressors that are found in the overall watershed and will function like a laboratory to illuminate how to go forward solving these problems.”

At stake is our most valuable natural resource. Given the more than 1,000 community water systems and millions of users in New York City and surrounding states, the William Penn Foundation’s watershed protection initiative, enhanced by the conservation acumen of the Open Space Institute, is poised to usher in a new age of clean water in our nation’s most densely populated region.



Map of the Delaware watershed

## On the Shores of the Delaware River

### Questions for Carol Collier

Carol Collier has been the executive director of the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC), an interstate water resource management agency, since 1998. During that time she expanded the commission's Special Protection Waters regulations for the 330-mile Delaware River, led efforts to develop "pollution budgets" for harmful discharge, and assisted in the ongoing effort to draft comprehensive guidelines for potential natural gas drilling in the watershed. Collier announced earlier this year that she plans to retire in March 2014. She spoke recently with Peter Howell, OSI's executive vice president.

#### **As you leave DRBC, what are the remaining challenges that are most poignant and the toughest to address?**

We have something in place in the upper basin called the Special Protection Waters (SPW) program. It is an anti-degradation program, because the water quality of the non-tidal river, all the way down to Trenton, is better than existing standards. With the National Wild and Scenic River designations in the basin and the fact that we are in this huge metropolitan area, protecting these very high quality waters is one of the most important duties of the DRBC. It's difficult for a number of reasons. Before the recession, we were seeing the highest population projections in the Poconos and plateau areas of the upper basin, which would definitely have greater impact on SPW waters. Also, if natural gas drilling is allowed, it would occur in the upper basin so it's important to set the bar high to protect the existing high water quality. About 16 million people depend on the waters of the Delaware Basin.

We have to step away from the silos that some of the laws drive us toward and really plan and implement holistically. You need to plan at the basin level because what happens upstream affects downstream and the downstream needs affect upstream, but much of the implementation must occur at the local level.

#### **While the headwaters are in great shape now, how do you ensure they stay that way? There's so much to do, from monitoring water usage to protecting the right lands.**

It takes multiple partners. DRBC has regulations for water withdrawal and wastewater discharge, but it becomes more difficult when you look at what is happening on the land and how that affects water quality. Our SPW program does require a non-point source pollution plan for any discharger to the special protection waters, but I think it must go further than that. There's a huge education process that's necessary because the forests in the upper basin are what gives the Delaware its purity. From an economic perspective, how much value are we obtaining from keeping the upper basin intact? People need their livelihoods in the upper basin; we are not going to take it off limits, but how do we protect those areas most important to water resources, which provide a benefit to all?

#### **You need people on the land actually making sure those forests stay as forests.**

As you know, the majority of the forests in the Delaware basin are privately held. It's working with landowners for sustainable forest management and developing a better understanding of the forests' resource values—water quality, bird habitat, etc. Through a grant from the William Penn Foundation, we were able to analyze what landforms have the most value to water resources in the basin. What came out on top were forested headwaters and forested riparian corridors. We've been in the process of mapping those areas in the upper basin, which will help build programs on the ground that allow economic viability while protecting those landforms most significant to water resources.

#### **What advice would you offer your successor?**

One needs to know that building trust and consensus is a slow process. The system is very complex. There are so many issues we are dealing with now and the future will only be more complex. DRBC must work with its many partners in the basin and continue to manage the resource holistically.



**Carol Collier**  
Executive Director  
Delaware River Basin Commission

On watershed  
planning:

*"You need to plan  
at the basin level  
because what happens  
upstream affects  
downstream and the  
downstream needs  
affect upstream."*





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The Open Space Institute  
was incorporated in 1974.  
To mark our 40th year, we  
are unveiling a new logo  
which represents the range  
of our conservation work,  
and the places where we  
do it.



Michael O'Donnell

*The Pfalz Point Trail Challenge, a 10-mile trail benefit race at the Mohonk Preserve, where OSI has preserved thousands of acres, has been named one of the top trail races in the country by Runners' World.*