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# Open Space



## Focus on State Parks

OSI Launches the Alliance for New York State Parks

In four decades of conservation, the Open Space Institute has added more than 75,000 acres to New York State Parks. Now, as a new administration takes office in Albany, OSI has launched the Alliance for New York State Parks,

a bold new initiative — its first dedicated solely to parks — that seeks to protect and enhance New York’s state parks and historic sites for present and future generations.

New York’s state park system is among the largest in the country and features open spaces and natural preserves recognized around the world. Attendance at the state’s 178 parks and 35 historic sites was up 3.5 percent this summer over 2009, and by the end of the year, more than 60 million people are expected to have visited its various facilities.

However, a look at New York’s parks today shows a system also facing extraordinary challenges.

Many parks have outdated water supply systems, aging wastewater treatment plants and substandard electrical systems. Major investments are needed to repair infrastructure such as

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Rosendale Trestle

Greg Miller





## Our Mission

The Open Space Institute (OSI) protects scenic, natural, and historic landscapes to ensure public enjoyment, conserve habitats, and sustain community character.

Since 1964, OSI has protected over 100,000 acres in New York State and assisted in the protection of an additional 1.7 million acres throughout the East Coast.



Jerry and Marcy Monkman/EcoPhotography

## Reflections on Life & Land

Dear Friends,

We've both recently returned from the Land Trust Alliance conference, an annual gathering of our peers, where the best and brightest in the land conservation movement share ideas and inspiration. Indeed, we both came away recharged by the energy and creativity we found there.

Today, conservation organizations face great challenges. Public funding, while gaining momentum on the federal level, is still scarce to non-existent in many states and municipalities because of the recession and dramatic drop in revenues. That's a principal reason why the Open Space Institute has just launched the Alliance for New York State Parks, which you can read about in this issue. Led by dedicated and proven conservationists and business executives, the Alliance is determined to restore and repair New York's park system—still our nation's finest but severely hamstrung in recent years by funding deficiencies, much like New York's Central and Prospect parks were 30 years ago.

In the majestic southern Appalachians, OSI is funding research to analyze how and where conservation might intervene to protect vulnerable ecosystems. Combining skilled mapping techniques with the very latest climate change science, we're identifying the most important lands to protect, before habitat is irreparably damaged by climate change or real estate development.

OSI remains passionate about preserving our ecological resources for the future. We're working to protect places where nature remains pristine, inhabited by a full range of flora and fauna, and can be enjoyed by all. We hope you'll read on to learn more about what we're doing here in New York State and throughout the East Coast.

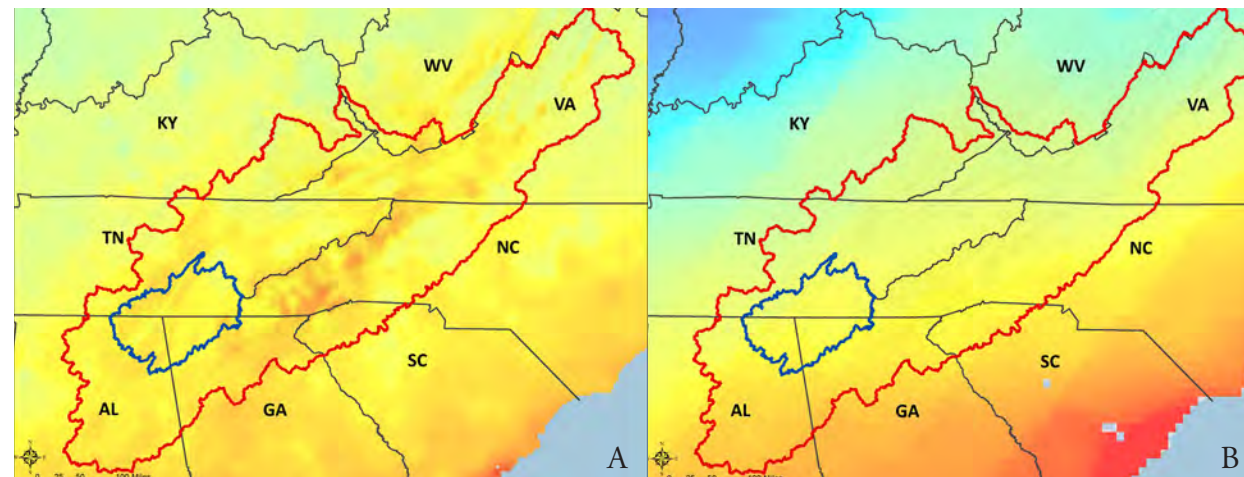
Thank you for your enthusiasm and support.

Kim Elliman  
CEO

Joe Martens  
President

## Tracking Climate Change

### Maps to Protect Habitat Corridors



Research incorporates the latest climate change predictions. Shown here are spatially explicit models depicting how temperature is predicted to increase from an average high variation of 90 degrees (map A) to as much as 95 degrees variation between 2040 to 2069 (map B).

The southern Appalachians, a remote mountainous region that stretches from Virginia to Alabama, to this day contains some of our nation's most dense forests and cleanest water sources.

Yet it is in this same region that scores of wildlife, like Swainson's Warbler and the Woodland jumping mouse, struggle to survive in an environment that's being altered by human encroachment and changing climate patterns.

The preservation of these habitat lands brought the Open Space Institute to the southern "Apps" in 2007 to establish the Northwest Georgia Land Protection Fund, a loan and grant program that helped land trusts in Georgia protect 5,300 acres throughout a million-acre territory.

Now, three years later, a new initiative is taking shape.

*Protecting Southern Appalachian Wildlife in an Era of Climate Change* combines the latest climate change science with State Wildlife Action Plans

(SWAPs) to further refine targets for habitat conservation across a seven-state, 83,000-square mile area.

"This is really geared toward studying an entire region," said Marc Hunt, OSI's southern Appalachians field coordinator, "and defining the most important corridors, regardless of state lines, where protection initiatives can link up and create the continuity that is so important for wildlife."

OSI researchers will analyze the vulnerability of more than 150 wildlife species via geographic information system (GIS) modeling to determine which species and habitats are presently and potentially the most susceptible to the effects of climate change. By using these tools, OSI will be able to compare how conservation priorities change under various climate scenarios.

Habitat conservation has traditionally focused on identifying core wildlife areas (often called "hubs") and pathways ("corridors"), yet recent climate science

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*The southern Appalachians is a 40 million-acre ecosystem with some of the richest biodiversity in North America. OSI created the Southern Appalachian Loan Fund in 2005 to help protect threatened landscapes in the region.*

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*By highlighting interstate connectivity among SWAP priority areas, OSI anticipates that our approach will help produce a more coordinated and regional approach to wildlife conservation in the southern Appalachians.*

## Tracking Climate Change

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suggests that higher temperatures and precipitation are causing these corridors to change. Based on the latest climate models, OSI's analysis will modify land protection strategies to ensure that wildlife can adapt and develop new corridors.

"The impacts of climate change are taking hold much faster than anticipated," said OSI CEO Kim Elliman. "As our landscapes change, we're realizing that we only have a short window of time to save the lands these species need to survive. Once the lands are gone, sadly, the wildlife will be gone as well."

The study, which is supported by the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Lyndhurst Foundation, and the Merck Family Fund, will also incorporate the predicted consequences of new roadways, housing infrastructure, and other human footprints on the landscape. This next layer of information will help the conservation community anticipate more accurately where the most threatened areas could be in the future in order to emphasize habitat protection in those areas.

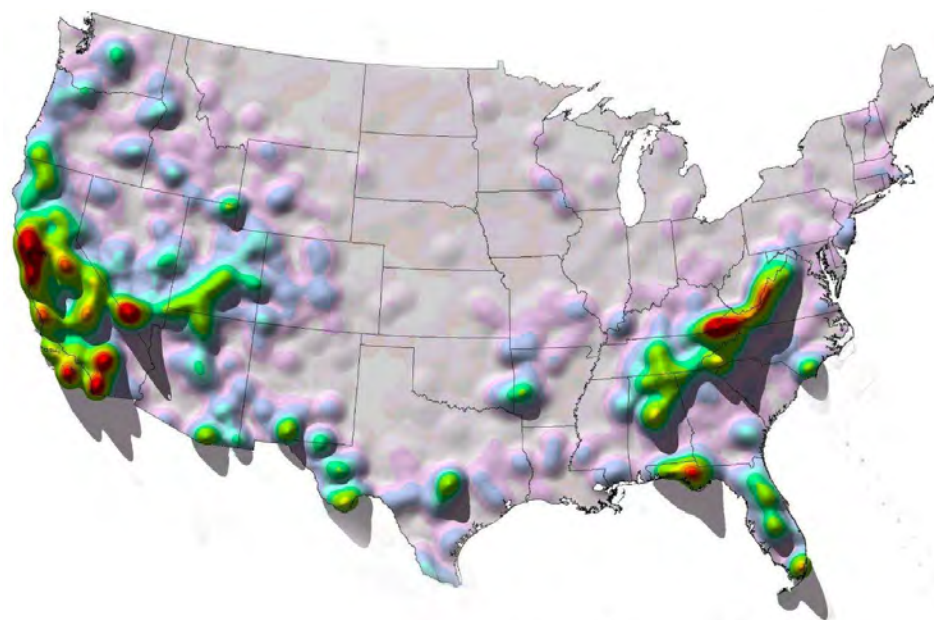
OSI will make the multi-layered maps this project produces accessible not just to



Danny Bales (Mudhen2/flickr.com)

*Swainson's Warblers are uncommon, mostly found in flooded swamplands and canebrakes of the southeastern United States. (inset, left): The Woodland jumping mouse is locally abundant in the southern Appalachian Mountains.*

OSI but to state agencies in the southern Appalachians and partner organizations as well. OSI hopes that such shared information will kick-start coordinated, targeted conservation efforts to save vitally important habitat.



*Map shows biodiversity hotspots of rarity from The Precious Heritage: the Status of Biodiversity in the United States, by The Nature Conservancy*

# Land Matters News & Events

## Northern Lights: OSI Transborder Fund



NCC

With funding assistance from OSI's Transborder Land Protection Fund, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is continuing its work on a conservation initiative that has drawn major support from the Canadian federal government.

NCC announced in September the protection of 15 properties, secured over the course of three years, in the Green Mountains in southern Quebec. Grants from OSI's Transborder Fund contributed to the protection of the Champigny and Kars properties.

The resulting ecological corridor stretches across the U.S. border into Vermont, where land trusts are working on companion projects. The parcels account for an area close to 15 square

kilometers (5.8 square miles) and an investment of \$7.4 million, half of which came from the Canadian government's Natural Areas Conservation Program.

The forests of the Green Mountains provide habitat for 59 at-risk plant and animal species, and are vital for the survival of many species with large home ranges such as bear, moose, bobcat, and to the east, cougar.

The Open Space Institute, after working for 10 years in the Northern Forest in the United States, launched the Transborder effort in 2009 to further support conservation from the Adirondacks in New York State to the Gaspé Peninsula in eastern Canada.

## Building a Bridge

In June, the Wallkill Valley Land Trust (WVLT) and OSI announced plans to begin an extensive restoration of the 940-foot-long railroad trestle over the Rondout Creek and Route 213 in Rosendale, NY. A fundraising effort is now underway to raise the \$750,000 needed to repair the 114-year-old trestle.

The renovated trestle will be a part of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail, which runs along the former Wallkill Valley railroad. Once reopened, the entire length of the trestle will be safe for public use, and the improved rail trail will extend for nearly 24 miles—double its current length. OSI and WVLT purchased 11.5 miles of rail bed in 2009.

Ultimately, OSI envisions the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail as a component of a 140 mile-long interconnected trail network running from southern Dutchess County, through Ulster, Sullivan and Orange counties and on to the southern and western Catskills. Such a trail network would attract many thousands of users and connect state parks, state forest preserves, wildlife management areas, nature preserves, and city, county, and town parks throughout the mid-Hudson River Valley.

## Which Watersheds are Safe?

Public polls show citizens more concerned about water quality than virtually any other environmental issue. As the impacts of climate change increase turbidity and water temperatures in regions experiencing increased precipitation, the issue stands to become only more important.

OSI has begun work on a project with students in the Yale Environmental Clinic that will assess watershed protection methods by researching the range of impacts of climate change on watersheds in the Mid-Atlantic and southern New England — most of whose residents are served by surface water. The researchers will identify the watersheds under greatest stress and articulate a clear case for the role of forests in protecting water quality under climate change scenarios.

Recognizing that state and federal funding for conservation is scarce, the research team will recommend several approaches to creating incentives for landowners to protect their forestlands, in turn protecting increasingly threatened water sources.



Greg Miller

*Cornwall Landing, New York*



*For over 40 years, OSI has protected and expanded New York State parks, historic sites and preserves including:*

Arden Point State Park  
Clarence Fahnestock State Park  
Hudson Highland State Park  
John Boyd Thacher State Park  
Minnewaska State Park  
Moreau Lake State Park  
Schunnemunk Mountain State Park  
Sterling Forest State Park  
Storm King State Park  
Thompson's Lake State Park  
Washington's Headquarters Historic Site  
Wonderlake State Park

### Focus on State Parks

*(cont. from page 1)*

roofs, heating and plumbing systems, park offices, recreation fields, bathrooms, roads, parking areas, and maintenance centers.

State funding for the operation and maintenance of the system has dwindled over the past three years in the face of unprecedented fiscal challenges. The Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation's (OPRHP) operating budget has been cut by \$35 million, from \$195 million in FY2008 to only \$160 million this year.

In 2010, for the first time in the system's 125-year history, New York officials considered closing as many as 90 state parks and historic sites—a full 40 percent of the system.

At the eleventh hour—the day before Memorial Day—the legislature and governor restored just enough funding to the OPRHP to prevent the closings. While that crisis was averted, more than \$1 billion of urgent capital rehabilitation needs remain.

The Alliance for New York State Parks seeks to help rejuvenate the system, reestablishing parks as community centerpieces where people can connect with the outdoors and one other. The Alliance will advocate directly for New York's state parks system, work with partners to build an organized and effective constituency for parks, and raise public and private financial support.



*John Boyd Thacher State Park, located along the Helderberg Escarpment, preserves six miles of limestone cliffs, woodlands and open fields.*

Brett Cole

“Cuts to the parks budget left us with nothing but difficult choices,” said departing OPRHP Commissioner Carol Ash. “The future of New York's park system is in jeopardy, and it will take a public-private partnership like the Alliance to ensure that our parks thrive.”

Led by Erik Kulleseid, former New York State deputy commissioner for open space protection, the Alliance is proposing that the state develop new, dedicated funding streams for parks. One potential model is a plastic shopping bag surcharge that has successfully generated funds for parks while reducing waste in Washington, D.C.

“New York should adopt a model that works best for New Yorkers, but there is no doubt a dedicated funding source is needed to make a difference in the agency's ability to address its backlog,” Kulleseid said. “The fact that the funding stream would benefit our great parks should make the charge more palatable.”

OSI and the Alliance envision a long-term partnership with the OPRHP and a revitalized park system that boasts affordable, close-to-home destinations where all citizens can enjoy the natural beauty of the Empire State.

“New York State's park system is still the best in the country,” Kulleseid said, “but it has the potential to be even better. The Alliance for New York State Parks was created to help realize that potential, for the benefit of parks lovers everywhere.”

## On New York's Magnificent Public Parks

### Questions for OSI President Joe Martens

#### Can we afford funding for parks when there are so many other budget issues in New York right now?

**JM:** We found out a year ago in the state budget crisis just how important state parks are. When the governor threatened to close up to 90 parks, there was a huge public response. And even though the state was facing large cuts in education and health care services, the number of people that called their legislators on behalf of state parks outnumbered virtually every other issue by at least 5 to 1. People regard state parks as their own and until they were threatened with closures, they were taken for granted. The proposed closures became a poster child for the dysfunction in Albany. People responded vociferously to keep them open, and in the end the legislature and governor scrambled for a solution. A deal was struck right before Memorial Day that kept the parks open.

We have a long, proud parks tradition in New York. We have the oldest state park in the country in Niagara Falls, and one of the largest park systems in the country. In the Capital District, there's Thatcher State Park; in Long Island, it's Jones Beach; in Buffalo, it's Niagara Falls. They are scattered across the state, they come in all shapes and sizes and about 47 million people from New York, surrounding states and other countries have visited them through August of this year.

#### Are parks and economic development at odds with each other?

**JM:** Not only are they not at odds, but parks are economic development. In many rural upstate communities, state parks are the center of economic activity. People who visit state parks buy local services. They stop at the restaurants, they gas up their cars, they buy provisions and supplies. In New York, it's estimated that parks generate about \$2 billion worth of activity to local businesses, and studies indicate that for every dollar that the state invests in the parks system, \$5 is returned to local econo-

mies around the state. That's a huge number. Statewide, these parks provide about 20,000 jobs and the average salary per park employee is about \$50,000, so from an employment perspective, it's hugely important for local economies from Long Island to Buffalo.

#### Is OSI going to tailor its conservation efforts to focus on parklands?

**JM:** The initial focus of the Alliance will be two-fold. One is ensuring that there is adequate funding for the parks system. We know there is a huge backlog in maintenance and capital improvement projects at state parks. The second issue is ensuring adequate staff to keep our parks open and operating. So, identifying new funding sources and expanding the resources that are available to state parks will be a major focus. As you know, OSI has been creating new state parks and expanding others for years. Although the state's budget problems will slow down the acquisition of new parkland, OSI will continue to work with state agencies on acquisition projects that help buffer and protect parks, provide better public access and help ensure their long-term ecological integrity. As the state's budget improves and EPF funding is restored, land protection projects will become an increasingly important part of the Alliance's mission.

#### Now that the Alliance has been launched, what is your number one agenda item for the parks system?

**JM:** We will work with our partners around the state to ensure that parks receive sufficient support so that none are closed and the deferred maintenance throughout the system is addressed. We also intend to launch an aggressive fundraising campaign to supplement state funds with private dollars. State parks are at a tipping point. OSI's *Alliance for New York State Parks* will help ensure that New York's magnificent parks and historic sites stay open, accessible, and in good repair for the millions of patrons that visit them annually.



*Joe Martens  
President, Open Space Institute*

Read the whole interview at:  
[www.osiny.org/Martens](http://www.osiny.org/Martens)

Read more about our conservation accomplishments this year at [www.osiny.org/2010](http://www.osiny.org/2010)