



TIME ON THE LAND IS A NECESSITY OF LIFE

Kim Elliman, President and CEO



I didn't think it possible, but somehow searching for birds with my children, seeing a shooting star on a clear night, and hiking a forested trail have become more gratifying over the past months. I breathe better, I think better, and I feel better out on the land.

The power of nature knows no bounds – and study after study reinforces this conviction.

Access to nature and the outdoors is not a luxury. It is a benefit for mind, body, and soul that should be available to all people. To be in nature is a necessity of human life. And I am proud of all that the Open Space Institute (OSI) has done over our 40-year history to protect the land that provides so much to so many people.

As the world around us continues to swirl, the public is turning to nature to calm and soothe our individual and collective stresses. In record numbers, people are going to outdoor places to play and spend time with family.

This is where OSI comes in. Saving land is in our DNA. From lush mountaintop forests

to coastal marshland – and everywhere in between – there is tremendous value in land protection for people and wildlife. But protecting the land is only one part of the equation. OSI's conservation work has evolved to making parks and public lands more inviting.

And we have embraced this purpose enthusiastically, knowing that it is only through building personal and deep-seated connections to the land in new locations and among new constituencies that we can grow the circle of conservation and conservationists.

At a time when Americans are hungry to be on the land, the conservation community must rise to the occasion. Yes, we will continue protecting land and creating natural destinations, but we must also strive to make land and all its benefits more widely available, enjoyable, and beneficial for all people.

As always, I thank all who support OSI's work and hope that nature and the outdoors will continue to provide strength, happiness, and good health for you and your families.

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

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ON THE GROUND

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NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTORS

EDITORS Tally Blumberg
 Eileen Larrabee

WRITERS Maria Garcia
 Kelly Proctor
 Michelle Sinkler

ART DIRECTION Susan Morningstar

DESIGN doubleclick first, llc

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 COVER SIDEBAR: Kim Elliman (Michael Nelson)
 BACK COVER: Peregrine Release (Greg Miller)
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MAGNIFICENT MINNEWASKA

The New Lake Minnewaska Visitor Center Boasts World-Class Amenities



Steve Aaron

On a clear and unseasonably warm October morning, a small group of properly masked park officials and supporters gathered as the New York State Parks Commissioner wielded a pair of oversized scissors and officially opened the long-awaited Visitor Center for Minnewaska State Park Preserve. Located just 90 minutes north of New York City, and unrivaled for its picturesque landscape, habitat variety, and recreational offerings, the grandeur of Minnewaska rivals that of our most famous national parks.

Yet, with its expansive 24,000 acres, breathtaking views, and more than a half million visitors each year, until now Minnewaska had lacked a welcoming location for the public to learn about the park and to plan an outdoor adventure featuring its many carriage roads and trails, stunning vistas, and inspiring waterfalls.

“Without a central location to plan an excursion, folks were missing so much of what Minnewaska has to offer,” says New York State Parks Commissioner Erik Kulleseid, who, prior to his appointment as parks commissioner, managed the Open Space Institute’s (OSI) parks program and first envisioned the new building.

With the opening of the Lake Minnewaska Visitor Center, a crucial missing piece has finally been added to the park, through a public-private partnership between New York State and OSI. For its part, OSI raised \$3 million in private funds and grants for the architectural design, state-of-the-art exhibits, and other upgrades featured throughout the building.

The completion of the visitor center is a capstone project topping off OSI’s decades-long commitment to protecting the landscape in the region and expanding the Lake Minnewaska park. Over the past 30 years, OSI has protected more than 33,000 acres of land on and along the Shawangunk Ridge, including more than 13,000 acres at Minnewaska, doubling the size of the park.

Additionally, as part of its commitment to make protected lands more widely available to those interested in spending time on the land, OSI has spearheaded the restoration of more than 12 miles of the 35 miles of historic carriage roads that meander across the park’s landscape.

LIVING ON THE LAND – SOUTH CAROLINA STYLE

More Than a Daily Pleasure – It’s a Way of Life

Between its quiet blackwater rivers, pristine coastal beaches, sunny longleaf pine savannas, and dramatic mountains, the varied landscapes of South Carolina provide a rich assortment of outdoor opportunities to play, explore, and recharge.

“For South Carolinians, being on the land is more than just a daily pleasure – it’s a way of life,” says the Open Space Institute’s Michelle Sinkler, who has spent most of her life in South Carolina and is passing on her love of the outdoors to her children. “Whether we’re hiking, farming, hunting, or paddling, being on the land strengthens our connections to it.”

The dual pressures of relentless growth and the pandemic underscore the critical need for more publicly accessible land. Thankfully, OSI has found a niche in saving some of the state’s most special places – places for people to escape and families to build lifelong traditions.

To date, OSI has safeguarded more than 18,000 acres in just six years, creating and expanding countless opportunities for hikers, bikers, birders, hunters, anglers, and other recreationists across the state.

For many in South Carolina, hunting is very much a part of their outdoor heritage. Working with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, OSI will, in the coming

months, add more than 1,800 acres to the Belfast Wildlife Management Area to enhance hunting opportunities in the Piedmont region.

These woods and wetlands, teeming with white-tailed deer, wild turkey, bobwhite quail, and American woodcock, offer a premier location for game hunting.

The addition also provides a key linkage between the Long Cane and Enoree Districts of the Sumter National Forest – increasing publicly available hunting and recreation land in the Saluda River Basin by 50 percent.

For those who prefer hiking to hunting, the Blue Ridge Mountain’s Table Rock State Park in the northeastern corner of the state is known for its popular swimming hole and panoramic views. But the character of the park was threatened when a timber company planned a housing development that would diminish the park’s inspiring views.

Working with a team of local partners, including the South Carolina Department of Transportation, the South Carolina Conservation Bank, Upstate Forever, and Naturaland Trust, OSI protected nearly 800 acres, ensuring the property remains undeveloped.

And in a big victory for Charleston area birders and bikers, OSI and the US Forest Service recently announced the protection

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 5)



Michelle Sinkler

and matters

New Jersey Greenway Closer to Reality

Northern New Jersey is among the most densely populated and demographically diverse regions in the United States. And like many of our nation's urban and suburban communities, availability of parks and access to nature is severely lacking. But this disparity could be about to change – in a big way.

The Open Space Institute (OSI) is leading the way for the creation of nearly nine miles of linear park in the Garden State's Essex and Hudson Counties.

The Essex-Hudson Greenway project offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to improve access to nature and create countless new recreational and transportation opportunities.

Earlier this year, in partnership with New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition and the September 11th National Memorial Trail Alliance, and with support from the Thomas L. Kempner Jr. Foundation, OSI reached an agreement with Norfolk Southern Railway Company to purchase the former Boonton Branch of the railway's property – setting the stage for the long sought after Essex-Hudson Greenway. And while much work lies ahead to make this project happen, this linear park has never been closer to reality.

Essex County Commissioner Brendan Gill, a long-time proponent and driving force of the project, calls it a “game changer” for suburban and urban locations along the



Bill Amos

line, including Newark and Jersey City. “The possibilities are limitless,” Gill says of the project. “From expanding commuting options to providing safe greenspace to exercise and enjoy the outdoors, we are on the verge of something really wonderful.”

Strong Forests for Strong Communities



Jerry Monkman

A colonial-era model for forest management is, today, garnering renewed interest as communities recognize the advantages of locally owned and managed forests. Community forests offer residents a variety of recreational, economic, cultural, and environmental benefits.

Across New England, the Open Space Institute has supported sustainable community forests to strengthen local communities and their economies. Over the past decade, OSI, through its Community Forest Fund, has granted more than \$2 million to support the creation and expansion of 25 community forests. All together, these projects span more than 40,000 acres in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont.

Most recently, support from OSI helped to expand two successful community forests in New Hampshire. More than 2,000 acres were added to the Gorham Town Forest, and nearly 700 acres were added to the nearby Milan Community Forest.

According to OSI vice president and manager of its Community Forest initiative, Jennifer Melville, these expansions stand to improve year-round recreational and sport opportunities for residents and visitors, while also generating local economic activity, and protecting drinking water and wildlife.

“Community forests really illustrate the tangible benefits of sustainable, locally-managed forests,” says Melville. “And for these two communities, the additional land will promote cross-country skiing, hiking, and snowmobiling, while protecting its irreplaceable forest asset.”

Welcoming Wilderness

For more than four decades, the Open Space Institute (OSI) has protected some of the most beautiful landscapes in the heart of New York’s Adirondacks – land that provides people with places to play and discover the wonders of nature.

The Adirondac Upper Works property is among OSI’s most storied Adirondack properties. Originally part of an expansive 10,000-acre conservation project purchased by OSI in 2003, a majority of the original Tahawus property was transferred to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

Today, OSI’s remaining 212-acre Adirondac Upper Works property offers important recreational opportunities, boasting the headwaters of the Hudson River and unparalleled paddling opportunities at Henderson Lake. The site was the beginning of Teddy Roosevelt’s 1901 “Midnight Ride” to the presidency. It also features the remains of a 19th century mining operation.

In addition, the property serves as a southern access point to the Adirondack’s celebrated High Peaks Wilderness. The growing popularity of the area’s trails has added stress to this outdoor playground, particularly at its northern entry points.

Hoping to alleviate some of that pressure, OSI is working with the Town of Newcomb and the DEC, to reposition the Upper Works’ parking area and upgrade trailheads to better accommodate visitors to the property and those looking to explore Mount Marcy and the other nearby peaks.



LIVING ON THE LAND – SOUTH CAROLINA STYLE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)



Ben Gruber

of 1,450 acres within the Low Country’s Francis Marion National Forest. One of the forest’s last large inholdings, the property is less than a mile from the East Coast Greenway – a 3,000-mile biking and pedestrian corridor – and close to both the Wambaw Cycle Trail and the Walter Ezell Statewide Bike Touring Route.

But the Francis Marion, which is appreciated locally as the Charleston community’s backyard wilderness, offers something for every kind of outdoor enthusiast. With this, its seventh project at the Francis Marion, OSI has added more than 8,100 acres to this beloved regional recreational destination since 2014.

The addition was completed with support from the Charleston County Greenbelt Program, its largest-ever acquisition, and the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

“Improving the public’s access to the land is a core feature of OSI’s work here in South Carolina, and OSI has big plans for the future,” says OSI’s Sinkler, noting that projects are underway to expand paddling and hiking options along the Ashley, Black, and Waccamaw Rivers, while also prioritizing work within underserved communities, such as rural Jasper and Horry Counties and Charleston’s sea islands.

And for someone who has been active in South Carolina’s conservation movement for decades, OSI supporter and outdoor enthusiast Alys Campaigne, the White Oak acquisition underscores the value of building connections between people and the land. “By increasing access to these beautiful places, OSI is saving some of what makes South Carolina so special,” she says. “In the short term, OSI is helping to provide land that offers a much-needed respite from a hectic world. In the long term, it is inspiring a new generation of conservationists.”

MAGNIFICENT MINNEWASKA

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“Working with the state, the Open Space Institute is making Minnewaska more widely enjoyable. The visitor center is introducing visitors to the wonders of the park and then preparing explorers to take the next step of venturing outside,” Commissioner Kulleseid adds.

With the addition of much-needed visitor amenities, including interactive activity and trail directories, educational exhibits, restrooms, and, for the first time – fresh drinking water, the center is elevating and transforming the visitor experience for thousands of park explorers.

Says Kim Elliman, president and CEO of OSI, “We always knew Minnewaska was a special place, and now we have a visitor center that not only matches its splendor, but will also serve as a jumping-off point for new park patrons, as well as those who might be inspired to try a new hiking adventure. Our approach to this project wasn’t to create a destination for Minnewaska, but rather a location where people can meet and gather information as they set out and launch their own outdoors experience within the park.”

Providing this new gateway experience was the primary goal of the joint project. While the park enjoys many “repeat customers,” lately, a growing number of visitors are arriving at the park not knowing what to expect or where to go.

“People are looking for safe places to play, spend time with their families, and enjoy the comfort of the outdoors,” adds Elliman. “For many, 24,000 acres and 85 miles of carriage roads and trails can be overwhelming. This new visitor center is primed to help the public more fully appreciate and access the very best of Minnewaska.” Elliman points to the increasing number of people turning to nature in response to the current

public health crisis. “Making parks and public land more welcoming and accessible is more important now than ever.”

Key to meeting this objective is a large-scale, three-dimensional topographical map table with interactive kiosks that highlight the prime hiking, biking, swimming, birding, and cross-country ski locations. The map table’s interactivity also allows patrons to choose the right experience based on their personal interests and abilities.

“By employing a bit of technology, the exhibits are allowing visitors to choose an excursion by time, distance, level of difficulty, and what they want to see along the way, a feature that is particularly useful with the rise of social media,” says Eric Humphrey, who has managed Minnewaska for 13 years and oversees its operations and half a million visitors each year.

“Instagram, especially, has people arriving at the park in search of a waterfall or striking vista,” says Humphrey. “Now, visitors can better plan before they head out in search of a specific sky lake, waterfall, or majestic view. And hopefully they have a great experience here at the park.”

And for those who favor an old-fashioned map and tips from park staff, for the first time ever, the visitor center’s main welcome desk provides a central location for these interactions.

“Between its sheer size, abundance of trails and carriage roads, and unique natural areas, Minnewaska is a place that can be enjoyed and explored over a lifetime,” says Humphrey. “It’s my hope that the new visitor center will not only create a great experience for visitors today, but have folks planning for their next trip as they leave. What a great gift to encourage a lifelong love of this spectacular place and allow the park to be protected for generations to come with responsible visitation.”



in conversation



BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE GREATEST LEGISLATIVE CONSERVATION VICTORY IN A GENERATION

This year's passage of the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) was heralded as one of our nation's most significant conservation achievements in decades. With its passage, full and permanent funding for the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has been secured following more than half a decade of hard-fought efforts. And in the middle of this great success story was Lesley Kane Szyal, who leads the Open Space Institute's Outdoor America Campaign.

What is the significance of this achievement?

Guaranteed funding for LWCF has profound consequences. It will protect the best of America for all Americans no matter where they live, work, or play. Now, because of the efforts of OSI and our coalition partners, and our allies in Congress, LWCF will be permanently protected. This assures \$900 million each year to protect America's natural, recreational, and cultural resources, including fresh air, clean water, and scenic landscapes. Passage of GAOA is a testament to the bipartisan appeal of parks and public lands – something we can all feel good about – especially now.

How did OSI's Outdoor America Campaign help secure passage of the Act?

For more than a decade, we brought together a diverse coalition of partners from every corner of the country to tell their stories about how LWCF protects the special places they care about. Land conservation organizations, outdoor recreation businesses, sportsmen and sportswomen, local elected officials, Native American nations, trails groups, and wildlife watchers came together to make the case for protecting nature,

culture, history, and heritage for all. And we worked with an equally broad and bipartisan group of decision makers who championed the legislation in Congress.

As Americans turn to the outdoors during these challenging times, how will passage of the Act help?

National parks and other public lands have seen a record number of visitors in the months following the start of the pandemic. The new law provides consistent funding to protect and provide recreational access to our public lands. LWCF is our best tool to create a range of open spaces for outdoor recreation in our National parks, forests, wildlife refuges, local parks, and other public lands.

What's next for OSI's Outdoor America Campaign?

Passage of GAOA and its funding of LWCF is very exciting, but we need to work hard to ensure that implementation goes well, and that funding is used as intended – promoting meaningful conservation and recreation for this and future generations in every state and county across the nation.



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SOARING ABOVE OSI'S RIVER-TO-RIDGE TRAIL

Not only has the Open Space Institute's River-to-Ridge Trail in New Paltz, NY proven to be popular with the local community – welcoming well over 100,000 people a year – it also turns out to be a great launching site for rehabilitated birds. Late this summer a group of scouts and trail users gathered to witness the release of four rehabilitated peregrine falcons. The trail was identified by Christopher Nadeski, a local bird rehabilitator, as an ideal location for the release because its sightlines allow greater monitoring as the birds take flight and re-enter the wild.