

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

OSI protects land through three main programs:

- New York Land Protection Program
- Conservation Finance Program
- Conservation Institute

We protect open spaces using an array of conservation tools including: land acquisition, conservation easements, special loan programs, re-granting initiatives, land planning initiatives, creative partnerships, and analytical research on conservation issues. Through these means, OSI has protected 100,000 acres in New York State and assisted in the protection of an additional 1.4 million acres in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and North Carolina, creating parks, supporting working forests and farms, protecting natural resources, and preserving historic sites for current and future generations.

PRESERVING THE LEGACY...

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CONSERVATION IN THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY

Open Space Institute

BOSCOBEL VIEWS,
BOSCOBEL HISTORIC SITE

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... AND A
PROMISE FOR
THE **FUTURE**

The forests are recovering, the fish are returning, and much of the land is now protected, but challenges remain. What lies around the next bend in the history of the Hudson River Valley, and what can be learned from the past?

Long before commercial ships plied its waters and cities dotted its shores, the Hudson River's incomparable natural character was recognized. The native people who originally inhabited the region called the Hudson *Muhheakantuck*, the "river that flows two ways," for the constant mixing of fresh water from northern rivers with saltwater from the Atlantic. For millennia, this pattern has created a diverse natural system—and has come to symbolize the constantly changing character of both the river and the Hudson Valley as a whole.

The region's conservation history has also ebbed and flowed, with currents of degradation and restoration running both ways. Sometimes it has seemed that each victory has merely shifted the focus to a new battlefield. Yet it is a credit to nature's resilience, and the power of human intervention, that throughout the long history of the Hudson Valley, every instance of real or potential environmental exploitation for commercial and industrial gain has been met, matched, and often outflanked by individuals and decision makers who have valued the natural resources, beauty, and social and economic benefits of a more pristine, intact landscape.

VIEW OF IONA ISLAND
FROM EAGLE WATCH

In many ways, both the Hudson River and its surrounding valley are cleaner and more protected today than they have been in centuries, but challenges remain. The story of the Hudson River—of its flowing waters and fertile valley and the people who inhabit its environs—is far from over.

LOSING THE LAND... AND SAVING IT

When the first European settlers arrived in New York, they found a seemingly endless wilderness: an estimated 90 percent of the state was densely forested. But the Hudson River Valley's landscape changed rapidly following Henry Hudson's discovery of the river in 1609. Soon, the forests were cleared to make way for agriculture and towns and to fuel industries such as tanning, paper, and charcoal. By the late 1800s, the Hudson Valley, like much of the state, was devoid of trees. At times, logging upstate was so intense that it closed down shipping on the Hudson River as millions of logs floated downstream.

Such rapid and widespread deforestation—as well as effects such as the siltation of waterways and increased flooding—set off alarm bells among naturalists, explorers, local residents, and policymakers. Influenced by depictions of the region's scenic beauty and wondrous nature in paintings by the Hudson River School and the writings of classic American authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Washington Irving, the early conservation movement grew in numbers and strength. Its new-found

clout became evident in 1894, when Forest Preserve lands were declared "forever wild" in the New York State Constitution. In less than a decade, this led to the establishment of the Adirondack and Catskill Parks. This bold act made slow but steady reforestation possible and also marked a turning point in the way that people regarded land and natural resources.

Further south, the tides of change were also flowing—this time in reaction to the unremitting blasting and quarrying of the towering Palisades cliffs for building materials (not least of all for New York City's brownstones). A groundswell of public support saved this unique landscape along the Hudson and led to the establishment of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission (PIPC) in 1900 by New Jersey Governor Foster Voorhees and New York Governor Theodore Roosevelt, who as president would later use New York's Forest Preserve as a model for national parks and preserves.

The singular set of circumstances in the Hudson River Valley, home to some of the country's wealthiest landowners—including the Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan, Harriman, and Perkins families—set the stage for conservation to take place at an unprecedented scale. Owning vast amounts of land throughout the region, they had the power, money, and most importantly the commitment to protect the intact vistas of the Hudson River Valley. In great part through their efforts, New York State established parks, preserves, and the nation's first green-belt. A century later, the descendants of these first generous conservationists continue to donate time, land and money to fill in the unprotected gaps across the region.

LAUNCHING A NEW CONSERVATION MOVEMENT

Even as tremendous conservation accomplishments were being celebrated, a darker reality was taking shape along the Hudson: the environmental impacts of 20th century industrialization. Ironically, it was the Hudson's attractive natural features that led to much of its degradation—industries chose to locate along the river in order to take advantage of an abundant water supply, fast currents to power machinery, and an easy means of waste disposal.

At the northern end of the Hudson River, trouble was seeping into the waters of the Hudson River beginning in the 1940s when General Electric (GE) began dumping polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), a coolant used in electrical equipment. Affecting a 200-mile stretch of the river, the chemical degraded aquatic ecosystems, killing fish and threatening human health. Nearly 30 years and 1.3 million pounds of PCBs later, environmental organizations celebrated a hard-won legal victory that finally stopped the dumping in 1975.

In the course of that battle, the Consolidated Edison Company (ConEd) announced plans in 1962 to build a hydro-electric power plant near the banks of the Hudson at Storm King Mountain in Cornwall, a facility that would have threatened the local water supply, Hudson River fisheries, and the scenic beauty of the area. As concerned citizens gathered strength and legal arguments, opposition to the plant surged. After 17 long years of unflagging effort by conservationists, ConEd was

finally forced to abandon all hope of building the facility.

The victory at Storm King was a crucial force in the rise of the national environmental movement for it illustrated to the entire nation the power of organized, citizen-led efforts. The case heralded a critical 1965 decision by a federal circuit court that recognized the value of aesthetic and historical characteristics, and directly resulted in passage of the landmark 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which requires federal agencies to carefully evaluate environmental impacts when deciding whether to approve large projects.

These events were emblematic of a growing national demand for greater environmental protection, and led to the passage of the U.S. Clean Air, Clean Water, and Endangered Species Acts in the early 1970s. It was during this era of awakening that the Open Space Institute was created to protect historic, scenic and natural landscapes throughout the region, in large part with the generous support of Lila and DeWitt Wallace, whose dedication to the Hudson River Valley carried a conservation torch into the 21st century.

Although industrial contaminants and, increasingly, pollution caused by development still compromise the Hudson, a host of environmental laws now protect the river. In 2002, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency approved a plan that required GE to dredge the chemicals from the river sediment, and the environmental community is pushing hard for its implementation. Enhanced regulation and greater public awareness have made sizable stretches of the river clean enough for humans and fish both. In a clear signal of improving ecological

health, osprey and bald eagles now soar through the valley after a prolonged absence. And the shortnose sturgeon, in steady decline due to overfishing since the early 1900s (when it was popularly known as “Albany beef”) and listed as a federally endangered species since 1966, is now making a strong comeback.

WRITING A NEW CHAPTER

In the Hudson Valley, the often delicate balance between human beings and nature continues to seek equilibrium. The region’s proximity to large urban areas has always made it a haven for new “settlers,” but today it is the pace of growth and development that threatens land and natural resources. Hudson Valley towns have become major destinations for tourists, outdoor enthusiasts, and new residents seeking access to land and scenic views. Between 2000 and 2004, the Hudson Valley’s population grew faster than any other region in New York, at a rate twice that of the state average. Skyrocketing land values make it difficult for many landowners to resist subdividing and selling their properties for new home development. In the process, open space is lost forever.

These powerful trends are being met by a counterforce of action. Working in partnership, local groups, state agencies, and conservation organizations such as the Open Space Institute are protecting thousands of acres of forests, fields, mountains, wetlands, rivers, and streams. Conservation easements, private land acquisition, and the purchase of development rights have become

invaluable tools in the movement to save open space and natural resources without compromising financial benefits to landowners.

In addition to the creation and expansion of protected areas, saving farmland has become a top priority in an effort to retain the region’s agrarian legacy. The American Farmland Trust ranks the Hudson River Valley as the tenth most-threatened agricultural region nationwide, reflecting the loss of nearly 79,000 acres of farmland between 1987 and 1997 alone. Organizations, agencies, and towns have responded by protecting thousands of agricultural acres in the region, effectively saving open space, safeguarding food production and local economies, and maintaining dynamic working landscapes.

LESSONS LEARNED

The conservation lessons of the Hudson Valley instruct and caution, showing us how we must manage and respect the natural resources of the region even as we continue to use and influence them. As we head into the future, the region’s rich natural and cultural legacy will be kept alive as it always has been—through commitment, action, generosity, and an undying appreciation for the land that sustains us all. Preserving open spaces is an invaluable way to restrain the impacts of humans who are capable of loving cherished landscapes to death. More than ever, we need to make a collective promise to future generations that the Hudson River Valley—the incomparable landscape that surrounds the river that flows both ways—is a place worth protecting.

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IONA MARSH, BEAR MOUNTAIN STATE PARK

THE LEGACY OF THE OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE IN THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY

THE OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE has its roots in the Hudson River Valley, where our commitment to the protection of open space began more than 40 years ago. Partnering with state government and local municipalities, land trusts of all sizes, and individuals, OSI has protected 100,000 acres of scenic, natural and historic landscapes in New York State, from the Palisades to the Adirondacks High Peaks, helping to create

and expand more than 40 parks and preserves. OSI also works with agricultural land owners to protect their threatened farms, assuring that the Valley’s centuries-old agricultural heritage isn’t lost forever. These protected landscapes are places of unparalleled beauty that provide wildlife habitat, keep viewsheds intact, filter clean air and water, provide local food, and serve as recreational resources for millions.