Open Space Institute

1350 Broadway, Suite 201
New York, NY 10018-7799
Tel: 212.290.8200
Fax: 212.244.3441

Support Our Work

There are many ways you can protect land for the future—use the attached envelope to make a gift today. For gifts of stock, mutual funds or donor advised funds, please call.

ecophotography.com

A couple hikes on an old woods road near Page Brook and Lake Winnipesauke in Meredith, New Hampshire.

Open Space

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE

Letting It Be

Conserving land could be the key to slowing climate change

Political power shifts, the value of the dollar fluctuates, but acre for acre, the United States remains the third largest country in the world, covering 3.5 million square miles.

How this land is being used, now and in the future, could prove to be an important part of how the human community faces the climate change challenge.

"When people think of greenhouse gases, they think of energy and cars," said Dan Sosland of the climate-focused nonprofit Environment Northeast, "but land is a huge element in climate change, both in terms of causes and potential solutions."

There is no silver bullet that can miraculously undo the effects of an industrial century, which resulted in the creation of excessive amounts of carbon dioxide, the greenhouse gas that is the single greatest cause of the atmosphere's steadily increasing temperature. But the traditional reasons for securing undeveloped land as open space have become more imperative with climate change. These lands sequester carbon and help direct development into more energy-efficient patterns. Open spaces provide habitat for flora and fauna that is shifting in both latitude and elevation in response to a changing climate. And preserving undisturbed

(continued on page 6)

below: *View from John Boyd Thacher Park, where OSI protected over 1,000 acres.*

INSIDE

top: Jerry and Marcy Monkman; right: Brett Cole

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 100,000 acres in New York State and assisted in the protection of an additional 1.7 million acres across the East Coast.

left and far right: Jerry & Marcy Monkman

Reflections on Life & Land

Dear Friends,

Recently traveling upstate by train, lost in conversation, something made us look up. There—just south of the Rhinecliff stop, with the Hudson River to our left—were at least a dozen great blue herons in a large wetland area on the opposite side of the tracks. In the middle of them all, perched confidently on a piece of driftwood, was a mature bald eagle.

The Hudson River has served as a barometer of the entire region's natural health for years. The state of its waters has ebbed and flowed with the growth of an industrial age along its banks and towns. On a larger but less visible scale, our planet's atmosphere is now telling us that we have a very serious problem on our hands. Gasoline prices bring the problem closer to home, but it is all part of the complex issue of climate change—of personal and global carbon footprints, of energy source and use, of rapidly changing land-use patterns—that is demanding our full attention.

This issue of *Open Space* looks at climate change through the lens of land conservation. Climate change doesn't radically change the work that OSI has been doing for decades, but it makes it more relevant and pressing.

Saving forests and farms from development encourages smarter growth in our existing urban centers and promotes a more energy-efficient lifestyle, leaving our open spaces open. Trees naturally remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and reduce our negative impact on the planet. Local food sources keep transportation costs and related impacts down.

Knowing that the climate change phenomenon has raised the stakes higher than ever, we at OSI will keep doing what we do best: conserving land and habitat, forests and farms, and reconnecting our culture with the land.

Seeing the herons and the eagle on the river where OSI has centered its work for so many years made us proud to be part of a movement bent on reclaiming this American treasure. And our work here will continue. As always, thank you for your support, and read on with optimism, as we strive to protect open spaces in a world that's always changing.

Kim Elliman
CEO

Joe Martens
President

Open Space is distributed to members and donors of the Open Space Institute. We welcome your support, suggestions, contributions, and photographs. Please contact us at:

1350 Broadway, Suite 201
New York, NY 10018
Tel: 212.290.8200
Fax: 212.244.3441
www.osiny.org

Newsletter Contributors
Tally Blumberg
Kim Elliman
Peter Howell
Joe Martens
Sally Schuiling
Jeff Simms
Meera Subramanian
Abby Weinberg
Production: Susan Morningstar
Graphic Design: Jenkins & Page

Printer: Monroe Litho, a Forest Stewardship Council-certified printer using 100% renewable, non-polluting wind power. Printed on Astrolite PC100, 100% post-consumer waste recycled paper using vegetable-based inks. Please pass along to a friend or recycle.

Circling Green Around New York City

View on the Catskill, Early Autumn by Thomas Cole.

In 1826, writer James Fenimore Cooper declared the Catskills "classic ground," taken as he was by the distinct topography of the central Hudson Valley mountains, where he marveled at the fine outline of fields and woodlands down low and the striking sunset he witnessed from on high. While much has changed since his visit, more than a century of land conservation has ensured that there are many parts of the greater Hudson River Valley region that still offer the vistas viewed in centuries past.

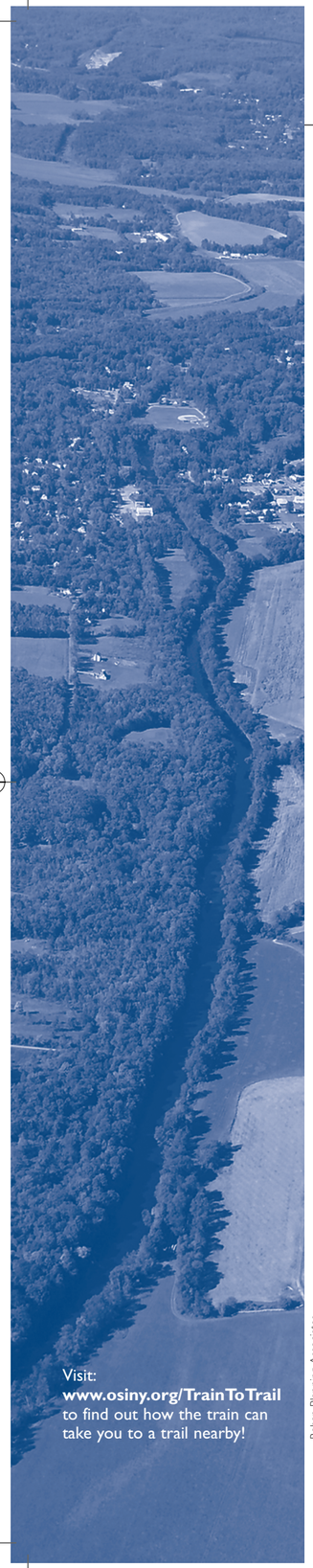
All this preservation work has created a regional greenbelt, cinched around the congested communities of the eastern seaboard megalopolis, home to more than 50 million people. While our national parks preserve some of the most iconic American landscapes, it is these backyard state parks and county reserves that we turn to for our long weekend camp-outs, our family reunions, that last-minute picnic. As gas prices fluctuate, the fact that these landscapes are so close by, some even accessible by train, makes them even more appealing. As the climate continues to transform, the importance of these same open spaces becomes even more significant, serving as the last reserves of undeveloped land in an otherwise crowded landscape.

OSI has protected thousands of acres in New York City's backyard, including nearly 50,000 acres across Sterling Forest, Schunnemunk, Fahnestock and the Shawangunks. In the Catskills, one such public playground and preserve that just expanded by several hundred acres is Overlook Mountain in Woodstock, Ulster County. In June, OSI's partnership with the Woodstock Land Conservancy and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)

(continued on page 4)

"I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order."

— John Burroughs



Visit:
www.osiny.org/TrainToTrail
to find out how the train can take you to a trail nearby!

Behan Planning Associates

Circling Green Around the City

(continued from page 3)
permanently protected 330 acres that will be added to the 300,000-acre Catskill Forest Preserve. The Overlook Mountain Wild Forest offers an abundance of all-season recreational opportunities including hiking, camping, biking, skiing, bird-watching and hunting.

From many of these mountainous viewpoints such as now-protected Overlook, we can experience—once again—the places that are a window into America's natural history. It was views like these that inspired Hudson River Valley painters such as Thomas Cole to paint exquisite romantic landscapes in the early 1800s, proving that the Americas had as much beauty as the greatest parts of old Europe. It was a defining moment in the new country's identity, one that lasts to this day. The United States was an expansive land of opportunity and material wealth, but it was also a place where there was a chance for the European immigrants to connect with their natural world as the native people had for centuries. As the country's population grew, these protected open spaces remained vestiges of the New World as explorers like Henry Hudson first found it 400 years ago and as New Yorkers found it last weekend.

Protection of these backyard beauties make certain that the paintings from a long-gone era remain true to the land and make room for new generations of Americans to easily escape their ever-growing cities and towns and maintain the connection to a wild and free country. From the Helderbergs to the Hudson Highlands, these scenes are an ever-present backdrop to the lives of New Yorkers. Both our backyard playground and sanctuary, this regional green belt is what inspired naturalist writer and Catskills' native son John Burroughs to once pen, "I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order."

Brett Cole

left: *Rondout Creek, as it flows north from Kerhonkson;* above: *Hudson River from Constitution Marsh.*

Land Matters *News & Events*

On the Land

In 2008, OSI completed 28 land conservation transactions involving more than 11,000 acres in New York State. Our work helped to preserve farms, forests and parks, as well as properties protecting water quality throughout the state. Noteworthy among our transactions was the purchase of the 374-acre Ashokan Field Campus parcel, which will help protect drinking water for New York City's 8.2 million residents and continued operations as a 40-year-old environmental and cultural education facility.

The Conservation Finance Program has made loans and grants this year totaling more than $7 milion to protect almost 5,000 acres in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, North Carolina and Georgia. Through this program, OSI assists smaller conservation organizations as they grow, extending the reach of our conservation efforts throughout the northeast and into the southern Appalachians.
www.osiny.org/2008

Seth Sherman

Bridge at Ashokan Field Campus.

TransBorder Conservation

Having completed a six-month assessment of the 80-million acre Northern Appalachian – Acadian forest region, OSI is now considering the possibility of launching a capital campaign to protect the region's forestlands, which straddle the United States – Canadian border.

OSI's transborder assessment follows its eight years of conservation work in the Northern Forest region, which stretches from western New York to the Maine woods. The report's findings noted a strong foundation of protected lands on both sides of the border; however, there are several unprotected gaps between the forests of northern New England and eastern Canada that face increased pressure for development and fragmentation. The unique trans-border ecosystem contains some of the largest broadleaf temperate forests in the world, as well as habitat for woodland caribou, lynx, moose, black bears and loons, among others.

For more information on the region and the risks it faces, as well as OSI's involvement in potential conservation initiatives, go to Two Countries, One Forest at **www.2c1forest.org**.

Recent Research

OSI and the Wildlife Conservation Society have teamed up to jointly produce *Conservation Easements and Biodiversity in the Northern Forest Region*, a report examining the role of working forest easements in the Northern Forest. The report reviews the biodiversity protections in six working forest easements funded by OSI's Northern Forest Protection Fund, concluding that biodiversity and active forest management are compatible as long as five critical steps are accounted for in the easement.

Working forest easements have become more important in assuring long-term conservation as the frequency of land sales increases. Another OSI Conservation Research Program report, *Forestland for Sale: Challenges and Opportunities for Conservation Over the Next 10 Years*, shows that some forestland ownerships have changed hands as many as four times over the last 20 years. The report examines changes in ownership in the Mahoosuc region of the Northern Forest, finding that the majority of the region's forests have been transferred from three industry owners holding an average of 100,000 acres apiece to 22 different owners holding an average of just 13,000 acres each. The report can be found at:
www.osiny.org/forestlandforsale

In addition, OSI's Peter Howell authored two articles in the most recent *Maine Policy Review*, analyzing timber investing and conservation in the Northern Forest and Maine's North Woods, respectively.

Brett Cole

Good public planning incorporates three elements: urban design, density, and mixed use.

— Joel Russell

Letting it Be *(continued from page 1)*

land acts as a precautionary prescription for other unforeseen changes yet to come. While the reasons to protect farms, forests and parks may change over time, the multiple benefits of permanent land conservation remain rooted in the land itself.

Protecting forests, for example, has always been important for local economies and tourism and wildlife, but climate change has upped the ante. "The imperative for saving forests is even stronger now," said Dr. John Hagan, director of the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences' Sustainable Landscapes Program. "The role of forests in carbon storage gives us a whole new reason to protect them. With a full 20 percent of global emissions coming from forest loss—conversion of forest to non-forest—we need to do everything we can to keep forests forests."

Adding farmland protection to the mix further strengthens the power of open spaces to mitigate climate change. Pastureland and cropland cover half the land area of the U.S., and forests another third. Together these undeveloped open spaces can offset 16 percent of the country's carbon emissions.

But that undeveloped land base is being eroded. Between 1997 and 2002, the Northeastern lands were developed at a pace only exceeded in the Midwest. Before gas prices recently forced developers and homeowners to question a car-dependent sprawling lifestyle, development expanded from population centers across the region.

"We need to get back to using our feet," said land use planning consultant Joel Russell. Maybe, Russell speculated, rising gas prices could be a blessing in disguise, encouraging communities to invest more in mass transit and pedestrian-friendly development. "We need to make an urban lifestyle so attractive that people will choose it," he said. "We can't address any of our environmental problems unless we make our cities attractive places where even environmentalists want to live."

For all these reasons, land conservation is more essential than ever. "Everyone looks at power plants and tailpipes," Sosland said, "but forests and open space are a huge component of sequestering carbon. Without them, greenhouse gases would be 10 to 20 percent worse in our region. What this suggests is that putting the effort into planning and policy should be a high priority. This is the link back to land protection and the work that OSI is doing." For human and animal communities both, land conservation is an often overlooked key to slowing climate change.

Kevin Smith

Preserving undisturbed land acts as a precautionary prescription for unforeseen changes yet to come.

Q&A

Climate Weirding and Habitat

Dialogue with Mark Shaffer and Kim Elliman

We recently sat down with Mark Shaffer, environmental program director at the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and Kim Elliman, OSI's CEO, to discuss climate change and its connection to land conservation. Mark and Kim talked about the link between the protection of our landscapes and the extreme climate patterns that have been widely reported in recent years. Particular attention was paid to State Wildlife Action Plans—blueprints for habitat protection and conservation that the Duke Foundation is working to help implement in each of the 50 states.

The following excerpt is only a small portion of their dialogue. The complete transcript can be found online at ***www.osiny.org/dialogue****.*

OSI: Can land conservation realistically undo any of the damage done by climate change? Is it a drop in the bucket or is it part of a real solution?

Mark: Conversion of natural vegetation, for whatever purpose, is accounting for about 25 percent of greenhouse gas emissions currently. And a lot of this is tropical forests, but not all. If you could stop the conversion of natural vegetation you'd make a huge dent in our emissions of carbon dioxide. So, clearly, land use is a big part of the climate change puzzle. Now, can you realistically stop tropical forest deforestation completely? Probably not, but how much can you slow it? I would say that this whole field is still emergent because there's so much information and so many different scenarios. One doesn't really know what to believe. But it's clear that land use right now is a huge part of the problem. That implies that if you add policies to affect those land uses, it could be a big part of the solution.

Kim: As one leading scientist says, it's not about climate change, it's about climate weirding. You have all these bizarre weather conditions, and think about extreme storms as one component of that. You only have to think about what's happened in the southeast with the drought, in the northwest with successive years of drought and then plenty, in the northeast where you've had these torrential storms. In the Catskills, which is the watershed for New York City, you've had three 100-year storms in five years. This is just weird stuff. The more stress you put on the watersheds, the less reliable your water supply and water quality is, and that's a stress on public health.

So, when conservationists talk about the need for more resilient landscapes in climate change discussions, it's not just an abstract concept about plants and animals. There are public health benefits. There are obviously buffering elements. Prior to Katrina, Louisiana had lost wetlands the total acreage of which approximated the size of Rhode Island. Had those wetlands been in place, Katrina wouldn't have been as damaging, because the wetlands would have slowed the surge. That too is land use.

OSI: But it doesn't seem like we hear that much about land conservation in the climate change discussion.

Mark: I think it's an under-reported portion of the debate. Where it comes in mostly is that the specter of climate change has been so much about sea level rise—and obviously that means the loss of land—and drought, and that probably will affect more land use in the long run than almost anything else.

Kim: I think, among policy makers and among the conservation community and an informed public in general, there is more awareness about land use and the need for smart land use. New York City has done terrific work in its watershed. Atlanta is doing interesting work in its watershed. In the southern Appalachians, North Carolina is spending a lot of money to control watersheds and drainage areas. Five years ago you wouldn't have heard about the land component. Now, at least land use is seen as a critical component not just of carbon sequestration through forest management and reforestation. Land use is recognized as a means of ensuring biological corridors, water quality and quantity, and home-grown recreation. It's central to how human and natural societies react to climate change.

ecophotography.com

A hardwood forest after a selective harvest.

Go to **www.osiny.org** for the complete interviews.

Letting it Be
Dan Sosland
www.osiny.org/sosland

John Hagen
www.osiny.org/hagen

Joel Russell
www.osiny.org/russell

Climate Weirding & Habitat
Mark Shaffer and Kim Elliman
www.osiny.org/dialogue

Year in Review
www.osiny.org/2008