

## Vly Swamp -- A Priority

In our January ViewPoints, we talked about developing a strategic land plan. With this plan now completed, we are starting to implement it. One of our highest priority areas is the Vly Swamp/ Black Creek Marsh area in Albany County.

While the word swamp often conjures up negative images, swamps are really fascinating places, filled with tremendous wildlife. A swamp is a wetland where the dominant vegetation consists of trees or shrubs so maybe if it's thought of as a very very wet forest, it will sound more appealing. This is in contrast to a marsh which is a wetland dominated by herbaceous vegetation such as cattails.



The Vly Swamp/ Black Creek Marsh complex is located at the base of the Helderberg Escarpment.

This area is listed as a priority area for protection in the 2009 New York State Open Space Conservation Plan which states that these adjacent wetlands "support a significantly high biological diversity, including an amphibian species diversity that rivals the entire New England region." This area has also been identified by the National Audubon Society as an Important Bird Area. Another important aspect of this area for the Conservancy is that Indian Ladder Farms lies in the middle of it.

The Conservancy received the donation of an 18 acre parcel of Vly Swamp in 2003, the same year it completed the 317-acre easement on Indian Ladder Farm. It also purchased 40 acres of land in Black Creek Marsh which will be donated to NYS for enlargement of the Black Creek Marsh Wildlife Management area. Funds for this purchase came from developers in the area who needed to mitigate wetland impacts of development projects as a condition of their permitting process.



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## Accreditation -- What is it?

At the July board meeting, the board of directors voted to apply for the accreditation in 2012 through the Land Trust Alliance Accreditation Commission. Preparing for this decision has been part of our strategic plan since 2007. We are now ready.

So what is the accreditation program and why is this an important step for us?

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, provides independent verification of 26 indicator practices from Land Trust Standards and Practices that show a land trust's ability to operate in an ethical, legal, and technically sound manner, and to ensure the long-term protection of land in the public interest. The full 88 Land Trust Alliance's practices serve as guidelines for the responsible operation of a land trust. Accreditation is an independent verification that we are meeting national quality standards for a land trust.

MHLC has been actively working to implement all of the Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices. It has taken some time to get all of our policies and practices developed AND to actually implement them. Over the past few years we have been steadily improving management of our preserves, documenting inspections, completing management plans, improving financial and stewardship policies and practices, all to comply with these practices. We now believe we are ready for the intensive review of our practices that accreditation requires.

According to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission: "Independent accreditation provides the assurance of quality and permanence of land conservation the public and donors look for, and publicly recognizes a land trust's ability to protect important natural places and working lands forever. Preparing for accreditation and the application process also affords land trusts the opportunity to review and implement policies that will help streamline their operations and lead to more effective land conservation."

A survey by the Land Trust Alliance in 2010 of some of the already accredited land trust found the following:

- 96% report the process strengthened their organization;
- 63% report it being easier to meet agency/funder requirements;
- 51% of those with staff report the sense of teamwork among staff is stronger.

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## Mission Statement

The Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy saves special places by promoting voluntary conservation of farmland and natural landscapes in cooperation with landowners and local governments for the use and enjoyment of current and future generations.

ViewPoints is published four times each year by the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy, PO Box 567, Slingerlands NY 12159 (518) 436-6346 or [www.mohawkhudson.org](http://www.mohawkhudson.org)

ViewPoints is also available at [www.mohawkhudson.org/pubs.htm](http://www.mohawkhudson.org/pubs.htm).

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## Executive Director's Message -

### Jill Knapp

I spent a weekend at my son's 150-year old row house in Philadelphia recently. This time, I could no longer stand his bathroom sink faucet – it was too short to hang over the sink properly, so something as simple wetting a toothbrush was difficult. It has driven me nuts every time I've visited, but after two and a half years in the house, Dan had gotten used to it. The only reason he readily agreed to give it higher priority on the "to do" list was that the hot water faucet was leaking.

So what does this have to do with land protection? It started me thinking about why I am finding it so difficult to find foundations or individuals that have made the Helderbergs, or other Capital District areas a priority for funding. There are numerous local groups, individuals, foundations, as well as the state, devoted to protecting the Adirondacks and Catskills, the Batten Kill, and the Saratoga Battle Field. While there is no question these areas are worthy of protection, why is there so little interest in protecting what is even closer to us -- essentially in our own backyard – the Helderbergs and hilltowns?

And I guess that is the answer, like the faucet, we have gotten so accustomed to it, it is no longer a priority. You look out from dozens of places and you see the Helderbergs – that ridge is just there. Nothing to get too excited about, certainly not as dramatic as the Catskills, just a high flat plateau across the western horizon.

But on closer examination the uniqueness of the area becomes evident; the diversity of amphibians that inhabit Vly Swamp and Black Creek Marsh, the fossils imbedded in the rocks, the birds that soar from the cliffs, Indian Ladder Farms, all of these features provide a richness of natural, agricultural, and cultural resources within 15 miles of Albany!

We plan to make this area a priority for protection and raise its visibility so that it is considered as worthy of protection as better known but more distant lands! We hope you will join us in support of this unique and diverse area *right in our own backyard!*

## Bequests – Leaving a Legacy

While MHLC has lost some friends and supporters in recent years, some of them live on through their bequests to the Conservancy.

This year we received two bequests, one from Nancy Winn, a long time friend and supporter. Nancy donated the Winn Preserve to us in 1997. Her original gift of 129 acres has grown over the years to 180 acres with additional land donations and purchases. This year a new entrance kiosk and trails have been completed to improve access to this beautiful property. Her final gift was her bequest which will be used for the permanent protection of this lovely property.

We recently received a gift from Evelyn Keller, a Delmar resident, who provided for us in her will. Evelyn was not well known to us, but her thoughtfulness in recognizing us in her will is most appreciated. Her bequest will help us with our land stewardship activities in the coming years.

If you would like to leave a legacy of local land protection, please consider designating a gift to the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy in your will. It will certainly make a lasting impact in our local communities for future generations to appreciate.



The Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy is partially funded by the New York Conservation Partnership Program administered by the Land Trust Alliance Northeast Program with support from the State of New York.

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Over the next 9 months we will be gathering and reviewing the required materials, evaluating our policies and programs, and preparing for the review. We hope this too further strengthens our organization, and builds greater public support and confidence in our work.

## Preserve Updates

Most of our preserves survived Hurricane Irene with minimal or no damage. The “musical bridge” at Wolf Creek Falls will need repair in the spring, and a small bridge at the Holt Preserve is now on higher ground after the stream changed course. Water levels along the Normans Kill were extremely high and reached the bridge by the creek at Normans Kill West. Most interesting was the significant enlargement of the sink hole near the entrance to Bennett Hill. While water was still flowing freely, it was observed that the sink holes on either side of the trail are actually connected and water was flowing between the two directly under the trail. It seemed evident that at some point the whole

trail might give out. So with this in mind, a new bridge has been built spanning the questionable portion of the trail.

The 287-acre property that we received from Katherine and John Barber of Seattle Washington has been named the Keleher Preserve

after Katherine’s father, William Keleher, who enjoyed many years of taking care of this land. In September we obtained the needed easements from neighboring land owners to allow for public access to the preserve. With these agreements now signed and filed, we have designated a parking area and installed a kiosk. A

path from the parking area to our property and the beginning of a trail system has been marked. While we had hoped to install a bridge across the small stream this year, that has been delayed until next year. The stream, which usually has very little water in it, can be readily crossed however on the existing pile of logs. We hope to have a formal opening in 2012.



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While the swamp itself is too wet for development, many of the adjacent upland areas have development potential. According to the NYS Open Space Plan, “Certain additional parcels associated with this wetland complex and important buffer areas remain vulnerable and should be protected before opportunities to do so are lost due to residential subdivision and development pressure.”

Protection of lands between Thacher Park and the wetlands would provide a large tract of undeveloped land for animal migrations. Many species have significantly wider ranges than is often imagined. This winter, a fisher was tracked going from Guilderland through Vly Swamp, up the escarpment and into Thacher Park, and out to Rensselaerville before eventually getting hit by a car on I-890 in Schenectady. On our February 6th outing in Vly Swamp, we saw fisher tracks. This may have been the same fisher. A nearby landowner said she had encountered one in her barn around the same time.

So with a nucleus of lands already protected in the area, significant resources worthy of protection, and landowners interested in protecting their lands, we are moving ahead on. Stay tuned for more details!

## Welcome New Board Members

The board of directors has appointed three new members to fill vacancies on our board of directors.

Tony Belsito was appointed in August. He is Assistant Counsel with the NYS Department of Public Service. He received his JD degree from St. John’s University School of Law in 2006. Prior to his legal studies, he completed his BS in Plant and Soil Sciences at UMASS and his MS in Crop & Soil Science/Applied Economics & Management at Cornell.

Also an attorney, David Blabey was appointed in September. David is a Delmar resident and before retirement served as Counsel to several state agencies and committees including the NYS Senate Energy Committee and the Public Service Commission, as well as working with a private law firm.

Anne LaSalle is back, this time as a board member. You may remember Anne who served as our Development Director prior to Kate. Anne comes with strong experience in fundraising, particularly major gifts and large scale special event planning.

We are pleased to have these new board members give us the benefit of their time and experience to help us move forward with our mission of saving special places.

## An Autumn Afternoon at the Shaker Heritage Society

We had another beautiful fall day for our annual benefit, “An Autumn Afternoon” on Sunday September 18. The Shaker Meeting House was filled to capacity. A diverse collection of silent auction items from many local merchants and individuals offered guests an opportunity to bid on get-away packages and gift certificates to local venues.

**Thanks to everyone who supported the event!  
We certainly appreciate your support of this annual benefit.**





**LAND  
CONSERVANCY**

*Saving Special Places*

## **Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy**

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### ***Get Ready for Coming Events (Bring Lunch & Waterproof Boots)***

**October 27 (Thursday) STEVE DOWNS PROPERTY:** The active environmentalist Steve Downs and his wife have built a passive solar home on property south of Glenmont where the Vroman Kill runs into the Hudson River. There will be a brief hike on the property that includes a beautiful garden. Meet at 10:00 am at the Elm Avenue Park and Ride in Delmar to carpool to this property.

**October 31 (Monday) WINN PRESERVE:** Celebrate Halloween on this beautiful preserve led by the steward Dan Driscoll. The most striking feature of this 180-acre preserve is the limestone fissures. Located on the edge of the Helderberg Escarpment, there are views of rock outcrops and steep cliffs. See the ever-present ground cover of Canadian yew (ground hemlock). We will meet at 10:00 AM at the Slingerlands Community Methodist Church, 1499 New Scotland Road, Slingerlands, to carpool.

### ***Eat for the Environment: Enjoy friends, family, and food while helping MHLC.***

*Please join us for our last restaurant of the year:  
The Albany Pump Station, 19 Quackenbush Square,  
Albany*

*Tuesday, November 15, 2011 5:00 - 10:00 p.m.*

*Please tell your server you're there for MHLC*

### **State Employees and Retirees:**

#### **Support MHLC through SEFA**

MHLC is eligible to receive funding through the SEFA (State Employees Federated Appeal) Campaign. If you give through SEFA, please consider designating the Conservancy (#50-00217)

to receive all or part of your donation.

Thank you!