

Four land trusts strengthen agreements protecting Ridge lands

The Mohonk Preserve has announced that it was one of 33 land trusts from across the state to receive funding from the Land Trust Alliance for a program designed to help protect the open space of the Shawangunk Ridge. The Preserve received a grant of \$8,750 to work with three other local land trusts to standardize and strengthen conservation easement agreements they hold. A conservation easement is

an agreement between a landowner who wishes to permanently limit development on their land and a qualified, non-profit land trust organization, such as the Mohonk Preserve.

The four agencies will receive training developed by the Open Space Institute, The Nature Conservancy and the Mohonk Preserve. Participants will include staff from the Preserve, the Wallkill Valley Land Trust, the Rondout Esopus Land Conservancy and the Cragmoor Conservancy. Over the course of the training, the land trusts will create a standardized protocol to be used ridge-wide in developing conservation easements and in monitoring ongoing compliance with an easement's terms.

"This project can only strengthen our conservation easements," said Chris Duncan, executive director of the Wallkill Valley Land Trust. "Through this training, we will be better able to meet the needs of the landowners and preserve the ecology of the land."

"The Land Trust Alliance is delighted that the Preserve is taking a leadership role in protecting the ridge," said Ethan Winter, northeast program coordinator of the Land Trust Alliance. "This project will serve as a model for other land trusts throughout New York State."

A new feature of easements held by the four land trusts will be that they will incorporate information about the fragile plant and wildlife found on a parcel, so that the easement agreement helps protect important natural habitat over the long-term.

"When we placed 70 acres of our land under a conservation easement, the Preserve informed us that the bird family on our pond was common mergansers – a species new to the Shawangunks," said property owners Sven Hartmann and Connie Beckley. "If we hadn't decided to do an easement, we might never have known that we were protecting such important bird habitat."

"Sven and Connie offer others a good example of what individuals can do to protect the ridge from the threat of development," said Glenn Hoagland, the Preserve's executive director. "It's a win-win situation. The land stays in private hands, while the owner makes a commitment to preserve wildlife habitat and open space for future generations."

The LTA grant program is funded through the New York State Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). According to the LTA, continued funding for this important grants program is being jeopardized by the current state budget impasse, which has frozen the \$200 million for the EPF initially approved by governor George Pataki and members of the assembly and senate this spring. A coalition of citizens, land trusts and environmental organizations continues to urge the three parties to resolve the 2006-07 EPF so that New Yorkers can keep their clean air, clean water and open space through EPF-funded conservation projects statewide.

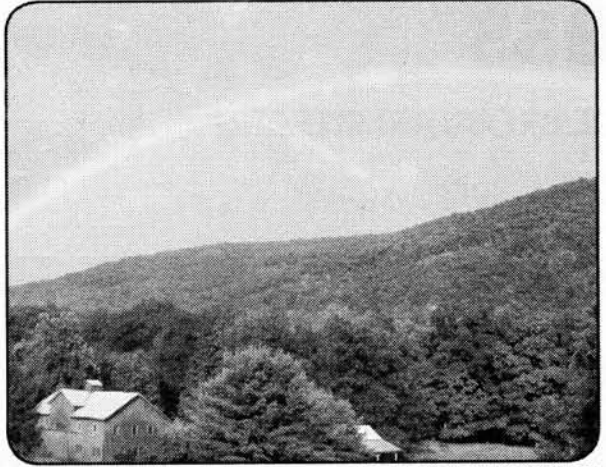


PHOTO BY CONNIE BECKLEY

The Mohonk Preserve currently holds 16 conservation easements on the Shawangunk Ridge, including these 70 acres owned by Sven Hartmann and Connie Beckley in the Town of Rochester.