

NEW PALTZ



COURTESY PHOTO

BIODIVERSITY TRAINING. Town officials have been learning to partner with the land.

Learning to use the land

Officials take part in biodiversity training program

BY ROBERT FORD

Ulster County Press

For the last six weeks, 35 officials from municipalities along the Shawangunk Ridge have been taking part in a Land Use Leadership Alliance Training Program sponsored by the Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership and Pace University Land Use Law Center.

The program was designed for local land use decision-makers, who will determine "the quality of life, the economy, and the environment of communities in the region," according to the Nature Conservancy, which helped sponsor the training program.

It teaches "practical strategies for natural resource conservation, development in appropriate locations, and effective decision-making."

Officials attending the course came from Rosendale, Marbletown, Rochester, Wawarsing, Ellenville, Montgomery, Shawangunk, Gardiner and New Paltz. They represented planning and zoning boards, town boards, open space committees, conservation organizations and businesses in the Shawangunks region.

"The Land Use Leadership Alliance Training Program is a multi-day course that teaches participants how to use land use law, dispute resolution and community decision-making techniques to accomplish smart growth," said training officials.

"It helps you take common sense tools and ideas and teaches you how to use them in real settings," said Maggie Colan, clerk of the planning board and zoning board of appeals in Marbletown.

Effective natural protection often requires a regional approach that extends beyond political boundaries, officials said. This is especially the case when trying to protect ridgeline resources that do not follow municipal borders, such as the Shawangunk ridge.

One of the goals of the program is for participants to understand how they can work to create intermunicipally to protect these resources.

"The training is a great opportunity to meet other officials and see the common issues of how intermunicipal cooperative plans might work for all," said Chip Watson, a member of the Montgomery

Board of Appeals.

"The Pace Land Use Law Center teaches local leaders about building community support for sound, land use planning," said Cara Lee, director of the Nature Conservancy's Shawangunk Ridge Program. "Their approach support the efforts underway in our region to retain rural character."

Funding for the program comes from the Hudson Valley Greenway, the Hudson River Estuary

Program, the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, the Green Assets project of the Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership, Central Hudson and from many of the area communities.

The Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership is a 10-member consortium of state agencies, nonprofit land management organizations and private landowners protecting more than 40,000 acres of the Shawangunk Mountains.