WATCHABLE WILDLIFE AT THE BASHA KILL

Eagle suns himself just above the ice. Photo by Linda J. Kantjas

American tree sparrow. Photo by Karen Miller

Screech owl in his favorite roost. Photo by Kevin Kreischer

Frozen even when you’re waterproof. Photo by Kevin Kreischer

Black bear walking on ice. Photo by John Haas

See story page 8
MAIL BAG

Dear BKAA Board,
(On Christmas Card) In the true spirit of the season, wishing you peace and joy.
Thank you for all that you do & monitor for the area. You bring each area resident Peace & Joy in every season with your vigilance for the Basha Kill & its surrounds.
With Praise & Thanksgiving, Mary & Jim Craig

Dear BKAA,
We cannot thank you enough for the scholarship for Jordan for Pack Forest this summer. We are all very excited for this adventure! I’m sure we’ll be in touch in the next few months.
Thank you once again!
Sincerely,
Dan & Holly Meyerhoff

The Community Church of Wurtsboro
February 12, 2014
Dear Friends:
On behalf of the Community Church of Wurtsboro’s Food Pantry, I would like to thank you for your organization’s recent donation of $100.00. It is organizations like yours that make it possible to provide food for people in our Town who are in need of groceries to feed their families. Without those donations, we would not be able to serve these people.
In the past year, we have had an increase of 40% residents coming to our Food Pantry. Once again, we would like to thank you for your donation.
Sincerely,
Marie Bryan,
Financial Secretary

President's Note: The BKAA compensated the Community Church for use of their hall for our Ravensbeard presentation during Wurtsboro’s Winterfest and once again for our Nature Watch orientation.

December Appeal Successfully Replenishes BKAA’s Legal Fund

Paula Medley
BKAA members and supporters are the BEST!!! Thanks to 115 generous households, contributing almost $15,000.00, our Legal Fund is restored to a level which enables strong, ongoing advocacy with 7 Peaks, Thompson Education Center, and future harmful developments. Also, invaluable partner, Friends of the Shawangunks, pledged an additional $5,000.00 to pay 7 Peaks induced expenses. The BKAA’s leadership truly appreciates receiving some “breathing room,” as it is extremely difficult to simultaneously strategize and conduct fundraising. Again, thanks to all whose big-heartedness “saved the day,” at least for now!!

CONTACT THE BKAA
Paula Medley 845-754-0743, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. email: info@thebashkill.org website: www.thebashkill.org

CONTACT THE DEC
If Mr. Bello is not available, call 24-hour Law Enforcement Dispatch 1-877-457-5680

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Mission Statement: Since our founding in 1972, our mission has been to protect the Basha Kill Wetlands and surrounding area from ecological degradation, to promote education and respect for the environment in general, and to preserve the beauty of the area.

We welcome new members who are interested in protecting the environment. Dues are $10 per person per year. BKAA is a not-for-profit corporation and donations are deductible to the extent allowed by law.
website: www.thebashkill.org • e-mail: info@thebashkill.org
Spring 2015 New Members

Steve Altman — Gloria M. Coruzzi & Douglas C. Daly — Linda Emanuel — Melissa Farley — George Gardianos
Barbara Schmitz Garriel — Caroline & Donald Harrow — John Hayes — Riley Richard Hobbs — Janet Hutter
Steve Jervis — Michael Kavanagh — Patricia Anne Kehoe — Richard Klinski — Jean Lerner — Ernie Lewis
Shaibal S. Mitra & Patricia Jean Lindsay — Bernadette Mullady — Anne O’Neill — Irene Padden — Ellen Pilipski
Joseph Pizzuto — Colleen T. Roth — Gall E. Vachon & M. Jon Rubin — Steven Rudin — Craig R. Safford
Tatiana Samoylova — Bruce Schechter — Joan Sichterman — Robert L. Wexler

Donations in Memory of Catherine Abate

Linda & Steven Abate — Chrissy & Bobby Beckles — Rudelle & Alex Canady — Susan W. & John Cioffi
Susan & Stephen Erny — Keiko Lampen — Paula & Michael Medley — Donna Perrone
Phillipsport Community Center — Christine Saward — Bob Speziale & Jack Weiser

Donation in Memory of Eddie Jones

Judy Frank

Donation in Honor of John Conrad Weiser

Jane Jordan

Donation in Memory of C. Lawrence West

Charles F. West

Spring 2015 Donors

Catherine & Michael A. Abate — Kathie Aberman — J. C. Adams — Anita Altman — Robert K. Anderberg
E. Susan & Robert T. Armistead — Paula Lazov-Baldinger & Scott J. Baldinger — Elinor B. Barber
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Robert L. Speziale — Mr. & Mrs. Matthew Stinchcomb — Sullivan County Audubon Society
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Carol Felstein & Stephen Vignet — Sandra J. Wallack — Cecilia F. Walsh — Andrew B. Weil — Dava Weinstein
2015 BKAA Calendar of Events  All activities free and open to the public!

Saturday, April 11, 8pm
**Star Walk with Bob Fiore**
Very dependent on weather! Meet at Haven Road DEC parking lot (209 side). Call Bob to register and/or check trip’s status at (845)498-9001.

Saturday, April 18
**34th Annual Basha Kill Clean-up**
9:30-10am (Registration and site assignments) Celebrate Earth Day! Enjoy a walk and fresh spring air while ridding the wetlands of debris. Garbage bags are provided. Wear boots, work gloves, and insect repellant. Bring chairs as lunch, supplied by the BKAA, will be eaten al fresco in the Haven Road DEC parking lot (209 side); also event’s registration site. BKAA merchandise will be on sale and door prizes awarded. Call Paula Medley at (845)754-0743 for further information.

Weekends from Saturday, April 18 through Sunday, June 28
**Nature Watch at the South Road Boat Launch**
Join trained BKAA Nature Watch Volunteers at the South Road boat launch to learn more about many residents of this amazing wetland. View the nesting bald eagles and other birds. Equipped with two powerful spotting scopes and lots of information, the Volunteers will help you get to know the Basha Kill a little better. Bring your children, other family members and friends of all ages for some fun in the outdoors! From 10:00am to 4:00pm every Saturday and Sunday between April 26th and June 29th. Call Maryallison Farley at 845-888-0261 or Patricia Diness at 845-386-5024 for more details.

Saturday, May 2, 8 am
**Spring Migration Warbler Walk with John Haas**
We will meet at the “Stop Sign Parking Area” off Haven Road at 8 am. Bring binoculars. We should see an array of spring migrants including warblers, orioles, and grosbeaks. We will move to the Nature Trail from there and finish up at the Main Boat Launch. The walk will last at least two hours.

Sunday, May 17, 10am
**Hike to Gobbler’s Knob with Mike Medley**
Enjoy views of a beautiful 650 acre Shawangunk Ridge property, which is also site of the proposed Bashkill Subdivision. The hike gains 450 vertical feet from the parking area to the Knob, which is almost 1,000 feet high. Wear comfortable, sturdy shoes; bring water. Trip takes two hours. Meet at the South Road fishing platform (Westbrookville end). To register or for more information, contact Mike at (845)754-0743.

Sunday, May 31, 8am
**Birding for Beginners with Scott Graber**
Experience the variety of birdlife that inhabits the Bashkill with naturalist Scott Graber. This walk will focus on the basic identification of birds by sight and sound. If you’re new to birding or have always wondered what birds exist beyond your backyard, this is the field trip for you! Binoculars are required and wear sturdy walking shoes. We’ll meet at the Haven Road DEC parking lot (Rt. 209 side). Call Scott to register and/or for additional information at 914-799-1313.

Sunday, June 7, 10am
**Happy for Herps with Bill Cutler**
Join herpetologist Bill Cutler on a search for amphibians and reptiles. Kids as well as adults love learning about them. Meet at the Haven Road DEC parking lot (209 side). Call Bill to register and/or for additional information at (845)807-0291.

Saturday, June 13, 10am
**History of D&H Canal with Gary Keeton**
Join Gary for a walk through time. Ever wonder about local stone walls and foundations? Curious about how people farmed the rocky soils or the relationship between the Basha Kill and Pine Kill? Oh, and learn about the canal, too! Meet at the DEC access road on Route 209 across from the Hometown Deli in Westbrookville. Contact Gary at (845)386-4892 for particulars.

Saturday, June 20, 8:30am
**Natural History Walk with Jack Austin**
Stroll 2-3 miles on level terrain with naturalist Jack Austin as you see and listen to what is nesting, growing, and maturing in mid-summer. Wear good walking shoes as there may be wet areas and bring insect repellent. Meet at the Stop Sign parking area, off Haven Road (South Road side). For information, contact Jack at (845)856-0706 or cell at (845)649-8720.

Saturday, July 11, 10 am
**Reprise of History of the D&H Canal with Gary Keeton**
Meet at DEC access road on Route 209 across from the Hometown Deli in Westbrookville. Contact Gary at (845)386-4892 for details.

Friday, July 31, 8:30pm
**Moonlight Canoe/Kayak Adventure**
with Scott Graber and Mike Medley
Experience the Basha Kill from a unique perspective! Must bring your own vessel. Meet at South Road Boat Launch. Should register and check trip’s status with Mike at (845)754-0743.

2015 CALENDAR continued on page 5
In Memoriam: Catherine Abate — Personal Reminiscences

Paula Medley

It is with profound sadness that the BKAA announces the passing of Catherine Abate, a remarkable woman and treasured member.

I instantly liked Catherine from our first encounter almost eight years ago at the BKAA’s informational booth during Ellenville’s Blueberry Festival. Gregarious, witty, and inquisitive, she posed questions about the BKAA’s mission and goals in her distinctive chirpy voice. Satisfied, she joined on the spot. Impressed with her intelligence, commitment and passion, I quickly identified Catherine for involvement in BKAA advocacy.

Shortly thereafter, she requested my assistance in challenging a cell tower proposed for construction next to her beloved Spring Glen Farm. Thus commenced a long-term friendship which blossomed in the intervening months as we daily conversed about relevant strategies. A quick study, Catherine needed minimal direction before independently coordinating cell tower opposition. Despite myriad setbacks and obstacles, she persevered, finally influencing the cell tower company to withdraw their application. This case certainly underscores the adage that “one person can make a difference.”

More recently she galvanized residents to battle a 4 wheeler driving school projected for their Spring Glen neighborhood. Though this undertaking was eventually approved, Catherine’s efforts significantly mitigated project impacts.

Her strong environmental sensitivity likewise was evident in frequent correspondence sent to Mamakating’s municipal boards, decrying various outlandish ventures. No one could say it like Catherine!

At our Annual Cleanup, she frequently rode with my husband, dispensing garbage bags and sundry supplies, along with encouragement, to volunteers removing debris from Bash Kill roads and parking areas.

Once, after winning an exquisite door prize, she immediately gifted it to me because she knew I fancied it.

Catherine conducted everything with pizzazz. For our Annual Meeting last October, I urged her to wear a special outfit when presenting the slate of candidates. In true Catherine form, she created a fabulous costume, replete with animal pins (see photo page 7). She was indeed the BKAA’s fashionista!

Personally, however, Catherine was my dear friend, whose joie de vivre and giving nature brightened my days. I will miss her terribly.

2015 CALENDAR continued from page 4

Saturday, August 1, 8:30 pm
Moonlight Walk with Gary Keeton
Amble along Haven Road and the Railroad Trail. Enjoy moonrise over the ridge as you discuss the area’s natural history. Meet at the Haven Road DEC parking lot (209 side). Contact Gary at (845)386-4892 for additional facts.

Saturday, August 8, 5:30 am
Sunrise Walk with Gary Keeton
Rise and shine! Enjoy the Bash Kill’s wonders from a different view. Meet at Haven Road DEC parking lot (209 side). Call Gary at (845)386-4892 for information.

Saturday, September 26, 10am
Canoe/Kayak the Bash Kill
with Scott Graber and Mike Medley
Join naturalists Scott and Mike for a late season venture on this first day of autumn. Bring your own vessel. Meet at the South Road Boat Launch. Call Mike at (845)754-0743 to register and for more details.

Sunday, October 11, 9:30am
Hike the Shawangunk Ridge with Mike Medley
Moderately difficult hike, lasting 4-5 hours. Wear comfortable sturdy shoes and bring water and lunch. Meet at the D&H Canal Kiosk at the Pat Moore Memorial Picnic Grove on Sullivan Street in Wurtsboro. Must register by calling Mike at (845)754-0743.

Saturday, October 17, 9:00am
Hike the Minisink Trail at Huckleberry State Forest in the Town of Greenville with Mike Medley
Join Mike on a beautiful 5 mile loop hike on the Shawangunk Ridge. Wear comfortable sturdy shoes and bring water and lunch. Carpool or travel in a caravan led by Mike. Meet at South Road fishing platform (Westbrookville end) at 9:00am. Absolutely must register for this trip by calling Mike at (845)754-0743.
Retiring Basha Kill manager relishes time at the wetlands

By Jane Anderson

Senior Wildlife Biologist Patricia Vissering may be saying goodbye after 30 years with the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), but she’s certainly not saying farewell to the Basha Kill.

“You can take a walk and there’s always something to see,” Vissering, who is retiring, said. “You can hold a red eft in your hand; you can stumble upon a hen mallard flapping her wings to drive you away from her babies.”

“I have the world’s greatest job,” she said with a chuckle. “Don’t let anybody know how much fun it is!”

Born in Honolulu into a military family, Vissering moved a lot during her childhood. But one thing held steady: she was always what she calls an “outside girl.” While at Iowa State University, Vissering started taking wildlife classes, and became hooked.

She took a seasonal job in 1985 in Stamford, N.Y. (in Delaware County), as a fish and wildlife technician. She participated in a creel census on the west branch of the Delaware River - her job entailed engaging fishermen in conversation, asking how the fishing was, what they were catching and where, and their opinion on the condition of the fish and the waters.

During school and afterward, Vissering continued taking seasonal wildlife jobs, but couldn’t find anything permanent. “It’s hard to live out of your car and be a wildlife bum,” she realized, so she moved to Long Island, where her family had settled. There, she switched gears and said “So long” to her dream of a wildlife career - or so she thought.

“I went to computer school at Grumman Data Systems Institute at night,” she said, “and worked seasonally with the DEC at Stony Brook.” As luck would have it, when she completed her computer studies in 1985, she was offered a job - as a fish and wildlife technician in Stony Brook. She worked there for several years, and then was promoted to wildlife biologist in New Paltz in 1990.

Her specialty was land management, where she became familiar with the Basha Kill and other areas throughout the DEC’s Region 3.

“New York State is the property owner, and I’m the property manager,” she explained. “I’m a supervisor, you could say: I’m in charge of making sure things are getting done.”

The Basha Kill has a way of “sneaking up” on visitors and making them fall in love with it, Vissering noted.

“It’s one of those things that doesn’t change, yet it’s changing all the time,” she said. “It’s based on the land itself, so it doesn’t change quickly. It’s always been a place for migrating waterbirds, migrating warblers. There’s always deer, bears, herps … lots of herps!”

As far as property management goes, the biologist said human oversight may be important, but isn’t completely necessary: “The wildlife and the land can take care of themselves without our interference.”

But when humans visit, that’s where management comes in.

“People management is really what we do,” Vissering said. “My concern is overuse by the public.”

That is why she appreciates the Basha Kill Area Association’s Nature Watch program at the South Road boat launch across from the Basha Kill Vineyards on the shores of the wetland. “If the Nature Watch wasn’t there, people would be intrusive,” she said. “They’d get too close to the eagles, and the eagles would abandon their nest. So it’s so important that the BKAA does what it does.”

34th Annual Cleanup

Paula Medley

Celebrate Earth Day by scouring and cleansing the Basha Kill wetlands of noxious debris during BKAA’s 34th Annual Cleanup on Saturday, April 18th. Registration occurs from 9:30 am to 10 am at Haven Road parking lot, where volunteers will receive site assignments, biodegradable garbage bags, door prize tickets, plus an opportunity to enter the Jane Jordan print raffle (see photo on page 7).

Members will be placed in larger groups to accelerate productivity. This system worked really well in previous years. Participants must furnish their own gloves, insect repellent, personal cleaning supplies (no running water) and chairs for alfresco dining (a limited number of rocks are available). A porta-potty will be located at the periphery of major activity. Following the actual cleanup, a sumptuous luncheon, organized by Marilyn and Bob Fiore, will be served in the parking lot, affording socialization with friends and new acquaintances, as well as time to purchase BKAA merchandise. As usual, there will be recycling stations where volunteers separate collected metal, plastic, and glass into various bins for eventual disposal at the transfer facility. All individuals are responsible for discarding their recyclables into proper receptacles.

This happening culminates in a drawing of unique donated door prizes and the raffle. It will be a fun, rewarding occasion, which can be enhanced by engaging in the BKAA Nature Watch Program, celebrating its 13th anniversary.
Raffle of Jane Jordan Print
A stunning 13-1/2x10-1/2 print of an original watercolor (20x16 framed) entitled “Phillipsport 1900,” generously donated by Jane Jordan, will be raffled off at the cleanup. Tickets are $5.00 apiece and may be purchased at the event or by mailing payment to Paula Medley, BKAA, P.O. Box 1121, Wurtsboro, NY 12790. Proceeds from this fundraiser will be placed in the BKAA’s regular account.
Winter Black Bear at the Bashakill

John Haas

On the morning of January 2nd, I went to the Bashakill to look for some new year birds. I hiked a couple of spots before going to the “Birch Trail” heading west from the main boat launch. I spoke with a couple of women at the launch and then headed out on the trail. When I reached the woods, just before the Birch Trail tower, a BIG black bear charged out of the barberries and crossed in front of me. To say I was startled is an understatement. The bear then disappeared into the barberries near the tower.

I decided to wait on the trail this time, since the bear certainly had to cross it again but hopefully farther down. That didn’t happen. I suddenly heard ice crashing. Could the bear be trying to cross the kill, which had only been freezing for a few days, so the ice was just two inches thick?

I ran to a partial opening in the trees where I was able to see the bear traverse the marsh. It broke through the ice periodically, but made quick progress across. When it reached the channel, everything changed, as the bear fell through the ice. It flailed all over, trying in vain to escape. This scenario appeared to continue forever until the bear abruptly disappeared under the water and ice for what seemed like an eternity. I was sure it had drowned.

Suddenly, it burst up through the ice! Again, it unsuccessfully attempted to “free itself.” This whole scene played out several times over the next ten minutes. I held my breath, feeling so helpless for the bear. Just when I thought “the writing was on the wall,” the bear grasped the ice and pulled out of the water. As it shook itself off, water flew twenty feet in every direction! After a while, it walked slowly toward the shore, still a hundred or more feet away. I took pictures every few seconds until it reached shore and lumbered into the woods. What an experience! This is my first January bear in Sullivan County.

I have only seen one in January once before, last January 6th at Oil City Road in Orange County. Hopefully, the Bashakill bear warms up and settles down for a long winters nap! I know I will never forget this most unexpected event.

RETIRING MANAGER continued from page 6

Lately, Vissering’s been working with game birds, particularly turkeys. The DEC traps them, puts bands on their legs (some of them also get satellite transmitters), and releases them, to track their locations and find out why their population appears to be on the decline.

“It’s just such a hoot,” she said, explaining how the field workers lay out bait, toss a net over the birds and practically have to jump onto the net before gently banding the turkeys.

The work she does is serious, but that hasn’t stopped her from having fun. Vissering has photos of herself smiling with a turkey under her arm (see page 27), and other pictures with her arms full of bear cubs. She even has been known to take selfies - with a tiny screech owl “photobombing” the shot. Does she have a favorite animal? “The one I’m with at the time,” she laughed. “They’re all my favorites.”

Nathan Ermer will be taking over Vissering’s responsibilities when she retires - which, she says, will be sometime this year, though she hasn’t set a firm date yet.

“l was thinking May, but then my coworkers said, ‘Oh, you can’t leave in May, what about goose banding?’ So now it’s the end of June,” Vissering said with a laugh.

Ermer is a forester as well as a biologist, which bodes well for the Bashakill and the rest of Region 3, Vissering promised: “The public will be excited to see in the future what Nate is planning to do.”

An Accord resident, Vissering is about an hour away from the Bashakill, which made it difficult for her to take the time to fully enjoy it when she was on the go all the time.

“Now I’m going to have the opportunity to enjoy the property as a user, not a manager,” she said. “The best thing about the Bashakill is that you don’t have to be a biologist to enjoy it. You can sit in your car, or there are two long, flat, easy trails to hike on, or you can ride your bicycle or your horse, or you can launch a kayak or canoe.”

As her recent interview for this story was winding down at the Mamakating Library in Wurtsboro, Vissering bade goodbye, stepped into her pickup truck - and headed down Pennsylvania Avenue, bound for the Bashakill.

Jane Anderson is a local freelance writer whose credits include magazines and daily and weekly newspapers. She loves to write - especially about nature - and always welcomes more opportunities to do so. She lives in Winterton with her husband, Jim, and their three children, Marty, Ellen and Tommy - all of whom love to fish, hike, bird-watch and marvel at the beauty that is the Bashakill.

President’s Note (The BKAA greatly appreciates Pat Vissering’s commitment to the Bashakill these many years, and includes this profile as our tribute to her efforts. Best of luck, Pat!)
2015 Wurtsboro Winter Festival Bird of Prey Presentation

Ellen Kalish — Director

This year, the Basha Kill Area Association sponsored Ravensbeard Wildlife Center’s Wild Bird Program at the Community Church of Wurtsboro. As long and cold as this winter was the town rallied and the people left their warm and snuggly homes to experience a magnificent day.

Inside Ye Old Community Church Hall was a cast of winged beauties, a stunning Red-tailed Hawk, a sassy Barn Owl, an explosive Barred Owl, our new addition Sequoia, the young Great-horned Owl and Bijou, the cutest Eastern Screech Owl ever. Our show is an introduction to the natural history of each of these birds and we explain how they came to live at Ravensbeard.

What were their injuries and why were they unreleasable? Each bird would have had a much different ending had it not been discovered by people like you who pay attention to what’s happening around them. These birds are the survivors of accidents that could have been fatal. An educational bird has a life because someone took the time to stop and make a phone call or three, before help could arrive. To these birds you are the heroes! Alone, we can’t save all of nature, but together we can save wildlife one animal at a time.

I have been asked, “Am I spending my time wisely?” Hmm, I don’t even have to think about this……

I chose to be a Wildlife Rehabilitator because it feels like I’m giving something back to the Earth. As it stands, I must follow my heart and this work above all has given me a sense of purpose, meaning, gratitude and love. To me, there is nothing better than working with animals. Every bird that comes through the center is our teacher. They are the essence of wildness and yet they read our intentions. Some settle in easy, others are fear on wheels; we’re given the shortest window to gain their trust and if we blow it, it’s on us. Our lives are blessed to work with some of the largest and most revered birds in the world.

As I tally my state and federal logs each year it reminds me of each animal and their individual story. In our experience, almost 70% of all intakes are injuries caused by our presence. Most common among our intakes are birds and mammals injured in collisions with cars or windows. Many of the cases we take in are struggling shorebirds that have eaten pesticide poisoned fish and amphibians. Songbirds, small mammals and reptiles caught and disfigured by our well-fed cats and mild-mannered dogs. Birds of prey and other scavengers who feed on a carcass laced with lead pellets can become sick with lead poisoning and die. These are not natural causes. We, at Ravensbeard believe it’s our duty to protect those without speech, those who have no rights or recourse.

Dwindling habitats mean more car accidents from the act of foraging, staking out territories and/or finding shelter. From mouse to mailman, every creature has an impact. By giving back to wildlife, we are making a pledge to service the circle of life in the best way we know. There are so many ways to caretake this planet from reducing personal waste to lobbying for better legislation for endangered species. No act of kindness is too small!

There is a phrase called “survival of the fittest.” A naturalist, Charles Darwin discovered this phenomenon after visiting countless countries and many continents on the ship of Captain Cook. His fear of religious persecution kept it a secret for 20 years. In 1859 he published ‘On The Origin of Species By Means Of Natural Selection’ a then radical view of what we call evolution today.

As we understand, he was scientifically trying to explain how a species could morph over thousands of years to become slightly different in appearance and yet prove to be more successful. By a mutation or birth defect a limb (for example) may be shorter or longer and may have benefitted the animal by living a longer and more fruitful life with more offspring, increasing the chances of the mutation appearing again somewhere down the genetic line, possibly creating an adaptation to reach its food more easily.

An example of evolution can be seen in some dinosaurs. Over the years bones became hollow and feathers replaced scales. Heavy teeth were shed and replaced by a lighter and equally successful beak, all brought about to aid in the search for food, shelter and safer reproduction possibilities.

Evolution and extinction are natural processes on this planet, but in these modern times, thousands of extinctions occur each year. As rehabbers, our statistics may become red flags, maybe the first to alert biologists of local outbreaks, pockets of disease or famine.

Most of us who are wildlife rehabilitators feel we need to step in with our expertise and help animals who have been injured or orphaned. We are the ones who drop everything and rush out like a fireman at any hour of the day or night. Spending countless hours transporting, feeding, cleaning, visiting vets, nursing, researching, worrying, hoping, loving and praying. And we are the ones who burst with elation when each kindred soul is released back home.

Each and every species has a purpose on this earth. We, as people are the guardians to keep the balance of nature and to ensure our survival on this big globe we call home. I believe it is “survival of the cooperative and adaptable.”

Am I spending my time wisely?

If you are interested in becoming a wildlife rehabilitator, contact us. We are licensed through the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the U.S.
WINTER FEST continued from page 9

Fish & Wildlife Service. To receive an application go to the NYSDEC website and locate Special Licenses. There is a fee of $15.00 for the home study guide and question booklets. An exam is given twice a year, 80% or more is needed to qualify and two letters of recommendation are requested. Once you’ve passed the test, there is an interview and home inspection by an officer of the NYSDEC. It is then suggested to apprentice under a licensed rehabber for 2 years to immerse yourself with hands-on experience.

For more information see www.NYSWRC.org website. New York State Wildlife Rehabilitation Council is our contact for further education and networking.

Good luck, there’s always room for more rehabbers!

Ravensbeard Wildlife Center is a not-for-profit Wildlife Rehabilitation facility specializing in birds of prey, wading birds and waterfowl. We are proud to announce it’s our 15th year of community service; our facility serves over 6 counties. Additionally, we will place any animal in need with the appropriate NYS Licensed Rehabilitator. Our job is to triage and stabilize. A vet visit may be necessary for diagnosis or X-rays and then we rehabilitate and prepare injured wildlife for a second chance.

Ravensbeard’s mission is to create awareness, care and concern to the human world; our goal is to provide medical attention and rehabilitation for all injured and orphaned species in order to return them to the wild.

Any contribution you give is a gift to the preservation of all nature. As a not-for-profit organization, your donation is fully tax deductible.

We would love to invite you to tour our center this spring and summer. For an appointment please call, text or email us. Thank you for your continued support.

Please send donations to:
* Ravensbeard Wildlife Center at 75 Turkey Point, Saugerties, NY 12477 and on the web at: www.ravensbeard.org - you can also donate through paypal
Phone 845.901.0633
Emails directed to: Ravensbeard@gmail.com

Visit our new Facebook page!!

** Ravensbeard is looking for a new home. Unfortunately, its time to fly the coop. We would love to find a secluded 2-5 acre parcel, stream or pond nearby and a modest house. Please contact us if you know of a property for sale.

Cross Country Skiing at the Basha Kill Patricia Kehoe

On Saturday, January 17, 2015, six adults led by expert skier, Mike Medley, enjoyed a 5 mile trip on the D & H Canal towpath. All dressed in layers and were glad to be outside. We met at Haven Road DEC parking lot, ready to brave 3 degree temperatures! Happy to have snow and blue skies, we anticipated a wonderful excursion.

Our group consisted of skiers with varying abilities. Mike, being an accomplished skier and teacher, enabled everyone to have fun and successfully complete the course. It was also exciting to learn the history of the Basha Kill and surrounding communities, particularly since this was my first visit to the wetlands.

I have cross country skied for at least 40 years, as has my equipment. Therefore, not surprisingly, (2 miles into our outing), my ski shoe separated from its sole! DRY ROT!! There was the sole of my shoe attached to the binding. The shoe was so well made, however, I continued walking with the others, feet warm and cozy. Consequently, a new sport was invented - Cross Country Shoeing!!

Ultimately, it was a great day. Everyone appreciated the Basha Kill’s beauty and look forward to another tour. For me, I will be sporting a new pair of shoes. Thank you Mike for your expertise and a fun-filled experience.
2015 BKAA Camper Scholarships

This year five applicants received BKAA scholarships to DEC environmental camps in the Catskills/Adirondacks and furnished requisite paperwork within the prescribed deadline. We are excited that these five candidates will enjoy DEC camp experiences that will enhance their environmental knowledge and sensitivities. Below we include BKAA mandated essays that accompanied the 2015 scholarship applications.

NATASHA DURAN

Dear BKAA,

My name is Natasha Duran and I am a Junior at SS Seward Institute in Florida, New York.

Why I am interested in the environment.

I'm interested in the environment because it is a center part of life, a beautiful entity, and a constant reminder of human negligence. I think people tend to underestimate the capability of the environment and its impact on not only our planet but also our everyday lives. People do not see the value of improving our deteriorating environment because it isn't wrapped with a pretty price tag. But I see the environment for all it entails. Without the environment in our great and wonderful earth, life would be lost. The millions of organisms that crowd this great big rock we call home would be gone.

I think the Earth is a beautiful place from the deepest part of its oceans all the way to the highest mountain and I see its value beyond what profit it can provide. I see it for the selfless life it gives to everyone and everything that inhabits it; I see it for its wonderful miracles and recognize that it needs my help. Taking an interest in the environment is displaying my interest in life outside my own and lives completely different from mine. I have a genuine interest to help the polar bears who drown as the poles become warmer and ice melts due to global warming, a genuine interest to help the environment and inhabitants whose water supplies become contaminated with toxic waste from factories producing plastic water bottles. I want to help find a way to reduce the amount of water bottles produced and consumed, thereby reducing the amount of drilling that needs to be done to obtain oil.

Helping raise awareness and solving problems like these is empowering and it's beneficial to not only humans but animals! It seems to me that their voice gets lost in all the commotion of daily life and I hope that what I end up doing with my life speaks for what they want as well. I don't want to help the environment because "it'll help me in the long-run," but because it's the right thing to do. In all honesty, however, I don't wish this is what I wanted to do. I wish that more people cared about the environment and it didn't need saving but sadly talking about the environment just isn't a "cool kid" topic nowadays. I am interested in the environment because no one else is; because nobody sees the need to help it and I am the only one who can hear its pleading calls of angst as it desperately reaches for help. I am the lone wolf who answers its calls.

JORDAN MEYERHOFF

Dear Members of the Bashakill Area Association (BKAA),

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Jordan Meyerhoff, a 16 year old boy attending Minisink Valley High School.

CAMPER SCHOLARSHIPS continued on page 12

Cross Country Glitch Cindy Coker

It was the day after Valentine’s Day and Bashakill Outdoor Educator, Mike Medley, would be leading another cross country skiing tour on a trail he had pre-groomed for the group. Cindy Coker and Fred Harding (novices) were joining Julie and Doug Stainton, Theresa O’Keefe, and Bill Crawford, all cross country ski experts and ready to brave the cold.

Wind gusts of 30 to 40 miles an hour caused the single digit temperatures to feel like minus twelve Fahrenheit. Fortunately the towpath trail Mike had selected winds its way through mature hemlocks that would shelter the brave pilgrims who prepared to venture out with him. Mother Nature further blessed the participants with a clear blue sky and a bright sun whose light filtered down through the hemlock bows and danced on the white snow.

As the group commenced their trek on silent skis immersed in the peace and beauty of the moment a glitch occurred. Cindy’s binding would not cooperate, causing the ski to come off, ending her adventure 100 yards down the path. During the prior cross country skiing event in January, another mishap had occurred when the sole of Pat Kehoe’s shoe came off, but she was able to venture onward and complete the trail.

With two such events occurring, it seemed there must be adverse forces at work. Cindy’s husband Fred attributed both mishaps to a trickle of negative energy that filtered to the surface from the dark side. Although hard to believe, there are those who dwell in the dark side, who do not appreciate the pristine beauty of one of the great unspoiled areas of our region, who do not value the efforts of the BKAA to protect and preserve it, and who therefore generate destructive vibrations.

But Cindy vowed not to allow this setback (or as Fred claims - negative energy) to deter her. The bindings were fixed the following day and the next cross country skiing trip beside the Bashakill is already in the planning.
CAMPER SCHOLARSHIPS continued FROM page 11
School in Slate Hill. I am in the 10th grade, working towards my advanced Regents diploma.

My interest in the environment developed at an early age, including backpacking overnight in Harriman and Catskill Parks from the age of 5. The mountains and wilderness have sparked something inside me for as long as I can remember. As I have gotten older I’ve branched out with my adventures in different areas, including over half a dozen backpacking trips to the Adirondacks and even a canoeing trip to Ontario. I always enjoy these trips with my father and brother. Watching my father, who is now 60, enjoy a lifelong passion with the outdoors, inspires me to do the same. I also love fishing, and often incorporate angling into my backpacking trips. With the exception of a few backpacking trips, we generally adhere to a “catch and release” policy. My favorite fish is the native brook trout. I love this fish because it’s a product of the beautiful and untamed North woods. Only such a landscape could produce such fish. Though I love our environment, there is much more I’d like to learn about it...this is why the DEC Pack Forest Camp would be of so much interest to me. I sincerely hope I am chosen for your scholarship program. Thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,
Jordan Meyerhoff

DANYLE MORGAN

Hi! My name is Danyle Morgan and I will be 11 in April, 2015. I am now in fifth grade in Mrs. Raap’s class at Hamilton Bicentennial School in Cuddebackville. I would like to go to Camp DeBruce in Livingston Manor if I am picked.

I am interested in the environment because I live in Westbrookville by the Bash Kill and I see what garbage people throw around and it upsets me. I like to go down by the water to see the fish, snakes, and birds and I do not like to see garbage that is thrown around by what grandpa calls Slob’s. We need to save our beautiful lands and animals, birds and fish and plants. I do not ever hurt any animals and do not like to see other people hurt them either or mess up the land. When we go down by the boat launch or any other spot and we see trash, we pick it up and bring it home to throw away. I like to walk in the woods with grandpa when he can. It is fun. Thank you for letting me enter this contest.

Respectfully Yours, Danyle Morgan (Danny)

MADELINE ROCHE

Dear BKAA,

My name is Madeline Roche and I am in the 8th grade at Cirekville Middle School. Nature is filled with incredible things. If you walk outside you’ll be surrounded by nature.

The environment is part of nature. People can affect the environment. It is important that people treat the areas around them in a good way and take care of nature. In nature you are surrounded by living and non-living things. There are so many things in nature that I could talk about.

One of the many amazing things in nature is the beach. Most think that the ocean is just pretty water surrounded by soft lying sand. At the beach people think of all the fun and nice things they can do. Some might want to go on a boat ride and others might want to just sunbathe on their beach chairs all day long. People do not realize that they are witnessing a great part of nature, the ocean. There is more to oceans than the nice waves and the color blue. The ocean is a huge body of saline water. Around seventy one percent of the earth’s surface is made up of bodies of water. In the ocean itself there are so many other parts of nature. There are mammals such as whales and walruses. There are tons of fish in the ocean like sharks, eels, flounder, tuna and salmon. Along with the fish there are invertebrates like snails, worms, barnacles, crabs, shrimps, and lobsters. Apart from all the animals living in the ocean there are plants, too. There is seaweed, and algae. There is also plankton, which uses photosynthesis to get its food. The plankton also helps the food chain. The ocean is just one amazing thing in nature. People need to try and not litter or pollute the ocean so that it can stay nice and clean. The pollution and litter can harm and affect every living thing in the ocean.

Another part of nature and the environment is an ecosystem. I remember when I learned about ecosystems in sixth grade and how interesting it was. Ecosystems are a group of living things that live in a certain area. The ocean is an ecosystem. The living things in an ecosystem usually consist of plants, animals, and other organisms. The living things interact with the weather, earth, soil, climate, and atmosphere in their environment. They also interact with each other. In each ecosystem all different organisms have their own job to do. This great interaction between the living things and their environment is part of the carbon and nitrogen cycle which supplies the energy that is needed for all living things.

There are some things that I personally like to do in nature. I started kayaking around four years ago. I was on a a trip to Saratoga. I was with my mom, my dad, and my friend. We decided that it would be really fun to try something new, like kayaking. While we were out on the water, it was so much fun. There were some times that were scary though, like the first few times you go out on the water and you start to tip. After we got back home my dad thought that we should buy a kayak so that we would go more often. At the time my mom thought he was crazy because we only did it once or twice. But now that we have two kayaks I am
CAMPBR SCHOLARSHIPS continued from page 12

Glad he got them. In the summer when we get a chance, we go out to the Bashua Kill and go kayaking. The first time we went we saw all these cool fish and the path was lined with tall plants. I like going there with my family. Another thing that I like to do in nature is go hiking.

My mom really likes hiking so we go a lot in summer. At first I didn't like it that much but as time went by it started getting more fun and exciting. The last and so far the best hike that I ever took was with my dad. It was in New Hampshire. We were there because it was my cousin's wedding. The hike was really long but worth it. It took about five hours. We got to walk over huge tree roots, which looked like a scene from a Disney movie. We also had to walk on rocks and take our shoes off to get to the other side of the river. There were other times that you would have to jump from rock to rock and right below you was a rushing river with tons of rapids. I fell and cut my knee, but it was fine and we dealt with that when we got to the top. When we got to the top there was a huge lake; it was so pretty. We got candy bars from the lodge to eat. On the top of the mountain there were cabins that people could stay overnight in; I thought it was really neat. When we got back to the lake we sat down and poured some water on my cut because it was really bad. As we were doing that a lady stopped and asked about it. She was so nice and gave me some band-aids so that it wouldn't get infected or worse. On the way back it was a lot quicker. It was so fun I would definitely do it again. I enjoy nature and hope people take care of it so others can witness all the beautiful sights.

RYAN WEINER

Dear Paula Medley,

My name is Ryan Weiner. I am 11 years old and in the 5th grade at Emma C. Chase Elementary School in Wurtsboro. I am interested in the environment because I enjoy outdoor activities such as fishing, snowmobiling, atving, archery, hiking, boating, shooting, and camping. From being a past student at the Homestead School in Glen Spey, I’ve learned that the environment is something that we really need to take care of, otherwise we would not be here today. While at school I participated in programs to raise funds to save the rain forest and actually purchased some acres of land in the jungle so that the trees there don’t get cut down, which gives us oxygen which is necessary to survive. I also raised money to help the school go solar and to fight against fracking. I have also visited the Bashua Kill area on class field trips and I was recently there with Ms. Kilgore from Emma C. Chase to draw the landscape.

I also spend a lot of time in Connecticut with my grandparents and have learned a lot about protecting the oceans and the life there. I have tagged horseshoe crabs as they are decreasing in numbers and scientists don’t know why. They are an endangered species and their blood is important for flu vaccines.

I am a Cub Scout crossing over soon into Boy Scouts. I love to camp and hike and I know how important it is to respect the environment. Leave no trace as I am taught.

In conclusion, when I am older I want to be a forest ranger so I can protect the environment. The environment is important to me and that is why I am interested in it.

Ryan Weiner

Susan Erny Joins Friends of Shawangunks Board

Friends newest board member provides us with a solid connection to a part of the Shawangunks that is facing the greatest threats of development, the ridge above the Bashakill Wildlife Management Area. Susan’s love for the Shawangunks dates back to the 1970s when she moved to New York State, attended SUNY New Paltz and SUNY Albany, and discovered, among other things, Sam’s Point, Verkeederkill Falls and the old Smiley Carriage Road.

In 1985 Susan and her husband, Stephen, bought a house just south of Wurtsboro, across the road from the Bashua Kill wetlands. The Ernys joined the Bashua Kill Area Association (BKAA) when threatening changes started brewing. Susan became a BKAA board member in 1990, and served for twelve years in a variety of positions, including treasurer, recording secretary and contributing writer for the BKAA’s newsletter, The Guardian.

Susan retired from her position as an elementary school teacher and librarian in June 2013. She walks almost daily near the Bashua Kill, enjoying the stunning views of the Shawangunks. She is grateful to Open Space Institute and The Nature Conservancy for making Sam’s Point Preserve a protected area for everyone to enjoy, and feels awe for the work Friends has done over the years.

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5th Annual Nonprofit Leadership Summit at Bethel Woods  

Linda Lou Bartle

On March 4th, 2015, representing the BKAA, I attended my first Nonprofit Leadership Summit at Bethel Woods Center For The Arts in Sullivan County NY. Experts and community leaders from the Hudson Valley region and New York City were present. This year’s theme was "Working Together for Healthier Communities and Improved Quality of Life". Among the 15 speakers and panelists were Dr. Anne Zahradnik of Marist College - Dept. of Public and Nonprofit Administration; Steven H. Mosenson, Esq. of The Center for Discovery; John Mondanaro of Mt. Sinai Medical Center-Louis Armstrong Dept. of Music Therapy; Dr. Gerard Galarneau of Catskill Regional Medical Center; Susan Weinrich of NYCON, and H. Aldervan Daly of New York University. The keynote speaker was March Gallagher of Pattern for Progress. In panel discussions, breakout work sessions, and networking, participants focused on vital topics such as building healthier communities, broadly partnering and collaborating with hospitals and community nonprofits; being thoughtful fundraisers, maximizing website-based donations, planned giving techniques, retirement plans for nonprofits and addressing the needs of the aging in our region. I attended two sessions, Being Thoughtful and Planned Giving Techniques.

About 75% of the summit participants were from healthcare non profit groups. The Affordable Care Act was the hot topic of the morning Session, along with a question and answer panel. I didn’t feel totally lost by this subject, considering I work in a school with many less fortunate children. The idea of hospitals reaching out to partner with nonprofits in health, wellness, the arts, the environment, housing, community development, and youth services to promote wellness, looks like a positive and hopeful future. After listening to the needs of the panelist discussions, I felt the role of the BKAA was to offer a place to get out and be healthy, educate others about the outdoors and be supportive to these groups by offering our trail maps and event calendars. To that end, I introduced myself to Dr. Gerard Galarneau of Catskill Regional Medical Center, sharing information and asking for the BKAA to be invited to the hospitals next wellness fair.

The highlight of this event was the Nonprofit Summit Innovation Award. A $5,000 cash prize intended to recognize and honor nonprofit organizations that demonstrate innovation in the areas of collaboration, marketing, organizational operations and programs. The nonprofit must be located in Sullivan County or provide services in the county or to county residents. I was very impressed with the three finalists and would like to share a little about them only because I found their hard work and dedication amazing. I believe it was a very difficult decision for the judges to pick just one recipient and know I couldn’t have made a choice easily myself.

Eat Healthy Sullivan Co. Farmers Market

This is an effort to increase access to healthy, local foods for under-served populations. The market is a Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and Women, Infants and Children -Vegetable (WIC-VF) approved market, which means that all the farmers and producers at the market are eligible to accept vouchers. Located across from the Government Center in Monticello, market day and times coincide with the day and times when FMNP and WIC-VF Vouchers are issued. Monticello is identified by the USDA as a food desert. Food deserts are defined as urban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. Instead of supermarkets and grocery stores, these communities may have no food access or are served only by fast food restaurants and convenience stores that offer few healthy, affordable food options. Web page is - http://www.catskillmountainkeeper.org/farmers_markets

Sullivan County Breastfeeding Coalition

Focused on improving population health by increasing breastfeeding initiation and duration rates, with the goal of implementing the US Surgeon General’s multifaceted approach as an effective model to improving breastfeeding rates and helping each other to create a breastfeeding-friendly community, while providing information and support. A Multi-collaborative effort dedicated to promoting and supporting breastfeeding as a key strategy to improve population-based health outcomes, at their organizations and at health care facilities, in the community and at work place. My only link to this very new coalition is - https://www.facebook.com/SCBFCoalition

The winner of this years Innovation Award! — Kingfisher Project

The Kingfisher Project is a community information and radio project based at WJFF-Radio Catskill. The project focuses on the new face of drug abuse in our communities. Project programers believe the most powerful radio segments come from those directly affected by the heroin and narcotics epidemic and by those who care deeply about them.

LEADERSHIP SUMMIT continued on page 16
BKA Cross Country Skiing See page 10
Photo by Patricia Kehoe

A red tail hawk shows off! Great horned owl in all his glory.

Wurtsboro Winter Festival Bird of Prey Presentation
See page 9 Winterfest photos by Linda Lou Bartle

Valentine’s X-Country Trip See page 11 Photo by Julie Stainton

Wurtsboro Winterfest crowd with the great horned owl.
For The Love of Dogs  Linda Lou Bartle

"Dogs come into our lives to teach us about love... they depart to teach us about loss. A new dog never replaces an old dog; it merely expands the heart." If you have loved many dogs, your heart is very big.

On a cold January day BKAA member Scott Baldinger spotted a small, collarless hound dog running around South Road on the Bashakill. Scott knew it was going to be one of those five below zero nights and couldn’t just leave him out there. It took him a while to catch him with the hound retreating each time he got close. Finally the dog laid down, belly up, and let Scott put him in the car. Scott and his wife Paula are dog lovers and did everything to keep him comfortable, extra warm and fed. They thought someone local lost a tied out dog so they traveled all around the Bashakill area, knocking on doors and even stopping at the local Wesbrookville Post Office. More local people joined in to help find the owner, using photos and sharing on Facebook, where thousands of people saw the photos and information. Not able to keep the hound dog because their own dog had special needs, the Baldinger’s decided to get him to a shelter. Scott found out you can’t just bring an animal to a shelter anymore, you have to call a control officer and they bring the pet to a shelter. The Town of Mamakating Animal Control came and picked up the sweet little dog and brought him to Walden Humane Society shelter.

I wasn’t aware of any dogs being found, I was on and off social media but was in my own little world of loss. My 13 yr old rescue dog Jasper had passed away on January 5th. She was one of two pups we took from Sullivan Humane Society 13 years ago. Spike, her sister, had passed three years before and now Jasper was gone. This was a huge blow to my husband and I. Our dogs were part of our young boys becoming teenagers and then men. They went fishing and hiking with us. They were spoiled, loved dogs and part of our family. More than just the "Dogs", they were a part of our life. Our nest has been empty of our three children for a while, but the loss of Jasper signaled the end of that whole era in time. My husband and I felt a deep loss, and at first I felt I didn't want another dog. It only took a couple of weekends in an empty house however, and I was out applying to shelters and visiting dogs in shelters around the counties. One of those shelters was the Walden Humane Society where I saw three beagle type dogs, but one with a blue tick color caught my eye. I wanted a young dog, not a puppy this time. Feeling that shelters were just bursting with older dogs I had made up my mind for an adult dog, not a puppy. This Hound dog looked perfect! I told them I wanted to see him but they said he was not available yet, that I had to wait the seven days by law because he was just found in the Town of Mamakating. “Oh! I said that's where I live, but I never asked where exactly. I asked if I could come back and visit with my husband and they said I was welcome anytime. I was so excited about him and I hadn't even held him. The next day I checked The Bashakill Facebook site that I manage for the organization and my heart dropped! There was my hound dog. I shared it to our main page on our Facebook account and thought, well if he is missed by another family then he was not meant to be for me.

Maximus was never claimed and I picked him up as soon as they would allow. "Max" is a very sweet, good natured Bluetick Beagle Mix. I would guess he was abused by an adult male and possibly crated most of the time. He had to be neutered and has food allergies. He’s getting the best care we can give him including a visit to the Sudsy Paws pet salon here in the Village of Wurtsboro. Max loves other dogs, is great with children and even sits nice for the oatmeal baths I give him to soothe his skin of the food allergies. He rides great in my jeep and loves long walks.

With the onset of snowstorm after snowstorm this winter, Max filled my days with a new hope for spring and a new happiness for Max, who might have been left in a shelter for a long time. Jasper and Spike can never be replaced, but it was wonderful to share our lives with them.

Try not let to the loss of your dog stop you from getting another one. However long it takes to heal, never let the hurt stop you from letting another furry friend into your heart. I’ve lost many dogs over my lifetime, but they are still in my heart. It would be very empty if I had stopped wanting a dog after the first one I lost. The best way to heal a hurting heart is to let another pet into it. It works every time.

LEADERSHIP SUMMIT continued from page 14

WJFF volunteers are reaching out to those people, and facilitating a community conversation by hosting public forums and broadcasting their stories, in hard-hitting broadcasts. The goal is to bring this issue into the open to stimulate public awareness, dialogue, planning, and most importantly action about this vital health issue that can impact so many lives.

Link to the full story and how it got its name http://thecatskillchronicle.com/2015/01/05/wjff-launches-programs-on-heroine-narcotics-epidemic/

It was a tough choice between these finalist as you can see. I felt they all deserved some recognition in a world where sometimes we think we might be the only people who care about our communities. I mentioned earlier that I work with high school age students whom I teach Health and Biology. They often tell me that "no one cares" as a general statement and I always rebut them with absolutely not. I care, and other people care. People care about many things and are willing to give their time and effort, without pay, without a definite outcome, but with strong conviction. It’s amazing to see how people will work so hard to help others. Congratulations to the Kingfisher Project on winning the Innovation Award at the Nonprofit Leadership Summit held at Bethel Woods!
Beavers in Paradise: An Invasive Species in Patagonia
Gil Kulick

Patagonia, the southern tip of South America shared by Argentina and Chile, has been described in 1,000 Places to See Before You Die, as “one of nature’s last virtually untrammeled wildernesses.” Indeed, Patagonia’s soaring jagged mountain peaks, stupendous glaciers, shimmering lakes and fjords, vast flocks of penguins, and truly awesome vistas are barely scathed by the hand of humankind.

But closer exposure reveals some problems in paradise. My partner (and BKAA Vice President) Anita Altman and I recently went on a two-week expedition there, culminating in a spectacular cruise through the fabled Strait of Magellan to Cape Horn, the world’s southernmost point of land north of Antarctica. One of our excursions ashore was a rugged hike on a wild island where Charles Darwin once set foot on his voyage of global exploration aboard the HMS Beagle. Although the island today is uninhabited, on our hike we encountered recent evidence of destructive, if unintended, human intervention: dams and ponds built by beavers. The water backed up behind the dams, coupled with acres of fallen trees downed by the beavers for logs to build the dam and their lodges, decimated wide swathes of this nearly virgin forest. We were told this was happening all over the region.

How did this come about? Beavers, after all, are not native to Patagonia nor, for that matter, to South America. The story is a classic instance of the law of unintended consequences. Several decades ago an enterprising pioneer sought a new source of income in this remote, isolated region. Observing that the latitude and ecology of this southern subpolar region were similar to that of central Canada, he imported a dozen pairs of beavers from Canada with the intention to establish a fur industry on the island of Tierra del Fuego. The beavers were to be raised in captivity and their pelts periodically “harvested” for the fur trade.

But to the puzzlement of the would-be entrepreneurs, the imported beavers failed to develop the luxuriant pelage they wore in Canada. Instead, their fur was relatively sparse and stiff, and not of commercial quality. Research, as it was explained to us, revealed that in their natural habitat the Canadian beavers’ grew dense and lustrous fur in part as a defense against predators, like wolves and cougars. It was the absence of any such natural enemies in far southern Patagonia, as well as a considerably warmer climate, that accounted for the unexploitably sparse fur of the imported beavers.

Having failed to establish a commercially viable enterprise, the settlers abandoned the project and released the beavers into the wild. Lacking any native predators to limit their population, the now-invasive rodents have proliferated uncontrollably to the point that they threaten to significantly alter the ecology of Tierra del Fuego and many of the neighboring islands. Efforts to cull the population through hunting have proven totally ineffectual.

The moral of the story for our region is tried and true: Before introducing non-native animals or plants into your environment, look before you leap.

MEET THE BKAA’S CONSULTANTS:
JOHN LYONS, ATTORNEY
Written by Susan Erny and John Lyons

In our showcasing of the BKAA’s consultants, we’ve previously focused on Spider Barbour, ecologist, Andy Willingham, engineer, and Dr. Katherine Beinkafter, geologist and hydrogeologist. It is with great pleasure that I introduce you to the final member of our Fabulous Four: John Lyons, an attorney who specializes in environmental law. First, an inside look at John’s most recent endeavor for the BKAA.

As you read in the winter edition of the GUARDIAN, it was attorney John Lyons, along with Andy, Katherine, Paula and wetlands specialist Norbert Quenzer, who composed the 95-page document concerning 7 Peaks last November. The main thrust of this submission addressed to Martin Brand, DEC Director of Region 3, was to provide evidence that the wetlands on the 7 Peaks project site do exceed the required 12.4 acres- in contradiction to DEC’s biologist’s findings- and that those wetlands as well as other area resources are of “unusual local importance” as noted in the DEC’s Open Space Conservation Plan. Such a designation would necessitate DEC regulation of 7 Peaks’ wetlands and would require creation of 100-foot wide buffers around them. In a conversation with John, he explained, “It was hoped that the DEC would consider the valid information presented in the document and that it would cause them to at least take another look at the wetlands in question.” John emphasized, “We would never have embarked upon the (95-page) project, knowing the amount of work it involved, unless we felt very good about the strength of our arguments.” He also spoke of his great respect for Norbert Quenzer and added that Norbert has done wetlands work for the DEC. So it’s apparent that the DEC values Norbert’s expertise. However, regardless of the clear evidence this document offered, the DEC upheld their original decision that the 7 Peaks wetlands are not within DEC jurisdiction. They responded to the BKAA with a very brief retort.

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JOHN LYONS continued from page 17

When asked about his reaction to the DEC’s pronouncement, John said, “I was immensely disappointed - not only because of their decision, but also because of the stated rationale for the determination. I don’t think they did a good job of addressing many of the compelling arguments we raised. They never mentioned the Bashakill Wildlife Management Area or the Shawangunk Ridge; the proximity of those important resources was the main reason we made the application.” Ultimately, the result is a blow to the environment.

Despite the disappointment, John made a point saying that he was very proud of BKAA’s effort to save the 7 Peaks’ wetlands. He reiterated that he would do it all over again based on the strength of the ecological case for saving those wetlands. He said, “There is no shame in losing a battle that objective data, intelligent strategy and passion for the environment compelled us to fight. I’m so proud of BKAA for not letting the risk of losing scare them away from a campaign worth fighting. Many of the most important victories in the history of the environmental movement were true David versus Goliath clashes. When you look at some of the seminal environmental struggles, for example, like the crusade to save Storm King Mountain from Con Ed, or the push to ban fracking in New York, you realize how important it is to have the courage to fight these battles even against unfavorable odds. Where would our environment be had those Davids shied away from their Goliaths? I am proud of the courage shown by BKAA on the matter of the 7 Peaks’ wetlands and I am proud to have been a part of their team.”

Lastly, since receiving the DEC’s determination, the BKAA has asked them for documents regarding 7 Peaks in accordance with the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL). Only a few have been forthcoming. As partners with the DEC, we had hoped for more. Still, the 95-page document was a brilliant and phenomenal product created by these five environmental giants. We are very grateful for their valiant efforts.

What happens next is yet to be seen, but the BKAA roars with pride for our “mane” man, John Lyons, and the great work he has done!

Following are responses to questions we posed to John.

**What first sparked your interest in law?**

From an early age, apparently two things were clear about me. One was that I was good at things having to do with reading, vocabulary and verbal skills. The other was that I was horrible at arithmetic and math. This prompted several of my elementary and middle school teachers to advise me that I should consider the law. I guess that idea took root. My plan, even as early as high school, was to eventually go to law school. I’m grateful I had the opportunity to fulfill that plan.

**Why and when did you become an attorney who represents environmental groups and defends the environment?**

I was admitted to the bar in New York State in 1986, and from then until 1994 I was an associate attorney at a firm that had an environmental and land use component to its practice. Those were still early days for environmental law and land use law, which really emerged as fields of law for the first time in the late 1970s. Environmental law emerged as a specialized field largely as a result of Federal Superfund legislation and New York State’s passage of the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA).

In 1994 I founded Grant & Lyons with my partner and dear friend, Drayton Grant (who lost a courageous battle with cancer in 2012). Being my own boss gave me the chance to dedicate my entire practice to environmental, land use and real estate law and to pick my own direction within those fields.

Drayton and I had litigated together as both adversaries and allies. I had always admired and respected her. She was a true pioneer in environmental law, having begun her practice in that area from the field’s inception in the 1970s. Before Grant & Lyons, Drayton had served as a Deputy Commissioner at the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. We found that we shared a love for the environment, for environmental activism and for using our skills to help accomplish something good. Drayton and I also valued volunteerism and we were both active as volunteers with numerous environmental and historic preservation groups. A by-product of those volunteer activities was the building of relationships within the environmental community. Through those relationships we came, over time, to be sought out by environmental groups, citizen’s groups, and other pro-environment clients. As we continued to serve those types of clients, our reputation for that kind of work grew, and continues to grow.

**What exactly does your work entail?**

In a nutshell, we help our clients, both private and municipal, to understand environmental and land use laws and help them put those laws to full and effective use to achieve their goals. My partner Drayton was fond of saying that, in a sense, we are retail teachers of civics. For example, we will assist citizens or environmental groups concerned about a proposed project to participate fully and effectively in the SEQRA environmental review process and to try to assure that lead agencies properly apply the law. We also represent municipal clients and in doing so we help them effectively use local and State laws to review development proposals and make decisions that are faithful to the law and to local comprehensive plans.
JOHN LYONS continued from page 18
Where it is required, we litigate on behalf of our clients when it is necessary to seek court review of local decisions.

When did you assume this role for the BKAA?
Grant & Lyons did some work for the BKAA back in early 2000, but our more recent work for the BKAA began approximately a year or so ago.

Over which issue?
In connection with the China City project (now called the Thompson Education Center), in the Town of Thompson. The Thompson Education Center (TEC) project has presented a variety of environmental and land use issues because of both the scale of the proposed project and because of the abundant natural resources on the land it is seeking to develop. Our role is to assist the BKAA in participating effectively in the review processes for this project as well as to make sure that the applicable environmental and land use laws are properly applied by the reviewing governmental bodies.

What other issues have you addressed in your BKAA role?
Following the BKAA’s President, Paula Medley, our firm led BKAA’s consultant team in petitioning the NYSDEC to exercise its wetlands jurisdiction over some important wetlands located on the site of the proposed Seven Peaks project on the Shawangunk Ridge.

What are some frustrations you have encountered as an environmental lawyer?
I experience my greatest frustrations when I observe environmental laws being ignored or dismissed by government decision-makers and those that have been given the responsibility for administering our environmental and land use laws. My next-greatest frustration is seeing environmental and land use laws administered unevenly, unjustly or unfairly. I consider the NYSDEC’s recent decision not to exercise its wetlands jurisdiction over the Seven Peaks wetlands to be an example of that type of frustration.

How do you like partnering with nonprofits like the BKAA?
I love it! I love being able to use my skills to make a contribution to the good works that citizens’, environmental and non-profit groups like the BKAA are doing every day to protect and preserve our environment and natural resources. It gives me the feeling that my work is doing something good and is part of a larger movement.

What is your value to groups like ours?
First, through my knowledge of the law, I am able to help empower a group like the BKAA by helping them utilize environmental and land use laws as powerful tools to achieve their goals. I am able to use my legal skills to increase the chances that they will be able to make a positive difference. Second, I bring experience. Having immersed myself in this work all over the Hudson Valley and southeastern New York for more than 20 years, I’ve been able to learn a thing or two about how to persuade decision-makers, fight a battle, inspire public support and build coalitions to help move the ball in the right direction.

How do you feel about the age-old dilemma of economic development vs. environmental protection?
Well, I could go on for a long time about this topic. The short answer is I think that we need both but development needs to be done sustainably. We need to be stewards of our environment and to protect our important natural resources. We also need to have places to live, jobs to go to, and places to shop. The key is how that relationship is managed. We need to be intelligently planning for development so that the location, scale and character of that development respects our environment and preserves the elements of community character that most of us care deeply about. Often, development isn’t inherently objectionable. What is objectionable is development that ignores or dismisses important environmental issues or impacts. We also need to bear in mind that environmental protection can be an economic driver (e.g., eco-tourism), and where that is the case, it should be seen and respected as such. Growth yes, but smart, sustainable growth.

Do you feel any connection to the Bashakill Wetlands and the Shawangunk Ridge?
I do. When I have been able to help an environmental group, it gives me a feeling that I have a special connection to the places and resources they are working to protect.

Who or what has inspired you?
The “what” that inspires me is my love for the beauty and the majesty of the natural world and my appreciation for the fascinating fabric of the environment. That appreciation has been fostered by my parents and by some of the giants of the environmental movement, like John Muir.

As far as who inspires me, in the law I am inspired by Abraham Lincoln and my late partner Drayton Grant. I find inspiring Abraham Lincoln’s intelligence, vision, honesty and simplicity in dedication to important truths. From Drayton, I draw inspiration from her love of the environment, dedication to community, her commitment to action in making our communities and environment better, her willingness to speak truth to power, and her enthusiasm for life. I try daily to carry these inspirations into my work.

JOHN LYONS continued on page 20
SEQRA Workshop Overview

Linda Lou Bartle

I represented the BKAA at the Sullivan County Partnership for Economic Development (the Partnership) second mid-winter educational conference on Wednesday, January 14 – the “Sullivan County Partnership New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) Seminar”. The Partnership advertised the event to its own “Investors”, Sullivan County Municipal Officials, as well as non-affiliated members of the public. Attendees included nearly equal numbers of municipal officials and engineers.

In collaboration with the Partnership, the event was sponsored by LeChase Construction, Advance Testing, Billig Loughlin & Baer, LLP, and Ecological Analysis, LLC.

Speakers included:

- Larry Wolinsky, Esq, Managing Partner, Jacobowitz & Gabits, LLP
- Jack Nasca, Director, Division of Environmental Permits & Pollution Prevention, New York State (NYS) Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)
- Robert Ewing, Environmental Analyst, NYS DEC
- James Bates, Managing Member, Ecological Analysis, LLC
- Kenneth D. Ellsworth, P.E., Managing Member, Keystone Associates Architects, Engineers and Surveyors, LLC
- Freda Eisenberg, AICP, Commissioner, Sullivan County Division of Planning and Environmental Management
- Terresa M. Bakner, Partner, Whiteman Osterman & Hanna, LLP
- Jacob R. Billig, Managing Partner, Billig Loughlin & Baer, LLP

The Partnership’s mission is to promote and coordinate the economic development of private business in Sullivan County to help enhance the quality of life and improve the standard of living while protecting and preserving the environment.

The kick-off speaker was Larry Wolinsky, Esq., who provided a valuable overview for those new to the SEQRA. In concert with his lecture, Mr. Wolinsky also offered attendees a one-page SEQRA Basics guide as well as a one-page guide to five basic SEQRA legal concepts. Mr. Wolinsky reviewed both of these guides in detail, including not only explanation of legal basis, but helpful ways for applying his guidance. The two guides serve as handy tools for future use.

Mr. Jack Nasca and Mr. Robert Ewing, from the NYS DEC provided a thorough overview of the DEC’s on-line “Mapper” tool. Mr. Nasca offered history, purpose, and an explanation of how the tool is designed to work with the DEC’s Environmental Assessment Forms and Workbooks.

Following his presentation, Mr. Ewing conducted a live demonstration of the Mapper tool. He explained and showed the group how to navigate to the tool online, how to navigate within the DEC website, and also mentioned helpful hints and tips to ensure proper functioning of the tool. The session was extremely useful for developers, municipal staff, and environmental/civics groups, as well.

Following the DEC presentation and demonstration, Mr. James Bates of Ecological Analysis discussed the importance of using checklists when building and presenting SEQRA packages. As part of his discussion he explained some potential pitfalls of making assumptions when using the DEC Mapper Tool. Specifically, he pointed out that just because the Mapper Tool does not give a “hit” regarding a certain property, it is not safe to assume that there is not data for the site. For example, the Mapper links to DEC data, but not to Army Corps of Engineers information.

Following a break for dinner, Ms. Freda Eisenberg, Commissioner of the Sullivan County Division of Planning and Environmental Management (DPEM) presented an overview of the county’s role in review of development process and actions. Ms. Eisenberg explained that NY is a “home rule” state, and as such the County’s role in development decisions is largely advisory.

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JOHN LYONS continued from page 19

What are some of your other pastimes?

I love the outdoors. I am a hiker and a kayaker during the spring, summer and fall and an observer of wildlife during those activities. I love dogs and can’t imagine life without them. I have two Bernese Mountain Dogs who love walking and being outdoors with me in all kinds of weather. I’m a skier in the winter. Regular meditation and contemplation are also important to me. I am an avid reader of good historical, espionage and crime fiction and I’m a devotee of British television drama. I am also an amateur pen and ink artist.

Have you ever thought about doing something else?

Not too seriously. I enjoy writing and I’ve thought about that from time to time. Sometimes I think about someday taking another role in the environmental world, one that would allow me to continue to help the environment, but that would give me a break from environmental legal combat. But so far these have been mostly daydreams. The pace of my practice doesn’t leave time for much more than that.
SEQRA continued from page 20

The county does have two roles: a mandatory role in review of GML (general municipal law) 239 actions and an optional role in providing technical assistance, where needed.

Mandatory review occurs so that the County can consider inter-community and county-wide impacts of any given project. Ms. Eisenberg defined and explained the reasons for referral to the County. She also explained exactly what should be included when a package is submitted to the County.

Following Ms. Eisenberg’s presentation, Ms. Terresia Bakner, a Partner at Whiteman Osterman & Hanna, LLP, offered tips for streamlining the SEQRA Process as well as common pitfalls to the process. Many of her streamlining tips were well-founded, perhaps even obvious. For example, she advised to start early, identify the type of action required, use standard checklists and form-letters, and use short-forms where possible.

On the other hand, Ms. Bakner seemed to promote “streamlining” at the expense of full, open, and independent discourse. Ms. Bakner, for example, advocates combining all possible public hearings into a single hearing wherever possible. While, on the surface, this could make the process go faster, it presumes that speed is the ultimate goal. In fact, over-focus on a speedy process may seem advantageous to applicants and their engineering/legal counsel. However, hasty, poorly researched projects that have been rushed past the public often return in the form of unhappy citizenry, dysfunctional traffic arrangements, poor drainage, freezing sewers, and the like. These types of problems negatively impact the public, the Government, and also the applicant. One could reasonably conclude that the only “winners” would be lawyers and engineers who are hired to help resolve legal disputes and place blame.

Well sequenced and methodical review processes may, at times, feel sluggish and cumbersome, but these processes are designed precisely to protect the citizenry and applicants. These methods allow planning boards, zoning boards, and the public that they serve to assess plans, approaches and their impacts in a strategic sequence, ensuring that all factors are given due consideration. Most important is to understand that the goal of the planning and zoning boards is not speed, but thoroughness and accuracy in evaluation of all pertinent factors, on behalf of the citizens, not just the applicant.

More interesting was Ms. Bakner’s recommendation that Towns consider creating a “Generic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)” at the Town-Wide level as part of their Comprehensive Zoning Plan. While this is an interesting concept, it would seem to apply only in Towns where the development strategy is quite fixed and not subject to change. Ms. Bakner gave examples of locations where this has proven beneficial, for example, towns which were actively seeking specific types of development in specific sections of Town. Examples would include Towns attempting to establish certain land for a specialized use, such as technology, medical, educational, shopping, manufacturing, or entertainment parks.

Ms. Bakner also suggested that Town Planning and Zoning Boards might find it useful to assign each new project to one member. That assigned member would be responsible to conduct advance research, advise other members of key points, and perhaps act as the “lead” on that project.

Mr. Jacob Billig gave the final presentation of the evening, offering an overview of several cases relevant to SEQRA. He spent the majority of his time discussing the Kittredge Decision. Mr. Billig seemed to imply that the Board’s decision in this case would have been upheld if they had only done a site visit. When asked by a member of the audience if a site visit would essentially protect the Board, no matter how thorough their visit/findings, Mr. Billig answered in the affirmative.

Of interest, however, Mr. Nasca, of DEC took immediate and forceful issue with Mr. Billig’s position, noting, essentially, that a site visit is not a box to be checked off, but a process to be pursued. You can’t justify your position by simply stating that you’ve done a site visit. You need to explain, when, where, how and who conducted the visit, and be precise with respect to what is observed (location, quantity, quality, etc). Finally, the site visit documentation must explain how you have assured that you did a thorough and complete assessment. It is essential that the individuals conducting the site visit demonstrate that they are qualified to do it and that they are thorough and impartial in their approach, findings, and analysis.

Mr. Nasca’s response to Mr. Billig was, perhaps, a perfect summation of the entire evening. The interchange demonstrated clearly that the interests of a lawyer and his client may not be the interest of the citizens. Hopefully this exchange showed the audience how it is incumbent on the members of our municipal boards to:
• slow the process down, not speed it up;
• walk through the required processes, not merge them; and
• research, analyze, document, and report, not just check boxes in checklists.

In short, it is incumbent on the municipal board members to represent the interests of the people, not the interests of a paying special interest.

The training session contained a wealth of information, provided that the listener was wise enough to consider the interests and motivations of each presenter.
SEQRA Workshop Did Not Live Up to My Expectations

Cecilia Walsh

On Jan. 14, 2015, I attended the SEQRA SEMINAR OFFERED AT BERNIE’S RESTAURANT, SPONSORED BY SULLIVAN COUNTY PARTNERSHIP FOR Economic Development. As a resident of Mamaroneck, and coordinator of the Concerned Residents of Winterton, I was interested in better understanding the purpose and process known as SEQRA, OR State Environmental Quality Review Act. Two developments in Mamaroneck - Seven Peaks and Learning Tree - currently are involved with the SEQRA process.

Sadly, this seminar failed to meet my expectations. It should have been advertised as a Refresher Course on SEQRA. While a booklet was handed out at sign-in, it was missing the first page; no one mentioned, at the beginning of the seminar, that it was on the center of each table. I started to take notes, and was frustrated by the quick pace, and the use of acronyms like SWPPP, EAF, EIS, FEIS, without any mention of what they stood for. Numerous times a reference was made to a KITTREDGE Decision, without any indication of what it was about. Only at the end of the seminar did I see that this court decision had been attached to the end of the booklet provided.(No mention of this was made at the beginning of the seminar)

I was particularly interested in what one of the main speakers, attorney Terresa Bakner, had to say, since she represents the developer for Seven Peaks, and Learning Tree. In my opinion, her presentation encouraged a developer-friendly and streamlined SEQRA process. She opened by saying that she would talk about "stopping SEQRA from becoming a life sentence." Another comment Bakner made was "the longer it takes, the worse it gets!"

She counseled to "resist the impulse to take steps that are not required by law," and to "use the short EAF form to streamline the process," making sure it is defensible in court. About the EAF (Environmental Assessment Forms), she stated that "they are not perfect; let it go," but "Don't neglect to fill out and sign the forms." Bakner went on to recommend written scoping for public comments, as well as combined public hearings on DEIS (Draft Environmental Impact statement) and on rezoning/site plan/subdivision actions, since having multiple public hearings on a project can contribute to delay and confusion. She recommends a GEIS (Generic Environmental Impact Statement), and wants to see reform, where there will be mandatory timeframes in SEQRA (which currently do not exist) . She advised against adding extra steps - "They don't improve the SEQRA process."

While I was surprised at Bakner's decidedly developer-friendly presentation at this seminar, I was impressed with what Jack Nasca, from the N.Y.S. Dept. of Environmental Conservation, had to say. He spoke about the revised Environment Assessment Forms, and the EAF Mapper. He took the time to show how to use the Mapper on the computer website, and recommended first using the mapper, and then filling out EAF forms. He also spoke about the use of Google Earth. I found his presentation very informative, and given at a nice pace. In future seminars on SEQRA, I hope more of the speakers will be like Mr. Nasca. I am certain I could have learned more if the speakers had been aware of the audience, like Mr. Nasca. He was the consummate educator, who wanted to be sure his audience understood him.
“High Points”  
By Roger B. Swain

A thin mantle of gritty soil partially covered the rough, gray granite ledges of the law hill and provided roothold for sweet fern, goldenrod, and New England asters. Patches of thin-stemmed grass and blueberry bushes spread across the open summit: To the east, looking out over the tops of the scrub oaks and chokecherries below, you could see the city sprawled in the sunlight and, beyond, the bright water of the harbor and the hazy silhouettes of islands in the distance. A hundred feet overhead a red-tailed hawk regularly circled, its eyes sharp for snakes.

The blueberries, growing in a dense copse underfoot, were the low-bush kind, with the succulent, light-blue fruit. In season whole families and their dogs hiked up on Saturday afternoons, bringing baskets and buckets. Children who were too young to travel under their own power rode on their fathers’ backs. Deposited in the middle of a particularly good patch while others picked, many of these youngest got their first taste of the great outdoors. And in the process the hilltop was indelibly stamped on their psyches as the purple stains on their clothing.

The hill still exists, but its presence is better in memory. Many years ago someone claimed the ground by building a house on the very top. Others followed immediately. The shortage of water and surfeit of rock that had kept away permanent residents for centuries were in the end conquered by iron pipe and dynamite. Surveyors sliced the land into lots, bulldozers made short work of the boulders and the blueberries. A maze of dead-end streets was laid out and lined with contemporary homes, each with its lawn on imported topsoil, each with a slick black drive and multi-car garage. The hawk is gone now, and the people who once picked blueberries under his supervision are none of them young.

For Sale signs appear up there from time to time. The view is still a big selling point for the homes and prospective buyers gaze out over the house tops below, pointing out the sea to one another. But the hill is only a fraction of what it once was and the view has also depreciated.

By now most of us are accustomed to witnessing local hills engulfed by the human tide. Subdivisions seem to settle on summits like seagulls on pilings. We might grieve more over the loss of our childhood haunts but for the discovery of more distant peaks. By the time the hills of first memory are built over we have moved on to higher, wilder ranges. There we can keep close company with clouds or walk in the preserves of ancient gods or watch as climbers with a sure grip on rock and fear mount the most forbidding pinnacles of all.

Why should we be drawn to heights? Our reasons are elusive and varied. Sir Edmund Hillary was being flippant when he replied to a reporter’s question about why he climbed Mount Everest with “Because it was there.” If any single cause unites us it is the sanctuary that high points offer, an escape from the leaking gutter, the opinion poll, the leveraged buy out. From the top the world falls away.

This same serenity extends even to those who contemplate mountains from below. “Mountains are the beginning and the end of all natural scenery,” wrote John Ruskin, England’s first professor of art. They catch the last rays of sunlight, the first snows of winter. Even from a distance they are a tranquil sight, soothing and calming, and relaxing us all.

The Japanese, connoisseurs of landscapes, have learned to see snow-capped mountains covered with mist and dotted with small caves in single stones called suiseki. Someday we too may have to find solace in such tight quarters. But for now lower powers of magnification suffice. Anyone, young or old, can turn a small hill into a large mountain. All that is required is an empty summit and imagination. With no sure measure of scale beyond variable rocks and trees, distances and heights can be enlarged at will. Ledges become escarpments; crevices, canyons.

What is lost when a ski-lift, a microwave tower, or a house is built on a hilltop is this freedom of perspective. With a yardstick to measure things by we are forced to accept the dimensions of reality. Buildings, how ever utilitarian, don’t simply occupy wild ground; they fetter its spirit.

The more concentrated our population, the more precious the remaining unoccupied and unharnessed heights. As a guide to their care we might do well to borrow from technical rock climbers, men and women who climb near-vertical rock faces with the assistance of ropes. Years ago these ropes were clipped to pitons, metal ringbolts hammered into cracks in the rock. In many instances the pitons were left in the cliff where they served not only as a constant reminder that the face had already been climbed but as a route map as well.

Today climbers practice what they call “clean climbing,” a technique pioneered by the British some twenty-five years ago on some of the more overused mountains in Wales. Instead of being attached with pitons, ropes are threaded through loops or slings that hang from small chunks of metal. These chunks are wedged into crevices where they will bear the climber’s weight, but can be removed easily when the last climber on the rope passes by. The result is a rock face as clean as the glaciers left it.

Let us try this ourselves, not just on distant peaks or in national parks, but on those small hills near home, the ones that we grew up on, the ones that we will die looking out upon. We have become masters of topography. We can. rearrange the landscape to suit our fancy, and we can ‘build wherever we please. But having learned to move mountains, we should not forget that mountains still have the power to move us.
7 Peaks Update

Paula Medley

Although 7 Peaks has not appeared before Mamakating’s Planning Board since the public input session on November 18, this venture inches forward with several major occurrences.

On December 19, DEC denied BKAA’s petition that 7 Peaks wetlands be ruled Dec regulated, which would have mandated 100 foot wide wetland buffers. To review, on November 10, the BKAA had submitted to DEC Region 3 Director Martin Brand a 95 page document whose purpose was to:

• provide evidence and analysis which indicate that the wetlands on the site do, in fact, exceed 12.4 acres.

• provide evidence and analysis which indicate that two or more areas of wetland should be treated as a single wetland for regulatory purposes because they are connected and function as a single unit.

• establish that the wetlands, aside from the issue of their acreage, are worthy of coming within NYDEC jurisdiction pursuant to Part 664.71(c) of the regulations because they are wetlands of “unusual local importance.”

DEC’s primary justification for their dissent was that DEC biologist Douglas Gaugler based his wetlands determination upon field observations while BKAA specialists, denied 7 Peaks access, relied on advanced mapping technology. Incredibly, DEC’s response never referenced the Bashakill Wildlife Management Area or Shawangunk Ridge, whose connections to 7 Peaks wetlands were central to the BKAA’s case. The following passage, extrapolated from DEC’s findings, underscores this point.

C. DEC Declines to Exercise Its Discretionary Jurisdiction

The Commissioner of the DEC also has the discretion to determine that freshwater wetlands have “unusual local importance for one or more of the specific benefits set forth in subdivision seven of [Environmental Conservation Law] section 24-0105.” ECL 24-0301(1)(a). Such specific freshwater wetland benefits include, among others, flood and storm control, wildlife habitat, protection of subsurface water resources recreation, pollution treatment, erosion control and open space. ECL 24-0105(7). DEC staff have thoroughly reviewed the information submitted with the petition. There is no question that the subject wetland provides some of these valuable wetland benefits. However, these benefits can be attributed to nearly any wetland and there is no evidence to suggest that the wetlands benefits provided here rise to the level of warranting ULI designation.

Also, while foiling DEC for pertinent data, we acquired an email from 7 Peaks attorney Terresa Bakner to DEC personnel (see Bakner letter). Several of her points were inaccurate and overstated. Most importantly, though, was the correspondence’s overall tone, especially when one considers that two months later, Ms. Bakner was the headliner at a State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) seminar sponsored by the Sullivan County Partnership for Economic Development, and others.

Unfortunately, there are few avenues for rebutting DEC’s decision. The Wetlands Appeals Board, where we may have proceeded, is now defunct. Urging DEC Commissioner Joe Martens to conduct an administrative hearing or filing an Article 78 lawsuit against DEC is expensive and will probably yield the same result.

Nevertheless, the BKAA would not have acted differently. As a wetlands group, we drew “a line in the sand” and fought for our beliefs. BKAA experts and leadership contend that we had compelling arguments. We are proud to be an action-oriented organization, unafraid to take risks or lead difficult campaigns, which ultimately enhances our credibility.

Special thanks to our invaluable partners Catskill Mountainkeeper, Concerned Residents of Winterton, Friends of the Shawangunks, Orange County Audubon Society, and Sullivan County Audubon Society, for writing letters supporting the BKAA’s DEC petition.

Additionally, the BKAA persists in facilitating NY-NJ Trail Conference’s proposed building of a 7 Peaks trail, along with advocating for Orange County Land Trust (OCLT) to hold conservation easements on 7 Peaks Community Open Space Areas. To that end, Paula Medley addressed the OCLT board on January 8, successfully encouraging OCLT to consider accepting easements.

That’s all for now. Stay tuned for future updates in BKAA Alerts.
Correspondence from 7 Peaks Attorney Terresa Bakner to DEC, Region 3 Challenging BKAA Efforts to Have 7 Peaks Wetlands Named DEC Regulated

Wednesday, November 19, 2014

To: DEC Regional Counsel Zackary Knaub and Permits Administrator Daniel Whitehead

Dear Zack and Dan,

I understand that a local environmental group, the BKAA, has through their counsel, Grant and Lyons, submitted a request for your Department to overrule a decision made by DEC staff Doug Gaugler that certain federal wetlands and drainage ways located on my client’s property are not NYSDEC regulated freshwater wetlands pursuant to ECL Article 24. Please be advised that my client, Mountain Road Preserve LLC, who owns the property which comprises over 600 acres in the Town of Mamakating, strongly objects to this request.

The wetlands on the site are not mapped and the project has been the subject of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement and public hearing. DEC has been an involved agency in the review of the project. In fact, in December of 2013 we submitted a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) on the project which the Town of Mamakating Planning Board has under review. The project has been scaled back and redesigned several times to address issues raised in the EIS process. Currently no individual permits are required from the Department. Of course, the project will require a general SPDES stormwater permit and the Town of Mamakating, we are advised, is an MS4.

In spite of our best efforts to work with the BKAA in numerous meetings and discussions, as well as providing them with any information that they have requested, the BKAA chose to submit this information without providing my client with any notice thereof or even a courtesy copy. Last night in the Town of Mamakating, the Planning Board chose to have a public comment session that degenerated into slurs against my client and against the Hasidic Jewish community in nearby Bloomingburg.

Regardless, my client intends to continue with this second home luxury development (48 homes on lots over five acres on over 600 acres) which has no relation to the Villages at Chestnut Ridge in the nearby Village of Bloomingburg. In the event that the Department decides to entertain BKAA’s request, I am writing to you as the representative of the property owner, to ask for an opportunity to respond to the BKAA’s request to designate wetlands on my client’s property as DEC Freshwater wetlands. I believe that the project’s environmental experts, Terrestrial Environmental Specialists, who accompanied Mr. Gaugler on his site visit, which resulted in his determination, will be able to clarify or refute many of the statements made in the BKAA’s report.

You should know that the BKAA is trying to use this request to further delay the Town Planning Board’s acceptance of the FEIS. Certainly, this situation highlights the need for SEQRA reform, as the environmental review for this project is starting to feel like a life sentence.

If there are any questions I can answer or any information I can provide concerning the project in the interim I will be happy to do so.

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Very truly yours,

Terresa M. Bakner
Update: Thompson Education Center (TEC)/China City of America

What is TEC’s Scope? After nearly two years, there is still no satisfactory answer and will not be unless the “elephant in the room,” the development’s conflict with zoning, is resolved by Thompson officials. Until then, TEC is not a credible project, being all show without any substance.

Nevertheless, Sherry Li and Company persistently overstate TEC’s viability. For example, they sponsored a “meet and greet” with contractors and subcontractors, promising JOBS, JOBS, JOBS. Their subsequent paid advertisement, published in the Times Herald-Record, and the Sullivan County Democrat on December 26, 2014, touted questionable employment opportunities (see accompanying ad). Paula Medley countered TEC’s disingenuous promotion in a “My View” printed in the Record, Democrat, and Shawangunk Journal (included herein).

The applicants’ “steamroller” approach was curtailed on February 3, when Thompson Town Board (board) did not authorize Town Engineer Dick McGoey to prepare a map, plan, and report for TEC to determine feasibility of sewer service for their proposed school/college. The board deemed TEC’s appeal “premature” and claimed “there were still too many questions” (presumably related to that aforementioned elephant). Undoubtedly, the board’s decision was influenced by correspondence from the BKAA, Yankee Lake Preservation Association (YLPA) and others (see YLPA letter).

In December, 2014 Thompson Education Center CEO Sherry Li purchased Simon Gelb’s 568 acre lot in Thompson plus adjacent 5-acre Fallsburg Renner Rd Lot for over $9 million. She bought the Fallsburg lot outright but Parkwood CEO Simon Gelb holds a $6.9+ mortgage on Lot 26-1-6 in Thompson. Terms of the Mortgage Agreement (Instrument # 2014-8329 recorded 12/18/14 at Sullivan Clerk’s Office) reveal that if Ms. Li, the Mortgagor, cannot satisfy the terms of her $6.9 million mortgage by paying it off all at once, the only way she can obtain partial releases and build in phases is to first subdivide off a portion or portions of the site each time she wants to build another phase in accordance with Pietrzak’s 5/11/14 Phase Map divided into 10 +/- Phases - and that Parkwood, LLC, the Mortgagee, in turn, is to help facilitate the subdivision process!

Please note that Project Engineer Vince Pietrzak had drafted this Phase Plan Map-depicting 10 +/- Phases/Subphases of the project - two weeks before Ms. Li filed her May, 2014 Thompson Education Center Application & EAF seeking only site plan approval to build a school/college facility (and millions of sq. ft. of development) on a remote, undeveloped 568 acre RR-2 site off Wild Turnpike (owned at the time by Parkwood, LLC) and giving no indication the land was to be subdivided. While we’ve known all along the project was to be built in Phases, TEC has never given any indication they planned to subdivide.

Failure to Disclose Intention to Subdivide: On the May, 2014 Application & EAF, TEC requested site plan review without also asking for subdivision approval. Pietrzak’s May, 2014 Phase Map (that is now to be used as a master plan to subdivide the premises) has never made its way into the project file. Nor have any documents been amended (to request subdivision approval) in the 2 months since the mortgage was recorded on 12/18, thereby withholding crucially important information from Town officials.

Segmentation: Consulting Planner Bob Geneslaw had previously advised the board to restart the SEQRA Review due to concerns about segmentation on China City and these new revelations suggest that improper segregation is continuing to occur. From here on in, the scope of the review will have to be broadened considerably because -in order to address all the cumulative environmental impacts associated with TEC subdividing off 1 or 2 lots at a time, plus the need to address development plans for Simon Gelb’s 1,165 contiguous acres in Mamakating (since he holds a $6.9 million mortgage on Lot 26-1-6) - a full environmental review will therefore require the Planning Board, as lead agency, to address all the steps and environmental impacts of the entire action.

Sullivan County Department of Planning & Environmental Management (DPEM)

DPEM & DEC’s Concerns: It’s hard to imagine the DPEM & DEC allowing this ecologically significant site containing most of Harlen Swamp to be cut up into 10 lots (see Phase Map) considering that in October, County Planning Commissioner Freda Eisenberg would not even approve a 2-lot subdivision on this site over concerns about damage to the wetlands from setbacks, access roads, etc. that could result from subdividing. And in his scathing Dec ’07 Lead Agency Determination letter on Mr. Gelb’s proposed Kingwood project (in Thompson and Mamakating), former DEC Commissioner William “Pete” Grannis warned of irreparable damage to these wetlands from such a massive “ex-urban” subdivision on this site, the same RR-2 site where Sherry Li now inappropriately proposes a school with millions of sq ft of development.

Update: TEC continued on page 28
For the Love of Dogs
See page 16  Photo by Linda Lou Bartle

Pat Vissering banding a wild turkey See page 6

Beavers in Paradise
See page 17

Meet John Lyons  See page 17

Beaver dam and pond in Tierra del Fuego.  Photo by Dannie Lai
Update: TEC continued from page 26

Supervisor Rieber has recused himself on TEC because he and his family own adjacent land, so Councilman Richard Sush will take the lead in this matter. So, in light of these new revelations, hopefully the developer will be required to start the review process over again, as Bob Greenlaw advised, and candidly apprise Town officials as to their development plans, and come up with a new proposal that complies with Rural Residential -2 zoning and density guidelines.

Notably, the Town of Fallsburg, where TEC owns five acres, recently issued a stop work order preventing developers from completing a road leading to their site intended for boring deep hole test pits for soil studies. Initially, Fallsburg believed this road would provide access to a single family residence, but later discovered it was to be a major “jumping off point” for TEC’s huge endeavor, which was in the midst of SEQR review with an adjoining town as lead agency. Subsequently, Fallsburg’s Code Enforcement Officer indicated “hold the horses” and suspended operations. To continue, TEC likewise will require permits from the Army Corps of Engineers and DEC.

TEC is taking us on quite a ride. Stay tuned for more information via BKAA Alerts.

PAID ADVERTISEMENT Appeared in the Dec. 26, 2014 Times Herald-Record and Sullivan County Democrat

China City of America can assist the struggling economy of Sullivan County

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Sullivan County currently has an unemployment rate of 6.6% which is above the national average of 6.2%. Based upon this rate, Sullivan County is ranked 47th of 62 Counties in New York State. Furthermore, the labor force has dropped from 35,474 in August of 2013 down to 31,703 in April of 2014, which is a decrease of 10.6%.

Unemployment is calculated by finding the percentage of people unemployed out of the labor force, so this drop in people looking for work could affect the calculation.

All of the towns located within Sullivan County have populations below 20,000 and are considered Targeted Employment Areas (TEA) by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The Immigration Act and Nationality Act of the U.S. have ruled that all EB-5 investors must invest over $500,000 into a new commercial enterprise in TEAS in the US. that creates ten full time jobs for U.S. Citizens and residents. This EB-5 investment immigration program will create many job opportunities for American citizens that are currently enduring tough economic conditions. While the EB-5 program allows foreign investors a chance to receive permanent resident cards, they will not be issued until ten jobs are proven to be created through their investment.

According to a recent study done by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the economic growth among upstate cities is projected to lag behind most of the country through 2020. The rate of economic development in upstate cities has fallen far behind that of most districts in the U.S., continuing to perform below the national level.

A Brookings Institute study has showed that the percentage share of total private employment and jobs from foreign-owned enterprises in the cities have remained below the median. These lackluster numbers in private employment with foreign owned businesses can grow given an opportunity to increase foreign investment in the region.

According to Sherry Li, the China City of America projects are located in Sullivan County, a county in upstate NY. The initial development of the education center, located in the town of Thompson, would work with famous colleges from US and China to develop a high-end and State of the Art high-tech university community in Sullivan County. These would include a Business School, a College of Film & Arts and other popular education programs, as well as related ancillary facilities.

The multiple phases of the project will include classroom buildings, student dormitory apartments/townhouses, faculty houses, a college inn, a college library, museums, an art center, a student conference center, a stadium, indoor/outdoor recreational facilities including playgrounds.

In tough economic times, this project will bring an influx of many jobs to Sullivan County. Initially and throughout the project, many construction and real estate workers will be employed. The construction sector jobs include general contractors and subcontractors, such as road workers, excavators, well drilling specialists, wood processors and millers, waste and sewer treatment professionals, plumbers, masons and concrete workers, residential and commercial house builders, gas and oil infrastructure professionals, HVAC professionals, and suppliers for materials. This wide array of professionals exhibits the breadth of this project and the large array of local workers and business owners that can benefit from the labor and materials required to complete it. Once the project is complete, there will be many operational jobs at the education center, including but not limited to professors, instructors, school book store, shop keepers, chefs, landscapers, cleaning, maintenance workers and security guards.

Last Year, Foreign Students contributed about $24 billion dollars to the U.S. economy. International education programs do much more than advance cultural enrichment, they also are an economic boon to communities that host foreign students.

Aside from the jobs directly and indirectly created from the project and the day-to-day operations on location, there will be an induced effect throughout the community. The student’s spending, new workers and resources required to run the education center will increase demand greatly for local goods and services, benefiting economy of the local community.

As of recently, there has been an increasing number of local local businesses contractors, sub contractors, suppliers, vendors and residents signing up and coming to show support for the project because it has the potential to spur economic growth, job creation, and to increase the amount of visitors to the region.

Paid for by Thompson Education Center
BKAA Rebuttal to Thompson Education Center Paid Advertisements in Times Herald-Record and Sullivan County Democrat

Paula Medley

A flawed paid advertisement (12/26/14) by Thompson Education Center (TEC), formerly Thompson Learning Center and China City of America compels this response by the Basha Kill Area Association (BKAA), a Sullivan County based environmental group whose mission since 1972 “has been to protect the Basha Kill wetlands and surrounding area from ecological degradation, to promote education and respect for the environment in general and to promote the area’s beauty.”

Concern that drainage from TEC’s site flows into the Bashakill Wetland System, recommended as a priority conservation project in the Draft 2014 New York State Open Space Conservation Plan (Plan), has prompted the BKAA to challenge this venture, in its various guises, for 1 1/2 years.

Significantly, this ad not only ignores the Basha Kill connection, but omits referencing the Harlen Swamp Wetland Complex, a unique ecosystem, encompassing 146 acres of TEC’s 573 acre property and listed as a conservation priority in the 2009 Plan for providing important habitat for varied wetland species. Notably, the Plan is jointly informed by New York State’s Department of Agriculture and Markets, along with its Departments of Transportation, State, and Environmental Conservation Climate change and other markers dispute the notion that we can continue whistling away at prevailing natural resources, like the aforementioned, without negatively influencing our quality of life and, indeed, our very survival. Therefore, excluding discussion of these pertinent assets in TEC’s recent public relations campaigns noteworthy.

Further eroding TEC’s credibility is sponsor’s determination to seemingly build on every available square inch of land that is not wetland or a wetland buffer, yielding a proposed development totaling 4 1/2 million square feet in the Town of Thompson’s most restrictive zoning district, rural residential, where such high density construction is prohibited.

Moreover, although EB-5’s investment immigration program may create employment opportunities, TEC currently has NOT been approved as an EB-5 Regional Center.

In its ad, TEC also invoked authority from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to support a contention that project approval would be in Sullivan County’s best interest. Treatment of BLS figures, however, is revealing. Sullivan County, like many New York State counties, has a seasonal economy. High and low levels of its labor force occur each year during or near the months of August and April, respectively. Presenting as evidence of long-term decline a comparison between April 2014 and August 2013, seriously questions sponsor’s fidelity to any interest but its own.

So, for TEC to advance considerable wide-ranging job possibilities at this juncture is false advertisement for several reasons. First, the endeavor’s massive scope is disallowed by town zoning. Second, TEC is only in the formative stage of undergoing the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) process, which will be arduous due to presence of the Harlen Swamp and Bashakill Wetland System. Requisite permits cannot be obtained without SEQR completion. Lastly, TEC is NOT an EB-5 approved site.

Clearly, sponsor’s marketing puts the proverbial “cart before the horse,” offering blatantly speculative promises to Sullivan County residents, who have already endured too many.

40 YEARS: HISTORY OF THE BKAA (PART 11) By Buff McAllister

Continued from the Winter 2014/15 Guardian

ORDINARY BUSINESS 1997

June 19, 1997 – Elizabeth Pollock, one of the three founders of BKAA, died at age 94. The BKAA agreed to create an award in her honor that would be given to BKAA members who had demonstrated outstanding service to the organization – the Elizabeth Pollock Great Blue Heron Award. The first award – a beautiful photo by Gary Keeton of a blue heron and a gold plaque framed together – was awarded to long-time treasurer Louise Briggs at the October 18 annual meeting.

October 18, 1997 – Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting! We celebrated with Bill Streeter and his live raptors. We also amended the bylaws to allow for 15 board members, up from 12.

History of the BKAA continued on page 32
Yankee Lake Preservation Association Correspondence

Re: Town Board February 3, 2015 Agenda Item 2: Discussion of Thompson Education Center (“TEC”) Request for Map, Plan and Report for Sewer Service (SBL 26-1-6)

Dear Supervisor Rieber and Board Members:

We respectfully ask the Town Board to deny authorization for the Town Engineer to prepare a map, plan and report for sewer service, and reject TEC’s request.

TEC’s request is, at best, premature given the inconsistencies in its continually reinvented development plans for the project; its disputed interpretation of Thompson’s zoning code and density regulations; and its lack of approval for the EB-5 financing required for any project. Our concerns about improper segmentation affecting Mamakating as detailed in our October 15, 2014 letter are heightened:

- The purported sponsor. CCOA (China City of America) does not have EB-5 regional center approval from USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) - without which it cannot deliver on its financial projections/promises of jobs.
- Additional records we obtained from USCIS spanning from January through July 2014 (attached) show that CCOA continues to tell one story about its development plans to the Federal Government, and another to the local municipalities. CCOA again promoted its plans for development in Mamakating to USCIS in late January 2014 (and remained silent through July) despite TEC’s concurrent representations to the local authorities that it has no plans for Mamakating!
- In connection with the “applicant/sponsor’s” recent attempt at subdivision, Commissioner Eisenberg recognized the Countywide and inter-community impacts of the project that required review to avoid improper segmentation. She recommended that the Board “verify and confirm the applicant’s ownership of and/or proxy for, and current development plans for the subject property and any adjacent lands for which the applicant has an interest.” (October 20, 2014 Letter from Commissioner Eisenberg to Thompson Planning Board re GML-239 County Review; emphasis supplied).

Which brings us to the pivotal question underlying our concern about improper segmentation: who is the applicant/sponsor of this project - the seller (Gelb/Parkwood) or the buyer (Sherry Li/CCOA)? We have witnessed a revolving door of lawyers appearing on behalf of the “sponsor” for a continuously evolving project — Attorney Jacob Billig, followed by Attorneys Hart and Proyect, and most recently, Attorney John Privitera. But who does each attorney represent - the seller (Simon Gelb/Parkwood) or the buyer (Sherry Li/China City)? What is the project - the plans CCOA represented to the Federal Government for development that includes Mamakating, or the morphing proposals presented to the local governments?

What we do know is that the seller, Simon Gelb, owns contiguous land (1800+ acres) in Mamakating that he previously tried and failed to develop due to insurmountable environmental issues. Should the recently alleged sale of parcel 26.-1-6 to TEC leave Gelb with a reversionary right, beneficial ownership, or other control or interest, then the project still bears many of the red flags associated with improper segmentation - a piecemeal approach to project review, that contrary to the intent of SEQA has been used by sponsors to avoid environmental review of large projects.

For the foregoing reasons, we urge the Board to deny authorization for the Town Engineer to prepare a map, plan and report for sewer service, and reject TEC’s request. We hope that you find our information helpful in reaching your decision and thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Very truly yours,
The Yankee Lake Preservation Association, Inc.
Laura A. Coruzzi on behalf of the YLPA
BKAA’s Nature Watch for 2015
Maryallison Farley

The 13th season of the BKAA’s Nature Watch Program kicked off with our Annual Volunteer Training on March 14th at the Church Hall of the Wurtsboro Community Church. We were happy to welcome eight new volunteers along with a cadre of seasoned volunteers to this spacious facility.

It’s fair to say that all of us enjoyed a superb presentation by Lance Verderame and John Haas on the Birds of the Basha Kill. Illustrated with beautiful photographs (most taken by John with a few by Nature Watch Member Matt Zeitler), the two presenters also shared a wealth of information about the behavior and habits of the birds that frequent this wetland. After the talk, volunteers were quick to purchase copies of John’s birding guide to the Basha Kill and other Sullivan County hot spots. Some new, excited volunteers even had John sign their books!

Information gleaned from the talk will be useful as we once again embark on the BKAA’s successful outreach and education program at the South Road boat launch. Starting Saturday, April 18th and continuing through Sunday, June 28th, volunteers will be situated at the site with our 2 spotting scopes to help visitors see the active bald eagle nest and the osprey nest. They’ll also have a table filled with hand-outs and reference books. Nature Watch volunteers will be on shift from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm each Saturday and Sunday during that two and a half month period.

Our long-time Basha Kill bald eagle pair are right on schedule with the nesting process this year. They began sitting during the last week-end of February. That means that an early April hatch is projected. John Haas and Jim Carney are also keeping tabs on another new nest built by a young pair of bald eagles at the northern end of Basha Kill. As always, lots to see at the Basha Kill. Come and take a look when we’re at the boat launch this spring!

For help with the Training, special thanks to: Patricia Diness, Cath Liljequist (Lil) and Kevin Keller for handling the preparation and set-up; Eileen Lake and Lil for managing the registration, membership and book sales; Kevin K. for helping to present on the nuts & bolts of the program, as well as introducing new volunteers to the use of spotting scopes (since we were rained out, he set the scopes up right in the Church Hall!); and last but not least, bakers Donna Stanton and Eileen Lake for supplying us with delicious homemade goodies.

Update: Yukiguni Maitake (YM)
Paula Medley

Although YM remains remains dormant in Mamakating, its parent company is on the verge of a takeover by Bain Capital (see article in Japan Times below). Currently, we cannot anticipate impacts of Bain’s actions on the Town’s proposed plant. However, we will continually monitor this situation and furnish pertinent details as they occur.

The Japan Times February 23, 2015

Bain Capital to begin takeover bid for Japanese mushroom producer

U.S. private equity firm Bain Capital LLC said on Monday it will launch Y9.5 billion ($79.8 million) takeover bid for Yukiguni Maitake Co., amid a conflict over management control at the Japanese mushroom producer.

Bain hopes to obtain at least a majority stake in Yukiguni Maitake, while looking to wholly own the Niigata Prefecture-based company known for having succeeded in the mass production of “maitake,” which are commonly known as ram’s head mushrooms.

If Bain succeeds in the buyout, Yukiguni Maitake would be delisted from the Second Section of the Tokyo Stock Exchange. Bain is expected to help turn Yukiguni Maitake’s businesses around by working with management as well as lenders to eliminate influence over the company from founder and major shareholder, Yoshinou Odaira.

Bain offered to buy Yukiguni Maitake shares at Y245 each, at 18.4 percent premium on its Friday closing price of Y207.

The takeover bid will last from Feb. 24 to April 6, with many Yukiguni stakeholder banks already showing their intention to accept the offer. Daishi Bank, which has 39.23 percent of the company’s shares as collateral for a loan to a shareholder has already voiced its approval of the deal.

Yukiguni’s management dispute came to light last year, when major shareholders including the founding family opposed a personnel proposal from management at its general shareholders meeting in June. The meeting ended with a change of company president.

The company, founded in 1983, posted a goup net profit of Y1.3 billion on sales of Y28.8 billion for the business year through March 2014. Amid intensifying competition from other firms, it marked a precipitous 51 percent fall in net profit to Y258 million in the nine months to December from a year earlier.

Odaira stepped down as president in 2013 to take responsibility for past accounting problems at the company.

Separately, Bain said earlier this month it would purchase Japanese hotel and spa operator Oedo-Onsen Holdings for around Y50 billion, in an attempt to capitalize on a surge in the number of foreign tourists visiting Japan.
History of the BKAA continued from page 29

WATER MONITORING PROGRAM (1997 – present)

The water program arose from concern over Paradise II and other developments along the Basha Kill. On checking with the DEC, we were amazed that no data was available; so we decided to do it ourselves. The original plan was to do an intensive one-year project to create a baseline, so we could have the data to back up our concerns about potential pollution.

We checked with experts, and got much help, financial as well as educational. Lori McKeen of NY Audubon Society Water Watch helped us to determine the protocol and recommended equipment providers. Training was done by Steve Fleckenstein, biology instructor at SCCC, and Kyle Myers, Water Specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension Service. DEC personnel helped select sites for testing. OCL Analytical Services in Bloomingburg (which tested for fecal coliform, the only test we couldn’t do ourselves) gave us a generous discount on fees.

Linda Gette had all the equipment purchased and wrote a quality control manual. When the whole plan was in place, the DEC gave us “…compliments on a very thorough and well-designed monitoring plan” and thanked us for our “…willingness to conduct this field work.”

The plan was to test twice a month for water temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, nitrogen and turbidity of the water at five different locations on the Basha Kill and tributaries. Once a month, samples were to be taken to OCL labs to test for fecal coliform. The coliform sample had to be done during the week, as it had to be taken to the lab within six hours for the test to be valid. The total monthly cost would be about $100.

The first date of the water testing was also the date of our 25th annual meeting, October 18, 1997, a fitting date! The monitoring continued, through all types of weather, in snow and heat and cold, as it had to be done at the same time every month. Kudos to the intrepid volunteers!

In the March 1998 Guardian, Linda Gette wrote that she was often asked if the water was “healthy” but that was not a simple question to answer. One good thing was that the pH was good; it ranged from 6.2 to 7.5, with most readings between 6.5 and 7 (7 is neutral). The largest variety of aquatic animals is supported by a range of 6.5 to 8.

In May of 1998, Linda and Toni Garrett were interviewed on WJFF radio about the Basha Kill and specifically about the water testing program.

At the end of the first baseline year, we decided it was a very important program and should be continued indefinitely. Generous donors made it possible to do so.

In the Fall 2006 Guardian, it was reported that over $6900 had been spent on testing since the beginning. Fecal coliform counts were generally fine, except for some spikes, mostly after flooding. The DEC explained that flooding can cause overflowing septic tanks, animal waste being washed into the Kill, and the bottom of the water being churned up. When the flooding subsided, so did the coliform.

In the Summer 2011 Guardian, it was reported with great pleasure that a generous bequest from the estate of the late John Winkler, a member who was always a great supporter of the BKAA, enabled us to buy new and upgraded water testing equipment. The new equipment would measure a number of things on the spot, and download it to a computer (donated by Rockland PC Users Club). The software would generate reports, graphs, charts, and highlight anomalies, if any. With this outfit, we were able to test more sites, increase the number of tests, and increase the frequency of testing.

This important project, critical to our stewardship of the wetlands, continues.

ORDINARY BUSINESS 1998

April 25, 1998 – The 17th Annual Cleanup, unusual because of the assistance of the Agassiz Society, a biology club at OCCC. They donned scuba gear and pulled up garbage inaccessible to those on the surface – including road signs, old bottles, a typewriter, and a house safe that must have been stolen during a burglary in the area!

Summer 1998 Guardian – A new store in Wurtsboro, called the Hiking Shack, owned by Susan and John Lavelle. They started to carry our T-shirts, hats and sweatshirts.

Fall 1998 – SCIL was back at the Basha Kill, and our own Gary Keeton was one of the judges.

ORDINARY BUSINESS 1999

March 1999 – The DEC discontinued the “Adopt-A-Wetlands” program in favor of a general “stewardship” program. We applied to become the wetlands steward.
History of the BKAA continued from page 32

April 17, 1999 – The 18th Annual Cleanup. We were assisted by Boy Scouts from Pack 153 in Huguenot, who helped clean as part of earning a badge in conservation.

May 21, 1999 – BKAA adopted a section of Haven Road, under the local “Adopt-A-Road” program. We received an official certificate and did a mini-cleanup the next day.

Summer 1999 – The BKAA got a toehold on the Internet. The Hiking Shack added us to their site.

Summer 1999 – BKAA received a Regional Water Resources Merit Award for 1999 for “furthering community education and for collaborative activities to improve water quality in the Hudson Valley.” It was awarded by a coalition of water improvement organizations: Southeast New York Intergovernmental Water Supply Advisory Council; NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee; Hudson Valley Regional Council; and Water-Wise Council of New York Inc.

September 1999 Guardian – The local Nature Conservancy chapters took a field trip to the Bash Kill in connection with their annual meeting. Also, a chartered bus brought 40-50 people from the Museum of Natural History in New York City to see the wetlands. They were happy to spend four hours on a bus to look at what we have in our backyard!

December 3, 1999 – Louise Briggs died at the age of 92.

CRESCENT HEIGHTS (1999 - )

An article in the September 1999 Guardian had a brief note on a project that was being watched by the BKAA. In the Spring 2000 Guardian, there was more information on the proposed development. It would be a massive project on 800 acres adjacent to Wurtsboro Hills, including four to five hotels with 250 rooms each, two golf courses, a spa, a conference center, condos, a equestrian center, vineyards and a waste treatment plant to empty into Wilsey Brook. The initial presentation was made to the planning and town boards, but it appeared that the developer was waiting for the change in the zoning laws (thank you, master plan!) before proceeding. In the meantime, the developers had an option to buy, and drilled several test wells at the site.

There has been no activity by the developer since then.

ORDINARY BUSINESS 2000

Spring 2000 – Maryallison Farley had an article in the Guardian about BKAA’s vision and goals. “The BKAA board has begun a strategic planning process, under the tutelage of George Schuler from the Nature Conservancy Neversink Preserve, to make sure that we as an organization are focused on how best to preserve the wetlands, to enhance people’s enjoyment of them, and to help the Town and the wetlands to live together fruitfully.” Comment was invited via a page to fill out and return.

June 17, 2000 – Record article that Mongaup Valley and the Bash Kill have been designated by Gov. Pataki as “Bird Conservation Areas.”

July 1, 2000 – After the death of Louise Briggs, everybody realized what a lot of work she did to keep up with monthly member renewals; so it was decided to change all memberships to run from July 1 to June 30.

July 13, 2000 – The Orange County Land Trust made a formal resolution to protect the Bash Kill.

A new brochure was printed this year, and a committee, of which I was a part, started work on a BKAA field guide, which had been a dream of mine for years.

KOHL’S DISTRIBUTION CENTER (2000-2002)

This was another huge project – a 500,000 square-foot regional distribution warehouse for retailer Kohl’s – that came to the BKAA’s attention in September of 2000. It estimated 18 trucks an hour (432 per day) and claimed to offer 900 jobs. Kohl’s representatives were amazingly cooperative with the BKAA. We quickly set up a meeting with them to discuss concerns about water (Gumaer Brook could be affected by runoff), and air pollution. Nobody had discussed air pollution with them, and they invited us to meet with their engineer to set up an air quality study.

We requested the planning board to make a positive declaration under SEQRA and require an EIS, which they denied. On October 3, the planning board issued a negative declaration (negdec) but said that the full range of environmental impacts would still be addressed. The board allowed a height variance (from 30 feet to 40 feet) because the building was in a depression relative to Route 209, and would appear to be only 30 feet high.

Also in October, Kohl’s presented its Air Quality Study, and Stormwater Management and Water Quality Report, which took many of our concerns into consideration.
History of the BKAA
continued from page 33

There was a long letter dated October 24 from the Wurtsboro Airport Pilots group, which represented over 50 pilots. They were worried about the proximity of the project to the airport. They were concerned with significant interference with flight patterns, the removal of a safety area for landing in case of emergency, wind turbulence from the size of the building, air pollution due to truck traffic in case of inversions, the potential impacts of water, sewer, and holding pools to collect runoff, etc.

There was a standing-room-only crowd at the public hearing, but Kohl’s did everything it was required to do: agreed to water monitoring, to planting native riparian species as a buffer along the brook (BKAA and Nature Conservancy helped to identify suppliers of native vegetation and offered to help them get discount prices for the water monitoring equipment which they agreed to buy and use); planting trees, etc. We suggested more consideration to water and air quality in the future as traffic built up, or if future expansion were considered.

It easily passed the planning board. In August 2001, the Wurtsboro Good News newspaper had a front-page photo of Gov. Pataki at a ceremony welcoming Kohl’s to Wurtsboro.

To be continued....