Volume 28, Number 2

Jack Austin gets in deep at Pine Boat Launch

On the move with Colin Holmes, Bob & Truth Muller

Eco Club starts young

2014 Cleanup Volunteers

33RD ANNUAL CLEANUP

Photographs by Linda Lou Bartle

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Jack Austin gets in deep at Pine Boat Launch

Kathleen Shea has the tools

Eco Club starts young
MAIL BAG

Dear BKAA,
We would like to “thank you” very much for sponsoring Braedon at Camp Rushford (near Buffalo) this summer! We know it will be a truly wonderful experience, one that he will remember forever! We love living so close to the Bash Kill and we visit it often to fish and look for the new baby bald eagles! It is a true environmental gem in our backyard. We think it is so wonderful that you sponsor young students and encourage them to enjoy the environment. We know our son, Braedon, will truly make the most of your wonderful gift. Thank you again!

Sincerely, The Halpin Family

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Ken McDermott -- Truth Muller  
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Conservation Officer: Michael Bello 845-665-5489  
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 Bash 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
33rd Annual BKAA Cleanup by Paula Medley

Dire predictions notwithstanding, excellent weather prevailed for our cleanup on April 26, with cool, comfortable temperatures during refuse removal, "morphing" into sunny, warmer conditions at lunch, perfectly timed for tired workers seeking sustenance and relaxation.

Establishing venue stations were Anita Altman, Linda Lou Bartle, Fred Harding, Monique Lipton, Bill Lucas and Michael Medley. This crew likewise assisted with registration, dispensed diverse garbage bags, and explained recycling protocol. Over 70 intrepid volunteers participated including Wurtsboro Mayor Mickey Maher, Bill Maher President of Wurtsboro Renaissance, along with a sizable contingent from Monticello High School's Eco-Club.

John Lavelle grouped attendees, assigning them to locales throughout the wetlands ecosystem, ensuring maximum resource coverage. Michael continued his "troubleshooter" role, checking in with participants, furnishing additional supplies, and retrieving collected roadside junk. Recyclables, metal, aluminum, plastic and glass were separated at an operation managed by Fred, Monique, Bill, and Jon Reed, whom we "coaxed out of retirement" for the day. More than 15 bins were filled and later hauled to a transfer station by Fred Harding. Thanks Fred and Andy Weil too, who removed scrap metal and aluminum for off-site processing, yielding extra earnings for the BKAA. Kudos likewise to Rock Hill's Thompson Sanitation for again donating an indispensable huge container.

During the mandatory group photograph, President Paula Medley thanked everyone for their great efforts. A sumptuous dining extravaganza, lovingly prepared and organized almost singlehandedly by Marilyn Fiore, then ensued (Bob Fiore was busy with a critical town master plan workshop.) Fortunately, Theresa Pauly helped Marilyn set up.

Throughout lunch, individuals networked, socialized, and shopped. Many purchased BKAA tee shirts, whose striking new colors attracted significant attention. We gratefully acknowledge Theresa who presided over the merchandise table and Marcia Briggs Wallace, who coordinates the BKAA's merchandise undertaking. A number also bought John Haas' Biriding Guides, generously signed by John on site. Town Board and BKAA member Bob Justus thanked everyone for "cleaning Mamakating." Dr. Katherine Beinkafner, BKAA consulting hydrogeologist, was introduced and briefly addressed the crowd.

Bob Speziale's stunning "Sorbet Dahlia" photo portrait raised a "whopping" $525 for our raffle and was won by Gene Lefebvre. Another prize, Eddie Bauer binoculars, kindly donated by Nature Watch, was secured by Anne Prather. The drawing of numerous, unique door prizes, contributed by Jane Johnson, Linda's Office Supplies in Goshen, and Paula & Michael Medley, concluded the event.

Many pitched in with breaking down the venue. However, standouts encompassed Jackie Broder, Martin and Frances Nankin, as well as Michael Medley.

Our 33rd Annual Cleanup was extremely successful as widespread noxious debris was removed amidst a convivial atmosphere that fostered new friendships and renewed old ones. See you next year!!!

Thanks to the following who contributed to a wildly successful 33rd Annual BKAA Cleanup. We apologize for any errors.

Anita Altman -- Wilma Amthor -- Fern Ashworth
Jack Austin -- Paula Baldinger -- Scott Balderger
Kathie Beinkafner -- Caroline Bork -- Arlene Borko
Galen Booth -- Maureen Bowers -- Bill Brad -- Dylan Broder
Jackie Broder -- Rachael Broder -- John Brown
Frank Brusinski -- Nora Brusinski -- Justina Burton
Janet Campbell -- Roberta Christy -- Ethan Cohen
Dave Colavito -- Donna Colavito -- Wayne Decker
Patricia Diness -- Frank Doty -- Jean Dougherty
Michael Dunckley -- Meg Edwards -- Stephen Erny
Susan Erny -- Scott Fairbanks -- Maryallison Farley
Tom Farrell -- Phoenix Fatiuk -- Bob Fiore -- Tom Franco
Judy Frank -- Kirsten Gabrielsen -- Paul Gamer
Vicki Godderd -- Lorry Green -- Helen Griggs
John Haas -- Fred Harding -- Patricia Hofmo
Colin Holmes -- Art Hussey -- Cliff Johnson
Jane Johnson -- Gina Kent -- Bob Ladero -- Eileen Lake
John Lavelle -- Gene Lefebvre -- Juanita Leisch
Monique Lipton -- Bill Lucas -- Bill Maher
Mickey Maher -- Michael Medley -- Paul Medley
Walter Mehr -- Matt Migliaccio -- Barbara Morgan
Bob Muller -- Maura Muller -- Truth Muller
Frances Nankin -- Martin Nankin -- Susan O'Neil
Greg Pauly Theresa Pauly -- Ronnie Pfeister
Ellen Pilipski -- Anne Prather -- Joseph Putnam
Sandra Radinsky -- Darlene Rassiga -- Jon Reed
Susan Robohm -- Marlene Roe -- Doreen Rooney
Louise Rozos -- Lisa Sabia -- Gerri Sacvione
Christine Saward -- Mr. Schripper -- Ken Shaw
Dennis Shea -- Kathleen Shea -- Felisa Sheskin
Dennis Solow -- Mark Spina -- Donna Stanton
David Tancredi -- Burt Thelander -- Sherry Thompson
Neil Toomey -- Bruce Townsend -- Eddie Van Buren
Renette Vealey -- Brian Waca -- Audrey Wade
Buzz Wallace -- Marcia Briggs Wallace
Kaytee Warren -- Matt Wein
Why I Volunteer with Nature Watch at the Basha Kill
Ira Finkelstein

I grew up in Brooklyn, not far from Ebbets Field - remember? The streets were my playground. But my summers were spent in the Catskills. We called it the “country” and everyone else called it the “borscht belt.” The trip was grueling. Hours in the car and waiting for the infamous Bloomingburg light to turn green. At the end of the journey were fields of green, fresh air, and nature in its purest form. Great memories. Some upper class destinations were the Concord - remember? Or maybe the Nevele - remember? And we had to stop at the Red Apple Rest - remember? It seems like nothing stays the same.

Now I travel on Rt. 17 – the Quickway – soon to be called Rt. 86. It seems like nothing stays the same. I always wondered what that plateau was when I came down the hill between exits 112 and 113. All white in the winter, a body of water in the spring and green in the summer. I finally found the Basha Kill. With a little research, I discovered the Association. My annual dues give back 10 fold. So many events led by expert naturalists. I was thrilled to have the opportunity to both support and volunteer. It is the most special place that should always be preserved and shield itself from having to say that “nothing stays the same.” It must stay the same. Reading about mushrooms, 7 Peaks, China City scares me. Any change will change the value of the Basha Kill and everything surrounding it. Imagine building houses in Central Park. The green fields would be lost and the value of everything near it would plummet. That’s why everything green should stay green.

I can say, without reservation, that the Basha Kill has enriched my life. The wonderful people associated with it and the wonderful people who come to visit. When I pulled into the boat launch parking lot this Memorial Day weekend, I saw something that explains more than I could ever express about the people who protect it. An injured gosling had been rescued. And there was the fellow who wrapped it in cloth and had contacted someone to rehab it. I took a photo through his car window while he was using his finger, trying to give the gosling some of his flavored water. The bird was so tiny, but this fellow’s heart was so large.

I travel from Plainview, Long Island. Now, most of my trips to the country are just riding around, loving the fields of green, fresh air and nature. The people I meet at the Basha Kill are amazed that I travel three hours to volunteer for three hours. What they don’t know is that I often visit the Kill to purify my soul. So, if I need to explain why I volunteer, you just may not understand my answer.

Come Clean -- Basha Kill! Garden Update
by Cathy Dawkins & Patricia Diness

Last summer, the Come Clean Team created a new Gateway to the Basha Kill garden at the corner of Haven Road and Route 209. We planted, watered, replanted, weeded, watered, painted, watered, added bird houses, and watered some more. Then came winter and we crossed our fingers and hoped for the best.

Sometimes that’s the hardest part of gardening – waiting to see how the plants tolerate the winter - and boy did Mother Nature give us a winter! Our garden included 4 magnificent evergreen trees, 3 evergreen shrubs, a number of interesting perennials, some colorful annuals, 3 gorgeous birdhouses, and our sign. So, this Spring (when it finally got here) there were a garden-full of surprises:

The Shrubs: “Crispy” is the best word to describe our Junipers. Not good. Ah well, you win some and lose some. These just didn’t survive. It was sad to pull them out, but it had to be done.

The Perennials: All up and green and growing. Look for several different grasses, Russian sage (lavender blooms), yellow Potentilla, and bright blue geraniums.

The Birdhouses: At least one of the birdhouses is inhabited! We’re hoping for some chicks soon. Mama swallow is fairly tolerant of our presence, but would prefer that we don’t dawdle under the house! How much fun is THAT!?

So, after celebrating the successes and getting over the lost junipers, we got busy and have added some annuals for summer color. We decided to go with more of the Dragon Wing Begonias (same as last year) and are hoping that some of you will enjoy the garden as much as we do! Keep an eye out for our swallows and be respectful of their nest!
A Day of Birding in the Basha Kill by Truth Muller

On March 30 the New York State Young Birder’s Club joined several adult members of the New York State Ornithological Association (including NYSOA President Kathy Schneider) and two of Sullivan County’s top birders, John Haas and Lance Verderame, for a four-and-a-half- hour birding tour around the Basha Kill Wildlife Management Area. The threatening forecast caused some to cancel, but those who did arrive were in for a treat. The weather held for the duration of the entire trip.

We began at Haven Road, right in the middle of the Basha Kill and several hundred waterfowl. Ring-necked Ducks dove for breakfast, geese honked, Buffleheads bobbed with Common Mergansers, and a handful of stylish Northern Pintails swam about the icy water. The cacophonous squealing of uncountable Red-winged Blackbirds filled the air. John and Lance trained their scopes on particularly interesting ducks while the rest of the group searched the air for Bald Eagles, of which two were found. Once every duck had been thoroughly viewed, we headed back to our cars where a Rusty Blackbird was found foraging in the parking lot’s leaf litter. It was a life bird for me.

Next we headed down to the main boat launch. The water, despite being well frozen, yielded Hooded Merganser and Black Duck. We then trekked down the Birch Trail. At first nothing truly noteworthy showed, despite all ten birders scanning every tree and bush. But, on the way back things began to pick up. First an azure male Bluebird with a large caterpillar clenched in his beak appeared. Then a female arrived, and it became quite apparent that they were mates. The male snuggled close to her and presented her the succulent treat. They were a perfect little couple. Just as we were about to leave the birch trail, John Haas’s keen ears detected the nervous buzz of a Winter Wren. Someone played the wren’s song on their phone, and the tiny bird belted out a beautiful song in response. Several minutes of “pishing”, running, call-playing and shrub-scanning later, the bird presented itself just long enough for a decent glimpse.

We then moved over to the Deli Fields; a combination of forest, river, stony clearings and thick fields, complete with a boat launch. Highlights there were: Kingfisher, a rather wet, disgruntled looking Bald Eagle in the last stages of teenagehood, and the pièce de résistance: a wonderful Eastern Screech Owl, peering from his roost-hole like a tiny feathered gnome. It was a life bird for one of the NYSOA members.

Our final stop was one last pass by Haven Road, where we picked up Tree Swallows and Green-winged Teals. Just as I closed the car door to head home the cloudy sky finally let loose its store of rain. The final count was thirty-four species. Despite the cold and damp conditions, a wonderful time was had by all, proving the point: if you’re gonna go birding, go birding, and let the weatherman fuss with the weather!

New York State Young Birders Club = Fun by Lance Verderame

Since 2009 I have had the pleasure of being the Sullivan County Audubon Society’s field trip coordinator and leader for the New York State Young Birders Club. The club is a special project of the New York State Ornithological Association and is open to ages 10 through 19, inclusive. The club plans field trips throughout the state and holds annual meetings. Young birders from other states are also welcome to join, so if someone would like to join and has a birding friend in another state who is also interested they can join as well.

Parents attend these trips and it’s a great way to spend time together. Many parents tell me they never went birding prior to their child’s joining the group and now they enjoy it as much as the kids do. I can honestly say that with all the other birding activities I have throughout the year there is none I look more forward to. These are a great group of kids. While a lot of the kids are very skilled birders there are kids of all levels in the group and the more experienced kids are happy to help the beginners with any questions or identification problems. They have a website where you can check out past trip reports and photos as well as other information about the club. The site address is www.nysyoungbirders.org.

Also, feel free to call me at (845) 701-7331. If I don’t answer please leave a message that it is in reference to the NYS Young Birders Club and I will get back to you. So, if you are looking for a great activity with a great group of people, the Young Birders Club may be just right for you!
Monticello HS Eco Club Celebrates Arbor / Earth Day 2014 & 5th Eco Hero Award by Alyssa Vilela & Maureen Bowers

(Alyssa Vilela is the club president and Maureen Bowers is the advisor.)

Every year the MHS Eco Club celebrates Arbor/Earth Day with a ceremony in which we honor one of our community members with the Eco Hero Award. This award is given to a person or people who are Good Stewards of our Planet and continually dedicate their time to our community, education, and the environment.

This year's Monticello High School Eco Club's honorees are Paula and Mike Medley. This couple volunteers their time for a greater cause that will not only benefit the community now, but also in the future. The Medleys do most of their work for the Bashakill Area Association.

The Association's mission has been to protect the Bashakill 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. The Association works with representatives of local government and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to address potential problems in the environment. The Association partners with other environmental groups to safeguard the region's valuable resources. Annually, the Bashakill Area Association sponsors a litter cleanup at the wetlands where members of the Eco Club have participated. This hands-on organization also sponsors a volunteer eagle watch program which keeps count of the number of eagles spotted in the Bashakill area, while educating visitors on eagle and wetland ecology.

Paula is the current President of the BKAA, having moved from Cragsmoor. Paula is a born activist who strongly exhorts activism and working to preserve the community she loves. As President, she supervises events that benefit the BKAA wetlands and the organisms that inhabit it. Michael is also an activist who actively participates and leads group outings in the Bashakill.

In addition to the MHS Eco Club's Arbor/Earth Day celebration, the club is actively involved in educating students. Some of the activities are cooking with organic products, recycling cell phones and ink cartridges, in addition to maintaining our garden and wildlife habitat.

Our mission statement is as follows: The MHS Eco Club is dedicated to promoting awareness on environmental issues and to help strengthen our school and community. The Eco Club is responsible for planting and maintaining our community Peace garden and National Wildlife Federation wildlife habitat. With everyone's help we can make our school and community a better and healthier place to live. Think globally, act locally!

Contact club advisors at 845-794-8840 or at: mowers@k12mcsd.net or rpfeister@k12mcsd.net

Mid-May Hike to Gobbler's Knob with Mike Medley by Lara Sheikh

What better way to spend a spring day than hiking through woods filled with beautiful ferns, towering trees and beautiful birdsong with Mike Medley and friendly Bashakill explorers?

We started our hike to Gobbler's Knob at the parking lot at the Westbrookville end of South Road. After a short walk to the green trail marker on the County Road that leads to Otisville, we entered the woods.

Mike Medley led us up a comfortable ascent through woods brimming with ostrich ferns, endless blueberry bushes, striped rattlesnake plantains and many species of trees. As we rose, the forest became more and more lush.

We reached the tree canopy after about an hour with glimpses of open sky and mountains peeking through the trail ahead. After passing some ancient dwarf pines, we stopped to enjoy a beautiful vista of the Shawangunk Ridge from a bluff known as Gobbler's Knob. The Ridge was a vision of too many shades of green to describe. It was simply breathtaking.

On our descent, mountain laurel and an abundance of blueberry bushes bordered the trail and beckoned us to return in June and July to see them in bloom.

We exited the trail on the County Road several hundred yards above our starting point. Our walk down the Road and back to the parking lot gave us a chance to chat about our nature experiences in the area. Mike took part of the group to visit the Boat Launch to see the Bald Eagles and Osprey and we agreed to meet again soon at one of the Bashakill's upcoming nature walks or kayak excursions.

(See photo on page 27)
These four photographers are all BKAA Nature Watch Volunteers!

Female Red-Breasted Merganser - Karen Miller - 4/5/14

WATCHABLE WILDLIFE AT THE BASHA KILL

Muskrat - Michael Dunckley - 4/1/14

Osprey - Matt Zeitler - 4/12/14

Great Blue Heron with Bowfin - Linda Kantjas - 6/3/14

Male Bald Eagle - Linda Kantjas - 6/3/14
Mother’s Day Flower Walk by John Kenney

As predicted, the weather was perfect for Mother’s Day, May 11. I arrived early to scout out the area and ran into a lot of birders -- many of whom I knew -- who were also taking advantage of the weather. It was the perfect nexus of migrating birds and trees that were not yet leafed out, which is a very small window of opportunity.

As expected, since the trees were still quite bare, I knew it meant there would be a dearth of plants in flower. I had to depend on my knowledge of plants in the early stages before inflorescense (flowering). I pointed out the differences in leaf structure, which often change in appearance from the initial basal leaves to the more mature leaves higher on the stem. Some differences are very subtle like yarrow and Queen Anne’s Lace, or wild geranium and buttercup.

As we circled the Haven Road parking area, we did see a lot of violets in flower. I mentioned, as a sort of prelude to my upcoming butterfly walk, that they are the host plant of the fritillary butterflies. The females lay their eggs near these plants, which overwinter, and hatch out when the new plants start growing. We found quite a few wood anemones in flower, and, of course, dandelions as well as cinquefoil. When we arrived at the area where the lady slippers are found, only a few plants were visible and they were very small. One happy note was that we found a Canada lily plant. Over the years it has not been visible but later on, perhaps on the butterfly walk, it should be spectacular.

At the birders’ parking lot we found sarsaparilla with its triple unbel inflorescence. The gaywing patch, which normally blooms early, did not have a hint of color. The kidney-leaved buttercup or crow’s foot was displaying tiny yellow flowers.

One special treat was that for the first time I was able to show people hepatica (liverwort) in bloom. I know of one small patch nearby, but it flowers very early and we usually miss it. I went to the Bashakill about a week before my walk to reconnoiter the area and found that some hepatica, as expected, had already bloomed. There was a spot where heavy rains had washed leaves over the plants. I uncovered the plant and a week later it thanked me by showing us its beautiful delicate blue flowers.

Our final stop was at the boat launch to view the eagle’s and osprey’s nests. We also saw a couple of northern water snakes which are quite common in the Bashakill. One last item of note was a dead spotted turtle killed by a car at the Haven parking lot. They are not common, so it was particularly sad to lose such a beautiful creature.

Spring Migration at the Bashakill by John Haas

As I sit writing this article, another spring migration has come to a close at the Bash Kill. No two migrations are ever the same and this year certainly had its unique characteristics.

When we know when and where to look, the Bash Kill proves to be a magnet for birds. This can be seen in a number of special areas and you may have noticed that many people migrate to the kill during the course of the season too.

Migration actually begins in March as the first influx of waterfowl takes advantage of the melting ice, forming large flocks of ducks, geese and grebes stopping to fill up on their way north the their breeding grounds.

The next wave is early migrating passerines. These denizens of the forest are small birds that come to feeders or gather in fields to feast on seeds recently exposed by the melting snows. Tanagers, Orioles, Grosbeaks and Goldfinches all come through in astonishing numbers.

Lastly, the warblers, Cuckoos and flycatchers make a mass move through the area, feasting on new buds and insect larvae on the trees and bushes that have just sprung to life.

With all these birds, comes the onslaught of people. Young and old, new birders and experienced diehards all show up to see what exciting find they may make. Whether you’ve just started your first list of lifers or are trying to add one of the rarities to a list you’ve kept for years, you know you’ll be out there.

On every weekend in May, at the peak of migration, dozens of people arrived this year to enjoy the spectacle in their own special ways. Both the second and third weekends of May saw the arrival of the Bird Clubs from near and far conducting their “Big Day” counts. Teams from Orange County Audubon, John Burroughs Natural History Society, Edgar A. Mearns Bird Club, Sullivan County Audubon, The Waterman Bird Club and Queens County Bird Club were all on the scene. At times it seemed like there were more (continued on page 9)
Spring Migration at the Bashakill  

(continued)

birders than birds, but we know that wasn't really true. On each of these weekends well over 100 birders were frequenting the Bashakill, and none were disappointed.

You might wonder where all these birds come from. There is no one answer. The Tree Swallow flying over Haven Road probably wintered in Florida. The Gray-cheeked Thrush on the Nature Trail wintered in South America, most likely Colombia, Ecuador or Brazil! The tiny Ruby-throated Hummingbird spent the season in southern Mexico and Central America. They all flew thousands of miles either to reach the Bashakill to breed or in the case of the thrush, just to re-fuel and head farther north to breed in the arctic!!

There are few things in nature more amazing than migration, it is an astounding feat for tiny winged creatures making their way around the globe to find the best spots to raise a family and secure their future. If this tremendous event seems daunting, just think once they raise one or two broods of young, in just a couple of months they start the reverse journey all over again.

Leadership Sullivan Visits The Bashakill by Truth Muller

It's another wonderful day at The Bashakill's main boat launch. The water has turned into a floating botanical garden, and the trees are heavy with leaves, flowers and birds. A mother Yellow Warbler tending her nest and the resident Tree Swallow preens atop her nesting box like an avian fashion model. Two scopes are aimed and waiting to give someone a glimpse of an Eagle chick or Osprey mother. Normally, such a setting would be that of a weekend 'Nature Watch' shift, but it is a Wednesday. Today it is not the Eagles that are the main focus, but the people that have come from across Sullivan County to see them – The 2014 Leadership Sullivan class.

At 1:30 the group of thirteen people arrived with Mr. Mike Medley, their official "tour guide." I asked Mr. Terry Grafmuller, secretary of Leadership Sullivan and the group's leader, what his organization is all about. "Leadership Sullivan is a non-profit organization that wants to show residents of Sullivan County what Sullivan County offers." He explained: "Some people have lived in Sullivan for years and still don't know what Sullivan County has to offer." Any participant of this program soon learns that there is quite a lot!

This is how the system works: Every year twenty or so Sullivan County residents apply for a ten-month program consisting of classes and visits to various locations across the county. "Each month has a different theme," says Mr. Grafmuller, "such as 'Small Business Month,' 'Agricultural Month,' and 'Crime & Justice Month.' For example, in 'Crime & Justice Month,' we visit courthouses and jails to learn about the county's judicial system." May, apparently, is environmental month. Mr. Grafmuller added: "Of all the places we visited this month, the Bashakill is by far the most environmental!!" The program culminates in a community service project or fundraiser. This year the group constructed a large storage unit for The Federation for the Homeless' clothing drive collections.

Right from the start the denizens of the boat launch (three Canada goslings) [photo on page 27] waddled ashore to greet the students, making it clear that they were welcome. The Eagles were exceptionally cooperative for the group's viewing pleasure, the Eagle chick strutting his stuff, flexing his wings, while the proud mother looked on approvingly.

Susan Diamond, class facilitator explained about Leadership Sullivan's beginnings. "Leadership Sullivan's parent organization is The Sullivan County Chamber Of Commerce Foundation. The first class started in 1998 and 'graduated' in 1999." Mr. Grafmuller said that he had been a "student" in that class and that this was the program's fifteenth year.

The resounding comments from the students were "I had no idea this place existed;" "I'll have to bring my kids here, they'll love it;" and "it's so beautiful!" The group was delighted when the showy Tree Swallows changed nest-sitting duty in the nesting box. Butterflies and Warbler song filled the air. A perfect day.

Mr. Medley then led the group on a nature walk down The Birch Trail, which is always rich with wildlife this time of year. Then, after being fully charmed by their Bashakill visit and expressing their wishes to return soon with friends and family, the Leadership Sullivan group headed over to the Bashakill Vineyards for a graduation celebration.

To learn more about Leadership Sullivan visit its website at www.leadershipsullivan.org
Preserving Nature’s Treasures

Cerro Blanco: A Protected Forest in Ecuador

by Jane Johnson

In 2008 I decided to write a children’s book about our grey-cheeked parakeet, Tangerine. I wanted to compare his life in the Catskills with that of his “cousins,” who live in the canopy of deciduous, dry tropical forest in Ecuador. While looking for first-hand information, I had the good fortune to connect with Eric Horstman, a former Peace Corps volunteer, who for 25 years has been the director of Fundacion Pro-Bosque Cerro Blanco, a 15,000-acre preserve where greycheeks live. Through our friendship with Eric, we have come to know something of the magnificence of the forest and the challenges of sustaining such a treasure. From this awareness, we appreciate the efforts of those who support the preservation of our own treasure, the Basha Kill.

Pro-Bosque Cerro Blanco is a non-profit conservation organization and one of 30 partners of the World Land Trust, which provides funds for the purchase of conservation lands and is a forum for its members to discuss their projects and issues.

Cerro Blanco has several unique characteristics. A dry, deciduous tropical forest indicates that there are “winter” rains (December through May), when small waterfalls form in the ravines, and spring-fed creeks provide year-round water to animals. For the rest of the year, there is no rain and the trees lose their leaves. With such a specialized climate, Cerro Blanco has a high number of endemic species, both flora and fauna. Foremost in importance (although very small in number) are the great green macaw, conservation symbol of the forest and of the city of Guayaquil, and the jaguar, evidenced by photographs taken by trip wires. There are 221 bird species, 37 types of bats, 9 of hummingbirds, and over 500 vascular plant species, many with medicinal uses, including Palo Santo. 100 of the plant species are endemic.

Brilliant Morpho butterflies flutter alongside the trails, while it’s possible to meet up with snakes, (poisonous or non-poisonous), termites, army ants, and tarantulas. Kinkajous, small mammals with a prehensile tail, sniffle out insects in the leaf litter when not eating fruit in the trees. The males in small bands of howler monkeys call to each other in the canopy, and an occasional jaguarundi, a small grey wildcat, passes by. On our last trip, a young ocelot crossed our path and disappeared into the dense forest.

Cerro Blanco is a favorite spot for birders, who with the help of a guide can spot many of the 221 bird species. To find the greycheeks, one listens for the cacophony of their chatter, scolding, and exuberance in the spreading branches of the green-trunked ceibo tree. Its pod contains their favorite meal, an oily and nutritious seed surrounded by kapok, the waterproof cotton-like fiber formerly used to stuff life vests and mattresses. In early morning or evening, one may spot a flock of red-lobed amazon parrots as they commute from the park, where they feed, to a nearby mangrove swamp where they nest.

The Cerro Blanco park staff numbers about 60 people: foresters, guards, administrators, and office workers. There are often one or two interns from abroad spending from weeks to several months in the park, studying in the field for their advanced degrees or helping the staff to facilitate educational programs in local schools, including recycling. Foresters and local volunteers plant up to 150,000 trees a year to reclaim land that had been cleared for ranching and agriculture. The nursery sells plants and young trees. Also, local young people volunteer to be trained as guides in a successful program developed by Eric. Being a guide has inspired many to choose a career in conservation. Scientific and conservation organizations such as the Nature Conservancy and the World Parrot Trust keep close connections with Cerro Blanco.

With all of this, another startling characteristic of Cerro Blanco is its location: a 15-minute drive from Guayaquil, Ecuador’s largest city, populated by 3 million and growing by the day. This allows day visitors, campers, and school children to come with relative ease; the park has hosted about 5,000 visitors a year. In 2013 there were two Eco-fairs, one with 3,000 people attending and an educational fair for 300 invited students and their teachers. But its proximity to Guayaquil poses the threat of hunters, poachers, animal traffickers, loggers, squatters who rent or buy shacks from land traffickers, government pressure to allow a pipeline or a highway to be built through the park, and noise pollution from existing highways, industries, and mining operations. One wonders how the forest survives!

The park has a small refuge center that receives confiscated, abandoned, or unwanted animals for rehabilitation and release. The group may include parrots, macaws and other birds, monkeys and other small mammals, and turtles. Their release may be difficult to

(continued on page 11)
Cerro Blanco  (continued)

arrange if they are not native to the forest. How does one arrange to return an animal to its native Amazon, several hours away? We helped release a young two-toed sloth which had been brought by the Ministry of the Environment for release in the park. It had not yet lived in the wild and it took a few tries for him to find his way as he climbed. We cheered at every success and as he sampled different leaves, finally disappearing into the canopy where he was bound to encounter his own species.

Experiences such as this are encouraging to those people dedicated to the preservation and safety of Cerro Blanco. The efforts being made by Eric, his staff, and friends of Cerro Blanco everywhere are the key to its preservation. Through environmental education, especially of children and young people, and through spreading the word to as many people as possible, the future of the forest will be secure.

(See photos on page 27)

Unprecedented Photography on BKAA Facebook Page! by Linda Lou Bartle

(Linda Lou Bartle is the page administrator.)

As the Basha Kill explodes with beauty this spring we are visually informed by professional and amateur photographers on our Facebook page. They bring watchable wildlife and scenery to you by sharing their experiences and passion of the Basha Kill on an everyday basis. We have several people helping as “Editors”: Tom Bushey, Kevin Kreisch, Karen C. Miller, Matthew Zeitler and Michael Rider who is also an Admin. This group of BKAA friends and photographers are placing wildlife photographs directly to our main page. We are overwhelmingly grateful for the photographic experiences they share with us. It has propelled our page to reaching over 1,000 Likes this spring!

Our “Post By Others” (posting for our page fans) feed is bursting with some of the most amazing photos of the Bashakill and its wildlife and we share everything to our main page so you don’t miss a thing! Here are just some of our friends who have posted: Gerald Berliner, Nate Berg, Kerry Clair, Stephen J Davis, Jess Deitz, Peter Giraudin, Terry Hardy, Jason Harris, Linda Kantjas, Gerri O’Sullivan Macilvane, Pamela L Phelps, Joe Putnam, Tom Reichert, Eddie Rodriguez, Larry Seaman, Justin Schmidt, Jeff Stedner, Aldo Troiani and Brad Wild.

We are seeing eagles so close up you can read the tag, sunsets and sunrises that make you want to jump in your car and race to Haven Road to catch them, a Leucistic Robin on the stop sign trail, and a couple of secret owls, one a Northern Screech Owl and the other a baby Great Horned Owl. So, if you ever had a doubt about what we are trying to protect here in the Basha Kill, you will be overwhelmingly reminded by our FB page. Everyone is welcome to share! If you’re not on Facebook that’s okay, you can always take a peek because it is an open page. Just visit our BKAA main web page (thebashakill.org) and click the Facebook tab. Thank you again to everyone who “Likes” and engages with us on Facebook!

Friends Gives $10,000 Grant to BKAA by Keith LaBudde

(Keith LaBudde is Friends Board Treasurer and BKAA member – Reprinted with permission of Friends of the Shawangunks)

“The mission of Friends of the Shawangunks is to protect the Shawangunk Ridge from adverse impacts. We have found that when a threat to the ridge arises, we can often be most effective if we work with a group of citizens from the town in which the threat occurs who are anxious to fight the threat. Outspoken citizens of a town can have a greater impact on town officials than an organization with a broader mission. An example of this is the support provided by Friends for the ad hoc group Save the Ridge in the fight against the proposed Awosting Reserve development. In this case Friends paid 85% of the legal expenses incurred in the successful struggle.

“In a similar vein Friends has given Basha Kill Area Association a grant of $10,000 to assist the BKAA in its opposition to two proposed developments: a housing development know as Seven Peaks and a casino on the old Shawanga Lodge property, both in the Town of Mamakating. Both properties are located on top of the ridge, and as such are obstacles to the Shawangunk Ridge Trail.”
Update: 7 Peaks by Paula Medley

Employing an aggressive strategy these last several months, the BKAA has presented Mamakating’s planning board (board) and specialists with non-stop arguments detailing organizational concerns about the massive, voracious 7 Peaks project.

When the “preliminary” Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was initially released, BKAA immediately advocated for our interests to be included in the document. Notably, opportunities to exert influence are greater when the FEIS is still being “tweaked.” Waiting for the final draft to be released is too late. Being proactive is the key!

So, what has the BKAA accomplished recently? On April 22, Paula Medley and BKAA consultants (engineer, hydrogeologist, ecologist) participated in a special board workshop, where we challenged FEIS contentions (See experts’ reports at www.thebashakill.org or contact Paula for hard copies at (845)754-0743). Collaborating with the BKAA were Ed Goodell, Executive Director of the NY/NJ Trail Conference and Andy Garrison, Long Path Co-Chair, who declared Conference interest in constructing and maintaining the proposed 7 Peaks footpath. Also involved were 7 Peaks representatives, who disputed BKAA’s points and had the evening’s proverbial last word. Dissatisfied with that outcome, however, the BKAA submitted written rebuttals soon afterwards (See accompanying rebuttals as well as Willingham’s remarks on 7 Peaks infrastructure maintenance).

Without delving into the April 22 “tit for tat” scenario, some observations must be asserted. Basically, the only way 7 Peaks will create an appropriate continuous habitat corridor or engage the Trail Conference is if the board, with their considerable authority, mandates these actions as conditions of approval and, even then, there will be much “kicking, screaming, and dragging of feet” by 7 Peaks. So, why this intractable stance? Quite frankly, it’s all about the money!!! 7 Peaks fears financial losses if they eliminate and/or relocate lots. And, they claim a “western ridge natural corridor” that traverses the entire 7 Peaks width already exists. Nevertheless, this has not been delineated on available site plans so we can only surmise it entails their suggested trail at the property’s western most border (See subdivision and 7 Peaks maps in last Guardian). 7 Peaks resists partnering with the Trail Conference as the latter’s wilderness trail corridor total width must be 600 to 1,000 feet, which again engenders lot reconfiguration.

An intensive letter writing campaign, bolstered by participants living near the base of 7 Peaks’ eastern flank, worried about flooding from enhanced stormwater runoff as well as groundwater depletion, has supplemented consultants’ commentaries. Lately, many of these residents have joined the BKAA!

Also, on May 21, the BKAA was invited by Planning Board Chair Mort Starobin to witness a balloon test that hopefully would determine 7 Peaks’ visual impacts on the Basha Kill. Test protocol encompassed anchoring a balloon 150 feet above Lot 32, a site most likely to incur visual consequences (Problematic lots are 32, 33, and 34). While the balloon was discernible from Haven Road bridge and Route 209 overpass, it was unclear whether a structure (house) could be seen from these locations. Skewing results was prevailing foliage which blocked views from Route 209. Further examination is necessary, from more vantage points and when foliage is absent.

7 Peaks likely will be on the board’s agenda for Tuesday, June 24, when public input will be permitted as promised at the April 22 meeting. Breaking news will be conveyed via BKAA Alerts.

7 Peaks Letters

BKAA Engineer Andrew Willingham’s Rebuttal of Seven Peaks’ Experts

May 6, 2014

Dear Chairman Starobin and Planning Board Members:

The Bashakill Area Association (BKAA) team greatly appreciated the opportunity to participate in the discussion at the April 22, 2014 special Planning Board workshop. As the Applicant’s consultants responded to our comments/concerns, we refrained from replying to avoid a “back and forth” format to allow for a more professional and productive discourse. We feel compelled now, however, to answer several points made by the Applicant’s consultants at that meeting and to address the Terrestrial Environmental Specialists (TES) letter dated April 22, 2014 in an attachment from our Ecologist J. G. Barbour. We also submit additional information on groundwater hydrology from Dr. Katherine Beinkafner of Mid-Hudson Geosciences. Please note the following report supplements remarks already sent by us to the Planning Board prior to the workshop.

I. Stormwater

We appreciate the Applicant’s attorney’s knowledge of NYSDEC Stormwater regulations and the general concepts behind the
7 Peaks Letters (continued)

Runoff Reduction Volume (RRv) requirement, Of the many statements made, we agree that credit is allowed for the preservation of undisturbed areas and buffers. However, no credit is given for the 116.6 acres of proposed disturbed area which includes 24.2 acres of impervious surface, unless infiltration or Green Infrastructure Practices are designed in accordance with the NYSDEC Design Manual. The Green Infrastructure Practices proposed (Vegetated Swales and Disconnection of Rooftop Runoff) do not meet standards per the design provided, therefore the Applicant has in no way shown that this challenging requirement has been met.

As mentioned in our previous letter, the Runoff Reduction Volume must be equal to the Water Quality Volume (WQV), unless the Applicant can prove that the Full WQV is not attainable. A common misconception (as confirmed by multiple conversations with NYSDEC staff) is that the Minimum RRV (in lieu of the Full RRV) can be provided solely based upon the lack of permeable soils on site (Hydrologic Soil Group A or B). Although the infiltration capacity of the onsite soils is a factor, it is only one of several considerations. As an example, Rain Gardens, which provide Runoff Reduction Volume, can be utilized in less permeable soils, however are not proposed at the site. The Full RRV requirement must be fulfilled unless justification is provided in accordance with the NYSDEC Design Manual.

Also mentioned at the April 22, 2014 meeting was the "substantial detail" provided in the DEIS and FEIS documents with regard to stormwater. We respectfully disagree. The Applicant must suitably and accurately analyze the project’s stormwater effects related to runoff rate, runoff quality and compliance with Applicable regulations to allow any meaningful determination of the project’s environmental impact. In response to repeated requests for adequate detail, the Applicant states that the information "will be provided." Not furnishing requisite data hampers determination of impacts during the current environmental review.

II. Road Design

As detailed in our previous letter, the ridge top is nearly 500 vertical feet above the elevation at Mountain Road. Therefore, providing suitable and safe access to the 49 proposed homes is clearly one of the greatest challenges and also has a high potential for adverse impacts. The code is clear that the proposed road is not a Minor Street, it is a "Collector Street." Collector Streets are defined in the [Town's] own Code as "principal entrance streets of large residential developments." The comments made at the April 22, 2014 meeting suggest that the proposed system is a Minor Street based upon the Applicant's definition. Respectfully, the Applicant's definition of a Minor Street does not matter. In the instance where a term is not defined in the governing code, it can be open to interpretation. This is not the case here. A Collector Street is specifically defined in the Town of Mamakating Code which clearly designates the proposed road as such. Therefore, the proposed road must be redesigned in accordance with Town Code.

It was also suggested that utilization of a tighter curve radius of 100 feet is provided as a type of traffic calming measure, and not as a tool to be able to utilize "switch back" curves to traverse the steep terrain. We would argue that more gradual, 300-foot radius curves, with a maximum 10% grade (as required by code) would provide better traffic calming as compared to the current layout that includes long uninterrupted straightaways at 12% connected by tight 100 foot curves.

III. Wetland Buffers

In response to wetland buffer disturbance consequences, the Applicant cited lack of a regulated buffer around federal wetlands on the site. Although the declared regulatory status of the buffer is noted, the task at hand is to assess the effect to the wetland buffers. The value of wetland buffers is well known, and the project proposes 17.9 acres of disturbance (100-foot buffer) to these sensitive areas. Under SEQR, environmental impact on these buffers has to be adequately addressed, whether they are regulated or not. Notably, such analysis has not occurred.

At the April 22, 2014 meeting a statement was made that the development "maintains a 50 foot wetland buffer, with the exception of road crossings." This is not consistent with the proposed project, as the 50 foot buffer is often heavily disturbed, mostly by stormwater management improvements. Typically, wetlands and their buffers are crossed by access roads perpendicular to the wetland, to minimize the disturbance to the greatest extent possible. Alternatively, the proposed roads often run parallel to wetlands and their buffers in many instances, drastically increasing buffer disturbance, which is evidenced by the proposed 17.9 acres of 100-foot wetland buffer disturbance. For example, Frederick Law Olmstead Way is located entirely in the 100 foot wetland buffer (much of which is in the 50-foot buffer as well) for 1,800 continuous feet (0.34 miles) from road station 111+00 to 129+00. This considerable disturbance to the wetland buffer is a result of aligning roads parallel and adjacent to wetlands, instead of minimizing impacts by aligning roads perpendicular. Wetland buffer impacts could have been substantially minimized by placing stormwater management practices outside of wetland buffers and by locating road crossings effectively.

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7 Peaks Letters (continued)

IV. Groundwater Hydrology
The conclusion stated in the Mid-Hudson Geosciences April 18, 2014 letter and reiterated at our team’s April 22, 2014 presentation remains the same: Well testing to date does not show that sufficient water can be obtained for each of the homes proposed on 49 lots.

It is appropriate to review the summary and conclusions section at the end of the Miller Hydrogeologic Incorporated report dated June 6, 2013 (pages 5-6). The "Summary and Conclusions" reads:

"An aquifer test as part of the well assessment investigation of bedrock wells located on the site known as the proposed Seven Peaks at Mountain Road located in the Town of Mamakating, New York was conducted from May 1-22, 2013. The assessment consisted of pumping two bedrock wells simultaneously at a combined discharge rate of approximately 36 gpm. Water level data from the two pumping wells, nine bedrock monitoring wells (two of which were neighboring home owner wells) and one surface water stilling well was used to evaluate the aquifer test. The two bedrock wells were pumped continuously for 72 hours and both meet the New York State Department of Health regulations for stabilized yield and drawdown during the final six hours of pumping. Examination of relative water level changes in the bedrock and surface water indicates no observable water level change effects in the on-site bedrock monitoring wells, off-site bedrock home owner wells or surface water stilling well due to pumping."

Please note that the conclusions do not mention the yield of the wells tested, nor do they suggest that the bedrock aquifer is capable of supporting 49 individual residential wells at a rate of 2 to 5 gpm each.

It should be noted that Miller’s water level monitoring and precipitation measurements were precise and accurate using recording transducers. Unfortunately, the test protocol did not provide for one well monitoring water levels while the other was pumping to provide the graphical test for recirculation recharge.

The bedrock water-bearing zones are characterized by highly variable yield and low transmissivity in the tested wells. Therefore, short of drilling and testing the wells on each proposed lot, the Applicant cannot show sufficient availability of potable water. As part of the environmental review, the Planning Board must ensure that each lot is capable of meeting the water demand. The means and methods for achieving this must be further discussed, with a plan implemented accordingly.

With regard to further testing, it must include measuring the impact on other wells and wetlands. Discharge of pumped water must be at an adequate distance from the pumping well to prevent short-circuit recharge of the well during the test. Drawdown during pumping and recovery after pumping should be measured.

V. Conservation Alternative
We have reviewed correspondence to the Board from the NYSDEC dated December 23, 2013, as well as the response letter from Reilly Associates to the NYSDEC dated January 10, 2014. The NYSDEC has commented extensively throughout the SEQRI process, strongly urging the Applicant to provide a "Conservation Alternative," which would concentrate lots on the eastern portion of the site, and thereby preserve the western ridge. We agree that this alternative would substantially reduce impacts (e.g. land disturbance, impervious surfaces, stormwater impacts, visual impacts). However, excepting minor layout changes, the Applicant has steadfastly maintained their proposed preferred alternative.

In response to the NYSDEC letter, the Reilly Associates letter argues that the Conservation Alternative is not feasible due to economic, wastewater, and potable water issues. An argument is made toward infrastructure costs related to the Conservation Alternative. The project proposes 4.7 miles of roadways, which would be substantially reduced by a Conservation Alternative (likely reduced by more than half). There would be substantial cost savings related to road construction for the Conservation Alternative, which would include decreased road maintenance cost for the future homeowners (through the Homeowners Association).

With regard to wastewater treatment, the Applicant’s Engineer has chosen one of the most land consuming and offensive forms of treatment available. Utilizing a 35 acre "central spray irrigation system" and a 5 acre "open air sewage lagoon" would be uncommon and impractical in almost every sense. Technology has been available for many years to provide compact, efficient wastewater treatment that in no way resembles the systems suggested by the Applicant’s Engineer. A small wastewater treatment plant could be located on less than 114 acre, with all systems installed underground (with the exception of a small control building). In supplying central potable water, the proposed water tank would not need to be "elevated" as suggested. A small water tank installed at ground level would be sufficient given the flow required and the topographic variation of the site.

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7 Peaks Letters (continued)
The arguments regarding infrastructure are simply not valid. We urge the Board to require a proper Conservation Alternative, like that advanced by the NYSDEC and BKAA on several occasions. This alternative will undoubtedly reduce the project’s environmental impacts. However, this involves revising the development’s current layout.

Please note that the above remarks indicate that most of our concerns remain outstanding.

We thank you again for your consideration and appreciate the opportunity to provide comments. Please feel free to contact me at your convenience with any questions or observations.

Sincerely, Willingham Engineering, PLLC, Andrew Willingham, PE NYS Professional Engineer No. 083984

BKAA Ecologist Spider Barbour’s Rebuttal to TES 4-22-14 regarding Habitat Corridor and Wetland Impacts

May 6, 2014

The following comments on behalf of the Basha Kill Area Association are in response to a letter dated April 22, 2014 from Terrestrial Environmental Specialists, Inc. (TES) to the Town of Mamakating Planning Board. [Editor’s Note: the excerpts from the TES letter are in bold italics.]

HABITAT CORRIDOR INTEGRITY
The proposed preferred site plan shows that there is a natural corridor the entire length of the Seven Peaks property.

1) The "proposed preferred site plan" referred to in the TES letter, and purported to show this "natural corridor" appears to be none other than the original preferred plan from the DEIS, since the preliminary FEIS does not present a revised preferred plan.

2) The FEIS does not present a revised "Conservation Plan" as specified in the letter of December 1, 2013 from Joseph R. Murray (Environmental Analyst, NYSDEC Region 3) to the Mamakating Planning Board. BKAA agrees with DEC that the applicant must provide the revised conservation plan specified in Mr. Murray’s letter.

3) Nowhere in the Seven Peaks DEIS or preliminary FEIS do I find a description or map of the "natural corridor" referred to in the TES letter.

In the absence of such a map and description, there are only two alternative remedies.

One remedy is that the Applicant provides the Mamakating Planning Board, BKAA, DEC and other interested parties with a detailed description and a detailed map of the aforementioned habitat corridor on the Seven Peaks property. An alternative remedy would be for an independent qualified agency or firm to produce such a description and map on behalf of the Town of Mamakating and its review team.

The corridor description and map need to explain and to show how this corridor can connect to preserved or preservable adjacent parcels, as well as to indicate clearly the connections from Seven Peaks that are suitable for trail access, wildlife movement, and continuity of unique natural habitats.

The width of this undeveloped corridor ranges from 100 to 900 feet in width.
The description and map of the corridor must be sufficiently clear and detailed to allow for an adequate assessment of suitability and value for both wildlife and human uses. Given the limited width of some so-far unspecified portion or portions of this corridor, the description and map need to indicate the number of narrowings to 100 feet, the extensions to a width of 200 feet adjacent to each 100-foot narrowing, and the total length of corridor under 500 feet in width.

Technical specifications must include identification of adjacent parcels, minimum 5-foot (preferably 2-foot) contours and other relevant details, such as land use restrictions, existing covenants, and ecological communities of adjacent parcels, as determined by the PlanningBoard in consultation with its review team.

This western ridge corridor has already been incorporated into the project plans "for the benefit to biota and environmentally appropriate recreation."

Whatever the benefits might be, the "project plans" referred to here in the TES letter must be identified and if necessary brought up to the standards of accuracy and detail outlined above. Benefits claimed by the Applicant must be specified in clear detail during the
7 Peaks Letters (continued)

review process. It is then up to the Planning Board and its advisors to review the Applicant's presentation, and to determine any benefits and impacts, and also whether additional materials for review are needed from the Applicant.

*The proposed design of a low-density subdivision provides a "mutual benefit to its inhabitants, human and non-human. the long term integrity and vibrancy of its natural landscape" and equals that of "the surrounding landscape of parks and preserves."*

The Applicant's assertion that the Seven Peaks development design itself offers benefits equal to those of surrounding parks and preserves is novel and bold. It is therefore reasonable and modest to demand extraordinary supporting data, including a detailed comparison of benefits and impacts between the Seven Peaks landscape and context, and several longstanding parks and preserves along the Shawangunk Ridge, such as Mohonk Preserve, Sam's Point Preserve and Minnewaska State Park Preserve.

Because of conflict of interest issues and other considerations, BKAA holds that such an assessment of comparative benefits and impacts should be performed by an independent, well-qualified, unbiased party with a track record of objectivity and thoroughness. Additionally, the past work of those under consideration for this task must demonstrate exceptional depth, detail and quality of data collecting and analytic technology.

**WETLAND IMPACTS**

*Seven Peaks has avoided direct and indirect wetland impacts on this property. Stormwater ponds are designed to receive stormwater from developed areas and to provide for water quality and water quantity. Once these functions are provided, these stormwater features outlet into upland swales and wetlands.*

This "outletting" will no doubt have impacts on these "upland swales and wetlands." These impacts must be assessed by the Applicant regardless of action or inaction by federal or state regulatory agencies.

> *Wetland A consists of numerous small wetland areas connected by ephemeral and intermittent drainage ways.*

The Applicant must demonstrate with hard data that these connecting waters are "ephemeral and intermittent." Surface evidence is rarely sufficient for such a demonstration; soil sampling and hydrological measurements are normally required.

*The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) regulates all Waters by designation whether they are wetlands or water bodies (ponds, streams, and rivers). The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) regulates wetlands under Article 24 and streams under Article 15.*

Neither of the above statements by the Applicant sheds any light on the potential or properly determined regulatory status of on-site wetlands, particularly Wetland A. Although the Applicant holds (correctly at present) that Wetland A is not mapped as a NYS wetland, more detailed data could demonstrate that it qualifies as a NYS wetland. Unless and until DEC weighs in on this question, the status of Wetland A remains in doubt. Thus there is a strong possibility that the status of wetland A will have to be revisited during the current review.

Respectfully submitted, J.G. Barbour, Ecological Consultant, Basha Kill Area Association

**Engineer Willingham's Remarks on Seven Peaks Infrastructure Maintenance**

Dear Chairman Starobin and Planning Board Members:

May 20, 2014

An issue that has been raised at Planning Board meetings, by the public and frequently discussed within our consultant team has been the extensive infrastructure proposed for the Seven Peaks Subdivision. The project includes +/- 4.7 miles of roadway (24,800 linear feet), 13 large stormwater management ponds and the associated extensive stormwater conveyance system. The Applicant is proposing a Homeowners Association as the entity responsible for the ongoing maintenance/replacement of this sizable infrastructure. It is our strong opinion that this element of the project is poorly planned, has a high likelihood of failure, and has potential future negative impacts on the Town.

Homeowners Associations (HOA's) have a history of being ineffective in managing their infrastructure systems. HOA's are much less common than they were in past years due to this issue. Specifically, situations arise where homeowners within the HOA refuse to pay maintenance or capital improvement costs or disagree with the expenses, means and/or methods of the repairs or improvements. Enforcing payment and resolving these disputes is a known issue for HOA's. As an example of a potential future dispute, the proposed road system will need an asphalt top course approximately 10 years after initial construction. The cost to install a 2" asphalt top course for the 4.7 miles of roadway is estimated to be over $600,000. Disputes over capital costs of that magnitude between homeowners are a near certainty.

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7 Peaks Letters (continued)

The regular maintenance needed for snow plowing, sanding, catch basin cleaning, pond mowing, etc. requires significant administrative time, effort and coordination. In our opinion, a HOA Board consisting of homeowners within the subdivision is not suited for that task. For instance, there are existing municipalities that have buildings and grounds departments that are dedicated to and responsible for maintaining similar lengths of roadway.

Since HOA’s often have difficulty managing and maintaining infrastructure, they often approach the local municipality for assistance, with many of these infrastructure systems ultimately dedicated to the Town to ensure proper maintenance. We believe this project is ripe for that scenario. The massive infrastructure is far beyond what a HOA would be reasonably capable of managing and maintaining, with future disputes over maintenance responsibility and costs a near certainty. Should the road system suffer from lack of maintenance and accessibility becomes an issue for emergency vehicles, local officials would be hard pressed to ignore requests for the Town to interject or entertain the dedication of the road system to the Town.

We have previously discussed the potential impacts of stormwater, due to the large disturbance area, large increase in impervious surface, and steeply sloped nature of the discharge points. The proper maintenance of the stormwater ponds and conveyance infrastructure is critical to mitigate the impacts of the additional runoff. The lack of proper maintenance could render the proposed mitigation measures ineffective, thereby allowing substantial adverse impacts to neighboring properties.

A HOA is simply not the appropriate entity to manage the maintenance of the development’s considerable infrastructure. We urge the Board to consider the potential long term impacts and burden on the Town, should the maintenance of the project’s infrastructure become an issue. Thank you for your consideration and we appreciate the opportunity to provide comments. Please feel free to contact me at your convenience with any questions.

Sincerely, Willingham Engineering, PLLC, Andrew Willingham, PE, NYS Professional Engineer No. 083984

Letters from Others

Dear Chairman Starobin:

Please find further below my April 15, 2014 letter to the Town Board; it provides some context for my remarks here on the 7 Peaks project.

May 8, 2014

The Bashkill Wildlife Management Area and Wurtsboro Ridge State Forest are New York State public lands belonging to all Mamakating residents -- and New Yorkers. For a variety of reasons these lands are priority areas for a range of stakeholders. Mamakating, like my Town of Thompson and others in our state that encompass public lands and waters, plays an essential role in safe-guarding public resources on behalf of all state residents, including those yet to be born.

The proximity of 7 Peaks to these public resources therefore presents a special challenge for the Board. So far as I’m aware, no one is suggesting the project shouldn’t proceed. What I and many others are asking is that it not do so in a manner that subordinates the broader public’s interests to narrower ones of a private developer.

I don’t have to tell you how complicated and contentious balancing these interests can at times be, but there are guideposts I hope you and the Board will keep in mind throughout the push-and-tug that will define it.

The developer has the right to develop property under ownership -- nothing wrong there. But that right, as with any right to invest, comes without the guarantee of financial profit. Yet the developer’s primary interest is generating personal profit - nothing wrong there either. But ensuring it doesn’t come at the expense of nibbling away at scarce (New York State is approximately 85% privately owned) public resources isn’t a responsibility the developer is tasked with. The developer’s primary responsibility is to use every legal means available to persuade and pressure you and other decision-makers to support the developer’s plans for maximizing personal profit -- this too, entirely permissible. Throughout that process the developer has and will continue enumerating all the benefits that will redound to Mamakating by virtue of the project -- claims made without warranty mind you, yet claims made nonetheless -- which include the compatibility of the project with surrounding public assets. But that is where we rely upon the judgments and wisdom of this Board.

Prior to the present tenure of current Board members many of us have for many years participated in the evolution and public deliberations surrounding this project - and others with similar potential for impacting the Bashkill management area and the surrounding state forest. These public resources have also been championed by non-profit organizations who too have invested heavily, in sweat, time, and money, not for personal financial gain but to enhance the public’s interests. They’ve purchased critical

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7 Peaks Letters (continued)

parcels along the Ridge for purposes that include providing increased public access to New York’s natural landscapes. They’ve designed and maintained public recreation programs that honor the legacy of those landscapes. They’ve staffed education programs designed to engage current and future generations in assuming responsibility for these invaluable public resources. And they’ve engaged public and private professional resource managers who’ve provided expert guidance intended to inform decision makers on what types of private development might irreparably harm sensitive adjacent public resources or be compatible with it.

I’m not competent to speak to how 7 Peaks might be designed to provide maximum financial returns for its investors. But I ask this Board to refer to the record. And I ask it one thing. Does it believe the projects’ investors possess the competence and motivation to assess, and the commitment to uphold, the public-trust responsibility so many of us have assumed for so many years?

As I recall, when the Town Board recently expressed support for a casino along the Ridge in Mamakating, Supervisor Herrmann was reported to have said though he understood the public resources concerns raised, economic considerations needed to take precedence. Much and more I’ve detailed here concerning 7 Peaks also applies to a casino on the Ridge. I’ve no way of knowing whether Supervisor Herrmann’s casino remarks were informed by developments with 7 Peaks, or whether this Board’s decisions to be rendered with 7 Peaks will be informed by the specter of a casino. What I do know is there is only one Bashakill management area and one Wurtsboro Ridge State Forest. If you and I aren’t going to work to uphold the public-trust responsibility that defines them, who will?

Respectfully, Dave Colavito

Dear Chairman Starobin and Planning Board Members: May 20, 2014

We at the Orange County Land Trust are submitting this letter in support of requests made by several other interested parties who have asked to see that stronger environmental concerns be addressed by the applicant for 7 Peaks before your board makes a decision. While the Land Trust does not own property in the immediate area of the development, which is in Sullivan County, we are concerned that the development of 7 Peaks will ultimately affect the water quality, ecology and disposition of our Lower Bashakill property. In addition, we consider ourselves an “interested party” since as owners of the Lower Bashakill Preserve that borders both sides of Route 211 near the intersection of Route 209 we are concerned with the development’s effect on our Preserve.

For one thing, storm water runoff is a concern which the DEIS and the FEIS have not fully answered. We still have only minor information about the runoff rate, runoff quality, and compliance with regulations. Since our property is downstream from 7 Peaks, we believe that our preserve could be seriously comprised.

We agree with NYSDEC in its SEQR process that the applicant needs to provide a “Conservation Alternative.” For one thing, that alternative would concentrate lots on the eastern portion of the site, thereby preserving the ridge. In addition, as a conservation organization, the Orange County Land Trust finds the applicant’s method to handle wastewater treatment disturbing. According to a letter submitted by Andrew Willingham, PE, the Applicant’s engineer “has chosen one of the most land consuming and offensive forms of treatment available. Utilizing a 35 acre “central spray irrigation system” and a 5 acre “open air sewage lagoon ....” ignores the fact that technology, which has been available for many years, can provide more efficient treatment, occupy much less property, and conserve many more acres of open space.

Of as great a concern to us is the loss of a wildlife corridor at the top of the ridge. The Orange County Land Trust has been working with the New York/New Jersey Trail Conference, the Open Space Institute and other conservation groups in the hopes of protecting the entire Shawangunk Ridge from High Point to Mohonk Preserve. To date we have helped to conserve over 500 acres outside of Greeneville and are working on several other parcels on the ridge to help preserve the ecological viability of the fauna and flora of the region. In addition, portions of the Long Path would go through the current property. That trail needs a buffer of at least 600 feet on both sides of the trail. The hiking and other kinds of tourism that would result from conserving land for trails and wildlife, not to mention the improved water and air quality, should be as strong a factor in your decision as the concerns about infrastructure, roads, runoff, and sewage treatment.

Thank you for your consideration.
Sincerely, Marlena Lange, President of the Board, Orange County Land Trust

(continued on page 19)
7 Peaks Letters (continued)

Dear Chairman Starobin and Members of the Board:

I am a resident of Mamakating and I am also currently a board member of the BKAA. I attended (in part) the Planning Board workshop on April 22nd concerning Seven Peaks. First, I wish to express my appreciation to the Planning Board for setting aside the time to hold the workshop -- it was so refreshing to have an appropriate forum for interested parties to exchange information and openly discuss issues of importance related to a proposed development project. I hope that this initiative is successful in improving the review process for Seven Peaks and that this same type of forum can be used when evaluating other proposals.

With respect to the Seven Peaks project I think that the presentations of the BKAA consultants have highlighted several areas where the current project plans are lacking or can be further improved and I would ask the Board to seriously review the comments provided. As noted in the workshop these areas include storm water management, wetland buffers, road design and the adequacy of the water supply. However, in addition to these items, I would in particular like the Board to require the developer to follow the recommendation of the NYSDEC regarding the “Conservation Alternative” which would preserve the natural landscape on the western ridge of the parcel and to have the developer work with the New York -- New Jersey Trail Conference to designate an appropriate wild ridgeline corridor which could be used for public trails. It is my belief that the natural beauty of this parcel and other areas of our Town should be preserved -- not only for the environmental and aesthetic benefits to the community -- but also for the future eco-tourist value that they can generate. Requiring the developer to limit development to the eastern portion of the ridge will still allow the developer to meaningfully proceed with the project. But by leaving the western ridge portion essentially undisturbed, the larger community will also have the opportunity to benefit from any future trail development and to currently enjoy the aesthetic and environmental attributes that this parcel brings to our area.

Please require the Seven Peaks developer to fully address the many issues raised by the BKAA consultants and to especially follow the “Conservation Alternative” proposed by the NYSDEC.

Very truly yours, Monique Lipton

Update: China City, Now Known as Thompson Learning Center

by Paula Medley

Since China City’s scoping session was canceled by Thompson Supervisor Bill Rieber on January 22, the project has been publicly invisible, until May 20, when a letter from CEO Sherry Li surfaced on the Thompson town board’s agenda (see accompanying Li communication along with referenced “attached letters” from Simon Gelb and WIR). Notably, China City’s site plan application (a new one was mandated), targeted for discussion at the planning board’s May 28 meeting, was removed from that agenda.

The aforementioned communiques underscore China City’s aim to eradicate once and for all reports of prevailing development interest in Mamakating, thereby eliminating the segmentation issue from overshadowing future environmental review. Strategy-wise, applicants also hope to drastically diffuse ongoing advocacy by Mamakating residents, who have passionately challenged this undertaking. While China City claims, “Don’t worry, we won’t build in your town,” we’ll worry because China City’s credibility is nil. Given their record, we cannot trust their word.

However, even if this venture remains wholly in Thompson, the BKAA contends that critical land use matters, like impacts on the Bashakill Wetland System, stay relevant and necessitate continued organizational involvement. We likewise believe that our partners will persist in supporting BKAA efforts.

Our relentless fight with China City, Thompson Learning Center, or whatever it is named next, will be quite a roller coaster ride, but we are prepared for the journey and will prevail!!! STAY TUNED.

China City Letters

Applicant: Thompson Education Center, LLC
April 29, 2014

Town of Thompson Planning Board

This letter shall supplement and clarify prior letters sent. I am purchasing and planning a project for:

The Section 65, Block 1, Lot 11.59, Fallsburg Parcel has 5 acres

The project will only be in the Town of Thompson with the exit road in the Fallsburg. I am not seeking to extend the project into the Town of Mamakating. Please see attached letters regarding the Mamakating properties I had been trying to purchase in the past.

Yours truly, Sherry Li

(continued on page 20)
China City Letters (continued)

WIR ASSOCIATES, LLC
March 14, 2014

RE: Yankee Lake / Town of Wurtsboro Sale of Property
Contract for sale of property

Dear Johnny and Sherry,

Please be advised that the contract between WIR and China City is over. I want to personally wish you the very best in your future endeavors.

Very truly yours, Irwin Gitlin, Managing Member

Kingwood, et al Real Estate & Development
March 25, 2014

To: China City Land LLC
Re: Contract of Sale to China City
In the Towns of Mamakating, Thompson and Fallsburg
Sullivan County, New York

This letter confirms that all prior agreements for the sale of lands to China City Land LLC in the Town of Mamakating are null and void. The contract of sale with China City Land LLC is for the lands in the Town of Thompson and Fallsburg only.

Yours truly, Simon Gelb

Other Updates by Paula Medley

Shawanga Lodge: Currently, it appears that Shawanga Lodge entrepreneur David Flaum is pursuing casino dreams in Woodbury, Orange County, rather than Mamakating. We underscore “appears” as gambling sites remain in flux until June 30, deadline for casino submissions, when specific locales must be named.

Though a Shawanga Lodge casino seems unlikely, lodge property will be a catalyst for “off the wall” projects unless purchased as open space and incorporated into the Shawangunk Ridge Greenway. Until then, the BKAA advocates that this parcel be rezoned for lower density (See #5 in Medley Master Plan article). The BKAA will apprise members and partners of relevant breaking news.

Yukiguni Maitake: Nothing new to report.

Notes on the Southern Section of the Shawangunk Ridge Trail
by Andy Garrison and Jakob Franke

Andy Garrison and Jakob Franke are co-chairs of New York-New Jersey Trail Conference’s Long Path, and BKAA members - Reprinted with permission of Friends of the Shawungks) (See map on page 21)

Since the geological Shawangunk Ridge extends down into New Jersey and even farther, it is an obvious candidate for long-distance through-hiking access as well as preservation of an ecologically significant ridgetop corridor for species survival and migration. What follows is an overview of the route of just such a trail, focusing especially on the southern Shawangunks.

The Shawangunk Ridge Trail (SRT) begins at the Appalachian Trail within High Point State Park in New Jersey. This is the southern extension of the Shawangunk Ridge known as the Kittatinny Ridge. The original reasoning behind the SRT was to provide a backpacking alternative to the Orange County Long Path (LP) route, which contained long stretches of road walking. The idea was that backpackers could take the Appalachian Trail in Harriman State Park, hike south (west) to High Point State Park, and continue north on the SRT to meet the LP again on the Wurtsboro Ridge. This part of the SRT, which was built from 1991-1993, ended originally in Sam’s Point Preserve, where it connected with the Verkeerderkill Falls Trail, part of the LP.

Although the SRT has never become popular as the LP alternative that was originally envisioned, it is a fine trail in its own right and has become the focus of a major greenway project along the southern Shawangunks, and a large portion of the original SRT has now been incorporated into the LP following a major reroute of the LP in Orange County in 2012.

In High Point State Park the SRT climbs over the highest point of New Jersey while passing the High Point Monument. Fine views are had here. As you descend north the views continue for some time. The SRT crosses Cedar Swamp on a boardwalk and also passes through Blueberry. After 3.1 miles the SRT leaves New Jersey and crosses into Orange County, New York, in the town of Greenville. The trail leaves High Point State Park and crosses onto private land. It’s the largest private holding (500 plus acres) left this far south on the Shawangunk Ridge. For the next 1.5 miles the trail crosses this parcel and reaches the Greenville Turnpike. For its first 12 years of existence the SRT followed roads in this region to Hathorn Lake. In 2004 we reduced

(continued on page 22)
Shawangunk Ridge Trail  (continued)

that long road walk when we built a two-mile trail on land acquired by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference (NYNJTC). Several nice views are had along this section. This land has since become part of the Huckleberry Ridge State Forest (HRSF).

Currently Interstate 84 is a significant barrier for the SKI, and the trail follows local roads for about 610 miles before again reaching the woods. HRSF adjoins I-84 on both its north and south sides. A land bridge over I-84 would significantly improve the wildlife corridor here. It could also eliminate I-84 as a barrier for the SRT.

Beyond I-84 the trail passes Hathorn Lake and reaches the woods. Currently the trail goes along the border of the original HRSF parcel on private land. A plan is in place to move the trail onto this preserved parcel, which has nice features and a good view. Beyond the state forest the trail crosses private land on the west side of the Shawangunk Ridge below the main ridge line. The NYNJTC is currently working to preserve some of the parcels on the north side of HRSF. The trail passes through Shin Hollow and west of the recently acquired Ridgeview parcel, and joins the LP here. The LP comes over the ridge through the Ridgeview parcel. Another lower ridge which abuts the Neversink River is to the west of the trail. Shin Hollow east of the railroad tracks is currently an undeveloped area with nothing more than a couple of hunting shacks.

The bridge for Shin Hollow Road over the railroad tracks has been condemned for many years now. Metro North has agreed to rebuild the bridge at some point in the future and this will be bad for the trail in this area, as it will likely encourage development. As the trail leaves Shin Hollow it crosses a couple of private parcels and reaches an abandoned rail bed, owned by Norfolk Southern. It's the lifeline of the SRT in this region. The rail bed passes through a large landholding of a local religious group and is our only way through for the trail. We are currently putting together a plan to try to preserve this rail bed.

The rail bed passes through the towns of Deer Park and Mount Hope and brings the trail to Route 211. Following a short road walk the trail climbs to the ridge on the Gobbler's Knob parcel, originally purchased by the Open Space Institute (OSI). This land is now owned by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Following that the trail descends back to the road and reaches the Basha Kill, which it follows all the way to Wurtsboro in the town of Mamakating, in Sullivan County. Although the SRT was originally envisioned as a ridge trail, ownership on the ridge in this area was too fragmented to acquire a trail corridor. The rail bed along the Basha Kill has proven to be a very attractive alternative to the ridge, and with the D&H Canal towpath on the west side of the Basha Kill, loop hikes are a real possibility. Currently there are still almost two miles of road walk in Wurtsboro, but we are actively exploring possibilities to eliminate most of this road walk.

Past the Village of Wurtsboro the LP/SRT climbs back to the ridge, and the next 15 miles to Sam's Point offer some of the best vistas in the entire Shawangunks. The trail is here completely on state land, but one of the current drawbacks in this region is the lack of loop hikes. When the proposed Unit Management Plan (UMP) for the Shawangunks becomes a reality, increased parking opportunities and the creation of side trails on both sides of the ridge will undoubtedly help to popularize hiking in this area.

In 2013 the SRT has been extended all the way the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail by co-blazing existing trails with SRT markers. In Sam's Point and Minnewaska State Park Preserve this includes the Verkeerderkill Falls, Scenic, Rainbow Falls, Jenny Lane, Wawarsing Turnpike, and High Peters Kill trails. In Mohonk Preserve the SRT is co-aligned with the Old Minnewaska, Undivided Lot, Chapel, and Crag trails, and Cedar Drive, Bonticou Path, and the Northeast Trail to Mountain Rest Road. From there it is approximately 4 miles on local roads to the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail, which it will reach about 65 miles from the AT.

The land acquisitions in the southern Shawangunks have been in large pan spearheaded by the NYNJTC, with help from OSI and the Orange County Land Trust. A few of the parcels, now part of HRSF, are located below Route 6 in the Town of Deer Park, and contain nearly 10 miles of trails with some fine views. In the near future these trails will get connected to the SRT.

Another small trail system is located in Graham Mountain State Forest, in the Town of Mount Hope. These trails are connected with the SRT but accessibility is an issue and these fine trails are therefore underutilized. With luck the soon-to-be-finished UMP for the Shawangunk Ridge will fix that.

For information on the UMP see http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/93937.html And additional information about both long-distance trails can be found in the online version of the Long Path guidebook, on the NYNJTC website: www.nynjtc.org/book/long-path-guide-softcopy
BKAA Recommended Modifications to Master Plan & Zoning Code
by Paula Medley

During Mamakating's one year moratorium on residential development of four or more units, the Town is reviewing and making adjustments to its Comprehensive Master Plan (Plan) and zoning regulations that will improve quality of life in our communities. *(See map on page 21)*

To facilitate this process, the town board elicited public input at two workshops, on April 26 and 29. The BKAA attended the latter and offered the following changes:

1. Conduct a town-wide habitat assessment to be incorporated into the Plan. Inventorying Mamakating's natural landscape will protect critical resources while facilitating appropriate economic development (See J.G. "Spider" Barbour's commentary below).

2. Employ stronger language when referencing the Basha Kill and Shawangunk Ridge as possible Critical Environmental Areas (CEAs). For instance, state the Town "will designate" the above as CEAs, rather that the Town "recommends" these classifications.

3. Eliminate ineffectual language in Town Code Section 199-42 - Shawangunk Ridge View Protection Area. Instead of saying "whenever possible, structures shall be sited at lower elevations and close to existing roads," assert that "structures shall be sited."

4. Eradicate the loophole in Chapter 199-36c of the Code, which calculates density in the Ridge and Valley Protection and Mountain Greenbelt Zones using soil methods which yield higher residential density than originally intended.

5. Change Shawanga Lodge's zoning from "mixed use resort" to Ridge and Valley Protection, thereby lowering density (presently single-family residences and townhouses associated with a resort are allowed) and enhancing public scrutiny via a special use permit requirement. Permitting a resort "as of right," currently the case at Shawanga Lodge, "flies in the face" of the Plan's Vision for the Ridge!

6. In the Wurtsboro Airport Economic Development Area, create a "no build" buffer between intensive commercial/industrial development and the Gumaer Brook (headwaters of the Basha Kill), Shawangunk Ridge, and D&H Canal Linear Park. Unless this is accomplished, there will be continuous battles with environmental groups. Remember Yukiguni? And right now, access to a proposed 1.2 million square-foot warehouse, part of Commerce Park at Wurtsboro Airport's project, is at the end of McDonald Road, right "on top of" the crucial assets just listed. Consequently, site major commercial endeavors in this economic zone, right along Route 209, not inland. We likewise urge recommended uses to be better defined such as "distribution centers and warehouses not to be included."

Once the Town prepares a "draft" of suggested alternatives, a public hearing will be held. The BKAA will notify members and friends when this is scheduled.

Habitat Assessment & Mapping for Towns by Spider Barbour
*(Adapted from material provided by Gretchen Stevens, HudsonLa, Ltd., Annandale, NY, 2014.)*

Conservation of habitats is one of the best ways to protect a town's essential biological resources that support human life and the rest of the living world. However, available information on local habitats often is sketchy, anecdotal, unscientific, and outdated. A poor information base hampers town officials, planners, participating citizens and conservation groups in their common effort to make decisions for the town's benefit.

Hudsonia, Ltd., a biological research center located at Bard College in Annandale, NY, has provided public education and private consulting services by expert biologists familiar with the New York-New England-New Jersey region since 1981. I have worked for Hudsonia as a research associate and field ecologist since the mid-1980s and as an independent environmental consultant in the same geographic region since 1988.

Since 2002 Hudsonia has completed town-wide habitat maps for eleven towns in Dutchess and Ulster counties, and for parts of other towns in Schoharie, Albany, Greene, and Orange counties. Three towns have incorporated the maps and habitat reports into their comprehensive plan and/or zoning ordinance, and six towns have incorporated the habitat information into their routine reviews of land development projects. Habitat information can be used early in the process of site design and environmental reviews of development proposals. In comprehensive planning the habitat information and maps can help identify the most appropriate and least appropriate areas for new development. A town implementing its Open Space Plan can use the habitat information to help prioritize areas for open space conservation efforts, on its own and jointly with citizens and conservation groups.

(continued on page 24)
Habitat Assessment & Mapping (continued)

The habitat approach to conservation is quite different from the traditional parcel-by-parcel approach to land use decision making. It requires examining the landscape beyond the boundaries of any particular land parcel, and considering the size and juxtaposition of habitats in the landscape, the kinds of biological communities and species they support, and the ecological processes that help to maintain those species.

A habitat assessment begins with a fresh look at a town’s ecological landscape. A preliminary review of existing maps, aerial photographs and relevant written documentation (e.g. studies, reports) provides a basis for planning a field survey of the town at a level of detail commensurate with the required or intended depth and breadth of the assessment and mapping. Qualified scientists, sometimes with knowledgeable local assistance, then complete a field survey that provides the ground-level basis of a subsequent habitat description-assessment, and a GIS-generated town-wide habitat map, which may include areas of special importance mapped in more detail.

The assessment report usefully interprets and describes scientifically the town’s natural landscape. The habitat map provides a bird’s-eye view of the landscape, illustrating the location and configuration of ecologically significant habitats such as wetlands, vernal pools, grasslands, dwarf pine ridges, steep slopes and other places with potential for rare species and high biodiversity.

Many interesting ecological and land use patterns emerge, such as the location and extent of unfragmented forest blocks, areas where special habitats occur together, and the patterns of habitat fragmentation caused by roads and other development. This kind of general information can help the town consider where future development should be concentrated and where future conservation efforts should be targeted, as well as how development can be located or designed to minimize impacts to sensitive areas.

An understanding of the significant biological resources in the town enables local decision makers to focus limited conservation resources where they will have the greatest impact. At the site-specific scale, the habitat map can be used as a resource for routine deliberations over development proposals and other proposed land use changes. The map and report provide an independent body of information for environmental reviews, and will help raise and illuminate questions about important biological resources that might otherwise be overlooked.

In an area proposed for development, for example, the habitat map can provide basic ecological information about the site and the surrounding lands. The map can be made available to guide site visits and detailed assessments by qualified professionals on behalf of the town, conservation-minded developers and others. During site visits, the presence and boundaries of important habitats can be verified, changes that have occurred since our mapping can be ascertained, and the site can be assessed for additional ecological values previously unrecognized. Detailed, up-to-date ecological information is essential for making informed decisions about specific development proposals.

Information contained in the habitat map and assessment report also helps a town plan wisely for future development by directing development to appropriate areas and locations within the town to the mutual benefit of developers, existing businesses, and town residents. Incorporating this approach into planning and decision making will help to minimize the adverse effects of human activities on the landscape, integrate the needs of the human community with those of the natural communities, and protect the ecological patterns and processes that support us and the rest of the living world.

The Town of Mamakating has instituted a year-long moratorium on residential development to allow for amendment of its Comprehensive Plan, planning and zoning regulations. The rationale is to "support controlled growth, preserve open space, and promote community planning values." The moratorium and a new code of ethics could be hopeful signs of the town’s emerging environmental leadership.

I trust this report will provide useful guidance to Mamakating’s town officials and involved citizens.
Conservation and Bird Migration by Wilma Amthor

(Wilma Amthor is a BKAA Nature Watch Volunteer and Bloomingburg Master Gardener - Reprinted with permission of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Orange County)

I can’t remember when I didn’t watch birds. I have fed them ever since I had my own home and have spent countless hours watching them. Two years ago a friend gave me a flyer from the Basha Kill Area Association with many activities for nature lovers. One of those activities was a walk at the Basha Kill, on the border of Orange County, with a local birder during the May bird migration . . . and so goes the obsession I have with birds.

I didn’t realize we had so many beautiful birds pass through our area and actually stay here. I always thought that birds only passed through in the spring and that those special birds didn’t stay. I was surprised to find that even in the cold months of February and March there are birds passing through the wildlife habitats in our area, and I started making a weekly trip to Basha Kill and documenting birds I saw with photography. I’m learning more about the Kill and efforts to conserve the natural habitat there. That has led to a thirst for knowledge and to find other places to visit in our area. I have found several within a short drive from Middletown, NY.

The United States has established a National Wildlife Refuge system dedicated to preserving the natural habitats of our wildlife and includes each state. We have two in our area of New York. The Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge is a large protected area that straddles New York and New Jersey. The Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Refuge is in Ulster County near the Orange County border. Another special area is 6-1/2 Station Road in Goshen and is owned and operated by the Orange County Audubon Society. There is also the Stewart Preserve located near Newburgh, NY.

As I drove around visiting each of them, I noted that in addition to the preserved areas, there are acres of old farm fields and wooded areas that surround them and increases the area available for the many species that pass through. There are winding creeks and marsh areas. Along the edges of the preserves there are tree lines that provide perching and breeding sites for many migratory songbirds such as indigo buntings, field sparrows and eastern bluebirds. It also provides protection from predators. Small ponds and streams help with flood control and are home to many breeding waterfowl like mallards, geese, wood ducks, swans and blue herons.

The grasslands and marshes are home to many birds that use it for cover and breeding. Bobolinks, grasshopper sparrows and eastern meadowlarks can be found in these areas. During late fall and early winter many owls pass through such as Short Eared Owls and Northern Harriers along with Rough-legged hawks and Broad-shouldered hawks. Red-tailed hawks inhabit the areas year round.

Cooperation between farmers and management areas throughout the country are important ecologically to our environment. Farmers help by mowing some grassy areas after breeding season which keeps grassy areas from becoming woody and in turn keeps the habitat for migrating birds and raptors. The raptors in turn keep insect and rodent populations around farmlands under control. As one rides through the black dirt and dairy farming lands in Orange County, you can see how integrated the area really is and how important it is to the survival of wildlife. The Department of Environmental Conservation keeps an eye on any large projects and does studies to prevent damage to our environment. It controls projects with tall buildings and lights in migration pathways that would affect bird health and safety. It also monitors building to prevent chemical runoff that would destroy breeding environments and any proposed changes in stream beds that would adversely affect water runoff or flood control.

Have you ever wondered why birds migrate? What causes them to move from one area to another? Did you think it was too cold for them to live? More than 650 species of birds nest in North America Some are permanent and some are migratory. Some species can live in the north as long as their food preferences are available. There are three types of migration.

1. Short distance: higher to lower elevation in search for food.
2. Medium distance: from one state to another or to multiple states
3. Long distance: some species travel from the US and Canada in summer to Mexico and South America in the winter.

Migratory pathways can be over land and some are directly over the ocean from North America to South America. They sometimes fly for days without stopping. Some waterfowl fly at 300 to 10,000 or even 15,000 feet to avoid storms.

(continued on page 26)
Conservation and Bird Migration  (continued)

and take advantage of winds to help their journey. We don’t see them because they fly high and frequently fly at night.

The North America migration count was started in 1992 and continues the second Saturday in May each year. Birders have specified areas that birds are counted. This helps with conservation efforts and gives an idea of the health of our environment if bird populations steadily decline or increase over time. During some years there are irruptions of different bird populations. This is a condition where it is believed they must move out of their normal habitat to find food. In 2013, the Snowy Owl was found in significant numbers in areas all over the northeast states. In recent years irruptions of pine siskins and common redpolls have occurred in our area.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is developing a program to monitor bird migration by Doppler radar. It gives migration forecasts in real time. You can access it at www.birdcast.info and it runs from March 1 to November. Information can be obtained regarding migration, when a group of birds can be expected in the area and the winds that affect migration fall out where an unusual number of birds are seen after a weather pattern. You can add an app to your smartphone to track the birds you see at www.ebird.org.

If you want to learn more about migration read Songbird Journeys, written by Miyoko Chu, an ornithologist at Cornell. More information about birds is available at the Cornell website: www.birds.cornell.edu

BKAA in the Community  by Paula Medley

8/28/2013 - BKAA represented at Mamakating Rotary Community Day at Town Park.

10/4/2013 - BKAA representatives attended Sullivan County Audubon Society’s Annual Meeting

10/12/2013 - BKAA partnered with NY-NJ Trail Conference on a trail maintainer’s workshop.

10/23/2013 - Michael Medley led an outing at Huckleberry State Forest.

10/19/2013 - The BKAA joined Mamakating Lions at a Basha Kill event.

10/20/2013 - Celebrated Friends of the Shawangunks 50th anniversary at their Annual Meeting in Gardiner.


1/15/2014 - BKAA representative presented Mary Paige Lang-Clouse, Director of the Ethelbert B. Crawford Public Library in Monticello with copies of John Haas’ Birding Guide for all Sullivan and Ulster County public libraries in the Ramapo Catskill Library System (RCLS).

2/8/2014 - BKAA sponsored Ravensbeard Wildlife Center’s “Live Bird Show” at Wurtsboro’s Winterfest.


3/10/2014 - BKAA representative addressed the Sullivan County Legislature Subcommittee on casinos.


3/29/14 - Nature Watch orientation at Mamakating Library


(continued on page 28)
A reception committee of goslings welcomes our guests from Leadership Sullivan at the boat launch. PHOTO BY BOB MULLER  (See Leadership Conf. story page 9)

Ceibo Tree in Cerro Blanco. ©2008 (story on page 10)

Tangerine, a grey-cheeked parakeet with Cliff Johnson. PHOTO BY MICHAEL STEWART

Matthew Migliaccio, 1 of 3 recipients of Sullivan Co. Human Rights Commission Recognition Awards (story on page 30) PHOTO BY HIS NIECE, ANGELA GUZZI

Willingham story (page 31)
BKAA in the Community (continued)

4/12/2014 - BKAA collaborated with the Port Jervis Free Library on a nature photography show.

4/22/2014 - BKAA participated in “Earth Day” at SUNY Orange.


5/10/2014 - BKAA representatives attended a ribbon-cutting ceremony in Westbrookville, officially opening 1 1/2 miles of the D & H Canal Towpath in Deerpark.

5/11/2014 - Participated in the 4th Annual Tulip Festival and Mother’s Day Celebration at Honor’s Haven in Ellenville.


5/18/2014 - Michael Medley led a hike to Gobbler’s Knob.

5/21/2014 - BKAA facilitated Leadership Sullivan Class of 2014’s “Basha Kill Day” via on-site presentations.

BKAA & Port Jervis Library Expand Cooperation by Fred Harding

The Public Computer Center (The Hub) at Port Jervis Free Library presented a free exhibition by regional nature photographers chosen for their focus on local subjects and exceptional quality of their work. This event, coordinated and organized by The Hub staff, was held on Saturday, April 12, 2014.

The Basha Kill and our region are blessed with beautiful landscapes, bountiful wildlife, and colorful foliage, and it is home to many talented photographers. BKAA members and supporters Linda Lou Bartle, James Carney, and Eleanor Knieriem were among the seven photographers selected to exhibit. Many works displayed centered on the plants and animals that call the Basha Kill home.

One picture from each artist was “Best of Exhibit” and highlighted with a blue ribbon. Several were of our beloved Basha Kill.

After the program, Linda Lou Bartle shared with Fred Harding, BKAA board member and Hub administrator, that “she had a great time and would be pleased to do it again.”

Other participating photographers included Richard Clapp of Port Jervis, Jim Davis of Mill Rift, as well as Nick Gessner and Caitlin Treuting of Port Jervis.

The Hub, as a public computer center, has 16 computers available for anyone to use along with a trainer, who is on duty at all times to assist and teach. It also presents and/or hosts 8 to 10 functions each month. Beverly Arlequeeuw, Director of the Port Jervis Free Library said, “I enthusiastically support the growing spirit of cooperation among our two organizations,” a statement supported by Paula Medley, President of the BKAA.

For more information about The Hub and its activities contact Fred Harding at fharding@hvc.rr.com.
Introduction to Sustainability by Colin A. Holmes

(Colin, 18 years old, was a BKAA-sponsored DEC camper)

Sustainable living and development is becoming more and more popular. However, many do not understand what this actually means. Sustainable development is the process by which we, as a global society, use our resources to meet the needs of today, while not compromising future generations to meet their own needs. There are numerous methods to achieve a more sustainable life. Some methods include agricultural conservation tillage, heirloom design, recycling, and soil and water conservation.

Wetlands used to be plentiful in North America, mainly prior to our exploration from the original colonies. Many wetlands have been drained for agriculture due to their soils being very rich in key nutrients for successful crop yields. During the time periods that these areas were drained, the people behind the operations just were not aware of the destruction they were actually doing to the environment. There were even federal laws, The Swamp Lands Acts of 1849 and 50 and The Homestead Act of 1862, which led to the encouragement of draining wetlands and deforesting certain areas for agricultural purposes.

This continued into the 1960's, which was the beginning of the environmental movement, thanks to Rachel Carson and her book, Silent Spring. Her book was controversial and caught people's attention, which led to actual awareness. From there, the Swampbuster of 1985, finally discouraged the drainage of the areas.

Protecting and conserving our wetlands are important in sustainability. According to Table 3 in “Global Estimates of the Value of Ecosystems and Their Services in Monetary Units”, coastal and inland wetlands rank second at $887,828 and third at $104,924, respectively, for the total maximum value of ecosystem services. This means that wetlands are an extremely important factor in our environment. These areas are home to a variety of species, all coexisting within the ecosystem and keeping a healthy balance within the system. They provide us with ecosystem system services.

Wetlands provide flood control, by acting as a sponge and absorbing large amounts of water, water purification, by trapping sediments and holding onto key nutrients, and biodiversity, by having a variety of available species.

Recently, I took part in an annual cleanup held in Westbrookville/Wurtsboro, New York, and hosted by the Basha Kill Area Association (BKAA). With roughly 60 volunteers, we split into small groups, and went in separate directions to start cleaning the Basha Kill Wildlife Management Area, which is approximately 2,175 acres and protected by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). This wetland area is surrounded by shrubland and forests, and is home to a variety of species such as Osprey, Bald Eagles, Wood Ducks and a variety of fish as well (Bashkill BCA Management).

The main objective of this clean up was to rid the area of man-made trash and wastes. We covered highly travelled areas such as the dirt parking lots, hiking trails, boat launches, and fishing holes. The project began at around 10 am on April 26 and went to about 1 pm. By then, each group had collected a large amount of trash.

Preventing garbage and debris from entering our waterways is a must. Having the waste flow downstream poses an increased environmental risk by affecting more areas. If the wastes were to remain there, harmful chemicals might be released into the water during decomposition and breakdowns and contaminate the area. Possible entrapment of aquatic life in tarps and plastic bags might also occur as some animals may mistake the trash for food.

The Basha Kill flows into the Neversink River, which connects into the Delaware River, and eventually the Delaware Bay. This wetlands area has a long aquatic system attached to it. The majority of the trash that was collected was glass bottles, aluminum and tin cans, plastic jugs, tarps, balloons, tires, fishing supplies, paint cans, and other basic household items.

Although the rate of wetlands loss has decreased substantially, we are still losing more acres of these lands than we are gaining and conserving. The less damage and man-made waste in a natural environment, the better. Local areas cleaning up trash and debris is a great way to help out and care for this delicate environment.

A better solution is to prevent the trash from entering the habitat in the first place. However this is a large and difficult task. Recycling and reusing also play a big role in this. For every item reused, there is one less item polluting the environment. A healthy habitat leads to a productive habitat, full of ecosystem services.
Eileen Haworth Weil Scholarship Brunch by Andy Weil

On April 17 the second annual Eileen Haworth Weil Scholarship Brunch was held at the Eagle’s Nest in Bloomingburg. The event was sponsored by the Sullivan County Human Rights Commission which was co-founded by Eileen. She served on the Commission until her death in March of 2012, when she lost a valiant fight with cancer.

Eileen was no stranger to a good fight. In addition to her human rights concerns, including active membership in the NAACP, Eileen was a longtime member of the Bashakill Area Association and a strong ally of Paula Medley. Together they fought tirelessly to protect the environment and preserve the rural character of Mamakating.

The brunch this year honored three local citizens who have championed their own noble concerns. Priscilla Bassett of Grahamsville was recognized for her lifelong work in civil rights and many years leading the charge at the Senior Legislative Action Committee of Sullivan County (SLAC). As she spoke we remembered her late husband, equally passionate and active, Emmett Bassett, who was honored at last year’s brunch.

Next to be acknowledged was Matthew Migliaccio of Phillipsport. Recently appointed to the newly formed Mamakating Board of Ethics, Matt served alongside Eileen on the Human Rights Commission. He is president of the Phillipsport Community Center, a long-time ally of the BKAA. For over thirty years he has provided rehabilitation counseling to individuals with disabilities. At the brunch, Matt spoke of losing his own leg in an accident. The traumatic event did not slow him down in his efforts to help others, which he credited in part to Eileen’s encouraging him through the ordeal. (See photo on page 27)

Monticello native Gladys Walker rounded out the trio of honorees perfectly. Another NAACP member, Gladys has dedicated nearly forty years to helping people through CACHE – the anti-poverty organization Community Action Commission to Help the Economy. After 38 years as the mouthpiece for those with no voice, she’s back at the helm as executive director while they seek a permanent replacement, apparently no easy task.

The role of Master of Ceremony was suitably ably played by Applepond Farm’s Dick Riseling. The powerful keynote address made by Paul Austin reminded everyone of their common humanitarian goals, (and a bit of “the good old days” of Sullivan Peace & Justice luncheons).

The main purpose of the event was to award a $1000 scholarship in memory of Eileen to an SCCC graduating student pursuing further education toward a four-year degree specifically aimed at making the world a better place. The scholarship was awarded to Julia Armstrong, who will be seeking a degree in environmental science at Columbia University, an appropriate aim for an already known activist for FrackAction, an anti-drilling group. “Action is what brings about change”, she declared, to which everyone in attendance at the brunch agreed whole-heartedly.

Poetry Corner

This Winter I’m Moved by Silvia Di Giulio-Colella

To see the swollen gnars and joints of trees from this high point,
Crossed branches hung in midair gods-waiting,
for breaking frost to ground them, what despair!
There they will lie; beginning to feed another of rapacious mosses and errant snails sphere;
whose oozings sketch lucid ribbons on their way;
to attack attached mushrooms under the weeping willow,
whose broken branches weep no more. . .

Why is the wind billowing at such a rate?
In the soul it swells the ingratitude.
Amid this -- what’s the use of dreaming of this Primavera
frosted Chimera?
Therefore repair your eyes, let’s rejoice!
Soon the flakes will invite again everyone’s
eye to their downward dance
Truly a rapture in silence as the oblivious sparrows heighten this reverence,
-Amidst- is there a God in all this?
Of course there is, "assures the mystic."
God, what to do for the skeptic, ridden
with contradictions, as the flakes undulating persist?

Mother’s Cat by Carmine Colella

There she lies in her semi sleep
most loyal to her wild rules.
She looks at the birds flying in the sky
she thinks of the morsel passing her by.
You may tease 20 year old Shelley
if you dare, she might end up running away.
But if she knows you well,
she'll become your slave.
That’s the way she’s been trained.
My mother takes her for granted
whereas she has become her loyal servant!
In the morning she goes around sniffing
her familiar scented sites, but for all
of us visiting she’s really a delight!
MEET THE BKAA’S CONSULTANTS:

Andy Willingham, Civil Engineer by Susan Erny & Andy Willingham

The BKAA is very proud of the four professional consultants who work with us reviewing the Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) of locally proposed developments. The consultants’ reports give the BKAA the clout needed to reveal to our town officials the faultiness of most EIS so that, hopefully, the problems will be rectified. Not surprisingly, the majority of our financial resources are expended on the services of these consultants. Because they are so invaluable to us, we are spotlighting each of them in the *Guardian*. In our last issue, we interviewed Spider Barbour, Ecologist. Stepping up to the plate next from the BKAA consultant team is Andrew Willingham, Civil Engineer. Batter up!

Most people would be surprised by how much their everyday lives are influenced by the work of civil engineers. They are the brains “behind the scenes” of such common things as roads, bridges, and water and wastewater systems. After speaking with Andy, I gained a greater appreciation of the significant role civil engineers play in our society. I’m also learning that these modest, brainy scientists lead colorful lives.

On the Willingham Engineering (WE) website, he offers “high quality land development consultation with integrity and excellence.” How? “By taking an integrated approach to land development, WE provides engineering services with the community, natural resources and aesthetics in mind.” Isn’t that just what the BKAA is looking for: integrity as well as a concern for the community, natural resources and aesthetics? Yes! And if you have had the occasion to read the reports Andy has created for 7 Peaks or China City, you can’t help but be impressed by the thoroughness and insight of his work. NYSDEC requirements, local codes and safety issues are just a few of the wide array of topics which he must become familiar with.

When I asked how he gets the information about the development sites, he explained it is not by going to the actual property since it is not usually permitted by the developer. Instead, he gets his information from surveyors’ mapping and topography which are in 3D. However, when he is contracted to design a project, he will go to the site to see firsthand the trees, the ground cover and get a general feel for the land and the surrounding properties. With this information he can urge the developer to work with the character and topography of the site.

Aside from BKAA work, Andy has also designed a number of projects in our area. One project he designed is the New Paltz Sports & Recreation Park which has 3 softball fields, a volleyball court, a concession stand and restroom facilities. He gets to reap the benefits of that project every time he plays softball there! Another project he helped design is the 1,000-foot long pedestrian walkway on the Rosendale Trestle 150 feet above the Rondout Creek. Additionally, he engineered a conservation subdivision where lots are clustered on one side of a piece of land and the rest remains undeveloped. How rewarding it must be to bring these beneficial projects to fruition.

Following are responses to questions we posed to Andy. If you are surprised at what a gifted writer this engineer is, he claims it as part of his heritage: his grandfather was Calder Willingham, novelist (ETERNAL FIRE) and screenwriter (THE GRADUATE).

*Why and when did you become an engineering consultant?*

The plain truth is I could have been a better student in high school if I had put forth more effort. Fortunately, I scored fairly high on the math portion of my SAT’s, and SUNY Buffalo agreed to enroll me under one condition – that I major in engineering. The opportunity to move 6 hours away from home sounded great to me, and it turned out it was in fact a field that was a good match for me. While at Buffalo, I chose civil engineering (e.g. instead of mechanical or electrical) because it seemed to have the most interaction with people and the community, as compared to other types of engineering.

*What are some functions of an engineering consultant? What exactly does it entail?*

Civil Engineering entails quite a spectrum of fields that include stormwater, wastewater, potable water, structures, roads, and construction. To be a competent civil engineer takes many years of experience and at least a general knowledge of all the different fields. My job is to be proficient in all aspects of land development, to know the applicable rules and regulations and be able to design (or review) developments while taking all the variables into consideration.

Although the backbone of my profession is being a competent engineer, it is surprising how many of my efforts are not related to engineering. Political climate,
Andy Willingham (continued)

environmental concerns, public relations, zoning, real estate and economics are all issues I consistently deal with, to name a few.

What do you enjoy most about your work? What is most difficult about your line of work?

I enjoy the variety of the work, and the opportunity to make land development projects better for the community and/or the environment. Above all, what I enjoy most is seeing a project built that I designed. The most difficult parts of my job are political considerations and misperception issues. Too often decisions are made on land development projects for the wrong reasons and without seeing the “big picture” and that can be difficult to be a part of.

When did you assume this role for the BKAA?

I have had the honor of being the BKAA’s consulting engineer since 2005, originally through David Clouser Associates and now through my firm, Willingham Engineering. It began with the very controversial Yukiguni Maitake Mushroom Plant which we were extensively involved with for many years.

What other issues have you addressed in your BKAA role?

In addition to the Yukiguni project, I have provided engineering consultation for Commerce Park, China City, 7 Peaks, Mamakating Stormwater Law and DPG Home Inspection.

How do you like partnering with nonprofits like the BKAA?

I thoroughly enjoy providing engineering consultation to non-profit organizations. Their intentions are almost always for the greater good, which makes my job rewarding. The BKAA is also very organized and goal oriented, which makes the experience more effective and beneficial to all involved.

What is your value to groups like ours?

Although it has become more common in recent years, it can be difficult for community advocacy groups or non-profit groups that have concerns about a particular project to find engineering consultation. Many engineers don’t want to be labeled as “anti-development”, since many of us often work on the other side, as the design engineer for the developer. We make a considerable effort to present what we believe are real engineering or environmental issues and don’t subscribe to the idea of “seeing what sticks”. Above all, the community group deserves expert representation equal to the other vested parties such as the municipality or the developer, who have their own experts at their disposal. Our value is to provide the engineering expertise needed for the group to make informed decisions, and to level the playing field for some of these controversial and environmentally impactful land development projects.

How do you feel about the age-old dilemma of economic development vs. environmental protection?

My view on this matter has changed over the years. After leaving college as fairly green (in multiple ways) I’ve developed what I believe is a balanced approach. I have come to understand the difference between a pristine wetland and a low lying area that has a clogged culvert or an old growth forest vs. an overgrown farm field. As the owner of 2 acres in a rural area, a coop filled with chickens and surrounding heavy wildlife activity, I have come to understand the coexistence of humans and nature more and more over the years. It is a complicated process with many variables, and each piece of land is inherently different and deserves thoughtful and separate consideration.

Who or what has inspired you?

I owe a lot of my success to my wife. It was after I met her that my ambition, work ethic and drive to succeed started gaining a foothold. And of course my two young sons further my aspirations to be successful and a good role model.

What are some of your other pastimes?

Although I do like my job, I’m one that works to live and not the other way around. I love to eat, cook, and strive to try every type of food there is on earth. I fish, hunt, ski, make my own beer, wine, pickles and kimchi. I’ve dabbled in woodworking, gardening and have tried just about every type of do it yourself project imaginable. I play on a soccer team in the winter and softball in the summer. Someday I’ll find time to travel more, grow my own mushrooms (not that kind), make cheese and become a honey beekeeper (my wish list of hobbies and places to travel to wouldn’t fit in this article!).

Have you ever thought about doing something else?

I thought about being a major league baseball player. If I didn’t have a bum shoulder I’d be on the Yankees for sure!

The BKAA is sorry for the Yankees’ loss and for your sore shoulder, but we are grateful for the “home runs” you hit for us, Andy. (See photo on page 27)
The Never-Ending Nature Walk by Nora Brusinski

This summer, I have been offered a unique opportunity. SUNY Orange is offering a biology class completely devoted to the Basha Kill, and I am fortunate enough to be taking it. The class runs for six weeks, from May 27 to July 2, meeting on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday afternoons. It is taught by Professor Martin Borko, who lived and taught in the area for many years before his retirement, and who was instrumental in the state acquisition of the Basha Kill in the 1970s. Although he now lives in central New York, he kindly came back this summer to share his encyclopedic knowledge of the Basha Kill flora, fauna, and geology in a special class.

Our class is very small, with only six students, but that allows us to learn in more detail. Our group is a mix of ages, majors, and backgrounds, but we are united by a love of nature. Every day we meet at the college and go over things that we have learned previously. Then we travel to the Basha Kill to explore nature. As this is being written, we have only been in class for two weeks, but already we have learned so much. We can now identify trees, birds, and rocks on sight. We have also seen some fascinating animals which most people do not get to see frequently. On our first day, we were able to get a long look at a Scarlet Tanager, and later we got up close and personal with a snapping turtle. As the class progresses, we are expecting to check out some creatures living in streams and ponds, as well as explore even more trails.

Although I have lived near the Basha Kill my whole life, there is still so much to learn about it. Taking this class will help me expand on my knowledge and better appreciate the beauty of the wetland. Be sure to read the next issue of The Guardian for a more in-depth analysis of my experiences with this class.

Birding for Beginners by Scott Graber

One of my favorite activities happens to be sharing my longtime passion for birds - particularly with people who are relatively new to birding as well as with folks who enjoy the birds around their home but just haven't taken the next step toward species identification. So I decided to add the Basha Kill to the mix and introduce a brand new BKAA program aimed at beginning birders! Thus on the morning of June 1, it was time to kick off Birding for Beginners.

An enthusiastic group of thirteen started the day by enjoying a picture-perfect panoramic view of the Basha Kill from the Haven Road bridge. Almost immediately, we saw several Red-winged Blackbirds. Many participants were quite surprised to learn that there is such a striking difference in plumages between the male and female birds. On Haven Road, we also spent time comparing the differences between Tree Swallows and Barn Swallows. We were then treated to a brightly colored male Cardinal flying by -- a nice bonus to some early morning birding.

Our next destination was the old railroad bed trail on the west side of the Basha Kill (known to some as the "Stop Sign" parking area). As soon as we reassembled, a male Baltimore Oriole made a colorful appearance. A truly beautiful bird for all to see! Seconds later, a Yellow Warbler was heard singing in a small maple tree. Following the sound of the song we located the gorgeous bird bathed in early morning sunlight.

Along the trail, we also spotted Grey Catbirds, a male Common Yellowthroat, a singing Warbling Vireo and an American Redstart. A Rose-breasted Grosbeak was heard singing overhead but couldn't be seen. One group member happened to spot a Veery only a few yards off the trail. It was most likely the same bird we had heard singing a bit earlier.

We capped off the morning by visiting the South Road boat launch and looked at Bald Eagles and Ospreys (in their nests) through spotting scopes kindly set up by the Nature Watch volunteers. A Great Blue Heron was also easily seen as it hunted for prey in the marsh.

To better assist the group, I handed out a resource sheet with information on birding field guides, local birding clubs, suggestions on purchasing binoculars and much more. I also displayed some of today's best bird field guides and discussed the pros and cons of each. Even smartphone users weren't neglected as we addressed a few popular birding apps.

With an abundance of birds, great weather, loads of enthusiasm and a magnificent setting, the morning was a great success! Please watch next year's BKAA program schedule -- Birding for Beginners will certainly be back for another round.
40 YEARS: HISTORY OF THE BKAA (part 9) by Buff McAllister

MASTER PLAN (1996-2002)

In 1996, questionnaires were sent to residents of Mamakating by a master plan committee, asking them what was important to them for the town. There were many meetings of the committee throughout 1996 and 1997.

On August 23, 1997, there was a public meeting to solicit public input. Stuart Turner Associates, the professionals assisting with the process, presented a “Design Guidelines/Land Use Planning Workshop” for the committee and interested parties. The visual survey rated the following extremely highly: open space, D&H Canal, Basha Kill, view of the Shawangunk Ridge, horse farms, farmhouses and stone walls.

Here are some of the conclusions reached by Stuart Turner Associates in a document dated September 14, based on the public meeting and the workshops:

1. Land use should preserve significant expanses of open space, woodland, farmland and preservation of scenic vistas. Residential developments should preserve large amounts of open space.

2. “New development should be required to incorporate and preserve historic features found within the community.”

3. “Farmland preservation is crucial.” Existing farmers should be assisted in finding alternative uses to retain their land.

4. “With few exceptions, large-scale residential and nonresidential uses rated Highly Inappropriate.” Nix on big-box retail stores and shopping centers. Landscaping and retaining of trees and other vegetation was very important. “…the community does not desire auto-oriented strip commercial development.” [emphasis in original]

There were many more meetings of the committee into 1998, and it seemed to take its job seriously and take public input seriously. By March 1999, the master plan seemed to be a solid, well-thought-out document that tried very hard to reflect the concerns of the citizens. At that point, the committee forwarded the plan (including some zoning amendments) to the Town Board, which started the SEQRA process.

Then something happened. As reviewed in a timeline from the town board to the public dated March 27, 2001, “In 1999, the then Town Board during review of the comprehensive plan and zoning amendment, proposed revisions to the comprehensive plan and zoning amendment, referred to collectively as the ‘resort development’ modifications.” [emphasis in original] What a bland way to refer to a disaster — and blaming the town board at the time, as though the current board could not reverse it!

Those “proposed revisions” essentially “spot-zoned” three areas in the town as “Planned Resort Community” (PRC). The amendments practically begged for mega-development (hoping for casinos?) on the Shawangunk Ridge, the Catskill Ridge above Wurtsboro Hills, and on the shores of Yankee Lake. (The planning board wondered if it should allow helipads!)

The Supplemental Impact Statement prepared by the town board for these revisions claimed that “it is not anticipated that any significant impacts will result from development of the areas for resort development.” The board didn’t “anticipate” any “significant impacts” on soils, ground or surface water resources, on wetlands or adjoining land uses; no impact on community services or solid waste disposal; and no negative impact from an increase in population.

It did admit that development would increase traffic and had the potential to have a significant visual impact due to the prominence of the Shawangunk Ridge. In addition, those areas might have suitable habitat for threatened and endangered species (not that the species were there, mind you, but the habitat might be). The SDGEIS cited no research or supporting evidence.

The public was outraged. (Well, except for groups such as Sullivan County Partnership for Economic Development, which wanted fewer restrictions!) There were public hearings on three dates — July 18, August 1, and August 19, 2000 — and hundreds of people turned out to complain, not about the bulk of the master plan, but about the last-minute town board revisions.

TO BE CONTINUED . . .
2014 CALENDAR

Weekends through Sunday, June 29th
Nature Watch at the South Road Boat Launch
Join trained BKAA Nature Watch Volunteers at South Road boat launch to learn more about residents of this amazing wetland. View nesting bald eagles and other birds. Volunteers have two powerful spotting scopes and lots of information; get to know the Bash Kill better. Bring your children, family and friends of all ages for fun in the outdoors! 10:00am to 4:00pm every Saturday and Sunday through June 29. Call Maryallison Farley at 845-888-0261 or Patricia Diness at 845-386-5024 for more details.

Sunday, June 29th, 10am
Blooms and Butterflies with John Kenney
See the next wave of wildflowers and a beautiful array of butterflies. Meet at Haven Road DEC parking lot, 209 side. Call John to register and/or for further information at 845-436-6046.

Friday, July 11th, 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 Haven Road DEC parking lot, 209 side. Contact Gary at 845-386-4892 for additional facts.

Saturday, July 12th, 8:30 pm
Moonlight Canoe/Kayak Adventure with Scott Graber and Mike Medley
Experience the Bash Kill from a unique perspective! Must bring your own vessel. Meet at South Road Boat Launch. Register and check status with Mike at 845-754-0743.

Sunday, July 20th, 10am
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.

Sunday, August 17, 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 27th, 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.

Saturday, October 4th, 9:30am
Hike the Shawangunk Ridge with Mike Medley
Moderately difficult hike, 4-5 hours. Wear comfortable sturdy shoes; 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 18th, 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.

TELL A FRIEND ABOUT THE BKAA!

Have your friends fill out this coupon for membership or more information. PO Box 1121, Wurtsboro, NY 12790

Yes, I’m interested in the environment and wish to become a member of BKAA. Enclosed is: ________ $10 for membership ________ Other Donation ________ Please send more information.

Name_________________________________________________________ Phone__________________________

Address________________________________________________________ Email__________________________

(for action alerts)
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<td>History of BKAA (part 9)</td>
<td>34</td>
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<td>Calendar</td>
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PHOTOS ON PAGES 1, 7, 27
MAPS ON PAGE 21