

SPRING 2020 NEWSLETTER

HAPPY EARTH DAY
from
Otsego Land Trust

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"Stay close to nature, it will never fail you."

- Frank Lloyd Wright

Letter from the Director

Dear Friends,

In the uncertain and difficult times we are facing in fighting the COVID 19 pandemic, we want to wish you all the best that can be, and for you to stay safe and healthy. We cherish our supporters, volunteers, conservation easement landowners, and friends from all walks of life.

We at Otsego Land Trust are working from our homes to make sure our public access lands are safe and available for you to enjoy, while implementing social distancing guidelines. These are unprecedented times indeed.

I am reminded of Frank Lloyd Wright's wonderful, truth-filled thought that has brought me resolve and peace over the years: *stay close to nature, it will never fail you*. I am greeted by a small plaque in our kitchen each day with this quote on it, and I am seeing it now more than ever. It reminds me that in reality, the natural world around us is doing exactly what it should be doing. It is oblivious to our troubles and fulfilling its purpose, and yet it welcomes us to marvel at its essence. It is real.

And yes, it is perfectly okay to hug a tree.

Speaking of trees, they are bursting with buds. Spring flora are blooming, birds are singing and checking each other out (and all the marvelous places on our property to nest and raise a brood!) and turkeys march through my yard as if on cue.

I hope you can stay close to nature during this time. Check out one of our public access lands, or simply get out and enjoy what is outside your home. In this newsletter you'll find new guidelines for public land use, and as always, stories and education about love of land. Stay well and safe, and a happy Earth Day.

– Patricia Szarpa, Executive Director



OUR EARTH IS ESSENTIAL.

We hope you always remember how essential it is, by being here. Please continue to utilize our public lands, and allow for a little space by following these directives:

- Refrain from using parks or trails if you are exhibiting symptoms of Covid 19, or any illness.
- Follow CDC, New York State, and Otsego County Health guidance on personal hygiene prior to use of parks or trails.
- While on trails, warn other users of your presence and as they pass, and step aside to let others pass.
- Follow CDC, New York State, and Otsego County Health guidance to prevent close contact interactions.
- Bring a mask with you, and use it if you must pass someone closely on the trail.
- Observe minimum recommended social distancing, remaining 6 feet from other individuals at all times. If this is not possible, users should find an alternate location or depart that space.
- Dog owners, please keep pets leashed in order to better prevent close contact interactions.
- Please be advised that conditions are changing very rapidly. Please stay tuned to the CDC, local and state mandates, law enforcement and health departments for the most up-to-date recommendations and public safety orders.

Thank you for helping us keep you safe.

Nature: A Prescription for Good Health

We've navigated 2020 so far in the midst of a global pandemic; an unprecedented time of uncertainty impacting each and every one of us. For many, the anxiety associated with COVID-19 is like nothing we have experienced before. Many of us have found sources of light and relief to help manage day to day life. For some it's exercise (we're partial to hiking) for others it's music, painting, reading—maybe it's that old hobby you've picked up again. Whatever that “thing” is, we hope it has helped you cope with the mental, physical, and emotional stress of this new and socially distanced world.

For us at Otsego Land Trust, conservation—and the connection between people and land— is our core mission. Through this unprecedented health crisis, the connection between open space and health is more important than ever. The research is still evolving, but the message is clear: the closer we are to nature, the healthier we are.

Dozens of studies show that time spent in nature can improve health in tangible ways ranging from reduced lower blood pressure, reduced nervous system arousal, enhanced immune system function, increased self esteem, reduced anxiety, and more.



The organization Parks RX America encourages healthcare providers to write literal, medical prescriptions for spending time outside to improve health, stating its mission is "to decrease the burden of chronic disease, increase health and happiness, and foster environmental stewardship, by virtue of prescribing Nature during the routine delivery of health care by a diverse group of health care professionals."

Public lands, parks and conserved lands have a vital role to play in this evolving science.

Many of us don't need to see the research. We know that when we take a walk in the woods and hear the leaves rustle above our heads, our stress level goes down. We know that sitting by a creek and casting a fishing pole relieves anxiety, or that taking a scenic drive along back country roads can leave worry behind. Or how about the smell of hay-scented fern in the woods? The primal sound of coyotes howling at night?

Taking a hike in the woods is a good form of exercise for physical health, but the sounds, smells, and other sensory aspects of nature are miracles for mental and emotional health. These connections with nature can make a difference!

If you are interested in the research and developing movements around nature for health, google terms like "ParksRx," "NatureRx" or "Vitamin-N". Or check out "forest bathing" on YouTube! It has been fascinating to learn about the research behind what many of us have always known in our hearts, minds and bodies to be true: nature is good for you!



RESOURCES

childrenandnature.org

Yale School of Forestry
& Environmental
Studies:

**Ecopsychology: How
Immersion in Nature
Benefits Your Health**

PBS:

**[How Immersing
Yourself in Nature
Benefits Your Health](#)**

parkrxamerica.org



Giving in a Time of Need

We know that for many, this is a difficult time financially. We encourage those fortunate enough to have the means to give back to the land. It gives everything to us.

There are a variety of ways to support Otsego Land Trust:

- Monthly gifts, which can be automatically linked to a credit card.
- Gifts of land.
- Planned giving, such as including OLT in your will.
- Gifts of stock.
- A used car in working condition, a piece of art, or just a gift of time as a volunteer. The possibilities are endless!

To learn more about giving and what types of giving might be right for you, contact us by emailing info@otsegolandtrust.org, or call us at 607-547-2366. While we are not in the office, leave a message and we will call you back soon.

Of Love and Land

A Landowner's Story by Dennis Fowler



In the Spring of 1971, a few months after we married, my wife Peggy and I decided to get out of New York City. We both had good jobs, and we were ready to abandon them for the green fields and hills of upstate New York. We wanted some acreage, and 100 sounded like a nice number. 100 acres, and a farm. Now I admitted, even then, that I knew just enough about farming to know I was not a farmer.

I suggested we might write to a local bank, perhaps somebody was looking to get out from under their mortgage. It happened that the same day the bank got our letter, someone had come in with just that wish. We made plans for a trip upstate, borrowing Peggy's sister's car.

The expedition got off to an inauspicious start. It was raining. Following the owner's directions we routed down Route 205 to State Route 7, heading toward Binghamton. We didn't realize what a good omen it was that the rain had started to ease off.

As we turned at what was then The Maple Terrace Motel onto Mill Creek Road, the rain stopped. In those days Mill Creek Road wound through a narrow gorge, over simple bridges, Mill Creek chuckling under them, and on the other side of the gorge things opened out. The clouds began to break up. Beautiful, lush green countryside on either side seemed to welcome us. Exactly two miles up from Route 7, following the directions to the east, we turned into a dirt driveway. Then, the sun came out.

There was an old farmhouse by the road (what was called a New England Saltbox) with mustard yellow Sears shingles and a rickety extension to the east that someone had added somewhere along the way. It looked very rustic, to put a gloss on it.

The house had a good furnace. The roof needed repair, which the owner assured us would be finished by closing. They were working on it as we signed papers and handed over checks, but what a setting! There were hills to the east and west, and rising ground to the north to shelter us from winter storms. A beautiful green valley stretched down to the south for a mile or so, to the hills, the gorge we'd driven through. A walk to the east, away from the road, past a massive old barn, took us to where the land dropped away into Mill Creek— a real creek, with water in it! We were in love. We hiked down to the stream and had a picnic lunch. We'd found home. We even had our 100 acres, roughly.

In 1980 the first beavers moved in and created their own pond, filling what had once been a mill pond within yards of our home. I built a bridge to cross the gap, wide and strong enough to take my riding mower across to the field. Thanks in part to a house fire, we lived in three residences on the land, beginning with the old Saltbox. We went through two dogs, three or four cats, at least three beaver families, and the land remained.

We walked the old farm field often, our daughter and the dog romping through the hay. Beyond the farm field was a stone wall, then another field rising up the wooded hills. Our water supply was piped about a quarter mile from a spring up on the hill (down past a monster elm that eventually fell victim to Dutch Elm disease) crossing under the stream and up to the house.

There were deer trails through the hay and weeds, Great Horned Owls nesting in a stand of hemlock trees, mink and muskrat in the beaver pond, a rare visit by three otter. Bald eagles and osprey and kingfishers fished its waters. In spring, rafts of mallard, mergansers, and wood duck squabbled, while Canada geese glided regally by, eventually trailed by fuzzy goslings. Deer and woodchuck roamed the hills and fields, as well as our front yard, along with fox, coyote and bobcat. Walking the woods one day I came around a bend in the trail, coming face-to-face with a raccoon. He hurried off the path and I walked on. When I turned back I found he'd been following me.

Almost 50 years later —has it been that long? —there have been changes. Mill Creek Road is paved, sort of, and no longer goes through the shady gorge but over the hill (no bridges). The Marcy South Power line went through the stand of hemlocks, and the great horned owls never returned. But we still have the deer and woodchuck, beaver, muskrat, mink, the shy bobcat and fox, and the noisy coyotes.

On her deathbed, Peggy made me promise to protect our land. I'm doing my best. My hope is that the conservation easement by the Otsego Land Trust will make the land— the fields, the hills, the woods, our pond— as permanent as anything can be, in this ever-changing world.



We at Otsego Land Trust are so grateful to each and every one of you for being a part of our community. Thank you for helping us connect people to the lands and waters that sustain us.

Please tag us in your trail photos on Facebook and Instagram @otsegolandtrust. We'd love to see you out there.

We wish you a happy Earth Day, and a safe and healthy spring season.