

Conservation Advisory Council (CAC), Town of New Lebanon, Columbia County, New York

2017 Annual Report

Members: Cynthia Creech, David Farren, Jack Lancto, Peg Munves, Craig Westcott

Monthly CAC meetings (6:30 – 8:00 P.M. at Samson Environmental Center, Darrow School): Jan 9, Mar 8, Mar 21 (*special meeting with consultant*), Apr 26, May 9, Jun 5, Jul 10, Aug 10, Sep 11, Oct 9, Nov 13, Dec 11 (*minutes posted on the town's web site*)

Overview of activities

The CAC published a *Natural Resource Conservation Plan for the Town of New Lebanon 2017* (NRCP) with the assistance of Hudsonia, our consultant, thanks to a two-year grant from the Hudson River Estuary Program of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The grant was awarded on November 18, 2015, through the New York State Conservation Fund for \$21,520. We met the grant deadline of October 31, 2017, with the publication in late October of the first-ever NRCP at 158 pages plus appendices. We printed 50 copies at \$43+ per copy and distributed 25 copies to all board members and the Town Clerk, Land Use Office and Town Library on November 6. Columbia Land Conservancy, Farmscape Ecology Program at Hawthorne Valley Farm, Hudson River Estuary Program and Hudsonia also received copies. The Town Clerk is holding 21 copies for sale to the public with a price established by the Town Board of \$25 per copy (\$10 per copy to landowners whose properties we visited for the NRCP).

The grant allowed the Town of New Lebanon to hire Gretchen Stevens, a biologist with Hudsonia based at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, as a consultant. Gretchen subcontracted the Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program (FEP) in Ghent. Claudia Knab-Vispo and Conrad Vispo of FEP have compiled extensive records of habitats in New Lebanon over the years, including a complete inventory of fauna and flora in the Shaker Swamp. Throughout the year, the CAC benefitted from the guidance and instruction of Gretchen and Conrad. Gretchen also wrote the NRCP and supervised its publication with guidance and editing assistance from the CAC.

At its monthly meeting on December 12, the Town Board passed a resolution approving the NRCP as an important contribution to the town. The CAC provided much of the language in the resolution and hopes that the NRCP will be consulted often and used wisely over the coming years by the various board members and town residents.

For the first time, the CAC was asked to respond routinely to development proposals to help guide the Planning Board in its decisions.

Natural Resource Conservation Plan (NRCP)

The NRCP explores natural resources in New Lebanon thoroughly and outlines courses of action to protect them. The Plan includes 23 maps and many tables, all newly created for New Lebanon.

Throughout the 158-page document, historic and new photographs illustrate the richness of our natural environment. At the insistence of the CAC, Gretchen Stevens added a 5-page frontispiece section, "How to Use the Natural Resource Conservation Plan," to help guide various stakeholders in their decision making.

In addition to the copies available for purchase through the Town Clerk's office, the entire NRCP is posted on the town's web site. The posting had to be in five parts due to the Plan's length and rich graphics. In addition to a thorough inventory of natural resources, the Plan explores New Lebanon's physical setting, land use history, threats to resources, protected lands and conservation areas. It concludes with a section on achieving conservation goals and offers an action plan. The appendices include lists of plants and animals in New Lebanon and Columbia County, an explanation of rarity ranks and a summary of conservation measures.

Once winter broke, we recommenced site verification visits to verify the remote mapping we had completed during Darrow Hands to Work sessions in 2016.

- Apr 19: The Abode of the Message on Mount Lebanon and Peter Count's parcel on Chair Factory Road, hosted by Devin Franklin of Flying Deer Nature Center (David Farren & Peg Munves, 9:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M., 450 acres). We drove to the peak where the Abode has a summer camp and hiked along a forested stream after crossing a hayfield near the West Family compound.
- Apr 26: Tim Weld's parcel off NYS Rte. 22 (David, Karen Ross, Craig Westcott and 3 Darrow Hands to Work students, 9:00 – 11:45 A.M., 237 acres). Tim Weld owns at least as much abutting property in Massachusetts and a stone marker straddles the border atop one of the higher elevations. Many sizable red oaks had been lumbered. The property has a large beaver pond and is a preserve for deer hunting. We located the northern entrance to the limestone cave network that runs south into the Ross property.
- May 10: Ed Barbaro property, Brickyard Road (David & Peg, 9:00 A.M. – 12:15 P.M., 58 acres). The home site at the top of the property, up a long, winding drive, has an unparalleled view of the Lebanon Valley. We hiked down a hillside towards U.S. Route 20 along intermittent streams and through a black locust grove.
- May 13: Paul St. Germain property on Pool Hill Road, Lebanon Springs, hosted by Paul (David & Gretchen Stevens, 2:00 – 4:30 P.M., 11 acres). Two cool ravines converge on this property, spectacular in their steepness and shaded by mature hickories.
- May 31: Weinheimer parcels off Lundy Lane (David & Peg, 9:00 – 11:45 A.M., 146 acres). These parcels of unimproved upland forest and an extensive wetland abut Weinheimer parcels in Chatham. There were many blow downs, usually white pine, along the ridge lines.
- Aug 2: The Bog, Canaan Road, hosted by Tom Gerety and Adelia Moore (David & Peg, 9:00 A.M. – 1:15 P.M., 104 acres). We kayaked through The Bog, a unique circumneutral (both alkaline and acidic) wetland that had been reduced to a farm pond early in the 20th Century.
- Aug 9: Denise Clayton property off West Hill Road (David, 9:00 – 11:45 A.M., 414 acres). The relatively young forest had many stone walls, indicating past agricultural use, and skid roads, indicating more current lumbering. David did not hike as far as the slope to the far west, where bear dens have been reported. The streams appeared to be accurately mapped.
- Aug 22: Shaker View Farm on Cemetery Road plus a visit to Barbara and Larry Benson at their home on Royce Hill Road (David & Peg, 9:00 A.M. – 12:45 P.M., 203 acres). The farming activity is primarily hayfields. A stand of old sugar maples lines Cemetery Road opposite the home.

- Aug 31: The Dymond property on C.R. 13 (Buttermilk Falls) hosted by Dale and Linda Dymond (David & Peg, 9:00 A.M. – Noon, 57 acres). The falls were not running when we visited but the Dymonds shared their photo album and we were able to shoot scenes from the photos. A stand of black walnut near the house provides Dale with seed pods that he scatters when he walks through the woods.

During the two-year project, we estimate that we visited roughly 22% of the acreage in town – 4,603 of 20,995 acres – and are grateful to landowners for their permission. In all, we visited 22 properties and devoted more than 725 volunteer hours to the project.

The CAC reviewed and responded to a succession of draft documents submitted by Gretchen during the year. Our suggestions were incorporated in the drafts and in the final plan before it went to press in late October.

We believe the NRCP is an exemplary document that will serve New Lebanon well in the coming years and we heartily thank Gretchen, Conrad and Claudia for their work on behalf of the town. We are also grateful to the Hudson River Estuary Program and the Conservation Fund for their faith in awarding the grant that made the NRCP possible. The grant stipulated that we match 25% of the amount awarded in volunteer hours. We blew past that commitment several quarters before the grant funding ended on October 31. The Hudson River Estuary Program approved allotting an unexpended balance in the grant to help cover printing costs.

Agricultural lands

For the NRCP, Cynthia Creech and Peg Munves submitted to Hudsonia a detailed map of agricultural uses of lands throughout town. The map had broad categories – crops (including hayfields and orchards), meadows (and how frequently brush hogged), and pasture. This data was the first ever compiled in town.

Outreach

Our major outreach occurred at Town Hall on June 28, 2017, with a Public Forum that ran from 6:00 to 8:15 P.M. Gretchen Stevens presented the next-to-final draft of the NRCP as a work in progress to members of the Town Board, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals and town residents. We had actively solicited attendance. The audience of 25 responded positively, offered many observations and suggestions, and appreciated the refreshments.

We also submitted periodic updates to newsletters published by the town and Grow the Valley. On May 28, David Farren staffed a CAC table during Family Day at Hand Hollow Conservation Area and shared draft maps from the NRCP with many interested attendees.

CAC Responses to Proposals before the Planning Board

For the first time, the Land Use Office asked the CAC to respond routinely to proposals before the Planning Board.

- Kolonics proposal for a two-lot subdivision on Canaan Road
- Coon proposal for a storage facility on U.S. Route 20 near the Theatre Barn

- Amlaw proposal for a two-lot subdivision near Shatford Park
- Dunkin' Donuts proposal for a new store on the Routes 20/22 corridor
- Stewart's Shops proposal for an expanded store on property abutting its current location, Routes 20/22 corridor

Prospective work

As the CAC looks forward to 2018, we anticipate completing many of the action items identified in the NRCP. Craig Westcott has volunteered once again to tap Darrow Hands to Work students to help post an interactive scenic resource inventory on the town's web site. We aim to complete that task in the spring. Among other tasks remaining are working with the Town Board to identify Critical Environmental Areas in town and prioritizing updates for the maps and text in the NRCP. We will continue to work with the Town Board, Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals and during Quad Board Meetings to underscore conservation priorities for the town. We will also continue to address development proposals and submit our responses in timely fashion to the various boards. David Farren has joined Peg Munves as the second CAC member on the Zoning Rewrite Committee.

Recordkeeping

David Farren kept careful records of all activities related to the NRCP and filed quarterly progress reports with the Hudson River Estuary Program. He filed the final quarterly progress report on December 15, shortly after Tistrya Houghling, the Town Clerk, filed her final financial reports. (*Note: The town had been fully reimbursed from the grant by the end of January 2018.*) David also submitted reports on site visits to Gretchen Stevens to help shape the NRCP.

Budget Line Item

Cynthia Creech attended the budget workshops held during the last fiscal quarter and secured the CAC's line item of \$2,000 in the town's 2018 budget. This amount will cover \$40/month for the unlimited data plan for the Verizon Ellipsis tablet that the town purchased for the CAC in December 2017. We use the Ellipsis during site visits and to help evaluate proposals submitted to the Planning Board.

Activities and Training

Cynthia Creech

Cynthia owns and operates Artemis Farms on Cemetery Road, raising Randall cattle, a breed she rescued in the 1980s in Vermont when fewer than 10 survived. She served as Deputy Town Supervisor and member of the Recreation Commission and Zoning Rewrite Committee. She also serves as Court Clerk and the CAC's liaison to the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals. In addition, Cynthia reported faithfully on CAC developments at monthly meetings of the Town Board and attended budget workshops during the last fiscal quarter. For the NRCP, Cynthia contributed a detailed list of agricultural uses of farmland throughout the town. On October 2, Cynthia attended the first Water Study Committee meeting at Darrow School convened by Steve Winkley of the New York Rural Water Association. On November 11, she attended a presentation by the Shaker Swamp Conservancy at the Town Library.

David Farren

In addition to the CAC meetings, site visits, and grant-related recordkeeping duties cited above, David's schedule through the year included the following training-related activities.

- Jan 5, Jun 1, Aug 3, Dec 1: Farmscape Ecology Program First Thursdays, 6:00 – 7:30 P.M., Creek House, Ghent, hosted by the Vispos
- Jan 6 & 10, Apr 18, Jul 13, Oct 12, Dec 14: Meetings at Town Hall with Town Clerk for grant paperwork
- Jan 30: Training by Conrad Vispo of Farmscape Ecology Program on field use of the Ellipsis tablet (with Craig Westcott), Creek House, Ghent, 2:30 – 4:00 P.M.
- Jan 30, May 17: CAC Roundtables convened by Columbia Land Conservancy, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M., Hudson (presented NRCP update with Craig on Jan 30)
- Mar 17: Planning meeting w/Peg Munves, 10:30-11:15 A.M., Blueberry Hill Café
- Mar 28: Garden Conservancy Lecture, 7:00 – 8:15 P.M., Bard College, Hastings-on-Hudson
- Mar 30: Wildlife Lecture on camera traps, 6:30 – 8:00 P.M., New Lebanon Library
- Apr 11: Picked up Ellipsis field tablet from Craig Westcott, 10:30 A.M., Darrow School
- Apr 23: Spring flower walk with Claudia Knab-Vispo, Farmscape Ecology Program, Noon – 2:30 P.M., Michael Polemis property, Chatham Center
- May 12: Roe-Jan floodplain forest walk with Claudia Knab-Vispo, Farmscape Ecology Program, Ancramdale, 3:00 – 5:30 P.M.
- May 15: Banner planning meeting with Craig Westcott, Darrow School, 9:30 – 10:15 A.M.
- May 28: Hand Hollow Conservation Area Family Day, C.R. 9, 3:00 – 5:30 P.M. (staffed CAC table)
- Jun 28: Public Forum on NRCP, New Lebanon Town Hall, 6:00 – 8:15 P.M.
- Oct. 5: Columbia County Rails Task Force, Chatham, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M. (met in Austerlitz at 4:30 P.M. to tour CLC's new Harris Public Conservation Area on Bloody Hollow Road)
- Oct 25: Scenic vistas w/Craig Westcott and Darrow Students, 9:15 A.M. – 12:20 P.M.
- Nov 3: Drove to Hudsonia at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, to inspect and pick up NRCP print run
- Nov 6: Delivered NRCP cartons to Town Clerk and helped distribute them
- Nov 11: Shaker Swamp Conservancy presentation at Town Library, 4:00 P.M. (could not join walking tour)
- Nov 15: Town of New Lebanon Planning Board monthly meeting, Town Hall, 7:30 P.M. (cancelled, but made the trip not knowing)
- Nov 16: Town of New Lebanon training, required for CAC members, Town Hall, 6:30 – 7:30 P.M.
- Nov 17: NYSACC Annual Conference, Kingston, 1:00 – 6:15 P.M. (panelist, 3:15 – 4:45 P.M. session)
- Nov 29: review of Columbia County Natural Resources Inventory (*in development*), Cornell Cooperative Extension Service, Rte. 66, Hudson, 5:00 – 7:00 P.M.

New Lebanon Town Board Meetings (7:00 P.M. start, Town Hall): Jan 10, Feb 14, Apr 11, Apr 26 (*Special Meeting*), May 9, Aug 9, Sep 12, Oct 10, Nov 14

David serves as Treasurer of the Corkscrew Rail Trail Association and attends monthly meetings that rotate between New Lebanon and Stephentown. He participates in occasional trail work days and serves on the Columbia County Trails Task Force. He is also a Director of the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance (RPA), attends monthly board meetings in Petersburg and serves on two RPA committees, Development (meets monthly in Averill Park) and Trail Vision (meets 3-4 times per year). In early 2018

he joined a third, the Rensselaer Children's Forest Initiative. On December 13, he earned a Game of Logging Level 1 Training Certificate after a full day of training on the proper use of power saws in lumbering at the RPA's Poestenkill Community Forest. David estimates that he travelled more than 2,600 miles during the year for his volunteer activities.

Peg Munves

Peg owns and operates a dog training business, Step in Time Training. On site verification visits, Peg and David Farren were the usual CAC duo. Peg participated in 6 site visits cited above and met with David on March 17 to plan them. In addition, Peg did all of the scheduling and sent thank you notes. Peg also took photographs during site visits and worked with her husband Moy Wong in October to capture scenic vistas. She also submitted Moy's nature photographs to Hudsonia, many of which now grace the NRCP. Peg attended nearly all of the Town Board's monthly meetings, all of the CAC's monthly meetings, and procured refreshments for the Public Forum on June 28. In January, Peg participated in the Winter Botany course offered by Claudia and Conrad Vispo of Farmscape Ecology Program. On October 2, Peg attended the first Water Study Committee meeting at Darrow School. On November 29, she attended the workshop in Hudson convened by the Columbia County Environmental Management Council to preview the County Natural Resources Inventory. In addition, Peg serves on the Zoning Rewrite Committee.

Craig Westcott

Craig serves as Assistant Headmaster for External Affairs and Sustainability at Darrow School. He arranged for Darrow's Hands to Work program to collaborate with the NRCP project and supervised the design and manufacture of an NRCP display banner. On January 30, Craig participated with David Farren in a two-hour training session conducted by Conrad Vispo in Ghent on the use of the Ellipsis field tablet. At the CAC Roundtable in Hudson that evening, he co-presented an NRCP progress report. On April 26, he participated with Darrow Hands to Work students, David and Karen Ross in the site visit to Tim Weld's property off NYS Route 22. On October 25, with Darrow Hands to Work students and David, Craig captured scenic vistas in the western half of town. On October 2, Craig took minutes at the first Water Study Committee meeting at Darrow School.

Respectfully submitted by David Farren, April 4, 2018