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Many Valley residents — from backyard ice-skaters and sledders to snowmobilers and skiers — celebrated an old-fashioned winter.

Photo by Jan Costello. To view more of her work, visit her on Facebook.



The BVA is a 501(c)(3) that serves the communities within the watershed of the Butternut Creek

# THE CURRENT

Spring  
2021

Connecting and Sustaining the Butternut Creek Watershed

## Join Our Quest to Unite the Valley

### Greetings, fellow residents and friends of the beautiful Butternut Valley.

I hope this newsletter finds each and every one of you in good stead and holding up in these unprecedented times. Like everyone else, I look forward to better times ahead as a national vaccination program takes off.

One of the things this pandemic has made me acutely aware of is the extent to which we are all reliant upon each other for our health and welfare. Yes, of course, each of us is responsible for our own well-being but unless we are all mindful of the effects our behaviors can have on others, we cannot achieve full potential with regard to the health and welfare of society as a whole. Perhaps this is just another way of saying that we are stronger united than we are divided.

Which brings me around to the Butternut Valley Alliance. Our mission

is to encourage the Butternut Creek watershed to become an even better place to live, work, and play. Our activities connect communities, protect the environment and promote the arts.

To achieve our mission, we act in alliance with individuals and organizations to bring a variety of activities to the Valley. Some of those, like the Summer Harvest Festival, you probably already are aware of. Others, like the Visionary Scholar Award and cycling programs, are more recently developed. And some are brand new, such as On the Trail of Art coming this June.

As the number and variety of our programs continue to expand, it is more and more evident that we can only achieve our full potential if we continue to expand our alliances. We work closely with a number of organizations in the community; however, we are looking now to increase the number of individ-

ual volunteers who support our mission.

Of course, to differing degrees, we all have competing priorities — family, career, health, financial, etc. To the degree that you are able, BVA invites you to get involved in any number of ways. For example, we encourage folks to help with particular activities: staff a table at the Festival, direct traffic at the Art Show, hang posters to promote a program, hike with us and map a trail in the forest or decorate trees for the Holiday Lights. You could consider writing an article for our newsletter, attending BVA monthly meetings which are open to all members or joining a committee that is of interest to you. Our committees range from event-specific — such as Art on the Trail and Holiday Lights — to ongoing activities such as Membership or Trails and Recreation. You don't even have to be a local resident. Going

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30 Miles  
Length of the watershed

4,400 People  
Approximate population

130 Sq. Miles  
Watershed area

by Erica Jamieson

# Calling All Landowners

## Protection and Conservation Options in the Butternut Valley

There are a number of actions that residents of the Butternut Valley can take to protect and conserve the natural splendor of this region. For landowners in particular, introducing riparian forest buffers and putting property into a conservation easement present two options for enhancing water quality, improving natural habitats and safeguarding undeveloped land for future generations.

The Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC) unites 22 soil and water conservation districts across the Chesapeake Bay headwaters region. Headquartered in Owego, the Coalition's overall conservation goals align with those of the Chesapeake watershed: to limit the amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment entering waterways. Locally, their goals along the Butternut Creek focus on increasing habitability for creatures native to the valley and its waterways including river otters, hellbender salamanders, eels and trout.

Enter riparian forest buffers. Simply put, introducing a riparian forest buffer involves transforming the strip of land on either side of a stream into a forested area. Once established, a riparian buffer zone is referred to as an ecotone, or transition area, between aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Thus, riparian forest buffers support and attract a cornucopia of animals and birds that rely on access to both land and water, such as weasels and kingfishers.

"We can really do a lot to increase the habitability of those areas [along the Butternut Creek] not just by reducing the nutrients that are hitting the water, but also by creating habitat with



**These tubes protect young saplings planted as part of soil-erosion mitigation efforts.**

canopy cover from trees and by adding large woody debris," explained Lydia Brinkley, Buffer Coordinator at USC. Charged with identifying and developing new buffer programs in the region, Lydia works with districts, landowners and other partners to convey the benefits of riparian forest buffers and support their introduction.

To start, space must be cleared to introduce the buffer zone. In unused, fallow, or grazing pasture this process is quite simple. Invasive species are removed to create room for saplings, plants and organic debris indigenous to the region.

For cropland and areas with ongoing agricultural practices, such activities need to be distanced from the waterway. Buffer zones not only provide room for animals and birds to thrive, but also reduce the amount of agricultural runoff entering the stream which

improves water quality. "It's a very simple, very cost effective practice to reduce the amount of nutrients and sediments reaching the stream and the water system," said Lydia.

Meanwhile, adding tree canopy cover over the stream surface decreases water temperatures and improves oxygen levels, breathing life for fish and macroinvertebrates like insects, snails and mussels. Tree roots interrupt the flow of stormwater to reduce flooding and protect river banks from erosion. After heavy rains, trees can also help slow the flow of water, preventing large and potentially destructive objects from being carried downstream. These factors not only conserve the waterway and the creatures that call it home, but also protect surrounding lands and property.

The Coalition is a resource for any landowner looking to introduce riparian forest buffers along their waterways.



24

Annual Meeting  
Saturday, 4:00 p.m.  
See website for Zoom link



12 & 13

Art on the Trail  
Saturday - Sunday  
Texas School House State Park



21

Summer Harvest Festival  
Saturday, 2:00-6:00 p.m.  
Guy Rathbun Park, Morris

USC facilitates the entire process from planning through to implementation and can even support landowners with riparian forest buffer maintenance via its Buffer Steward Program. “People will not be left hanging. We will not plant the trees and leave. We will be around to help it come to fruition,” Lydia was keen to emphasize.

**Join Lydia Brinkley of USC for an on-line presentation about riparian buffers. Wednesday, March 24, 7 p.m. Visit the BVA website for the webinar link.**

The Coalition underscores remaining flexible, nimble and responsive to landowner goals and will adapt its model to generate creative solutions to particular needs. For instance, buffer zone work may include creating habitats for certain organisms or introducing edible and medicinal plants.

Most importantly, buffer zone work can often be achieved at low or no cost to the landowner, thanks to USC’s extensive partners and knowledge of state and federal funding options. By offering financial and logistical support, the Coalition hopes to engage as many partners as possible in this watershed conservation effort.

“We have all of these really large goals for the Chesapeake Bay. In New York state, for the watershed implementation plan, those goals are thousands upon thousands of riparian forest buffer. Realistically we can’t get to that goal without engaging the entire community within the Chesapeake Bay headwaters in New York state,” said Lydia.

Another option for landowners seeking to preserve and maintain natural habitats such as wetlands, forests and agricultural land is by implementing a conservation easement.

Deeds of conservation easements are unique to the particular property and are typically broken into three zones: building, open and natural area.

In the building area, residential structures are permitted and at times new buildings can be constructed. The open space area may include forest, wetlands, agricultural lands or recreational spaces. Easements are designed to protect their inherent open nature. Often, a forest management plan and, depending on the land’s use, a harvest management plan are written to prevent destructive practices.

Finally, the natural area is most protected. New developments are strictly prohibited, although hiking trails, fishing and hunting may be permitted. At times, natural areas are home to riparian forest buffer zones or wetlands.

Land under conservation easement remains private property and is protected from being overly divided and developed in perpetuity; however, almost all easements allow subdivision and development, with limitations. A deed of conservation easement remains with the property even as it is bought and sold or inherited by a family member.

“That’s basically the biggest driving reason for landowners to want to do a conservation easement,” explained David Diaz, Interim Executive Director at the Otsego Land Trust (OLT), “to protect the land that they love, and then also know that they’re doing this for future generations, because there will be forests, there will be agricultural lands.”

Since its founding in 1988, the Otsego Land Trust has protected over 11,000 acres, of which 10,000 of that is in conservation easement. OLT also preserves land for public access. Its flagship property, Brookwood Point in



*Erosion areas such as this one documented during the creek assessment carry large amounts of sediment downstream and further destabilize the creek bank.*

Cooperstown, spans 22 acres and is open to the public for hiking, fishing, paddling and picnicking. The Trust also engages in educational programming and outreach and works with elected officials on related legislation. Otsego Land Trust supports landowners through the easement process so that they may create and ensure the continuity of their vision for the land they love.

There are also tax incentives. Proprietors entering into conservation easement may typically choose between a one-time federal charitable tax deduction, spread over 16 years, or an annual 25% state property tax refund up to \$5,000 per year. The latter option, offered by New York state, remains with the property permanently.

“It’s easy living in a more rural area to say, ‘Ah! Look at all the forest we have, look at all the farmland we have’, but populations are going to continue to rise. More and more people are looking to move out of cities. Rural areas are a hot commodity,” cautioned David, “We need to set apart some of it so that it doesn’t all get sliced and diced.”

For more information, contact Lydia Brinkley at [lbrinkley@u-s-c.org](mailto:lbrinkley@u-s-c.org) or David Diaz at [David@OtsegoLandTrust.org](mailto:David@OtsegoLandTrust.org)



*In extreme instances, erosion can lead to severe flooding such as occurred near Olds Road this past Christmas Day rainstorm.*

# Gallery in the Forest

Butternut Valley Alliance is hosting its first watershed-wide arts festival called “On the Trail of Art”. Over 100 students and their art teachers from Gilbertsville-Mount Upton and Morris Central schools and will join professional artists to exhibit their work in the Texas Schoolhouse State Forest. The end result will be a museum-quality art show with student artists viewed alongside professional artists.

Various artist demonstrations also will engage the community who visit this two-day “gallery in the forest” event. The exhibits will be mounted along the newly developed trail that recently received trail improvements along with interpretive signs, trail markers and path enhancements.



Co-sponsors for the festival are the Town of New Lisbon, Golden Artist Colors, Otsego County Conservation Association and the Butternut Valley Arts and Craft Center along with the BVA.

Taking place entirely outdoors, this event will be COVID-friendly as social distancing will be maintained. Hand sanitizer and masks will be provided for all. Food will be available for purchase and country music will enhance the festive atmosphere. Parking will be easily accessible on Lena Road. Stay tuned for more information in the coming months.

The New Lisbon Highway Department has completed installation of bike route signs on the town roads and the County Highway Department has fabricated and installed signs on the county roads. In addition, a cadre of volunteers has completed installation of signs in Gilbert Lake State Park which will be painted in the spring.

# New Bike Trail

A group of volunteers has completed a bike trail that connects the trailhead at Texas Schoolhouse State Forest with Gilbert Lake State Park. Approximately 20 miles long, it has a cumulative incline of about 1600 feet. The map shows the new trail as well as the trail in the park.



You are encouraged to give the route a try but be forewarned that it is not an easy ride! If you drive to the trail, you can park at the trailhead on Jones Road. While you're there, you may want to check out the blue hiking trail with the interpretive signs that were installed last year.

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to be in town for the Creek Float? Sign up to volunteer. Have some expertise in Fundraising? You can lend a hand.

Our Valley and our membership are filled with talented, energetic, enthusiastic, visionary residents who share our goal of continuing to enhance the benefits of our community. Won't you be an ally in our quest? To find out all the ways you might contribute, please reach out directly to me at edlantz@mac.com or 607-263-5425. You can also contact any of our directors, by sending an email to info@butternutvalleyalliance.org, or by messaging us on Facebook.

Happy Spring!

Ed Lentz  
Chairperson, BVA

## Please Join or Donate to the Butternut Valley Alliance

The BVA is doing good work in the Butternut Valley for us, for our children and for our children's children. Help us maintain the pace of our work by supporting the alliance with your generous donation. Please also invite your friends to become BVA members. Donations small

or large to the BVA go a long way. Donations can be made by check or online at the Butternut Valley Alliance website: [butternutvalleyalliance.org](http://butternutvalleyalliance.org). We are seeking nominations to fill vacancies on the board to be elected at the annual meeting in April. If interested, please contact Ed Lentz.

## Your Neighbors, Our Board

Chair: Edward T. Lentz  
Co-Chair: Stacia Norman  
Secretary: Bob Thomas  
Treasurer: Rick O'Keefe  
Alyx Braunius  
John Braunius  
Doug Ernst  
Norm Farwell

Carla Hall  
Les Hasbargen  
Flo Loomis  
Glen Noto  
Danielle Rhone  
Tom Washbon  
Alex Wing

