



RECREATION REVOLUTION

OSI's River-to-Ridge Trail Opens in New Paltz

Traversing 360 acres of bucolic farmland and riverfront in New Paltz, New York, the Open Space Institute's new River-to-Ridge Trail has quickly become a popular recreational centerpiece of this thriving college town.

The six-mile loop trail is as inspiring as it is functional, providing a direct connection from New Paltz to more than 100 miles of trails and carriage roads that crisscross the nearby Shawangunk Ridge.

"The gorgeous land really makes this trail a special place," asserts Kim Elliman, OSI's president and CEO. "With its open fields, rolling hills, and breathtaking views, River-to-Ridge captures the essence of this beautiful agrarian landscape. It connects people to the land in a tangible, meaningful way."

This connection to the landscape is especially meaningful to Elliman, as it was OSI that protected the land from future development before constructing River-to-Ridge.

The trail, which opened in early September, has become a favorite destination for residents and visitors from throughout the region.

"The River-to-Ridge Trail is a gift to the community," says New Paltz mayor Tim Rogers. "This magnificent trail has been built to world-class standards and provides better access and connection to experience the treasured properties of Mohonk Preserve, the Shawangunk Ridge, and Minnewaska State Park."

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Our Mission

The Open Space Institute protects scenic, natural, and historic landscapes to provide public enjoyment, conserve habitat and working lands, and sustain communities. OSI conserves diverse landscapes including parks and preserves, working farms and forests, and utilizes climate science to identify critical landscapes for protection.

ON THE GROUND

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COVER SIDEBAR: Waccamaw River property (Mac Stone)
ABOVE: Owl in South Carolina (Mac Stone)
BACK COVER: Cadets at Fahnstock State Park (Greg Miller)
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CONSERVATION & CLIMATE

Kim Elliman, President and CEO

For years we have been warned, and been warning, about the potential effects of climate change. We've seen compelling maps that illustrate rising sea levels. We've watched time-lapse video clips of melting arctic icecaps. And we've been alerted to concerns about drinking water quality, food security, and adaptation for humans and wildlife.

For those who have believed that we could put off making hard decisions, that climate change was a problem for future generations, or that our own communities would be spared from potential impacts – the undeniable truth is that climate change is here. And the land trust community has a role to play on the front lines in fighting climate change and working to mitigate its effects.

As a land conservation organization, the Open Space Institute (OSI) recognizes and promotes the important role that protected land plays in sequestering carbon, supporting wildlife adaptation, and in flood mitigation.

From the protection of large-scale, intact forests to the growing understanding of how soils and wetlands function as a carbon storehouse, land protection provides a critical piece of the sequestration puzzle. In addition to protecting land for its carbon sequestration benefits, OSI is employing strategic land conservation to help mitigate the effects of severe weather.

For example, in the struggle against flooding, landscape-scale conservation stands out as a key strategy in defending our communities and our infrastructure.

This newsletter highlights an OSI-supported project in Conway, South Carolina aimed at setting aside land for the sole purpose of absorbing water during increasingly frequent flood events.

OSI has also joined the Land Trust Alliance in launching the *Land Trust Climate Change Initiative* to provide land trusts with the strategies and training needed to incorporate and climate-change adaptation and mitigation into their work. The initiative, also featured in this newsletter, helps land trusts communicate more clearly and effectively as they move to become local leaders in the fight against climate change.

The project builds on OSI's *Resilient Landscape Initiative*, which has mobilized to conserve nearly 45,000 acres of climate-resilient lands across eleven states in the eastern United States.

The effects of climate change are being experienced in areas we love and work and live in. Through strategic conservation, strong partnerships, and effective communications, the land conservation community is uniquely poised to help respond to, and plan for, our new reality.

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PLANNING FOR THE NEW NORMAL

In Conway, South Carolina, community leaders prepare for the future



Flooding in Conway, South Carolina (Gabriel F.W. Koch)

This September the scenic Waccamaw River crested at more than 20 feet, flooding the city of Conway, South Carolina. The flood, caused by Hurricane Florence, garnered national attention, as the normally placid Waccamaw, which winds its way through Conway on its way to the Atlantic Ocean, left destruction and devastation in its path.

For the 17,000 residents of Conway, these “historic” weather events are, sadly, becoming the new normal. Occurring more frequently – and with greater intensity – the floods are permanently altering the way of life in Conway and surrounding communities. Even before Florence hit the region, devastating floods in 2015 and 2016 resulted in nearly \$1.2 billion in damage to city property alone.

Recognizing this new reality, community leaders are taking steps to better prepare for the future.

“Extreme weather will hit us again and again,” says Barbara Blain-Bellamy, the mayor of Conway. “Our challenge is to improve our understanding of extreme water and wind events, and to act appropriately to best protect our residents, their property, and local businesses.”

For long-term solutions, Conway is turning to land conservation and to the Open Space Institute (OSI).

In 2016, OSI joined the Upper Waccamaw Task Force, a collaboration of conservation organizations and local governments looking for a natural solution to the flooding problem. The Task Force – which is administered by Winyah Rivers Foundation and includes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the City of Conway, Horry County, and several conservation groups – identified land conservation as one of the most effective long-term solutions to help absorb water during and after extreme rain events.

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land matters

Protecting Land to Protect Drinking Water

Being able to turn on the faucet and grab a glass of tap water without hesitation is a convenience we can easily take for granted. The Open Space Institute's recent protection of nearly 4,400 acres of forested land in the southern Adirondacks, provides long-term protection for the drinking water for the 18,000 residents of the City of Amsterdam, New York.

In the southern foothills of the Adirondack Park, 15 miles north of Amsterdam, OSI purchased the Hans Creek property, one of the largest contiguous, single-ownership tracts of forested land left in the southern Adirondacks.

The acquisition permanently protects the watersheds of the Steele and Ireland Vly reservoirs, which together provide water for Amsterdam. "Clean drinking water is critical to maintaining healthy communities," says Randy Gardinier, the city's Water Plant Chief Operator. "The City of Amsterdam is grateful that OSI is addressing the needs of local communities and taking important steps to increase the security of a clean supply of drinking water, now and in the future."



Robert Stone

In addition to protecting an important watershed, the Hans Creek property includes an established forest road network that will serve as the foundation of a trail system for hiking and snowmobiling.



Upstate Forever

Land Trusts Taking on Climate Change

An innovative partnership between the Open Space Institute and the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) is helping local land trusts incorporate climate science into their conservation plans – and offering guidance on how better to communicate about how strategic land protection can mitigate the effects of climate change.

A key finding of the *How to Talk about Climate Change* study, released earlier this year by OSI and LTA, found that land trust supporters were eager to see their trusts engage local communities on the topic of climate. In fact, the reputation of land trusts as locally focused and non-adversarial, gives them a certain license to be community leaders on the topic of climate. This leadership role translates to increased visibility, relevance, and more funding for climate initiatives.

In addition to the study, OSI and LTA are providing local land trusts with training, including webinars and in-person guidance, on how to better communicate on climate.

"Land trusts want to be part of the climate change solution," says Abigail Weinberg, Director of Research at OSI. "Communicating effectively around the topic is a key way to ensure our voices are heard, and the right facts get out there."

Talking Trash in New York City

Talk Trash City has been an OSI Citizen Action group since 2015. The New York City-based environmental start-up employs a fun and creative approach to one of the city's biggest climate-related problems: waste management.

Throughout the year, the organization brings people together to, well, talk trash. They hold local competitions where presenters pitch innovative ideas on how to reduce the amount of trash that ends up in landfills. The winner takes home a cash prize to help promote or develop their idea.

"Talk Trash City is finding environmentally responsible solutions to urban waste management problems, and helping ambitious goals become real, sustainable progress," says Jessica Watson, director of OSI's Citizen Action program.

Past event winners have included the creators of 100-percent compostable beverage cups, and a fashion design company that uses discarded fabric scraps.

"Our organization is helping to reclaim the value in what we throw away, improve social justice, boost the economy, and help to combat climate change," says Meredith Danberg-Ficarelli, a co-founder of Talk Trash City. "Our affiliation with OSI has given Talk Trash City credibility and security. We have reached thousands of people because they gave us the launch pad that we needed to advance our mission."



NEW NORMAL

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)



Waccamaw River (Mac Stone)

After the Task Force identified a floodplain forest along a section of the Waccamaw River and within Conway's city limits, OSI's Maria Whitehead, Senior Project Manager, helped locate a key, 152-acre parcel critical to providing flood relief to Conway.

When they are conserved on a large enough scale, parcels like this one can provide a natural buffer against catastrophic flooding, since they can hold millions of gallons of water that would otherwise inundate local homes and streets. On a local scale, forested wetland properties act effectively as sponges, and they can even provide a brake against fast-moving flood waters, slowing their speed and reducing erosion.

Coupled with sustainable city planning, improved and updated building codes, and other measures, land protection will form a critical part of the solution to safeguarding Conway.

"Especially during times of extreme weather, protecting wetlands and floodplains is an effective way to buffer communities," says Whitehead. "Land is an extremely important, but often underappreciated, tool in the effort to curb the effects of climate change. While people generally recognize the value of land conservation for clean water, habitat, and recreation, it's gratifying that folks are grasping other values of protected land."

Hurricane Florence has spurred the conservation community and localities into thinking more broadly about land as one of the most effective ways to absorb excess water.

RECREATION REVOLUTION

(CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE)

New Paltz resident Seth McKee agrees. “The River-to-Ridge-Trail is a game changer! The new trail directly links New Paltz to our beloved Shawangunk Ridge and is already enhancing our quality of life by allowing pedestrians and cyclists an off-road alternative to access the Ridge. And the connection to the nearby Wallkill Valley Rail Trail and the soon-to-be Empire State Trail is very exciting. I am so very thankful for the work of OSI and Mohonk Preserve in making this important new trail link happen!”

The trail, built in partnership with the Mohonk Preserve and with the support of the Butler Conservation Fund, showcases 40 years of OSI’s substantial conservation work on and around the Shawangunk Ridge.

The Shawangunk Ridge stretches for 50 miles and spans three counties. With its rugged, forested terrain, it is a refuge for wildlife and rare plant species, as well as a significant

recreational draw. “The Gunks,” as they are known locally, are less than a two-hour drive north of New York City, and one of OSI’s most prominent and beloved landscapes. Here, OSI has protected more than 33,000 acres – an area twice the size of Manhattan.

“One of the most gratifying results of the new River-to-Ridge Trail, is that the people of New Paltz and beyond will have more direct access to land OSI has been working to protect on and around the Ridge,” Elliman adds.

Margaret Zappavigna DeCicco, a resident of New Paltz and a neighbor to the trail, concurs: “River-to-Ridge is a beautifully designed trail that is improving the health of our community and environment. I am ecstatic to have easy access to a scenic biking trail. It’s been a pleasure watching others enjoy the trail as much as I do.”



TOP: View of the River-to-Ridge Preserve (Bob Fagan) BELOW: Linda Engler

in conversation



Land conservation is more than just protecting the ground we stand on. A leading communicator on the health and emotional benefits of nature, Florence Williams is a bestselling author, podcaster, and public speaker. Her book, *The Nature Fix*, delves into the myriad benefits that getting outside can have on our happiness, our health, and our creativity. Here, Williams reflects on the importance of land conservation – for us, and for our grandchildren.

GETTING OUTSIDE WITH FLORENCE WILLIAMS

Is there a role for land trusts and their supporters in helping people better embrace nature?

I like to see land trusts as “people trusts,” too, preserving the landscapes humans need to be our best selves and to form our best communities. If we now understand that access to nature is not just an amenity or a privilege or a nice feature of development, but a fundamental human need for our bodies and brains, land conservation organizations like OSI can help foster a critical connection for populations who need it the most.

How do you see the role of land conservation in securing natural experiences for future generations?

We are seeing massive population growth in cities and suburbs, and as that happens, natural landscapes often suffer or disappear altogether. Amidst these pressures, securing pockets of protected land – both large and small – for people and for biodiversity will only become more critical as the 21st century thrums on.

Land nearby is the nature most of us see. But we also need the parks and expansive vistas, for the times when we can break out and consider who we are and our place in the universe. Protecting nature – and providing access to it – will be one of the greatest challenges of this urban century.

How can we help foster the next generation of stewards to appreciate and care for our natural world?

We must connect kids to nature early and often. Research shows that repeated exposure to nearby nature has lasting effects on how close people feel to nature, how committed they are to protecting it, and how well people will use it as an important tool for resilience, enjoyment, and emotional enrichment. More land conservation organizations should follow the example set by OSI to take an active role in providing green play spaces for schools and educational programs; and provide opportunities for underserved populations who wouldn’t normally have that access. OSI and others can lead the way.

Clearly, nature enriches human experience. Is there a public policy message you’d like to share?

Some nations have made access to nature a human right. We need more opportunities for high-quality nature experiences for all people, whether that’s through protecting new lands or enhancing public spaces we already have, or encouraging our institutions to build connections through design, access, and time. Here’s to more recess, greener school yards, and neighborhoods and healthy green work environments!



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CADETS IN ACTION ON FAHNESTOCK TRAIL



Cadets from the US Military Academy at West Point designed and built a replacement trail bridge at Clarence Fahnestock Memorial State Park with the support of the Open Space Institute. The effort allowed engineering students to take a project from design through construction. The bridge is part of a larger improvement project at the park, where OSI is looking to upgrade trailheads, install informational kiosks, and improve signage.