

Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, Inc. Annual Report 2013

Mission Statement

The Rensselaer Plateau Alliance promotes and facilitates the protection of the Rensselaer Plateau's undeveloped and unfragmented forests. These possess many significant natural features and provide natural habitats for plants and animals; forest products, recreation and most important, water and air quality.

Presidents Message

Recently I was asked how the RPA was able to come so far and achieve so much in such a short time. There are many factors involved including the incredible dedication of our all-volunteer board of directors, but if I had to choose the main factor contributing to our success it would be that we actively seek and accept help and advice from others who have more knowledge and experience than we do. In the fall of 2007 we connected with Karen Strong of the Hudson River Estuary Program of NYS DEC. Karen advised us on how to effectively engage the municipalities of the Rensselaer Plateau Region, how to go about developing the Regional Conservation Plan, how to craft our message to the community and many other things. Karen and more recently, Ingrid Haeckel, continue to help and advise on many things and have actively worked with us on writing of the Conservation Plan and User Guides. Another advisor and mentor is Nancy Bell from The Conservation Fund. I first connected with Nancy in early 2008. Nancy facilitated our Community Forums in 2010 and has advised us on many things including public relations and our Forest Legacy projects.



Early on we began participating in the Wildlands and Woodlands Partnership in New England and have attended many of their Regional Conservation Partnership Gatherings. We have gained a tremendous amount from these gatherings in the form of knowledge learned from the excellent workshops and breakout sessions to meeting and networking with many extraordinary people and organizations. In 2011 a presentation on collaborating on multi-parcel campaigns was given the Jay Rasku and Sarah Wells of the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership and Lee Youngblood of the Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust. This was a such a great presentation and this partnership was so successful in their large Forest Legacy projects that I asked them if they would travel to the Rensselaer Plateau and present to our whole organization. They agreed to do that and this grew into a larger effort supported by a Peer-to-Peer grant from the Regional Plan Association (the other RPA), in which they visited several times and mentored, taught and helped us and our partners the Agricultural Stewardship Association and the Rensselaer Land Trust work through our first big multi-parcel Forest Legacy project. Another

connection we made via the Regional Conservation Partnership was with Tom Curren, formerly the Director of the Northeast Land Trust Consortium of the Pew Charitable Trusts. Tom is a guru and veteran of numerous large successful capital campaigns and will be working directly with us on our first big capital campaign to raise funds for our Community Forest. Bill Labich and Emily Bateson of the Highstead Foundation recognized the potential of the RPA and invited us and only several other organization to participate in a grant that would fund Tom Curren's active involvement in our campaign.

We will continue to accept help and advice from these same people and from new sources as we move forward. Most recently we have been participating with the New York Office of the Land Trust Alliance. We have attended their roundtables and have received several grants from them. Along with these grants has come technical advice and help. In 2014 we will be partnering with the Hudson River Valley Greenway to develop a Regional Trail Vision for the Rensselaer Plateau.

Through the years we have reaped the benefits of the knowledge and experience of many people who have been willing to take time from their own jobs and lives to help us . We would not be where we are today without their help.

Our Vision Statement (Adopted June 7, 2010)

Vision of the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance

The Rensselaer Plateau Alliance envisions all human activities on the Plateau guided by consideration for the Plateau as a whole. The Alliance, a coalition of organizations and individuals, recognizes that the Plateau is greater than the sum of its parts. Our members will foster communication about the value of natural resources and other common values held by the communities of the region and, in concert, help to advance those values on a regional scale. Our vision will be realized when each of the wide range of human activities that occurs on the Plateau leaves the Plateau in better harmony with the ecological whole.

OUR VISION FOR THE PLATEAU (100 years from today)

The Rensselaer Plateau remains a large unfragmented forest with abundant lakes, wetlands and streams that run with high quality water which helps provide the entire County with drinking water. The land consist of a patchwork of private and public properties that has been voluntarily protected by landowners and municipalities that are fully aware of the benefits of forested land and open space. The local economy thrives with recreation based businesses, tourism and locally grown forest products. People can hike, ski, bike, horseback ride and snowmobile on a trail system that connects the far corners of the Plateau. Wildlife abounds. There are healthy populations of large mammals such as moose, black bear, bobcat, forest interior bird species and an abundance of native fish such as brook trout. Native plant and animal species that existed on the Plateau in 2011 still thrive.

People visit the Plateau not only for its recreation and scenic beauty but to enjoy the hunting and fishing which have seen resurgence in popularity. A large percentage of the Plateau remains working forest providing valuable timber resources. There are core areas that have been left as wildlands and are now old growth forests supporting species such as Northern Goshawks. Visitors marvel at the large trees and undisturbed surroundings.

Well-planned development on the Plateau has resulted in a high quality of life and higher property values. It has minimized the cost of municipal services resulting in lower residential property taxes. Children have natural areas where they can play and explore freely, feeling as comfortable in the woods as anywhere. The residents that live on or near the Plateau share a special community and are proud of their forests, lakes and streams. Residents have excellent sources of information about tools that help them keep their land in forest and understand the ways they can live that minimize their impact on the ecological resources of the Plateau. The communities on the Plateau support land owners and are fully aware of the benefits of forested land and open space.

The surrounding cities and towns are proud to have the Rensselaer Plateau nearby and continue to find more ways to make green connections, wildlife and recreation corridors between the Plateau and other existing protected areas. The Plateau is an intact, functioning, unstressed ecosystem with the dynamic buffering capacity to sustain itself in the face of large scale natural disturbances.

2013 Accomplishments

2013 was a year packed with accomplishments for the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance. Foremost we completed the Rensselaer Plateau Regional Conservation plan which will provide the plateau towns with much needed ecological data for planning and conservation in each town. It will also serve landowners and organizations in their efforts for conservation of these 118,000 forested acres on the plateau.

We began the year with a public meeting in March to introduce the draft plan to our multiple stakeholders including landowners, recreation users, municipalities and citizens. The meeting on March 21st at the Grafton VFW was well attended and provided thoughtful and extensive feedback on the plan.



Supervisors from all the plateau towns were also invited in March to a dinner meeting to introduce the Conservation Plan draft and provided feedback to the Alliance. Feedback from both meetings was analyzed and incorporated in the plan during the following months resulting in a final approval vote

on the revised plan in October with printing and distribution of the plan in November and December. After 5 years of work and thousands of hours of volunteer time a major goal of the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance had been reached. With the awarding of a Land Trust Alliance grant early in 2013 we were able to hire Amiee Collins, who with Board members, meet individually with supervisors from each town to introduce them to the Conservation Plan and schedule an introduction of the plan to Town Boards and Planning Boards. As the plan was being finished in 2013 we also developed 3 separate user guides for municipalities, landowners and organizations. These guides give individuals a number of examples regarding how the plan can be useful in their conservation efforts, how to use maps to obtain data and conservation values particular to the plateau. User guides have been distributed to town officials, organization leaders and used in landowner workshops which were occurring during the year. Brought to the Land Trust Alliance Roundtable in Wilton on Oct 8th, the User Guide was shared with other local land trusts as an innovative way to communicate conservation approaches for different groups. See our user guides at <http://rensselaerplateau.org/RensselaerPlateau/ConservationPlan.aspx>

Working with landowners we again applied for the Forest Legacy Grant to provided federal funds for the purchase of development rights on over 2600 forested acres on the plateau. This year we are able to include an increasing number of landowners with stewardship plans for their forests. This is a joint effort with the Rensselaer Land Trust and Agricultural Stewardship Association.

2013 was a year of increasing public awareness of the plateau due to the efforts of many Board members. Fred DeMay wrote a series of articles on different aspects of the plateau which were published in local newspapers. Board members met with staff of NYS Senator Kathy Marchione and US Senator Kirsten Gillibrand to provide information and request support for ongoing initiatives which resulted in subsequent letters of support for grants. President Jim Bonesteel was asked to join the NYS Open Space Plan Regional Advisory Committee. Board member Alice Howard complete phase 1 of the plateau library with donations and purchases including over 100 items which have been catalogued and are now part of the Upper Hudson Library System.



May 19th was an open house at the Sand Lake Public Library to introduce the community to the new

resources of the Plateau Alliance library including a good deal of historic items and environmental information. On November 16th Alice, working with the library and the Sand Lake Center for the Arts presented a 2 part group show contemporary photos of the plateau and historic images from the Grafton Historical Society. Alice is also maintaining a calendar of events which occur on the plateau and in nearby towns on the RPA web site at rensselaerplateau.org.

Multiple workshops were provided during 2013 as part of our ongoing educational opportunities for landowners with forests big and small. A large turnout resulted when Rensselaer County landowners were invited to a workshop on Saturday, March 16th, 2013 at Tamarac High School in Troy, NY. The day-long workshop provided information to help landowners get the most out of their woodland and address some of the issues facing woodland owners today. The event was co-sponsored by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Hudson River Estuary Program and Cornell Department of Natural Resources in partnership with the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rensselaer County. From the Northeast State Foresters Organization we were awarded a grant partnering with Columbia Land Conservancy to engage family forest owners. Through a series of workshops we began providing information on best foresting practices and options in planning for legacy of family lands. A workshop on best foresting practices was presented to 30 people on July 16th in Stephentown particularly aimed at 2nd home owners. Six landowners signed up for forester visits and questions ranged from how to work with a forester to protecting trout streams. A follow up workshop on Estate Planning provided information on legacy issues to multiple families, many of whom had attended the previous workshop. John Lavelle, an attorney discussed the multiple options when future planning regarding your land is considered. On November 14th another Woods Forum was held in the Sand Lake area with over 40 participants. The forum included loggers, foresters and landowners who generated many questions on timber harvesting. Two participants won free consultations with forester, Mary Spring to their delight. Walter Kersch provided an educational and service opportunity for 4th graders with a stream improvement day along the Poestenkill including planting willow shrubs and tree

identification, 20 hard-working 9 year olds helped prevent stream erosion.





A new project begun in 2013 was the development of a community forest which would include purchase of a forested land area on the plateau to provide demonstration areas for different types of foresting, educational opportunities for landowners to learn many areas from tree identity, forest management

practices to how to use a chainsaw. The public would also have recreational opportunities such as hiking, skiing, and mountain biking. Board members visited a community forest in Green County. With support from the Land Trust Alliance grant a public meeting was held at Zion Church in Taborton where interested citizens learned about the Community Forest concept, some joined the committee which was forming. The CF committee visited multiple properties over the next 3 months and found an ideal location on Legenbauer Road. Work then began on a grant requiring a 50% match to the Federal Forest Service for funds to purchase this property. A big undertaking to add to the list of projects for 2013, but community members have responded with enthusiasm to the possibility of a new place to bird watch, recreate and learn more about the plateau forest and forest management.

The RPA assisted other community groups in their own efforts around the plateau. A community group in the Stephentown, New Lebanon and Petersburg area is pursuing the possibility of a new multiuse trail on the path of the old Corkscrew Railroad which ran from Chatham to Bennington. RPA has provided organizational and technical support and provided maps for the group to begin planning.

Three new organizational members joined the RPA in 2013. Wyomanock Center in Stephentown which teaches sustainability practices and nature education, Graftonondack Outfitters, a new recreational boating business on the plateau and Dynamic Sport Adventures providing NYS Licensed Guide services and outdoor adventure and wilderness classes for all ages. This brings the number of organizational members in the Alliance to 32.

The RPA Board began work on a 5 year Strategic Plan in 2013 with a series of meetings for brainstorming and development of goals. We also used 2 surveys, one for Board members and one for Alliance members to help us focus on priorities which were most important to our members. Strategic planning will continue into 2014 with a daylong facilitated retreat.

September 14th and 15th found us with many other hardy hikers out on a 33 mile traverse across the plateau from Tibbitts State Forest to Stephentown with the encouragement of 22 private landowners who permitted us to cross their fields, yards and forest. We hiked and talked, got stung by wasps, saw some amazing moose tracks and cooled our feet at Stump Pond.





The following weekend Shari Gibbs led 15 bikers across the plateau for 48 miles over hill and dale, passing the Bowman Ponds, Dutch Church cemetery on to Dyken Pond, the Grafton Peace Pagoda, climbing the Dickerson Hill Fire Tower and stopping at the Barberville Falls.

We share this year of accomplishments with all who volunteered, with land owners who attended educational workshops, with those who worked with us on conservation efforts, with those citizens who came to our public meetings and gave suggestion, feedback and support, with our organizational members who supported us financially and technically and with our hard working dedicated Board.

2013 Thank You Donors

Grants and Donations from Organizations

NYS DEC Hudson River Estuary Program
NYS DEC Conservation Partnership Program,
Land Trust Alliance.
Black River Raiders Snowmobile Club
Dynamic Sport Adventures
Friends of the Dyken Pond Center
Friends of Grafton Lakes State Park
Pineridge XC Ski Area
Sand Lake Historical Society
Spring Lake Holding Corp
Taconic Hiking Club

In Kind Donations of Event Spaces:

Pineridge Cross Country Ski Area
Town of Stephentown
Zion's Church

Donations from Individuals & Families

Alice and Harold Howard
Andy Beers
Anonymous
Bob Mayo and Linda Maier
Brian Zweig
Bruce and Sally Perry
Christian Collins
Christina and Edward Blanchard
Christine Young
Constance Cooper
David Fleming, Jr.
David Hunt
David Hunt
David Trickey
Donald Anthony
Donna Simms
Dr. Robert Loesch
Elizabeth and Mr. John Siedhoff
Elizabeth Feathers
Frank Hunter
Fred and Mona DeMay
Heather and Rob Bruce
James Slavin
Jeanine Wisniewski
Jim Bonesteel
John and Rosemarie Sniezyk
John Meierhoffer
John, Brad and Stephanie Deyo
Kenneth Mangione

Kevin Carpenter
Lani Rafferty
Lawrence Howard
Lisa Hoyt
Michael J Palumbo
Nadine and Ira Baumgarten
Neil and Susan Roberts
Paul Hicok
Rachel Riemann
Richard and Shari Gibbs
Rick Percoco
Robert and Eileen Stegemann
Robert Juenger
Roland and Bev McClare
Roy and Pam Jacobson
Sandra and Jim De Waal Malefyt
Stanley and June Hmielenski
Steven and Deborah Pentak
Walter Kersch
William Jennings

How You Can Help

Help us acquaint the towns with the new Rensselaer Plateau Regional Conservation Plan

We will continue to hold public meetings in 2014 as we bring new projects and conservation efforts to the community. We are looking to you for feedback on what is most important to your community, what will help you as landowners and town officials in your concerns about the plateau. We want to hear from everyone who works, lives or plays on or near the plateau.

Stay Informed/Keep Us Informed

Sign up for our e-mail list and keep updated on the Community Forest, Trail Projects, outings and other programs

Volunteer

Wish List

A professional photographer to photograph smiling people at our events and enjoying the Plateau

Books for our reference library; about local history, ecology, etc.

Board of Directors

Rachel Riemann Akera
Jim Bonesteel
Fred DeMay
Jim de Waal Malefyt
Fran Egbert
Richard E. Gibbs

Sharon Gibbs
Alice Howard
Lawrence Howard
Lisa Hoyt
David Hunt, Ph. D.
Walter Kersch

Alliance Members

1. [Rensselaer Land Trust](#)
 2. [Friends of the Dyken Pond Center](#)
 3. [Friends of Grafton Lakes State Park](#)
 4. [Grafton Trail Riders](#)
 5. [Mohawk-Hudson Cycling Club](#)
 6. [The Nature Conservancy](#)
 7. [The Conservation Fund](#)
 8. Babcock Lake Estates
 9. [The Trust for Public Land](#)
 10. [The Village of East Nassau](#)
 11. Berlin Mountain Fish & Game Club
 12. [New York Forest Owners Association \(CDC\)](#)
 13. [Audubon New York](#)
 14. [Black River Raiders](#)
 15. Spring Lake Association
 16. [Trout Unlimited \(Home-Waters Chapter\)](#)
 17. [Northeastern Cave Conservancy](#)
 18. [New York Flora Association](#)
 19. [Agricultural Stewardship Association](#)
 20. [Hoosic River Watershed Association](#)
 21. [Taconic Hiking Club](#)
 22. Friends of Cherry Plain State Park
 23. [Capital Region Nordic Alliance](#)
 24. [Saratoga Mountain Bike Association](#)
 25. [Greater Stockport Creek Watershed Alliance](#)
 26. [SKYHIGH Adventures](#)
 27. [Sidney Albert Albany JCC](#)
 28. [Regional Plan Association](#)
 29. [Albany Area Amateur Astronomers](#)
- In 2013 we welcomed these new members:**
30. [Wyomanock Center](#)
 31. [Graftonondack Outfitters](#)
 32. [Dynamic Sport Adventures](#)

2013 Financial Reports

Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, Inc. Balance Sheet As of December 31, 2013

	<u>Dec 31, 13</u>
ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Checking/Savings	
Checking (First Niagara)	
Fund - Conservation Plan	380.00
Checking (First Niagara) - Other	27,757.01
Total Checking (First Niagara)	<u>28,137.01</u>
Total Checking/Savings	<u>28,137.01</u>
Total Current Assets	28,137.01
Fixed Assets	
Equipment and Software	69.00
Total Fixed Assets	<u>69.00</u>
TOTAL ASSETS	<u><u>28,206.01</u></u>
LIABILITIES & EQUITY	
Equity	
Unrestricted Net Assets	6,265.10
Net Income	21,940.91
Total Equity	<u>28,206.01</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	<u><u>28,206.01</u></u>

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05/21/14
Cash Basis

Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, Inc.
Profit & Loss
January through December 2013

	Jan - Dec 13
Ordinary Income/Expense	
Income	
Direct Public Support	4,523.98
donations	30.00
H R E Grant	18,117.60
Land Trust Alliance	
donation	3,005.00
Land Trust Alliance - Other	15,625.00
Total Land Trust Alliance	18,630.00
NESFA	5,340.94
Other Types of Income	
Miscellaneous Revenue	37.13
Total Other Types of Income	37.13
Peer to Peer Gr.	11,200.00
Program Income	
program reimbursement	995.34
Program Income - Other	180.00
Total Program Income	1,175.34
Trail Vision	750.00
User Guides Grant	9,000.00
Total Income	68,804.99
Expense	
Bank Charge	
Credit Card Processing Fee	17.55
Bank Charge - Other	37.83
Total Bank Charge	55.38
Business Expenses	81.33
Contract Services	
Accounting Fees	400.00
Outside Contract Services	
H R E Grant	15,116.72
Land Trust All/Com.forest	2,000.00
NEFA	3,400.00
User Guides	9,000.00
Outside Contract Services - Other	200.00
Total Outside Contract Services	29,716.72
Peer to Peer Grant	5,000.00
Total Contract Services	35,116.72
Facilities and Equipment	
Rent, Parking, Utilities	2.00
Total Facilities and Equipment	2.00
Membership	250.00
Operations	
Postage, Mailing Service	437.24
Printing and Copying	
H R E Grant	2,732.40
user Guides	1,511.76
Total Printing and Copying	4,244.16
Supplies	94.99
Operations - Other	337.97
Total Operations	5,114.36
Other Types of Expenses	
Insurance - Liability, D and O	506.00
Total Other Types of Expenses	506.00
Programs	
H R E Grant	323.39

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05/21/14
Cash Basis

Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, Inc.
Profit & Loss
January through December 2013

	Jan - Dec 13
Land Trust All/woodsforums	1,635.46
Land Trust Alliance/Comm. Engag	31.70
LandTrust All/Comm. Forest	511.47
Northeast Forest Assoc.	1,940.94
Programs - Other	258.94
Total Programs	4,701.90
SMBA	750.00
Travel and Meetings	
Travel	286.39
Total Travel and Meetings	286.39
Total Expense	46,864.08
Net Ordinary Income	21,940.91
Net Income	21,940.91