



Summer Newsletter & 2018 Annual Report Highlights

"We are showered every day with the gifts of the Earth, gifts we have neither earned nor paid for: air to breathe, nurturing rain, black soil, berries and honeybees..."

—Robin Wall Kimmerer

Rensselaer Plateau Alliance

Conservation Through Community



Fred McCagg

Nurturing a generation...

On a sunny spring morning, forty 4th and 5th graders sprang off the school bus at Albert Family Community Forest. These kids, out on their annual Service Day from Miller Hill-Sand Lake Elementary, had come to the right place to release some energy.

The students jumped right into gear clearing trails, raking leaves, collecting trash, and spreading mulch around signposts.

“It was amazing to see how the kids were able to channel all that enthusiasm into productivity. We provided the tools, but it was all them. They took ownership,” said Dan Morse, his face lighting up.

Dan, RPA’s new Volunteer, Program, and Outreach Manager, recalls his childhood woods in nearby Washington County and how much he loved exploring there and climbing trees. “Those woods gave me so much,” he said.

That’s part of why he now works in conservation, and he is delighted to see kids out on the land like he was.

Two girls, Sarah and Lily, who were raking leaves in an open area around the kiosk, called Dan over to ask a question.

“There wasn’t a whole lot there to look at, but the girls zeroed in on little maple seedlings and fern fiddleheads growing there and wanted to know all about them. I loved witnessing that sense of wonder.”



...of kids who care

RPA Member Polly Karis said, after watching a video taken that morning, “It’s great to see kids exposed to the forest and having their curiosity piqued. If they love nature, they will want to protect it.”

With the average American child spending around seven minutes a day in unstructured outdoor play, and over seven hours at a screen, experiences like this are invaluable to our kids’ wellbeing and a healthy future for all.

“If they love nature, they will want to protect it.” –Polly Karis, RPA member

That Service Day – and the memories and empathy it will inspire – is what the Community Forests are here for, because of you. Thank you for nurturing a generation that cares.

You can see the kids in action in a two-minute video produced by Albert Family Community Forest steward, Fred McCagg. Just type: vimeo.com/341430349 in your internet search bar.

Calling all parents, teachers, youth leaders:

Do you have an idea for engaging young people with the land? Contact Dan Morse at dan@rensselaerplateau.org or Amanda McCreary, Rensselaer Youth Outdoors Program Coordinator at amanda.ryo.coordinator@gmail.com.

You can help connect kids with nature

RPA’s Children’s Forest Program, initiated in 2016, led to the formation of Rensselaer Youth Outdoors (RYO), a partnership of the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center, Grafton Lakes State Park, and local schools. RYO now needs to stand on its own financially, and the program is welcoming its first supporting members.

The Ann Allen Cetrino Family Foundation has generously offered a match challenge. The foundation will match up to \$10,000. If we can raise the full \$10,000 by October 15th, they will increase their match amount by an additional \$5,000.

You can contribute to this fund at: ryoutdoors.org/donate



Where the Poesten Kill bends in Troy

On a Saturday in June, Sarah and Jaron took their kids, Saoirse, 4, and Ronan, 2, for a walk to their favorite spot by the creek. Saoirse immediately wanted to dip her toes in.

For this family, the forest behind Elmwood Cemetery in Troy – in walking distance from home – is more than a wild tangle of trees and shrubs.

“Our kids love going on adventures on the land to hike, throw rocks in the water, and hunt for treasures.”

For Sarah and Jaron, this is important. They both loved the outdoors as kids, and Jaron always wished his favorite state park had been closer to home.

This 76-acre property along the Poesten Kill creek is a wildlife haven. It’s home to Great Horned Owls, three different species of hawks, Pileated and other woodpeckers, Red winged-blackbirds; and coyotes, fishers, weasels, and snapping turtles.

It’s also a favorite spot for locals of all ages and has been so for decades. Students from Emma Willard School, just up the road from the forest, swim there. Teens come down after school, fisherman wade into the winding creek to cast lines, and families like Sarah and Jaron’s come down to play and enjoy nature.

With the property now for sale, its future as a sanctuary for wildlife and people is not guaranteed. That’s why RPA teamed up with our partners at the Rensselaer Land Trust to purchase the property. The plan is to create a new preserve based on the Community Forest model. We’re currently in the fundraising phase, hopeful for a closing on September 1, 2019.

Already, a local committee has formed and met to create a land management plan for the property. Sarah and her dad, Bill, are part of it.

“It’ll be up to the committee to determine what we do with the land, how we manage it ... that’s what we’ve



done in our other Community Forests, and it's worked really well because it's coming from the community. They take ownership of it," said Jim Bonesteel, RPA's Executive Director.

Since the Poesten Kill flows off the plateau and bends through Troy to the Hudson River, this project connects the dots between the rural forests and an urban population center. With Troy drinking water coming from plateau streams, it's a natural connection.

We are grateful to generous donors who have contributed \$57,000 to this campaign to-date. That's 58% of what's needed by September 1st to close on the property.

Now, we need your help to raise an additional \$42,000 by September 1.

If you're interested in learning more about how you can support this project, please call Jim at 518-712-9211.

Estimated Project Budget:

Land	\$83,000
Closing Costs	\$11,000
Land for Parking	\$25,000
Parking & Signs	\$15,000
1st Year Property Tax	\$10,000
Stewardship	\$10,000
Other Costs	\$4,000
Total	\$158,000

The Poesten Kill flows off the Rensselaer Plateau and winds through the town of Troy to the Hudson River. With this 76-acre property for sale, the unofficial access that neighbors have enjoyed for decades — and the wildness of the land — is not guaranteed. If purchased by RPA and RLT, we will maintain this place by the creek for all to enjoy.



Nate Simms



The effects of climate change are here, and forests and wetlands can help

At Soul Fire Farm in Grafton, in the heart of the Rensselaer Plateau, farmer Damaris Miller grapples with the challenge of farming in a changing climate. “Last spring we rushed to set up our irrigation system when we encountered a sudden drought. This spring we’ve lost time and crops to excessive rain and lack of direct sunlight,” said Damaris.

Outdoor recreation businesses also feel the impact of changes in weather patterns. In the winter, there are fewer good days for sports like cross country skiing. More frequent storms and excessive rain – which the National Climate Assessment has identified as part of climate change for the Northeast – cause damage to homes and roads, as we saw with Hurricane Irene in 2011.

Meanwhile, our forests are struggling due to diseases that spread more quickly in milder winters, such as the Emerald Ash Borer. Indeed, with the pace of climate change we’re experiencing, our region’s forests and people face an uncertain future.

Land conservation is part of a climate change solution

The good news is that conserving forests, wetlands, and farms in the region can play a major role in the effort to slow down climate change. If land is managed to capture and store greenhouse gasses, these landscapes can be part of our local and regional climate solutions.

For wildlife and plants, conserving our forests is a matter of survival. Due to the Rensselaer Plateau’s diverse ecosystems and abundant wetlands, some species will find much of what they need here as the climate warms. Likewise, the corridors of forest that run between the Rensselaer Plateau and the Taconics and Berkshires, in our neighboring states, will allow wildlife and plants to move north as needed.

Forests and wetlands protecting communities

In response to Hurricane Irene – and to better prepare for future storms in Rensselaer County – RPA launched a flood resiliency study in 2018 for the Poesten Kill watershed, in partnership with the towns of Poestenkill, Grafton, and Brunswick, and the City of Troy.

Research by the engineering firm, Chazen Companies, and restoration firm, Interfluve, revealed that the Plateau’s wetlands are one of our biggest assets in flood control. Wetlands act like giant sponges that absorb rainfall, which is so important in slowing down flood waters. Likewise, vegetation and roots slow water down and soak it in – without them we would have many more flash floods.

In so many ways, conservation is a big part of the solution. Thanks to your generous support and foresight, we are well on our way to ensuring a resilient landscape that will help protect our communities—and the wildlife—for a better future.

Funding for the Poesten Kill watershed resiliency study was provided by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation’s Hudson River Estuary Program, with support from the NYS Environmental Protection Fund, in cooperation with the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission. The viewpoints expressed here do not necessarily represent those of NEIWPCC or NYSDEC, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or causes constitute endorsement or recommendation of use.



Jim de Waal Malefyt



Nate Simms

The Nature Conservancy – one of the national leaders in climate solution research – identified the plateau as a place of refuge for species in a changing climate. That’s good news for wildlife like moose and bobcat, as long as we act now to protect this habitat. *** A northern, deep-woods dweller, the Black-throated Green Warbler is likely to benefit from plateau conservation as the climate changes. *** There are more than 3,000 acres of wetlands up on the Rensselaer Plateau. Those wetlands filter and absorb rain, critical to minimizing floods. But they won’t all continue to thrive in isolation. With your help, RPA works with local communities and landowners to conserve the lands that matter most.

YOU MADE IT HAPPEN...

The Poestenkill Community Forest grows

Thanks to our generous members, the entire Big Beaver Bog is protected, and the Community Forest is part of a large forest block, benefiting rare plants like black gum and bog sedge, and wildlife such as the Black-throated Green Warbler.

The Community Forest now abuts a large parcel of former Cowee lands, conserving around 5,000 acres of connected acres. Larger forests like this are a major part of RPA's conservation goals because of what they mean for wildlife and ecosystem resilience in a changing climate. The acquisition is also a boon for hikers, with new trails such as the Perched Pond trail.

Jeff Briggs, PCF steward, explained, "With this addition to the Poestenkill Community Forest we can now follow in the steps of the revolutionary army by walking the old Albany road toward Williamstown, Mass." The PCF's trails will link to a new DEC trail system once The Conservation Fund sells the former Cowee Lands to DEC, creating excellent recreational opportunities.

We are so grateful to Michael and Bobbi DeFilippis and family for selling the property to RPA at a significant discount.

"It was just time to give back"

There are now more ways to support conservation

When you realize that the place you love, the forests you cherish, and the community you want to support, is on the Rensselaer Plateau, there is no better moment than now to contribute. That was true for Bill Lanford, who lives just south of the Plateau and owns land in Grafton. Bill recognized that there was a short window of time to help make the expansion of the Poestenkill Community Forest a reality.

"I've lived simply and it was just time to give back," said Bill. "Donating through a Qualified Charitable Distribution from my IRA just made sense." We couldn't have conserved this land without Bill's generous gift and the support of our other members.

If you're 70 ½ years or older and must take the Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from your IRA, a Qualified Charitable Distribution could be used to satisfy the RMD by making a direct, trustee-to-trustee transfer to the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance. The RMD would not be reported as income, so the donation would lower your taxable income. Talk to your financial advisor, IRA custodian, or accountant to determine if this could work for you. You can also donate through a gift of stock, which will provide you with financial and tax benefits while supporting conservation.

To learn more about these giving options, please call Jim Bonesteel at 518-712-9211.



Lee King sits at his kid-sized table, coming soon to the Poestenkill Community Forest. Lee stumbled upon the Forest in 2018 and has been joyfully volunteering his time and skills ever since. Lee is one of the many volunteers who collaborate with RPA to work for the good of all in Rensselaer County. Have an idea for a project that could benefit the community and conservation? E-mail Dan Morse at dan@rensselaerplateau.org.



Kids need places where they can imagine and have fun, and you can help

Are you wondering how to make a difference here on the plateau? Lee King, a Poestenkill native, was asking that question when he found his niche improving visitor experiences at the Poestenkill Community Forest.

Lee is retired from the military in materials and design, and his kids are grown.

“Life has been rich. I can help with this kind of thing,” he said as he peeled the bark off an aspen sapling to make one of his famous walking sticks. He supplies the Poestenkill Community Forest with walking sticks of all sizes for visitors to use, and keep if they want.

Raising four children helped Lee tune into to what kids need, and that is part of what prompted him to start constructing picnic tables and walking sticks for the Community Forest. “I want the tables to be something sweet that draws in families to have picnics,” he said.

Lee uses rejected wood from Home Depot and his own designs to create what he calls Taconic Tables, inspired by the Adirondack Chair. He engineers them to be three things: safe, durable, and aesthetically pleasing. He is careful to create smooth edges, safe for active kids.

He placed one Taconic Table in the open area at the Poestenkill Community Forest this spring, and he is now nearly done with a miniature-sized version for children. He’s calling that one the “Imagination station.” It will even have a built-in tray for young folk to stash their things.

Lee is planning a special day for the installation of the Imagination Station with three of his granddaughters, who live here in Rensselaer County. He hopes it will be a learning experience and also a memorable and fun time for them.

“I believe that there’s no better investment of our time and energy than what we do for our kids,” says Lee. “And, I have a whole lot of fun doing it.”



Fred McCagg



Looking for a fun opportunity?

The heart and soul of conservation are the people who make it happen, and volunteering is a big part of that. Want to join a growing community of people, from all walks of life, who are making a difference in the region? Volunteers build trails, host events, teach workshops, contribute photographs, and much more. E-mail Dan Morse at dan@rensselaerplateau.org, or call our office at 518- 712-9211, to explore what is right for you.

“Building and maintaining trails is a great way to be outdoors and help make it available for others, get some exercise, and enjoy a little fellowship.”

– Peter Wood, RPA/Rensselaer Land Trust Volunteer Trail Crew



Fred McCagg

2018 Income



Government Grants	\$121,352
Individual Contributions	\$117,634
Project Carryover	\$51,348
Special Events Income	\$19,640
Other Income	\$13,100

Total \$323,074

2018 Expenses



Program Services	\$232,321
Fundraising	\$42,215
Management and General	\$34,234

Total \$308,770

Monthly Giving supports conservation year-round, for today and for the future

Want to support conservation in a big way throughout the year? Monthly giving might be for you. Donating \$5, \$10, \$25 or \$100/month all adds up and helps support this work when we need it most. This kind of sustaining membership is at the heart of what we're doing together.

A big Thank You to our 2018 Monthly Donors

Regina & Bill Andrews
Ian Bonesteel
Jim Bonesteel & Jill Rembetski
Jeffrey & Jean Briggs
Francille Egbert
Challen E Hammer
Kate Lovering & August Schneeberg
Fred McCagg & Lani Richards
Elizabeth Reid
Garreth & Eliza Santosuosso
Rik & Wendy Scarce

Want to go monthly with your gifts?

Let us know, or visit rensselaerplateau.org/donate.

In 2018, because of you...



1,000 kids

got out on the land
for hands-on learning

86 acres added
to the Poestenkill
Community Forest



32 miles of trail
created by volunteers

Thank you to all who made so much happen for the Rensselaer Plateau region in 2018.

Donations for fiscal year January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2018.

Individual Members

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continued...

You are protecting the nature we love and cherish

Because of you, this land will be here for future generations

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Peter Sanzen & Sheila Mahan

"We give to RPA to
make nature more
accessible to the
community, and
preserve land for future
generations through
wise stewardship."
—Susan Poisson-Dollar

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New York State Conservation
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NYSDEC Hudson River
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Scott Cole
Theodore & Deborah Holtz
Janice & Richard Newport
Micheline & Charles Wilson


Kenneth E York

Wendy York Briggs

A special thank you

...to landowners who have sold
their land below market value
in 2018 — this generosity of
spirit allows conservation to
happen where we need it most:

Michael & Bobbi DeFilippis &
Family

 denotes members of Woods
& Water Heritage Circle
(\$1,000 and up annually)

 denotes Monthly Donors



Rensselaer Plateau Alliance

Conservation Through Community

PO Box 790
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Rensselaer Plateau Alliance

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Join us for learning and fun on the land!

Hike Lt. Col. Gundrum Land to beaver pond and mountain views

Saturday, August 3, 9 am – noon

Visit the beautiful beaver pond, then hike up to cliffs off Firetower Road that overlook the Wildlife Management Area and Taconic Crest, and back, with steward August Schneeberg. Co-sponsored with the Rensselaer Land Trust.

Reading the Forested Landscape with Tom Wessels

Saturday, October 5

Did you know that you can read the history of our woodlands through clues such as rock walls, dead trees, and the lay of the land? Exploring the woods with Tom is like learning a new language.

Details about these programs, and more opportunities for you, including the Rensselaer Naturalist Series and Taconic Crest hikes co-sponsored with the Rensselaer Land Trust, can be found at rensselaerplateau.org.