



CONSERVATION THROUGH COMMUNITY

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

Rensselaer Plateau Alliance

Mission Statement

The Rensselaer Plateau Alliance works with the community to promote and facilitate the conservation of the Rensselaer Plateau's undeveloped and unfragmented forests and other ecologically important areas. These possess many significant natural features and provide many benefits including natural habitats for plants and animals; forest products, recreation and most important, water and air quality.

Alliance Members

Rensselaer Land Trust
Friends of the Dyken Pond Center
Friends of the Grafton Lake State Park
Grafton Trail Riders
Mohawk-Hudson Cycling Club
The Nature Conservancy
The Conservation Fund
Babcock Lake Estates
The Trust for Public Land
The Village of East Nassau
Berlin Mountain Fish & Game Club
New York Forest Owners Association (CDC)
Audubon New York
Spring Lake Association
Trout Unlimited (Home-Waters Chapter)
Northeastern Cave Conservancy
New York Flora Association
Taconic Hiking Club
Friends of Cherry Plain State Park
Capital Region Nordic Alliance
Saratoga Mountain Bike Association
SKYHIGH Adventures
Sidney Albert Albany JCC
Regional Plan Association
Albany Area Amateur Astronomers
Wyomanock Center
Dynamic Sports Adventure
Hoosic River Watershed Association
Agricultural Stewardship Association
Corkscrew Rail Trail Association
Greater Stockport Creek Watershed Alliance
Appalachian Mountain Club (Mohawk Hudson Chapter)

2016 was another monumental year for the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance with positive and constant progress toward our vision and strategic goals. While many important projects were underway or accomplished in 2016, none exemplify the RPA spirit and approach to problem-solving like the acquisition of the Gundrum property in Grafton. This was truly a win-win-win situation where multiple players came together around the common goal of conserving a remarkable piece of property. The Gundrum tract is 927 acres of forested landscape in the Town of Grafton that represents some of the most biologically diverse and ecologically important real estate on the plateau. It shares a common border with the Pittstown State Forest and includes a lengthy range along the plateau escarpment with incredible views over the Tomhannock Reservoir, the Green Mountains and the southern Adirondacks. The Gundrum family spent years adding parcels and growing their holdings from the original 150 acres they first purchased in the early 1970s. They managed the land for their lumber business and grew to love it for its beauty. They decided that this was a special place and should be conserved for others to love into the future. They approached NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) about acquiring the property to add to, and almost double, the Pittstown State Forest. DEC in turn reached out to The Conservation Fund and RPA about acquiring and holding the land until New York State was able to buy it. This was a big project with a price tag of almost three quarters of a million dollars. The RPA Board of Directors spent considerable time deliberating their ability to successfully manage this project. Not being ones to shy away from some risk in pursuit of our mission and after a great deal of discussion with our partners and due diligence RPA secured a loan from The Conservation Fund to move forward and close the purchase. The “winners” in this story are the Gundrums for being able to sell and protect at the same time, the State for eventually being able to expand the Pittstown State Forest, The Conservation Fund for advancing their mission of conservation, the RPA for brokering a deal that saves the forests of the Rensselaer Plateau and most importantly, the people of this region who gain an extraordinary new playground. Thanks to everyone who made this happen!



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Vision Statement

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.

***Working cooperatively with groups & individuals,
RPA listens, inspires, leads & gets results.***

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 consists 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 2010 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.

2016 Accomplishments

This year has been another successful year for the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance. From our Children's Forest being on the verge of becoming a reality to our establishment of a second Community Forest on the Plateau to running our new Lecture Series, we have once again accomplished a great deal!



Community Forests

The RPA is gaining valuable experience and expertise on the operation of Community Forests ... See Page 9



Educational & Recreational Programs

The RPA ran numerous educational and recreational programs this year, providing opportunities for community members with varied interests.... See Page 11



Forest Legacy

While NYSDEC negotiates the purchase of development rights, RPA explores with these landowners the possibility for public recreation rights and trails ... See Page 13



Municipal Engagement

RPA continues engagement with Plateau towns through town official meetings, presentations and informational training workshops...See Page 13



Children's Forest

The Children's Forest is on the verge of becoming a reality! Local school children will not only study environmental subjects, but will have a hands-on experience...See Page 14



Trail Vision

The Hudson River Valley Greenway awarded RPA a two-year grant of \$25,000 to help complete a trail vision for the Plateau... See Page 15



Organizational Capacity

RPA forms a Board of Advisors... See Page 16



Partnerships

Much of what RPA does involves partnership. We partner with many of our Alliance Members on various project throughout the year... See Page 17

Community Forests

The Community Forest model has evolved into a foundational emphasis for the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance. The RPA is gaining valuable experience and expertise on the operation of this program which is intended to provide recreational trails for Plateau residents and visitors, serve as demonstration areas for best management practices for forest stewardship, and provide a venue for a variety of other educational programs for adults and children. Additionally, these areas are vitally important for watershed protection and wildlife habitat.

Poestenkill Community Forest

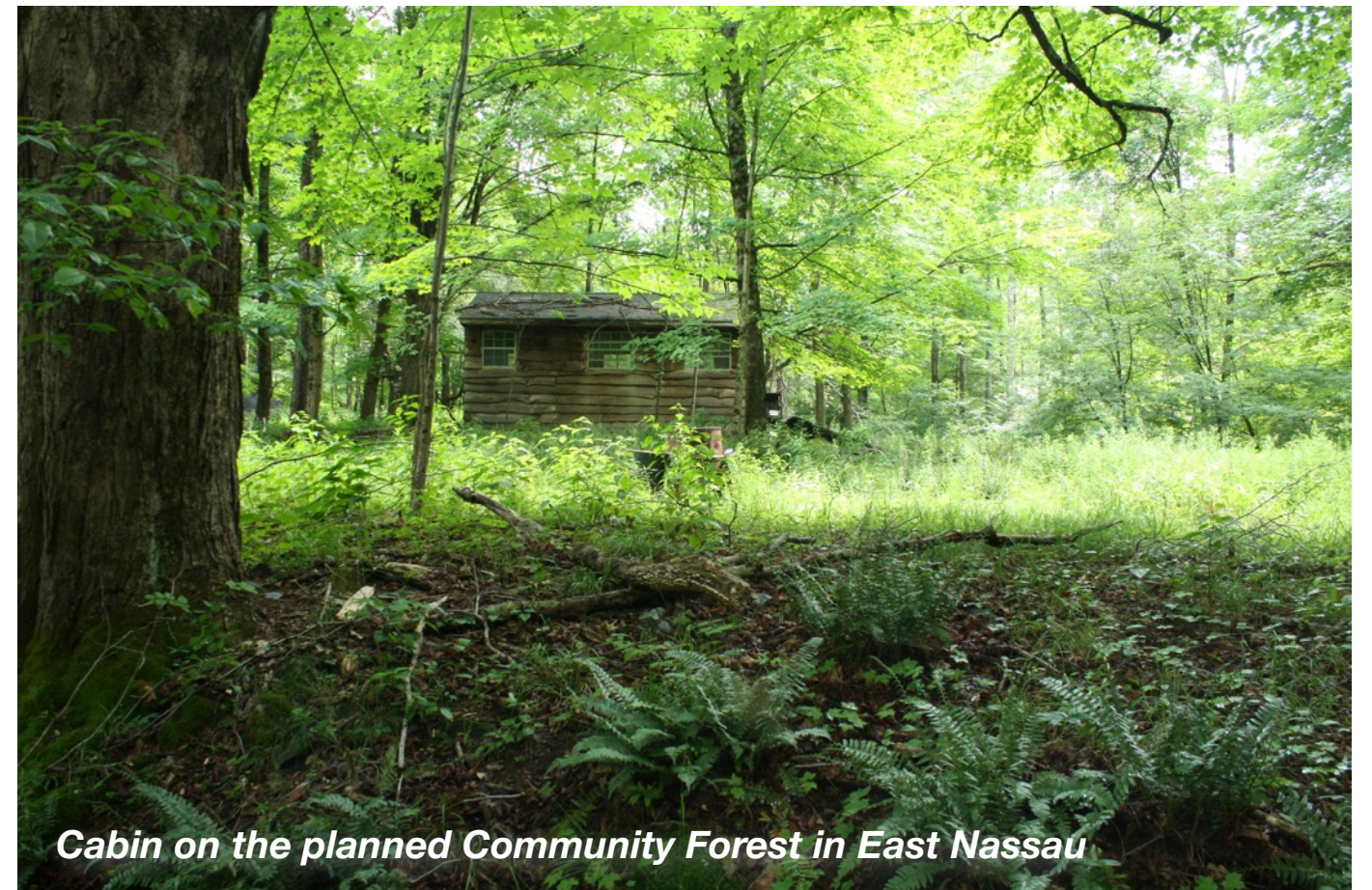
The first community forest – The Poestenskill Community Forest- saw a flurry of activity in 2016. The CF Committee, composed of local residents with a variety of interests and skills, met on a regular basis to discuss and plan how to proceed with operation of the community forest. They reviewed and prioritized detailed forest management plans developed by Forester Mary Spring, developed and recommended a variety of program suggestions for approval, and discussed trail routes that were then handed over to a group of volunteers led by board member Fran Egbert. The RPA Board worked closely with the committee and the Poestenskill Planning Board to approve a Special Use Permit which authorized us to proceed with the development of a parking lot and other infrastructure improvements on the property. The RPA Board particularly wants to thank the volunteers and members who devoted countless hours to removing brush and laying out the parking lot, to Fran's trail crew for providing miles of hiking paths, and to Jeff Bridges for agreeing to be the property's steward.



Timber Marking with Forester Mary Spring

Community Forest in East Nassau

The East Nassau Community Forest (now being called the Albert Family Community Forest) is moving forward. The newly formed community forest advisory committee created a plan and submitted a grant to the U.S. Forest Service to acquire the property. The grant was awarded in June. Due diligence including surveys, appraisals, and title work were conducted in fall 2016 with a target to close on the land in January 2017. This 353 acre parcel is being made possible by a generous bargain sale by Kevin and Mary Albert and a grant from the U.S. Forest Service Community Forest Program. This property has extensive wetlands, stone walls and homestead sites, and well-developed old logging roads and trails that will make it ideal for hiking, , cross country skiing, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, bird watching, forestry, and education.



Cabin on the planned Community Forest in East Nassau

Educational and Recreational Programs

The RPA ran numerous educational and recreational programs this year, providing opportunities for community members with varied interests. Here's a sampling of this year's activities. We held a variety of other workshops and programs such as a boundary marking workshop for landowners, a Landowner Open House, Alcott Smith Animal Tracking and various hikes and work days.

Game of Logging

On October 28th & 29th RPA again partnered with the New York Forest Owners association to co-sponsored two days of "Game of Logging" (GOL) chain saw safety training courses. These full-day intensive sessions under a professional trainer are co-sponsored by RPA and the New York Forest Owners Association (NYFOA). These are funded through a grant administered by the New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health (NYCAMH). GOL covers safety gear, saw safety features and operation, saw sharpening, proper procedures for operating a saw, and then moves into directional tree felling in complicated woodlot situations. GOL is a great program for land owners on the Plateau. On October 8th, we also partnered with New York Logger Training Inc. to provide another full day of this training for professional loggers. All three of these training sessions were conducted at the Poestenkill Community Forest.



Mountain Bike Skills Clinics

In August the Saratoga Mountain Bike Association (SMBA) partnered with us to conduct two beginner mountain bike skills clinics at the Poestenkill Community Forest. The SMBA members are not only accomplished mountain bikers but are very good teachers. These clinics attracted families for the most part. One participant said, "It was amazing to see the kids at the beginning of the clinic and then what they were doing at the end. This was a fantastic opportunity".

Lecture Series

RPA's began a monthly lecture series that is now in full swing. Lectures are held the 2nd Thursday of each month (with the exception of July and August) at the Sand Lake Town Hall. Lectures cover a vast range of topics from history to ecology, science and community interest. 2016 lectures included: geology of the plateau, historic roads, fly fishing, "Sustaining this Place" film screening, Native Americans of Rensselaer County, forest regeneration, Fox Hollow Festival, mushrooms, and birds of the Plateau.

Rensselaer Plateau Traverse Hike & Cycle the Plateau

Shari Gibbs let the 6th Annual Cycle the Rensselaer Plateau. Road bike riders travelled 45 miles and visited numerous sites of interest. The 6th Annual Rensselaer Plateau Traverse Hike took place on Sept 24 and 25 as part of the Hudson River Valley Ramble. This year we hiked south to north from Garfield Road in Stephentown to Pittstown State Forest. This year's route included the new Chestnut Hill parcel and was made possible with permission from over a dozen private landowners.

Holiday Wreath Making Workshop

Wreath making in 2016 was great! On a lovely sunny day at Pineridge Cross Country Ski Center, about 20 participants learned about different types of evergreens and how to make wreaths. Board member Walter Kersch donated all the greens, which were from the Plateau. Everyone enjoyed a chili lunch while working and went home with a wreath or two.



Forest Legacy

The Forest Legacy Program on the Plateau, funded through the US Forest Service in December 2015 with \$5.5 million in federal funding matched by \$2.4 million from New York State's Environmental Protection Fund, continues to be negotiated with landowners. Ranked fifth nationally, the program brings together 15 landowners in a 12-mile corridor and would conserve 12,348 acres of mostly contiguous forest from the Plateau's southern escarpment in Stephentown north to the Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center in Grafton. The NYSDEC is working to negotiate the purchase of development rights. RPA's partners in the Forest Legacy project – NYSDEC and its Hudson River Estuary Program, the Agricultural Stewardship Association and the Rensselaer Land Trust – demonstrate support from both government agencies and not-for-profit organizations.

Municipal Engagement

Open channels of communication and exchange of information with Town Officials are important to the success of the RPA's conservation efforts. Our semi-annual meetings are held at Pineridge where we provide dinner followed by a topic discussion or presentation with time allotted for Q/A, general discussion, and sharing of ideas and concerns.

On May 23rd, David Fleming, Supervisor of the Town of Nassau, gave a great presentation about the creation of the Town's Mud Pond Preserve. The volunteer community efforts involved in forming the MPP were highlighted and much of the discussion that followed was around the process by which community "buy-in" was established from the very start of the project and the cost to the Town was and remains minimal.

Another well attended meeting was held on November 29th. Flora Fasoldt, Sand Lake Town Supervisor, updated the group on the collaborative effort and progress that the Towns of Poestenkill, Nassau, and Sand Lake had made securing and implementing a grant to develop Rensselaer Plateau signage. Sign design and templates were reviewed and discussed.



Children's Forest

RPA's concept of a Rensselaer Plateau Children's Forest was hatched almost as soon as the community forest idea began to take shape. Now, the Children's Forest is on the verge of becoming reality. The first of its kind in the Northeast or New England, the Children's Forest holds the promise of bringing school children from throughout Rensselaer County to not simply study environmental subjects from history to ecology, but to experience those topics as well.

The nation's twenty-four "Children's Forests" are formally recognized by the U.S. Forest Service and have their foundation in sound educational approaches. The Forest Service says that children's forests should foster "high quality outdoor learning experience(s)" emphasizing "hands-on projects," education "about natural environments," and stewardship. In other words, children's forests are locales for place-based environmental education—education that involves direct learning by students as opposed to education that comes primarily from classroom or even laboratory experiences



Over the last year, RPA and Alliance member Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center (DPEEC) implemented a \$7,900 grant from the Rubin Fellows Program to support the conceptualization of the Children's Forest. The Rubin Fellows grant funded several workshops with area teachers and school administrators, yielding considerable guidance for the way ahead. Those discussions affirmed strong

interest in the establishment of a Children's Forest from administrators and teachers in Rensselaer County school districts, and demonstrated widespread support for a vision centering on a cutting-edge, multi-grade, and multiple exposure model of environmental education.

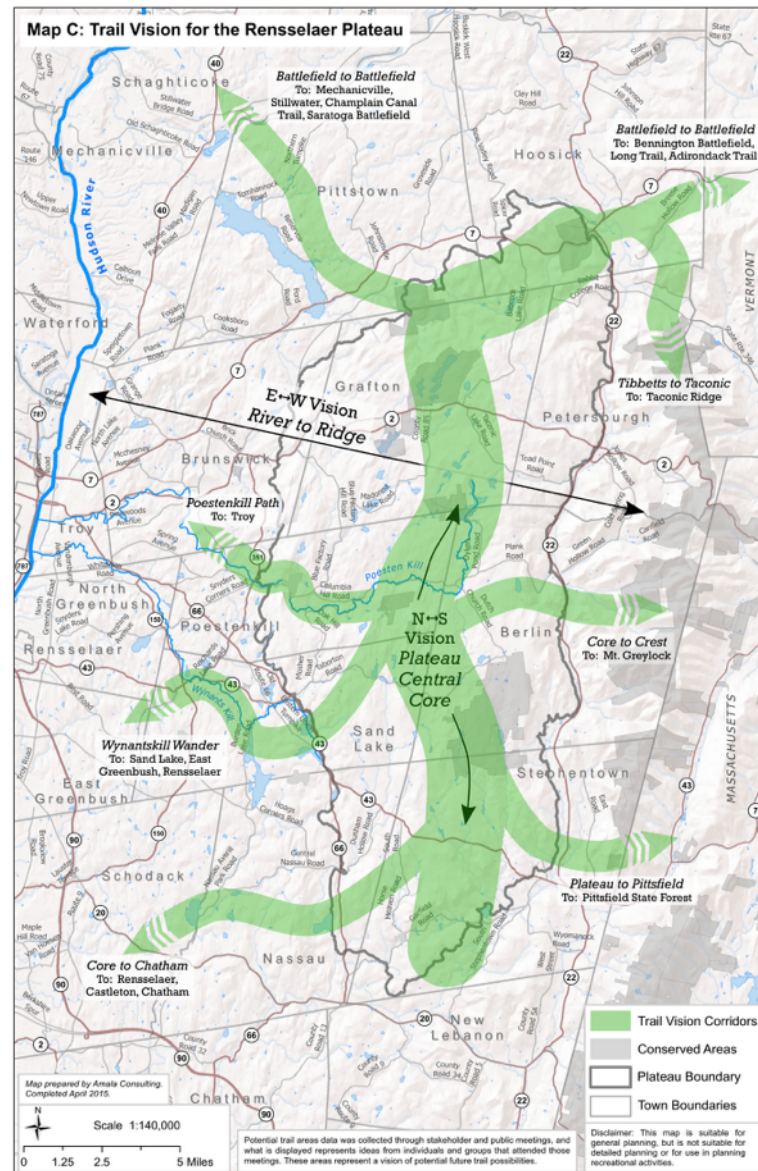
RPA has requested funding from two foundations to further that work. We hope to hire a coordinator who will work with RPA, DPEEC, and Alliance member Grafton Lakes State Park to develop and implement a pilot project involving multiple school districts. In the long term, the vision is to make the Children's Forest available to students across multiple grades in every school system in the county.

Trail Vision

The Hudson River Valley Greenway awarded RPA a one-year grant of \$25,000 to help complete a trail vision for the Plateau. The grant requires volunteer hours and contributions of equal value. To start, RPA would like to explore a north-south trail open to the public connecting Cherry Plain State Park to Grafton Lakes State Park. In addition to a critical stretch through Dyken Pond Environmental Center, the majority of the trail would run through privately owned lands that are part of the Forest Legacy Program.

The overall trail vision calls for connections from the Plateau east to the Taconic Ridge and to Vermont and Massachusetts via the Taconic Crest Trail. To the west, Plateau trails would connect to Hudson River Valley Greenway trails that are being extended along the Hudson River. In time, Plateau trails would also connect south to the Harlem Valley Rail Trail, currently extending north into Columbia County towards Chatham. To the north, the trail vision calls for connections to the Saratoga National Historic Park and Bennington Battlefield State Historic Site.

Once achieved, Plateau trails would form the hub of a trail network linking cities with parks and other recreational opportunities, with neighboring states and with historical sites across a region with more than one million residents. Five active partners are participating with RPA in the trail vision – NYSDEC, Hudson River Valley Greenway, Rensselaer Land Trust, Taconic Hiking Club and Saratoga Mountain Bike Association – and demonstrate once again support from both government agencies and not-for-profit organizations.



Organizational Capacity

In the fall of 2015 RPA worked with consultant Connie Manes on an Organizational Assessment. This assessment highlighted areas where we were doing well and areas that needed improvement. Connie indicated that our assessment was one of the best she's ever done with RPA conforming to 80% or more of land trust standards and practices needed for accreditation. In 2016, we put considerable effort into revising our By-Laws and implementing new policies and procedures to keep up with our growth from a small all volunteer organization to the rapidly growing organization that we are today.

Having budgeted ahead, our staff and board participated in a significant number of high quality training and professional development opportunities including training in governance, development, public relations and communications.

In the fall of 2016 we formed a Board of Advisors (BOA). This is a group of prominent individuals who bring knowledge, experience and varying backgrounds to RPA but who would not otherwise have the time to serve on the RPA Board. The BOA will advise RPA on key decisions, policy, and strategic planning but will not be involved in day-to-day decisions.



Partnerships

Much of what RPA does involves partnership. We partner with many of our Alliance Members on various projects throughout the year. In 2016 we formalized several partnerships. Executive Director, Jim Bonesteel, was asked to serve on the Steering Committee of the RCP Network of New England and Eastern New York as the representative from New York State. The RCP Network provides education, support and networking for the RCP's (Regional Conservation Partnerships) in the Northeast. Jim sat on the working group for the Berkshire Taconic Regional Conservation Partnership, a new partnership with a mission to conserve the important "connectedness" of the Taconic Range in New York, Vermont, Massachusetts and Connecticut. The Taconics represent one of the longest connected regions in the Northeast.

Jim partnered with Rob Davies, Director Division of Lands and Forests, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Julie Renaud Evans, Director of Forestry, Northern Forest Center, and Jennifer Melville, Vice President Conservation Grants and Loans, Open Space Institute to present Community Forests, a New Model for Land Conservation in New York State at the New York State Land Conservation Summit in Saratoga Springs. Jim was asked to join Scott Stewart, Forest Legacy Program Manager and Community Forest Program Manager, U.S. Forest Service to present Community Forests at the Land Trust Alliance national conference, Rally, in Minneapolis.



Photo by Alene Onion



Donor Acknowledgement

Thank you to everyone who made contributions in 2016. Reflected below are contributions received between January 1st, 2016 and December 31st, 2016. We have made every effort to ensure the accurate listing of our supporters. Please email info@rensselaerplateau.org to note any corrections.

Grants & Donations from Organizations

Blue Skies Travel
Dynamic Sports Adventure
Empire State Forest Products Association
Lazy Oak Lumber
Nature Conservancy
Open Space Institute
Spring Lake Holding Corp.
Stewarts Shops
Taconic Hiking Club

Donations from Individuals & Families

Plateau Visionary (Greater than \$1,000)

Henry J (Jack) Alexander & Lyn Howard
Fred & Mona DeMay
Richard & Shari Gibbs
Alice & Harold Howard
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Donor Acknowledgement Continued...

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Pamela & Bruce Barbeau
Judith Beiss
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Photo by Trix Niernberger

In-Kind Donations (Event Spaces)

Old Daley Inn on Crooked Lake
Pineridge XC Ski
Shulman, Howard & McPherson LLP
Town of Sand Lake

In-Kind Donors (Silent Auction)

Absolute T-Shirts
Adirondack Paddle n Pole
Albany Symphony Orchestra
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Palace Theatre
Fashion for Fashion Studios
Ramblewild
R&G Cheese
RPI Athletics Department
Sand Lake Center for the Arts
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SPAC
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Tomhannock Bikes
Tri-City Valley Cats
Wayne Trimm & Melodee James
Troy Savings Bank Music Hall
Doug Williams
Yankee Trails
Kristina Younger

In-Kind Donors (Other)

Averill Park High School Jazz Band
Creighton Manning Engineering
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Doug Williams
ELAN Planning
Jeff Victor
Lawrence Howard
Melody James
Old Daley Inn on Crooked Lake
Sarah Parks
Shulman, Howard & McPherson LLP
Terry Williams
Town of Poestenkill
Warren W. Fane Inc.

2016 Financials

Financial results for RPA in the fiscal year ending December 31, 2016, show a continued steady increase in the amount of financial support received. While government grants that generally are for specific projects may fluctuate from year to year, income from individual and business contributions, programs and special events has been steadily rising. In 2015 RPA hit the income threshold that requires us to get Financial Reviewed Statements from an independent certified public accountant. These were done by the accounting firm DeChants, Fuglein & Johnson, LLP. We are still below the threshold that would require us to get a very expensive annual audit.

2016 was the first full year with paid staff. With the help of some key donors RPA was able to retire the loan from the Conservation Fund for the Poestenkill Community Forest on time in October of 2016. In late 2016, we acquired the Gundrum property in Grafton. This acquisition accounts for much of the large increase in fixed assets and liabilities.

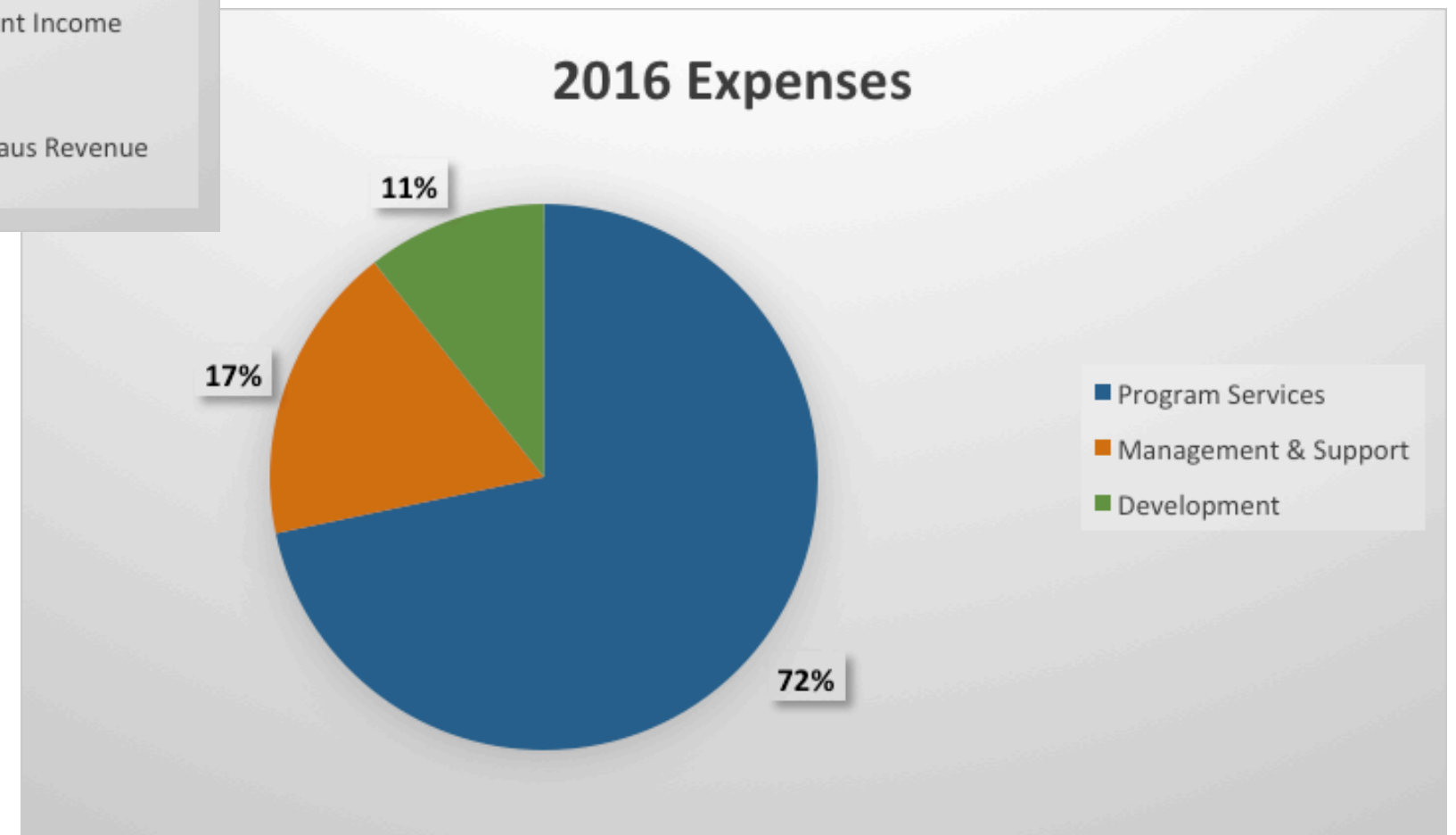
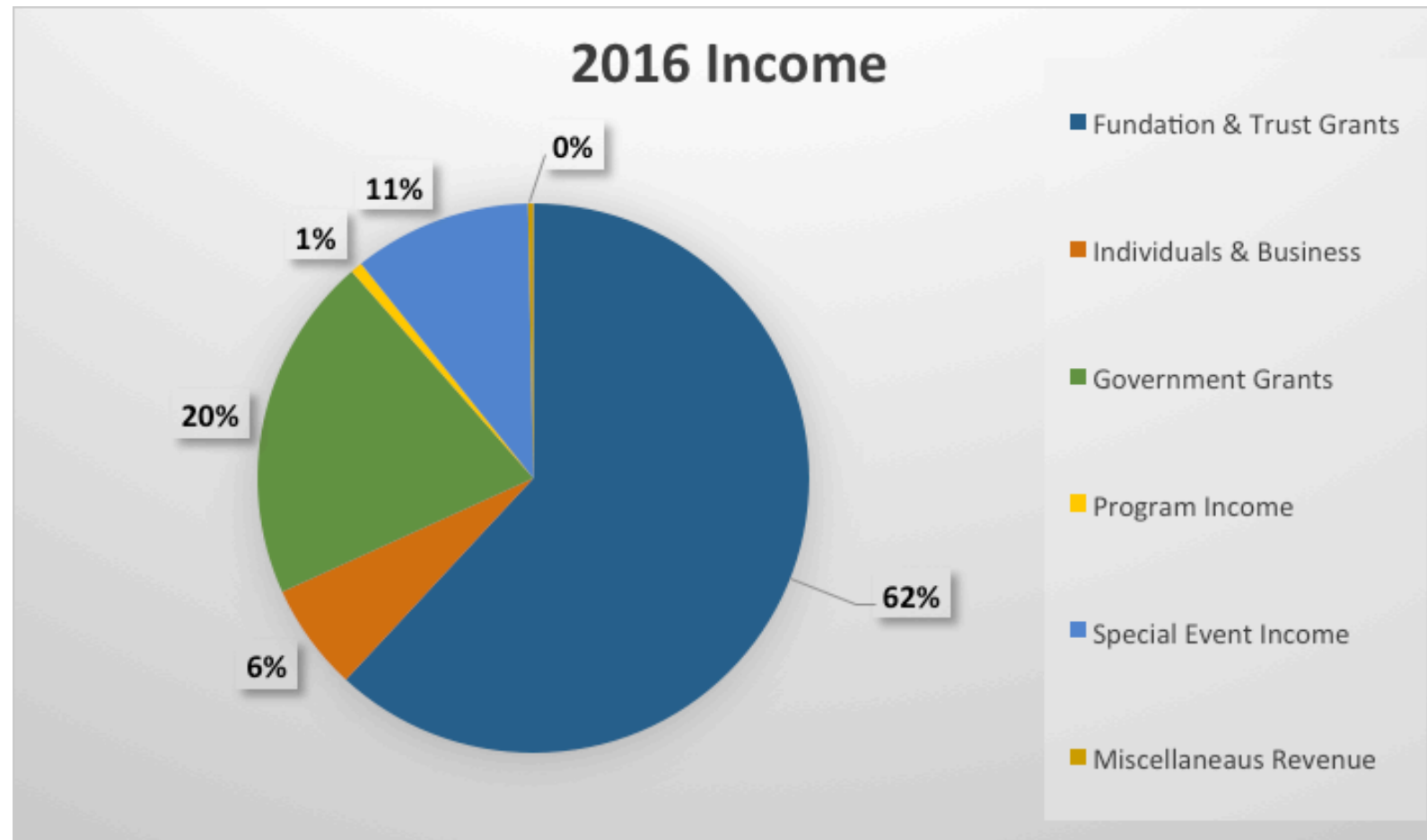
Statement of Financial Position

ASSETS	2016	2015
Currents Assets	221,353	50,119
Fixed Assets (including property)	1,068,874	346,570
Other Assets	64,932	46,260
TOTAL ASSETS	\$1,355,159	\$442,949
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Current Liabilities	855,433	26,274
Net Assets	499,726	416,675
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$1,355,159	\$442,949

Statement of Activities

INCOME	2016	2015
Direct Public Support (general)	61,471	52,220
Direct Public Support (one-time project specific)	50,000	135,000
Foundation and Trust Grants	12,546	16,654
Government Grants	36,900	235,413
Program Income	1,269	1,520
Special Events Income	19,002	9,536
Miscellaneous Revenue	570	172
TOTAL INCOME	\$88,769	\$450,812
EXPENSE		
Program Services	70,847	54,567
Management and General	17,436	8,226
Fundraising	10,524	4,463
TOTAL EXPENSES	98,807	67,256
INCREASE IN NET ASSETS	83,051	383,556
NET ASSETS-Beginning	416,675	33,416
NET ASSETS-Ending	\$499,726	\$416,675

2016 Income and Expenses



Take Action... Join Us Today

We all value our outdoor heritage, traditions, and the character of the landscape. The land, unfortunately, will not protect itself, nor will benign neglect conserve it. Conservation is a shared responsibility.

Become a Member:

Visit: www.rensselaerplateau.org

Call: 518-712-9211

Email: info@rensselaerplateau.org

Donations & Estate Planning

The work of the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance in the future will be made possible through the generosity of individuals who want to assure that this work continues. We welcome gifts of cash, appreciated securities, life insurance, bequests and land.

Donations can be sent to:

Rensselaer Plateau Alliance
PO Box 790
Averill Park, NY 12018

Or Donate online at:

www.rensselaerplateau.org

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