

# Rensselaer Plateau Community Forest

Status as of Sept 1, 2015

## Background

A Community Forest Advisory Committee comprised of community members and several RPA board members was formed in September 2013 and continues to grow. The Committee considered over a dozen parcels of land before deciding to pursue this parcel. A grant submitted to the US Forest Service that ranked #1 nationally provided \$150,000 toward acquisition. With the assistance of a loan from The Conservation Fund, we closed on the purchase in November 2014. RPA has worked closely with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation on this project.

## Fundraising

Callanan Industries generously donated \$100,000 toward acquisition of the Community Forest. Since then, RPA has raised an additional \$46,000 from the community and local foundations for a total of \$284,000 toward our \$450,000 goal. The short term goal is to raise \$25,000 to pay off our loan and allow us to look at next land conservation steps. We need an additional \$76,000 to develop infrastructure and major programming.

## Stewardship

A detailed Community Forest Plan has been created. A Forest Management Plan is being developed with grant funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) EQIP program. This be the basis for establishing a demonstration forest for best practices. Forester Mary Spring has experience working at the Siuslaw Model Forest and is getting input from Audubon New York and several local ecologists. Meanwhile, DEC surveyors have been working on finding and marking the property boundaries. This is a first step to fully opening for public use.

## Recreation

The Community Forest will be open to the public for a full range of recreational activities. Volunteer trail crews have been working on clearing some of the logging roads to establish our first trails. Saratoga Mountain Bike Association (SMBA), an Alliance member, has received a grant to conduct a series of Trail Building Workshops and Beginner Mountain Bike Classes. RPA and SMBA are also exploring options to fund a beginner Mountain Bike Skills Park on the property, this would be the first such park in this region of New York State.

## Education

- RPA, the Dyken Pond Center, and Grafton Lakes State Park have been awarded a Rubin Fellowship grant that is funding a collaboration with RPI Professor Kim Fortun to explore the feasibility and necessary steps to establish a Children's Forest that would span the three "parks." We are currently engaging teachers and administrators at all Rensselaer County rural and city schools for their input on this exciting project.
- RPA hopes to collaborate with the Dyken Pond Center to hire a year-round shared educator who will conduct educational programs for children and adults.
- RPA is partnering with the Rensselaer Land Trust to conduct programs and outings for the general public.
- RPA is partnering with the New York Forest Owners Association on forestry related programs and chainsaw safety classes. We will be partnering with The Empire State Forest Products Association and New York Logger Training to conduct training programs for professional foresters and loggers.