

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a stream filled with fallen autumn leaves. The leaves are in various shades of yellow, orange, and brown, some with dark spots. The water in the stream is clear, reflecting the colors of the leaves and the sky. In the background, the silhouettes of trees with yellowing leaves are visible against a blue sky.

Rensselaer Plateau Alliance

Conservation Through Community

“We are part of the forest community, too.”

- Alcott Smith, New Hampshire Naturalist

2017 Annual Report & Newsletter Highlights | Fall 2018



This place we call home

10 years of community conservation with you

This spring I had the chance, along with other RPA staff, to fly in a small airplane over the Rensselaer Plateau. The trip was courtesy of LightHawk, a visionary non-profit that donates flights to land trusts and other conservation organizations. That day, after we lifted off from Albany, we got a view from above of what we're all working for together.

I saw something more clearly than when I look at a map: conserved areas on the Rensselaer Plateau are actually quite connected and close to each other. And the gaps between them that we hope to conserve in the future are not so great.

From the sky, I was able to grasp the vastness of this land we lovingly call home – and share with many wildlife species – as well as other lands in the region that RPA has played a role in conserving. And the strength of the community behind it all is just so inspiring.

Thanks to this dedicated community, RPA has grown up a lot since it was incorporated in 2008. In this time, you and members and supporters like you have made it possible to conserve nearly 12,000 acres of plateau forest, establish two Community Forests, and get the first Children's Forest in the northeast off and running.

Yet even with permanent protection for conserved lands, the forests of the plateau are still vulnerable to such threats as damaging storms as the climate changes. You are part of making sure the land is resilient and can withstand change.

That's where projects like the Poesten Kill Flood Mitigation study that started this spring come in.

Likewise, wildlife corridors and deep forests, like the vast forests I saw from the plane, will only become more important in the future. And so will safe drinking water and healthy watersheds.

Because of your support, RPA is able to face these challenges. Ten years of community conservation are behind us, but much more work is ahead. Thank you, so much, for being part of this.

We couldn't do it without you.

Jim Bonesteel
Executive Director
Rensselaer Plateau Alliance



Grafton Forest

A family's vision, a haven for wildlife

On a bright and crisp day, the renowned New Hampshire naturalist and wildlife tracker Alcott Smith led participants through Grafton Forest. “The first step to learning tracks is to stop thinking. Move through the woods the way an animal would, use your senses.”

It was almost like seeing the forest from the bobcat's point of view. And for a bobcat, Grafton Forest is a really good place to be.

The forest is large – 1,098 acres—and abuts the Pittstown State Forest, creating a conserved forest block of over 2,000 acres. Such extensive forest is increasingly important for animals such as the bobcat, as well as birds that need deep forests for nesting, given development pressure and climate change.

Creeping change

One challenge to conservation is that forest fragmentation happens piece by piece and isn't always obvious. “The landscape is being cut into

parcels, so there's a new roadway here and a new driveway there and another driveway across from it,” explained Alcott. “Each time you take away from the forest like that you're cutting the range of wildlife into pieces.”

For bobcat, and other animals that depend on larger, relatively undisturbed areas to raise their young, this can be a real challenge.

Large forest blocks are also critical for water absorption from heavy rains, reducing levels of flooding, and are important to the local communities who depend on the Tomhannock Reservoir for their drinking water. As we see more extreme flooding events in the future, places like Grafton Forest will be ever more important.

Alcott Smith reminded the group that humans need the forest as much as the bobcat does. “Our health is only as good as the health of a forest. If you don't have healthy forests, you don't have clean air or sufficient aquifers,” he said. “We are part of the forest community, too.”





The Grafton Forest, conserved and owned by RPA, is increasingly critical for wildlife and contains the headwaters of the Tomhannock Reservoir, the source of water for 135,000 people in Troy, East Greenbush, North Greenbush, Poestenkill, and Brunswick. New trails created and managed by volunteers respect the habitat while providing access to three overlooks of the Tomhannock Reservoir and watershed.

Conserving the land that we grew up loving

When Rynard Jr. and Ingrid Gundrum were growing up in Grafton, their weekends and after-school hours weren't spent in front of the TV. Instead, the brother and sister were outdoors taking care of farm animals and getting to know the forests that provided for their parents' lumber business, Gundrum Logging and Lumber.

"America's forests and woodlands are a precious commodity," said Ingrid.

"Some of our earliest memories are just being in the woods with Dad and then coming home all excited to tell Mom what we saw and what we learned," said Rynard.

Ingrid and Rynard came to love the forest just as their parents did and, when they grew up, kept the family business going. Later, a love of the forest was central to the Gundrum sibling's decision to sell their 927 acres for conservation.

The forest wasn't always so large. Rynard and Ingrid's parents, Lois and Rynard Sr., first bought 150 acres in the 1970's. Piece by piece they

acquired more parcels with a vision of sustainable forestry that kept large stretches of forest intact.

And just as sustainability was a driver in Lois and Rynard Sr.'s decision making, so it became for their children. "My brother managed all of our woodlands to ensure that they could be harvested for many generations."

When it came time to sell the family land, Ingrid and Rynard wanted to honor their parents' conservation ethic.

Yet selling it for conservation and recreation wasn't easy, as Rynard reflected. "In addition to timber, the Grafton Forest land is ripe with Greywacke, a superior stone native to Grafton that is in high demand for road-building. Over the years we contemplated selling to several of the major mining operations in the area."

In the end, their commitment to keeping it as working forest won out. "America's forests and woodlands are a precious commodity," said Ingrid, "and keeping this land as an intact block of forest means a lot to us."

Grafton Forest became a reality through an extraordinary partnership in which the Gundrums sold their land under market value to RPA, with conservation financing from The Conservation Fund. RPA will transfer to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation within the next 12 months, making it officially part of Pittstown State Forest.

Land conservation often starts with a family like the Gundrums who love their property and decide to make conservation a priority. It takes vision,

teamwork, generosity, and the ability to keep trying in the face of sometimes significant odds – and Grafton Forest is an inspiring example of that.

“My brother managed all of our woodlands to ensure that they could be harvested for generations,” said Ingrid.

As supporters of RPA, you are making land projects like Grafton Forest possible. Quite literally, this forest is safe from future development because of you. 🍁🍁



Is conservation right for you?

Land is a treasured part of life and very personal. Like the Gundrum family, so many of us cherish the land and all it means to our friends and family, the wildlife that reside there, and the sense of place it provides. If you or someone you know would like to explore whether conservation will help you achieve your goals and vision, please give Jim Bonesteel a call at 518-712-9211 or send an email to jim@rensselaerplateau.org for a confidential discussion.

Remembering Irene

Working toward a resilient Poesten Kill watershed

Were you one of the many northeasterners affected by Hurricane Irene in August 2011? In the heart of the Rensselaer Plateau, Poestenkill Town Supervisor Dominic Jacangelo won't forget that catastrophic storm any time soon. "I couldn't believe it," Dominic said. "Bridges and roads were totally destroyed, and private property, including people's homes, suffered too."

Like much of New York and New England, major flood damage occurred across the Poesten Kill watershed during Tropical Storm Irene, which dumped enough rain here to reach 200-year flood levels at nearby gauges. Major destruction occurred in the upstream sections of the Poesten Kill and the Quacken Kill tributary, with damage all the way to the City of Troy, affecting communities both rural and urban.

"We were not prepared—there was just no place for the water to go," said Dominic. "And the costs of dealing with these floods can be devastating to a town."

"We were not prepared—there was just no place for the water to go. It's important that we understand these systems and what we can do differently, since it appears the town could be hit by a significant flooding event every forty years – or even more frequently," said Dominic, "and the costs of dealing with these floods can be devastating to a town."

A team approach

With flooding on the rise in a changing climate, communities across the northeast are actively looking for ways to manage these extreme events. It isn't going to be easy to adapt to more frequent and intense storms, which are predicted as the oceans warm. Yet now, with a team effort, we are taking a step in that direction.

Thanks to grant funding and your support, we initiated a one-year watershed resiliency study working with the towns of Poestenkill, Grafton, and Brunswick,



and the City of Troy, to identify ways to slow down floodwaters, reduce bottlenecks, and anticipate problem areas with an eye toward utilizing cost-effective natural solutions when possible.

The Chazen Companies, a local engineering firm, and the restoration firm Inter-Fluve will provide technical assistance as we investigate how – and where – natural features such as wetlands could help abate flooding. Stream patterns, including those altered by Irene and during emergency repairs, will be evaluated. In urban areas, the project will focus on storm water techniques suited to city settings.

"This project will allow us to look creatively at existing open spaces and urban centers to better prepare for future floods," said Troy Mayor Patrick Madden. RPA is so grateful for this opportunity to work together toward a resilient Poesten Kill watershed. 🍁🍁



Nate Simms

The Poesten Kill flows for 26 miles from Dyken Pond in Berlin and through the City of Troy, where it enters the Hudson River. Its watershed covers 96 square miles, including portions of the towns of Poestenkill, Grafton, Brunswick, Sand Lake, Berlin, and the City of Troy. Restoring wild trout habitat in the upper reaches is one of the goals of this project.

Land trusts across the country are working with landowners and their communities to identify ways to help slow down, and adapt to, climate change. To help slow down climate change, New York State has set a goal of reducing carbon emissions from fossil fuels by 50% over the next 15 years. Research is documenting that trees, soils, and grasslands, if managed appropriately, can be an important part of the solution by storing carbon pollution.

Grant funding for the one-year watershed resiliency study is a step in that direction. Funding has been 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 for use.



“I didn’t know dragonflies were born in the water!”

Haley shrieked with excitement as she peered at a thumb-sized predacious diving beetle in her net. “What IS that?!” a chorus of students from West Sand Lake Elementary School asked. For Haley and her classmates, it was a bit of shock. But for her smiling outdoor educators, it was just another day of surprises in a new program for local schools hosted by Rensselaer Youth Outdoors.

“Rensselaer Youth Outdoors gets kids out investigating the aquatic life and forests and animal adaptations. And they love it!”

Across the country we hear the mantra about the importance of engaging students in science. Yet here, close to home, that’s been easier said than

done. Our local schools in the capital district often find themselves teaching scientific concepts in an abstract manner at a time when many students are more and more disengaged with nature and the out-of-doors.

That’s changing with a pilot program funded by people like you, our members and supporters. Thanks to you, Rensselaer Youth Outdoors – a partnership between Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center, Grafton Lakes State Park, and local schools – is able to bring kids outdoors to experience their curriculum first hand. The program also gets teachers into nature for trainings such as Project Wild, a nature-based curriculum and activity guide.

“I often see kids disengaged when we’re talking about things like the water cycle in class,” explains a 3rd grade teacher at Berlin Elementary School. This program gets them out investigating the aquatic life and forests and animal adaptations. And they love it!”

Funding for the program allows schools to bus classes out to natural areas owned by the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance as well as Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center and Grafton Lakes State Park. The cost of supplies like microscopes and field thermometers— a critical part of exploration and discovery – are also covered.

“These kids are our future—and the land and water is theirs. Our task is to make sure that all kids in Rensselaer County, and their families, have access to these special places.”

The Rensselaer Youth Outdoors pilot program served 3rd grade classrooms from Berlin, West Sand Lake, Sand Lake, and Poestenkill Elementary Schools this spring, and there’s a host of year-round programs for the public.

Jim Bonesteel, RPA’s executive director, explains a growing trend happening on the national level, “Land trusts are realizing that their pledge to conserve land for generations is only as strong as those who care about local lands and waters. These kids are our future—and the land and water is theirs. Our task is to make sure that all kids in Rensselaer County, and their families, have access to these special places.”

In the coming year, we look forward to working with our community to bring the joy of learning through nature to additional school districts, including in urban areas of Rensselaer County.

Back at the water, Haley and her classmates had another thrill. Among the aquatic invertebrates they’d collected for close-up study was a dragonfly nymph. This stocky critter looked nothing like the graceful dragonfly it would become. “I didn’t know dragonflies were born in the water!” said Haley’s classmate Jacob.

It’s moments like these, with Haley and Jacob, that all your support and caring really shines. You are helping to bring new outdoor experiences to Rensselaer County youth, and the future is brighter because of it. 🍂🍁



Rensselaer Youth Outdoors is a project of the Children’s Forest Program. In addition to the generosity of individuals, funding for this program comes from the Land Trust Alliance-DEC New York State Partnership Program, Ann Allen Cetrino Family Foundation, Kelly Family Cuidiu Foundation, the U.S. Forest Service, the Connect Kids to Parks Field Trip Grant Program (funded through the Environmental Protection Fund), and Friends of Dyken Pond. This kind of collaboration makes long-term conservation possible now and for future generations.



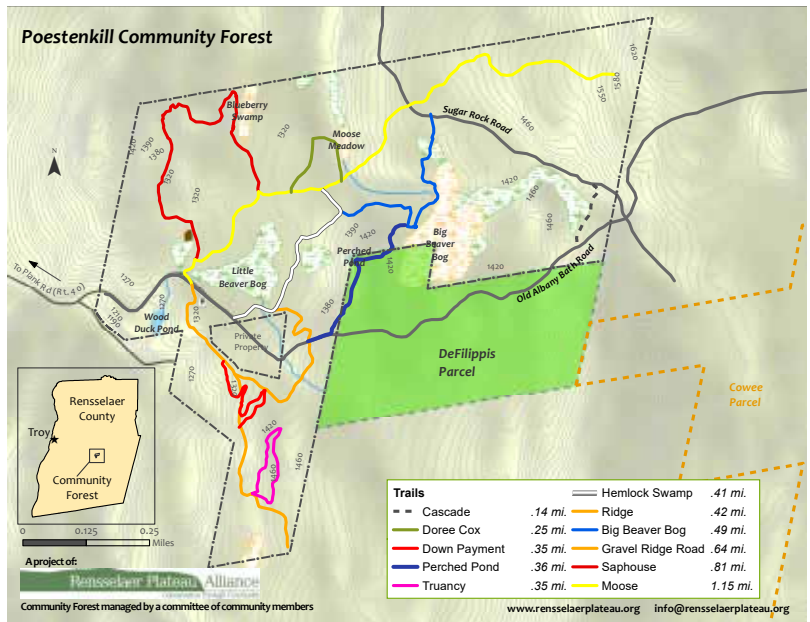
"Nature is not a place to visit. It is home."
- Gary Snyder

Help grow the Poestenkill Community Forest

Building forest connectivity

Big Beaver Bog is just one of the features that makes the Poestenkill Community Forest amazing. The wetland hosts six county-rare plants and abundant wildlife.

Recently, through the process of surveying the entire Community Forest, we discovered that several acres of Big Beaver does not actually belong to RPA. As it turns out, 10 acres we'd thought were part of the Community Forest actually belong to the neighboring property owner, Mike DeFilippis Jr., and 10 acres he'd thought were his are actually ours!



After this discovery, Mike generously offered us a bargain sale for his entire 86-acre parcel. This is an incredible opportunity – not only would we gain full access to the bog and be able to protect the rare plants, but the Community Forest would gain a corridor connecting it to extensive conserved Cowee lands, building toward the goal of larger intact forestlands. The benefits to wildlife would be many, and the corridor would also allow the Community Forest to connect to the Trail Vision core trail. All we need to do is raise the money to close on the land and also pay off a lien on the land - \$41,000 in all. We've already received a lot of generous support from members.

Now we need your help to make the remaining \$17,850.

We'd love for you to consider contributing to the campaign for this significant addition to the Poestenkill Community Forest in addition to your annual membership gift. To learn more, call Jim at 518-712-9211.

You're invited

People of the Plateau Lecture Series

The 2018-19 Thursday Lecture Series features people of interest who live – or have lived – in a Rensselaer Plateau town. There's so much to learn! Join us. **Lectures are held at 7 PM at Sand Lake Town Hall on the 2nd Thursday of each month unless otherwise noted. The series kicks off on Friday, September 14th.** See more information and a full schedule at www.renselaerplateau.org/rpa-lecture-series.

November 8th: Hellen Ellett, Grafton, Firetower Observer. Presented by Dick Gibbs, Chair of the Friends of Grafton Lakes State Park Dickenson Hill Fire Tower restoration project in 2012.

December 13th: Judith Enck, Poestenkill, Environmental Policy Expert and recent Regional Administrator of US Region 2.

2017 Income



Individual contributions (general)	\$237,288	(\$61,471 in 2016)
Government Grants	\$195,000	(\$36,900 in 2016)
Individual contributions (restricted)	\$150,000	(\$50,000 in 2016)
Special Events Income	\$20,135	(\$19,002 in 2016)
Other Income	\$9,716	(\$2,046 in 2016)
Foundation and Trust Grants	\$4,500	(\$12,546 in 2016)
Total	\$616,639	(\$181,965 in 2016)

2017 Expense



Program Services	\$137,170	(\$70,847 in 2016)
Fundraising	\$31,090	(\$10,524 in 2016)
Management and General	\$27,477	(\$17,436 in 2016)
Total	\$195,737	(\$98,807 in 2016)

Thank you

In 2017, you made so much happen



10,300 acres
conserved on the
Rensselaer Plateau

20 bird species
identified in the
Poestenkill Community
Forest spring census



2,600 hours of
volunteer time & talent

4 miles of new
trails created



Planning for future generations on the plateau

If you'd like to help ensure a bright future on Rensselaer Plateau, with forests and wetlands protected and accessible, consider making a planned gift. Options for planned giving include leaving a gift of any size in your will or making a planned donation of real estate. If you'd like to discuss options, please contact Jim Bonesteel at 518 – 712 – 9211 for a confidential discussion. If you've already included the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance in your will, we'd love to hear about it so we can thank you in person.



“Monthly giving allows us to give back in a way that we can manage. And we get so much more than a good feeling – we take advantage of hikes and lectures year-round and so it’s great to be able to contribute to the RPA community, too.”

– Kate Lovering, Monthly Donor to Rensselaer Plateau Alliance

Fred McCagg

Monthly Giving makes an impact

You can make it happen every day, all year long

When it comes to conservation, giving comes from the heart. And there are so many ways that RPA members express their caring for the Rensselaer Plateau. For some, giving on a monthly basis is a meaningful option, and is so helpful to RPA as we plan and budget throughout the year. Knowing we can count on this regular, sustaining support means so much.

We thank all our monthly donors for expressing their passion for conservation on the plateau in this way! Want to become a monthly donor? **Visit us at www.rensselaerplateau.org/donate.**

Thank you, monthly heroes!

Jean and Jeffrey Briggs

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Challen E Hammer

Elizabeth Reid

Garreth Santosuosso

Rik and Wendy Scarce

Kate Lovering and August Schneeberg

Thanks to all who made 2017 a wonderful year for conservation

Your support each year makes it possible to protect the natural beauty of our region

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Every individual makes a difference.” - Jane Goodall

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Conservation on the Rensselaer Plateau.

and vital resources of this special region, for today and for the future.

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A special thank you

...to landowners who have sold their land below market value in 2017 — this generosity of spirit allows conservation to happen where we need it most:

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

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Rensselaer Plateau Alliance

Conservation Through Community

PO Box 790

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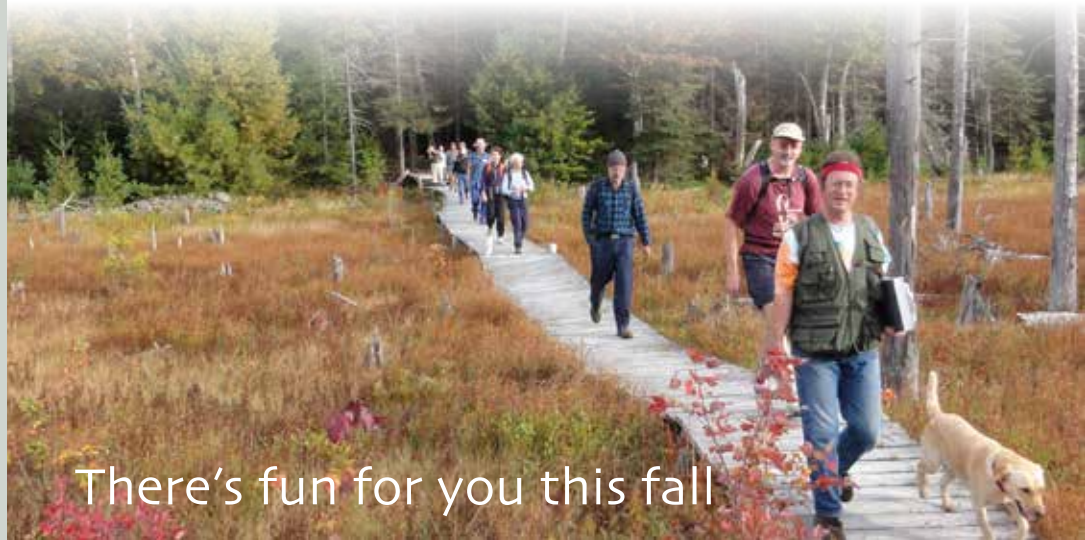
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There's fun for you this fall

There are so many ways to connect with your community and enjoy time with your friends and family outdoors! Visit www.renselaerplateau.org to see the many fall offerings co-sponsored by RPA and our partner Rensselaer Land Trust.

9th Annual Rensselaer Plateau Traverse Hike

September 22-23:

Hike 27-34 miles across the Rensselaer Plateau over 2 days through various terrain. Enjoy the company of hardy hikers. \$10 donation/day.

Contact: annie@renselaerplateau.org.

John Bulmer Nature Photography Workshop

October 13, 4:30pm – 7pm, Tomhannock Reservoir:

Join professional photographer and filmmaker John Bulmer on a hike along the Tomhannock Reservoir. Space is limited. \$10 donation.

Contact: Sally Lawrence, (518) 674 – 2669.

Wreath Making

November 10, 11am and 1:30 pm (2 sessions):

Make a fragrant balsam wreath to last the entire season with a variety of fresh greens. Supplies and greens included in \$20 fee.

Contact: Francille Egbert (518) 674-3214, fran.egbert@gmail.com.