

field, forest & fen

The Nature of Conservation

Downy Rattlesnake Plantain Found in Red Creek Ravine

Last August, when Otsego Land Trust Field Representative Joe Homburger was hiking in the Red Creek area, he came across one of Otsego County's most unique plants—Downy rattlesnake plantain, *Goodyera pubescens* (Willd.) R.Br. This member of the Orchid family is usually found in shady woods on thin, acidic soils, and is identified by its distinctive foliage—a basal rosette of 1-2" plantain-like leaves with silvery veins. It blooms in late July through September with a 6-20" spike of 10-57 small white

flowers. An evergreen perennial, Downy rattlesnake plantain spreads primarily by rhizomes, although populations are usually not very extensive. The common name comes from the similarity of the silvery netting to rattlesnake skin markings. Folklore relates its use to cure rattlesnake bites (as in the "Doctrine of Signatures", see inset box) and another tale is that if you step on this plant you will lose your way in the woods (Joe did not!). Two other related species that may be found locally include Dwarf rattlesnake plantain (*Goodyera repens*) and Checkered rattlesnake plantain (*Goodyera tessellata*). Keep a lookout for all three!



Downy Rattlesnake Plantain
Harper's Guide to Wild Flowers, 1912; drawn by Benjamin Lander <http://wisplants.uwsp.edu/index.html>

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were shown a sample of artifacts recovered by students from the site, including nails, fragmentary ceramic tableware and crockery, buttons, and carriage parts.

Otsego Land Trust is grateful to the Oneonta Foundation for partnering with us to protect this breath-taking site along Otsego Lake and for co-sponsoring this outing. Thank you, David Staley, Melissa Jaquay, and students for interpreting this site and sharing your discoveries with us.

SAVE THE DATE

July 12— Explore the Hollow; Dimmock Hollow Road, Morris, co-sponsored with the Butternut Valley Alliance. Led by a local geologist, biologist, and historian, explore the natural and cultural history of Dimmock Hollow, including a tour of the historic All Saints Chapel.

September 12— Take a hike at Leatherstocking Falls; State Highway 80, Town of Otsego.

Space is limited. Reserve your place today at (607) 547-2366 or connie@otsegoandtrust.org

On the Hill

When her husband, Bill Karl, a doctor at Bassett Hospital in Cooperstown, needed time to get away and relax, he would tell his family that he would be "on the hill". His wife Marion remembers these words fondly, as her dog Leila zigzags with abandon across the meadow she recently protected with Otsego Land Trust. The 172 acres of meadow, forests, and a pond are full of memories: the pines and spruces her daughter Annie planted—with some help from the family, the lean-to her son David built at age 16, family gatherings, swimming in the pond, and relaxing walks through the woods. A springtime stroll across the park-like property reveals an old house foundation with a hand-dug stone lined well, a vernal pool with a multitude of salamanders, trailing arbutus and low-bush blueberries, and an abundance of wildflowers. Nesting bluebirds and tree swallows can be seen along the "Bluebird Trail", thanks to the numerous bluebird houses erected by the family over the years. Marion always knew she would do something to preserve the property, recalling the 1967 purchase from Madeline de Berg, who confided to Marion "I would like you to have this land because I know you will take care of it". In 2008 Marion followed up her pledge to Mrs. de Berg by procuring

a conservation easement through Otsego Land Trust. The children may be grown now—and the grandchildren, too—but thanks to their mother's foresight, the property they love will be protected in perpetuity, this cherished sanctuary "On the Hill".



Marion Karl

Just Minutes from the Cooperstown Flag Pole

Along with Marion Karl, two other landowners have recently developed conservation easements on their properties with Otsego Land Trust. These three properties add another 316 acres of private land in conservation in the Red Creek area. Nearby, at the site of another easement, one can see the village of Cooperstown from its hilltop vantage. The Sahler family also wanted to keep their property near Cooperstown protected for future generations, land his father, a doctor at Bassett Hospital, had purchased in 1961, and land the family has treasured in succeeding generations. From the road, a small

stream drains down to a wetland where beaver and ducks flourish—just minutes from the flagpole in Cooperstown. A world apart, their easement protects woodlands and wetlands, where Paul returns to hunt each fall. "I wanted to join others in the Red Creek watershed that have developed conservation easements" Paul says of his decision to work with Otsego Land Trust. He adds proudly "Now a large portion of property around Cooperstown is protected".

Red Creek Landowners Promote Conservation

These three recent easements join several others in the Red Creek area that now protect over 1,500 acres of land near Cooperstown and the vital upper Susquehanna watershed. Conservation easements preserve working farms and forests, sensitive natural communities, important animal and plant habitats, and significant historic and cultural sites. Conservation easements help to maintain the timeless character of rural communities. Everyone benefits thanks to the foresight of these Red Creek landowners and their partnerships with Otsego Land Trust. Call us today if you or a friend are interested in learning more about conservation easements or other innovative land protection tools.



Beaver activity on Sahler easement



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Otsego Land Trust protects the distinctive rural character of the Otsego County area by securing lands and waters of significant scenic, historic, and ecological value, including forests and farmlands.

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Otsego Land Trust is partially funded by the New York Conservation Partnership Program administered by the Land Trust Alliance Northeast Program with support from the State of New York. A copy of Otsego Land Trust's annual financial report may be obtained upon request from our office or from the New York State Attorney General's Charities Bureau, ATTN: FOIL Officer, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.

Field Notes

Many Native American tribes hold oak trees in high esteem, because they portray virtues worth emulating. Their steady and deliberate growth makes oak trees outstanding in strength and height. One species of oak reknown for resilience is the Swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*), capable of withstanding both flood as well as fire. These majestic trees with broad canopies grow along many of the waterways in the Otsego region. Like other tree species that grow in wet areas, Swamp white oak trees, as their name implies, are adapted to protracted periods of flooding. They also have thick bark like many oaks, which enables them to withstand the periodic wild fire.

Like the fields, forests, and fens you help us protect, Otsego Land Trust continues to develop and mature as an organization. Because of your active support, we are stepping up the pace at which we work. In the past two years, together, we have doubled the number of conservation transactions we complete on an annual basis. This increase in action has resulted in the protection of another 1,700 acres in just two years—a 40% increase in our overall portfolio of conservation lands!

This issue of *Field, Forest and Fen* highlights Red Creek—one of the valuable landscapes you are helping us protect—and some of the fascinating people and plants that inhabit this special place. In 2008, three landowners partnered with us to protect another 316 acres in the Red Creek area, where now over 1,500 acres of private lands are in conservation. This is a remarkable achievement in conservation, and we thank you and all the landown-

ers involved who have the vision for landscape-scale conservation.

In this issue, we also introduce you to some of the many people who quietly work behind the scenes with us to protect rural areas in the Otsego region—Marion Karl and Paul Sahler, two of our many landowner partners in the Red Creek area, as well as Ryan Huggins, a conservation-minded college student, who is diligently helping us steward conservation lands this summer.

At a time when many non-profit organizations face significant stress, we are taking action to make sure that Otsego Land Trust remains a sustainable, durable, and resilient organization capable of fulfilling our vital conservation mission. The Land Trust Alliance recently developed an accreditation process to ensure that member land trusts are implementing best management practices, and we are preparing for accreditation over the next few years.

Also, we are working to do more with less. In fact, long before current economic challenges, land trusts were growing in popularity around the country as private landowners sought cost-effective ways to protect their land. The innovative partnerships developing between landowners and Otsego Land Trust represent practical solutions to private land conservation. Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment, which enable Otsego Land Trust to withstand a variety of circumstances and to prosper like the white oak.

Peter Hujik
Executive Director

Harry Levine
Chairman

The People Behind the Places We Protect

We are pleased to have Ryan Huggins on board this summer as our Stewardship Associate. Ryan will be working on several projects that will enhance data management systems



Ryan Huggins

for over 60 conservation easements held by Otsego Land Trust. He will also be introduced to stewardship responsibilities in the field. Ryan is a sophomore at Wells College in Aurora, N.Y. where he is studying Environmental Science and plays Division III soccer. He is a graduate of Cooperstown Central Schools and in 2008 received the Thayer Family Scholarship, awarded to a graduate pursuing a course of study in conservation, biology, or related fields of study. When not away at school, Ryan lives locally in the Town of Hartwick with his parents Gino and Colleen Huggins, and brother Kevin and sister Cailin.

The Earle Peterson Conservation Fellowship program was established two and a half years ago to honor our past president and his extraordinary conservation legacy. If you are interested in collaborating with us to support future conservation leaders please call our office at (607) 547-2366.

Conservation Spotlight: Red Creek

Why is the Red Creek watershed such an important component of the Upper Susquehanna Conservation Area? Located east of Otsego Lake in the Town of Middlefield, the Red Creek watershed, approximately 20,000 acres, runs north to south, converging with the Susquehanna River just south of Cooperstown. Agriculture has always been the mainstay of the Middlefield economy, but according to the American Farmland Trust (2002), the high-quality farmland in this area, is "severely threatened" by development*. Red Creek is a New York State designated trout stream that provides spawning habitat, and bird species of conservation significance that inhabit this watershed include the northern harrier and pied bill grebe. The southernmost hamlet, Bowerstown, and the eastern portion of the Village of Cooperstown are located in the Glimmerglass Historic District. As residential development pressures increase, conservation efforts in the Red Creek area are also on the rise—1,500 privately owned acres now have conservation easements, half in the last five years alone.

*American Farmland Trust, Farming on the Edge <http://www.farmland.org/resources/fote/states/default.asp>



Red Creek Watershed



Scott Sheldon, Scott Stiles, and Tyler Smith sifting for artifacts (photo by W. Harman)

Archaeological Hike: History Underfoot

On May 23rd, 2009, over 20 participants were treated to a unique hike to visit archaeological excavations at the Thayer homestead on Rum Hill in the Town of Springfield. Leading the tour was David Staley, an archaeologist with New York State Museum's Cultural Resource Survey Program. Assisting was Melissa Jaquay, a Social Studies instructor at Cherry Valley Springfield Central Schools, who supervised several students from her Archaeology elective class actively working on the site. Featured were the 19th century remains of the Thayer Homestead whose stone masonry house cellar, barn, and outbuilding foundations have been the subject of several years of cooperative investigation by CVSCS classes and the State University College of NY at Oneonta Anthropology department. Rum Hill is an excellent laboratory for the study of regional settlement, the history of agriculture in New York, and 19th century lifestyles. Participants

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