



Photo by Susan Rowland

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The Cranberry Bog, one of the largest areas of conserved land in the county, lies near the headwaters of Butternut Creek.

**BUTTERNUT
VALLEY
ALLIANCE**

*The BVA is a 501(c)(3)
that serves the communities
within the watershed of the
Butternut Creek*

THE CURRENT

Spring
2022

Connecting and Sustaining the Butternut Creek Watershed

Many Ways to be a Conservationist

Spring is here! Whether you are a year-round outdoor person or hibernate over the winter, it's time to get outside.

The Butternut Creek, comprising the largest watershed in Otsego County after the Susquehanna, is full of natural beauty as it courses approximately 40 miles from its headwaters on Angel Hill in the Town of Exeter to its confluence with the Unadilla River in the Town of Butternuts. Contributing to the main stem, with its nearly pristine water and healthy wildlife habitats, are innumerable tributaries with hidden treasures — falls, cascades, pools, beaver dams, wetlands, forests, fields and wildflowers.

Beyond the creek and its tribs, we enjoy an abundance of state and county forests and state and town parks. We also have numerous conservationists protect-

ing and preserving the natural beauty of the watershed on private property.

Conservationists come in all sizes and flavors. In this issue, we feature one family's creation of Mussel Flats and introduce a man who has dedicated a large part of his life to the preservation of the Cranberry Bog. But you don't have to dedicate your life to contribute. Many hands make light work. If we all do what we can, however big or small our individual contributions may be, collectively, we will have a large impact.

Along with your personal choice to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle you might switch household tools or even vehicles to battery powered electric motors. You can participate in events such as Earth Day clean-ups or maintain riparian buffers between creek banks and your lawns, fields and pastures. Perhaps most impor-

tant of all, you can get outside and enjoy the wonderful natural resources we who live in the watershed are blessed with.

Supporting the BVA is another way to be a conservationist. BVA has participated in projects aimed at protecting our natural resources such as the Butternut Creek Assessment, the Butternut Creek Watershed Management Plan, riparian buffer plantings, hiking trail installations, a Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Survey, etc.

If you have ideas for conserving the natural resources of our watershed or if you want to share your favorite scenic vista, walking trail, birding area, or the like, please send us an email.

Ed Lentz
Chairperson, BVA



11&12

On the
Trail of Art



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Summer
Harvest Festival



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Butternut
Creek Float

Power of the People

Local Family Helps Create Mussel Flats



Otsego Land Trust (OLT) worked with a local family and a diverse collection of donors and organizations to purchase this land in the Butternut Valley. The 82-acre parcel boasts over 7000 feet of frontage on Butternut Creek and contains extensive wetlands, critical for wildlife and flood attenuation and supporting many wildlife species including American eel, yellowlamp mussel, eastern elliptio mussel and the river otter. The property also has high quality farmland in active cultivation.

Many years ago, Robert and Blevyn Wheeler spoke with OLT and BVA board member Carla Hall and then-OLT Board Chair Earle Peterson about conserving their property. Years later, Robert and Blevyn's children (Kate, Diana, John and Bob) decided to move forward to protect their family's homestead. "Protecting this land feels like a love letter to our parents and honoring them in a way that will last forever," Diana Wheeler said.

Located along the gorgeous and biologically diverse Butternut Creek, the property, known as Mussel Flats, was purchased by OLT and then transferred to The Wetland Trust (TWT), a non-profit organization that focuses on wetland protection and improvement. Jim Curatolo, the Executive Director of TWT, jumped on board the "project train" very early in the process.

The non-profit Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC) works in a multi-county region in New York and Pennsylvania to enable wetland, floodplain, streambank and stream protection and improvements. USC contributed significant time, expertise and funding to the project. USC staffer Lydia Brinkley shared, "We are thrilled to have been a part of this project. It is a model for multi-organizational and individual partnerships resulting in important land, water and species conservation."

The Otsego County Soil and Water Conservation District (OCSWCD) also

played a vital planning role. As a subcontractor following the recommendations of USC, they planted 20 acres of the Butternut Creek banks and floodplains, utilizing New York State's "Trees for Tribes" program. Mark Kugler, an OCSWCD staffer, says, "These saplings will eventually grow into a forested wetland, providing habitat and water quality benefits for generations to come."

Ed Lentz, Chair of the Butternut Valley Alliance, said, "We are really excited to see this land, especially its wetlands and creek frontage, protected by OLT and owned and managed by The Wetland Trust. We thank OLT for making this happen. We are glad that BVA was able to support this effort with some BVA boardmember dollars."

For more information about Mussel Flats or opportunities to protect properties including farms please visit the OLT website at otsegolandtrust.org.

Abridged from an article by David Diaz, Fall/Winter 2021 Otsego Land Trust newsletter.

Local Schools Collect Plastic Film Recycling by Laurel Brigham

Plastic pollution is one of the biggest issues in the world today. In 2021, Americans generated 35.7 million tons of plastic according to Recycle Coach. To date, there are about 8.3 billion tons of plastic in the world. There are many people and organizations all over the world who care about plastic pollution

and its effects on our world, but there are still people who don't care and continue to pollute our planet. If you live in Otsego county you can help!

Plastic film cannot be recycled from curbside bins. If you put it in with your regular recycling it gets tangled up with

other plastics at material recovery facilities. When that happens it damages the recycling equipment and the plastic film ends up going to a landfill.

Every year since 2018, Otsego county has held its Plastic Film Recycling Challenge. You can bring any plastic film you have to participating schools and put it in their special recycling bins. This year the challenge ran from America Recycles day (November 15, 2021) until April 15, 2022. The winners were announced on Earth Day, April 22, 2022. [GMU won this year's challenge in both grade levels, collecting 956 pounds from the elementary school and 558 from middle/high school. MCS collected a total of 709.5 pounds.]

Our Environmental Studies class at Morris Central School collects the film from our recycling bins once to twice a week and weighs it. We then log the

weight of the film we collected and our teacher, Heather Grant, takes it to Price Chopper to recycle it. At our school we make it a challenge between the high school and the elementary school, as well as with other schools in the county.

This challenge is important, not only for our community but for our planet. Heather Grant believes, "This is a chance for us to remove plastic waste from the community by providing an easy drop-off point for people." This challenge is a great way to bring our community together and get educated on the major plastic pollution issue in the world. So the next time you want to make a change, and you have some extra plastic film lying around, bring it to your local school — anything helps! And if you can't bring it to school bring it to Hannaford, Walmart or Price Chopper! *Laurel Brigham is a student at MCS.*



MCS student Triana Hawkins checks the recycling bins in the MCS lobby.

by Carla Hall

One Man's Efforts to Conserve the Land

Dr. Earle Peterson and the Preservation of Cranberry Bog

"The beautiful Butternut Valley ... an absolute treasure ... sculpted by a glacier, this north/south valley was gouged from sedimentary rock that stands beneath its hills, and refined by the meanderings of an ancient river created by icemelt. As this river diminished in size and volume, it laid down the gravel drumlins and deep rich soils that have characterized the valley for centuries. Ever restless and ever changing, this ancient stream we know as the Butternut has defined the character of the valley floor.

Spilling out of the hills in Burlington Green, the Butternut Valley widens as it passes through Garrattsville, Morris and Gilbertsville on its way to the Unadilla River at Mt. Upton. These historic and classically beautiful villages served the farms and travelers that populated the valley and its surrounding hills and have remained largely unchanged today.

It was the high-quality soils that attracted the early settlers and made the Butternut Valley an enduring center of agriculture and commerce, and it has been the soils that have enabled farmers to make a final stand in this once highly populated area of family farms.

It is those soils and the agricultural

heritage of the Butternut Valley that we seek to preserve for future generations. They are our regional treasures and the soils are our nation's valuable resource.

Once a breadbasket of the region and beyond, the Butternut's fertile, well watered soils may well be needed again as climate changes and the cost of market access stretch America's capabilities to feed her growing population.

For nearly seven decades, I have driven through the Butternut Valley and have watched the evolution of the farming industry and the gradual demise of the family farm. I have seen the valley in every season ... the manure stained snow in the winter, smoke and steam curling over the sap houses in the spring, the sights and smells of the new mown hay and horse drawn mowers in the summer and the segmented roaring of the ensilage blowers filling silos in the fall. I watched technology change, but the valley remained basically the same and stood still in a time warp of sorts.

All that is rapidly changing as Otsego County and its affordable land has been discovered and a land rush is taking place. The good news is that we have the tools now to allow us to conserve."

Dr. Earle Peterson made these poignant remarks at the dedication of the 1190-acre General Jacob Morris State Forest on June 24, 2006. As an environmental visionary and a leader in conservation, Earle's generous and forward-thinking life's work continues to contribute to the Butternut Valley's heritage.

Born in 1933 in Yonkers, New York, Earle's "love affair" with nature began while spending summers with his uncle in Unadilla Center. In the early 1940s his Swedish parents moved the family to Sydney Center where they purchased a farm, 11 cows and two heifers. There he attended a three-room school and graduated first in his class of five students. Every free minute, he worked on the

family farm, looking forward to Sundays when he would run in the woods, creeks and fields with his dog exploring all the insects, critters and habitats.

After attending Cornell University and graduating with a degree in Veterinary Medicine, Earle opened his practice in Metuchen, New Jersey, where he and his wife Cindy raised their two children, Jim and Susan. Yet his heart still yearned to be connected with nature and to share his love of the land with his family.

In 1974, he bought the initial 245 acres in West Burlington. In 1976 it took one week for Earle and his small crew of friends to build a log cabin. Eventually, Earle amassed 1200 acres, thereby preserving the precious Cranberry Bog and



Dr. Earle Peterson and the late Ben Friedman, a founder of BVA.

planting over 40,000 mostly spruce trees. Irrepressibly energetic, Earle planted these trees with the help of his children and the Rutgers lacrosse team.

Earle and Cindy retired and moved to Cooperstown in 1997. There he worked with the Otsego Land Trust to protect his land in perpetuity through a conservation easement to remain forever wild. To ensure the future of the Cranberry Bog, he created the Greenwoods Conservancy, a nature preserve and outdoor laboratory whose mission is education, environmental research and stewardship of a diverse habitat — all managed together with SUNY Oneonta and the Biological Field Station.

In August 2008, Earle met with a group of residents to brainstorm the mission of the Butternut Valley Alliance. His message was "to do this work, we had to love the land and be a 'true believer' in our values of conservation and community."

His advice to BVA today, 14 years later, is to continue expanding our positive impact in the watershed and focus on enhancing the connectivity and "feel" of our villages and landscapes. We are grateful to our treasured colleague and friend, Dr. Earle Peterson.

Events and Programs

Visionary Scholar Award Each year, BVA asks local seniors to share their vision of what the Butternut Valley could be like in 2040. Using the BVA vision as a guide, students may use any creative means to communicate their message. The winner receives a \$500 award toward their future education.

"I was excited that my artwork was the favorite of the ones submitted. The prize money helped my mother and me pay for my college," says Katelyn Robinson, the first-year award winner. "The VSA contest has room for artistic freedom; whether painting, writing, or sculpting, you will be able to create something that will be accepted. It is a great opportunity for any young person in the area, whether you have pursued art for years or this is your first piece."

The deadline for the 2022 application is June 15.

On the Trail of Art This year's "Gallery in the Forest" will be held at Basswood

Pond State Forest on June 11-12. The program is expanding to include students from Edmeston Central School as well as Morris and Gilbertsville-Mount Upton. Performance artists, plein air artists and participatory art activities will be added as well. Local artists, whether professional or hobbyists, are invited to display their work.

Harvest Festival The annual Summer Harvest Festival is moving to Saturday—August 20th from 2–6 p.m. Offerings from the Morris Farmer's Market will be available as well as from local vendors and artists. Children's activities such as a tractor pull and crafts are planned along with live music for everyone.

Butternut Creek Float Add September 11th to your calendar for the annual float down the Butternut Creek. Some canoes are provided by co-sponsor Otsego County Conservation Association.



Earth Day Community Cleanup On the roadside and in the creek, over 50 volunteers cleared eight miles of roadway and a ton of plastic agricultural film during the event co-sponsored with Morris Rotary and Morris Central School.

Area History BVA offered a live lecture via Zoom last November about the history of local mills. Tom Washbon provided a look into local life during the 19th century. "I was interested in the photo of the woolen mill," said attendee Marcia Foote, "because one of the workers probably lived in my house." Part Two is scheduled for this October. See the BVA website for details on all events and for scholarship and art trail applications.

Welcome New Executive Director Michele Farwell; Join, Volunteer Time or Donate to the BVA



We are pleased to announce Michele Farwell as the new BVA Executive Director. Michele, a native of the Valley, comes to us with 10 years' experience as a

town Board Member and County Representative where she focused on small business economic development, cell service, soil and water and environmental concerns, and public safety.

The BVA is doing good work in the Butternut Valley for us, for our children and for our children's children. Help us maintain the pace of our work by supporting the alliance with your generous donation. Donations small or large to the BVA go a long way. Donations can be made by check or online at the Butternut Valley Alliance website: butternutvalleyalliance.org.

Invite your friends to become members. Membership fees help

us continue our work and expand our reach. Membership allows you to attend monthly board meetings and vote in the annual election.

Your Neighbors, Our Board

Chair: Edward T. Lentz
Co-Chair: Maggie Brenner
Secretary: Bob Thomas
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