



Friends of the Great Swamp



FrOGS

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Hiking in the new Slocum-Mostachetti Preserve in Wingdale



The new Slocum-Mostachetti Preserve in Wingdale

by Judy Kelley-Moberg

On December 5th the Oblong Land Trust became the new stewards of 106 acres along the Swamp River in Wingdale. The largest portion of the purchase price came from FrOGS' NAWCA Grant. Iroquois Funds from The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation picked up another large portion of the bill. A donation from FrOGS and money raised by the Oblong Land Conservancy provided the last pieces needed to acquire the property.



The new preserve contains a variety of wildlife habitats. Trails ramble in and out of wetlands, through a ridge of cedars interspersed with meadows and into deciduous bottomlands. There are views of the high ridges to the east and west that bracket the Harlem Valley.

The property had been part of a large farm originally owned by Egbert Slocum then passed to his son Homer Slocum and his wife Marion Judson and inherited by their daughter Helen Slocum and her husband Leo Mostachetti. At one time the farm had a horse barn, a dairy barn, tenant houses, an icehouse, a cider mill and an orchard.

Helen recalled a happy childhood growing up on the farm. The Judsons and the Slocums owned vegetable and dairy farms up and down the valley. They were one big extended family that helped each other plant, put-up (can) the enormous amounts of vegetables and fruit they grew, bring in the hay and fill the silos before winter. Helen's mother taught in a one-room

schoolhouse and Helen got to high school by train, hitching rides in the winter with farmers taking their milk to the creamery. Every Sunday uncles, brothers, sisters and aunts spent time at each other's homes until 3:00 pm when it was time to get home and milk the cows. Homer sold his dairy cows in the 1950's. He was getting older, and though he would miss the cows he wouldn't miss getting up at 4 am to milk them.



Helen's husband Leo Mostachetti, grew up just down the road from the farm. Together they ran a store and deli for 30 years. The store started near the railroad crossing and later moved to the small business plaza they built out on route 22. Leo and Helen still loved the farmland on the ridge behind their home. Leo brush-hogged trails through the property so Helen could take long walks and just sit quietly at some favorite spot.



The 106-acre preserve starts at a pond and wetlands by the Swamp River on the east and then runs up and over a ridge of limestone/marble and down into a wooded valley on the west. A well-maintained and monitored grass capped landfill abuts the southwestern corner of the preserve lands. Leo's trails give the hiker access to a variety of habitats. The swamp trail is quite wet and runs along the edge of a large stand of phragmites. A trail on the south end of the swamp reveals a section of sedges and cat-tails. Moving west the land rises gently up to a limestone ridge covered with stands of cedar (a sure sign of sweet soil). The dark greens of the cedar branches sprinkled with blue berries contrasts nicely with the yellow-browns of the wildflowers and grasses beneath them. The winter landscape on the ridge appears soft and gentle without the sharp edges and skeletal profiles seen in a deciduous forest. The vista from this location takes in the distant ridges that bracket the Harlem valley.



Bill Wallace has spotted more than 30 species of butterflies here in mid-July. One unusual species is the olive hairstreak, whose caterpillars feed exclusively on cedars. The green color of the adult butterflies' wings allow them to blend right in with the trees. Among the wildflowers that thrive in these sweet (calcium rich) soils are lady's tresses and the ragged fringed orchis.

When walking the site in early January, we saw purple finch, a flicker, red-winged blackbirds and bluebirds. Patches of melting snow still held the tracks of otter, bobcat, fox,



coyote, rabbit, and squirrel. Although we didn't have time to explore all the trails, we did stop to admire the textures and patterns of the meadow plants in winter. Like Helen, I just wanted to sit on a rock on one of Leo's trails, breathing in the spicy clean fragrance of the cedars while gazing off at the distant hills emerging from the mist.

This sale is a clear example of passing a love of the land and the responsibility for its care from the farm families that knew it intimately as the source of their sustenance and well being, to new stewards so that future generations can still experience that special connection. Many thanks to all those individuals who have held the land and passed that trust along to us. You will be the beneficiary of this trust when you sit quietly in the preserve, listening to the wind move among the cedars, and watching for the flight of a small green butterfly.

Look for upcoming announcements about the Preserve's opening!



Eighteen Acres of Promise

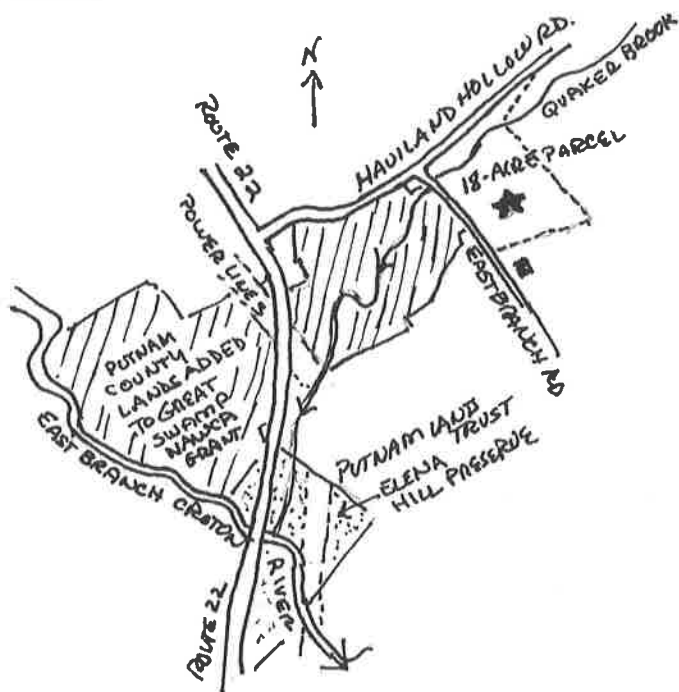
by Judy Kelley-Moberg

With a lot of hard work, a little help from our friends, and NAWCA Grant funds, FrOGS has been able to acquire an 18-acre patch of uplands and floodplain meadow bordering Quaker Brook at the corner of Haviland Hollow Road and East Branch Road in the Town of Patterson.



Quaker Brook sometimes called Haviland Hollow Brook runs through the 18-acre parcel before turning south to join the East Branch of the Croton River in the Great Swamp. The brook begins in Connecticut, flows through Deep Hollow then into New York where it runs parallel to Haviland Hollow Road. Several tributaries join the brook near the Connecticut border. The streams drain portions of New York State's Cranberry Mountain Preserve. One stream flows through a deep limestone gorge in Putnam Counties' Ciaiola Park and another drops down the mountainside in a series of small waterfalls along an abandoned section of Stagecoach Road. As Quaker Brook wanders westward through the forested valley it's criss-crossed with beaver dams and passes through the ruins of a massive milldam to emerge in the wide wet meadow of the 18-acre parcel. It then runs under East Branch Road and into a wooded floodplain before it joins the Croton River.

Quaker Brook is not only a major artery that feeds the "heart" of the Great Swamp but it's also an ecologically unique and important waterway. Fishermen know this brook as a pristine trout stream thought to be one of the rare places where native trout populations can still survive. It has one of the highest trout stream



ratings given by the State of New York. FrOGS hopes to see the entire stream corridor protected from the Connecticut border to the Great Swamp. The corridor would connect the County and State parks near the Connecticut border to the future Great Swamp Conservation Area. The acquisition of this 18-acre piece of wet meadow is an important step towards reaching this goal. The property already connects parcels donated by Putnam County, another partner in the "Heart of the Great Swamp" NAWCA Grant, to the Elena Hill Preserve along Route 22 owned by the Putnam Land Trust. This 18-acre corner parcel will provide access to the whole Quaker Brook corridor.



The corner of Haviland Hollow Road and East Branch road also has historic significance. It marked the western boundary of the Oblong, a strip of land awarded to New York in 1731 to settle its boundary dispute with Connecticut. Land in the Oblong was very attractive to settlers since it was not part of a patent already owned by a landlord and could be bought free and clear. Jacob Haviland, a Quaker, bought a huge farm in the valley or "hollow" giving Haviland Hollow its name.

During the Revolution East Branch Road was part of the military highway that connected Danbury to the Hudson River in Fishkill. There are records of General Washington moving nine divisions of his troops through here in 1778. After the Revolution Capt. Benjamin Cowl bought the property at the corner of the two roads. He built a farm, and a store there as well as a tannery on the brook. The corner was then named Cowl's Corner. His house and store are

private homes today but they served for a time as the parsonage and chapel for the Methodist Episcopal Church. The stonewalls that mark the original path of Haviland Hollow Road from Cowl's Corners to the Connecticut line can still be seen in the woods north of the present roadbed.

FrOGS had to rely on Mark King and the Eastern New York Chapter of The Nature Conservancy in order to finalize this acquisition before the end of the year. The Nature Conservancy has been a valuable partner in the North American Wildlife Conservation Act (NAWCA) Grant. TNC advanced the money needed to meet the sale deadline and will be reimbursed by federal funds from the NAWCA grant. The Conservancy will hold the land until it can be turned over to the State of New York, who will then pay local taxes on the property. High praise is owed to all the parties that made this important acquisition happen.

FrOGS' Chairman Dr. Jim Utter Honored as an Educator and Environmentalist

The 2007 Community Leadership Award

Camp Herrlich honored Jim Utter with their Community Leadership Award at their 2007 "Autumn in Putnam" fund raising dinner dance. The following article was printed in the fall edition of The Herald, Camp Herrlich's newsletter.

"More than 180 guests gathered in the ballroom at the Putnam National Golf Club in Mahopac to honor special guest, Dr. Jim Utter, as the recipient of the 2007 Community Leadership Award. As a BOCES certified environmental education center, Camp Herrlich chose to recognize Dr. Utter for his important research and teaching of Environmental Sciences particularly in the area of the wetland-dependent migratory birds within the Great Swamp Wetland." The article also praised Jim for promoting awareness of the values and needs for conservation of the Great Swamp for over 20 years and his active participation in land protection and habitat preservation.

FrOGS Chairman, Dr. Jim Utter, was recognized by Dutchess County Executive William Steinhaus at the "1st Annual County Executive Green Achievement Awards" on October 25th at a ceremony at the Bowdoin Park Community Center in the Town of Poughkeepsie. Awards were presented in five different categories - Government, Education, Non-Profit, Commercial and Individual. Dr. Utter was recognized in the "Individual Category" for his environmental work and preservation efforts in the 6,000 acre Great Swamp, and his success in protecting hundreds of acres in the Great Swamp through partnership with various organizations funded by a NAWCA grant as well as private donations.

County Executive Steinhaus stated, "Our Green Achievement Awards are our way of recognizing those who have gone the extra mile to preserve and protect our environment. The Green Achievement Awards were designed to credit the good work of individuals and corporations who are making strides to help sustain and protect the environment".

Sly Fox - Crafty Fox- Let's Hope You Are Crazy Like a Fox and Can Out-Fox Us!

by Judy Kelley-Moberg

Have you ever been out-foxed by an opponent, been foxed (disoriented, confused) after a long night on the town, done the foxtrot (small, quick straight-line steps) with your partner on the dance floor or dug a foxhole? Perhaps you've seen the fine veins or foxing that occurs in decayed wood and the glow of foxfire it can create?

When someone does something unbelievably stupid that leads to the total destruction of whatever was to be protected, we often remark that what was done was like, "letting the fox into the henhouse". Or are you a "foxy" lady? Is this a compliment? If it means sexy and attractive most ladies would see it as a compliment. But, there is something not quite so nice about being labeled a "vixen" (female fox).

Although this might seem a little off center for a nature article on foxes these terms and references have entered our vocabulary from the interaction of humans and foxes over time. The "crafty" fox appears in Greek fables, Indian myths, and the fox is the one who finally catches the "Gingerbread Man". The fox is always portrayed as a fleet, clever hunter and an escape artist. The "fox hunt" after all requires packs of hounds and large numbers of mounted hunters to outsmart and outnumber the elusive fox. Humans may consider the fox a pest but grudgingly respect its ability to outwit those who hunt it.

The fox is a lone hunter, eating fruits in season as well as birds, small mammals, amphibians and insects. They are members of the canine family and can yip and bark like a dog but their pupils dilate vertically like a cat's eye. When

hunting a fox will often leap straight up in the air to pounce on its prey. Fox scent mark strategic trees or spots along a trail with urine. Red fox urine has a distinct skunk-like odor. The color and content of fox scat varies with the season and the food source. The scat can contain fruit (berries and seeds) or be full of small mammal hair and bone fragments. Large bone fragments and deer hair are usually found in coyote scat. Don't get too close to animal scat as it can contain parasites!



In the winter the walking pattern of a fox is a single straight-line of small oval holes punched in the snow. When walking the back foot directly registers or lands in the track of the front foot leaving a single track. As the fox speeds up the two tracks begin to separate and grow further apart, leaving a clear larger front

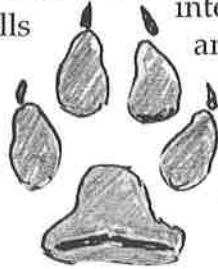
and smaller back foot print. Red fox are more common and their tracks are larger than the grey fox but more delicate than a small coyote. "The track of the front foot of a red fox is 2 and 1/8 inches to 2 and 7/8 inches long including the nails. All the canidae leave nail prints but the grey fox can partially retract his nails and even climb trees." (*Tracking and the Art of Seeing* by Paul Rezendes, Camden House Publishing, 1992). Felines direct register too, but a cat's nails are retracted and their tracks very rounded. The red fox track shows a pretty distinct bar across the rear of the heel pad on the front foot.

The fox is the most often seen reminder of the elusive creatures of the "wild" forest unlike deer, skunks, raccoons, opossum, squirrels,

rabbits and even coyote that have learned to live in and around our homes. A flash of russet red seen out of the corner of your eye or the brief glimpse of a red fox trotting purposely through the forest or pausing briefly to check for the unfamiliar is something special to share and remember. Seeing a fox flattened on the highway is a painful reminder of how we're replacing their world with ours.

One spring many years ago I was exploring a ridge in the woods behind Muscoot Farm Park in Somers. I had noticed a narrow animal trail that led from a small pond nearby up through the fields directly to the rocky cliffs on a forested ridge.

The leaf covered forest floor that rose to meet the ridge was littered with feathers, eggshells and various other animal parts. At the bottom of the cliff face directly above me was a small mound of dirt and the dark opening of an animal den. I couldn't believe my eyes when four fuzzy fox kits not only appeared but also began to tumble down



the hill towards me to investigate. It was a magical moment and I held my breath wondering just how close they'd come but at the same time thinking I should be scaring them away. Suddenly an adult red fox appeared on top of the ridge and issued a series of sharp barking commands. The youngsters stopped in mid tumble and raced back up to the safety of the den. I felt gifted with that moment and will have it forever.

There seem to be more coyote sightings nowadays and I wonder how the increased coyote population and the competition for food and shelter in a declining ever more fragmented habitat will affect the fox population? Another powerful reason to try and protect more large interconnected undeveloped sections of forest and wetlands.

"Where have all the foxes gone"?

A question I hope we never have to answer or answer for.

Calendar of Events February thru June 2008

Friends of the Great Swamp (FrOGS) and Putnam Land Trust (PCLT)
For information on Putnam Land Trust Programs (PLT) please call 845-225-5635.

FEBRUARY

**Sunday, February 3, 1-4pm (FrOGS)
Winter Hike to Pine Island**

Rick Saratelli and Judy Kelley-Moberg will lead their annual 2-3 mile winter hike to Pine Island, the "heart" of the Great Swamp in Patterson. The ice must be thick enough to travel to Pine Island. The hike is not recommended for children under ten.

We will leave at 1:00 from the south parking lot of the Patterson Recreation Center located at the end of Front Street in Patterson. Reservations are required. Call Judy Kelley-Moberg at 845-878-7740.

APRIL

**Saturday, April 5 (PCLT)
Woodcock Walk**

Join naturalist Beth Herr at dusk to witness the amazing mating flight of the woodcock. The group will meet at the Patterson A&P parking lot. For reservations 845-228-5635.

MAY

**Friday, May 16, 7pm (PCLT)
Beaver Talk**

Learn about the life and habits of nature's master builder from DEC wildlife biologist Kevin Clarke at 7:00 Friday evening at the Lawlor Building. Located at the corner of Route 311 and 164 in Patterson. For updates call 845-228-5635.

**Saturday and Sunday, May 17 & 18 (FrOGS)
2008 Spring Canoe Trip**

\$18 adult members, \$11 child (6-14 years)

\$22 adult non-members, \$15 child (6-14 years)

(child must be 6 years or older)

Call Evelyn at 845-877-6498 for reservations & details.

JUNE

**Saturday and Sunday, June 7 & 8 (FrOGS)
2008 Spring Canoe Trip**

\$18 adult members, \$11 child (6-14 years)

\$22 adult non-members, \$15 child (6-14 years)

(child must be 6 years or older)

Call Evelyn at 845-877-6498 for reservations & details.