47th BKAA Annual Meeting

2019 HONOREES

Marcia Briggs Wallace
Linda Lou Bartle

Representatives of 2019 Nature Watch Team

Photos by Bob Muller
MAILBAG:

Dear Paula and BKAA,  August 22, 2019

I want to thank you for offering to advertise the Ridgetop Lakes Conservancy (RLC) “Birds of New York State” presentation by Bill Fiero. We’re sorry that you couldn’t join us, but, Wow! What a response we got from your email. Thank you!

In addition to representation from four of the five ridgetop lakes (Masten, Wanaksink, Wolf, and Yankee), we were pleased to welcome BKAA members from various locations in Orange and Sullivan Counties. We thoroughly enjoyed hosting these people who share our passion for the environment. Some had never been to the ridgetop lakes area, and others were pleased to return. One announced, “I haven’t been up here in 50 years!”, while Bill Fiero shared with us that his great grandparents had, at one time, owned a boarding house just down the road.

Your generosity is something that we hope that we can return to you, our “neighbor organization”...actually, even though we are just beginning on our organizational journey, we hope that one day we will be able to conserve the property abutting both Yankee Lake and the Harlan Swamp as a ridgetop oasis. When this reality comes to pass, you will have been part of getting us up on our feet.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the RLC, I’d like to offer our most sincere and hearty THANKS TO YOU!

Sincerely,

RIDGETOP LAKES CONSERVANCY, INC.
Robert F. Rogers,
President

Dear Paula and BKAA,  Sept. 2019

Thank you for keeping me informed of BKAA activities. Your organization has been very busy and doing amazing conservation work! I am no longer working at Trout Unlimited and am not currently working in the conservation

MAILBAG continued on page 3

CONTACT THE BKAA
Paula Medley 845-754-0743, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.  email: info@thebashakill.org  website: www.thebashakill.org

CONTACT THE DEC
Environmental Conservation Officers (ECO’s) & Forest Rangers Covering the Bashakill WMA for the NYS DEC
ECO’s: Officer Ricky Wood 845-665-5637 (cell)  
Officer Thomas Koepf 845-612-6099 (cell)
Call 24-hour DEC Law Enforcement Dispatch at 1-877-457-5680 if the Officers are not available.

The Guardian is published quarterly by the Basha Kill Area Association Inc., PO Box 1121, Wurtsboro, NY 12790.
President: Paula Medley  •  Vice-President: Anita Altman  •  Treasurer: Monique Lipton
Corresponding Secretary / Membership: Bob Muller  •  Recording Secretary: Cliff Johnson
Board Members: Jackie Broder  •  Fred Harding  •  Bill Lucas  •  Susan O’Neill  •  Christine Saward
Publicity & E-mail Coordinator: Susan O’Neill  •  Alerts Coordinator: Liberty Press - Jon Heaphy
Water Testing & Facebook Coordinator: Linda Lou Bartle
Nature Watch Co-Leaders: Maryallison Farley, Kevin Keller & Cathy Liljequist
Guardian Editor: Paula Medley

Mission Statement: Since our founding in 1972, our mission has been to protect the Basha Kill Wetlands and surrounding area from ecological degradation, to promote education and respect for the environment in general, and to preserve the beauty of the area.

We welcome new members who are interested in protecting the environment. Dues are $10 per person per year.
BKAA is a not-for-profit corporation and donations are deductible to the extent allowed by law.
website: www.thebashakill.org  •  e-mail: info@thebashakill.org
IN MEMORIAM

With profound sadness, the BKAA announces passing of valued members:

**David Diness**
David was an extremely generous organization member, who supported several successful BKAA grant proposals, enabling printing of John Haas publications. He also loved Paula’s thank you’s.

**Stephen Gordon**
Stephen was a true BKAA friend and advocate, especially regarding Thompson Education Center. He also was a driving force behind Columbia Hill Neighborhood Alliance and Fallsburg's Future, always seeking to improve quality of life in Sullivan County communities.

**Marlene Roe**
Marlene was a long-time postmaster in Westbrookville and on the original Mamakating 2001 Comprehensive Plan advisory committee, which initiated excellent work before the then town board’s negative intervention. Marlene was the first person the Medleys met upon moving to Westbrookville and her warm, welcoming manner made them feel “at home”.

**Ruth Shursky**
Besides being an avid BKAA supporter, Ruth was an exceptionally active, veteran Sullivan County Audubon Society member. Knowing Paula's penchant for sending myriad thank you notes, Ruth indulgently gifted her with numerous cards from her personal collection.

**Ted Sly**
For years, Ted served as Orange County Historian, where he fulfilled his passion for educating others on local history.

MAILBAG continued from page 2

field. Please remove me from your list (and save money on postage)! Best! Thank you!

Katy Dunlap,
Trout Unlimited
Alpine, NY 14805

Dear BKAA, November 24, 2019

It is nice to see good use being made of the Environmental and Interpretive Center. Mamakating and the general area should be duly proud of this beautiful facility. It is also good to know that this handsome center is in the very capable and dedicated hands of Jackie Broder — an individual with an exemplary track record on behalf of the same laudable causes exemplified by the great BKAA!

Most sincerely, and with best regards,

Galen (Booth)
Justina Burton, former BKAA board member and recent email facilitator (printing all relevant BKAA emails for President Paula Medley) passed away, unexpectedly, before we could say goodbye and express our love. So, we now convey our goodbyes to this remarkable woman through Paula’s note to Justina’s sisters, Alva and Helen and Susan Erny’s poignant verse.

Dear Alva/Helen,

We are heartbroken by Justina’s untimely passing, a devastating loss both personally and from an organizational viewpoint. Justina was truly “one of a kind” classy lady. She never complained nor spoke ill of anyone and invariably projected a positive outlook, tinged with humorous overtones. Always helpful, Justina frequently “googled” information for Michael and me. Incredibly generous, she definitely eased my load as BKAA President, even if it doubled her own work or costs. We spoke daily, more if necessary, and even now I find myself almost dialing her number. Quite simply, she was a good, decent person, a wonderful friend who brightened my life and whom I miss terribly. It’s a testament to her importance in our lives that we hurt so much now.

Love,
Paula

Ode to Justina

Such a sparkling, dazzling example of a human being
Your commitment and devotion amazed and inspired us
Endlessly you said, “Yes!” whenever help was needed:
To your precious, ailing husband
To your darling sisters
To your dear family
To your friends
To the protection of the beloved Basha Kill
To our veterans
To Mamakating Library
To dear little Wurtsboro
To the many unseen kindnesses you offered

Memories will forever remain
Of you walking the trails with Mark and a big, bouncy dog
Of your self-assigned litter maintenance of South Road
Of your always cheerful, warm “Hello, my dear” on the phone
Of your hours in the library bending and tending
Of the scores of used books for sale
Of so many kindnesses you ever offered

Outspoken, outdone, outstanding!
We were graced by your fabulous presence, Justina
How best to honor your loving spirit than
To keep you close in our hearts
And to give of ourselves whenever possible
Thank you, Justina
Shine on!

— Susan Erny
47th BKAA Annual Meeting

Paula Medley

Each Annual Meeting serves as a key organizational benchmark, reflecting on past accomplishments and preparing for upcoming challenges, like during this year’s 47th gathering on Saturday, October 19, 2019 at Phillipsport Community Center (PCC), with 42 attendees.

Many arrived early, registering at a welcome/information table overseen by Monique Lipton and Jackie Broder, who dispensed Annual Reports, agendas, ballots, and door prize tickets. Prior to the Call to Order, participants socialized, enjoying refreshments lovingly organized by Marcia Briggs Wallace and Christine Saward as well as perused BKAA merchandise, including shirts, mugs, and publications.

The meeting commenced by introducing former BKAA President and Nature Watch Founder Maryallison Farley, Mamakating Planning Board Chair Lorry Green, and Deerpark Rural Alliance representative Grace Woodard. Notably, Jean Lerner, Friends of the Shawangunks board member, also attended. A moment of silence ensued, recalling members and friends, who passed away during the year: Paul Beinkafner, Frank Brusinski, Justina Burton, Silvia Colella, David Diness, Ira Finkelstein, Maggi Heath, Al R. Hunt, Ted Kerpez, Keith La Budde, Sylvia Maliga, Alfred B. Merritt, Deanna Prisco, Marlene Roe, Andree C. Sherman, Ruth Shursky, and Fred Weissman.

In a change from previous occasions, a drawing for diverse, donated door prizes was next, followed by President Paula Medley highlighting major advocacy issues such as Mamakating’s Draft Comprehensive Plan, Thompson Education Center, Paradise II, Beautiful Earth, and 7 Peaks, with Grace Woodard discussing Dragon Springs.

Afterward was Election of the Board, whose slate was presented by Stephen Erny: President - Paula Medley, Vice President - Anita Altman, Treasurer - Monique Lipton, Corresponding Secretary/Membership Chair - Bob Muller, Recording Secretary - Cliff Johnson, Board Members - Jackie Broder, Fred Harding, Bill Lucas, Susan O’Neill, and Christine Saward. With no challenges, the slate was unanimously approved.

This year’s awards ceremony honored two extraordinary Basha Kill educational ambassadors, Linda Lou Bartle and 2019’s Nature Watch Team, along with the Elizabeth Pollock Great Blue Heron Award, the organization’s highest accolade, bestowed on one best reflecting the BKAA’s Mission over an extended period. During her tenure, the committed, ever responsible Marcia likewise was the Jack Orth Memorial BKAA Scholarship liaison with SUNY Sullivan, merchandise coordinator, historian, and Annual Meeting refreshment co-chair. Additionally, she assisted at myriad informational and advocacy venues. Throughout, Marcia was inevitably considerate, kind, and professional with all she encountered, definitely a most worthy recipient!

The Annual Meeting’s grand finale was herpetologist Randy Stechert’s “Live Snake” Show, wonderfully reviewed by Galen Booth on page 6. See photos on page 9.

Thanks to everyone who facilitated this meeting’s successful outcome: those acknowledged earlier, PCC, Bill Lucas, Andy Weil, and Michael Medley. See you at the BKAA’s 48th!

BKAA Action and Information Alerts

are sent from the following email address:

libertylithoink@yahoo.com

To ensure that emails reach your Inbox, and not your junk or spam folder, add this address to your safe senders list (called ‘whitelisting’).

Your email provider or security service (if you use one) may have their own instructions for adding an email address to a whitelist. Look up instructions with the provider or service you use.
Snakes Alive!

Galen Booth

There was an unusual announcement at the outset of the facility-full October 19, 2019 Annual BKAA Meeting. “Before the event’s special presentation, the first two rows of chairs and attendees would be relocated.” Later, we found out why. This venue provided a special treat, a demonstration by herpetologist Randy Stechert, a reptile/amphibian specialist and endangered and threatened species expert (affiliated with NYSDEC). Mr. Stechert defined "herpetologist" and briefly delved into his five-plus decades of extensive experience, studying, tracking, and rescuing poisonous snakes in New York State.

Reinforcing why two rows were removed, Mr. Stechert first produced a copperhead and then a timber rattlesnake. One at a time, the snakes were carefully and literally—given the floor. We learned the copperhead and timber rattler are the two venomous snake species in New York (and also New Jersey). Mr. Stechert was a consummate professional in flawlessly handling poisonous snakes. There were absolutely no issues of danger. His program was fascinating, entertaining, and educational. He had scholarly answers to pointed questions from the impressed audience (and there were many interesting ones!). The copperhead was nearly three feet long, whereas usual measurement for a mature one is twenty-four inches. The timber rattler was over thirty inches in length with a mature snake normally maxing out at forty-four inches. There are larger exceptions and we will not divulge the humorous recount of Mr. Stechert's conversation with a Delaware County old-timer, who told a tale of a "behemoth" rattler.

Mr. Stechert is one of several credentialed herpetologists who are State-qualified responders to "nuisance" snake encounters. If a party calls police reporting a poisonous snake near home and property, the police are trained to encounters. If a party calls police reporting a poisonous who are State-qualified responders to "nuisance" snake Mr. Stechert is one of several credentialed herpetologists

Stechert's conversation with a Delaware County old-timer, answers to pointed questions from the impressed audience
and we will not divulge the humorous recount of Mr. Stechert's conversation with a Delaware County old-timer, who told a tale of a "behemoth" rattler.

Mr. Stechert is one of several credentialed herpetologists who are State-qualified responders to "nuisance" snake encounters. If a party calls police reporting a poisonous snake near home and property, the police are trained to contact a "nuisance" handler such as Mr. Stechert. These "nuisance" calls usually result in capturing the offending reptile, which mistakenly wander into a populated area, so the "capture" is really a "rescue".

We discovered most timber rattlesnakes range about two miles from their "home" winter den. Once safe in the winter den, snakes are far enough below ground that air temperature is never lower than 38 degrees Fahrenheit. Snakes are dormant and hibernating during winter denning. Also, other snake species safely join the winter denning population. We heard poisonous snakes typically fan out two miles from their den (leaving in spring and returning in fall before frigid weather). Are "nuisance" reptiles transported many miles from their point of capture/rescue? No. Why not? "Captured" snakes are actually genetically "locked down" to their "home den". If a snake is transported miles from its home, perhaps one of ten eventually integrates into the "foreign" den population. However, the remaining snakes fail and die.

These snakes play important roles in maintaining nature's balance. They help keep field mice and other rodent populations in check. These reptiles are not aggressive toward humans and will not go on the "offensive" to attack people and animals. They threaten only in "defensive" circumstances, like when cornered. They have several non-human predators, including raptors such as hawks, as well as coyotes, other snakes, which are immune to their venom, and even opossums which have some venom immunity. Additionally, we learned the last rattlesnake bite fatality in New York occurred in 1929. The victim was in charge of poisonous snakes at the Bronx Zoo. Somehow a careless mistake was made, resulting in the fatality. Mr. Stechert emphasized that poisonous snake bites in the wild in this day and age are rare, usually generated by negligence and knuckle-headed conduct by both so-called "experts" and reckless amateurs. Only specialists should catch, touch, and otherwise handle poisonous snakes—critters that would rather be left alone. Notably, rattlers do not ALWAYS rattle to announce their presence. That primordial and unforgettable "rattle" says it all; walk away, and leave the snake.

Mr. Stechert's presentation was enlightening and riveting. The only thing "bitten" was the usual array of appetizing bagels and fixings.

Nature Watch Fundraiser for BKAA at BashaKill Vineyards

Maryallison Farley

On Sunday, September 22nd, Nature Watch hosted its biennial BKAA Fundraiser at BashaKill Vineyards with owners Paul Deninno and Samara Deninno-Ferris. Happily, we raised almost $2,000 for the BKAA, thanks to 113 generous people who attended, as well as others who contributed but did not attend. Participants also enthusiastically purchased raffle tickets for a beautifully framed Basha Kill photo, generously donated by nature photographer, Kevin Kreischer. The lucky winner was BKAA member JoAnn Hegarty! A raffle of wine and food certificates from the Vineyards and Blind Dog Catering also added to our final tally. As expected, the return of Bill Streeter from Delaware Valley Raptor Center with his live birds of prey program was a major crowd pleaser (see photos on pages 18 & 19).
Historical Depletion of Timber Rattlesnake Colonies in New York State

Randy Stechert

Timber rattlesnakes (*Crotalus horridus*) have been exposed to depredation by man since the early colonists settled along the eastern seaboard. New England farmers organized rattlesnake hunts in Massachusetts and Maine that exterminated hundreds of the reptiles annually. These hunts occurred when rattlesnakes were emerging from their dens in rock slides or rock ledges in considerable numbers during a few days each spring, usually in early May. The snakes were slaughtered at localized areas that are vulnerable because of the snakes’ habit of congregating for winter hibernation. Prizes were given for the largest yield; occasionally an individual man (or woman!) would bring in over a hundred snakes. The hunts continued until rattlesnakes were completely extirpated from Maine and were very uncommon along the lower New England coastal areas.

In New York State, the first dens raided were on Manhattan Island, the Palisades of the Hudson River, and a few coastal sections of Long Island. Rattlesnakes have long been absent from these localities. Inland, their populations remained stable except for areas undergoing development for farming and industry, such as mining for iron ore in the Ramapo Mountains. At one time the Ramapos were virtually stripped of their forests for fuel to heat homesteads and to operate the once abundant smelting furnaces. These activities temporarily created beneficial conditions for timber rattlesnakes and copperheads which colonized some mountains that were originally too heavily timbered. This man-made boon for the snakes didn’t last long, however.

In the early 1900s, logging and quarrying were two major industries in New York State. The hemlock forests of the Catskill Mountains largely disappeared to the tanning factories. Rock slabs for slate (bluestone) patios and walks were often cut from ledges in the immediate vicinity of rattlesnake dens. This happened particularly in Sullivan, Ulster, and Delaware counties. The rattlesnake populations in these counties suffered a nose-dive until the advent of Portland cement closed a majority of the quarrying operations. The logging industry has continued on a smaller scale and has, in fact, actually experienced a resurgence in 1981. Logging is detrimental, however, only when done in the vicinity of a snake den or in the same forest for a period of several years.

By the 1930s, timber rattlesnakes had begun to build up appreciable numbers in the more remote areas until a renewed interest in exploiting fur-bearing mammals and small game included *Crotalus horridus* on the list. A bounty system was instituted in Warren, Washington, and Essex Counties in northeastern New York where (in recent years) a five dollar bounty was paid for every rattlesnake tail with rattle attached. The bounty encouraged a host of snakehunters to decimate the colonies found in these counties until the better known dens were either extirpated or produced such low annual yields that killing rattlesnakes was no longer profitable. Fortunately, the bounty program was discontinued by the new state conservation law in 1971, but only after thousands of rattlesnake tails were turned in. In other parts of the state, snakehunters pursued timber rattlesnakes in areas where they were reputedly abundant, such as in the southern Ramapo Mountains in Rockland and Orange Counties, around Elmira, and in parts of Steuben and Allegany Counties. The snakes were killed for their skins, occasionally to make snake oil, or simply for “sport”.

Rattlesnakes experienced a brief respite from snakehunters between 1940 and 1955. Then, in the mid-1950s, a growing interest in herpetology made collecting snakes alive for sale to roadside “serpentariums” and reptile dealers a semi-profitable business for the more ambitious commercial collectors. I know of one individual who has caught and sold over five thousand timber rattlesnakes in a 30-year period, 90% of which came from the Ramapos, Shawangunks, Catskills, and Berkshires in southern New York. This commercial collector is still taking snakes from these mountain ranges, which comprise 75% of the suitable habitat for timber rattlesnakes in the state. This individual alone has severely reduced New York’s stocks of timber rattlesnakes and the depletion can be seen in many areas where the snakes can no longer be found in anything approaching their former numbers.

During the 1950s, hiking and camping grew in popularity as a recreational activity in the northeast. Numerous trails were blazed on state-owned lands in the Ramapos, Catskills, and Adirondacks, frequently bisecting summer ranges of rattlesnakes and occasionally leading past their dens. When encountered on these trails the snakes are often killed by people under the mistaken impression that they are acting for the overall safety of mankind. The fact is, however that each year more people in the United States die from insect bites and stings than from bites inflicted by venomous snakes; and, that snakes benefit mankind by consuming numerous rodents that would cause severe...
The Basha Kill Area Association

Gratefully Recognizes

The 2019 Nature Watch Team for passionately and knowledgeably educating visitors about eagle ecology and the wetlands biodiversity.

2019

Awards

ELIZABETH POLLOCK
GREAT BLUE HERON AWARD
MARCIA BRIGGS WALLACE
2019

Photo by Gary Keeton

The Basha Kill Area Association

Gratefully Recognizes the Dedicated Service of Long-Time Board Member

Linda Lou Bartle
Especially in Her Role As BKA Water Testing Coordinator
Randy Stechert’s Live Snake Presentation

Randy’s shirt says it all!

Photos by Bob Muller

Copperhead

Timber Rattlesnake
crop damage and deforestation if their populations were not checked. Due to the timber rattler’s secretive behavior and habit of quickly retreating when confronted, snakebite is a rare occurrence in the northeast.

The combination of rural development, and ever-growing interest in wilderness exploration, and commercial snake collecting to supply a growing number of reptile dealers for the pet trade has reduced the timber rattlesnake colonies to 40 percent of their original numbers at the turn of the 20th century. Unless the species is legally protected and unless the law is rigidly enforced, the timber rattlesnake will soon become an endangered species. Rattlesnakes are useful contributors in the biotic community. They help control the abundance of rodents in the forests and adjacent farmlands. The timber rattlesnake should be accorded the same respect and given the same legal protection as birds of prey and other rare wildlife species in New York State.

Author’s note: As of late 1982 the timber rattlesnake will be designated as a protected species in New York State by the state’s Endangered and Protected Species Law. Collecting, importation, transportation, possession or sale of timber rattlesnakes in New York State will be a violation of the law and the violator may be subjected to a considerable fine for each rattlesnake found in his possession.

(Editor’s Note: The timber rattlesnake is now considered a threatened species under the state’s Endangered and Protected Species Law.)
Saturday, April 18
389h Annual Basha Kill Clean-up
9:30-10am (Registration and site assignments)
Celebrate Earth Day! Enjoy a walk and fresh spring air while ridding the wetlands of debris. Garbage bags are provided. Wear boots, work gloves, and insect repellent. Bring chairs as lunch, supplied by the BKAA, will be eaten al fresco in the Haven Road DEC parking lot (on left coming from Route 209); also event’s registration site. BKAA merchandise will be on sale and door prizes awarded. Call Paula Medley at (845) 754-0743 for further information.

Saturday, April 25, 10 am
Walk the O & W / D & H Canal Trail Loop with Gary Keeton
Stroll a 3 mile loop on level terrain with Basha Kill naturalist Gary Keeton as you observe wetlands, headwaters of the Basher Kill, and Gumaer Brook. This 1.4 mile portion of the O & W rail trail was recently gifted to Mamakating by Open Space Institute. At McDonald Road, event participants will return to Wurtsboro via the D & H Canal towpath. Bring binoculars, insect repellent, and wear good walking shoes. Meet at the trailhead adjacent to O’Toole’s Harley-Davidson on Sullivan Street in Wurtsboro. To register and/or for more information, contact Gary at (845) 386-4892.

Sunday, April 26, 8 am
Birding for Beginners with Scott Graber
Experience the variety of birdlife that inhabits the Bashakill with naturalist Scott Graber. This walk will focus on basic identification of birds by sight and sound. If you’re new to birding or have always wondered what birds exist beyond your backyard, this is the field trip for you! Binoculars are required and wear sturdy walking shoes. Meet at the Haven Road DEC parking lot (on left coming from Rt. 209). Visit to Mamakating’s new Environmental Center included. Call Scott to register and/or for additional information at 914-799-1313.

Saturday, May 2, 8 am
Spring Migration Warbler Walk with John Haas
Meet at the Stop Sign Parking Area off Haven Road (from Route 209, cross Haven Road bridge and take first left just before Haven Road ends at South Road). Bring binoculars. We should see an array of spring migrants including warblers, orioles, and grosbeaks. We will move to the Nature Trail from there and finish up at the Main Boat Launch. Visit to Mamakating’s new Environmental Center included. To register and/or for more information, contact John at (845) 688-0240. The walk will last at least 2 hours.

Sunday, May 3, 10 am
History of D&H Canal with Gary Keeton
Join Gary for a walk through time. Ever wonder about local stone walls and foundations? Curious about how people farmed the rocky soils or the relationship between the Basha Kill and Pine Kill? Bring binoculars and insect repellent. Oh, and learn about the canal, too! Meet at the DEC access road on Route 209 across from the Hometown Deli in Westbrookville. Bring binoculars. Contact Gary at (845) 386-4892 for particulars.

Friday, May 8, 9:00 pm
Moonlight Walk with Gary Keeton
Amble along Haven Road and the Railroad Trail. Enjoy moonrise over the ridge as you discuss the area’s natural history. Meet at the Haven Road DEC parking lot (on left coming from Route 209). Contact Gary at (845) 386-4892 for additional facts.

Sunday, May 17, 10 am
Hike to Gobbler’s Knob with NY-NJ Trail Conference Representative
Enjoy views of a beautiful 650 acre Shawangunk Ridge property, that was also site of the proposed Basherkill Subdivision. The hike gains 450 vertical feet from the parking area to the Knob, which is almost 1,000 feet high. Wear comfortable, sturdy shoes; bring water and binoculars. Trip takes two hours. Meet at the South Road fishing platform (Westbrookville end). To register or for more information, contact Paula at (845) 754-0743.

Sunday, June 7, 10 am
Happy for Herps with Bill Cutler
Join herpetologist Bill Cutler on a search for amphibians and reptiles. Kids as well as adults love learning about them. Bring binoculars and insect repellent. Meet at the Haven Road DEC parking lot (on left coming from Route 209). Visit to Mamakating’s new Environmental Center included. Call Bill to register and/or for additional information at (845) 482-5209.

Saturday, June 13, 9 am
Natural History Walk with Jack Austin
Stroll 2-3 miles on level terrain with Basha Kill educator Jack Austin as you see and listen to what’s nesting, growing, and maturing. Bring binoculars, insect repellent, and wear good walking shoes. Meet at the Haven Road DEC parking lot (on left coming from Route 209). Visit to Mamakating’s new Environmental Center included. To register and/or for more information, contact Jack at cell # (845) 649-8720.

Sunday, June 14, 10 a.m.
Examine Early Summer Vegetation and Plants’ Relationship to the Basha Kill’s Ecology with SUNY Orange Professor Emeritus Marty Borko
Bring binoculars and insect repellent. Meet at the Haven...
Encore Journey
Janet Barnett

Three BKAA members will be presenters for a course entitled, "Journey Along the Basha Kill", offered through SUNY Orange’s Encore Program this spring. Encore is a learning program that provides daytime courses to adults 50 and older. It is an informal sharing of knowledge and experiences run by its members. Although courses are usually held on the college campus, ours can take place at Mamakating’s Environmental Center!

“Journey Along the Basha Kill” will be offered on three Tuesdays from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m., March 10, 24, and 31 for approximately two hours per session. Elly Kniieriemen will produce her lively slide presentation, "Biodiversity of the Basha Kill" on day one. Day two, Karen Miller hosts "Birds of the Basha Kill", showing her photos and sharing her birding expertise. The last session will be a "Guided Nature Walk" along the Basha Kill Wetlands with outdoor educator, Mike Medley. Highlights will include viewing nesting bald eagles through a spotting scope.

This is a unique opportunity to share the wonders of the Basha Kill Wetlands and the importance of being its guardian. Anyone who knows and loves the Basha Kill can't help but want to protect it. The Encore calendar follows the college one and continues from September to June. Only current Encore members can register for the 2020 spring semester, but hopefully, we will offer this course again next year.

NEWS BRIEFS:
BKAA Member Janet Campbell Received “Best Basha Kill Painting” Award at Hudson Valley Plein Air Festival
Paula Medley

Janet Campbell’s watercolor “Trail Ferns”, painted 10/11/19 from the railroad trail south of the main boat launch (see page 15), was named BEST BASHA KILL PAINTING at the 4th annual festival, sponsored by Wallkill River School.

Twenty-seven talented artists were selected participants, painting en plein air (outdoors on location) in the Hudson Valley from Tuesday evening October 8 through Saturday October 12 to provide all show works, later exhibited at SUNY Orange from October 13 to November 25.

Congratulations, Janet!

John Haas Appointed Region 9 Editor for The Kingbird
Karen C. Miller

The Basha Kill Area Association congratulates John Haas, a.k.a. the Bashakill Birder, on his April 17, 2019 appointment as Region 9 Editor for The Kingbird.

Published quarterly by New York State Ornithological Association, Inc., The Kingbird is a peer-reviewed journal that furthers study of bird life and documents ornithology of ten state regions. John has responsibility for compiling and recording birding activity in Region 9, which includes seven counties in the Hudson-Delaware area (Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster and Westchester). He gathers data from eBird and from submissions by individual birders.

This appointment certainly recognizes John’s knowledge of birds and his dedication to the birding world. Well deserved!

2020 CALENDAR continued from page 11
Road DEC parking lot (on left coming from Route 209). Visit to Mamakating’s new Environmental Center included. Call Paula Medley to register and/or for additional information at (845) 754-0743.

Saturday, October 3, 10 am
Canoe/Kayak the Basha Kill with Scott Graber and Mike Medley
Join naturalists Scott and Mike for a late season venture on this first day of autumn. Bring your own vessel and binoculars. Meet at the South Road Boat Launch. Call Mike at (845) 754-0743 to register and for more details.

Friday, October 9, 7-9 pm
Free Public Star Watch by John Kocijanski of the Catskills Astronomy Club
Bring scopes and/or binoculars. Meet at the South Road Boat Launch, across from Bashakill Vineyards. To register, call John at (845) 798-8087. For event updates, visit Catskills Astronomy Club’s Facebook page. Rain date the following day.

Sunday, October 18, 10 am
Hike the Shawangunk Ridge with a NY-NJ Trail Conference Trail Maintainer
Event co-sponsored with Trail Conference. Moderately difficult hike, lasting 4-5 hours. Wear comfortable sturdy shoes and bring water, lunch and binoculars. Meet at the D&H Canal Kiosk at the Pat Moore Memorial Picnic Grove on Sullivan Street in Wurtsboro. Must register by calling Paula at (845) 754-0743.

Sunday, October 25, 9 am
Hike the Minisink Trail at Huckleberry State Forest in the Town of Greenville with Mike Medley
Join Mike on a beautiful 5 mile loop hike on the Shawangunk Ridge. Wear comfortable sturdy shoes and bring water and lunch. Bring binoculars. Carpool or travel in a caravan led by Mike. Meet at South Road fishing platform (West-brookville end) at 9:00am. Absolutely must register for this trip by calling Mike at (845) 754-0743.
Do You Know a Boy or Girl from 11-17 Years of Age Who Would Like to Attend an Environmental Camp for One Week Next Summer?

The Basha Kill Area Association (BKAA) is sponsoring two children for one week each at a NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Camp during the summer of 2020.

Camp choices include:
- Camp Colby (Saranac Lake)
- Camp DeBruce (Livingston Manor)
- Camp Rushford (Caneadea)
- Pack Forest (Warrensburg)

BKAA will pay $300.00 of the total camper’s fee ($350.00) for each child selected. Primary requirements are that campers be between 11 and 17 years old and be interested in the outdoors. Priority will be given to first-time applicants.

**Types of Camper Experiences**
- Campers 11-13 years old
- Teen Ecology Camp 14-17 years old

**To Apply** (Minimum 100 words):
Please have the interested child send us a letter with the following information:
1. Why you are interested in the environment.
2. Your name and names of your parents or guardians.
3. Your address and phone number.
4. The grade you are in and which school you attend.

Send your letter to:
Paula Medley, BKAA President, P.O. Box 1211, Wurtsboro, NY 12790
or email: info@thebashakill.org

We must receive your application by Friday, January 17, 2020.

WHO WE ARE:
The BKAA, formed in 1972, has some 800 members who are dedicated to preserving the wonderful 3,000-plus acres of the BashaKill Wildlife Management Area and its watershed in the Town of Mamakating, New York.
Jack Orth Memorial BKAA Scholarship

Marcia Briggs Wallace, Scholarship Coordinator

Our members will recall that the Jack Orth legacy, left to the Bashakill Area Association (BKAA), was turned over to Sullivan County Community College (SCCC) in 2003 to fund scholarships in the environmental sciences. Currently, two majors at SCCC are involved—Environmental Studies and Green Building Maintenance and Management. However, at the BKAA board meeting on March 24, 2019, it was decided that full time students matriculated in environmental sciences at SUNY Orange and SUNY Ulster shall have equal consideration in applying for the Jack Orth Memorial Scholarship. Additionally, it was determined that the Sullivan County residency requirement should be waived, in keeping with globalization efforts to protect the environment. Accordingly, a residency requirement is no longer appropriate. Finally, the Board of Directors decided to increase the Scholarship from $300 to $500. All other Scholarship requirements remain unchanged: applicants must be enrolled full time in environmental sciences, completed 30 credits with a grade point average of at least 3.0, and submitted a qualifying essay of at least 500 words, along with a letter of recommendation.

I am pleased to announce that our next BKAA Jack Orth Memorial Scholarship winner is Awinita T. Stasilli, a full time student at SCCC, an Environmental Studies major with a GPA of 3.969. Her qualifying essay, picture, and letter of recommendation follow. My thanks to Kathryn Scullion, Instructional Assistant, Department of Science, Technology, and Mathematics at SCCC, for her invaluable assistance in organizing the required application materials.

Future Career Goal

Awinita Strasilli
Jack Orth Scholarship Winner

My ultimate career goal relating to Environmental Science is to become a New York State Forest Ranger. To do this I will need to earn my Associates in Environmental Studies from SUNY Sullivan. Then, I will transfer to Paul Smith’s College in the Adirondacks where I intend to earn a Bachelor of Science in Natural Resource Conservation and Management. This will give me the knowledge and understanding of science and how the environment works so I can fulfill my career goal and help protect the environment. Next, I will need to complete the six months of training at the DEC (Department of Environmental Conservation) Academy in Pulaski, NY. There I will be trained in all the aspects of a forest ranger position in New York State including: law enforcement, fire suppression, initial medical care as well as several other skills. After I graduate from there, I will become a New York State Forest Ranger.

By becoming a Forest Ranger, I will have the opportunity to help the planet, the animals, and the people in my community and across the state all through the aspects and opportunities in this one job. I will be able to help the planet by apprehending and fining offenders who are littering trash or deliberately discarding of chemicals or garbage which requires proper disposal in transfer stations or appropriate facilities and safe removal out of the environment. Additionally, I will be able to assist other agencies, such as the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), to enforce their environmental protection laws and regulations. I will be able to help animals by enforcing poaching, hunting, fishing, and other game laws. This will reduce the amount of animals which are just used for their hides, decor, and boasting rights. Instead, I will aim towards apprehending and charging violators who do this. This will help protect the animals from illegal harm as well as protect the endangered species which we desperately need on our planet.

Additionally, as a Forest Ranger, I will be able to help people when they are in need of help. The tasks of Forest Rangers include but are not limited to: assisting and performing high angle search and rescue to reach stranded hikers on mountains or rock faces, water and ice rescue calls, wildland search and rescue incidents, brush and forest fire calls to extinguish and preserve the habitats of wildlife, ATV accidents, as well as hunting/fishing accidents. As a Forest Ranger, I will also be able to educate people about the environment and the human impact on it. This is in hopes to enlighten people and show them that climate change is actually happening and action needs to be taken immediately to reverse the effects of climate change which we, as a planet, are already experiencing. Overall, with my future goal of becoming a New York State Forest Ranger, I hope will allow me to accomplish all these aspects to make people, communities, animals, and our planet safer and a better place to live for many generations to come.

Letter of Recommendation

November 5, 2019
Science, Technology and Mathematics - SUNY Sullivan
112 College Road, Loch Sheldrake, NY 12759
Re: Awinita Stasilli’s application for the Jack Orth Memorial BKAA Scholarship

Awinita Stasilli has applied for the Jack Orth Scholarship. She will graduate from SUNY Sullivan next spring with an Environmental Studies degree and plans to transfer to Paul Smith’s College for a degree in Natural Resource Conservation and Management. She has been a student in two of my classes and I am also her academic advisor. She is an excellent student with an almost perfect 3.95 GPA. She has been a pleasure to have as a student. She’s always enthusiastic and hard-working, and willing to help other students struggling with lab assignments. She contributes to class discussions, comes to class prepared, and had perfect attendance in both of my classes. As an advisee, she is always prepared and knows exactly what classes she needs and wants. From the beginning of her time at SUNY Sullivan, she has been focused on her career goals.

I highly recommend Awinita for this scholarship. I expect her to have a successful career and to make significant contributions to Environmental Science.

Sincerely,
Gregg Erickson, Professor
“Trail Ferns,” watercolor, Janet Campbell (painted October 11, 2019 on trail leading south from the main boat launch).
Good afternoon: This past Saturday featured a fascinating presentation at Mamakating’s Environmental Education and Interpretive Center, Wurtsboro, New York. Now-retired Sullivan County resident Gene Weinstein spoke of his 22+ years of volunteerism in New York State’s bald eagle repopulation efforts.

Around 1976, bald eagle repopulation began with a single existing eagle nest (located about 30 miles west of Syracuse). This endeavor was spearheaded, one small step at a time, by a forward-thinking gentleman named Peter Nye (who spent 34 years in this service). In 1976 he led the NYS DEC Endangered Species Unit. The now-banned pesticide DDT had ravaged the eagle population in many areas, rendering egg shells too soft to withstand the weight of incubating eagle parents, thus causing their destruction.

In 1976, only this single eagle nest existed in New York. Although that pair (they mate for life) was suffering from DDT, the two eagles survived for another five years. Usually, bald eagles may live 25 years.

Mr. Nye, with a volunteer army, began his repopulation work by purchasing bald eagle eggs and young eagles, primarily from Alaska. Eggs were then carefully placed in the last remaining eagle nest and young eagles were painstakingly raised and released. Released eagles were banded and sometimes electronically "tracked".

By 1980, known bald eagle nests in New York had doubled to two nesting pairs. Soon, 14 other states instituted bald eagle repopulation programs, all modeled after Peter Nye’s. In 1990, there were fourteen nesting pairs in New York. By 2000, there were fifty-nine, and by 2010 the number soared to two hundred twenty three. Currently, there are over three hundred twenty three known bald eagle nest sites in New York. This eagle population descends almost entirely from the Alaskan eagles and eggs re-introduced in 1976. New York experiences seasonal migrations by bald eagles from the north during winter months. When northern rivers and other water bodies freeze solid, northern bald eagles fly south to lower New York to feed in open waters. Once warmer weather arrives, migrants normally return to their northern homes.

Bald eagles achieve white heads and white tails upon reaching maturity at five years. Until then, eagles are "immatures", sometimes confused with golden eagles. There is no permanent golden eagle population in New York, with golden eagles more often found in the American west and southwest. It was also explained that they are not fish eaters like bald eagles. Bald eagles are primarily fish eaters, but, if fishing areas freeze, bald eagles will feed on waterfowl (i.e. ducks) and carrion (i.e. deer and other deceased animals).

With bald eagles mating for life, they maintain their nest sites from year to year and annually attempt raising one to three eagle chicks. Amongst the chicks, the first-hatched eaglet is always at the top of the pecking order. Once chicks are fully independent, before winter, they must find their own territories.

In 1976, our nation's bicentennial, our national bird was nearly extinct in New York, hanging on for dear life with a single remaining nest. Fortunately, Peter Nye, and countless volunteers like Gene Weinstein, intervened and turned the tide. It took fourteen years for one bald eagle nest to become fourteen, but then numbers snowballed. Other states noted this success and positively implemented Nye’s strategies. Many thanks to Peter Nye and his volunteers for their service to such a laudable cause.
MEEIC Connection Vol 1

Jackie Broder

It’s been a whirlwind two months to the day since I assumed my Director’s position at Mamakating’s Environmental Education & Interpretive Center (MEEIC), during which I have spent every moment reorganizing, networking, planning, and basically reinvigorating this amazing place, while getting my bearings. And, I’ve loved every minute of it!

I have been blessedly surrounded by supportive, knowledgeable, talented people, both in the town and community, who want to contribute to MEEIC. We have cleaned the grounds and interior, thanks to help from ARC Sullivan-Orange Counties, NY Community Pre-Voc Program. If you are not familiar with the latter, it provides work training for developmentally disabled adults, who volunteer in the community in exchange for job experience. Participants have been invaluable in restoring this center to great shape!

An amazing community asset, Gene Weinstein, presented our first function, on the NYS Bald Eagle Restoration Project, attended by 26 people. The following week we sponsored an event on opossums by Pam Golben and Jan Berlin, joined by 46 people, Henrietta the Virginia Opossum and Scampers the Brazilian Possum. Coming soon, we will have a program featuring turkeys (tis the season!), a movie night with Catskills Astronomy Club, along with many other activities in the works. We had our first school group, from Chase Elementary in Wurtsboro, visit and learn how trees move. Students were fun, enthusiastic, and experienced a great time.

We have received generous donations of exhibit cases, desks, table and chairs which have created a more inviting center. We have added extra educational materials, bird feeders, and rearranged the Peter Nye and Gene Weinstein Room so that patrons can sit and enjoy the woodland/wildlife scenery at their leisure. I don’t want visitors to view MEEIC as just a space for programs, but a place that they can sit and enjoy the woodland/wildlife scenery at their leisure. I don’t want visitors to view MEEIC as just a space for programs, but a place that they can return again and again. We started a wonderful reference library and will have journals ready to record sightings and thoughts. We have video tutorials set up as well as calming music playing to ease stress. So, welcome and join us even when we don’t have planned activities.

I networked with local businesses to support each other and the area by promoting ecotourism. I met with the artists who generously contributed their time and art making this place a masterpiece. The Facebook page is up and running, while the website is under construction. By the time this Guardian lands in your hands, the MEEIC Advisory Committee will have had their community Meet & Greet, discussing residents’ ideas and concerns. These discussions will shape MEEIC’s future and we look forward to your input. If unable to attend, please call or stop by. Your ideas are always welcome!

Also, there has been considerable time spent addressing other issues that will be revealed in the future. All in all, I am confident we have stopped spinning our wheels and begun gaining ground. A heartfelt thank you to those who have enabled my first months here to be productive and wonderful. I will continue to update our progress and doings in the Guardian so, until next time, be well, give to your community, and explore your backyard!

Mongaup Eagle Blind Dedication

John Kocijanski

A dedication ceremony for the new Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) eagle blind at Mongaup Falls Reservoir in Forestburgh, New York took place on November 2nd (See photos on page 20). The original blind, dating to the early 1990s, was over 25 years old and needed replacing. Building a new blind provided a dedication opportunity for the late Dr. Ted Kerpez, a significant, well-respected member of the DEC community.

Dr. Kerpez started with DEC as a wildlife biologist and eventually became a Regional Wildlife Manager. He was employed by the Department for almost 28 years before unexpectedly passing away. His work helped define how DEC protects endangered wildlife in New York and contributed to biodiversity conservation. He also assisted drafting the first management plan for Mongaup Valley.

The ceremony was well attended. Fellow DEC co-workers, family members, and representatives from various organizations filled the audience. DEC Natural Resource Supervisor Bill Rudge was master of ceremonies. He introduced DEC co-worker Nathan Ermer, Ted’s wife Barbara Sunshine, and Seth Mckee of Scenic Hudson, all of whom spoke about Ted. Nathan mentioned that Ted brought his sons to the Mongaup to observe Bald Eagles. Seth said he accompanied Ted on eagle viewing trips to the Mongaup and saw more eagles there than he’d ever encountered in his life. Barbara stated Ted always pointed out highlights in the natural environment he felt his family should experience and enjoy.

After the speakers, a ribbon cutting ceremony for the Dr. Ted Kerpez Memorial Eagle Viewing Blind was held. The new blind is larger on the inside than the old one, with two benches, a closet, and new information panels. One panel is dedicated to Dr. Kerpez. The site’s parking area is paved now as well.

Delaware Highlands Conservancy conducts eagle watches at the blind on weekends in January and February. Some winter volunteers also participate in the Bashakill Area Association’s spring Nature Watch. Volunteers working with both organizations attending the ceremony were: Ed Duvinski, Kevin Keller, Don Kenny, and John Kocijanski. Following the ribbon cutting, they spotted a mature Bald Eagle flying over tree tops to the east of the blind, providing a fitting end to the dedication.
Raptors Revealed at BKAA Fundraiser

American Kestrel

Photo by Kevin Krescher
Bill Streeter and Bald Eagle!

Photos by Kevin Kreischer
Below, left to right: Kevin Keller, Don Kenny, and Ed Duvinski, volunteers with both Delaware Highlands Conservancy’s winter watch and BKAA spring eagle watch, stand under the new Dr. Ted Kerpez Memorial Eagle Viewing Blind sign. At right, crowd gathered for the November 2nd dedication of the memorial blind at Mongaup Valley Wildlife Management Area.
Orange County Land Trust Preserves 99 Acres of Sullivan Forest Owned by BKAA Member Toby Boritz

(Editor’s Note: This article was originally published September 12th in the Times Herald-Record)

Matthew Nanci

Close to 100 acres of forest in Sullivan County are now protected courtesy of the Orange County Land Trust.
The 99 acres being preserved are within the Neversink River Watershed in the Town of Thompson and consist of hemlock northern hardwood forest and two streams, including a tributary of the Fowlwood Brook, according to a news release from the trust.

“This project presented us with an opportunity to both help maintain the water quality of the Neversink River Watershed and safeguard habitat for those species of wildlife that require unfragmented tracts of forest in order to thrive,” Executive Director James Delaune said. “It covered all the conservation criteria and then some.”

The impetus for the project started with landowner Toby Boritz, who contacted the land trust to protect her land via a conservation easement, the release said.

Her family has owned the land since 1911. It was initially used as a 50-acre farm run by her grandparents and later became a summer getaway for extended family members.

Message from Toby

Monday, September 16, 2019

I wanted to let you know that on September 5th a conservation easement was finalized with Orange County Land Trust (OCLT) on my 99-acre property located on East Glen Wild Road in Thompson’s Rural Residential-2 (RR-2) District. Terms of our agreement specify that the property, which has been in my father’s family since 1911, will be maintained as one un-subdivided lot in perpetuity.

Sending good wishes your way.
Toby Boritz

TELL A FRIEND ABOUT THE BASHA KILL AREA ASSOCIATION!

Have your friends fill out this coupon for membership or more information:
P.O. Box 1121, Wurtsboro, NY 12790

Yes, I’m interested in the environment and wish to become a member of Basha Kill Area Association. Enclosed is:

_____ $10.00 for individual membership  _____ Other Donation  _____ Please send more information

Please make checks payable to: Basha Kill Area Association

Name __________________________ Phone __________________________

Address __________________________ Email __________________________

(for action alerts)
Exhibit B: Conservation Easement Map of Boritz Property
Exploring Innovation and Progress in Wurtsboro Through Recent Development of the O&W Rail Trail / D&H Canal Towpath Loop

Alethea Pape

What better way to explore the D&H Canal Towpath than walking on the re-vamped O&W Rail Trail/D&H Canal Towpath Loop? Ten participants, including an enthusiastic puppy, joined Kerron Barnes at the August 23 Town of Mamakating event. Revitalization of the O&W Railroad bed that loops with the D&H Canal Towpath was a decades long endeavor. Earlier this year, Mamakating’s Highway Department cleared the trailhead for a landscaped parking lot, trailhead gates, and a roomy path. A gravel lot, bordered by carefully selected flowers in full bloom on the edge of two streams, opens trail views from Sullivan Street. There, at the foot of the Shawangunk Ridge where the railroad line once crested, we started our outing (See photos on page 25).

Entering the trail was like visiting a living museum. History was all around, if you knew where to look (have Kerron Barnes as your guide). Under cover of Hemlock, Emerald Ash, and Shagbark Hickory, remnants of stone culverts and retaining walls dotted our walk. Proximity made it possible for both the canal and rail to use the drainage system. Stonework, easily seen from pathways, was laid by hand without any mortar. From the path, it was clear those were not just piles of rocks. The engineering and hard labor that built both transportation systems has remained in place for almost 200 years. The once tree-bare towpath was trod by canal boys, leading mules pulling thirty ton boats full of coal. Boat captains hurried, making the most of the short April to November season. Imagine one hundred years ago, O&W Railroad tracks carrying trains of passengers eager for fresh mountain air. Also travelling to New York City were freight cars of anthracite coal. Off the path, covered in a century of vegetation, were railroad stakes in the ground and a nearby steel fence. The Rail Trail ends at McDonald Road, where the D&H Canal Towpath is picked up for a return to Wurtsboro.

Kerron Barnes, Town of Mamakating Interagency Coordinator, explained that new gates on trailheads are large enough for wheelchair access and small enough to prevent ATVs from causing damage. Both trails have benches in viewing areas for quiet reflection on the rich and undisturbed Basha Kill wetlands. The easy pace and calm weather enabled socialization. Familiarity with one other and the trails varied. Participants came from as far away as Dutchess County but also included village residents living down the street. There was time to ask questions about both trails and learn from other attendees. Near the end of the two and one-half hour walk, Kerron pointed out the invasive Japanese Knotweed. While sharing a stem, he explained that knotweed is edible. Taste-test results: it is survival-worthy.

The hard work and community volunteer efforts that started our township continue preserving it, keeping it relevant. Cooperation between organizations facilitated expanded access to Mamakating’s natural and cultural resources. More is planned. As a forward thinking community, we understand that conserving our natural resources and history is progress.

Basha Kill Boat Outing with State Senator Jen Metzger and Staff

Bill Lucas Friday 8/30/19

There was a good turnout on a great late summer day for this Metzger organized event, 20 sign ins for boats, canoes and kayaks of all sizes and vintages, a true flotilla. There were also another half dozen painters of varied ages for the land based paint class, led by Ari Mir-Pontier, part of the day’s program.

Mike Medley directed us on the meandering channel from the main South Road boat launch with Jen and her husband John in their canoe as we paddled south around the eagle island to a wide part of the channel. From a distance, eagles, perched atop dead trees west of the island, monitored our fleet. Mike Medley provided his usual friendly and informative banter on Basha flora and fauna. Numerous boats then headed south toward Westbrookville, while the remaining Metzger party returned to the South Road launch for a group photo op with the proud painters, followed by lunch and a social gathering at the ever-popular Basha Kill Vineyards, hosted by Paul Deninno and Samara Ferris Deninno.

This venture was a very satisfying outreach effort by Metzger’s office, introducing the senator’s followers to another unique regional recreational resource.
State Senator Jen Metzger Sponsored Basha Kill Outing

Metzger event participants, some with their Basha Kill paintings. Senator Metzger is 6th from left above, next to husband John.
Mamakating’s Beautifully Landscaped O&W/D&H Canal Towpath Loop Trailhead
Photos by Alethea Pape

Kerron Barnes addressing trail participants.
October 16, 2019 was a gray day with rain threatening. It was predicted that precipitation would arrive after our hike. Some said it would be a nor'easter; some said a monsoon. We were grateful that whatever was coming waited. I met Mike Medley, hike leader from the Basha Kill Area Association and retired teachers Jane Groves and Cynthia Matteson at the kiosk of the beautifully landscaped trailhead next to O'Toole’s Harley Davidson on Sullivan Street in Wurtsboro. The hike is a 3-mile loop beginning on the O&W Rail Trail and returning on the D&H Canal Towpath. The O&W Rail Trail was donated to the Town of Mamakating in 2015 by Open Space Institute. It connects with the towpath at McDonald Road. The New York, Ontario and Western (NYO&W, also known as the O&W) Railway was a regional railroad, originating in 1868 and operating until 1953. It is now a hiking path (with a base of cinder, crushed stone, dirt, and grass), traversing the Town.

As we walked toward McDonald Road, remnants of the rail bed were seen: rail ties, a steel bridge over Gumaer Brook and pockets of coal. Mike pointed out an old shag bark hickory tree, one of the oldest he’s encountered. Hickory, oak, maple and hemlock, as well as marshy areas, flanked the trail. Leaf colors were shades of green, yellow-green, yellow, yellow-orange and “rust” orange, none really bright. One quarter mile later, several benches were strategically placed for scenic enjoyment near the Gumaer rail bridge. There, on the left, was a large beaver dam, an intriguing engineering feat. Mike told us about western beavers, which grow as large as 70 to 80 pounds, compared to eastern ones at 25 to 30 pounds. Western beavers influenced stream flow with their dam construction. They were plentiful until Europeans arrived and trapped them for their pelts. In this pond, created by the beaver dam, were 8 Canadian geese. We did not see any beavers.

Further along, a canopy of trees resembled a train tunnel. Unfortunately my camera phone ineffectively portrayed this image. Conversation on the outing revolved around various water animals, like otters. Mike recounted a hunter who trapped and killed one of an otter pair. When the hunter returned for the second one, he noted it was grieving for its mate. He was so moved by this that he gave up trapping. This demonstrates animal relationships, like experiencing loss.

Quiet on the trail and surrounding woods was broken only by rustling of our feet through the leaves, along with occasional conversations. Parts of the path were covered with a plethora of acorns from overhanging oaks. A bush with bright yellow leaves caught my eye. Upon inspection, I observed that its leaves and flowers indicated witch hazel, recognizable by a recent photo on Facebook. We reached McDonald Road, where the Town is constructing a new kiosk, and turned left, walking a short distance to the D&H Canal Towpath. Along the road, Mike hoped to discover the pheasant he had seen yesterday, but there was no sighting.

We turned onto the towpath, returning to Wurtsboro. Here we spotted a tree to the right with a nest perched in an odd place, a crook of a rather small extending branch. The nest was built of twigs and situated relatively low, not like a squirrel’s nest which is usually made of leaves and located much higher. Later after looking online, I thought it might have been a hawk’s nest. There was some water in the old canal bed, as well as remnants of stone walls lining the canal. We came upon Hornbeck’s Basin. Basins were expanses of waterways alongside or at the end of a canal, wider than the canal, constructed to allow boats to moor or unload cargo without impeding progress of other traffic, and permitting turning, thus serving as a winding hole (Wikipedia). They were also places where boats could be moved for repairs. Unfortunately, the trail also included refuse, tires and other debris deposited in the canal bed. As we continued, seeing a huge sycamore hinted at how old and historic this region is. Sycamores have bark that appears to be peeling off, making them look “sick”, thus their name. We traveled the remaining towpath, arriving in Wurtsboro near the D&H Linear Park between Pine and Sullivan Streets. We turned left onto Sullivan Street and walked another quarter mile to access our cars.

MARTA was formed to connect retired educators with one another and their profession. Starting solely as a social group, it now includes many related stimulating opportunities, such as daily trips, hands-on activities, discussions, and sponsoring scholarships. With participation of 600 plus, MARTA has evolved into a staunch group for disseminating information pertinent to members and their communities and is open to any educator retiring from an Orange County school district.

Mid-Hudson Area Retired Teachers Association (MARTA)
October Hike on Mamakating’s O&W/D&H Canal Towpath Loop
Christine Saward

Haven Road Bridge
Is Open!
BKAA Armada Paddles the Basha Kill

Fred Feibusch

On a beautiful early fall morning, a fleet of 15 vessels launched from the South Road access site. It was one of the largest turnouts for the annual voyage. Nine kayaks and six canoes lined up in orderly fashion as co-leader Mike Medley checked off his list of paddlers who signed on for the journey. Participants prepared for the morning with similar but varied objectives. Scott Graber, the group’s ornithological leader, hoped to spot great blue herons, egrets, wood ducks and mallards. Mike anticipated observing bald eagles, perhaps a northern harrier, but certainly the early fall foliage. Claire from Middletown anticipated a wonderful family activity with her three children and adult friends. Her 3-year old looked forward to seeing eagles and turtles. Betsy and Josh from Narrowsburg, along with friend Courtney from New York City, wanted to “get the city girl on the water for a little nature adventure.” Christine and Andy from Summitville were happy to finally use their kayaks for the first time this season. For me, on my second time joining the annual fall paddle, it was a chance to share the experience with my Spring Glen friend Sally who had never been in a canoe.

As we paddled to the main channel, a strong wind gusting from the south provided an extra challenge, particularly for canoes with their higher profile. The twisting turns of the Basha Kill, the gentle current and prevailing late season vegetation demanded that participants navigate a careful and efficient course. With so many boats in close proximity, vegetation demanded that participants navigate a careful and efficient course. With so many boats in close proximity, I was impressed that the group paddled and steered in unison with only an occasional soft bump. Mike and Scott in the lead canoe focused on scanning the panorama for bird life.

Scott soon noted a hovering kestrel, smallest of the falcons, above the tree line. As we rounded a bend, we discovered a perched bald eagle. The majestic bird was still in the same spot as we continued downstream, offering better views with our binoculars. On the way, we passed an eagle nest, currently vacant, but available for next year’s nesting. Also seen were a red tail hawk and several wood ducks. A small turtle slipped off a lily pad as our canoe approached. I hoped the 3-year old also saw it.

We gathered and then turned around at a deep cove, site of a past fish kill of gizzard shad. Mike said changes in water temperature or quality can lead to such occurrences, which underscore fragility of this unique habitat.

On the return trip, an additional red tailed hawk, a few tree swallows and a great blue heron appeared. As our canoe rounded a bend, we unexpectedly sighted a fellow voyager waist deep in water next to his one-person canoe. The lesson learned appears to be, don’t stand in one of these tipsy craft for a better view. Fortunately, several other boaters came to his aid and demonstrated the technique for assisting a capsized canoeist. Happily, only the victim’s pride was injured.

As our flotilla disembarked, Scott reported that, in his view, the outing was quite successful. Weather was fantastic and the tree swallow sighting was interesting so late in the season. I checked with the 3 year old for her greatest trip impression. She said, “It was the man who splashed in the water”.

Mamakating Library’s “Bashakill Nature Club Bird Walk”

John Haas

On September 28th, I was privileged to lead Mamakating Library’s Bashakill Nature Club fall bird walk. We had a small group, seven participants and me, resulting in an enjoyable morning. We started with a quick lesson on using binoculars to suit each person’s eyes, therefore providing optimum viewing results. We didn’t have an abundance of birds, but what we saw were really great close-ups.

We began at the Deli Fields in Westbrookville. It was a cool, calm morning and quite sunny. Birds were very active and we noted several species. Eastern Bluebirds sang from the treetops. Eastern Phoebe, Pileated Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, House Wren, as well as several warblers, were also observed. We talked about their speed and how this is peak migration, which draws birds south. A very tiny Red Eft was likewise enjoyed and elicited many questions from curious youngsters.

At that point we headed to Haven Road to find larger marsh denizens. Walking along Haven, it didn’t take long to first hear, then see, a Great Blue Heron. As we watched it, I spotted a tiny Musk Turtle crossing the road. This is our smallest Bashakill reptile, adults reaching about four inches! This little guy was only half an inch long, no bigger than my thumbnail. One young participant sketched it sitting in my hand. As we continued, five Great Egrets appeared, landing near us. A flock of Tree Swallows, perched on the wires, were joined by a single Barn Swallow, leading to a discussion of differences between these two similar species. Someone spotted a Bald Eagle in the distance, sitting on a limb near its nest.

We examined many topics of bird and animal life in and around the Bashakill and the importance of preserving this special place for such biodiversity. We spoke of Muskrats creating a cache of plants for winter feeding and how Great Blue Herons nest and catch fish. All in all, it was quite a productive, enjoyable morning walk through the Bashakill. I’d like to thank those who came for their eager participation!
Shawangunk Ridge (Ridge) Hike with NY-NJ Trail Conference

Soña Mason, West Hudson Program Coordinator, Trail Conference

What more could anyone want: spectacular weather, lots of color from oaks while hiking the Shawangunk Ridge Trail (SRT) and Long Path (LP) with outdoor-minded people whose conversations ranged from trails, explorations, hiking gear, to trail maintenance and land conservation.

Hosted by the Trail Conference’s (TC) Todd Jennings and Soña Mason, the hike led to breathtaking views of the Catskills and Sullivan County ridgetops, row upon row of bronzing mountaintops into infinity. The reason trees and mountains, instead of buildings, are seen to the horizon testifies to land preservation efforts of earlier environmentalists.

For those who don’t know, the SRT and LP coalition through Wurtsboro, winding from the Basha Kill along Pennsylvania Avenue and Sullivan Street, heading east toward the Ridge. Wurtsboro provides a refreshing stop and refueling point for LP thru-hikers and runners each summer. Like the Appalachian Trail, the SRT and LP offer opportunities to “escape” for a few weeks, back-pack through diverse sites within the Hudson Valley, camping enroute. Visit our facebook page for pictures and inspiring stories: www.facebook.com/groups/friendsofthelongpath.

Keeping trails publicly accessible, the TC trains and engages a force of over 2,000 volunteers, who maintain more than 2,000 trail miles from the Delaware Water Gap to the Catskills and beyond. These include the 70-mile SRT and 358-mile LP. Each summer, if hiking the Ridge, spanning High Point, New Jersey to Mohonk Preserve, you may encounter small gangs of hard-working volunteers clearing trails of seasonal overgrowth, prepping them for the Annual Shawangunk Ridge Trail Race in September.

The race itself is a herculean feat of rugged, unsupported trail-running across rough, rocky ground, starting at night with headlamps, and ending 24 hours later at Rosendale. The race is a herculean feat of rugged, unsupported trail-running across rough, rocky ground, starting at night with headlamps, and ending 24 hours later at Rosendale. Race directors Todd Jennings and Ken Posner, TC volunteers/supporters and ultra-marathoners, created the race to publicly highlight the SRT and LP, ultimately enlarging these two trails’ fan base. Photos and details on www.longpathraces.com/shawangunk-ridge-trail-run.

Another little-known secret of the SRT and LP is ongoing land preservation and advocacy by volunteers and staff, protecting the Ridge for trails and wildlife, as well as water and viewsheds. The TC partners with the Basha Kill Area Association, advocating for the land when inappropriate development threatens, and purchasing appropriate vacant property when available to permanently preserve as State Forests and Parks. As the LP still has a 14-mile road walk remaining in western Orange County, more volunteers are needed to conserve land for trails, and create a permanently protected green corridor connecting state owned acreage.

If you support this worthy work, consider becoming a TC member or volunteer. Contact us at volunteer@nynjtc.org or check our website at nynjtc.org. We need more good people to protect trails and the lands that support them! For further information, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Happy Hiking.

Minisink Trail Hike with Mike Medley

Lara Sheikh

Each fall in late October or early November, Mike Medley leads a beautiful 5 mile loop hike on a lesser traveled section of the Shawangunk Ridge, the Minisink Trail at Huckleberry State Forest in the Town of Greenville. We were a diverse group of 11 hikers from several neighboring towns, ranging from Milford, Pennsylvania, Westbrookville, Wurtsboro, Port Jervis, Bethel, and Monticello. The outing takes advantage of the cool dry weather of mid-fall, along with incredible foliage, views featuring rich farmland, City of Port Jervis, Neversink River Valley, and the ridge towering over Route 84. If you haven’t been, this is a beautiful trail that is generally flat, but includes a fairly steep hill providing a workout without causing too much stress. An incredible Shawangunk rock formation creates a wall on the ascent, where we posed for a group photo once reaching the top (See photos on page 32). Towards the hike’s conclusion, we rested and lunched on a ledge overlooking a private lake and the ridge.

Even the most knowledgeable naturalist learns something new on a BKAA hike – and this one did not disappoint. We heard from long-time Sullivan County resident Ellen from Westbrookville about local mushrooms. In particular, Ellen showed us a Hen of the Woods, which tastes like chicken when cooked. We took a side trail that overlooks a railroad track and spotted 2 curious foxes observing us from a very camouflaged hill across the tracks. Fortunately, several of us had followed the recommendation to bring binoculars. We also learned about burls, which are knots, forming on trees undergoing stress. The wood contained in burls is particularly beautiful and is often sliced for veneer by furniture makers.

There is no better way to discover the natural wonders of the Bashakill area than by joining a BKAA led hike. Mike Medley is a tremendous source of information about the natural wonders of the Bashakill region and his trips tend to attract many knowledgeable local residents who add to the experience.
Starwatch at the Basha Kill

John Kocijanski

Beautifully clear skies greeted the Public Starwatch at the Basha Kill with the Catskills Astronomy Club, held the evening of November 1st at the boat launch off South Road. Approximately 25 to 30 people attended, including two astronomy club members. Three telescopes were set up to share views of the night sky. After sunset, participants observed the first crescent moon, Jupiter, and Saturn. The cratered moon’s surface, rings of Saturn, and Jupiter’s atmospheric cloud belts, as well as its four large moons were distinctly visible through telescopes. As skies darkened, double stars Albireo in constellation Cygnus and Mizar in constellation Ursa Major were observed. Mizar is a double star system in the bend of the Big Dipper’s handle in Ursa Major. In reality, each component of Mizar is itself a double star system so Mizar is actually a quadruple star system. Albireo is made up of a cool, orange giant star and a small, hot blue star. Some observers noticed the orange/blue colors of each star. Under darker skies numerous deep sky objects were viewed, including the Andromeda Galaxy (M31) in the constellation Andromeda and Double Cluster (NGC 869 and NGC 884) in the constellation Perseus. Observers saw vast numbers of stars in the Double Cluster and the distinct oval shape of Andromeda Galaxy’s central region. The Double Cluster is a pair of open star clusters populated by young stars a few million years old. Clusters are about 7000 light years from earth but only a few hundred light years apart. These clusters lie within our Milky Way galaxy. The Andromeda Galaxy is a spiral galaxy 2.5 million light years beyond our Milky Way. It is estimated to contain one trillion stars, twice the number in our own galaxy, causing a greater mass than the Milky Way. M31 is approaching our Milky Way at a speed of 68 miles per second and is predicted to collide with our galaxy in about four billion years. Another evening highlight was appearance of a few meteors momentarily flaring in the sky. These meteors may be associated with the Taurid meteor showers, occurring from September 10th until November 20th. Starwatch attendees came and went as they pleased. Most left by 8:30 but a few stayed until the event officially ended at 9:00.

The Catskills Astronomy Club formed in 2000 and was active until 2011, with a maximum membership of 65. The club reformed in 2017 and currently has 20 members. Monthly club starwatch programs are held at Walnut Mountain Park in Liberty. Some are open to the public, while others are members only. Monthly star watch dates are chosen on Friday or Saturday evenings closest to new moon, when the night sky is darkest. The club also offers indoor astronomy movie nights periodically open to the public during the year. Movie nights allow participants to view and discuss an astronomy related documentary. Past movie nights were held at Ethelbert B. Crawford Public Library in Monticello and Daniel Pierce Central Library in Grahamsville. Afterwards, a brief starwatch occurs at the movie location, weather permitting. All club public offerings are announced on our facebook page, which also presents astronomy related news stories and happenings, as well as summaries of club activities. The club email is catskillsastro@hotmail.com. Membership forms are available upon request.

Many thanks to the BKAA for hosting this starwatch.

Star Struck

First of November, 43 degrees and clear at 7:00 PM
Headed to the Starwatch
Cars were lined up along the deep-puddled parking lot
Ahead a cluster of folks were all bundled up
Standing on the edge of the Basha Kill
A cannon of a telescope was pointed upward
Above us was a very starry sky
“Who wants to see Jupiter?”
Sky navigator John Kocijanski asked excitedly.
Carefully, one by one, we peered into the eyepiece.
“Wow!” “Cool!” And four moons, too!
Lovely Saturn had dressed in a skirt for the occasion
“Who wants to look at the moon?”
Our expert astronomer adjusted the scope
Dark and light sides of the moon were pocked with craters
So close, it seemed
One gazer said they saw a man there
Another enthusiast wanted to see the flag left by Apollo 11
Some meteors passed by
“How about Andromeda Galaxy, anyone?”
It’s only 2.5 million light years away!”
Beautiful beyond words
“Just how far is a light year?” we wanted to know
“Six trillion miles!” was our star guide’s answer
We looked upward, stunned by the scope of the universe
Much of what we’d seen had occurred millions of years ago
Trying to grasp the vastness, we were speechless
Time stood still
Unforgettable. Spectacular.
Starry-eyed gratitude
For an evening’s gathering under the stars

— Susan & Steve Erny
BKAA Sponsored Basha Kill Events

Beaver Dam

Mid-Hudson Area Retired Teachers on the O&W/D&H Canal Towpath Loop
Photos by Christine Saward

Entering the “tunnel”

Old Sycamore

Jane, Mike, Cynthia & Christine
Star Watch

After sunset at the Basha Kill
Photos by John Kocijanski

Milky Way over the Basha Kill
Minisink Trail (Huckleberry Ridge) Hike

View from trail - Photo by John Kocijanski

Ellen with Hen of the Woods

Mike leading his group

Photos by Lara Sheikh
Canoe / Kayak Venture & NY / NJ Trail Conference
Shawangunk Ridge Trek

Steve Boyer and pal

Viewing the Basha Kill

Trail Maintenance

Photos by Soña Mason
Ever the opportunist, the BKAA utilized myriad opportunities to promote the wetlands and our organization, which ultimately enhanced networking, outreach, and educational pursuits.

**BKAA Board:** “Change is in the air.” Sadly, both Membership Chair, Marcia Briggs Wallace, and board member/water testing coordinator, Linda Lou Bartle, will retire as of the 2019 Annual Meeting. Bob Muller officially assumes Marcia’s role then, while Cliff Johnson and Martin Nankin join the board pending Annual Meeting approval, Cliff becoming Recording Secretary for Christine Saward, who remains on the board.

**Developments in the Basha Kill Watershed:** While this year’s advocacy was sporadic, the BKAA critically intervened on Mamakating’s draft Comprehensive Plan, Dragon Springs, Thompson Education Center and 7 Peaks.

**Mamakating’s Draft Comprehensive Plan**
- April 20, 2019- Paula Medley represented the BKAA at the Plan’s public hearing before Mamakating’s town board.
- June 18- Town Board adopted the Plan’s Final Environmental Impact Statement.
- July 16 – Town Board adopted the Findings Statement & Plan.
- Present – Still awaiting the SEIS and more site plan information on Galley Hill’s commercial/residential venture.

**Dragon Springs (DS):**
- November 11, 2018 – Deerpark’s planning board held two public hearings on DS proposals, constructing a traffic loop across DS Guymard Turnpike Entrance and creating a large-scale solar farm.
- April 10, 2019 – BKAA consulting engineer Andy Willingham testified at Deerpark planning board’s public hearing on DS Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), reflecting current expansion as well as cumulative site development impacts since 2000.
- May 8 – DEIS written comments due.
- May 22 – Proposal for commercial/residential development on Galley Hill Road, 21,00 sq. ft. building, 21 apartments, and 120 parking spaces, all within the Basha Kill watershed.

Planning board required DS to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) on their expansion plans as the DEIS did not adequately address concerns.
- June 21 – Deerpark Rural Alliance (DRA) fundraiser at D&H Canal Park in Cuddebackville.
- September 2- DRA, BKAA, and Friends of the Shawangunks discussed DS issues with State Senator Jen Metzger and staff.
- Present – Still awaiting the SEIS and more site plan information on Galley Hill’s commercial/residential venture.

**Thompson Education Center (TEC) aka China City of America:**
- TEC has not appeared before Thompson’s planning board since September 13, 2017.
- 2018 – TEC purchased a 67 acre Thompson parcel on Wild Turnpike as a second access to their 568 acre development site.
- July 2 – Public hearing before Thompson’s town board on local law #6 to enact new and revised definitions of camps, bungalows, schools, and dorms. Written comments accepted until July 16.
- Present – The town board and consultants continue reviewing the proposed local law and will undoubtedly recommend modifications, precipitating additional public input.

**7 Peaks:**
- November 13 – At Mamakating planning board’s work session, reconfigured 7 Peaks on 554 acres owned by Shalom Lamm, upslope from the Basha Kill on the west and overlooking Winterton Road on the east, was discussed.
- Present – Nothing has transpired since November 13.

**Networking:** The BKAA carefully nurtured new contacts and constantly revitalized connections with long-standing friends and supporters. These priceless collaborations, with their myriad resources, positively influenced BKAA accomplishments.
- The BKAA retained its affiliation with Sullivan Catskills Visitors Association (SCVA), whose website and publications highlight our programs and wetland ecosystem. On May 8, Bill Lucas and Paula Medley participated in SCVA’s Annual Literature Exchange at Kartrite Resort and Indoor Water Park in Monticello.
- BKAA partnered with Trailkeeper, a coalition of Sullivan County organizations who promote their events on a collaborative website, with Paula attending several Sullivan County trail committee meetings in 2019.
- BKAA maintained membership in the Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed.
- BKAA minimally networked with local politicians, but interacted with State Senator Jen Metzger on 2 occasions.
- BKAA enjoyed consistent backing from loyal supporters: Deerpark Rural Alliance (DRA), Concerned Residents of Winterton, and Friends of the Shawangunks.
- For the BKAA, Paula mentored DRA.
- Regular communication ensued with DEC Bashakill Wildlife Manager, Nate Ermer, who updated DEC activity at the Wildlife Management Area in our Guardian and attended the Nature Watch orientation and BKAA fundraiser.
- February 7, 2019- Paula met with Mamakating Library Director Peggy Johansen to discuss mutual concerns.
- March 21 – Paula represented the BKAA at DEC’s Volunteer Partner Meeting in New Paltz.
- May 18 – Michael Medley and Paula networked at Sullivan Renaissance’s Annual Conference at the Center for Discovery in Hurleyville.
- June 21 – BKAA members networked at DRA’s fundraiser.
47TH ANNUAL REPORT continued from page 34

Come Clean:
Maintaining Our Gardens by Cathy Dawkins & Patricia Diness

Once again, the Come Clean Team did an early summer clean-up and maintenance of our two gardens. In both gardens (one in front of the laundromat in Wurtsboro and the other at the corner of Haven Road and Route 209 near Westbrookville) our Spring work involved weeding, trimming, raking and pruning. Several times, during the season, we visited for simple weeding. The rains were good for everything – trees, grasses, sages, and weeds. In the late September, we visited, and pulled out even more weeds.

• Our four evergreen trees are quite simply – beautiful. They are tall, thick, and healthy, producing lush needles and beautiful cones. In the next year or two, we will need to consider how to prune at least one of the Japanese White Pines, as its branches are reaching out towards Haven Road. At the onset, we were advised that keeping the branches from the snow plows is the key!

• The Russian Sage has seeded excessively. Little seedlings had to be weeded out, sadly.

• The Rose of Sharon has also seeded quite a bit. In fact, I took a few of the seedlings from under the pines and put them in my own yard. I was pleased to get TWO blossoms in September. I’m hoping for a robust season next year. If anyone else would like to come get some of these little seedlings, contact me at CathyMDawkins@gmail.com and I will arrange to meet you at the garden.

Local Environmental Activities:

• March 9, 2019- BKAA cosponsored Lance Verderame/John Haas "Birds of the Basha Kill" presentation at Mamaraking Library, which included John signing his newly released 3rd edition birding guide.

• March 30 – Nature Watch orientation at Mamakating Environmental Education Interpretive Center (MEEIC)

• April 25 - Paula represented the BKAA at Nate Ermer’s talk on “Forest and Wetland Management” at Mamaraking Library.

• April 26 – BKAA sponsored Ravensbeard’s “Live Bird Show at Wurtsboro’s Spring Fling. Nora Brusinski, Monique Lipton, David Lybolt, and Susan O’Neill performed yeoman services for this event.

• June 1 – Opening of the Wurtsboro Art Alliance and BKAA co-sponsored “Basha Kill Show”.

• July 5 – September – Michael, Paula, Christine Saward managed a BKAA informational table most Fridays at Mamakating’s Farmers Market.

• July 13 – Wurtsboro Founders Day. The BKAA ‘s booth was “manned” by Anita Altman and Gil Kulick, Chris Leser, Christine Saward, Paula, with Andy Weil “breaking down” the venue.

• August 23 – BKAA participated in a Trailkeeper sponsored walk on the D&H Canal/ O&W trails loop.

Campers:
In 2019, Mary Clark, Justin Costello, Alex Decker, Ashley King, Shealyn Leon, Leo & Owen Messenger, Skyler Redzimski, and Anneliese Vitale all attended Camp DeBruce in the Catskills.

Jack Orth Memorial Scholarship:
Enrique Castro was this year’s winner.

Catherine Abate Memorial Scholarship:
The following graduating high school seniors received the 3rd Annual Catherine Abate Memorial BKAA Scholarship, funded by Michael Abate to honor his late wife Catherine, a passionate environmental activist. Their winning essays focused on local environmental problems and ways to mitigate them. Congratulations to:

Madison Graham - Monticello Central School District
Courtney Pekusic - Pine Bush Central School District
Jenna Rumsey - Pine Bush Central School District

Basha Kill Walks and Educational Calendar:

These activities are crucial to the BKAA’s core mission, which teaches the value of wetlands, the Shawangunk Ridge, and entire Basha Kill Watershed, along with ways to safeguard them. Paula established the BKAA’s educational itinerary and assembled the experts who implemented it.

John Haas took 12 birders on his “Early Spring Waterfowl Walk” and another 16 on his “Spring Bird Migration” venture. NY-NJ Trail representatives led 10 participants to Gobbler’s Knob and others on a Shawangunk Ridge trek. Bill Cutler captivated 25 visitors, including many children, with his “Happy for Herps” outing. SUNY Orange Professor Emeritus Marty Borko educated 20 attendees about wetland plant life. Jack Austin guided 6 aficionados on his “Natural History” trip. Kerron Barnes and Gary Keeton escorted 20 on the D&H Canal/O&W trails loop; 12 went on Gary’s “Moonlight Ramble”, 3 on his “Sunset Walk”, and 20 on two excursions highlighting D&H canal history. Scott Graber and Mike captained a flotilla of 17 vessels during their September Paddle.

• April 19 – Opening day of Nature Watch
• April 26 – 38th Annual BKAA Cleanup
• May 21 – Mike and Paula facilitated Leadership Sullivan’s Class of 2019 “Basha Kill Day” presentations at MEEIC and South Road boat launch.
• June 12 – Mike took a local resident on a Basha Kill tour
• August 20 – Janet Barnett, Maryallison Farley, Elly Knieriemen, Karen Miller, Mike and Paula discussed BKAA involvement in a spring Encore program at the Basha Kill.
• September 3 – BKAA sponsored a canoe/kayak outing for State Senator Jen Metzger and friends.
• September 22- BKAA fundraiser at Bashakill Vineyards

Nature Watch: by Maryallison Farley

In its 17th year of operation, a dedicated cadre of BKAA Nature Watch (NW) volunteers (42 people) worked as educational ambassadors for the Basha Kill. They recorded observations about the behavior of the nesting bald eagle pair at the southern end of the Basha Kill (Nesting Territory # 35 of NYS DEC Region 3). We’re happy to report that the pair raised two eaglets who
help them learn to communicate with visitors about this wonderful resource. Bashakill birder extraordinaire, John Haas, our key birding resource person, Gary Keeton, long-time Bashakill naturalist and Cathy Dawkins, creator of our beautiful NW graphs, completed the 2019 Nature Watch Team. Ours is truly a collaborative effort!

Other Outreach Events:
• February 26 – BKAA (Paula) oversaw an informational table at Verderame/Haas “Birds of the Bashakill” event at Port Jervis Free Library’s the Hub.
• April 24 – Paula managed a Bashakill resource/organizational display at SUNY Sullivan Earth Day festivities.
• April 25 – Nora Brusinski and Christine Saward did the same at SUNY Orange.

3rd Edition of A Birding Guide to Sullivan County, New York Including the Bashakill Wildlife Management Area (WMA), 250 Field Checklists of Birds of the WMA and 500 New Field ID Cards for Marsh Birds of the Bashakill are now available at MEEIC and BKAA venues thanks to a matching grant from the Environmental Protection Fund’s Parks and Trails Partnership Program.

A Birding Guide to Sullivan County, New York, Including the Bashakill Wildlife Management Area:
John Haas’ book, which continues to educate and pique interest, is available at Mamakating’s Environmental Education Center (MEEIC), Canal Towne Emporium, and Bashakill Vineyards in Wurtsboro, Morgan Outdoors in Livingston Manor, and online.

Publicity/Emails/thebashakill.org/Alerts/Facebook/Guardian•
The Bashakill gratefully recognizes Susan O’Neill’s ongoing dedication as our public relations guru, writing and distributing all press releases. Special thanks to Bill Lucas for continuing as BKAA email coordinator this past year and to the late beloved Justina Burton for her invaluable work in facilitating the email process.
• Our website, www.thebashakill.org, and BKAA Alerts update BKAA programs, supply general news, and rapidly galvanize members for advocacy. Props to Maryallison Farley for being the BKAA’s contact with our webmaster. Thanks also to Jon Heaphy of Liberty Press for excellently functioning as Alerts Coordinator!
• The BKAA is part of Social Media, having a Facebook page competently administered by Linda Lou Bartle.
• Thank you to Liberty Press and Jon Heaphy for orchestrating the Guardian’s online operation and for patiently managing Paula’s Type A personality, as do so many others. Also, Kudos to Jon for designing and organizing the Guardian’s layout.

BKAA Consultants:
Consulting engineer Andy Willingham testified orally and in writing on DS DEIS. Our consulting attorney, hydrogeologist, and ecologist were not activated this year, but remained on call. The BKAA is extremely fortunate to collaborate with such a talented, dedicated team. Thank you, everyone!

Respectfully submitted,
President, Paula Medley
# General Fund Account

Balance from October 19, 2018: $12,288  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Membership Dues</td>
<td>6,940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations</td>
<td>22,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding of Catherine Abate Scholarships (by Michael Abate)</td>
<td>1,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature Watch Fundraiser</td>
<td>2,496</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Sales:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haas - A Birding Guide to Sullivan County</td>
<td>2,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Basha Kill Wetlands Field Guide</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Protection Fund's Parks &amp; Trails Partnership Program</td>
<td>3,896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royalty</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchandise Sales</td>
<td>571</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total Income     | 39,605 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenses:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guardian printing</td>
<td>(16,874)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing/Copies/Office Supplies, etc.</td>
<td>(3,136)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postage, Postal Fees</td>
<td>(3,059)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEC Campers (9 campers @ $350 each net of $50 contribution paid by each camper)*</td>
<td>(2,400)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>(1,717)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine Abate memorial Scholarship Awards</td>
<td>(1,050)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Testing</td>
<td>(227)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port-a-potty</td>
<td>(1,250)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>(411)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchandise Purchases</td>
<td>(297)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| John Haas Birding Guide Printing (Funded by Parks & Trails Partnership Program - received $3,896 in 2018, $3,896 in 2019) | (7,789) |
| Spring Fling - Ravensbend Presentation | (300) |
| Community Church of Wurtsboro Donation | (100) |
| Wurtsboro Art Alliance - Basha Kill Show Opening | (215) |
| Nature Watch Fundraiser - Delaware Valley Raptor Center Presentation | (400) |
| Nature Watch Expenses | (131) |
| Outside Membership Fees | (50) |
| NYS Sales Tax | (126) |
| Annual Charity Filing Costs | (50) |
| PayPal & Bank Fees | (115) |
| Annual Meeting | (327) |
| Miscellaneous | (45) |

| Total Expenses | (40,069) |

| Net Income | (464) |

Balance at October 18, 2019: $11,824

* Note an additional camper was able to attend free of charge due to number of campers sponsored by BKAA

---

# Legal Fund Account

Balance from October 19, 2018: $12,087  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Various Donations</td>
<td>$11,117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total Income     | $11,117 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenses:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willingham Engineering</td>
<td>($6,511)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total Expenses & Outlays | ($6,511) |

| Net Income | $4,606 |

Balance at October 18, 2019: $16,693

---

# "Come Clean" Fund Account

Balance from October 19, 2018: $812  

| Annual Clean-up Expenses | ($711) |

| Balance at October 18, 2019 | $101 |

---

# DEERPARK RURAL ALLIANCE

Treasurer's Report  
October 20, 2018 - October 18, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Balance from October 19, 2018</th>
<th>2,104</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income - Donations</td>
<td>4,012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total Income                  |       |

| Expenses:                     |       |
| PayPal fee                    | (1)   |

| Total Expenses & Outlays      | (1)   |

| Net Income                    | 4,011 |

Balance at October 18, 2019: 2,104

Total Available Funds October 18, 2019: 6,115
Columbia Hill Neighborhood Alliance

Roger Betters

The Article 78 lawsuit filed against Gan Eden Estates and Town of Thompson by The Center for Discovery and Catskill Mountainkeeper in early 2019 is being closely followed by Columbia Hill Neighborhood Alliance (CHNA). The lawsuit argues that the project would adversely affect both organizations and also seeks to void the settlement reached between the developer and Town of Thompson as the town violated the Open Meetings Law (OML) and failed to comply with current SEQRA (State Environmental Quality Review Act) regulations.

The town board’s resolution to accept settlement terms was passed following an Executive Session by that body. Notably, citizens were not advised, as required, prior to the town board entering Executive Session, that any action would occur when the board reconvened, so the public was not present when the settlement resolution was actually passed after executive session. Also, this agreement was discussed and reached before a new site plan was presented, violating OML.

The settlement stipulated that only six sections constituting a DEIS (Draft Environmental Impact Statement) would be redone for scoping by the developer despite the incomplete and inaccurate initial DEIS that had been previously submitted. Additionally, the town agreed to expedite project approval, including sending correspondence to the DRBC (Delaware River Basin Commission) to that effect.

HISTORY

• Gan Eden consists of 197 acres in the Town of Thompson purchased in 1988 and 13 landlocked acres in Fallsburg purchased by the same developer at a later date.

• Gan Eden twice requested and was granted questionable zoning changes, once in 2005 (as part of town-wide zoning code modifications) and again in 2007 for the remaining Thompson property going from RR1 (Rural Residential) to SR (Suburban Residential), allowing building at much higher density.

• The developer submitted a site plan for 885 multi-family units in 2007.

• Most locals weren’t aware of this proposal and the adopted zoning changes until spring, 2012. CHNA formed that summer and held public meetings, informing surrounding communities of the project’s scope. CHNA members campaigned at Thompson Town Board meetings to have the multi-family density calculation rolled back to pre-2005 levels.

• Thompson’s town board passed a local law in November 2012, scaling back number of allowable townhouse and row house units to 4 per acre and garden apartment type units to 1.9 per acre.

• Developers returned to the town only 2 or 3 times over the next few years before requesting and obtaining permission to drill three additional test wells in December 2015, only drilling one.

• Gan Eden submitted a revised site plan in 2016. CHNA then advised the town by letter that the developer lacked enough buildable acreage under zoning enacted in 2012 to construct the units proposed in the revised plan.

• At the end of December 2017, the developer filed a lawsuit against Town of Thompson in Sullivan County Supreme Court, citing numerous complaints about the town’s zoning code, which prevents building 147 townhouse units and 388 garden apartment units on the buildable 135 acres as outlined in the July 2016 site plan.

• In December’s 2017 lawsuit, developers contended the town’s pertinent zoning code unconstitutionally prevented building much needed local workforce housing because of limited allowable density. In a subsequent lawsuit, they also contested the town’s imposition of park and recreation fees. CHNA learned on 2/5/19 that, by the Thompson Town Board organizational meeting of 1/8/19, the developer had dropped the lawsuit and agreed to pay park and recreation fees as well as conform to the town’s building code by only constructing townhouses. The judge submitted the dismissal to Albany and the developer won’t be able to sue on those complaints again. The town was waiting to receive the stipulation agreement from the developer as well as revised site plans before the project could resume before the planning board.

OUR POSITION

• There are many troubling aspects of this proposal not yet addressed by the town. For instance, compatibility with the surrounding community should be reviewed under both SEQRA and town codes. Other issues include:

  o Water supply
  o Type and ongoing maintenance of wastewater treatment plant
  o Disposal route of treated wastewater
  o Stormwater runoff
  o Increased area traffic
  o Noise and light pollution
  o Protection of wildlife and natural resources
  o Electricity supply

CHNA members continue vigorously bringing these and other issues to the attention of Thompson and Fallsburg officials. Members also had productive meetings with NYS Senator Jennifer Metzger and Assembly Member Aileen Gunther in fall, 2019 apprising them of our environmental concerns, specifically those presented by Gan Eden.
Public Hearing on Proposed Amendments to Mamakating’s Zoning Code Held December 3 - BKAA Endorses Amendments

Paula Medley

(Editor’s Note: This hearing occurred after the Guardian’s winter deadline, so its outcome will be detailed in our newsletter’s spring edition.)

A critical public hearing, before Mamakating’s town board on proposed zoning amendments supporting the town’s newly adopted Comprehensive Plan (CP) was held Tuesday, December 3, 6 PM at Town Hall.

A CP is only as productive as the zoning enforcing it. Consequently, the proposed zoning changes, generally supporting the CP’s vision, are crucial, with the majority BKAA favored.

Notably, significant positive modifications were initiated in Schedule I Table of Use and Bulk Requirements. For instance, in Ridge and Valley Protection (RVP) (See map on page 40), the amendments downsized or eliminated most principal uses, with country inns replacing resorts, bed and breakfasts substituting for conference centers, and dude ranches expunged.

Unfortunately, though, 300+ acres within the RVP zone, site of the former Shawanga Lodge, off Exit 114 of Route 17/86, overlooking Wurtsboro and Bloomingburg, continue allowing Mixed Use Resort Development, permitting greater development and expanded uses than elsewhere in Mamakating’s RVP. Here, current zoning enables optional increase in development height. “The Town Planning Board may approve an increase in maximum development height for restaurant-conference centers, lodging facilities, condo-hotels, hotels and motels of up to 8 stories, not to exceed 80 feet.” Nothing in the proposed amendments addressed the aforementioned, which it should have as maximum height in all other RVP districts is 40 feet!

Lake Neighborhood Residential Zoning District (Yankee, Masten, part of Wolf Lakes)

In this newly proposed zoning district, intense development was eradicated or dramatically reduced, recognizing the region’s dependence on clean lakes and their hydrological connection with the Bashakill Wildlife Management Area.

The proposed Airport Development Area replaces the former Light Industry/Office Zone. Realizing its value as a vital area aquifer, principal uses such as light industrial, distribution centers, warehouses, and trucking terminals would be prohibited here.

The Incentive Development Area, northwest of Route 17/86’s intersection with Route 209, is the town’s designated heavy duty development site, along with Economic Zone Overlays. While the BKAA understands reasoning for these districts, they are within the Basher Kill’s watershed, so endeavors there bear close monitoring.

Proposed zoning likewise prohibits new extractive operations (mines), asphalt plants, junk yards, and bungalow colonies anywhere in Mamakating.

Another positive zoning modification applies design guidelines to all commercial developments within Village Adjacent (VA), Hamlet Center (HC) and Airport Development (AD) Districts. Previously, they were recommended, not mandatory.

Kudos to the Town Board and their consultants for a job well done!

No Decision Yet by Thompson’s Town Board on Proposed Local Law #6 of 2019 to Enact New and Revised Definitions of Camps, Bungalows, Schools and Dormitories

Lien Placed on TEC’s 9,000 Sq. Ft. “Residence” in Town of Fallsburg

Paula Medley

Local Law #6 continues under review by Thompson’s town board and its consulting attorney.

Meanwhile, several months ago, a substantial lien was imposed on TEC’s supposed residence located off Renner Road in Fallsburg. Apparently, TEC was in arrears with payments related to building construction.

The BKAA remains on the case!
Deerpark Rural Alliance (DRA) Update

Grace Woodard

While DRA awaits the Supplemental EIS from Dragon Springs, we have conducted outreach to Friends of the Shawangunks, Yankee Lake Preservation Association and appeared before the BKAA Annual Meeting at the super Phillipsport Center. Sharing what’s been accomplished, what is looming, approaches to problem solving, and the big picture of maintaining our rural identity, while remaining environmentally educated and prepared for action, helps everyone.

As a watchdog, DRA monitors the DS’ tributary that regularly contains plumes—dark, light and sometimes bubbly—pouring into the Basher Kill (BK). We are establishing long-term water protocol monitoring throughout the DS tributary, which joins the BK along Galley Hill Road (GHR) and placing meters past were the BK joins the Neversink. This activity is coordinated with the Delaware Watershed Initiative (DWI). Key people are Paul Wilson from E. Stroudsburg University and Steven Schwartz of DWI and the Pocono-Kittatinny Cluster. This initiative is sponsored by New York Environmental Sustainability Committee (nyenvironcom.org), a new non-profit founded by Alex Scilla (a DRA and BKAA member).

DRA has also contacted Deerpark and presented ideas on positive community growth/improvement and Brownfields Opportunity Initiatives available for the C&D Technologies site (former battery factory) next to Town Hall. The first down payment into the Superfund was made by past owners the end of October. DEC is designing cleanup and protocol for the next 8 months, which involve regular onsite visits. It will be 2021 before cleanup starts. The former site’s ambitious plans. Stay tuned.

Have a safe winter everyone. Seeing buffleheads and common mergansers rollicking on Guymard Lake make all the struggles seem worthwhile.

Updates:

Paula Medley

Beautiful Earth (BE) - Word has it that BE finally purchased Yukiguni Maitake Manufacturing Corporation of America (YM) assets including YM’s 47-acre property, (off McDonald Road) site of an earlier proposed mushroom plant.

On November 13, a public hearing was scheduled before the Delaware River Basin Commission on “an application to renew the approval to withdraw up to 13.14 mgm (million gallons per month) of groundwater from existing Well No. PW-2 for geothermal heating and cooling, agricultural production, industrial purposes such as cleaning, and potable supply at the docket holder’s proposed pilot-scale and subsequent full-scale agricultural production and processing facility. The initial allocation for use at the pilot facility remains limited to 1.95 mgm. The well is screened in outwash sand and gravel in the Gumaer Brook - Basher Kill Watershed in the Town of Mamakating, Sullivan County, New York within the drainage area of the section of the main stem Delaware River known as the Middle Delaware, which the Commission has classified as Special Protection Waters.” The Commission votes on this application December 11.

BE consists of 3 phases: 12 - 3,000 sq. ft. greenhouses, a 40,000 sq. ft. pilot building for production, and a 200,000 sq. ft. production processing and research/development facility. Almost three years have transpired since BE received site plan approval from Mamakating’s planning board for an endeavor that has not yet begun.

Hopper Hill, 7 Peaks: No further activity.
BKAA Still Awaits Dragon Springs’ Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Paula Medley

When Dragon Springs’ Supplemental EIS is released, BKAA consulting engineer Andy Willingham will review it and provide written and oral testimony, doing likewise with the site plan for Galley Hill Mall (7 buildings, 21 apartments over shops, and 120 parking spaces) if a public hearing is scheduled. Apparently, 4 or 5 years ago, there was a public hearing on a different proposal at the mall's locale. Whether the planning board will require another hearing is uncertain (see Grace Woodard’s update on page 41 for Deerpark Rural Alliance’s recent activity).