

CONSERVATION & COMMUNITY

2019 IN BRIEF



FREE PROGRAMING

- Hands-on learning for schools
- Hiking buddies program for seniors
- Guided nature walks

CARING FOR ENVIRONMENT and PEOPLE

- Over 200 feet of bog bridges to reduce erosion
- Safe and well maintained trails to explore
- Wildlife and invasive species monitoring



SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

- Volunteer days with high school groups
- Community service events with SUNY and schools
- Logged over 1,400 hours with trail volunteers

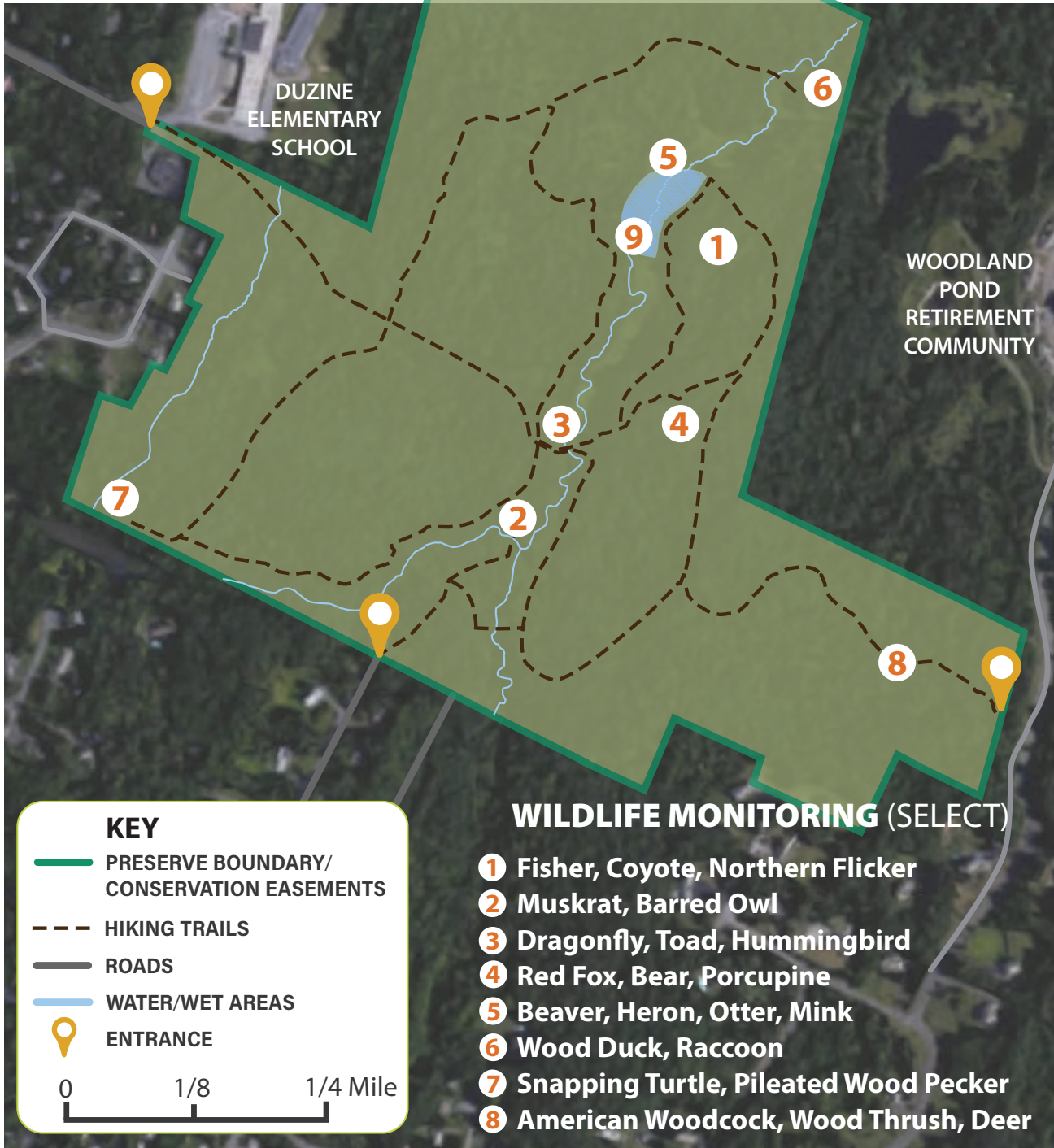
RESEARCH RELATIONSHIPS

- SUNY New Paltz bird ecology research
- High School Science Research projects
- Riverkeeper water quality assessments



THE MILL BROOK PRESERVE

New Paltz, NY



Our mission is to promote and protect biodiversity and wildlife habitats, while providing recreational and educational opportunities within the Mill Brook Preserve.

MILL BROOK PRESERVE INC.

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Mill brook preserve Inc. (MBPI) Annual report 2019

BOARD/STAFF/LIAISONS

Board of Directors*

Tal Ilany Seweryn, President
Lynn Bowdery, Treasurer
Gerald Benjamin, Secretary
Jim Delaune
Jonathan Katz

Staff

Julie Seyfert-Lillis, Executive Director (ED)

Liaisons

Paul Fargis, Woodland Pond Conservation Committee
Ted Nitza, Walden Environmental Engineering
KT Tobin, Village of New Paltz

* There is an identified a need for between four and six additional more board members to assist in building the preserve visibility and engagement with the community in accord with its state mission.

Accomplishments in 2019

MISSION STATEMENT

Developed mission statement: Our mission is to promote and protect biodiversity and wildlife habitats, while providing recreational and educational opportunities within the Mill Brook Preserve.

CONTRACTS

An Amendment 1 to the Recreation plan was created, and is pending approval from Wallkill Valley Land Trust (WVLT), Town and Village. The Amendment updates the map to indicate a slight change in the location of a trail.

FUNDRAISING

Membership Incentive

- Created and advertised a **Founding Member Campaign**:
Become a member by the close of 2020 and receive Founding Member Benefits:
Founding member lunch in the Preserve, members only walks/talks, discounts at stores.
- Appealed and received commitments from local businesses to provide member discounts: Mudd Puddle, Grazery, and Yard Owl.
- Improved all aspects of the website. Re-organized and created new sections to better showcase achievements and objectives, appeal to donors, and improve functionality.
- \$3,200 raised through local donors (September-December 2019).
- 25 Founding Donors since the campaign launch in December 2019.

Small Donation Campaigns

- Facebook Giving Tuesday: raised \$1000
- End of the Year Appeal: raised \$500

Donation of services

- Web services – Alex Motzembecker – approx. 12 hours + free server hosting
- GPS mapping/trail stewardship – Alex Bartholomew – approx. 10 hours
- Sign making – Mark Desmery, Paul Fargis – approx. 25 hours
- Logo re-design – Amy Papaelis – approx. 11.5 hours
- Web + visual design – Tal Ilany Seweryn – approx. 60 hours
- Engineering – Ted Nitza – approx. 12 hours
- Trail crew – 27 people volunteered to do trail days, providing upwards of 300 volunteer hours of trail work (excluding Executive Director’s hours, hereafter identified as ED)

Digital

- Created preliminary donor and membership database.
- Collected photos and permission from subjects for use in our media campaign.

TRAILS AND HABITAT

Trails and Water Crossings Overview

- All proposed trails to-date have been established.
- A selection of trails have been marked to create four trail “loops” designated by red, blue, green and yellow paint or disks.
- A selection of the existing “social” trails are purposely not being marked due to concerns about the public entering private property.
- Over 200ft of bog bridges built
- One larger bog bridge was built over Tributary 13
- **Green Trail**: A new portion of trail was established to provide connectivity to the entrance at Sunset Ridge. Another section completed a loop that opened the south-east quadrant of the Preserve.
- Created a trail map for free use available on the website.

Volunteer Work, Heavy Duty: Bog Bridges

Trail volunteers carried lumber/logs and built/installed bog bridges over muddy sections and shallow streams. This was accomplished during Volunteer Days organized by the ED. In the field Mike Lillis supervised/trained volunteers. (Chad Foti supervised/trained on one occasion.) Chain saw usage was limited to supervisors. **Volunteers learned:**

- Drill usage (saw usage at discretion of supervisor).
- Identification of cedar (dead standing or dead and down).
- Safety precautions (lift with legs, use gloves with treated lumber).
- Poison ivy identification/avoidance.
- Self-care (hydrate, tick check, and partner checks in field).
- Importance of looking out for hazards such as wasp nests, standing dead trees, etc.

Volunteer Work, Light Duty: Trail Clearing

During Volunteer Days participants, supervised by the ED, helped with lighter duty trail work. Tasks included cutting back vegetation, installing trail markers, removing down trees, using logs to delineate trails, brushing-in old trails, removing fire rings, and more.

Volunteers learned:

- How to cut a branch with health of the tree in mind.
- Identification of invasive shrubs (prioritized for cutting).
- Proper usage of lopper, mower (Saw usage at discretion of ED).
- Safety precautions (lift with legs, don't sit in leaves because of ticks).
- Poison ivy identification/avoidance.
- Proper tool usage (e.g Don't put tool handle where poison ivy might be, use gloves, keep track of tools).
- Self-care (hydrate, tick check, and partner checks in field).
- Importance of looking out for hazards such as wasp nests, standing dead trees, etc.

Signage

- Signs were placed in the preserve to help visitors way-find, the majority of which were hand carved by Woodland Pond resident, Paul Fargis.
- Bruderhof community committed to donating entrance kiosks.

Conservation Strategies and Maintaining “Wilderness in the City feel”

MBPI kept conservation a priority when developing trails:

- Created well marked trails and constantly monitored muddy/wet conditions, placed and moved bog bridges accordingly to mitigate erosion.
- Made rules public and enforced, whenever possible, that people stay on trails and keep dogs on leash.
- Established baseline understanding of how the Preserve is used by animals through many years of tracking and setting camera traps. Continued to keep some areas free of trails, especially wildlife corridors. Trail establishment took into consideration animal dens and care was taken to avoid these areas.
- Efforts were made to remove invasive shrubs to restore native understory. Invasive species were removed selectively to minimize disruption of wildlife activity/patterns.
- Maintained the “Wilderness in the City” feel by creating winding trails, limiting trail widening, and placing rustic signs and bridging.

PARKING

Initial Exploration

- **Sunset Ridge:** Identified and spoke to owners of Bluemark office building at top of Sunset Ridge. The owners were amenable to a driveway easement to allow access to a potential parking site.
- **North Manheim:** Local resident, Mark Maseo, offered pro-bono assistance to widen pavement and provide landscaping.
- **Harrington:** Ted Nitza communicated with the landowner, Floyd Kniffen, as well as the Village, to determine access (possibly via a village owned paper road).

OUTREACH/PUBLIC RELATIONS:

Community

Developed community outreach goal to increase awareness, interest, and involvement in the Preserve. Neighboring residents, the Duzine School community, and Woodland Pond were a major focus. Other efforts included reaching out to New Paltz Police, SUNY, and the broader community through social media and the newspaper.

- Duzine family brunch/walk with an introduction from Ross Hogan (Duzine Principal)
- Public Information session at Community Center
- Regular Facebook and Instagram posts, including those calling for volunteers
- Developed Hiking Buddies program (Woodland Pond resident matched with a community member) - 6 volunteers identified so far.
- Collaborated with New Paltz police to discuss handling of infractions in the preserve and protocol for helping lost persons.
- SUNY Make a Difference Day - Hosted 13 student volunteers
- New Paltz School District Wellness Day - led 50 teachers on a guided walk in Preserve
- Provided Support for Duzine teachers who requested guided educational walks for their students (100 students participated in 2019)
- *New Paltz Times* - Contributed to articles about the Preserve
- Put in nomination for a Chronogram. Best Park/Preserve

Woodland Pond

Attended four Woodland Pond Conservation Committee meetings. ED presented our film that highlights habitat/wildlife of the Preserve. Gave overview of ongoing work and MBPI's vision for the preserve, and expressed availability to always answer questions and concerns. Relationship established with Paul Fargis and Tom Natoli (head of the Woodland Pond Conservation Committee) and agreed that Liaison will not attend MBPI meetings, but rather receive copies of the minutes.

EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Duzine Elementary

- Established a relationship with the new principal, Ross Hogan
- Maintained the section of trail to Duzine (on Duzine property)
- Identified a significant increase in Duzine Elementary teachers using the Preserve as an outdoor classroom.

- Led 6 age appropriate classroom walks through the preserve (Nov-Dec), 1 hour each, animal tracking and ID, ecology, forestry lessons. Reached 100 students.

Research in the Preserve

Four research projects commenced in the Preserve. We identified this as an appropriate use of the preserve resources, provided there is continued low impact on habitat. The nature of this research fulfilled our vision to establish outreach and partnership with students and teachers from our local schools and institutions.

- Kara Belinsky - SUNY Ecologist - Blue Bird Study (60 boxes) -The goal is to monitor forest-nesting cavity dwellers.
- Hope Nitza - NPHS student - Macroinvertebrate Study to assess water quality of Tributary 13. Advisors, Martha Cheo (WAVE educator) and Neil Bettez. Assistance from Jen Epstein (River Keeper) and Justin Seweryn/NPHS Science Research Program.
- Guinness VanMeter - Homeschool sixth grader - Opossums (possible request to install opossum boxes). Advisor: Julie Seyfert-Lillis
- River Keeper - In 2019 River Keeper provided data regarding the water quality of Tributary 13. It was found to be highly impacted by enterovirus.

Priorities Identified for 2020

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

- Help identify and bring on new board members, some of whom may chair committees:
 - Fundraising/Outreach/membership
 - Trails and Stewardship
 - Education and Research
- Focus on board diversity, with ties to different parts of the community and varying expertise
- Develop board member binders (preferably electronic)

FUNDRAISING

- Continue to work on donor letters, press releases, catchy promotional materials
- Preparation for the May Fundraiser at Yard Owl (music/raffle with donated items)
- Utilize New Paltz Community Foundation (NPCF) resources – offered to provide assistance in sourcing larger donors
- Increase advertising for the Founding Member Campaign
- Improve database functionality to solidify mailing list (hard copy or digital)
- Create protocol for follow-up and thank you letters for donors
- Continued improvement of website and digital presence

Grants:

- Hudson Valley Foundation for Youth Health – to be applied for Spring
- Clif Bar Family Foundation – open application

TRAILS

- Establish George Danskin Way Entrance: Mark/improve trail/remove garbage. A bike rack will be installed and, at least for the time being, the entrance will be considered an entrance without parking.
- Work with the Village to develop a plan for garbage removal near George Danskin Way.
- Mark connector trail from Red to Green trail in southeast quadrant.
- Install more bog bridges where needed.
- Install benches (4 locations).
- Add additional signage: Entrance signs will be added, as well as additional interior signs. At a main intersection, a post is planned which will have a map of the Preserve.
- **Woodland Pond Trail:** Woodland Pond residents expressed a desire for help with a trail that would allow for easier and safer passage from their residence into the Preserve. The ED will lend assistance with designing/clearing/markings a suitable trail.

PARKING

- **Sunset Ridge:** Secure easement with owners of Bluemark office building. Consider design, cost and next steps to develop a parking area.
- **North Manheim:** Further confirm with the Fire Chief the need to keep one side of the “T” free of parking and determine signage needs. Work with Mark Maseo to increase capacity, while considering the visual impact on the neighboring residents.
- **Harrington:** Secure access, whether through landowner Floyd Kniffen or the Village of New Paltz.

OUTREACH/PUBLIC RELATIONS

- Host casual community Q/A sessions at locations like the Grazery
- Hiking Buddies Program
- **Retired Men’s Breakfast March 2, 2020:** ED will do a presentation, answer questions, and mention fundraising needs at the monthly gathering at a diner.
- **SUNY New Paltz Panel Discussion** on Environmental Education opportunities in the Hudson Valley for k-12 on March 28, 2020: ED will present opportunities for educational walks in the preserve with MBPI.

EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

- Continue to foster relationship with NP k-12 schools and teachers as well as SUNY professors and students. Offer educational programming, ecological research opportunities, and sanctioned citizen science programming.
- Citizen Science
- Bioblitz Fall 2020, in collaboration with WVLT
- Invasive species management: We plan to partner with PRISM (Lower Hudson Valley Region) to map our invasive plants and develop a plan for reduction and restoration of native understory.

CALENDAR OF PROGRAMS (more to come):

Jan (done): Tracking Walk

March: Tom O'Dowd will lead a Tree identification hike.

March 7: Animal Tracks, Scat, and Sign (in cooperation with WVLT)

April 19: Lynn's walk, in cooperation with John Burroughs Natural History Society

May 2: SUNY Panel on Environmental Ed

May 7: Fundraiser at Yard Owl (music/raffle with donated items)

Oct: Bioblitz (in cooperation with WVLT)