

You can help preserve valley's natural resources



Blanding's turtles are among the species that call the Hudson Valley home. / Courtesy photo

Written by
Maribel Pregnall and Stephen MacAvery

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The Dutchess County Environmental Management Council recently completed a State of the Environment report for Dutchess County. This is the seventh in a series of articles from the report. The entire report can be found online at <http://dutchessemc.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/dcsoereport2012.pdf>.

Dutchess County has diverse, rare and ecologically important biological resources. We are home to species ranging from river otters and black bear to pileated woodpeckers, Blanding's turtles, woodland warblers and specialized wetland orchids and sedges.

Not only is the county extremely diverse, it is also home to 13 federally and/or state protected animal species and numerous state protected plant species. Three of the key threats to maintaining this diversity are habitat loss, habitat degradation and habitat fragmentation. Through habitat protection and careful planning to minimize its impact, we can maintain and even improve our remaining biological resources.

Everyone who lives and works in Dutchess County benefits from these biological resources in multiple ways. We enjoy the clean water and air that forests, wetlands and stream corridors work

to protect. We benefit economically from the tourism and recreational opportunities that our natural areas and associated wildlife provide.

Our town conservation advisory commissions, town boards and planning boards and other municipal agencies play a large role in land-use planning, environmental reviews and issuing regulatory approvals for development projects. The public can play an important role by supporting decisions that prevent habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation of sensitive habitats.

Recruiting citizens to play more active roles in Dutchess County conservation advisory commissions will enable citizens to be involved in the protection of the biodiversity in their own backyards. The momentum created by these and other organizations is powerful and continued support of them is paramount to protection of biodiversity in our county.

Open-space protection can go a long way toward the habitat protection and the travel corridors that connect these habitats. Successful projects that preserve open space will continue to nurture and protect the remarkable diversity we still have left.

For example, the Friends of Peach Hill, Scenic Hudson, the Town of Poughkeepsie, New York state and Dutchess County all worked together providing funds and support to save and protect an old apple orchard from development. Peach Hill is home to a large population of diverse birds and other flora and fauna.

The Hudson River Valley Greenway Act, a bi-partisan bill passed by New York state 20 years ago, is a popular and successful collaboration between private sectors and local, county and state government. In 2000, Dutchess County completed the Greenway Connections, which outlines guidelines and principles for maintaining open space.

Since then 29 of the 30 municipalities have incorporated Greenway Compact guidelines in their local regulations. The county has allotted funds helping to leverage additional funds from the state for the protection of thousands of acres of open space. This very successful program is another avenue that can minimize the impact on sensitive habitat.

Maribel Pregnall is a member of the Dutchess County Environmental Management Council and a teacher at Arlington High School. Stephen MacAvery is a member of the Dutchess County Environmental Management Council and a registered landscape architect.



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