

Community

Planning
for
Nature
and
People

*Using Planning Tools
to Protect Open Space
Around the Shawangunk Ridge*



SHAWANGUNK RIDGE BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

Customizing a Plan for Your Community

“Home Rule” rules — The essence of preserving the ridge is ensuring a sustainable relationship between people and nature. This balancing act can only happen at the local level, where land-use decisions are made.

What are the Tools?

Conservation and development aren't always at odds with each other. Innovative land-use policies enable communities and developers to identify, understand, and protect the important natural and community resources found on particular properties. Such techniques include:

Conservation easements
Conservation subdivisions
Zoning
Large lot zoning
Incentive zoning

Mapping of sensitive resources
Conservation overlays
Subdivision regulations
Clustering
Standards and incentives

How Do You Choose?

Selecting the right mix of local land-use tools is a tough challenge for the most experienced communities. But it pays off — in lower construction costs, a quicker and less costly approval process, and reduced appeals and lawsuits. Why? Because all parties agree from the start on the balance to be achieved between development and open space protection.

As your community re-examines the ability of conventional practices to protect community character and natural features around the Shawangunks, the Biodiversity Partnership can offer expertise on the features and processes of the ridge, as well as planning tools that can create an attractive future for our communities in harmony with our natural setting.

The Biodiversity Partnership's **Green Assets** project can help your community build a customized “tool kit” that will take into account the interests of your town. Through **Green Assets**, the Partnership can:

- **Identify ridge areas that are top priorities for protection due to their natural, scenic, recreational, or open space value to your community;**
- **Meet with community-based Environmental Commissions, Open Space Committees, Planning Boards, Master Plan Committees, Farmland Protection Committees, and local residents to identify land protection goals;**
- **Make our GIS/biodiversity data available to inform community-based, natural resource inventories and land-use planning;**
- **Provide technical assistance to customize a “community tool kit” for open space protection;**
- **Work with communities to create intermunicipal agreements**
- **Help leverage federal, state, county and private funding for land protection.**

The Biodiversity Partnership's **Green Assets** project offers planning expertise and detailed scientific information about the ridge to help communities protect open space, key natural scenic quality and biodiversity, while providing for appropriate development and enhancing the quality of community life.

Why Protect the Shawangunks?

As population grows in our region, we will need to develop ways to protect the Shawangunk Ridge, to keep its fragile ecosystem healthy and whole. With development burgeoning in our area, our generation can shape a relationship to the ridge that will preserve its unique natural qualities for people to enjoy for generations to come.

The Shawangunks and our “Sense Of Place”

The Shawangunks enhance the quality of life for people in our region. The mountains help define the identity of our communities, by connecting people to the natural landscape in which they live.

Whether hiking on the weekend or viewing mist-shrouded cliffs on the way to work, residents and visitors alike are surrounded by unsurpassed beauty and boundless opportunities for recreation and reflection, in and around the Shawangunks.

Creating Economic Growth

The Shawangunks enrich our communities beyond measure. Recreation and scenery translate directly into tourism dollars and economic vitality. New residents are drawn to the area because they want to enjoy our natural areas year-round. This fuels a more vibrant community and economy. Living near nature increases property values, making living here a good, long-term investment.

Preserving Clean Water and Air

The wetlands and forests around the ridge help filter our water, ensuring that we have clean water to drink and making municipal water treatment easier and cheaper. Also, the ridge’s forests serve as priceless “lungs” for our area, silently processing air and improving its quality.

Protecting one of Earth’s “Last Great Places”

Scientists have determined that the Shawangunks are a top priority for biological conservation because the geology, soils, elevation, and climate of the ridge have produced a remarkable array of species adapted to these conditions, including the globally rare dwarf pitch pines. This natural diversity is important to our region and the world.

John Hayes



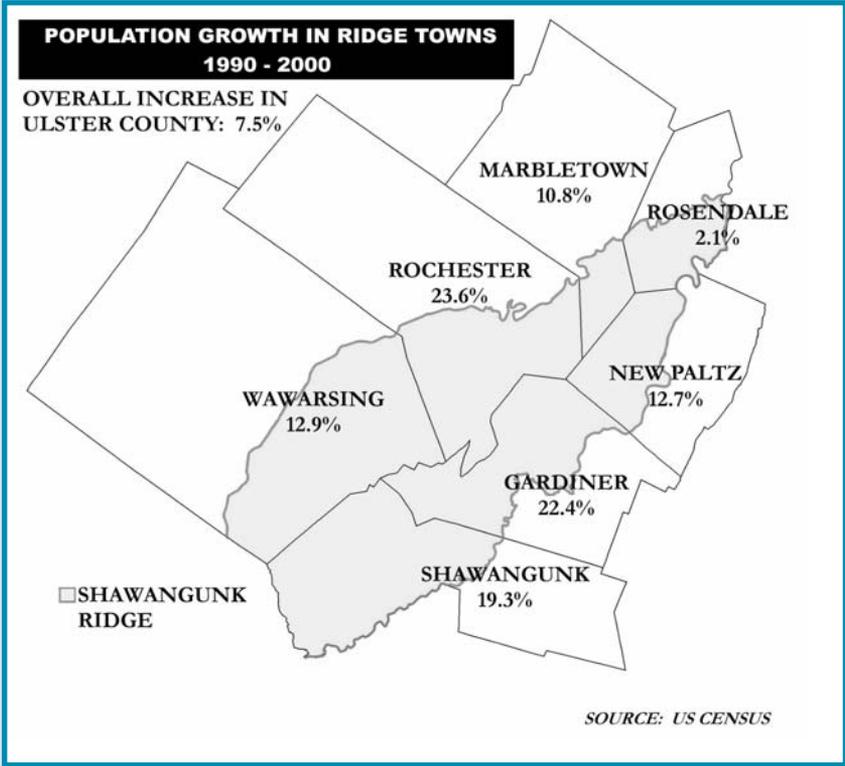
The Nature Conservancy



John Hayes



Balancing Development and Conservation



Planning for a Whole Landscape

Nationwide, local leaders, land-use planners, economists, and conservation biologists are recognizing the importance of communities working together to achieve “whole landscape planning.” This approach can maintain the special places that enrich our lives, protect natural diversity, and give our homes a special “sense of place” — while allowing appropriate development to sustain our local economy.

Planning for whole landscapes requires analysis and understanding of what makes a place “tick.” In the Shawangunks, science tells us that unbroken stretches of forest, wetlands, and streams and the recurrence of forest fires are all essential to keeping the Shawangunk’s unique ecology “ticking.”

Gary Kitchen

Ruth Smiley



Maintaining an Intact Landscape

The diversity of plants and animals, healthy forests, and clean water found in the Shawangunks are there because the mountain systems of forests, streams, and wetlands are essentially *intact*. This means that the ridge's natural areas are still relatively unbroken, or unfragmented, by roads, subdivisions, power lines, and other built infrastructure that can diminish how natural areas function.

Fragmentation by Roads and Development Can:

- Divide wildlife populations;
- Cause changes in water flow and soil cover; and
- Rapidly spread non-native plants and animals, displacing native species.

In the Shawangunks, these changes would be very difficult, or impossible, to reverse. Fragmentation would diminish the value of the ridge as a natural area, and as a draw for people.

As residential development in the Walkill and Rondout Valleys continues, it will be vitally important to protect the natural systems of the Shawangunks from fragmentation, so that the ridge can continue to flourish and to sustain our communities.

Protecting the Slopes of the Ridge

Much of the land at the base and on the slopes of the ridge is agricultural, or was farmed earlier in the 20th century. This open space is valuable for farming, for its scenic quality, for residential development, and as a transition from our more densely populated areas to the unbroken forests of the ridge.

Many of these slope lands contain sensitive wildlife and plant communities. Protecting these areas helps keep the ecosystem intact — *preventing fragmentation*, or the breakup of habitats that can cause species to decline and even disappear. These slope areas — including open fields, wetlands, and forests — are part of the ridge's ecology and need careful planning. Ridge towns are increasingly challenged to plan for these diverse and sometimes conflicting uses.

Roland Bahret



THE SHAWANGUNK RIDGE BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP is composed of non-profit and public agencies dedicated to protecting sensitive habitat and other natural resources of the Shawangunk Mountains. Partners include the Cragmoor Association, Friends of the Shawangunks, Mohonk Preserve, The Nature Conservancy, New York Natural Heritage Program, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, New York State Museum, Open Space Institute, Palisades Interstate Park Commission, and New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

This rugged landscape is renowned for the biodiversity — or variety of life — that thrives in these summit lands, surrounded by the villages, towns, and road networks of an increasingly developed region.

Informed by field research and scientific analysis, partners manage over 40,000 protected acres of the Shawangunks, provide environmental education, and work with local communities to preserve open space on the slopes of the ridge.

For more information about the Partnership's Green Assets project and for referrals to other partners, contact:

Minnewaska State Park Preserve (845) 255-0752

Mohonk Preserve (845) 255-0919

Open Space Institute (212) 629-3981

The Nature Conservancy (845) 255-9051

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