

*Land—
they don't make it
anymore.*

—WILL ROGERS



sparc
NEWS

THE STEWART PARK AND RESERVE COALITION BULLETIN - FALL 2010

Draft State Forest Strategic Plan

The NYS DEC has basically sprung this on us. They did a press release on September 3, but we were not included and just heard about this policy document three days ago.

There's no doubt that any proposals and plans contained in these 300 plus pages apply to Stewart State Forest. To quote the DEC, "The plan will guide management of the 786,000-acre state forest holdings. . . There are 442 State Forest Units, located in every region of New York. This does not include the Adirondack and Catskill parks, home to the constitutionally protected Forest Preserve. Timber management is an integral part of activity in State Forest Units, in contrast to management of the Forest Preserve, where no timber harvest is allowed under the . . . "forever wild" provision."

It's important to note that the document is also entitled the "Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement". This raises a lot of questions about the process and suggests the intent is to put approval of the plan on a fast track.

Unfortunately, by the time you read this article the only local hearing will already have been held at the DEC Region 3 headquarters in New Paltz on Thursday, September 23rd. (An email will go to our list in the meanwhile.) The comment period on the plan continues until October 29, 2010, which is not sufficient time, we believe, to read and digest such a long document.

SPARC will attend the hearing and then send additional information to our email addresses. There are additional hear-

ings as follows: Schenectady on September 28th, Long Island City on September 30th, and Stony Brook on September 30th.

Again, from the DEC website, they see our state forests as serving the following purposes. (to quote)

- Allowing for the sustainable use of natural resources.
- Providing watershed protection
- Serving as a valuable source for the state's forest products industry.
- Providing hundreds of thousands of annual visitors with access to lands for hunting, fishing, camping, boating, snowmobiling, and other activities.

Currently, state forests are subject to Article 9 of Environmental Conservation Law (ECL). The following are some examples of the provisions of this law:

- exercise care, custody and control of state lands
- enter into stewardship agreements with any person or persons for the purposes of preserving, maintaining, or enhancing a state-owned natural resource or portion thereof
- sell the trees, timber and other products on State Forest lands outside the forest preserve [Catskills and Adirondacks]
- enter into leases for the purpose of aiding in discovering and removing oil or gas from, or for storage of gas or oil on State Forest lands outside the forest preserve.

If you have a computer, look for a copy of the draft plan and other information on the NYS DEC website at www.dec.ny.gov/lands/64567.html.

Now we have something new that needs attention. And to be continued.

EPA Hearing on Fracking

SPARC and Sierra member Jurgen Wekerle and SPARC president Sandra Kissam drove to Binghamton this past Wednesday, September 15, to give testimony at a much publicized hearing sponsored by the EPA (federal Environmental Protection Agency). The agency is preparing an extensive study on hydraulic fracturing (fracking) as a drilling method for obtaining natural gas.

We testified at the meeting because SPARC, as we wrote in our last newsletter, has decided to oppose fracking and support groups such as the Catskill Mountainkeeper, that are taking the lead on this issue.

The EPA wants to investigate the impacts that the fracking process has on water resources. For example, says EPA, "It is estimated that it takes two to five million gallons of water to drill and fracture a well". This water can come from ground or surface water and cause decreased stream flows, lowering of the water tables or other problems. The process also injects fluids containing chemicals deep into the ground, which is followed by wastewater returning to the surface. There is the potential for runoff to streams from spills, leaks, accidents, as well as contamination of drinking wells and/or surface drinking water supplies.

It is also necessary to store/contain the wastewater and these pits can leak, spill or leach underground. And then there is the inability of most treatment systems to handle and filter out the contaminants in this wastewater.

This gas drilling has occurred across the country in recent years, and there have been many unforeseen negative consequences. Some of these were documented in a film called "Gasland", that was produced by Josh Fox from Pennsylvania. But beyond that, hundreds of incidents/complaints have been recorded by authorities in Pennsylvania where fracking has been allowed, and the state has been amending their regulations. For example, the DEP there ordered a drilling firm to plug

three of their wells because they had contaminated the drinking water in 14 homes.

Because the Stewart lands were saved as a 'state forest' or reforestation area, mining is a potentially legal activity on the land, and one speaker said that 10% of State Forest land has been leased for gas drilling (primarily in the western part of the state)..

Jurgen and Sandra were very impressed with the hearing they attended. In one four-hour session, about 100 people were able to speak (with a time limit of two minutes each) and a lot of information came out. The majority of speakers were opposed to or worried about fracking, although some supported it. The EPA held four of these sessions over the course of two days and the speaking slots were filled. They will accept comments through September 28th and they may be emailed to: hydraulic.fracturing@epa.gov. Please identify your comments with the title 'Hydraulic Fracturing Study—Comments.' You can also mail comments to EPA and address them to Jill Dean, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Mailcode

NEW MAP with TRAILS



SPARC has a new and updated Stewart State Forest map. Same size (11x17) and full color, but this version have the new road, the new parking spaces and the current trails added. Get yours at **Wheel and Heel** in Fishkill or from **SPARC**. The map is available for a \$5.00 donation to SPARC.

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In this connection, Wes Gillingham, who is the Program Director of Catskill Mountainkeeper, will be the featured speaker at SPARC's Rudy Vallet Memorial Dinner on October 29th. when he will lay out the issues for us (using Powerpoint).

We are excited that he will be with us.

Giles Pond

SPARC and Mearns Bird Club member Claudia Perretti is a busy person, but not too busy to post herself smack in the middle of shrubs and other dense vegetation, in hot weather or whatever, to fulfill her mission: surveying the birds and other wildlife at Giles Pond in Stewart State Forest. She is doing this to discover who the nesters are and other avian and herptile residents and visitors as well.

Said Claudia, "It wasn't easy this past spring (mid-May to mid-June). Hot, hot, hot along with eight or ten ticks found after every visit." But she didn't abandon her post and her observations will be turned into a report for the DEC.

Giles is a small pond compared to some others at Stewart, but the critters love it, all the same. (Just a tidbit: a nighthawk was hunting [not typical] in broad daylight) And Claudia? "Yes, I'll do it again next year", she says. We, at SPARC, eagerly await the news and the numbers.

What About Those New TRP Guidelines

SPARC's last newsletter (Spring-Summer 2010) featured a long article outlining conflicts between dog training groups and other users, including hikers, bike riders, and horseback riders, at Stewart State Forest. In the summer (2009) SPARC formed a committee, even as there was newspaper coverage of the issues, followed by a SPARC-sponsored September meeting featuring retired DEC forester Fred Gerty. Meanwhile the committee met with DEC staffers including Regional Director Willie Jane-way at their Region 3 Office and were assured that the Department would investigate the complaints and consider changes in policy.

The DEC did follow through and in January 2010 our committee met again with Region 3 staff and were presented with a set of "Guidelines for Stewart State Forest Temporary Revocable Permits", which were also a topic at the DEC sponsored annual User Group meeting held last February 11th, 2010.

So, what impact did these new guidelines have on the different groups that use the Forest? It looks like they are working. Users informally report that there is less vehicle traffic on the internal roads, that different groups are much more courteous and considerate with each other. The guidelines also reserved more weekends when no organized TRP activities could be scheduled, freeing up these weekends for individual and small group users. It seems that the DEC, the managers of the Forest, have made a positive difference with their new policies, and SPARC commends them.

But the complainers should be commended also. The lesson is when there are problems, they shouldn't be ignored. Stirring the pot is a good thing, and causing some discomfort leads to constructive action with everyone better off because of it.



Missing Kelly

Dear Kelly,

We miss you so much. July was a very sad month because you left us on Friday, the 16th. Who is going to walk the lands and roads the way that you did for years, day in and day out, and write about all the birds and other creatures you saw and loved. Who is going to observe and sometimes complain and often explain to others the importance of nature at Stewart. Who will fill your shoes and carry your walking stick and share with SPARC and with others what needs to be observed, corrected, documented, loved—on those wonderful acres that so many people now enjoy, a treasure with fields, woodlands, wetlands, ponds and so much wildlife. You truly fulfilled your stewardship of the Forest, and all have benefited.

Therefore we want a pond named after you. We want Restoration Pond to stay just as it is, but we want to change its name as a tribute to you. You were the one who discovered the nesting Pied billed grebes at the pond and so we want it to be **Kelly's Pond** because your spirit has left its mark there. We still hear your enthusiasm and eagerness to share, and want you to be remembered in the dynamics of the pond's wild inhabitants using its banks and plants and the sky over it.

To those who wish, please send a letter to **Forester Jeff Wiegert** of the DEC calling for Restoration Pond to become Kelly's Pond. His email is jawieger@gw.dec.state.ny.us.

Thank you.

Other Land Use Efforts

Benedict Park is near a tipping point. The DEC gave a green light to the plans for ballfields, and the Town of Montgomery is not tending to the sedge wren habitat. Right now there is a little time to make a difference. Contact Sandra Kissam if you want to help. Call 845 564-3018.

The Vanderbilt Mansion in Hyde Park is planning a big clearcut of 100-year old trees. If you want more info call Donna Zulch in Dutchess County at 845 876-8787. She is heading up a petition campaign with others.

Once again this year, the **Stewart State Forest Bike Tour**, formerly known as "Bike the Buffer," faced threats of rain... luckily, though, the Forest missed the storms and only suffered a few scattered showers. As a result, cyclists enjoyed a relatively dry ride, though many were proud to show off any mud they brought back with them from the trails. The ride was a few weeks earlier, on June 6, and though we got brochures out a tad late, it was the largest ride by far, with over 200 riders coming out to enjoy the trails of Stewart. Once again, our volunteers carried the day, with **Jeff Montanye**, **Bill Shields**, and **Mike Sturm** trailblazing and marking all-new routes for all skill levels. Our food and drink sponsors made sure everyone was fed –from pie to beer, we had it covered! **Gilded Otter**, **Dines Farms**, **Kezialain farms**, **Soons Orchards**, **Scotty's Country Kitchen**, **T & M II Go**, **Glebocki Farms**, and **Blueberry Mountain** all provided local drink and food, well-earned by riders cranking out the miles. Free massage from **For Your Well-Being Massage & Yoga**, bike repair and great prizes from **Wheel and Heel**, a nature walk & talk with **John**

Yizarry and fun demo bikes from **Beacon Cycles** rounded out the day.

Thanks to our great sponsors and riders, the ride cleared over \$3,500 to support SPARC's continued efforts to protect and enhance the lands. In addition to the folks above, a big thank you to: (*Dialed in*) **Wheel n' Heel**, **Wappingers Falls** | **Ace Self Storage**, **Newburgh & Hyde Park** | **The Print Shop**, **Newburgh** | **Judelson, Giordano & Siegel, CPA, PC**, **Middletown** | **Beacon Cycles** | **Assistacomp**, **Bullville**; (*In the Zone*) | **Serene Foam Corp.** | **Bryan's Bikes** | **Colden Manor at Spruce Lodge** | **The Bicycle Doctor** | **Otterkill Animal Hospital**; (*Bunny Hop*) **Gene's Autowaxing Center** | **American Icon Screen Printing**. Also thanks to **New Windsor Volunteer Ambulance Corps.** and the **Department of Environmental Conservation**. Last but not least, thanks to all the volunteers who helped make our 11th annual ride the best ever!

For photos and more on the ride, visit www.SPARCride.com or SPARC's Facebook page. The 2011 bike tour committee is forming now –to help out, e-mail Sharon (sharon@soons.us).

SPARC'S 6TH ANNUAL

Rudy Vallet Memorial Dinner

And our 5th year since we settled with New York State and saved the Stewart Buffer Lands as Stewart State Forest, making 2010 an important time marker.

Our evening will be on **October 29, 2010** at the **Colden Manor at Spruce Lodge**, located as always on Rt. 17K in the hamlet of Coldenham, near Ridge Road (which leads onto the Forest). Again the evening will start at 6:30, with (new!) hot and cold appetizers on the menu to go with the Cash Bar. Dessert is being donated by **Soons Orchards**, meaning delicious homemade pie with our coffee.

Wonderful items and services will be offered at our **Silent Auction**.

Yes, our speaker will be **Wes Gillingham**, the dynamic and dedicated **Program Director of Catskill Mountainkeeper**, and in Binghamton he commented with spirit and conviction. After his presentation he will take questions and let us in on the environmental struggle around gas drilling. Wes lives in Livingston Manor on an organic farm with his family. He is one of a growing group of people who live "off the grid", and he has been working with environmental issues for 30 years. The Catskill Mountainkeeper organization was started in 2007 with Wes as one of its founding members.

Also at the dinner we will be giving SPARC's environmental award to retiring Board member, **Michael Serinsky**, and to the Chair of our Stewart State Forest Bike Tour, **Sharon Soons**.

This year we are saddened by the loss of Board member **Kelly Sheridan** (see separate article), and a family member will share with us her many achievements. We are also so pleased to honor a past activist who worked tirelessly during the 1990's to save the Buffer Lands, a dedicated and fearless member of both the Orange County Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs and SPARC, **Frank Reggero**, whose award 'in memorium' will be accepted by his sister, Michele Starkey, also joining us that evening.

The evening's cost remains the same as the last several years, \$45 per person, and your check and reservation can be sent to SPARC at Box 90, Blooming Grove, N.Y. 10914. For information send email to sparc@frontiernet.net.



Fix it! Debby of Wheel and Heel makes sure the bikes are ready to roll!



Brooklyn in da' Forest! This group of riders trekked up from Brooklyn to enjoy a day in the Forest.



Great Ride! Great Food! Post-ride noshing in your new 2010 SSF Bike Tour T-shirt – what could be better?



Uber Vols! Jeff, Mike and Bill, route designers and markers, share a post-ride moment.

Another Chance to Pitch In

Lynn Barber is a busy SPARC Board Member who also heads up the O.C. Audubon Society, leading field trips and other activities. But she still finds time to organize and lead our regular **highway cleanups**.

We are scheduled to go out on the road again with Lynn, joining her for the sweep on **October 17, 2010**. This is a Sunday and we

need your help to make the 2-mile stretch look neat and clean in a couple of hours.

Please call **Lynn at 845 744-6047** and reserve your spot. Even picking trash is satisfying when it's with others and you can see how nice the shoulders look when we're done. Lynn will tell you what you need and what we will provide. And we hope to see the great people that have helped out before.

Dear Members and Friends of SPARC

We sincerely thank the following, who have donated to SPARC since last spring 2010. Your moral support, as well as your donations, means very much to us. Through all these years we have been a completely grassroots organization and individual donations have kept us moving forward.

Again, thank you.

The SPARC Board

Edmund Armento
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Michele Starkey
Beth Tersillo
Jean Watson
Rosemarie Werkman
Woodbury Field and Stream
Margaret Wort

(We apologize for any omissions,
please inform us of any errors.)

UPCOMING EVENTS

September 28th, 2010, Tuesday
Stewart Airport Commission Meeting, 8:30 AM, Stewart Airport Administration Building

October 29th, 2010, Friday
Rudy Vallet Memorial Dinner, The Colden Manor at Spruce Lodge, Montgomery, Rt. 17K, Call SPARC for info at 845-564-3018.

SPARC SEEKS NEW BOARD MEMBERS

SPARC wishes to encourage interested individuals to apply to **join the Board of SPARC**. These would be volunteer positions, involving monthly meetings and other responsibilities. Board members are part of the decision-making process.

If you wish to be considered please send a brief email to us at **sparc@frontiernet.net**. We will contact you with information on the acceptance process.

Thank you for your interest.

Dennis Reistad

Sadly, Dennis Reistad passed away on August 19th. He was a longtime member and supporter of SPARC and extremely active with the Black Rock Fish & Game Club. A great lover of the outdoors, he enjoyed sharing stories about his many experiences.

We offer our sympathy to his family and close friends, and we miss him also.

I Want to Help SPARC Protect the Land

- * I want to **join** / **renew my membership in SPARC**,
Family/Individual \$15/yr___; Organization \$50/yr___; Member/Sponsor \$50/yr___
- * I want to **support SPARC with a donation**. For a completely tax deductible contribution, make your check payable to the Open Space Institute / note SPARC on the memo line.
Supporter \$25___, Sponsor \$50___, Benefactor \$100___, Other \$___.
- * I want to **help** (mailings, fundraising, clean-ups, phone campaigns, etc.).
Call ___day, ___evening.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Date: _____

Make your check Payable to: SPARC. Mail to: SPARC, Box 90, Blooming Grove, NY 10914

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