



ECOS NEWS

ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse



ECOS provides environmental experiences and education for youth and adults to develop enjoyment and understanding of the natural world and foster action to preserve it.

Celebrating Our 51st Year in Environmental Education

Volume LI

Number 2

February / March 2023

Annual Dinner

Tuesday, April 11, 2023

SUNY Schenectady

Guest Speaker: John I. Garver, PhD, Professor of Geology, Union College



See insert for reservations

Save the Date

Annual Meeting March 16, 2023, 6 pm

ECOS NEWS

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RECENT LOSSES

—*Ruth Bonn*

ECOS has lost two important members of the ECOS family in the last few months.

Nancy Slack, a member since ECOS' beginnings, was honored with ECOS' Rachel Carson Award in November. A few days before Christmas, she, very unexpectedly, suffered a massive stroke. Many ECOS members know Nancy as a leader and organizer of Tuesday Nature walks. Nancy was a regular participant in the Tuesday winter outings as well. Additionally, she was teaching a class at her home on mosses and lichens, singing in a choral group, learning to play the dulcimer, folk dancing, writing articles and more. She was planning to lead a trip to the Brant Lake bog for ECOS in the spring, and to give a talk to ECOS in April. She never slowed down. On the day of the stroke, she had been cross country skiing in the morning and was with friends, listening to music, when she collapsed. The award cited her research on ecosystems, especially in the Adirondacks, and her generosity in sharing her knowledge and understanding of the natural world with her students, friends, readers of her writing, and ECOS members.

Ed Kautz, who was an ECOS volunteer extraordinaire, succumbed to cancer in November. The Board presented him with a Special Volunteer Award, at his home, just days before he died. Ed volunteered with ECOS as a leader of nature walks and leader of ski trips. He also taught in the ECOS summer program with the City schools, and served on the ECOS Board. Ed was an enthusiastic and energetic outdoors person, a skilled cross-country skier, a cyclist and a hiker, as well as a bow hunter. He was also a folk dancer and a skilled yodeler! By profession, he was a wildlife biologist. He had a deep understanding of the natural world and the interdependence between creatures and their habitat. Taking a walk or ski with Ed could be a revelation. From a few tracks or droppings or bits of a pine cone, Ed could tell a story describing the hidden lives of animals in their habitat. He opened the eyes of many to see the natural world around them with wonder and appreciation.

ECOS will be poorer without these two extraordinary members.



Josh Bennett, Award winner Nancy Slack, Ruth Bonn
at the Rachel Carson Dinner

PRESIDENTS COLUMN —*Josh Bennett*

Encouraging people to get outside and experience nature is a primary goal of ECOS. “Getting outside” could mean climbing an Adirondack high peak or an epic through hike, but often it’s something much closer to home.

We are extremely lucky in the Capital District to have a large number of trail systems conveniently located near population centers. In many cases, these trails are a walkable (or bikeable) distance from homes, which greatly lowers the barrier for access. It’s easy to get a quick impromptu hike on a weekday evening, or perhaps convince someone to try something new.

While experiencing local trail systems, you intuitively know that it didn’t take a multi-hour drive up the Northway to get to the trailhead. Your cellphone gets a solid signal. But you are still solidly immersed in the natural environment. I’ve had a staredown with a coyote in Schenectady’s Central Park probably within a few hundred feet of Route 7. Pine Bush trails are at times mere yards from two interstate highways, but it’s rare to spend time there and not see deer. Tivoli Park in Albany had a beaver dam just out of sight of I-90. While not in the Capital District, I’ve seen black bear on nature trails in northern New Jersey within 20 miles of Manhattan.

These trail systems involve unique challenges not encountered in more remote trails systems. Traffic is often very high, so trails must be carefully designed to minimize erosion. Often this requires lots of careful grading or hardening. This is especially true with the clay-based soils common in the Capital District that are impervious to water. Constant upkeep is also necessary. In addition, space limitations often determine trail placement. In large wilderness areas, trails can simply be rerouted to avoid a problem area. With more compact systems, creative solutions are often required.

Some of these local trail systems have been planned from inception, but many were not. Many trails were cut decades ago with little regard for land ownership. This is obviously a practice that’s frowned upon today. Property boundaries are often not posted, so many of these trails have seen long-term use with trail users having no recognition that they were crossing from public to private land. Lest you think that such use is exclusive to kids on BMX bikes, recognize that ECOS-led hikes on the John Brown trails in Niskayuna prior to 2009 crossed onto private land.

The progression of development in the Capital District extends into formerly undeveloped areas which, in recent years has led to conflicts between this traditional “bootleg” trail use and owner/land management organizations. There are a number of success stories locally where trail user organizations have brokered successful compromises with land owner/management organizations to allow development while maximizing the trails that can be retained. Sometimes this solution is as simple as land swaps or easements that prevent segregation of trail systems. The easement connecting the current Mohawk State Park trails with the John Brown trail system on Niskayuna town land is one such example. In other cases, a portion of land not planned for development can either be sold to a government or trail organization. Local examples include the Daniels Road trails in Saratoga and separate town parks in Delmar and Bethlehem. In some cases like Schenectady’s Central Park, a clear-eyed examination of the legal liability issues resolved one commonly noted concern.

There are also some less successful attempts, including the trails adjacent to the STEP (Saratoga Technology Energy Park) trails in Malta. These trails spanned STEP land, public land, and private land. The trails on private land have recently been posted as off-limits.

As I write this column, one local legacy trail system is being affected. A ten-mile trail system currently spans the land on both sides of the Mohawk-Hudson bike trail, in and adjacent to the Colonie Town Park. A portion of the trail system on the south side lies on land currently planned for development. As noted in a column in the Albany Times Union on January 10, 2023, a relatively new organization the “Friends of Colonie Town Park Trails”, is facilitating discussions with the developer and the town to set aside a continuous portion of the land designated for recreational use. As noted in the TU article, both the town government and developer appear amenable to this idea.

As an active ECOS member, what can you do to help maintain the availability of these conveniently located trail systems?

First, respect the wishes of the owner/land manager organizations. If the intent of prohibiting access has been communicated, the ethical response is clearly to comply. If there is a “Friends of...” organization lobbying to maintain access, they lack credibility as a representative user organization if people are clearly disregarding postings and notices.

Second, if there is a trail system that you frequent and wish to support, reach out to the volunteer organizations that maintain and advocate for the trails. These organizations always exist, however the level of formality varies. Another hat that I wear is administrator of a local mountain biking organization with over 2000 members. So if I don't directly know the contact for a particular trail system in the area, I can likely point you in the right direction. If you're particularly interested in the Mohawk State Park/ John Brown trail system, I administer the "Friends of Niskayuna Trails" organization (I wear many hats).

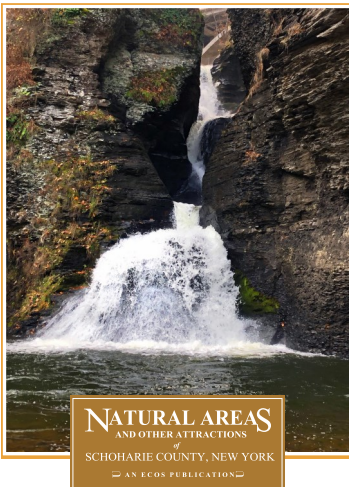
Finally, and most importantly, get out and experience these trail systems! That's why they exist. A robust user community helps justify the existence of the trail advocacy organizations and sends a clear message that these trails are valued.

The ECOS "Guide to the Natural Areas of Schoharie County" nears completion

—*Peter Tobiesen*

ECOS has published "Natural Area" guides to all of Schenectady County's surrounding counties except one—Schoharie County. Now that guide is in its final stages and should be completed by the end of the month.

This guide will diverge somewhat from the formats of the other guides in that I've broadened its scope to include "other attractions." These include the county's history, much of which is relevant to its ecology, and its geology (where to find fossils and the remnants of a 380 million year old forest). I have also described only 13 "natural areas," whereas some of the other county guides have 20-30. So I have included chapters on "How to Read a Forest, a primer on forest ecology", "How Old is a Tree" and a key to the most common trees in the county to give readers a basis for understanding forests wherever they may wander.



Note on the Executive Director Position

Last month, the ECOS Executive Committee accepted the resignation of our Executive Director, John Loz. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I sincerely thank John for his service. In fact, we were happy to accept him as a volunteer member of the Board as he transitions to separate full-time employment.

ECOS reestablished the Executive Director position as a result of an intensive Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats (SWOT) analysis performed in 2021. The analysis suggested that ECOS was missing out on potential growth and outreach opportunities without a dedicated Executive Director. We took a careful look at our finances, interviewed candidates, and made a hire. Then this process was repeated a few months later. In both cases, the stability of full-time employment with benefits elsewhere was a significant draw.

ECOS operates on a budget of approximately \$50K per year, funded in approximately equal measure by grants, individual and business contributions, membership dues, and fundraising events such as the Annual Dinner and Rachel Carson Award Celebration. ECOS has operated with a slight historic positive cash flow that allows the organization to maintain cash reserves averaging a year's worth of expenses. The Board recognized that hiring an Executive Director would result in expenses that exceeded the prior levels of income. Since obtaining additional sources of revenue was a significant part of the job description, the Board concluded that the risk of committing to the additional expense was acceptable with the existing cash reserves available as a buffer.

Our level of attrition suggests that our budgeted salary may not be sufficiently competitive. The conclusions of the SWOT analysis, however, remain unchanged. So the path forward is unclear. In the short term, the Board has decided to table the hiring process until our needs are reevaluated.

In the interim, ECOS will continue to rely on our talented, knowledgeable, and dedicated volunteers to plan events and programs, lead activities, and represent ECOS at community events. These actions are primarily accomplished by the various ECOS subcommittees, as I laid out in the October/November 2022 newsletter. We are always looking for members to participate. As always, I am available for comments and questions at president@ecosny.org.

ECOS Winter “Ski/snowshoe” Outings in the NEW Normal Winter

Hi Everyone - In the past we used to plan our Ski and Snowshoe Outings based on having a reasonable probability of SNOW. In the last several years Mother Nature apparently has been more impacted by our ever heating of our planet. So good snow has been a rarity. However, we still love to get out even when the snow is crusty, icy or non-existent! In those instances, we still plan our Tuesday and Saturday outings with the appropriate winter gear! This includes Yaktrax for moderate hard/icy conditions and micro-spikes for very hard icy conditions. Hiking poles with metal tips are also recommended for these conditions.

The best thing about Winter Outings is to be out in nature looking for tracks, birds flitting around in the trees, porcupines climbing trees, etc. You might find Bluebirds, Bald Eagles, otters, depending on where we go.

—Roy Keats

We had a great outing our first Tuesday walking from Ferry Drive to the overlook just before the Lock 7 Dam. It was cloudy with a slight sprinkle in the air on occasion. Twenty-three hardy folks braved the elements! We saw many mallards in a bay off the main river, a Bald Eagle in the top of a tree on an island just below the dam, and gushing waterfalls spilling over the dam. Maybe next time we will actually have some winter weather to either ski or snowshoe on! A group picture from the start is attached. "Think SNOW!"



The third ECOS Tuesday morning outing had 14 people exploring some of the Anchor Diamond Park at Hawkwood. A tree dwelling porcupine demonstrated its remarkable climbing ability high above. Ruins of the former Mansion site were examined, with some walkers visiting there for their first time. Traction devices worn on all boots kept the group safe on the sometimes slippery and well-designed wooded paths, boardwalks and bridges, with the Delavan Creek meandering through.

The Frostbite Challenge Is On, Again!

Vischer Ferry General Store (357 Riverview Rd Rexford, NY) is once, again partnering with ECOS to encourageok, bribe....kids to get outside in the winter months! VFGS will offer a free cookie to kids under 14 year of age who complete a four-mile walk along the Towpath Trail from January 1st to March 31st.

This stretch of trail runs along the Mohawk River, from the Whipple Bridge entrance to the Lock 7 Overlook. Both ends have small parking areas. There's an additional parking lot midway, at the end of Ferry Drive. The four-mile challenge can be done in either direction, on one day, or in sections on different days.

First, send an email to celikECOS@gmail.com to let ECOS know that you are undertaking the challenge.

After completing the four miles, the family may go to Vischer Ferry General Store and tell them that the child has completed the four miles! Vischer Ferry will jot down the child's name and age, email it to ECOS, and give the child a cookie. They might even like to see photos of the walk, as well.

To document completion, the child (or parent) should email two digital photos of themselves on the path, one near each end of the walk, with their name and age to: celikECOS@gmail.com . If parents give permission to publish the names and/or photos of the participants on the ECOS website, Facebook page or newsletter, please state so with the photos.

For the Whipple Bridge entrance: A small parking pull-off area is available directly across from the intersection of Riverview Road and Van Vranken Road.

For the Lock 7 overlook entrance: A parking area can be found by going down the hill toward the Mohawk at the intersection of Riverview and Sugar Hill roads. A blue sign, "Vischer Ferry Power Plant" leads to the parking lot from Riverview Road.

Note: The Vischer Ferry Parking Lot at the end of Ferry Drive makes a good midpoint location along the trail for parking and walking the trail in sections. This central parking lot is near Vischer Ferry General Store.

Trail Map link:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1eWQSDsaEz4cc2ZKxH DU22AxmXhga3oeZ&ll=42.80279888164603%2C-73.78720474999997&z=13>



ECOS Speaker Series

—Sarah Celik

Our Speaker Series continues via Zoom on the **3rd Thursday of each month at 7 PM**. Please join us for these interesting one hour presentations from the comfort of your home! You can click on the Zoom Links from the reminder Mailchimp sent to your email address (if you don't see them, check your spam folder) OR from the ECOS website calendar found at ecosny.org

On **February 16th** Jeff Leon, owner and steward of Strawberry Fields Nature Preserve in Amsterdam will present, "Road to Net Zero." Jeff will share the story about his family home, working farm, and nature preserve with public trails and explain how it operates on a net zero sustainable basis.

On **March 16th** Josh Stiller, a Game Bird Biologist with the Division of Fish and Wildlife will provide us with a look into the current waterfowl research projects.

On **January 19th** Nick Klemczak, Director of the Schenectady Soil & Water Conservation District, presented via Zoom an excellent overview of the history, structure, mission and goals of the Conservation District. He shared photos and descriptions of recent and upcoming projects. Numerous attendees expressed amazement at the sheer scope and diversity of the projects that the Conservation District manages, ranging from their Adopt-A-Space Flower Program, to habitat enhancement, to Preserve maintenance, technical assistance to farmers, composting, recycling, tree planting, to name a few.

Nick expressed an interest in collaborating with ECOS to help with trail stewardship in the Preserves. Those interested should send an email of interest to Steve Jones: doniphin.jones@gmail.com

2023 CALENDAR

Tuesday Ski Outings

Date	Trip Leader
February 7, 2023	Karen Wang
February 14, 2023	Rich Vertigan
February 21, 2023	Don Orr
February 28, 2023	Margie Litwin

Saturday Ski Outings

Date	Leader
February 4, 2023	Andy Kulmatiski
February 11, 2023	Don Orr
February 18, 2023	Josh Bennett
February 25, 2023	Bruce Bonacquist

Zoom Speaker Series

Thursday, February 16, 2023, Jeff Leon

Thursday March 16, 2023, Josh Stiller

ANNUAL MEETING, Thursday, March 16, 2023 via Zoom

ANNUAL DINNER, Tuesday, April 11, 2023, SUNY Schenectady

For addresses and additional details on walks or other events visit the calendar on our website: www.ecosny.org

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse

Please check your membership contribution level.

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<input type="checkbox"/> \$10 Student	<input type="checkbox"/> \$500 Patron	

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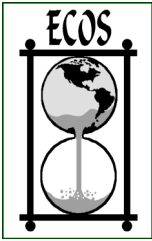
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☐ As a current GE employee my contribution is eligible for GE Foundation Matching Funds. I have registered with GE for the matching gift by computer at www.gefoundation.com. If you do not have computer access, call customer service at 1-800-305-0669.

☐ My employer will match my contribution. I've enclosed my matching gift form.

☐ I would like to be a volunteer. Please send me more information.



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ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse is located in the Niskayuna Community Center, 2682 Aqueduct Rd. Niskayuna, NY.

Adopt a Trail!

ECOS is forming a Trail Stewardship Initiative with Schenectady's Soil and Water Conservation District, which officially oversees and manages the Schenectady County Nature Preserves, along with the section of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike Hike Trail from the Schenectady County Community College west to the Montgomery County line. ECOS has a long-standing tradition of helping with trail maintenance, sign posting, and litter removal in our parks and along our roads, but the Initiative provides an organized and consistent framework, led by the professionals who know well the parks and their needs. In addition to clean up, trail widening, brush and tree removal, members may want to choose one park and serve as a steward, walking it several times a year to check what needs to be done and what might be improved. Joining the group won't commit you to specific activities and duties (unless you do want to be a steward), but will provide us with a pool of interested volunteers that we can tap when needs arise. ReTree Schenectady is organized in a somewhat similar fashion, and has been amazingly successful for decades. If you are interested in joining, please contact Nick Klemczak at nickklemczaksswcd@yahoo.com, or Steve Jones at doniphin.jones@gmail.com.

Union College Intern

ECOS will be benefitting from the skills and energy of a Union College Intern this quarter. Thomas Schrader is a junior at Union who is double majoring in Environmental Policy and French. He is particularly interested in the horticulture of native plants, and rebuilding habitat through gardening.

Thomas will be helping ECOS reach more people with our programs and activities by providing help a few hours per week with our social media. Check our webpage at ecosny.org or tour the ECOS Facebook page to see the activity posts that Thomas will be keeping current for us.

ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse is a non-political, not-for-profit organization. Our mission is to provide environmental information and educational opportunities that enhance appreciation of the natural world, build a community that is aware and knowledgeable about environmental issues, and advocate informed action to preserve our natural resources. ECOS is funded through the support of our members and the community.