

Conservation Advisory Council, Town of New Lebanon, New York

Meeting Minutes

Monday, February 8, 2016, Samson Environmental Center, Darrow School

Members present: Cynthia Creech, David Farren, Jack Lancto

Guests: Ingrid Haeckel (Hudson River Estuary Program), Eric Johnson

Presenters: Gretchen Stevens (Hudsonia, Ltd.), Conrad Vispo (Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program)

The meeting was called to order at 6:40 P.M.

Note that snow had fallen since late afternoon, making the roads slippery, and continued falling throughout the meeting. Attendance was likely less than it might otherwise have been.

We started with introductions. Gretchen Stevens, a biologist and Hillsdale resident, has been with Hudsonia for 25 years and a member of the Hillsdale CAC since its inception. Hudsonia was founded in 1981 by biologists then teaching at Bard College and has been based at the college in Annandale, NY, ever since. As an independent, nonprofit, non-advocacy, environmental research and education institute, Hudsonia does independent scientific studies and provides full resulting information, observations and recommendations for use in public decision making. At its height, pre-2008, Hudsonia had 11 biologists on staff and now has four. Conrad Vispo, a wildlife biologist and Canaan native, has been at Hawthorne Valley Farm on Harlemlville Road with his wife Claudia Knab Vispo, a botanist, since 2001. Gretchen is co-author with the Vispos and Anna Duhon, New Lebanon resident and colleague at the Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program, of *Field Guide to the Ecology and Habitats of Columbia County*, now being written. Both Gretchen and the Vispos have assessed various sites in New Lebanon over the years, including the circumneutral bog lake off Canaan Road just above the Canaan border. An inventory of the Shaker Swamp's flora and fauna prepared by the Farmscape Ecology Program and revised in May 2012 as "A Preliminary Ecological Description" is posted on the web site of the Shaker Swamp Conservancy.

Gretchen had prepared a thorough illustrated presentation of the proposed Natural Resources Conservation Plan (NRCP) for the Town of New Lebanon. She shared a number of maps of New Lebanon, some still preliminary, to illustrate the comprehensive nature of an NRCP. After outlining salient points, she sought feedback from CAC members about features unique to New Lebanon that should not be overlooked and asked members to take as many photographs as possible, even in winter. She also cited Darrow School and the helpful work being done by the Hands to Work Program. Every Wednesday morning between 9:00 and 11:20 A.M. at the Samson Environmental Center, Craig Westcott, David Farren, two Darrow students and other Darrow staff work in QGIS to identify possible ancient forest patches, intermittent woodland pools, intermittent streams and other wetlands not currently identified on any maps of New Lebanon. The mapping will lead to site visits to corroborate these important ecological features. Volunteers willing to join this effort would be very much welcomed and would benefit from the knowledge and guidance of Gretchen and Conrad.

Gretchen provided samples of work completed by Hudsonia that could inform the New Lebanon NRCP: Strategic Conservation Plan for the Woodstock Land Conservancy, Open Space and Farmland Plan for the Town of Pleasant Valley in Dutchess County, Natural Resource Conservation Plan for the Town of Ancram in Columbia County, Dutchess County Natural Resources Inventory and Orange County Open Space Plan.

Ingrid Haeckel suggested that the CAC proactively strengthen ties to decision makers and involve them during the project's course. Cynthia Creech will attend the next Planning Board meeting and volunteered to provide then an update on the NRCP.

The next CAC meeting will be Monday, March 14, beginning at 6:30 P.M. in the Samson Environmental Center at Darrow.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 P.M.

*(Respectfully submitted by David Farren)*