

# RIDGE AND VALLEY VIEWS

*Preserving Natural Lands Since 1992*



## RVC Reflections

### A Message from Susi Tilley, RVC Executive Director

*“To be whole. To be complete. Wildness reminds us what it means to be human, what we are connected to rather than what we are separate from.”—Terry Tempest Williams*

It has been a rough year. If living during a pandemic has taught me one thing about coping, it is to go inward and to go outside! During breaks in my workday, I open my door and explore the trails in my backyard. Each time, I return to my desk feeling refreshed and centered.

Judging by the increase in visitors to our preserves, I am not alone in this. Since March 2020, more people than ever have discovered our preserves and walked our trails. One sunny day in April, we received reports of up to 100 people taking advantage of Dark Moon’s trail alone!

RVC’s pandemic experience has been similar to that of so many organizations and individuals. It has been unprecedented and uncertain. We decided that the only way through our challenges was forward. And, to move forward, we too went inward and then outward.

Through hard work, strategic decisions, support from our members, the gift of effort and hours from volunteers, and a whole lot of creativity, RVC has achieved milestones this year. However, 2020 has had a significant economic impact on our organization. The continued and increased support of our community is critical to realizing our mission to protect and steward all that has become so dear to us.

Your donation is more important than ever. It will help us keep the lights on and continue our path to improve the landscape of the Ridge and Valley region for generations to come. We thank you for remembering us in your year-end giving. Every dollar counts.

## 2020 HIGHLIGHTS Strategic Plan

Members of our Board and executive leadership participated in a six-month strategic planning process. In September, we adopted a new strategic plan with a continued focus on community conservation, stewardship of RVC preserves, and land protection in our beautiful region.

## Land Trust Accreditation

RVC completed its reaccreditation application with the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, a program of the Land Trust Alliance recognizing land conservation organizations that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. This was a rigorous process and we are proud of RVC’s status as an accredited land trust.

## Volunteers

While the 2020 Volunteer Days looked and felt different with COVID-19 restrictions, our stalwart volunteers showed up and got things done. In only five Volunteer Days this year, they worked for more than 200 hours, tackled ecological restoration, invasive plant management, and the removal of 300 pounds of trash. THANK YOU!!

## Staying Open

Despite our inability to conduct our regular educational/recreational programming, our commitment to helping people enjoy our preserves remained steadfast. We installed containers with physical trail maps, as well as a QR code linking to digital maps, at preserve entrances so that all guests from newcomers to longtime visitors could explore and feel at home.

## Building Community

Seeking opportunities to gather, we launched a virtual book club, cheered on the RVC Wrenegades in the World Series of Birding, and hosted a limited number of physically-distanced events including a Summer Solstice Hike with a bagpiper, a Leaf Peeping and Lunch gathering with a guided hike, and an October Full Moon Hike.

## Looking Forward

Looking forward, plans are underway for a 2021 Women and Their Woods retreat for women landowners that will be generously supported by a grant from our friends The Nature Conservancy, a new landowner outreach program, continued improvement of our stewardship efforts, and growing educational and recreational programming. And, of course, adding more acreage to our portfolio of protected lands!

## *“To Everything There is a Season”*

### **A Message from Margaret Schiller, Acting RVC President**

RVC’s Board of Trustees has weathered some changes during this exceptional year. Long-term president and original co-founder, Bob Canace, has resigned from that executive position. However, he will still serve on the board and direct RVC in its land protection efforts. As we continue to preserve land in our corner of New Jersey, his sage wisdom will be vital for our future success.

Dennis Briede, a Trustee since 1998, has retired from our board. Dennis is a self-taught naturalist, a walking compendium of ornithology, and has led many nature walks for RVC. “Flying” into the dark skies of 2020, Dennis led the RVC Wrenegades to first place in the World Series of Birding in March, certainly a high point for many of us at RVC.

Another long-term board member, Roman Oscada, has decided to step back. Roman had dual careers as a chemical engineer and garlic and honey farmer and made significant contributions to both the renewable energy and organic agricultural movements in both Warren and Sussex counties. We will miss both Dennis and Roman, their support and unique expertise, and wish them well on their new trails.

We are fortunate that one of our own has returned! George Schaberg, who left the board last year to travel the United States’ glorious expanse, has returned to New Jersey and has graciously accepted to serve again on our board. George has worked with Raritan Headwaters Association and is employed in real estate. George’s experience will steady our transition this upcoming year.

I was honored to be voted in as the acting president, and I will continue to serve our organization with pride. The year of Covid-19 demanded that we create new ways of sharing our passion for nature with our community. Whether it was masked, spatially-distanced hikes or remote zoom book club meetings, the wonder of nature continued to meld our devoted community. We are so grateful for your support, and we look forward to the day when we can gather again, unmasked and smiling, under a canopy of trees or a vast expanse of sky at one of our pristine preserves. Stay well.



#### **Ridge and Valley Conservancy Mission Statement**

***Ridge and Valley Conservancy is an accredited land trust that, in cooperation with strategic partners, permanently protects and stewards land in northwestern New Jersey for the benefit of natural communities.***



### **Thank You**

A special thank you to Carla Lee Lewis (pictured above with husband and RVC Trustee Bob Lewis installing new signage) for her tireless service to RVC as its stewardship coordinator. Carla’s love for the RVC preserves is evident everywhere you see an RVC logo or trail marker. Her work included invasive management plans, field monitoring, trail development and maintenance, trail map creation, volunteer day oversight, and so much more. We are grateful to have benefitted from her special talents and pleased that she will continue to serve on RVC’s Stewardship Committee.

### **Welcome**

#### **Ali Severino, RVC’s New Stewardship Coordinator**

Ali Severino joined RVC as its Stewardship Manager in October. Ali is an Ecological Landscaper and has professional experiences with field monitoring, ranging from forest health surveys to water quality assessments, to practicing ecological restoration and consulting in the state of Washington and her home state of New Jersey.

Ali believes that the only way for there to be a change in how we view the landscape is to be properly educated on our everyday interactions in our environment. We can then turn that understanding into tangible actions that could range from pulling invasive vines from a native tree in the backyard to converting a mowed lawn into a functioning pollinators’ meadow.

She is looking forward to applying her past experiences to steward the RVC land and community. When you come across Ali at one of our



## Muckshaw Ponds Preserve

In March 2020, RVC accepted the transfer of ownership of Muckshaw Ponds Preserve located in Andover and Fredon townships from The Nature Conservancy. This preserve, a 201-acre nature preserve and 333-acre farm, increases RVC's protected and managed land to more than 4,000 acres across Warren and Sussex counties. Since the acquisition, we have updated the preserve's trail system, including a new trail map (below right), launched a pilot project for deer management, and leased the 333-acre farm to the Foodshed Alliance for its SaGE program offering affordable leases to sustainable farm businesses.

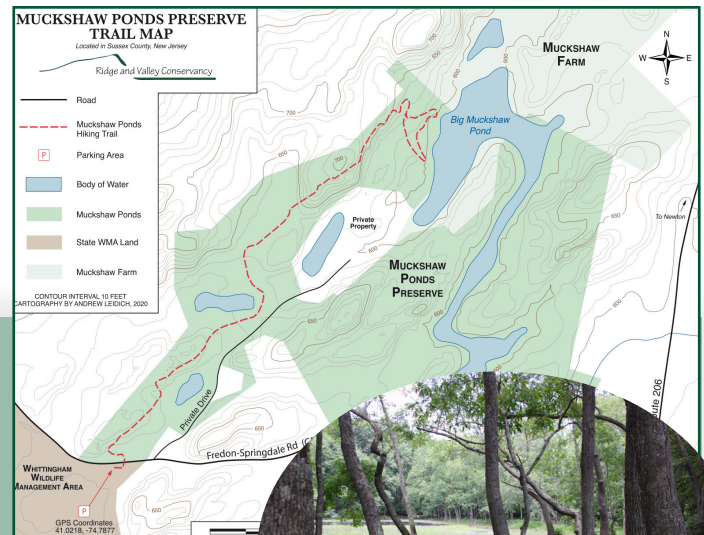
Our work with SaGE introduced us to the Ramapough Lunaape Nation Turtle Clan and its Three Sisters Medicinal Farm (TSF) on the SaGE property. Spearheaded by Turtle Clan Chief Vincent Mann and Clan Mother Michaeline Picaro, TSF empowers, creates jobs, and donates food to the Ramapough and other indigenous populations.

Farmed by members of the Turtle Clan and related communities, TSF offers hands-on education on traditional, sustainable, Native American farming methods, including three sisters planting and no-till farming. The three sisters is a traditional method of companion planting "with three plants growing symbiotically to deter weeds and pests, enrich the soil, and support each other." (Boeckmann, Catherine. "The Three Sisters: Corn, Beans, and Squash." *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, 14 May 2020, [www.almanac.com/content/three-sisters-corn-bean-and-squash](http://www.almanac.com/content/three-sisters-corn-bean-and-squash).) The no-till practice is proven to

have myriad sustainable farming benefits, including water usage reduction, soil erosion prevention, higher yields, and increases in beneficial microbes and insect support.

RVC applied on behalf of TSF for a Franklin Parker grant to fund deer fencing that would increase crop yield by at least 40%. We are pleased to announce that the grant was awarded and expect work to be completed by the spring of 2021.

We have learned a great deal from this new relationship about their culture, the land, and indigenous farming. Moved by their important work and commitment, RVC's board voted to serve as a fiscal sponsor for their foundation, the Ramapough Culture and Land Foundation, so that they can achieve 501(3)c status. We have shared beliefs in honoring and preserving our natural world and look forward to growing this relationship.



## The Ramapough Culture and Land Foundation

by Chief Vincent Mann

The Ramapough Culture and Land Foundation was created for many reasons, but one of these reasons was to steward and protect lands of cultural and spiritual significance.

We find both of these within the preserve known as Muckshaw Ponds Preserve. Our ancestors, the Munsee (who are the northern band of the Lunaape/Lenape), occupied and still do, the areas from the Raritan River through Northern NJ and Southern NY.

The area surrounding Muckshaw was undoubtedly one of those areas upon which our ancestors relied. Our ancestors quarried chert for making arrows and other tools such as knives. The farm fields of today were actually plantations of our ancestors that, like our Munsee Three Sisters Medicinal Farm today, grew corn, beans, and squash known as the three sisters, and a village site.

Working together with our fiscal sponsor, Ridge And Valley Conservancy, we hope to forge ahead to steward and protect sacred sites such as Muckshaw. We will work on ways to also allow for interpretation to the general public of these sites that are sensitive and sacred to the Ramapough Munsee and our relatives who, through diaspora, found themselves far from our collective homelands.

Our ancestors lived upon these lands for nearly 12,000 years, and just as they did then, we strive today to keep the balance between ourselves, as well as our natural world.



### Ridge and Valley Conservancy Vision Statement

*A region that is abundant in natural beauty and biodiversity protected for the future.*



## THE RIVER

She sits on the bank  
where small stones punctuate  
the surface in front of her,  
and the river ripples  
gently at her feet.  
Here the forest waits  
while the river crosses,  
tall trunks reflected  
in its flow.

This is a place  
where grief and love come  
together. She comes here to watch.  
She comes here because.

She comes in the morning  
when dreams of before  
dissolve with the light  
and she wakes  
to the thinness of things  
around her.

She comes in the evening  
after the din of distraction  
and the business of living  
have concealed all thought.  
She comes here to listen.

This is a place where knowledge fails—  
and she comes here  
to the river  
for the answer.

*"The River" by RVC supporter Elaine Koplou, published in  
Tiferet, Spring, 2020 . (Photo of Hemlock Ridge Ravine.)*

Ridge and Valley Conservancy

Winter 2020/2021

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