



## 2015 – Year in Review

Columbia County has a diverse cultural and ecological landscape. The Farmscape Ecology Program (FEP) strives to help people develop their own informed, heartfelt connection to this landscape, and consciously contribute to its future in ways that honor this rich diversity. We hope to complement the valuable work done by others in the County by integrating aspects of many disciplines (e.g., ecology, sociology, agriculture) in both original research and stimulating outreach. This year's activities, described below, illustrate our approach.

### Living Land Project

The Living Land Project continues to be at the core of our efforts. We completed the data collection with a series of in-depth interviews with twelve hunters, foresters, and foragers about their use and perception of the different habitats in Columbia County. We began analyzing four years' worth of field data, including ecological information from almost 500 sampling locations and the habitat-focused cultural information gathered through interactions with almost 1000 people. Together with our collaborators from Hudsonia Ltd., we have begun drafting chapters for the *Ecological and Cultural Field Guide to the Habitats of Columbia County* (you can follow the work in progress [here](#)) and shared results and ideas with the general public, town officials, members of conservation advisory committees, and professionals working with regional land trusts during a series of well-attended and well-received workshops this summer and fall. We are still seeking funding to allow us to complete the manuscript in a timely manner for publication in early 2017.

### “The Nature of the Place”

Conrad's book “[\*The Nature of the Place: A History of Living with the Land in Columbia County, NY\*](#)”, which was published by Adonis Press late in 2014, sold out its first printing of 750 copies. Thanks to the Columbia Land Conservancy and an anonymous donor, 75 public officials in the County received a copy as a resource for their work. The book is now being prepared for a 2<sup>nd</sup> printing and electronic publication.

### Progress of the Seasons Project

This project is our newest initiative and was launched earlier this year after discovering a rich source of meteorological and phenological data (seasonal occurrences) collected for several decades by Academies throughout NY State in the mid 1800's. We have already created a publicly accessible and searchable [database of the historical phenology data](#) and are partnering with the New York Phenology Project to bring this historical data into vibrant conversation with

modern phenological data. We are seeking support to continue to grow this unique project. This includes developing a phenology curriculum for high schools that not only connects students with the natural events observable today, but draws them into the historical data, thus providing a unique window into the changes in land use and climate right here in Columbia County. One of our immediate goals is to digitize the historical meteorological records and make them available alongside the phenology data in the online browser.

### **Agroecology**

Our research into the synergies between farming and wild nature took us once more beyond the County this year, as we became involved with habitat mapping, biological inventories, and consulting at the Farm Hub in Ulster County (see [here](#)). This engagement has already evolved into plans for more collaboration next year. At the same time, the groundwork was laid for us to collaborate with Xerces and the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) right here at Hawthorne Valley Farm, with the goal of making the Farm ever more insect friendly.

### **Wild Plants and Insects of Landscaped Wildflower Meadows**

In order to explore the potential habitat value of landscaped native-plant meadows, we continued our comparisons of a landscaped wildflower meadow and a nearby lightly grazed dry meadow in Falls Village, CT and initiated the comparison of another landscaped wildflower meadow and a neighboring old field in northwest Ghent.

### **Natural Resource Inventories**

We collaborated with Hudsonia Ltd. on a Natural Resource Inventory for the Greenport Conservation Area. Our contribution included plant, bird, butterfly and dragonfly inventories in the meadows, and a profile of historical land use on the site. We have been invited to help the New Lebanon Conservation Advisory Council with their upcoming town-wide Natural Resource Inventory.

### **Scenic Views Mapping**

Building on our “special places” mapping project, we partnered with the Columbia Land Conservancy to create a crowd-sourced map of favorite scenic views in the County through an online mapper.

### **Customized Walks and Land Biographies**

Throughout the year, we continued to lead customized walks with landowners to help them deepen their knowledge of their land and its resident plants and animals. During these walks, we share management ideas on how to safeguard and/or enhance native biodiversity. We are also completing a pair of year-long consulting projects to create land biographies of large, privately-owned parcels. These land biographies are customized and include drawing up habitat maps accompanied by management suggestions, inventories of plants and animals with photo

documentation, and archival and field research to profile aspects of land use history. We welcome inquiries from those interested in having such projects done on their land.

### **Facebook**

We completed our second full year of using Facebook to provide a glimpse into our day-to-day work and to share our exciting discoveries. So far, the page has 335 followers, but the top ‘hit’ this past year, a posting about a moose bull who wandered through Harlemlville on Sept. 23, 2015, reached 9,703 people.

### **Public Ecology Walks**

We offered 20 free public ecology walks throughout Columbia County. These usually were filled to capacity (15 people) and attracted a steady stream of new participants.

### **Presentations**

This year, we also had quite a lineup of presentations including a talk at the Northeast Natural History Conference, a poster at the Teaching the Hudson River Conference, seminars at SUNY Albany and the Conway School of Landscape Design, slide shows at several public libraries and historical societies, and field classes with farm apprentices at Stone Barn, students from Omega and Sienna College, and young students at the Kite’s Nest.

We also presented to the Columbia County Environmental Management Council, to groups of town officials and Conservation Advisory Council members, as well as a group of professionals from six regional land trusts. We are scheduled to facilitate a workshop in March 2016 at a Conference on “The Spirit of Sustainable Agriculture” at the Harvard Divinity School and anticipate another year of lively sharing of our work at a variety of venues.

### **Fellowship**

Anna received the Re:Generate fellowship, a holistic leadership development fellowship for young leaders of faith exploring vocational issues focused in the areas of food justice, sustainable agriculture, climate change and ecological resilience. She will join a total of 20 fellows from throughout North America for a three day retreat in North Carolina in January.

### **Acknowledgements**

We are grateful for the financial support from, in alphabetical order, the T. Backer Fund, Hygeia Foundation, Kalliopeia Foundation, New World Foundation, Rudolf Steiner Foundation Social Finance, Sandy River Charitable Foundation, Ole Skaarup Fund, and from almost 100 individual donors.