In 2018 the Otsego County Conservation Association will be celebrating our 50th birthday. We are truly proud to have been a part of natural resource conservation in Otsego County since 1968. From our humble roots as an organization formed to protect forest resources and the rural character of the county, we have grown into a multi-faceted organization taking part in a multitude of programs all to serve the citizens of Otsego County and help be a part of a larger group working tirelessly to conserve our valuable environment. None of this work could have been done without the generous support of our members and donors since the very beginning. We are sincerely grateful for all the help we have received over our 50 years, and hope to be able to continue our great work for another 50 more. Check in with us over the year for exciting events, OCCA history blurbs, and much more.
Letter from the President

By: Vicky Lentz
It has never ceased to amaze me when I look at all the work that OCCA’s staff, board members and our wonderful volunteers get done each year and 2017 is no exception. As you read through this report, I am sure that you too will be amazed. OCCA has been busier than ever. We have worked with the county government on several projects. We have worked with town and municipal governments. We have worked with volunteers. We have worked with schools. We have worked collaboratively with other non-profits. We have worked with….. just about everyone in some way. We, at OCCA, are determined to continue to work to keep Otsego County the wonderful place it is. But we need your help. We need you to be aware of what is going on around us. While we have to rely less and less on our current federal government, we must rely more on state and local governmental and nongovernmental organizations to be the watchdogs for our region. And we need to rely on ourselves.

What can you do? Let OCCA know what you see. If you observe something that doesn’t seem quite right, tell us. If there is something that you have a question about, ask us. If you see something that is working, tell us that, too. If there is a topic that you are interested in knowing more about, let us know. Help us continue our environmental advocacy, education and research.

As we come to the end of this year, we are again asking for your donations to keep us going. Please let me say “Thank You!” for your generous past support. While we do apply for as many grants from government sources and private foundations as we can, it is not enough. We need your contributions to keep us moving in the right direction - making Otsego County the best place it can be.

Note from the Executive Director

By: Leslie Orzetti
Greetings from Mohican Farm, home to OCCA. In my first full year as Executive Director, I have had the pleasure of getting to know a great many of you, and I am so very thankful for your support of OCCA. Without you, we would not be able to do the many successful programs we do. I am proud to say that during this year, we raised over $40,000 in small grants, foundation support and from our generous donors. With these funds we were able to carry out many programs under our pillars of Education and Outreach, Research and Management, and Policy and Planning. With the help of many volunteers and staff, we were able to recycle many items such as tennis balls, agricultural plastic, Styrofoam, and electronics; shred over 4000 pounds of paper; and dispose of many household hazardous wastes safely. We conducted 22 education programs in the form of lectures and hikes to educate our citizens on a variety of topics, carried out five invasive species eradication events, helping to slow the spread of Japanese knotweed and water chestnut, and supported boat inspections at Otsego and Canadarago lakes. In keeping with tradition, OCCA hosted Earth Festival, and was integral in planning Lakes Festival with our partners from the Otsego County Soil and Water Conservation District, Otsego Land Trust, SUNY Biological Field Station, Otsego Lake Association and the Clark Sports Center. In addition, we started three popular new programs this year: Get the Kids Out, Be Informed Lecture Series, and a citizen science stream monitoring program.

This has been a very busy year, and I am proud to call OCCA my home and my family. I look forward to another successful year, and hope to meet more of you out and about appreciating Otsego County’s natural resources.
Volunteers are essential to many of our projects. From our charity pour at Ommegang to our citizen science stream monitoring program, none of this valuable work would get done without an army of volunteers. Among our many projects volunteers helped us accomplish this year were: Household Hazardous Waste Day; invasive species control; highway clean-up; tote-bag making; Earth Festival; Lakes Festival; Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Garage Sale; and citizen science stream monitoring. Thank you for all your hard work!
OCCA has been providing nature walks in Otsego County since 2001. During 2017, OCCA conducted 13 nature walks in a wide variety of locations throughout Otsego County, from Basswood Pond State Forest in Burlington, to Robert V. Riddell State Park in Oneonta, and many places in between. We explored the world of birds at Mohican Farm and bugs at SUNY Oneonta, paddled along the Canadarago Lake shoreline, and identified winter trees at Thayer Farm.

This year we introduced Get the Kids Out!, a themed program that provides fun and exciting nature activities for families during school breaks. Get the Kids Out! was enthusiastically received by the community. Families participated in a winter scavenger hunt at Robert V. Riddell State Park, a search for amphibians at Thayer Farm, and a sensory-based exploration of Gilbert Lake State Park.

The nature walk series is an important part of our mission as it promotes APPRECIATION of our natural environment. OCCA thanks volunteer walk leaders and all of our program participants.

In late February, more than 20 people concerned about our hemlock forests gathered for a hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) workshop at Mohican Farm. Dan Snider, of the Catskill Regional Invasive Species Partnership (CRISP), demonstrated how to recognize HWA, as well as the protocols for surveying and reporting HWA infestations.

First found in the east in the mid-1950s, HWA arrived in New York in 1985. The insects themselves are almost invisible to the naked eye; they announce their presence with white, woolly egg sacks along the twigs, and by the defoliated skeletons of hemlock trees they leave behind. The Eastern hemlock is a tree of great beauty and ecological significance. Expect more outreach from OCCA on HWA in 2018.
**Recycling**

OCCA has been involved with solid waste and recycling issues for over 45 years. Whether it’s establishing recycling programs or expanding existing ones, providing volunteers, or educating the public about solid waste issues, OCCA does it. In 2017, OCCA helped organize four days for Otsego farmers to drop off used agricultural plastic film for recycling, and coordinated on-farm education activities. This effort brought in some 8,000 pounds of plastic; on-farm activities yielded another 13,000 pounds of plastic. Used agricultural plastic film is recycled into a wide variety of new products, including composite lumber, alternative pavers, and plastic bags.

OCCA’s Volunteer Recycling Committee organized the collection of Styrofoam, TerraCycle items, textiles, tennis balls, shoes and more at Earth Festival, and organized a project that created 200 sturdy, attractive reusable tote bags from plastic pet food bags. Bags were used to distribute holiday supplies through Family Services Association of Oneonta. The committee keeps up-to-date on current recycling laws and works with the Otsego County Solid Waste Department on maintaining the "How Do I Get Rid Of...?" web guide.

**Forestry**

Beginning in 2016, OCCA and Mohican Farm began planning a partnership program focusing on Forest Stewardship and Forest Invasive Species. The Forestry program uses Mohican Farm as a base of operations and as an educational facility and ‘learning lab’ modeling practices that will eventually be used on Clark Foundation properties around Cooperstown, and throughout the region. This year, the program kicked off with a special training session on the hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA), an invasive insect that threatens the health of hemlock forests in New York State (see p. 4). During the summer, community volunteers and a crew from the Headwaters Youth Conservation Corps worked on eradicating Japanese knotweed from a forested stream bank.

OCCA’s founders were concerned with forest stewardship. This partnership brings us back to our “roots.”

**Earth Festival**

This past year marked the 13th year of the Otsego County Earth Festival. OCCA is proud to be the sponsor of this great event, and we hosted over 30 different displays and vendors, in addition to presentations by the Master Gardeners of Otsego County. Climate Change was this year’s theme, and to celebrate that theme, we started a new Friday Movie Night screening the Josh Fox film, “How to Let Go of the World and Love all the Things Climate Can’t Change,” sponsored by the Cooperstown Presbyterian Church and Otsego 2000. In addition, Cooperstown native Beth Renckens Gibbons, the Managing Director of the American Society of Adaptation Professionals, served as keynote speaker. Her talk highlighted climate change, its impacts at the local level, and the resiliency that can be built into our everyday lives. Continuing at this past year’s event was the ever popular recycling opportunities. Together with our partners, we recycled an entire U-Haul of Styrofoam, over 200 tennis balls, and 4300 pounds of paper. Thank you to our Earth Festival planning team – Susan O’Handley, Rich McCaffery, Martha Clarvoe, Angelica Palmer, Mandy Robinson, and Maria Kaltenbach for all your hard work on making 2017 a success!

"In the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand and we will understand only what we are taught" -Babe Dioum
OCCA continued protecting our county’s land and waters from the threats of invasive species. Water chestnut eradication in Goodyear Lake has shifted into maintenance mode. Volunteers now have to range far and wide through the Stump Lot and Wightman’s Cove to find a small number of plants. Nonetheless, we will continue to offer opportunities, as water chestnut seeds can remain viable for years before sprouting. Also on the aquatic invasive species (AIS) front, OCCA continued to administer two three-year grants awarded by NYSDEC to prevent the proliferation of AIS. The grants cover major expenses for purchase, installation and operation of boat wash stations at launches on Canadarago and Otsego lakes, as well as the expansion of boat inspections in Cooperstown, Springfield, and Richfield. These programs have helped prevent AIS such as Hydrilla from becoming established in our lakes.

On the land, OCCA conducted three Japanese knotweed removal sessions at Mohican Farm this summer. With much hard work, 23 volunteers spent three days cutting and bagging the plants, and grubbing stubborn rhizomes out of the ground. Like the water chestnut, this will require years of work. Look for volunteer opportunities in 2018!

For the first time, OCCA participated in the regional Chesapeake Bay Watershed Forum. Executive Director Leslie Orzetti won a scholarship to attend this important event. The forum is part of the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay’s program to bring policy makers, scientists, and NGO’s together to share ideas, collaborate, and learn about programming going on the Chesapeake Bay watershed. In addition, OCCA presented our citizen science program with the Alliance for Aquatic Resource Monitoring at the regional Upper Susquehanna Watershed Forum in Binghamton.

OCCA was among only a few groups from New York represented at the larger Chesapeake Bay forum. Representation at this regional meeting is important because it puts Otsego County on the map as a headwater partner to help preserve water quality in the Chesapeake Bay, and allow us to share the many successes of not only OCCA but our partner organizations as well. We are happy to have participated in such an important collaborative event!
This year OCCA partnered with the Alliance for Aquatic Resource Monitoring (ALLARM) to start a county-wide volunteer-based citizen science stream monitoring program. Under facilitation from ALLARM, we worked with local partners from SUNY Oneonta’s Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences and the Biological Field Station; Trout Unlimited; Otsego County Soil and Water Conservation District (OCSWD); Otsego Land Trust; and the Butternut Valley Alliance to determine priority monitoring sites and water quality parameters. The initial sites chosen represent priority areas determined by OCCA and our partners and are located at previously monitored locations to continue a long-term dataset of water quality conditions in the county. Twenty-three volunteers and three schools (Morris Central School, Cooperstown Junior/Senior High School, and Milford Central School) are monitoring ten sites. Volunteer teams were given a kit to measure seven water quality parameters and will monitor the third weekend of every month. Data collected from the volunteers will become part of the Chesapeake Monitoring Network and will be shared widely with such entities as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, several universities within the monitoring network, New York Department of Environmental Conservation, and other local and regional partners. To this end, volunteers are required to pass a quality assurance plan before their data are shared within the network. Response to the program has been overwhelming, and we are looking to grow and add new sites, schools, and volunteers to the program in 2018. For more information on sites, parameters and data from our first sampling trips, please see http://occainfo.org/citizen-science-stream-monitoring/.

“Plans to protect air and water are in fact plans to protect man.”

Stewart Udall

This year, OCCA was able to support four interns at the SUNY Oneonta Biological Field Station (BFS) in Cooperstown. Funding from OCCA went to sponsor one high school, one undergraduate and two graduate interns, all of whom carried out valuable research projects in the Upper Susquehanna watershed. Jim Peterson conducted a water quality and benthic macroinvertebrate survey on Butternut Creek. He presented his work at the Upper Susquehanna Watershed Forum in Binghamton. Kayla Dolce carried out a survey of macrofungi at the BFS Upper Site as a follow-up study to a survey done in the 1970s. Laurens Central School graduate and current SUNY Oneonta student, Connor Murch studied alewife population dynamics on Otsego Lake. Finally, Elise Iwanyckyj had the opportunity to oversee monitoring within the Otsego Lake watershed as well as a project on zebra mussels in the lake. OCCA is proud to be able to sponsor a vast array of research projects in Otsego County, and are happy to support the work of our future scientists. Thanks also to Bill Harman and Matt Albright for coordinating this research and working so diligently with our interns. For more information on these research projects see the OCCA website.

Have you ever wondered where our most viable farmland is located? OCCA, in partnership with SUNY Oneonta, used math and Geographic Information Systems Technology to find where Otsego County’s most valuable farmland it located. SUNY Oneonta alumni Carl Vricella created a Land Evaluation Site Assessment model that ranked every 10 x 10-meter block of land in Otsego County with respect to its suitability for agricultural production. The model took factors like soil conditions, compatibility of agricultural parcels with surrounding uses, and distance from major highways to identify parcels in most need of protection. This will help entities like the Otsego Land Trust better target agricultural lands for conservation easements and secure funding to expand their program areas moving forward.

The LESA model identified six priority conservation areas for agriculture in Otsego County. These areas are located in the Route 20 corridor, State Highway 80 corridor, State Highway 166/28 corridors, Richfield/Plainfield, State Highway 51 corridor, and Butternut Valley/Laurens.

Using Math and Mapping to Protect Farmland
OCCA’s Circuit Rider Planner Program provides essential planning services to municipalities who lack access to a professional planner. In 2017, OCCA worked with four towns in Otsego County on issues including Geographic Information Systems, land-use planning, and environmental reviews.

In Richfield, OCCA assisted with the review of a halfway house project. In Edmeston, OCCA is working with the Planning Board to revamp the Town’s Zoning Ordinance. In Springfield, OCCA prepared the Town’s Official Zoning Map. In Otsego, OCCA conducted a training on the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act for 19 municipal officials from four towns.

In 2018, OCCA hopes to expand the reach and efficacy of this crucial program. If you are part of a Town, City or Village in need of training or planning help, please reach out to OCCA to hear more about our program.

Upstate New York has seen an uptick in applications for mid- and large-scale renewable energy projects. In Otsego and Delaware County, many towns have been caught off guard when it comes to reviewing them. Over the past year, OCCA has been assisting numerous towns in reviewing applications for renewable energy development.

Over time, it became clear that OCCA needed to revisit its position on renewable energy development. In October, OCCA adopted a new position statement on renewable energy development. Our position generally supports solar and wind applications of all sizes; however, an emphasis is placed on fair and thorough review, sustained public engagement, and a focus on transparent reviews. Please visit http://www.occainfo.org to learn more.

SEQR TRAINING

Navigating the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act can be a daunting undertaking for most people. OCCA now offers a fun, exciting training to educate municipal officials on how best to conduct a thorough, inclusive, and fair SEQRA review! If done correctly, environmental reviews can be conducted efficiently, with minimal risk of litigation. OCCA’s training was successfully piloted in the Town of Otsego on July 26, with 19 officials being trained that evening. OCCA offers this program for a flat fee of $500 and will provide training materials and Continuing Education Certifications for those who attend.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Upstate New York has seen an uptick in applications for mid- and large-scale renewable energy projects. In Otsego and Delaware County, many towns have been caught off guard when it comes to reviewing them. Over the past year, OCCA has been assisting numerous towns in reviewing applications for renewable energy development.

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Agriculture and Farmland Planning

In September 2017, the Otsego County Board of Representatives unanimously voted to adopt the 2017 Otsego County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan. The Plan charts a five-year course for the future of agricultural economic development and farmland conservation in Otsego County. The unanimous vote represented the culmination of three years of work by 13 entities, citizen volunteers, OCCA interns, and county officials.

Agriculture is a prominent part of our county’s economy accounting for nearly $66 million in sales in 2012. The 2017 plan identifies six priority recommendations and four projects that, if implemented, will strengthen our agricultural sector while preserving farmland for future generations.

To ensure that the policy recommendations and projects contained within the plan are implemented, the Otsego County Board of Representatives allocated $25,000 in funding to help Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schoharie and Otsego Counties hire an Agricultural Implementation Specialist to make sure things are done right.

Should the organizations tasked with implementing the plan continue to collaborate, the future of agriculture in the county looks bright!

Climate Resilience Planning

In March 2016, global Carbon Dioxide levels passed 400 parts per million. This marker was significant not because of the consequences of reaching this threshold, but because of what exceeding the 400 ppm threshold means for our future.

In response, OCCA has applied for approximately $500,000 in grant funding from state and federal sources to make Otsego County more resilient to the effects of climate change. Along the way, OCCA has made some amazing connections.

OCCA partnered with the Model Forest Policy Program, a national nonprofit based in Idaho, to assist us in the preparation of climate adaptation plans. In March 2017, OCCA was successful in garnering support from the Otsego County Board of Representatives to authorize us to apply for $250,000 to establish a Countywide Climate Adaptation Plan. In August 2017, OCCA partnered with the City and Town of Oneonta to submit a grant application to establish a climate-focused water management plan.

If successful in our funding applications, OCCA will be able to lay the groundwork for Otsego County to begin mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change. It is our hope that we will be able to build more connections in the coming year!

Advocacy Through Civility

Environmental issues can pit neighbor against neighbor, friend against friend, and family member against family member. In 2017, OCCA began assisting citizen advocacy groups through our Circuit Rider Planner Program to navigate state and local review processes.

OCCA’s advocacy approach focuses on using science and policy-based arguments to elevate the level of discourse concerning controversial projects. We believe civility, open dialogue, and collaboration with all parties is essential to a successful review process.

In 2017, OCCA worked with the citizen advocacy group Preserve Harpersfield to assist in the review of a 54-acre community-scale solar project. OCCA worked with the group to build the official record related to the project, coordinate communications, and organize attendance at meetings. By incorporating a civil, fact-based approach to advocacy, Preserve Harpersfield became a significant player in the review of this high-profile project.

“What is the use of a house if you haven’t got a tolerable planet to put it on?”

Henry David Thoreau
OCCA has a proud tradition of collaborating with many local and regional partners. We realize that conservation of natural resources is not confined to territories or borders, and does not happen in a vacuum. In 2017 we forged some new partnerships and cultivated existing relationships to expand our programming and reach more people. We formed new partnerships with the Alliance for Aquatic Resource Monitoring to start our citizen science stream monitoring program; the Model Forest Policy Program, Climate Solutions University, Cultivating Resilience, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to start planning for climate change in our county; Hopeful Hearts, who are raising funds for the stream monitoring program; and many local jurisdictions and advocacy groups to help promote more sustainable use of our natural resources.

Existing relationships were strengthened with new collaborative projects with the Otsego Land Trust, Otsego 2000, Mohican Farm, Otsego County Soil and Water Conservation District, Butternut Valley Alliance, Otsego Lake Association, Canadarago Lake Improvement Association, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society, Catskill Regional Invasive Species Partnership, several local municipalities and many, many others. Working efficiently and collaboratively is paramount to getting the job done, and at OCCA, we’ll continue this long-standing tradition to conserve natural resources in Otsego County and the Central New York Region.

Butternut Creek Assessment

In late 2016, OCCA joined the Otsego County Soil & Water Conservation District, the Butternut Valley Alliance, and Dr. Les Hasbargen, SUNY Oneonta, to assist with a physical assessment of the Butternut Creek watershed. OCCA participated in planning meetings, helped publicize the project and recruit volunteers, and assisted in conducting field assessments using methods developed by the Upper Susquehanna Coalition. OCCA staff walked approximately 3.5 miles of stream, documenting and recording data on bank conditions, erosion sites, invasive species, opportunities for stabilization projects, and more. The data will be used by Soil & Water and others to bring money into the county for best management practices to help improve water quality in our county and the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Environmental Studies Camp

This year OCCA partnered with the Otsego Land Trust and the Schoharie River Center to offer an environmental studies camp to students from Morris, Worcester, and Schenevus Central Schools. Under leadership from the Otsego Land Trust, over 30 students visited seven sites around Otsego County and learned everything from aquatic resources sampling to basic forestry techniques. OCCA and Mohican Farm hosted the first day of each camp, introducing students to the natural resources of Otsego County, and, under tutelage from the Schoharie River Center, basic stream sampling techniques. Students then visited several other sites in the county including Otsego Land Trust sites Parslow Road and Fetterley Forest Conservation Areas, Greenwoods Conservancy, and a site of local importance to each school, bringing conservation back to the students’ backyard.

Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success.”

Henry Ford
## Financial Disclosures

### Statement of Financial Position
**Year Ending December 31, 2016**

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<th>Assets</th>
<th>Current Assets</th>
<th>Other Assets</th>
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### Statement of Activities
**January 1—November 15, 2017**

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**Earth Festival Net Income** | **$1,496.09** |

### Administration

- Administration: 10%
- Communication and Development: 18%
- Education and Outreach: 23%
- Research and Management: 31%
- Policy and Planning: 18%
Thanks to Our Donors

**Butternut**

Ellen Alex  
Carole Alicino  
Michael & Dawn Altschuler  
Cynthia Andela  
Velma Armstrong  
Roy Bartoo  
Cliff & Patti Brunner  
Brian & Elizabeth Burns  
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SAVE THE DATE

50th Anniversary Celebration

August 11, 2018 at Mohican Farm Terrace
5:00 in the afternoon
Since 1989, OCCA has recognized individuals who have made an outstanding positive impact on Otsego County’s natural resources with our Conservationist of the Year Award. In 2017 we celebrated Bob Sutherland of Mohican Farm and The Clark Foundation. Sutherland has been managing Mohican Farm for The Clark Foundation since 2009. Under his management, the farm has spearheaded The Clark Foundation’s sustainability efforts. He established and oversees a composting operation that has recycled over a million pounds of food scraps and green waste since 2010, manages invasive species, and uses the farm’s greenhouse to support community agriculture. A former instructor in the Plant Science Department at SUNY Cobleskill, Sutherland continues to support education through his involvement on the steering committee of The Farmers’ Museum’s annual Food and Farming Conference, and regularly speaks at round tables, lectures and events. Sutherland has worked closely with OCCA staff on numerous projects, and gave a talk on “Integrated Pest Management for the Home Garden and Greenhouse” as part of OCCA’s Be Informed! lecture series. In addition to his work at Mohican Farm, Sutherland is an active participant in the community. He is a member of the Otsego Lake Association’s Board of Directors, and supports Growing Communities and the Kid Garden at Cooperstown Elementary School. Sutherland has also been a key player in an initiative to develop a county-wide composting facility in Oneonta. Sutherland was honored at OCCA’s Annual Picnic at Gilbert Lake State Park on September 10.