

Doubling the fun

Thanks to purchases by the Open Space Institute, Fahnestock State Park has grown to twice its original size

Driving up to the ticket booth at Canopus Lake in Clarence Fahnestock Memorial State Park, Tildy La Farge, communications director for the Open Space Institute, stops to identify herself. The teenager inside immediately perks up, dropping what he's reading to lean out the door.

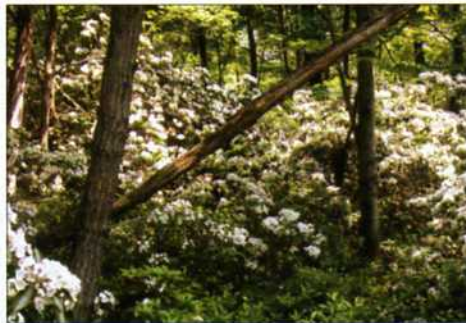
"I love the OSI!" he exclaims.

So should everyone who uses the park. A series of acquisitions by the OSI has more than doubled the size of Fahnestock over the last dozen years. Starting out at 5,100 acres, it now encompasses 12,137 acres of lakes, streams, and wetlands, as well as meadows, rugged stone outcroppings, hills, and miles of secluded forest. What makes Fahnestock especially unusual is that so much wilderness is just 50 miles north of Manhattan.

The OSI's purchases around Fahnestock began in 1991, when an adjoining 2,068-acre parcel was threatened by a 700-home subdivision. (OSI in turn sold it to the state in 1996.)

Since then, the organization has periodically purchased more land to expand the park's Hubbard-Perkins Conservation Area, including 2,000 acres that were bought directly from the Perkins family between 1991 and 1993. Recently, the group acquired 699 acres from the Fresh Air Fund. That land, on Fahnestock's northern edge, includes what is now the highest point in the park.

As early as the 1970s, when the OSI began preserving land, it earmarked the region around Fahnestock as critical. The intervening years have only increased the threat of development: Putnam County is among the fastest growing regions of the state. "It's very unique to have so much open space in this area," explains Jennifer Grossman, the OSI's vice president for land acquisition.



The Open Space Institute works to expand the delights in Fahnestock Park



sition. "It's too late for other counties that are already developed, but not for Putnam."

During her recent trip to the park, La Farge gazed out at Canopus Lake, where a group of swimmers splashed in the water. "It's just amazing," she says, breaking the silence. She explains how she skied around the lake last winter, when the water disappeared beneath a blanket of snow, with a wall of mountains surrounding her. Aside from the occasional picnic table and concession area, the property remains relatively untouched.

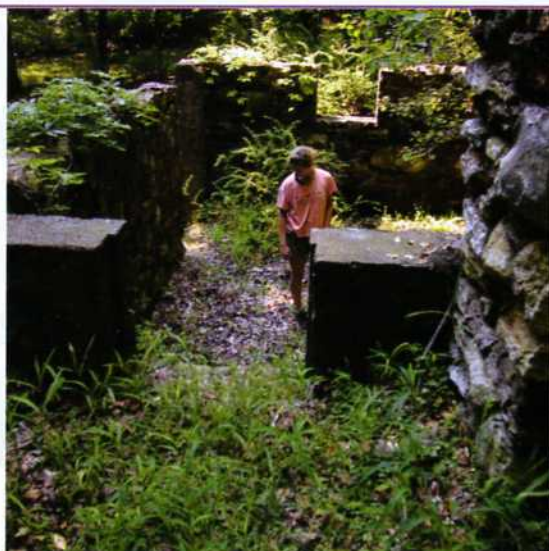
Fahnestock's up-and-down terrain is perfect for hiking — a section of the Appalachian Trail runs through the park — as well as cross-country skiing, horseback riding, and biking. (It's also a popular spot for birdwatchers.) But it wasn't always so wild. In the 19th century, its trees were cut to produce charcoal for iron furnaces,

preservation

and iron mines scarred its hills (abandoned mines now dot the park). In the early 1900s, the land became a shooting preserve and family retreat for Manhattan physician Clarence Fahnestock. "The footstep of the Fahnestock family is incredible," says La Farge. "It started as a gentleman's farm, and now it's a landscape for everybody." (The family gave the park's original acreage to the state in 1929.)

Many of the OSI's additions to that landscape have been helped by a multimillion-dollar land-acquisition fund created by *Reader's Digest* founders DeWitt and Lila Acheson Wallace. The state also supports the organization's efforts. "Governor Pataki has the Teddy Roosevelt conservation vision," says Grossman, who explains that state agencies are working to fulfill the governor's million-acre commitment to land preservation. She says that early on, significant time often passed between the OSI's purchases and the land's resale to the state. Now, a synergy has developed between the two entities. "The state has been very on par with us, and we've got it down to a science," Grossman says.

Local property owners also play a key role in the OSI's efforts to preserve the land around Fahnestock. "We couldn't do this without the cooperation of the landowners,"



Exploring Fahnestock's hidden treasures

cheaper in the long run for taxpayers to keep the land undeveloped because it requires fewer services.

Most of the gains in protecting land cannot be measured monetarily. Each expansion of the park brings trail access closer to neighborhoods, and nearby landowners are ensured that they will never have to look out their windows and see a new subdivision. "I get excited when I get out there and I see people enjoying it," says La Farge. "We want to educate and connect people with the landscape so they can see why it's so precious."

The acquisitions also safeguard rare species of plants and animals. Another benefit is the protection of the water supply. The OSI's most recent purchase conserves part of the Wicoppee Creek, which feeds into the Fishkill Creek Aquifer and New York City's reservoir system.

Despite the OSI's success at increasing the size of the park, there's more to be done. "We're still very much committed to working in this area to expand this park as far as we can," says Grossman. The group's next goal is to buy the land connecting Hudson Highlands State Park, to the west, with Fahnestock. That would ensure that hikers passing through on the Appalachian Trail could always experience the breathtaking views.

Looking back on all that has been preserved in Fahnestock, Grossman reflects on the impact of the protected land. The most important thing, she says, is "the legacy that is left...that there is going to be a natural resource available to the public that can't be provided elsewhere. When it's protected, you've got something special there." ■

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says La Farge. At times, the OSI has struggled to obtain new acreage around the park because properties next to protected land instantly increase in value. "A lot of landowners are getting wind that they're sitting on a fortune," says La Farge. Still, the majority of the surrounding community supports the OSI's vision. "The people are usually just thrilled," says Grossman.

"I believe strongly in what they're doing," admits Liza Moon, whose property sits on the edge of the most recently protected land. "Years ago, there was a lot of fear about what would have happened to our neighborhood," she says, referring to the proposed 700-home subdivision. Now, she adds, "We call it living in heaven."

The OSI works with the community, keeping it informed about future acquisitions and addressing concerns regarding land taxes. Grossman explains that it's

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