

Open Space Institute Scenic Hudson

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Groups Partner to Protect Farmland, Magnificent Olana Views

GREENPORT (Columbia County) –The Open Space Institute (OSI) and Scenic Hudson have partnered to protect a 95-acre farm adjacent to the Olana State Historic Site. The initiative ensures that the farm’s high-quality soils can continue to support the Town of Greenport’s agricultural economy and preserves magnificent views from Olana, a popular tourist destination.

OSI and Scenic Hudson acquired a conservation easement on the property, known as Pleroma Farm, a diversified biodynamic farm and therapeutic retreat center located at the base of the hill on which renowned Hudson River School painter Frederic Church built his home to take advantage of sweeping vistas of the Hudson River and Catskill Mountains. The Olana Partnership and Omega Institute contributed funds—\$50,000 and \$10,000, respectively—to make the transaction happen.

In addition to preventing development that could have spoiled outstanding views from Olana—which generates \$7.9 million of economic stimulus each year in surrounding communities—the easement guarantees that 75 acres of federal- and state-designated prime agricultural soils will remain a source of fresh, healthy produce. (The current landowner raises poultry and Dutch belted cattle.) The easement also safeguards critical wildlife habitat, increasing the size of protected contiguous forest to more than 100 acres and conserving a portion of a 169-acre wetlands complex.

OSI Land Project Manager and Assistant Counsel Katie Stone and Scenic Hudson Senior Land Project Manager Cari Watkins-Bates negotiated the purchase. Scenic Hudson funded this transaction from the Lila Acheson and DeWitt Wallace Hudson Valley Land Preservation Endowment.

Collaborative approach essential to save valley’s world-class landscapes, vistas

“The Pleroma Farm is important not only for its agricultural values but for its scenic and historic significance as well,” said Kim Elliman, OSI’s president and CEO. “We are happy to have partnered with Scenic Hudson to complete this important conservation project, which will keep the magnificent viewshed from Olana intact. May future generations be inspired by its beauty just as Frederic Church was many years ago.”

“Protecting working landscapes within the Olana viewshed is a priority of Scenic Hudson’s Saving the Land That Matters Most campaign because of the substantial contribution they make to the region’s tourism and agricultural economies. Sustaining the momentum of this campaign in these challenging economic times requires strategic partnerships like the one that enabled us to protect Pleroma Farm, whose fields and woods are in the foreground of world-class vistas essential to Olana. We applaud the landowner and fellow organizations that made this success possible,” said Scenic Hudson President Ned Sullivan.

Sara Griffen, president of The Olana Partnership added, “The eastern views towards Pleroma Farm are views that Frederic Church painted regularly and help define the beauty of Olana, a three-dimensional designed landscape considered by many to be Church’s finest work of art. We are most grateful to all our partners for recognizing the historical and economic value of preserving these views.”

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“As an environmental steward, Omega is dedicated to mitigating our environmental impact, and to teaching others how to adopt sustainable living practices. We are proud to support OSI and Scenic Hudson’s conservation efforts, and believe that biodynamic farming has a tremendous role to play in the health and well-being of our Hudson Valley community, economy and the environment,” said Skip Backus, chief executive officer at Omega.

Transaction has strong economic, ecological, health upsides

The conservation easement preserves a landscape that contributes to the Hudson Valley’s \$4.7-billion tourism economy that sustains 80,000 jobs, as well as its \$810-million agricultural economy. Located within the Catskill-Olana Scenic Area of Statewide Significance, designated by New York State for its outstanding scenic and historic value, Pleroma Farm practices a method of organic farming that treats farms as unified and individual organisms, emphasizing a balanced interrelationship of the soil, plants and animals as a self-nourishing system without external inputs.

Protecting large, contiguous landscapes safeguards the interconnected network of diverse habitats on which many wildlife species depend. Increasing the acreage of protected open space also offers myriad human health benefits. Trees sequester pollutants that contribute to asthma, lung cancer and cardiovascular disease, while releasing oxygen. Woodlands and wetlands collect and purify water that filters into the ground to recharge local aquifers, which communities depend on for drinking water. Vegetation and wetlands also intercept rainfall, preventing it from flowing into streams where it could cause flooding. Safeguarding prime wildlife habitats helps maintain biodiversity, which plays an important role in preventing diseases such as West Nile virus and Lyme disease.

Collaborative campaign targets protecting valley’s most important landscapes

Scenic Hudson’s campaign to Save the Land That Matters Most was launched in 2007 to provide a lasting way of commemorating the Quadricentennial of Henry Hudson’s voyage of discovery. It is a multi-year, collaborative effort with fellow land trusts (including OSI), governments, individuals and businesses to protect lands of the highest scenic, ecological and agricultural significance throughout the Hudson Valley. In addition to providing the cornerstone of a sustainable economy for the region, protected lands help attract new business. A recent study by the Trust for Public Land notes that executives looking to relocate or start up firms rank quality of life—including an abundance of parks and open space—higher than housing, cost of living and good schools. To date, the Saving the Land That Matters Most initiative has conserved 6,280 acres.

In Columbia County, Scenic Hudson has preserved nearly 7,000 acres—including 970 acres (and another 345 in Greene County) to preserve views from Olana and more than 3,500 acres of farmland. The group in 2010 created Harrier Hill Park in nearby Stockport. The preservation work has helped protect the Hudson River estuary, critical wildlife habitats and farms that include dairies, orchards, vegetable farms, horse farms and a vineyard.

In four decades, OSI has protected nearly 120,000 acres in New York State. In Columbia County, OSI has protected 1,152 acres in the Kinderhook Creek corridor, which includes Lindenwald, the historic home and estate of Martin Van Buren, the eighth president of the United States. Working with a host of partners, OSI has helped protect and expand the scenic, agricultural and historically significant corridor that surrounds the creek as it winds through the Village of Kinderhook and on to Stuyvesant. OSI also has preserved 803 acres in the Greenport Conservation Area, a highly productive ecosystem that protects the North Bay tidal estuary, sitting just one mile north of the City of Hudson.

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About Olana and The Olana Partnership

The eminent Hudson River School painter Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900) designed Olana, his family home, studio and estate as an integrated environment embracing architecture, art and landscape. Considered one of the most important artistic residences in the United States, Olana is a landmark of Picturesque landscape gardening with a Persian-inspired house at its summit, embracing unrivaled panoramic views of the vast Hudson Valley. Olana State Historic Site, one of six historic sites administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Taconic Region, is a designated National Historic Landmark and one of the most visited historic sites in the state. The Olana Partnership, a private not-for-profit education corporation, works cooperatively with New York State to support the restoration, development and improvement of Olana State Historic Site. To learn more about Olana, please visit www.olana.org.

About Omega Institute for Holistic Studies

Founded in 1977, Omega Institute for Holistic Studies is the nation's most trusted source for wellness and personal growth. As a nonprofit organization, Omega offers diverse and innovative educational experiences that inspire an integrated approach to personal and social change. Located on 195 acres in the beautiful Hudson Valley, Omega welcomes more than 23,000 people to its workshops, conferences and retreats in Rhinebeck, N.Y., and at exceptional locations around the world. www.eOmega.org

About the Open Space Institute

The Open Space Institute protects scenic, natural and historic landscapes to ensure public enjoyment, conserve habitats and sustain community character. OSI achieves its goals through land acquisition, conservation easements, regional loan programs, fiscal sponsorship, creative partnerships and analytical research. OSI has protected nearly 120,000 acres in New York State. Through its Northern Forest Protection Fund and Conservation Finance Program, OSI has assisted in the protection of an additional 1.8 million acres in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina and Georgia. Please visit www.osiny.org for more information.

About Scenic Hudson

Scenic Hudson works to protect and restore the Hudson River and its majestic landscape as an irreplaceable national treasure and a vital resource for residents and visitors. A crusader for the valley since 1963, we are credited with saving fabled Storm King Mountain from a destructive industrial project and launching the modern grass-roots environmental movement. Today with more than 25,000 ardent supporters, we are the largest environmental group focused on the Hudson River Valley. Our team of experts combines land acquisition, support for agriculture, citizen-based advocacy and sophisticated planning tools to create environmentally healthy communities, champion smart economic growth, open up riverfronts to the public and preserve the valley's inspiring beauty and natural resources. To date Scenic Hudson has created or enhanced more than 50 parks, preserves and historic sites up and down the Hudson River and conserved nearly 30,000 acres. www.scenichudson.org