

THE FUTURE OF SNAKE HILL

An Informational Update
Via Zoom
February 26, 2025
3:30-4:30 p.m.



Photo: Ryan Campbell of Saratoga Drone

Agenda

Introduction to PLAN

Snake Hill's Protection

Community Benefits

What We Heard

Future Management

Questions & Discussion

Snake Hill is permanently protected by Saratoga PLAN (Preserving Land and Nature), a nonprofit land trust.

PLAN's Mission

To preserve the rural character, natural habitats, and scenic beauty of Saratoga County, ancestral homelands of the Mohican, Mohawk and Abenaki people, so that these irreplaceable assets are accessible to all and survive for future generations.





Community Planning

We help communities identify conservation assets & work on plans that balance growth with conservation goals.



Farmland Protection

PLAN has worked with farmland owners to permanently protect over 30 farms in Saratoga County.



Natural Resource Protection

PLAN has helped conserve over 14,000 acres of land across 21 municipalities.



Connect People to Nature

Saratoga PLAN owns 13 public nature preserves throughout Saratoga County and manages over 30 miles of trails.



Land trusts like PLAN acquire land and/or work with property owners to permanently protect wildlife habitats, natural resources, and agricultural land from development or harmful activities.

Land trusts achieve conservation through:

- ◆ Conservation easements, a legally binding agreement where the landowner donates or sells development rights to the land trust while maintaining ownership of the land
- ◆ Fee purchases of land in which the land trust owns the land like any other private property owner

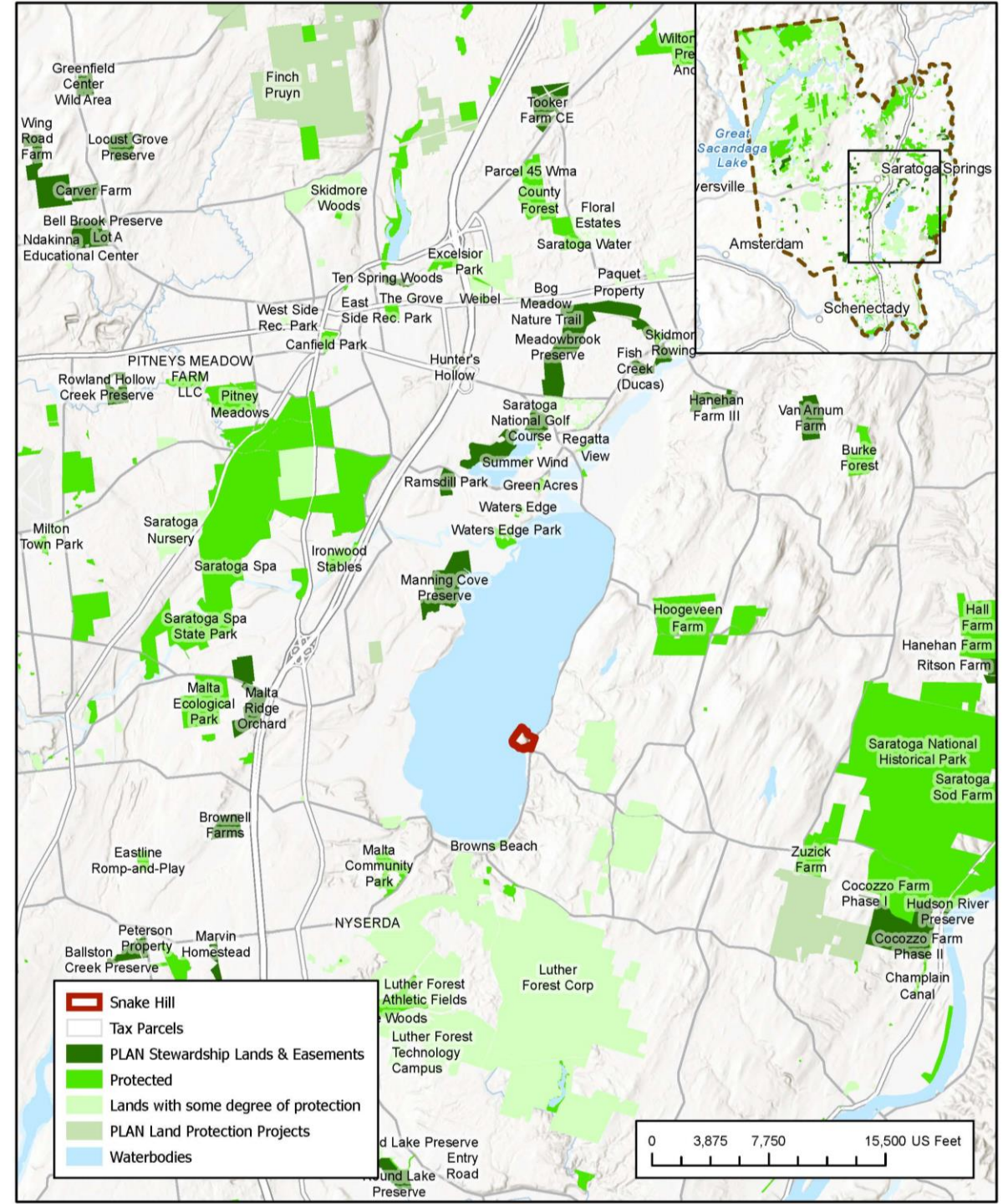
Snake Hill's Protection

In late 2023, PLAN bought Snake Hill through a bargain sale from Stewart's Shops for \$1 million, and with the support of Assemblywoman Carrie Woerner.

A Natural Resource Rich Property:

- 30 acres of forested land and wildlife habitat
- 2,300 feet of undeveloped shoreline along Saratoga Lake
- Unique geological formation from 450 million years ago
- Iconic landmark seen from many spots around lake with historical significance

PLAN and the community had one primary goal: Protection from development and it's now accomplished!



Snake Hill's Protection: Community Benefits

- ❖ Protects shoreline, wetlands, and forest in the Saratoga Lake Watershed, within the second fastest growing county in NYS
- ❖ Prevents pollution which would otherwise deteriorate water quality and foster the growth of harmful algal blooms (HABs), already detected in Saratoga Lake
- ❖ Provides natural climate solutions to weather-related events such as flooding
- ❖ Protects biodiversity by preventing wildlife habitat loss



What we've learned about Snake Hill

Wildlife

- 45 bird species documented

Plant life

- Plant surveys
- Primarily Red Maples, Eastern Hemlocks, and Oak trees

Geology

- Remnant of the Taconic Mountain Lowlands
- Sandstone and shale

Cultural history

- Timber Rattlesnakes
- Collegiate regatta
- Quarry





Hemlock mortality due to HWA in the Great Smoky Mountains

Credit: Cook Forest Conservancy



Stewardship Challenges

While only 30-acres, **Snake Hill** presents many **stewardship challenges** including **steep slopes, thin soils, erosion, and several invasive species** that threaten its fragile ecosystem.

One invasive species, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (known as HWA), is known for leading to the death of hemlock trees and has left “ghost forests” throughout the Appalachian Mountains.

HWA was found on Snake Hill this past winter, posing a significant threat to the hemlocks on the property.

How are We Planning for the Future of Snake Hill?

- Learning about Snake Hill with the assistance of professional scientists and other experts
- Developed draft management options with staff and partner input
- Shared options with the public and asked for community feedback
- Analyzed community and partner feedback
- Refining our preferred management approach



What We Heard From You



We held a public meeting to share alternative management options for Snake Hill and heard back from over 165 community members!

Many shared an appreciation for the unique environment of Snake Hill, a desire to learn more about it and to preserve it.

Many shared they want to have a safe means of access, parking, and opportunities for enjoying Snake Hill.

Most advocated for limited or no public access to best protect the natural resources and scenic beauty of Snake Hill.

Thank you for helping to shape the direction of PLAN's future management of Snake Hill!

What We Heard From Potential Program Partners



Interest in programs and volunteer options for small groups of attendees.

Need for safe entrance, exit, parking, and vehicle turn-around.

Need for a gathering area to focus attention of participants.

Desire for gathering area to have seating, as well as shelter in some seasons

Desire for PLAN to support programming with educational materials.

Desire for natural trail surfaces that are safe and accessible.

Desire for a port-o-let facility for longer programs.

Overarching Management Goals

- Protect the Snake Hill parcel from development
- Protect and improve forest health
- Protect and improve biodiversity
- Protect and improve terrestrial and wetland habitat and potential breeding areas
- Protect and improve shoreline stability, wetlands, water quality, and storm water runoff
- Protect Snake Hill as a visual resource within the Saratoga Lake viewshed
- Provide public access through educational programming



Our Management Approach

FOCUS: Education and resource protection using an adaptive management approach

- Provide the public an opportunity to experience Snake Hill with small groups of visitors
- Maintain a wild place that can be seen from many locations along Saratoga Lake
- Make sure that Snake Hill visitors, neighbors, and surrounding communities can safely access, park, and enjoy Snake Hill
- Ensure Saratoga PLAN and its partners have the capacity and appropriate programming for public access

◆ Public access will be limited to small groups attending Saratoga PLAN or partner programs or volunteer events when conditions allow.

◆ Trails will be maintained with a natural surface or gravel for passive public pedestrian use only (no bikes or motorized vehicles).

◆ No dogs will be allowed (except for service dogs).

Potential Future Facilities and Amenities

- A natural surface loop trail, ~1 mile
- A small pull-off on Route 9P
- A parking lot for approximately 6-10 vehicles
- A small gathering area and possibly a shelter/cover
- Informational and safety signage
- A boot-brush station
- A port-o-let
- A gate that may be closed when no programming is occurring
- Designated areas of the property that are closed for resource protection or research (e.g., wetland areas)



PLAN's Next Steps

- Continuing research on Snake Hill ecology, geology, history, and cultural importance
- Working with Town of Stillwater, Saratoga County and NYS for planning and permitting requirements
- Developing educational materials to share with public and partners
- Addressing invasive species and other stewardship challenges



We will announce the beginning of public access opportunities after the proper permitting and safety concerns have been met.

Thank you for your patience!

Questions & Discussion



Thank you for joining us!

Stay in touch!

Follow us on social media: @saratogaplan

Questions?

Email: info@saratogaplan.org

Scan the QR code below to join
our email newsletter for updates!

