

2015 Annual Report

Dear Friends . . .



**THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING
HAPPENING AT THE GORGE!**

*Check the Events tab on our website,
www.mianus.org, to stay informed on
all the lectures, walks, and volunteer
opportunities going on here.*

*The News tab will keep you up to date
on our land protection and management
issues, our community involvement, and
the achievements of the amazing students
in our educational programs.*

*The Publications tab brings you to
articles on MRG in the media, papers
published by our scientists, and our
newsletter archives.*

A year after the second largest land acquisition in our history, we completed and began implementing a management plan for the Levene Property. This plan will guide us in properly stewarding this parcel of land that the Gorge now owns in perpetuity. We led two private tours of the property with over 100 attending the fall and the early winter walks. We shared with donors and friends the vistas from atop the ridge, glacier erratics, Piping Brook, and other natural wonders.

Land acquisition remains the foundation of our mission to preserve, protect and promote appreciation of the natural heritage of the Mianus River Watershed through land acquisition and conservation, scientific research and public education throughout the region.

Mianus River Gorge's Research and Education program is the bellwether for like-minded organizations in the region. MRG scientists and staff mentored 13 high school, undergraduate, and graduate students throughout 2015. MRG provides hands-on ecology research experience, exposes students to meaningful field experience, teaches best practices in data collection, interpretation and presentation, and demonstrates a path for further study or a career in the sciences.

Our own research studies included Chris Nagy's deeper look at the ecology, population growth, and range expansion of eastern coyotes (*Canis latrans*) in 2015. The Gotham Coyote Project began to analyze genetic samples to identify individual coyotes, determine distinct family groups, and track movement patterns of coyotes in the urban environment. We also began a baseline aquifer study in the headwaters of the Mianus River and assessment of the health of and threats to major wetlands systems throughout the Mianus River Watershed. The Source to Sound study, funded by the Westchester Community Foundation, dovetails in part with the collaborative Hudson to Housatonic (H2H) Conservation Initiative by engaging landowners to help protect streams, drinking water reservoirs, and plant and wildlife habitat.

We are poised to build on the groundwork done in 2015 to work toward environmental sustainability – from wildflowers to the old-growth forest, from the headwaters of the Mianus River here in Bedford to its endpoint in Cos Cob Harbor, and on all the land in our care throughout the watershed.

Thank you for contributing your time and resources to Mianus River Gorge. We are truly grateful for your support and look forward to welcoming you to the Preserve.

Sincerely,

Timothy Evnin, Chairman

Roderick G. Christie, Executive Director





Building Strong Relationships in the Community

Lectures and Presentations

As part of the Hudson to Housatonic (H2H) Conservation Initiative, MRG Preserve Manager Sarah Hoskinson, Ph.D., and the project's collaborative partners held landowner workshops in Greenwich, Stamford, and North Castle to discuss backyard forest stewardship, including invasive species management and techniques to protect our water resources. She also partnered with The Invasives Project to lead an invasive species workshop and several invasive vine pulls at the Gorge. H2H leaders (MRG included) also held several training sessions for all partner organizations to help them in their work with private landowners.

Director of Research & Land Management Chris Nagy, Ph.D., was in high demand on the lecture circuit to share his work on the Gotham Coyote Project. He also supported Wildlife Technician Program (WTP) participant and high school student Becca Raffo as she presented her final poster at the Northeast Natural History Conference in Springfield, MA. Becca studied associations among exotic earthworms and ground vegetation in our Preserve. MRG also held a tracking workshop to train participants on how to distinguish between coyote tracks and other closely related relatives like foxes and dogs.



Public Programs

Mianus River Gorge held several well-received public programs including a wildflower workshop, a Source to Sound Watershed Tour and two tours of the newly acquired Levene Property led by Executive Director Rod Christie. All programs were fully subscribed and together educated hundreds of people to the mission of MRG. The Watershed Tour gave participants a unique opportunity to see where their drinking water comes from and how it is filtered and delivered to their homes. The Levene walks allowed participants to visit this property that, as yet, is not open to the public.

Chris Nagy also held a night-time owl walk in the Preserve, giving participants a rare look at the Preserve at night and the sights and sounds only seen and heard in the dark.



Thanks to a generous donation from the A.E. Charitable Foundation, MRG recently purchased our own 3DR Solo drone.

Chris Nagy takes it for a test drive. The drone will be used to take aerial videos for promotional materials and grounds patrol, boundary monitoring, aerial wildlife surveys, and other research projects.

Left: Fifty people joined Mianus River Gorge Executive Director Rod Christie for a private walking tour of the Levene / Castlebrook properties.

Conserving Land and Protecting our Watershed



Rod Christie leads a Source to Sound Watershed Tour.



Source to Sound Initiative

Mianus River Gorge applied for and received a grant from the Westchester Community Foundation to collect, aggregate, and analyze water resource studies from the towns within the upper Mianus River Watershed aquifer in an effort to determine the health of this water supply. The second part of the study was to assess the health of the upper watershed's wetlands and identify current and potential threats to their functionality. MRG anticipates a successful pilot project that could lead to future funding opportunities to expand this study to the lower watershed.

Conservation Easements

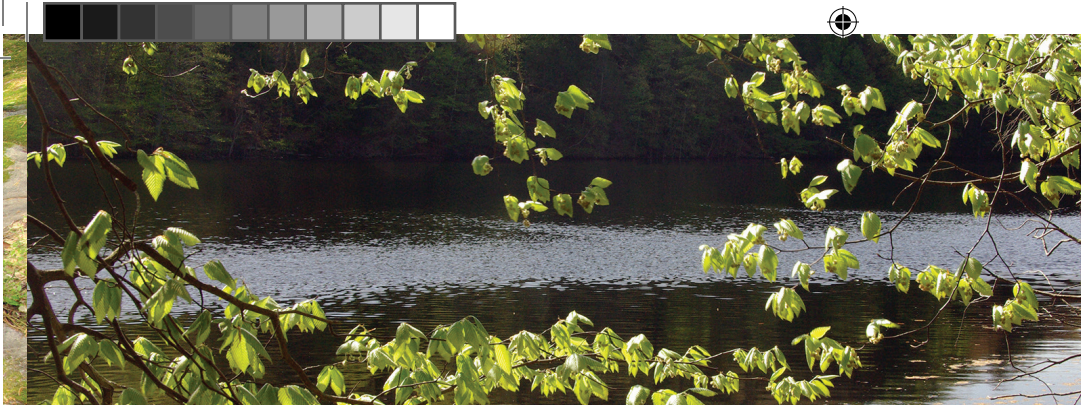
We expect to complete several wetland protection projects in the Piping Brook and Havemeyer Stream sub-watersheds in the coming months that will add over 30 acres of land under our protection. We continued to pursue conservation easements and explore acquisitions of properties in critical wetland properties throughout the watershed. These projects are well under way and we hope to complete them soon.

Hudson to Housatonic (H2H) Initiative

The Hudson to Housatonic Conservation Initiative (H2H)—a collaboration of local and regional conservation organizations and civic partners across Westchester, Dutchess, Putnam, and Fairfield Counties—entered the second year of the two-year grant period. The H2H grant, spearheaded by Mianus River Gorge, Highstead Foundation, Westchester Land Trust, and Housatonic Valley Association, focuses on educating and engaging landowners in an effort to protect water resources and forest habitats resilient to climate change. This Regional Conservation Partnership Program engaged over 3000 landowners in 2015 and, in 2016, will join 42 other Regional Conservation Partnership Programs throughout New England and New York State.

Mianus River Gorge, in collaboration with the North Castle Open Space Committee, Greenwich Land Trust, and Stamford Land Conservation Trust, held landowner workshops in Greenwich, Stamford, and North Castle that discussed backyard forest stewardship, including invasive species management and techniques to protect our water resources.

“Landowners have a unique role in protecting and preserving the land that comprises their part of the watershed,” noted MRG’s Sarah Hoskinson. “We are grateful for the H2H grant that gives us the opportunity to talk with property owners and enlist their help in preserving and protecting our shared drinking water sources.”



Stewardship and Land Management

Accredited Land Trust

Finally, MRG worked hard on the accreditation renewal process to maintain its status as an Accredited Land Trust through the Land Trust Alliance. Land trust accreditation is a mark of distinction, showing that a land trust meets high standards for operations and land conservation. We anticipate receiving renewed accreditation, assuring that we keep our promise of perpetuity and are worthy of the public trust.

We continued to explore possible acquisitions of properties deemed critical to the protection of the watershed. Land acquisition remains the foundation of our mission to preserve, protect and promote appreciation of the natural heritage of the Mianus River Watershed through land acquisition and conservation, scientific research and public education throughout the region.



Have you seen us in the news?

MRG was featured in a number of TV, magazine, and newspaper spots in 2015 for our land acquisitions, research activities, and advocacy. Below is a list of some of these appearances:

- 2/2015 "Coyotes right at home in N.J. suburbs" by James O'Neill, NorthJersey.com
- 3/2015 "That Howling? Just the Neighborhood Coyotes" by Lisa Foderaro, The New York Times
- 3/2015 "Wild Suburbia takes a look at local habitat" by Mary Legrand, The Record-Review
- 3/2015 "Coyotes in New York City - We Have Nothing to Fear" by Stuart Liess, Epoch Times
- 3/2015 "Going Deep - Preserving Nature on the Mianus River" by Amy Oringel, Bedford Magazine
- 5/2015 "Urban Fauna: Coyotes. Wily in the City" by Jen Kirby, New York Magazine
- 6/2015 "On the prowl in suburbia" by Akiko Matsuda, The Journal News
- 7/2015 "New York Needs Coyotes" by Lance Richardson, Slate.com
- 8/2015 "Cameras Catch Coyotes as They Take Manhattan" by Rebecca Harrington, Scientific American
- 10/2015 "Greater than the sum of its parts", The Economist
- 11/2015 "Levene Property Walk with the Mianus River Gorge", Greenwich Look



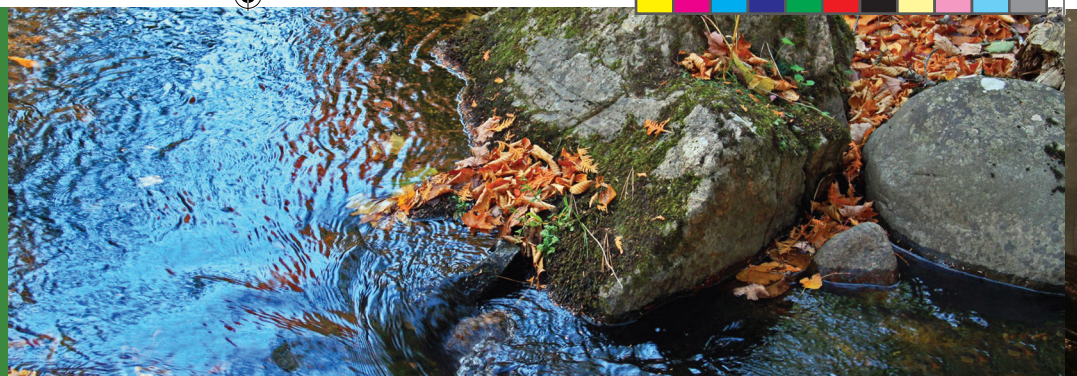
Erin McKenna,

A senior at NYC's High School for Environmental Studies and in MRG's WTP, Erin

presented her work at the 2014 Student Conference on Conservation Science at the American Museum of Natural History. Erin's work examined the variability in detection rate of camera traps in photographing coyotes in urban parks. Erin noted that even if a given park had coyotes, a set of cameras placed in that park had highly variable detection rates (i.e., each camera had differing chances of photographing a coyote). Her research means that cameras ought to be placed throughout a site, and should be moved and redeployed if the target animal is not detected before concluding that the target animal is not present. We hope that future students can build on Erin's work and figure out why certain places yield a lot of coyote detections and others do not.

SEE MORE RESEARCH
AND EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS
ON PAGE 6

Research and Education



Summer 2015 interns: Zach Berzolla, Miranda Bandeli, Kasey French, and Becca Bauer

Research Highlights

■ MRG staff and regional colleagues published a paper in June in the journal *Cities and the Environment* titled “A research agenda to study the socio-ecological impacts of coyote range expansion on Long Island pre- and post-arrival.” The paper described the range expansion of coyotes through NYC and, soon, Long Island –based largely on work performed by the Gotham Coyote Project – and outlined goals, objectives, and potential study designs for addressing important ecological questions that this event makes possible.

■ WTP students Rebecca Raffo and Sarah Cosmedy attended the Northeast Natural History Conference. Rebecca presented her work comparing earthworm presence to tree seedling abundance and diversity. Rebecca concluded that two species of invasive earthworms are spreading their distribution in the Gorge, and that plots with more worms tended to have lower seedling biodiversity. This suggests that worms could be affecting tree regeneration, or at least that worms occupy soils where trees do poorly for a variety of factors.

Research Updates

Since its founding, MRG has prioritized research in applied ecology and conservation biology. In 2015, we supported three Ph.D. students in our Research Assistantship Program (RAP), a 3-year grant program that funds graduate student research. Our staff and RAP students mentored 13 high-school researchers in our Wildlife Technician Program (WTP) and four undergraduate interns over the summer. We continue to be impressed with the quality of the students, their attentive contributions to our ongoing projects, and their dedication to their own work that we unreservedly support.

Development of restoration protocols for native wildflowers in post-agricultural forests

Geoff Griffiths, SUNY ESF, 2015 RAP Award

Most of the forests in our region are categorized as “post-agricultural,” in that they are relatively young forests that have only grown up since the late 1800 to the 1920s and 1930s, after being cleared and used for agriculture after European colonization. Even if the land is now forested to some degree, this history of clearing, plowing, tilling, pastoral use, and other anthropogenic activities lead to lower diversity of native wildflowers, shrubs, and trees. These forests could require centuries before they are naturally recolonized by all of the species that were lost. Geoff’s research is focused on finding ways to speed up natural recovery and return missing understory plants over the course of years or decades and will provide MRG with specific techniques we can deploy to restore our forest.

Red-oak sentinel monitoring

George Raxworthy, Fox Lane High School, WTP Class of 2017

There are many factors affecting the regeneration of trees and plants in our forests, but white-tailed deer are by all accounts the most powerful factor in limiting the recovery of trees, shrubs, and wildflowers. MRG has been monitoring 21 permanent vegetation plots since 2004 to examine long-term trends in the vegetative structure of the Preserve, but in 2015 we began a shorter-term study on measuring deer impacts as well. George Raxworthy, a sophomore at Fox Lane High School, helped plant 60 red oak seedlings throughout our forest. He monitors all 60 each month during the growing season and records their survival and whether they have been browsed by deer or other animals. This study will give us a glimpse of how badly our deer are limiting the growth of red oaks, an important food source for the entire forest food web. Thus far, George has found that roughly 85% of his trees survived their first year; a good sign to be sure. However, an oak seedling is in danger of being eaten by deer for 10 years or more (before it grows tall enough to be out of reach), so even this high rate of survival may not be enough to ensure that the next generation of red oaks will reach the canopy.



OPERATING PUBLIC SUPPORT AND REVENUE

Contributions	\$255,448	44%
Grants	\$96,471	16%
Other income	\$21,662	4%
Board Allocated Investment Income	\$212,366	36%
Total Operating Public Support and Revenue	\$585,947	100%

OPERATING EXPENSES

Program Services	\$370,443	72%
Management and General Expenses	\$97,285	19%
Fundraising Expenses	\$46,697	9%
Total Operating Expenses	\$514,425	100%





Annual Giving 2015



Annual Giving is comprised of generous support to our annual fund and special projects here at Mianus River Gorge, Inc.

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**We also thank all our volunteers for their
generous support throughout the year.**

Gloria Anable (1901-1988), whose vision and indefatigable spirit guided its evolution for more than three decades, was one of the original founders of Mianus River Gorge. When a 68-acre parcel in the middle of her beloved Mianus River Gorge was under threat of development, Gloria and other perceptive neighbors rallied together in 1953 to purchase the land and designate it a preserve. Under Gloria's early direction, and with the support of generous donors, the Preserve is now comprised of over 877 acres, with another 177 acres in conservation easements.

In memory of Gloria Anable and to honor special donors who have helped advance its mission, Mianus River Gorge established the Anable Society. Anable Society members are passionate about helping secure the future of the Gorge and the quality of its surrounding watershed. Members of the Anable Society have indicated a bequest to Mianus River Gorge in their will, given a major gift of \$25,000 or higher for land acquisition, or donated land or a conservation easement.



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Thank you!





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