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of the Mianus River Gorge, Inc.

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Executive Director Rod Christie to Retire



After nearly 30 years at the helm of Mianus River Gorge, it's time to say goodbye to Executive Director Rod Christie who is set to retire in May. Rod's vision and commitment to conservation, science-based research and education, and sharing his knowledge and expertise with the community, has helped build a strong foundation for the future.

Acquiring land for permanent protection has always been at the heart of Mianus River Gorge's mission to protect irreplaceable habitats for the community, wildlife, and future generations. With

Rod leading the charge, MRG raised \$15 million over the years, specifically to acquire properties critical to the health of the Mianus watershed and add to our Preserve.

In 2000, Rod spearheaded MRG's present research and educational programs. These programs have grown, garnered awards for their excellence, and introduced students to experiential science-based ecological study and research. Mentored by MRG biologists, students have learned skills for success in college, and many have gone on to pursue jobs in the natural sciences.

Mianus River Gorge became an accredited land trust in 2010 under Rod's direction. Land trust accreditation is a mark of distinction, showing that a land trust meets high standards for land conservation. The initial application process was arduous, and Rod made sure MRG checked all the boxes.

Needless to say, Rod has accomplished so much in every facet of his job as executive director for this organization – too much to expound upon here – and we are all grateful. The board of trustees, staff, friends in the neighborhood, and the broader community wish him an abundance of happiness in his retirement.

Thank you, Rod, for your many years of dedication to and steady leadership of the Mianus River Gorge.



Platinum Transparency 2025

Candid.



Scan this code to learn the different ways you can donate to support the work that helps Mianus River

Gorge attain its conservation, scientific, and educational goals. Thank you!



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MRG Champions Fund

Thank you to the early-bird donors who contributed to the MRG Champions Fund. We raised over \$132,000 for this matching fund that will double the impact of other donors' gifts during our annual appeal.

We protect irreplaceable natural habitats for our community, wildlife, and future generations.



A Look Back at the 2025 Series, Life in the Watershed

This past spring, Bedford Field Notes brought the community together for an inspiring educational series exploring the natural world in Bedford, NY. Held at Bedford Historical Hall, the series

featured world-class speakers, interactive content, and convivial gatherings that celebrated the unique ecology of the region. Presented by Mianus River Gorge in partnership with the Bedford Historical Society, Bedford Garden Club, and Rusticus Garden Club, the series was a resounding success.

The series focused on the Mianus River Watershed's ecology, wildlife, water systems, and land management from renowned experts. The series was moderated by David Pogue, the Emmy-winning CBS Sunday Morning correspondent. The Wildlife session featured Dr. Scott Loarie (iNaturalist)

and Budd Veverka (MRG); the Water session featured Marc Yaggi (Waterkeeper Alliance), Laura DeMott (NY Water Science Center) and Rod Christie (MRG); and the Land session featured Kate Orff (Principal and Partner of SCAPE), Murray Fisher (Plan It Wild) and Dr. Chris Nagy (MRG).

The Bedford Field Notes series was a celebration of Bedford's natural beauty and a call to action for preserving its unique ecology. A huge thank-you to everyone who attended and contributed to making this series a memorable experience ... stay tuned for details on the 2026 series!

Flying Squirrels in the Gorge

Flying squirrels are the most common squirrel in the eastern US, but most people have never seen one. That's because flying squirrels are nocturnal animals that do not actually fly, but rather glide from tree to tree, spending little time on the ground. There are two species of flying squirrels in the eastern US – the common southern flying squirrel and the less common northern flying squirrel.

Endangered in southern portions of their range in the Carolinas, the larger northern flying squirrel prefers areas with conifers on larger unbroken tracts of land. In our region, northern flying squirrels have been documented in the Catskills and northwest Connecticut.



Daisy Lamb with a baited platform which she'll use to collect flying squirrel DNA

The historic range of northern flying squirrels includes the Mianus River Gorge and its remnant old-growth conifer forest. . . are northern flying squirrels still in the Gorge? That is the

question WTP student Daisy Lamb of Irvington High School seeks to answer.

In the first year of her study, Daisy installed remote cameras and acoustic recorders at sites across the Preserve to see if southern and northern flying squirrels could be identified by sight and sound. Although she observed many flying squirrels, she has not been able to determine if they are the northern or southern species. This fall, in the second year of her study, Daisy will collect flying squirrel DNA from baited platforms and use eDNA to definitively determine which species occupy the Mianus River Gorge. If we find that the northern flying squirrel is indeed present, this important research could help focus future stewardship and land acquisition efforts to effectively conserve them.

Gateway to the Gorge Restoration Project

MRG has been working on projects to improve the entrance to the preserve. We added a new trail loop, removed dead ash trees, and expanded the parking lot. Now we are shifting the focus to restoring native vegetation.

The parking area had long been one of the most heavily invaded areas in the preserve. Multiflora rose, Japanese barberry, and Chinese privet dominated and suppressed the native species that are trying to grow.

Aided by several invasive removal crews, Director of Land Management, Budd Veverka, and Preserve Steward, Jean-Luc Plante, are working to remove the remaining invasive plants and replace them with native shrubs, such as



Newly-planted native shrubs

spicebush, winterberry, and chokeberry.

With determined management over the next few years, these shrubs will fill the gaps left by invasive plant removal and help prevent other invasive plants from returning to the area.

Reminder! Invasive plant seeds, insect eggs, and other microscopic organisms can cling to clothing, boots, and outdoor equipment, spreading them to new locations. Please clean your gear and use the boot brushes at the entrances to the trails before and after your visit to the preserve. Thank you!

New Post-and-Beam Stewardship Barn



Construction of our new stewardship barn began last November. Following excavation and foundation work by J. Mortara Landscaping & Design and Vival Concrete Foundations LLC, respectively, we began to construct the barn from an amazing DIY kit purchased from Country Carpenters of CT. Staff, along with volunteers Richard Veverka and Elena Kubicek, assembled the frame over the winter. We installed the siding and loft flooring

over the spring. This summer, Richard Veverka returned to help install the shingle roof while staff completed the windows, doors, and trim. The barn project was completed in early September when George's Seamless Gutters added a galvanized gutter to the front of the barn. This beautiful post-and-beam barn has already become an indispensable part of the Mianus River Gorge's stewardship program.

MRG Finishes Field Work for Tick Research Partnership

Earlier this year, MRG began a research partnership with Mohonk Preserve and Nature Health Global to examine associations among tick distribution, hiking trails, and deer density.

This summer, staff and volunteers at both MRG and Mohonk collected ticks at varying distances from hiking trails, both inside and outside deer exclosures. The goal was to see if the species of tick, the life stage, or the abundance of ticks changed at each Preserve, or as one moved closer or farther from trails, or in areas where deer were present or fenced out.

Over 100 ticks, mostly deer ticks (*Ixodes scapularis*) but a few dog ticks (*Dermacentor variabilis*), were collected across five days of sampling. Data analysis will proceed through the fall and winter, and we are in the process of building preliminary models that can help predict exposure risk to people hiking and possibly determine the functional scale of deer and habitat management. We hope this first study will also lead to other scientific collaborations with these partners.

A big thank you to the volunteers that helped at both sites! This project is generously supported by a Catalyst Grant from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation / Land Trust Alliance.



Building Strong Relationships in the Community

Part of MRG's mission is to share our conservation ethic and expertise with the community. Staff disseminate ecology research findings and share land management knowledge and best practices with other professionals in the field and with the public at large. Our most recent presentations included:

Director of Research & Education Chris Nagy, Ph.D.

- “Ongoing Range Expansion of Coyotes in the New York City Area, 2016 – 2024: Monitoring, Management, and Outreach” and was a panel member on the Urban Coyote Discussion at the International Urban Wildlife Conference (Atlanta) on June 3 – 6
- Gave a talk about the Gotham Coyote Project for the Animal Behavior Research Seminar class at Mercy University on April 21
- Appeared in the film “Coywolf” by Lucy Adams, shown at several film festivals including the International Wildlife Film Festival and Brooklyn Film Festival

Director of Land Management Budd Veverka

- “Managing Woody Invasives: Torching” at Perfect Earth @ Stone Barns on May 7
- “The Effects of Deer Overabundance on Forest Ecology and the Methods to Mitigate Those Effects” at the Lower Hudson Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management Partner Meeting on July 9
- “Student Research and Education on Suburban Private Lands and Its Use in Engaging the Public: Successes and Challenges” at The Wildlife Society Annual Conference (Edmonton, Alberta, CA) on October 8 – 9



2026 First Day Hike

Mark your new 2026 calendars for the annual “First Day Hike” on January 1 at 9 am.

The Preserve is open on this one winter day only, affording an experience unlike any other hike on our trails. Registration details forthcoming.

MRG caps for sale!

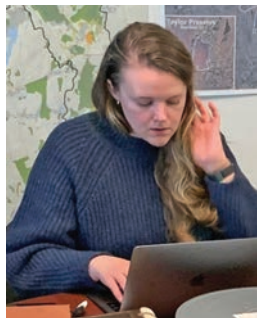
Show your support for the Gorge when you wear this MRG logo ball cap around town. Visit our website’s “Support” tab to purchase.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Meet Kristin Annon

In June 2024, Kristin joined us for an invasive species walk with Preserve Steward Jean-Luc Plante. Interested in ways to volunteer, she took on a unique challenge this summer: organizing more than 70 years of historical documents.



Kristin sorted through founding documents, photographs, slides, and newspaper clippings – including coverage of the Connecticut Water Company’s 1954 plan to flood the Gorge. She uncovered old home movies of our founders’ dachshunds and rare footage of scientist Gloria Hollister Anable’s 1930s bathysphere expeditions with William Beebe. Kristin even visited the Library of Congress, Princeton University, and the Wildlife Conservation Society to deepen her research into Gloria’s remarkable career.

Reflecting on the project, Kristin shared: “As someone new to the Mianus region, I was able to learn not only the story of the Gorge but also of the town I now call home. This place has such a rich history, and I had the chance to preserve a small part of it. From Gloria Anable and the neighbors who first saved the Gorge, to later battles against development, the story shows how amazing things can happen when people work together.”

We are deeply grateful to Kristin for her dedication and for creating a professional archive that preserves our history for future generations.

Hard-working summer interns

MRG hosted four interns in our College Internship in Suburban Ecology (CISE) for 10 weeks this summer. Megan Chun (Colby College), Maximus Santos (University of Vermont), Charlotte Shih (UC San Diego), and Zack Spivak (Kenyon College) helped us pull invasive species, sample for ticks, monitor vegetation plots, deploy dozens of camera traps, and build our new trail and wildlife pavilion, among many other projects.

Chris Nagy also supervised a Calder Summer Undergraduate Research (CSUR) Program intern, Claire Renault (Fordham), from Fordham’s Louis Calder Center. Claire estimated deer density at three county parks in our area and compared them with our most recent estimates at MRG.

The interns are an integral part of our land management and research programs each year, and this year our team was exemplary. Thank you to Megan, Maximus, Charlotte, Zack, and Claire for their hard work, and to our generous donors that supported the program.

BOARD SPOTLIGHT

Meet Jayni Chase

Jayni Chase has worked to advance environmental education for over 37 years. She founded the Center for Environmental Education in 1988, providing resources to build environmental education programs in K–12 schools. Now operating out of Unity College, Unity, Maine, The Center is a resource for educators worldwide.



In 1995, Scholastic published Jayni’s Blueprint for a Green School, a compilation of environmental information, resources and ideas for schools to ‘Go Green.’ This guidebook empowers everyone to transform schools into safe, healthy places of enlightened learning.

Jayni spearheaded two ambitious green school initiatives: GREEN Community Schools, creating model green schools, and Energy Efficient Schools in a partnership with the National Wildlife Federation and Serious Materials.

Before joining the Mianus River Gorge board of trustees, Jayni served on several boards, including The Alliance for Climate Education (ACE), the US Green Building Council Center for Green Schools, the NY Harbor School, the Billion Oyster Project (BOP), Green My Parents, Friends of the Earth US, and she chaired NY Senator Kirsten Gillibrand’s Green Schools Working Group.

Jayni credits her husband, Chevy, and their three daughters, Cydney, Caley and Emily, with providing the force behind her dedication to environmental health, safety and education.