

# WOODSTOCK TIMES

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## *The last step: Overlook purchases completed*

by George Pattison

Back when the Woodstock Land Conservancy announced what seemed to be a highly idealistic, if not totally gargantuan effort to Save Overlook Mountain four years ago, buying up a host of remaining properties and conservation easements on the key ridge defining the community's profile, the goal was simple...to eventually add to the mountain's park lands and, by inference, the town's sense of being in that park.

Then-Conservancy Board President Michael DeWan seemed to be everywhere at the time, trumpeting the campaign he'd help start, speaking about how important it was to Woodstock's soul.

Two years ago, John Winter took over the WLC's director's position stating that it was time to move on from the successful Overlook effort, which had served to help rejuvenate the organization founded in the 1980s to help save the Zena Cornfield. Lands, it was announced at the time, had been purchased with funds from the Open Space Institute for eventual donation to the state Department of Environmental Conservation's Overlook Wild Forest. New projects would be attended to, from protection of areas within the community itself to the creation of what has become the WLC's new crown jewel, its pristine Sloan Gorge trail property off Stoll Road in West Saugerties.

When Kevin Smith was named the WLC's new Board President to replace DeWan, he acknowledged the Overlook project as one of his predecessor's key achievements.

This past week, that project finally achieved its ultimate goal via a series of press announcements and releases from the State DEC, who trumpeted their own incorporation of the 330 acre Land Conservancy-sponsored properties with great pride...and idealism.

"A prominent and popular Catskill mountain summit has been permanently protected," DEC Commissioner Pete Grannis announced, making the local effort a precedent for further conservancy attempts throughout the state. "As one of the most recognizable landmarks on the eastern escarpment of the Catskill range that provides stunning backdrops to the Town of Woodstock, Overlook Mountain has long enjoyed a prominent place in America's natural and cultural history. DEC will continue to partner with local governments and land trusts to

protect precious properties like Overlook Mountain throughout the Catskill Forest Preserve."

The 330 acres includes three properties whose acquisition had been arranged by the WLC in recent years: a 210-acre Woodstock Guild of Artist and Craftsmen parcel known as Magic Meadow, a 92-acre parcel owned by Miriam Berg, and a 28-acre parcel owned by Bob Illjes, the latter two located on the steep southeastern side of the mountain and visible for miles around.

DEC paid a total of \$784,000 for the parcels using the Environmental Protection Fund.

The acquisitions will be added to DEC's Overlook Mountain Wild Forest in the Catskill Forest Preserve and offer recreational opportunities that include hiking, hunting, trapping, and camping.

"This announcement is the culmination of years of hard work, and thanks are due to the hundreds of Woodstockers and folks from all over who responded to our call to protect our beloved Overlook," said DeWan after hearing about his effort's final denouement. "We are immensely grateful to be able to realize this long-held dream, now a reality, and for the people of the State of New York and beyond to enjoy its wild, rugged beauty forever."

Chalk up another one for big dreams writ local...

*For further information on Woodstock Land Conservancy projects, issues, and membership, visit [www.woodstocklandconservancy.org](http://www.woodstocklandconservancy.org) or call 334-2418.*