



**Friends of the
Washington County Grasslands IBA**

- 2016 Annual Report -

www.ibafriends.org

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ANNUAL REPORT - 2016

2016 – A YEAR OF PROGRESS

We saw record growth in programs and outreach this year, with total revenues up 26% over 2015. Friends of the IBA's Alfred Z. Solomon Grassland Bird Viewing Area opened, Winter Raptor Fest 2016 attendance of 2,000 set a new record and we launched new conservation initiatives that will expand conserved lands by 244 acres!

Friends of the IBA's dedicated Board of Directors worked hard on building the organization's capacity to acquire, conserve and manage additional lands in the IBA. Thanks to a \$25,000 grant from the NYS Conservation Partnership Program (NYSCPP)* we were able to continue Friends of the IBA's growth as a professional land trust. The grant allowed us to hire a Director of Conservation and Program Development and other much-needed help on a contractual basis. As a result, membership and revenues increased by double digits again this year.

**Funding for this grant comes from New York's Environmental Protection Fund. The NYSCPP is administered by the Land Trust Alliance, in coordination with New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).*

LAND CONSERVATION

1) **64 acres under contract!** This property is located near our AZS Viewing Area and provides terrific habitat for wintering and breeding grassland birds. We saw dozens of Bobolinks and Savannah sparrows on the 64 acres in June, before the land was mowed. We also saw or heard several Eastern meadowlarks and a pair of threatened Upland Sandpipers at the site! The landowner agreed to leave the field uncut next year so we expect to see an increase in breeding and wintering birds in 2017. The early arrival of at least a dozen state endangered Short-eared owls in the fall and abundant prey populations portended a good year for the owls and other wintering raptors. We'll be launching a fundraising campaign to purchase this property.

2) **NYSDEC to add 180 acres?** Friends of the IBA stepped in to assist New York State DEC's proposed purchase of 180 acres of critical grassland habitat in the heart of the Washington County Grasslands Important Bird Area (IBA) from a willing landowner. FIBA submitted a proposal to the Town Board in July that would compensate the town for lost tax revenues of approximately \$4000 if they agree to allow the purchase to go through. The purchase has been held up for three years because the state can't pay taxes on WMAs. The Town Board voted in November to work on an agreement with Friends of the IBA. The property will become part of the existing Wildlife Management Area (WMA) on Blackhouse Road.

3) **Legislative support.** Friends of the IBA supported legislation introduced by Senator Betty Little and Assemblywoman Carrie Woerner to amend the real property law so the state can pay taxes on lands it owns in the IBA (the existing WMA and the 180 acres). The Fort Edward Town Board and Washington County Board of Supervisors also passed resolutions of support. The Senate bill passed; the Assembly bill did not make it out of committee. Little and Woerner have promised to re-introduce the bills in 2017.

4) **Alfred Z. Solomon Viewing Area Opens for Birding!**

Friends of the IBA's Alfred Z. Solomon Grassland Bird Viewing Area was completed in May. The Grand Opening was held in October, with over 70 people attending. Special thanks to Dave Larrow for building and donating material for the kiosk and sign and putting the finishing touches on the blind, Board member Ron Renoni for working with contractors and dozens of hours of labor and Bob Parker, Mark Janey and Stewart Brown for their labor!

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

1) **Winter Raptor Fest 2016** – May 14 & 15

Our move to May and the Washington County Fairgrounds in Easton/ Greenwich attracted a record numbers of visitors, with attendance of 2,000 the best yet! Live Bird of Prey programs showcased many of our native species and offered insights into the world of raptors. Many people stopped by on their way out to tell us how much they love this event. “Awesome,” “terrific,” and “wonderful” were frequent comments. Our terrific membership volunteers signed up over 100 new members – doubling last year’s record of fifty!

2) **Youth Education.** Friends of the IBA's new Education Committee began work to formalize and expand our youth education program this year. They are developing new activities that will be offered for the first time at Winter Raptor Fest 2017. An initial program at the Georgi in August proved extremely popular. We also increased our presence at the Washington County Fair from two days to five days.

3) **Field Trips & Workshops.** FIBA's guided walks and field trips continue to be popular. Trip leaders offered three guided walks/tours to view winter raptors in January thru March and two “migratory & breeding bird” walks in May & June. We’ve recruited three new field trip leaders and expect to expand offerings in 2017.

ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

1) **New Role for FIBA Founder.** Laurie LaFond left the Board of Directors in July after serving as Friends of the IBA's President and Acting Director since she founded the organization in 2010. She was promptly hired as FIBA's Director of Conservation and Program Development. “It’s time to focus on growing our land conservation program,” she said. “It’s imperative that we permanently protect critical habitat from willing landowners before it’s lost to development.” Laurie will continue to serve as Acting Director.

2) **New President brings Business Experience.** Board Member Mark DiIanni was elected as FIBA's new President. He brings a wealth of knowledge and skills gained from 30 years of business experience to his new role. He worked as an executive and “company builder” in the pharmaceutical/ biotechnology industry before providing research and development consulting services through the establishment and management of several independent service firms later on. Mark retired in 2015. He is passionate about his life-long interest in birding and the environment and has set high goals for Friends of the IBA’s next three years.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT - FY 2016

Revenues

Grants & Contributions	\$59,592
Programs	\$20,448
Miscellaneous income	\$703
2016 Total Revenues	\$80,743

***Special Thanks to:* Stewarts Shops, Sandy Hill Foundation, International Paper, Katherine & Hugh Roome, Odd Duck Farm, TCG, McCann’s Pharmacy, Eric Krantz, Frank Reilly, New York State Conservation Partnership Program* and all of our Winter Raptor Fest sponsors, members and supporters!**

Expenses

Program	\$41,589
Administration	\$14,311
Fundraising	\$3,917
Miscellaneous	\$3,639
2016 Total Expenses	\$63,456

Balance \$17,287

**NYS CPP grants are funded through NY’s Environmental Protection Fund and administered by the Land Trust Alliance in coordination with NYS DEC.*

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

- Mark Dilanni, President
(July – December)
- Laurie LaFond, President
(Jan – July)
- Cliff Oliver, Vice President
- Ron Renoni, Secretary
- Margaret Baldwin, Treasurer
- Scott Pulver
- Sandra Scroggins
- Ken Beckley

NON-VOTING MEMBERS:

- Laurie LaFond, FIBA Director

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION:

Friends of the IBA honored five individuals who have met the criteria for Lifetime Membership at our annual program held in March: **Joanne Loftus, Dave Larrow, Karen Chapman, Eric Krantz and Sean Junda** – thanks for all you’ve done and continue to do for Friends of the IBA!

We also recognized the hard work of our Board and Committee members and our year-round volunteers: Dave Larrow, Karen Chapman, Gordon Ellmers, Mark Janey, Sandi Sullivan, Debbie Kidalowski, Bob Parker, David deVries, Lee Capodegli, Elizabeth Nichols, Rich Speidel, Steve Sanford, Marilyn Stephenson, Robin Lyle, Sandy Smith and Stewart Brown.

Thanks also to all of our members, supporters and volunteers who assisted at Winter Raptor Fest or other events and programs throughout the year – we couldn’t do it without you!