

information we have gathered about the Shawangunks with local communities so we can develop plans collaboratively to protect ridge lands over the long-term – as crucial open space resources for local residents and as critical habitat for plants and wildlife.”

Want to track the more reclusive life that lives on the ridge? Have you heard a coyote howl and wanted to catch a glimpse? Or tracked a bobcat to a cliff edge? This is the topic of the **February 6** talk by naturalist and habitat specialist Susan Morse. Her organization, *Keeping Track*, trains volunteers to read animal tracks and sign and record the movement of animals through larger landscapes.

“Preserving large tracts of interconnected open areas – both on and off the ridge – is crucial for the survival of some of our larger species,” explained Hatti Langsford, educator and naturalist at the **Minnewaska State Park Preserve**. “Although it’s one of the smaller predators, even the elusive fisher travels up to 150 square miles – wandering even further in winter when food is scarce, these species rely on these wildlife corridors,” she said. A member of the weasel family, the fisher disappeared from the Shawangunks and most of the northern U.S. by the 1930s, due to trapping and land-clearing up through the early 1900s. Fishers were successfully reintroduced in the Shawangunks in the late 1970s.

Far from reclusive or rare, white-tailed deer are an example of a rapidly growing species that – by its

sheer numbers alone – threatens to strip bare much of the plant life to be found within five feet of the ground. One deer can eat a ton-and-a-half of greenery a year. This excessive land clearing destroys habitat for other small animals and nesting birds, sending the entire ecosystem into chaos.

Although rarely seen on the ridge in the early 1900s, deer now number well in excess of a million in New York State. Drawn to the well-fed and watered plants in suburban backyards, white-tailed deer are every gardener’s nemesis, causing nearly \$1 billion in farm, garden, and timber damage nationwide. Car accidents involving deer kill more than 100 people and cause more than \$1 billion in damage nationwide every year. How do deer change the composition of our woodlands? What can and should be done about this “natural” threat to both ridgetop and valley open areas will be discussed on **February 20th at 7 PM** by Brad Roeller, Manager of Display Gardens and Grounds at the Institute of Ecosystem Studies.

The free winter lecture series continues every Thursday in February and March, with February lectures being held at SUNY New Paltz, and the March series being offered through the **Ellenville Public Library & Museum**, at **40 Center Street**. For more information about the lectures, contact Hatti Langsford, Park Interpreter, *Minnewaska State Park Preserve*, (845) 255-2011. (Detailed schedule follows on next pages.) ↗

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