

## **THE MOHONK PRESERVE POSITION OPPOSING THE PROPOSED AWOSTING DEVELOPMENT**

For forty years the Mohonk Preserve has welcomed and worked with caring neighbors who share a commitment to saving one of the outstanding natural areas in the eastern United States. The Preserve and its neighbors have sought to guide development and use of the lands abutting and surrounding the northern Shawangunk Mountains so that their aesthetic, ecological, and economic benefits are not diminished.

*Accordingly, the Mohonk Preserve believes that the extensive development of houses, facilities, and roads proposed for the tract of land called the Awosting Reserve would have a serious negative impact on the ridge and the surrounding communities, and would not adequately safeguard the incomparable scenery and ecological fragility of the Shawangunk Ridge.*

The Mohonk Preserve is concerned about the scale, location, and configuration of the "Cluster Subdivision Plan" submitted to the Towns of Gardiner and Shawangunk on December 23, 2002. In several meetings the Preserve has discussed with the developers the reduction and redistribution of home sites, and the setting aside of a large, intact, and functional tract of open space compatible with ridgewide and community open space goals. The Preserve has offered participants scientific, land management, and conservation planning information to help effect a positive outcome.

### **The Shawangunk Ridge is of statewide, national and global importance.**

The Mohonk Preserve, New York's largest member and visitor supported nature preserve, protects over 6500 acres of the northern Shawangunk ridge. The ridge is widely known as one of the most important sites in the northeastern United States for landscape-level biodiversity conservation, earning it a designation by The Nature Conservancy as one of Earth's "Last Great Places." Approximately 7500 acres of the ridge on the north end are designated as the Mohonk National Historic Landmark, while the Ice Caves at Sam's Point in the south are designated as a National Natural Landmark. These nationally recognized "bookends" match with Minnewaska State Park Preserve in the middle, called by many the "crown jewel of New York's parks."

New York State, in its Open Space Conservation Plan, cites the Shawangunk Ridge as a "major resource area" and a top priority for protection. The Plan identifies the combination of ecological factors, the extremely high watershed protection value to surrounding valleys, and the need to maintain unfragmented forest and barrens to protect the aquifer to assure quality ground and surface water flow. The Plan further recognizes the ridge as a greenway corridor for scenic enjoyment, recreation and as a regional anchor for heritage and ecotourism that contributes significantly to the economy. *The Awosting Reserve proposal will significantly compromise these major resource and ecological factors.*

### **The open space uses of the Shawangunk Ridge are an economic engine for the region.**

In the Hudson Valley Region, the economic contribution of the Shawangunk Ridge is widely recognized. The 500,000+ annual recreational visitors to the ridge spend over \$10 million in the local economy on food, lodging, and other retail purchases, supporting merchants and tourism-related jobs, and yielding hundreds of thousands of dollars in county sales tax revenues. As a result, a growing number of community and business leaders have supported the protection of the Shawangunk Ridge as a critical element of the tourism economy. *Inappropriate residential and commercial uses of the ridge can seriously compromise the very rural qualities that support*

*the tourism and real estate economy. As communities surrounding the ridge grow through development in acceptable locations, it is the beauty and recreational attraction of the ridge that sustains high real estate values and drives a thriving housing and hospitality market. Housing should be developed only in a manner that does not despoil these values.*

**This development as proposed will compromise scientific and land conservation values.**

Hundreds of scientists, landscape experts, and planners have been studying the ridge for a long time. They have noted that unique factors of elevation, slopes, soils, habitat, and water availability render the ridge a highly sensitive place and these criteria must guide any development review. The lands flanking the ridge should serve as a healthy transition zone where low density, compatible land uses can enable adequate buffers, linkages, and corridors for “eco-permeability” so that species can migrate. *Given these constraints, any ridge development must respect the physical limitations of the land.*

**The Mohonk Preserve urges a continuing, thorough review to ensure that any proposal relies on sound land use planning and credible scientific information.**

Clearly the Town of Gardiner, the Department of Environmental Conservation and other involved agencies and organizations, gathering, studying, and acting upon expert and citizen input, will take a hard look at the Awosting Reserve proposal. *Alternatives must be carefully considered, as required by law, to find acceptable solutions without irreversibly transforming the critical open space functions and core biodiversity values that have made the ridge a widely treasured landscape and a community asset to our region.*

**The Shawangunk Ridge must be preserved as a place of beauty, retreat and spiritual renewal for generations to come.**

Perhaps the most important reason the nature of this property is critical is the incomparable ability of the Shawangunk Ridge to inspire renewal of the human spirit through the wonder and majesty of nature. On this we cannot easily place an economic value, nor does any honorific designation do justice to the awe-inspiring and captivating experience of so many people, from Native Americans to the earliest settlers to the present generation, who have visited the ridge. Future visitors for generations to come should have this same opportunity to make a life-affirming discovery of their place in nature.

**The Mohonk Preserve believes that the high slopes, cliff bases, and summits of the Shawangunk Ridge are not a suitable place for the intensive and large-scale development proposed for Awosting Reserve.**

*Thousands of people from all walks of life have chosen to live year-round or part-time in proximity to this ridge without impinging on its unique character. The investors of the proposed Awosting Reserve should seriously consider whether the present plan, if implemented, would be at the cost of forever altering the very landscape which provides the value. The Mohonk Preserve has always welcomed caring neighbors, but this proposal fails that test.*

*\* The above position was adopted at a meeting of the Mohonk Preserve Board of Directors on April 6, 2003*