

## ***Dionondehowa Wildlife Sanctuary and School***

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Dionondehowa Wildlife Sanctuary and School is a forever-wild nonprofit land trust located on 217 acres, bordering the Battenkill River in southern Washington County, east of Saratoga Springs by about 45 minutes.

While the Sanctuary serves as a refuge and recharge areas, the School is dedicated to Nature Studies and to the Healing and Expressive Arts, using them to promote social and environmental responsibility in an atmosphere both joyful and contemplative.

Dionondehowa (Dye-on-on-duh-how-uh) was first recorded by the European immigrants in 1709. It is listed in Beauchamp's *Aboriginal Place Names of New York State* and translates to *She Opens The Door For Them* which may have referred to the river itself, to some ancient sachem or perhaps to the Keeper of the Eastern Door of the Iroquois Confederacy.

Although it is difficult to pronounce - and may have drifted far from its original meaning - the name was chosen as bowing homage to the ancestors of this place. The rolling beauty of the word can still summon in us something deep and distant which we strain to hear in the din and spin of our daily lives.

There remains on the Sanctuary land, a strong sense of the people who lived here before it was refashioned by the 18<sup>th</sup> century wave of settlers. More ancient yet, a 5000-year-old spear point was found in 1993.

The land still retains its magic, its sprites and other spirits, offering glimpses for those who dare to see. The Sanctuary can be a refuge for humans, as well, offering us respite - the chance to be still - and coaxing us to "come to our senses!"

Besides offering the opportunity to pause, reflect and shift our thinking, Dionondehowa has also undertaken four projects: habitat for medium-length-grass-nesting species of birds such as Bobolinks, Horned Larks and Meadowlarks; riparian stabilization of the Battenkill bank; reforestation; and wetland restoration. (Note: 2019, several years ago after *many* attempts with the help of Trout Unlimited, the Washington County Soil and Water Conservation District, and the NYS-DEC, we had to surrender to the understanding that our bank cannot be stabilized against the River's action, in good part because of the rip-rap across the River, stalwartly in place to stabilize the railroad tracks. This solution on that side of the River effectively "throws" the coursing water's weight, volume and velocity against our side.)

As a land trust, Dionondehowa is able to receive donations of property rights from other landowners along the river corridor, throughout the watershed and beyond. In 2002, neighboring landowners donated a valuable conservation easement to DWS&S, relieving their own tax burden and moving Dionondehowa toward eventual purchase of the parcel, once the Capital Campaign goal of \$50,000 would be reached through public support (completed June, 2006).

There are many aspects to the work of DWS&S, including fundraising and scientific study, which are the most obvious and tangible pursuits of a land trust and school. These studies can help humans define our relationship with nature. However, Dionondehowa was not initiated for these purposes alone. More fundamentally it was initiated to help our species rethink our relationship with nature, with the wild ones, and with our sustaining resources. It is not so much a place to quantify or to change as it is a place to allow ourselves to *be changed*. Dionondehowa - *She Opens The Door For Them* - invites visitors to cross thresholds of expectation and perception and to fully embrace Being Alive as a mystical adventure.

This Spring, 2004, DWS&S will add Apprenticeships to its many offerings of workshops and classes. Giving individuals the opportunity to study, one-on-one, any combination of Nature Studies (including spiritual ecology), Expressive Arts, and Healing Arts. Participants will create their own course of study, guided by inspiration and by Dionondehowa Director, Bonnie Hoag.