

# Committee on Resources

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## Witness Testimony

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My name is Jack Jordan and I am from the Town of Lexington, New York. Six years ago my wife Kathy, our four children and I moved to this area. Kathy's grandfather had brought what is now our home approximately 57 years ago as a summer home for his family. What we did not know before moving here was how much New York City, New York State, the National Park Service, and the United Nations also wanted to move here.

Our involvement in the Property Rights Movement began late January 1995, when we read a small article in *The Catskill Daily Mail*. It was about a meeting that was to be held in the Town of Cairo dealing with the **Greene County Planning Board**, the **Environmental Management Council**, and the **Catskill Center**. The purpose of this meeting was for the **Catskill Center** to bring a presentation on something called the **Heritage Trail** and was to be given by Deborah DeWan. This would not normally have caught my eye had it not been for the sentence stating:

*"The Catskill Center received a National Park Service grant last year to launch the project..." The Daily Mail, County Planning Board, EMC Hear Presentation On Heritage*

### Trail Jan. 31

We became concerned since we had heard some stories of what the NPS had done to personal property rights in other areas. *The Daily Mail*, Jan 31, 1995 We decided to find out as much as we could before the meeting which was going to be held in a few days.

We contacted a friend in Virginia who put us in touch with David Howard, **Alliance for America**, and Carol LaGrasse, **New York Property Rights**. Kathy and I borrowed a FAX machine and started receiving information. At the same time we started going door to door asking people if they had heard of the Heritage Trail. We started along the route the trail was to take speaking to property owners and to our surprise we found no one had ever heard of this plan. With this information we put together a petition against the Heritage Trail, trails, scenic designation, their linking with and connecting to private property.

The day before the meeting my wife was able to get a copy of the **Catskill Center's Catskill Center News** from which we read a story written by the **Senior Program Associate Deborah Meyer DeWan** entitled **American Heritage Areas Partnership Program**. In this story DeWan speaks of the House of Representatives bill dealing with the creation of **The American Heritage Areas Partnership Program**. This bill, **H.R. 5044** among other things establish a 140 mile **Hudson River Valley American Heritage Area**. Gerald Solomon wrote a letter to his fellow congressmen stating:

***OPPOSE ANOTHER FEDERAL LAND GRAB!***

***VOTE "NO" ON***

***THE AMERICAN HERITAGE AREAS PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM***

*"I urge you to defend property rights and strongly oppose the AHAPP... the environmentalist advocating*

*this bill have **FEDERAL LAND USE CONTROL AS THEIR PRIMARY OBJECTIVE.***" Congressman Gerald Solomon, letter dated Sept. 19, 1994

In this story DeWan was upset about Solomon's letter and what she felt it had done for the outcome of the bill. That night at the meeting, however, she told the people that it was Solomon who introduced the bill. If it were not for the fact that I had received a FAX of a copy of Mr. Solomon's letter and showed it to everyone there she would have gotten away with misleading the people at this meeting.

In her article DeWan stated that bill had become tied up in the House and latter left unfinished, "*the Heritage Trails would have to become a local 'grassroots effort' in order for the program to go through*", and that this designation was a way to tap into federal funds and assistance from none other than the **NPS**. In this she was stating that the idea for the trails *was* founded in this bill, and would be continued on a local level in order to bring about the goals set forth in the original bill.

The night of the meeting to we were told that the "idea" for this trail had come about from a "local" group of people which lived along the area involved, and was meant to be a means for the different towns along NYS Routes 23 and 23A to bring in more business and that it was non governmental and non regulatory. DeWan lead the people to believe that this "*partnership*" was and is a "*grassroots effort*", which has been put together by other interested individuals from the area and not connected to any other actions.

However, listed in the project goals for this "partnership" was the statement; "*The success of this project will be demonstrated by the creation of a regional task force that can serve as a local empowerment tool for conservation and planning.*" Handout from the Catskill Center, Jan. 31, 1995

What was being said was that the **Catskill Center** wanted to impose an unnecessary bureaucracy on the Mountaintop area. This would also open the door for even more governmental regulations and control of private property and rights. We already have "local control" over this area, why do we have to dilute and marginalize what we already control?

While the **Catskill Center** stated that it is the short term goal of this task force to put together maps and brochures telling people of the many places of interests in this area, they went to the **NPS** in order to find help. This did not make sense, in light of the fact that Greene County already had **The Greene Country Promotion Department** which puts out the *Greene County Catskill Travel Guide*. Just off the N.Y.S. Thruway we have the **Greene County Visitor Information Center**. If it was better guide information we needed why have the federal government come in to show us our own area?

What we did not know then was the real goal of the **Catskill Center**. We feel that the **Heritage Trail** was misrepresented by the **Catskill Center** in order to push through their own plans and goals. Besides the members of the **Center** many of the other "interested individuals" represent museums, historical societies, special interest groups; **everyone but the main stream local property owners who live along the area in question.**

Kathy and I knew however, that in order to protect our rights we must become active. What we did not expect was the attack which would come against us and others wishing to protect their rights.

We learned that the **Heritage Trail** was not the only program the **Catskill Center** was involved in. They had also put together an application to designate the area as the **Catskill/Biosphere Reserve**. Without so much as asking even the local government, much less the local resident land owners which this reserve

would effect, the Catskill Center took it upon their selves to ask the **UN** for this designation. While this proposal would effect all of Greene, Delaware, Schoharie, Sullivan, Ulster, Otsego, and part of Albany Countries, the **Catskill Center** did not even offer to inform them of these actions.

Then we learned of another meeting being held in Prattsville at the Pratt Museum dealing with the **Heritage Trail**. This was an unadvertised meeting and was lead by **Ron Wagner**, of the **Catskill Center**. We were surprised to find that at this meeting there were quite a few museum and historical sites resented along with **Karl Beard** of the **NPS**. Before this meeting we had put together a handout of information we learned **No Takings**, Jack Jordan. Wagner was upset and felt that we were spreading nonfactual information. Yet the information had come from the **Congressional Record**, **The National Park Service Concept Paper**, **NYS Department of Environmental Conservation**, and *The Catskill Center News*.

At several **Heritage Trail Meetings** both **Ron Wagner** and **DeWan** insisted that they had nothing to do with the **Biosphere Reserve Project**. However one of the "Principal References" listed in the application was that of **DeWan's** own thesis *The Daily Mail*, April 7, 1995 **A View From The Mountaintop**. The truth turned out that **DeWan** had spent two years working in a local town helping to put together a historical profile of the area to be used for her thesis. When people in the area started to learn that the same woman was involved with these projects they felt betrayed.

The **Heritage Trail** was portrayed as only being a "concept" and "benign". These same words were later to be used for the **Biosphere**. In a period of less than two weeks Kathy and I read everything we could about property rights, biospheres, and land use. We organized a group of local people and called it **NO TAKINGS**. Our family took a trip up to Gloversville to meet David and Bonnie Howard. They supplied us with mountains of information, contacts, and a video of a documentary film about the making of a park in Cayuga Ohio.

The video showed how the people of Cayuga Valley had been told that this was only to be a Recreational Area and would help the area and the people living there. Since the people who lived there, loved the land, respected and took care of it, they thought it would be a good idea to preserve it the way it was. They didn't dream that the NPS had plans to acquire their land and remove them from their family homesteads. In the end the people were moved out and their lands taken to make way for the "Recreational Area".

With this material we invited people to our home to share the information and the video. The interest in this was so great that we used the church hall in town to show the film to members of some of the local town boards. (One local paper was to later write that "now it turns out that much of the language utilized by **No Takings** and many of the town and county officials who voted against the Biosphere project came from the same sources uncovered in recent investigations of the Oklahoma City bombing" **The Mountain Eagle**, *These People Are Suspicious*.)

The problem here on the Mountaintop was and is the limited number of non-bias newspapers. During this time there was one reporter from a newspaper trying to print the facts while another paper would print one-sided facts and even out right misinformation (a fact which the reporter was latter to admitted to my wife and myself was done mainly to sell papers). We learned that one of the most important thing in dealing with this problem was the speed at which one could obtain information. The old FAX machine we borrowed was slow. We need to be able to put together information fast and get it out to people just as quickly. We decided it was nessary to buy a copier and newer FAX machine. Armed with this we started putting out an informational newsletter called **Mountain Views** *Mountain Views*, Feb/March 1996.

One local paper started a campaign against us and others working with us. Using fictitious writers this "paper" said there were "dangerous waves of bad information passing around". One reporter from another paper who was blowing holes in the Biosphere was accused of being "in bed with a certain Delaware County property right activist". The property right activist is in fact the reporter's wife. The Mountain Eagle, April 6, 1995, "Ned Buntline", *A Growing Board Brouhaha* As opposition to the UNMAB increased so did the slanderous attacks by this paper. Anyone opposed became anti environment right wing extremists.

We believed that the people had a right to know what the **Biosphere** was all about. We contacted a legislator in our area and he knew nothing about it. The newspaper tried to get a copy of the application and could not. I contacted the Attorney General's office and they were not able to get a copy. It wasn't until Senator Cook became involved that we were able to get portions and more information.

At that time Greene County Legislature Clerk Donald Olson said it was news to him. He was stated on February 16, 1995 that he "still has not received any information about the project from the Catskill Center." This was in spite of the fact that all of Greene County was to be in the **Biosphere**. When asked about this **Tora Johnson, Center Program Associate for the Catskill Center** said, "Announcements and invitations to participate in the project will be sent to town supervisors and county officials in about 2 weeks." **The Daily Mail**, Feb. 16, 1995 Sadly however, it was already in the hands of the UN.

At an unadvertised meeting on the Biosphere the first copy of the application to be shown to the public (only after it had been sent to the UN) was passed around the room. In the front was a "**Mailing List for Catskill Region Biosphere Reserve Organizing Meetings**" which listed the names of local officials. Not knowing who Kathy was, the book was passed to her. Kathy copied the names and we turned them over to one of the newspapers. The following day the paper published the list and we were surprised to learn that some of these people had never heard of the **Biosphere** much less taken part in an organizing meeting. The director of the **Catskill Center, Janet Crawshaw** wrote on March 17, 1995 ; "It has come to our attention that some of the people in the region have misinterpreted the meaning of the list, and this has caused problems for some individuals on the list." For anyone reading the application it appeared that the **Center** had the support of the local officials because of this list.

By getting in touch with other groups within the Property Rights Movement we were able to bring together vast information. Alone, we did not know the power or the goals of these environmental groups, yet with the help and communication of groups within the Property Rights Movement the overall picture began to come together.

On April 6, 1995 there was a hearing in Kingston, NY on the **Biosphere**. I made up a map showing the size of the **Biosphere** and the counties it would cover **Catskill Region Biosphere Reserve Map**, Jack Jordan. We brought it along with us to show the biosphere and the **Heritage Trail**.

At this meeting **Mr. Sherret Chase** who was one of the sponsors of the **Catskill UNMAB** told the audience how wonderful it would be for everyone and how it would bring the Catskill into a new light. He stated that the people against it did not understand the idea behind the Biosphere. Because he had worked for "so long" at putting together the work towards the Biosphere it was wrong not to be for it. **Mr. Chase** spent a long time telling of his local work and groups he belonged to but failed to mention work done in other areas of New York.

A woman from our group wished to ask about his other activities in the Adirondacks. Yet even having her hand raised for quite a long time and was not recognized. She finally stood up and told everyone about his

other background, at which **Mr. Chase** demanded to know who all was from the Adirondacks. **David Howard**, who had come with Kathy and I was the only person outside of the Catskill there. Once he saw David **Mr. Chase** never said another word during the meeting.

While the meeting was going on a copy of the UN draft document entitled, **Global Biodiversity Assessment Section 10** was being passed around. In the Daily Mail April 13, 1995 Raymond Christensen the Delaware board chairman read a passage from section 10.5; "During the initial stages of park and reserve establishment, there may be a transition phases while local inhabitants are provided with options for relocation outside the area. In many cases this phase can be 20 to 50 years where residents are given life tenancy, that is, where following purchase of and payment for their valuable buildings, livestock, crops and other items, they may remain and work the land (under certain restrictions) for the remainder of their lives. Some people have called this nothing more than the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval," Christensen said, "I don't think so." He also said he objected to the fact that the center "worked 3 years on a project involving 6 counties without letting anybody in those counties know what they were doing." *The Daily Mail*, April 13, 1995

Also at this meeting was Langdon Chapman legislative aide to Senator Cook and Councilman from the Town of Hunter. He was quoted in the newspaper the next day, "Last night I asked a question which you were unwilling or unable to answer. I will restate it here: If a county, by formal resolution, requests not to be included in the biosphere, will you honor the request of the locally elected officials and remove that county from the biosphere? He continued with other statements about home rule. Chapman quoted her as saying that she would take into consideration "the thoughts" of the respective counties". Chapman declared the answer "unacceptable". *The Daily Mail*, April 10, 1997

After the meeting Mr. Chase sent out a 3 page letter to local newspapers Letter of Sherret S. Chase, May 12, 1995. He stated "Here in the Catskills. There are hate groups of paramilitary structure; bush bullies. Some of the leaders of these groups receive their funding and encouragement from local fascists, others from European fascists including the Nazi government itself. After Pearl Harbor these groups dissolved or went dormant many of their followers serves their country well during the war." Later in his letter he stated, "At that meeting I discovered that I am individually targeted. One of the Prattsville disrupters - a women well known in Prattsville - revealed as a treat that she had a lengthy dossier."

The events depicted by Mr. Chase's letter is a far cry from what actually occurred at that meeting. The people in attendance had more questions but the meeting was abruptly closed. Because of public awareness, in the end different towns voted not to support the **Heritage Trail** and the **Biosphere**. Had it not been for **Section 10** many people there would never have known the real goal of the biosphere which is to depopulate the area. The **Good Housekeeping Seal** without the "house".

After this and the fact that many towns asked not to be part of the Biosphere and the Heritage Trail *The Daily Mail*, March 20, 1995; April 11, 1995; April 12, 1995, the Catskill Center withdrew the application. *The Mountain Eagle*, March 23, 1995

The rhetoric and discourse even reached this meeting before it was given a chance to convene. On May 1, 1997 another of the long dead came back from the grave to mislead people. Daniel Shays, an insurrectionist from 1787 wrote in the local newspaper that he had diner with Congressman Sherry Boehlert the other night. According to "Shays" Boehlert is "sick and tired of so many crazies getting control of agendas, such as the upcoming congressional hearing on U.N. activities planned for Hunter..." *The Mountain Eagle*, May 1, 1997 The Catskills is a wonderful place to live, just ask Nellie Bly (1867-1922), Ned Buntline (1823-

1886), or Daniel Shays(1747-1825) apparently they too have come back to live here.

It is sad that here in America we must write laws protecting lands belonging to America Citizens. I feel that land owners do care for the land and work to take care of it. An important right as an American is the right to own property. Sadly there is an environmental agenda which is opposed to private property rights. So much of this area is under regulations unheard of in other parts of the country.

The Catskills supply New York City with their drinking water, because of this NYC regulates how we can use the water flowing through our land. It is their long term plan to own the land in the Catskills. The devastating effects of new watershed regulations upon the local population will not be seen for years to come. These new regulations involve land acquisition and stricter regulations.

With soaring taxes many farms are no long in operation. Land once used to feed the people are now turned over to the State to be added to the **Catskill State Park**. Enactment of **H.R. 901** will help protect the rights of American Citizens.

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