Press Conference:

**Save The Caves**

**Sunday, October 25, 2020, 2:00PM**

***Rain date: Sunday, November 1, 2020, 2:00pm***

**55 Main Street, Chester, NY (outdoor patio)**

**(Please wear a mask and social distance)**

**Preservation Efforts---not Mining---are Needed to Preserve Dutchess Quarry Caves**

**Orange County NY is the site of the internationally significant Dutchess Quarry Caves on Goshen’s Mount Lookout.** One of the oldest sites of human habitation east of the Mississippi River, occupation of these prehistoric caves has been dated back to between 12,500 to 15,000 BC!The caves were discovered by boy scouts in the 1940s and have been the subject of ongoing archeological investigation beginning in the 1960s. Eight of the caves are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Looking out over Orange County’s Black Dirt Region, occupants of the caves surveilled a viewshed where mastodon and giant beaver abounded in the primordial cedar swamp stretching out below Mt. Lookout. Here, we come to an understanding of our region at the earliest point of human presence on our continent. This site is perhaps Orange County’s most important historical treasure and is a place sacred to our indigenous peoples as a direct connection to their original ancestors.

The bad news is that, from the late 1930s, Mt. Lookout was mined for its limestone rock. As the rock mass was destroyed, some of the caves were too. In the 1980s, Orange Environment, local archeologists and many others acted to protect the caves. Even as Orange County allowed mining to continue---the label Dutchess Quarry caves derives from this practice---the caves were to be protected with a 200’ buffer zone and restricted access. But just beyond that buffer a shear drop of 200’ reveals a giant chasm mined into the mountain. Pumps run constantly to prevent the chasm from filling up with water so that mining can continue. Seismographs measure vibration of the caves. Now Orange County must decide whether to allow a mining company to acquire the remaining portion of Lookout Mountain for additional mining; it awaits an appraisal of the mining materials in preparation for exploring a potential sale.

Under former planning commissioner Dave Church, an exhaustive study of the caves was published in 2012, “Dutchess Quarry Sites National Register District- a management and conservation report” (available on the OC website). This report echoes recommendations made in the past by many, including Orange Environment.

In holding this press conference, Orange Environment announces its opposition to additional mining on Mt Lookout. And we demand a complete reclamation and preservation plan. There are many good reasons for this position.

1. The Mt. Lookout (Dutchess Quarry) caves are an unparalleled resource for County and the world. This a potential source of education and tourism opportunities for the future if an interpretive center, distributed educational kiosks, related curriculum and further research are developed around the caves (albeit not allowing further disturbance of them).
2. These caves should not be jeopardized through additional blasting, drilling and weakening of the thin remaining shelf they are perched atop of. We will be joined in the press conference by partners to help underscore the importance of the site and its vulnerability.
3. The Lookout Mountain caves are sacred to the Native Americans of our region who view the caves and the potential burials and objects they contain as their responsibility to protect, even if the county and mining companies have not. We will be joined in our press conference by Chief Vincent Mann, head of the Turtle Clan of the Ramapough-Lenape tribe, who represents a network of Native Americans who seek to protect the caves.
4. The county has allowed severe environmental degradation to occur on Lookout Mountain without having an overall plan for reclamation. Now they are caught literally between a rock and a hard place. If they stop the pumps, the chasm will fill up with water---Lake Lookout---that will require security and management. But to keep the pumps on is a major responsibility. Plus, there is the responsibility to protect the National Register site. The rockface where the caves lie may be drying out from the pumping. But if water is let back into the site, might it dissolve the cave’s foundation? A major reclamation and cave protection study is required at this juncture to create a long-overdue site plan.

This press conference will further elaborate the reason for Orange County to prevent additional mining, better protect the caves, promote this educational and tourism resource and plan for the best long-term reclamation of the site. If it instead moves to allow further mining (including through a property sale); a full environmental impact statement will be required. And future mining permits will be actively opposed. This press conference also welcomes our indigenous community, for whom this site is sacred, to the broad but not always connected coalition of citizens and scientists that have long sought to protect this resource. It is time for us all to respect this treasure, this connection to forebears and this remnant of the early environmental history of our region.

**Kathy Skafidas 845-988-7687** [**kathy@skafidas.com**](mailto:kathy@skafidas.com)**; Mary Altobelli 845-469-9487** [**mtaltobelli@gmail.com**](mailto:mtaltobelli@gmail.com)

**Please visit our website at** [**www.orangeenvironment.com**](http://www.orangeenvironment.com)**.**

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