



THE LAND STEWARD

Newsletter of the Finger Lakes Land Trust

Vol. 15, No. 4

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes Region

Fall 2003

Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve Keeps on Growing

Land Trust secures contract to purchase addition to the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve and kicks off fundraising campaign.

With the recent signing of a purchase contract on 30 additional acres, the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve keeps on growing. This latest addition will be the eighth milestone in our efforts to protect this important section of the Cayuga Inlet Valley, just south of Ithaca. To cover the cost of this and at least one other future addition to the preserve, the Land Trust is launching a \$100,000 fundraising campaign.

A brief history of our work here at the true Cayuga Inlet puts this latest addition and new fundraising campaign into perspective. The seed was planted when forester Mike DeMunn and volunteer Priscilla Sodums nominated this area for the Land Trust's list of potential conservation projects. It easily qualified for the Wish List, sitting proud as it does against the 7,000-acre Danby State Forest where Thatcher's Pinnacles rise from a convoluted expanse of glacial moraine. When Land Trust Volunteer of the Year for 2002 John Smith and his wife were gearing up for



Photo by Marie Reard

Nestled within the protected borders of the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve, Coleman Lake plays host to a variety of bird species, including the majestic Osprey and the stately Great Egret.

their relocation to Ithaca, they bought a topographic map and directed their real estate agent to the spot displaying the densest jumble of topo lines. "We want to live here!" they said.

Once earmarked, some vision and nurturing produced the inaugural version of our Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve; about half its current size but exhibiting a healthy root structure from the start. In 1995, the Tompkins County Board of Representatives was impressed enough by the Land Trust's vision

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A New Tool & A New Partnership

"We've got a useful new tool in our tool kit," says Andy Zepp, director of the Land Trust. He's not talking about a hammer or a saw, but an agreement the Land Trust has just formalized with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We are now working with its Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program—a program that helps private landowners with habitat restoration and management. Its goals: to "enhance agricultural activities and wildlife" via selected projects "based on their benefits to migratory birds, native fishes, rare and unique species, and their habitats."

Nationwide, the program has been working closely with farmers and ranchers, Indian nations, corporations, and schools, as well as individuals who own modest parcels of land and wish to ensure that their property will benefit wildlife into the future.

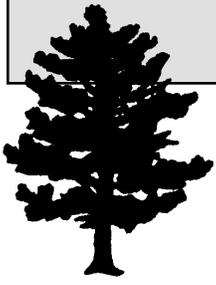
"In our region," continues Andy, "the emphasis has been on restoring wetlands that had once been drained and restoring

streams that have been degraded. The program also provides assistance for managing grasslands where declining or endangered bird species nest." Since 1990, the annual goal for New York has been to restore one thousand acres of wetlands, 500 acres of upland, and five miles of streams.

Cayuga County landowner Bob Ingham tapped the Partners program for assistance in restoring an 8-acre wetland on his property. Bob wanted to restore the wetland to benefit local wildlife. The site had been drained many years ago to grow potatoes and onions. USFWS provided a water control structure that allowed him to recreate the wetland while also controlling water levels – an important feature that provides for the control of invasive Purple Loosestrife plants. Bob now sees a variety of shorebirds and waterfowl on his property and heartily recommends the program to other landowners.

Through the partnership program, USFWS staff biologists

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PERSPECTIVES

As we tromped through the damp woodlands, several grunts and a few groans punctuated the sound of our heavy footsteps. We were carrying timbers, planks, and other building materials far into the interior of the

Land Trust's Dorothy McIlroy Bird Sanctuary. I had joined a crew of more than a dozen volunteers, both young and not-so-young, who were spending the day constructing a boardwalk and interpretive kiosk.

While we toted lumber, other volunteers were pounding nails, cutting timbers, mixing concrete, and clearing trails. Skilled craftsmen guided young students, teaching new skills while preparing the preserve for visitors. At the end of the day, we'd made substantial progress: the frame of the kiosk was upright and in place, the first boardwalk segment was constructed, and piles of lumber had been moved from the staging area to where they were needed. Additional volunteer crews would follow in our footsteps to complete the job.

Our efforts were only the latest at the McIlroy Sanctuary. Since acquiring our first tract at this Cayuga County wetland last year, a considerable amount of effort – particularly volunteer effort – has gone into making this a nature preserve that will both educate and enchant visitors. Before my day in the woods, volunteers had already removed four dumpsters full of trash and 150 tires from an illegal dump at the site. Volunteers had coordinated the burial of a demolished building and placement of large boulders to discourage trespass by motor vehicles. They had also assisted with the design of the trails system and outreach to neighbors of the preserve.

Volunteers truly are the backbone of the Finger Lakes Land Trust and, indeed, the land trust movement.

At the McIlroy Sanctuary, and elsewhere, we simply could not achieve our mission without the contributions of countless volunteers. Volunteers write and edit this newsletter. They monitor and inventory our preserves and easements; maintain trails; control invasive plant species; research land ownership; raise funds; organize membership mailings; lead field trips; make public presentations, and, of course, guide the course of the organization.

Volunteers truly are the backbone of the Finger Lakes Land Trust and, indeed, the land trust movement. As one volunteer recently commented to me, "this isn't work for me – I care about what I'm doing, I'm having fun, and I can actually see the results." Financial contributions to the Land Trust are leveraged many times over by volunteers' contributions of time and effort.

During the coming year, the Land Trust intends to expand its volunteer programs. We will make a concerted effort to involve more people in the stewardship of our nature preserves and the implementation of our educational programs. If you are already volunteering for the Land Trust - THANK YOU!!!! We couldn't succeed without you. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact us or look for upcoming opportunities in the pages of this newsletter.

—Andrew E. Zepp, Executive Director

Our sincere appreciation for generous contributions in memory of...

Nancy Bent
From
Robert Aronson

Dr. Richard E. McBride
From
Betty J. McKnight

Matthew Pothier Jones
From
Flora Sagan

Virginia Allen Sibley
From
Ellen Royce Nacinovich

Fred Koslov
From

Charles E. Royce
Mary Royce Severns

Ira and Laurie Kamp

Our sincere thanks for generous contributions celebrating the birthdays of Barb & Amanda Hamlin, & Peter Schwartz from

Patricia Boland
Jerry and Maxene
Greenfield

Hiram and Cornelia
Tindall

Frederick Albert
McKechnie

Chris and Gary Henehan
Ann and W. Gilbert
Livingston

James Terwilliger
John and Anne Fayko

Byron and Caroline
Delavan

Marilyn Liebowitz
Susan M. Rea

E. Laurie Bittner

We would also like to thank those who made gifts not yet received as of press time.

Welcome Emily Eisman, Outreach and Membership Coordinator

We are pleased to announce that on October 1st Emily Eisman will assume her new full-time position as Outreach and Membership Coordinator for the Land Trust. She will oversee our new membership database, facilitate membership recruitment and renewals, and play a role in landowner education and outreach.

Emily is no stranger to the Land Trust. A key volunteer since 1999, Emily has also served the organization as a student intern and part-time office assistant. Seasoned and versatile in Land Trust affairs, Emily is equally at home working on publicity, membership, special events, marking preserve boundaries, and taking plant inventories.

We welcome back our old friend, Emily Eisman, and look forward to having her on board in her new and expanded role.

Wish List

The services of a private pilot with plane

•••

The following tools, in good condition:

Work gloves for small hands (e.g. early teens)

Hammers

Screw drivers

Maddocks

Pick axes

Hatchet

Shovels

Digging bar

Keeton and Kingsbury Easements Further the Land Trust's Efforts to Protect Ellis Hollow

Barbara Keeton and her late husband, Bill were visionaries. In the 1970s, while others were contented with Glenn Campbell music and bell bottomed corduroys, they had the foresight to preserve large chunks of Ellis Hollow, an area just east of Ithaca at the southern tip of Cayuga Lake.

One of these unspoiled tracts of woodland, the 111-acre Ellis Hollow Nature Preserve, was given to the Land Trust in 2000. Now a second has been preserved by a perpetual easement against development, with the Land Trust serving as steward.

It was a pleasure to meet Barbara and talk about what moved her to protect these lands. Sitting on her back porch overlooking the new easement, she spoke of memories spanning 30 years, of an Ellis Hollow that was more bucolic than it is today. While she is saddened by the habitat she has watched erode, Barbara is hopeful that protection measures like her easement will preserve enough continuity of forest and meadow for wildlife to thrive. Habitat will disappear from any area that is ripe for development if people don't take a stand.

Jack and Louise Kingsbury, who live next door to Barbara and have also established a Land Trust-managed easement abutting the Keeton parcel, echo some of Barbara's perspective on Ellis Hollow development. Jack observes that it doesn't take much imagination to envision the area overdeveloped. Ellis Hollow is very close to Ithaca, so there is a perpetual march to convert wild space into habitat for humans.

This hollow, a narrow valley between Mount Pleasant and Snyder Hill, with Cascadilla Creek meandering through, really is something special. If you fly a plane at 3,500 feet over the Finger Lakes region, you'll see countless pockets of extraordinary land: giant creek bends, secret gorges, and ancient hemlock stands. But many of these gems are still distant from dense development. Protecting land in a place like Ellis Hollow takes on greater importance by the weight of the threat looming just a few short miles away. It's good to see the Hollow poised for protection, although its destiny is far from assured.

Jack Kingsbury would like to see the oasis that he helped create become a corridor linking other land on Snyder Hill that can be protected from future development by easements and other preservation action. Think of any wild landscape that has been paved over and imagine what might have been if a few visionaries had created a greenway there instead. Thanks to people like the Kingsburys and Barbara Keeton, confidence is high that this area will remain magnificent forever.

—Rich Sheiman

Note: The Keeton easement property and the adjoining house are for sale. For information, call Andrea McFarren at 607-220-5351

Photo by Rich Sheiman



Easement donor Barbara Keeton

Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve...

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here to donate a 36-acre tract as a foundation stone. Fast forward over a year and the critical acquisition was finally completed: a 224 acre parcel which includes 26-acre Coleman Lake.

Dr. Thomas Eisner, the Jacob Gould Schurman Professor of Biology at Cornell, provided ample intrigue to motivate would-be donors. Dr. Eisner and others from the Cornell Institute for Research in Chemical Ecology (CIRCE) upheld the yet unnamed preserve as a fertile prospecting site for plants and fungus with pharmaceutical potential. In fact, the Land Trust enjoyed at least 15 minutes of fame when the New York Times profiled the envisioned preserve as its centerpiece of a story about chemical prospecting in the temperate zone.

Dr. Eisner notes that the pharmaceutical industry is moving away from field-based research in favor of computer-based research and development. "This is a folly that our descendents won't forgive us for." He adds that what we look for in nature is largely a function of what we already know how to find. "Habitat protection is so important because it preserves the riddles while we wait for the keys to be discovered."

The next major milestone occurred in mid 2000, when the Land Trust acquired the 103-acre Beech Hill tract. This extraordinary piece of land rises sharply from the valley floor to 1,840 feet, then descends into the densely forested Beech Hill Brook ravine. This county-designated Unique Natural Area is home to a wide range of migratory birds. No one knows how long the thrushes, warblers, and tanagers have been coming back to this hidden glen to breed. Thanks to the Land Trust's protection efforts here, there is a good chance that these delicate songbirds will persevere.

Percy Browning purchased, and in late 2001, donated a 48-

acre tract adjoining the eastern portion of the preserve—making the preserve over a mile across from Beech Hill to the Pinnacles.

Of course, the work is not complete here at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve. Additional acquisitions are envisioned. The stewardship plan involves taking a stand against invasive honeysuckle, autumn olive, and multiflora rose. An interpretive kiosk and improved parking area will make the preserve more accessible and enhance its educational value to the community.

The Land Trust has begun a \$100,000 fundraising campaign to build upon our achievements at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve and provide the resources for future additions and stewardship. According to Dr. Eisner, the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity

Preserve should continue to grow in order to foster the greater diversity of interactions that are possible through unbroken continuity of wild space. "Our grandchildren will be infinitely grateful for the conservation steps we take today," he says. To help kick off the fundraising campaign, Dr. Eisner and colleague Jerry Meinwald have already made a generous donation.

If you are a friend of the Land Trust and have never visited this preserve, please lace up your hiking boots and shake the urban residue from your senses (see our website at www.fllt.org for directions). We welcome your donations to keep up the momentum as we write new chapters in the history of this special preserve.

For additional information about the fundraising campaign, or to find out how to visit the preserve, contact Abbey Chernela in the Ithaca office.

—Rich Sheiman

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A New Tool & A New Partnership...

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will be available to provide the Land Trust with management assistance on our preserves, as well as private lands subject to conservation easement. In return, the Land Trust will promote the partnership program to private landowners across the region.

"Individuals who want to protect their land for the long term call us all the time," says Carl Schwartz, the partnership program's coordinator for New York State. "Now we will be able to refer those in the Finger Lakes region to the Land Trust. In addition, those landowners who already have conservation easements will be able to turn to USFWS biologists for advice on how best to manage their holdings. For example, if someone wants to restore a tract of land that had been drained for agricultural purposes, the USFWS will provide assistance for plugging the drainage ditch so as to reestablish the original wetland. They can

also advise on methods for eliminating invasive plant species as well as selecting and planting native grasses."

Some of that assistance will be financial, but, explains Schwartz, the USFWS is not a granting agency. The federal government supports the program with funds, but financial assistance to projects will be on a highly selective, dollar for dollar matching basis.

"Even so," adds Andy, "the partnership will provide the Land Trust with additional resources that will help us achieve our mission. We're looking forward to a mutual and increasingly beneficial relationship as a partner of the USFWS."

For more information, see <http://partners.fws.gov>

— Caissa Willmer

Land Trust Launches Effort to Identify and Conserve Lands Within the Cayuga Watershed

Spanning close to 500,000 acres, the Cayuga Lake watershed is the largest in the Finger Lakes Region. From the sweeping forests of the south to some of the continent's most productive farmland in the north, this watershed harbors a wealth of undeveloped lands.

Increasingly, however, these lands are threatened by development. According to U.S. Census Department estimates, the Ithaca area at the southern tip of Cayuga Lake grew faster than anywhere else in upstate New York during the past year. In other parts of the watershed, residents and retirees are being drawn to the lake's last undeveloped shores and, increasingly, the bluffs overlooking the Lake.

To ensure the protection of the Cayuga watershed's most inspiring landscapes, the Land Trust has launched a new initiative to identify and conserve those lands that are of special significance. We began with funding from an anonymous donor, the Community Foundation of Tompkins County, and Cornell University.

Our yearlong project involves:

- inventory, outreach, and analysis to identify lands that are critical for conservation
- workshops for landowners to introduce them to options for conserving their lands, with particular emphasis on the use of conservation easements
- expanded land protection efforts—initially targeting lands within the Six-Mile and Fall Creek watersheds as well as undeveloped bluffs along the shores of Cayuga Lake

The project is already well underway. Thor Snilsberg, a graduate student in Cornell's Department of City and Regional

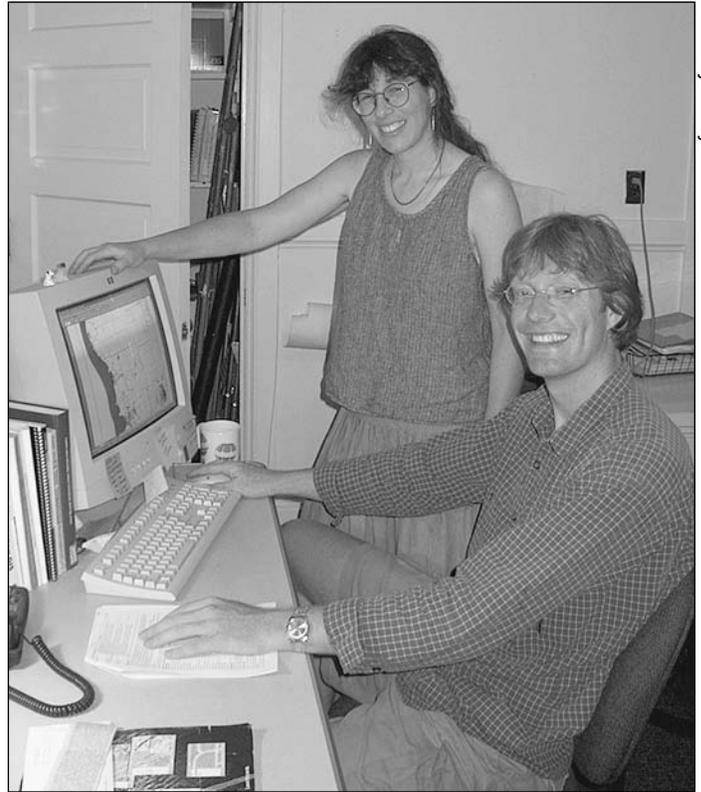


Photo by Abbey Chernela

Staff member Karen Edelstein with Student Intern Thor Snilsberg utilizing GIS technology to identify lands that are critical for conservation.

Planning, has taken the lead on inventory and outreach efforts. Working with county planning offices, state conservation agencies, and non-profit groups, we are assembling a list of lands and land resources. We'll refine the list this fall to create a land protection plan for the watershed. The plan will guide our efforts in the months and years to come. Meanwhile, our inventory may benefit state and county planning agencies—and other organizations too—as they determine which sites to purchase or protect.

Take a look at the calendar on the back page for descriptions of our educational workshops for landowners. We'll also be contacting landowners directly in areas where we see the most immediate need. Emily Eisman, the Land Trust's new outreach and membership coordinator, will lead both of these efforts.

"This project will allow us to become more strategic, and more effective, in our land protection efforts," says Executive Director Andy Zepp. "Given increasing development pressures, it's essential that we take this step now. Once this project is complete, we will work on similar projects in other watersheds."

Fundraising for the project is still underway. We need funds both to cover direct expenses and also for easement stewardship, so that we can accept conservation easement donations from landowners who are unable to cover these costs.

For more information about how you can support this effort, please contact Andy Zepp at the Ithaca office.

Scenes

from the Dorothy McIlroy Bird Sanctuary



Wooded wetlands along Fall Creek.

The new boardwalk and viewing platform at the Dorothy McIlroy Bird Sanctuary are made possible by a donation of Trex composite lumber from The Trex Company and Parksite Plunket & Webster of Syracuse – many, many thanks to you both. We would also like to thank Tom Brown of Locust Lumber Co. in Newfield for providing untreated locust lumber and poles at a discount; Builder's Best in Cortland for providing numerous needed materials; Bob McNamara, our versatile and talented project director; and, of course, the many friends and volunteers of the Land Trust without whom this project would not have been possible.

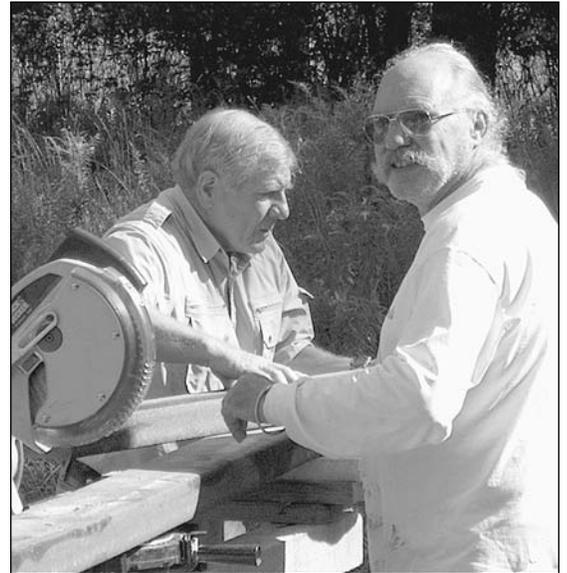
All Photos By Andrew E. Zepp



12 able-bodied volunteers raise the supporting structure for the new kiosk.



Student volunteers support the new structure while Bob McNamara and Nick Gavrielides ensure that uprights are plumb.



Volunteers John Smith and Nick Gavrielides set up shop on-site as they prepare to cut wood for the new boardwalk and kiosk.



Emergent marsh along Fall Creek.



Project Manager Bob McNamara staying on top of things.



Director of Land Protection Betsy Darlington greets arriving student volunteers from Cornell's Pre-Orientation Service Trips Program.



Student at work on the new boardwalk.

ALBANY, N.Y.

The New York Legislature adjourned in June with their environmental agenda complete save one: refinancing the Superfund and dealing with the brownfields issue. (Actually, the assembly passed their version and Governor Pataki has agreed to sign if the senate produces one that matches theirs.)

Superfund money pays for the cleanup of contaminated and polluted industrial and residential sites, of which there are more than 800 in New York. In contention was the formula for paying the costs: it used to be split 50-50 between public funding and funding from the polluting industries. In 2002 a bipartisan group of legislators proposed that industry pay 75 percent of the costs and the General Fund pay only 25 percent, but that went nowhere, and worse: we had no funding at all. Now Senator Bruno promises that when the senate re-convenes September 16, they will pass the same bill the assembly did.

Also included is language and money to deal with brownfields: abandoned or underused industrial or commercial sites that are less-contaminated than Superfund sites. Former owners are often absent or insolvent and therefore the sites do not lend themselves to cleanup in the Superfund style because with those, the costs are at least 50% borne by the polluters. In states that have them, typical Brownfields programs offer tax incentives for private developers to clean up and develop sites, and provides for community involvement in the planning. This will be New York's first brownfields plan.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

A new tax bill, already passed in the Senate, could greatly expand the income tax deductions that donors could claim when they donate land to a Land Trust. It would also reduce the capital gains tax on sales of land or conservation easements to Land Trusts. The House Ways and Means Committee will deal with its version, H.R. 7 this fall. At the moment (mid-August) the provisions on capital gains and deductions are not in the House version. Representative Wayne Gilchrist (R-MD) is asking his fellow representatives to request that the committee add conservation tax cuts to H.R. 7. Of our six Finger Lakes Congresspersons (Hinchey, Houghton, Boehlert, Walsh, Reynolds and Slaughter), only Hinchey has signed on as we go to press.

The House of Representatives has passed its version of the Interior Appropriations bill, H.R.2691. The Senate will not vote on its version, S.1391, until after recess, and then reconciliation of the two bills must take place. However, the Senate Appropriations Committee has approved a \$19.8 billion spending bill for Interior. It calls for spending about the same amount of money as the House bill, but in different ways.

Even within what might seem like a routine spending bill, much good or damage can be done to the environment. Many cuts have been made in the House version, such as to the conservation trust fund (for land acquisition). New programs were introduced for extractive industries in formerly roadless areas. A proposed bipartisan ban on snowmobiling in Yellowstone National Park resulted in a 210-210 tie, quite remarkable--and under House rules, the amendment fails!

—Merry Jo Bauer

Our sincere gratitude for generous contributions celebrating the marriage of

**Katherine Lieberknecht
and Robert Young**

From

**Dick and Betsy Darlington
Ariane Kissam**

Our deepest thanks for a contribution in honor of:

• • •

Harry Littell

From

Flora Sagan

Land Trust Offers Educational Workshops for Landowners

To educate landowners about options for conserving their land, the Land Trust will offer four educational workshops throughout the Finger Lakes region this Fall. The workshops will provide an introduction to the Land Trust and, in particular, its use of conservation easements. Those attending the workshops will also learn more about FLLT projects in their area.

Workshops will be held in Canandaigua, Ithaca, Naples, and Skaneateles. Dates and times are listed in the calendar on the back cover. Please contact the Ithaca office for additional information.

WESTERN LAKES CHAPTER UPDATE

Outreach efforts expand in Western Lakes area

Western Lakes Chapter volunteers have been busy raising the profile of the Land Trust throughout the Western Lakes area.

In June, Sybil Craig arranged for Andy Zepp and Meg Ewing to address the Chatterbox Club in Rochester, Sara Kersting spoke to a group of foresters, and Virginia Homsey brought Andy in to speak on conservation issues in the Finger Lakes at a Canandaigua Kiwanis meeting.

Wendi Cartwright and Cathy Gardner did a fantastic job of organizing Talks & Treks this summer. A hardy crew of volunteer hosts and leaders promoted and presented a dozen events, ranging from family-friendly outings such as building a bluebird house to a night-time Owl Prowl at Wesley Hill Nature Preserve to talks on water quality and sustainable living, in the Canandaigua, Hemlock, and Honeoye Lake areas. With a season stretching from mid-May to mid-September, this year's series of nature talks, walks, and canoe treks—even a cruise on Canandaigua Lake—offered our members the opportunity to learn more about our region and introduced dozens of potential new members to the Land Trust.

In August, Al and Sybil Craig, Western Lakes' first easement donors back in 1995, hosted a Sunday afternoon gathering for neighboring landowners in Canadice. The topic: conservation easements. Andy Zepp and fellow Canadice easement donors Jim and Sara Kersting led the discussion. New volunteer Allison Cooper arranged a public event at the Wood Library in Canandaigua on Sept. 25 to promote both conservation easements and the Land Trust. Again, Andy and Jim will lead the presentation. A similar event will be held at the Naples Library on October 1st (see Calendar on back page of newsletter for additional information). Want to suggest a group that would enjoy having Andy or another Land Trust representative as a speaker? Call WLC at (585) 394-4189, or the main office: (607) 275-9487.

Land Protection

Land Trust staff and protection volunteers Sara Kersting, Bob Growe, and others are working with landowners across the region to conserve their lands through the donation of conservation easements. Work is underway to add to protected lands at our Wesley Hill and Great Hill Nature Preserves, and to protect key tracts in the watersheds of Canandaigua, Canadice, and Hemlock Lakes.

Nature's Gift

The chapter's Nature's Gift Campaign continued through the summer, highlighted by a "Sunset Spectacular" evening at the Canandaigua Lake home of John and Anne Fayko. The campaign team has set a target of \$30,000 in this last, most challenging stage of the campaign. Creative tactics such as encouraging birthday gifts in the form of Nature's Gift donations helped bring in more contributions.

Chapter picnic

Western Lakes' summer meeting was held in July on a conservation easement property in the Canadice Lake watershed, the 100-acre Kersting-Malmendier "Canadice farm." It was a casual mix of chapter regulars, recent members, and new volunteers who gathered for pot-luck and the Kerstings' grilled chicken, a bit of business, and a hike to the waterfall. A few hardy souls even took a dunk in the pond.

Chapter meetings are the second Tuesday of every other month at 7 p.m. Usually we meet at the office at 90 S. Main St., Canandaigua. Any member is welcome to attend. The next meeting will be Nov. 11. Call the office at (585) 394-4189 for information.

—Jim Kersting

Volunteer Thanks

THREE CHEERS TO ALL OUR VOLUNTEERS!

For leading, helping with, or giving inspiring, entertaining walks or talks; For your hard work at the Leopold Center, the Western Lakes Chapter office, and Nature Preserves, and helping with educational and fundraising events;

For serving on committees or as stewards of our conservation easements and nature preserves;

For legal or technical help and expertise;

For many hours of legal or technical support;

*For providing the funds and several volunteers for the rebuilding of the puncheon bridge across a muddy spot on the Finger Lakes Trail at our Sweedler Preserve at Lick Brook: **Eastern Mountain Sports, and employees Kelly Rawson, Al, Jenn, Erin, Tree, and Stephen;** and thanks also to the **Cayuga Trails Club (Phil Dankert, Tom Reimers and Greg Wooster)** for helping with the construction and coordinating the project.*

For extensive help with the trails at the Ellis Hollow Preserve:

Two groups of 11-13-year-olds from the Learning Web and their leaders, Sue Schwartz and Natasha Ezequiel-Shriro

VOLUNTEER PROFILE: MARY WOODSEN

A Fresh Breeze in Our Prose

People love our newsletter,” says Betsy Darlington, director of land conservation for the Land Trust. “They’re always telling me that they read it from front to back as soon as it arrives.”

In part, that’s thanks to Land Steward editor Mary Woodsen. Four years ago this fall, Mary brought a fresh breeze into the newsletter’s prose while ensuring that it remained richly informative about topics of interest to Land Trust members. The closing feature, “A Closer Look,” was conceived and developed under her guidance. “A Closer Look” provides a detailed picture of subjects such as the lives and well being of the porcupines, rattlesnakes, and black bears that inhabit our Finger Lakes universe.

“She’s such a really fine person,” says Betsy Darlington of Mary. “She’s so knowledgeable about plants in the wild. She has such a sharp eye for animal tracks. But she’s modest; she probably has no idea how smart and skilled she is.”

Essentially a writer, Mary brings a journalist’s sensibilities to the editorial

task. She devised a style guide to ensure uniformity of language mechanics throughout the publication. She insists that the reader be drawn into each article from the very first sentence. Yet she takes pains to preserve each writer’s personal voice. It’s a delicate task, but one that has been clearly fulfilled.

Mary has been published in *The New York Times*, *Audubon*, *Outside*, *The Utne Reader*, and elsewhere. She is also a writer in the Cornell University Integrated Pest Management Program, from which she gleans material for a monthly column, “Pest Prevention,” in the *Ithaca Journal*.

Her current focus, however, is a book proposal—about nature and human nature. She may be modest in her social interactions, but her writing goals are challenging; the themes of the book are “sex, hunger, and death.”

“I’m going to talk about electric fish that bite off the tails of other electric fish during the mating season,” she declares with enthusiasm. The sample chapter she’s developing is about insects, and

research for that chapter recently took her to Nantucket to observe and participate in the release of a colorful endangered beetle—the largest native burying beetle in the United States. The male and female, she explains, locate a decomposing organism; the female lays her eggs on it, and the couple buries it so that the later hatchlings will have plenty to eat. The chapter is called the ‘Green Reaper’ and includes concerns about the vulture die-off in India (where vanishing vultures spell trouble for cultures that practice sky burials) and observations about the undertaker caste among honeybees. “Everything fascinates me,” she exclaims.

As a child she was always out in the woods where she would sit and stare at the forest, the sky, the wind in the grass. “I was stunned by the beauty of it all,” she recalls. “Both my parents were dreamers, so I’m a dreamer, too. My dream is of a more beautiful world, and working with the Land Trust is a small way to help make it so.”

—Caissa Willmer

Creative Giving

Membership dues and appeal contributions are our bread and butter. Yet time and again, people surprise us with new and innovative ways of giving. In the last few months, we have been the fortunate recipients of some very creative giving.

In April, for example, two Cornell University student groups, the Society for Natural Resources Conservation (SNRC) and Roots & Shoots, voted to make the Finger Lakes Land Trust a beneficiary of proceeds from their “5K” run during Cornell’s Earth Day Bash. The run was held at Cornell Plantations and drew a number of runners and sponsors.

Then in early July, we received a letter from an artist named Margie Crisp in Elgin, Texas. She told us that, as an artist, she has “limited ability to donate to the conservation organizations...that she would like to support.” She explained that she had created a silkscreen print called “Pond Cycle” and had decided to donate a share of the print edition “to encourage the cycle of giving back to the community.” For a donation to the nonprofit of the givers’ choice, the donor gets a “Pond Cycle” print as an acknowledgment of that gift. As Margie says, “The donor gets art, the organizations get needed cash, and I get to feel like I have made a small difference.”

Not long after that, we received a donation from Ethan Yale in Manhattan. Ethan was giving a donation to the Land Trust in memory of his father—but he put a different spin on it. He was marrying, so in joyous remembrance of his father, he and his bride, Amanda, gave this donation in lieu of a favor for guests at their wedding. Over the years, we have had several couples who have suggested to their guests that they make a donation to the Land Trust instead of giving wedding gifts, but this was the first time anyone’s done the opposite.

Most recently, the Hamlin and Schwartz families celebrated the birthdays of three family members by holding a party and encouraging contributions to the Land Trust in lieu of gifts. According to Barb Hamlin, “It’s a wonderful way to support an organization you really care about, especially when you have enough things.”

We invite you to consider how events (big or small) in your life may open the door for a creative way to give back to your community and your world. We thank everyone for making one of the hardest parts of our job a little easier.

—Emily Eisman

A CLOSER LOOK

Lounging Lizards... of the Finger Lakes

Some creatures won't win awards for being warm and cuddly, yet stand out in my mind as some of the most fascinating animals we might have the privilege to see. At the Steege Hill Nature Preserve in Big Flats, you may get a glimpse of one of the preserve's timber rattlesnakes, endangered in New York. Or if you're lucky, you could see another unusual reptilian species, far smaller and even more secretive—one of New York State's four lizards, the northern coal skink.

Photo by Matthew Blow

New York's other three lizards—the five-lined skink, the Italian wall lizard, and the northern fence lizard—live only in the southeastern part of the state. The range of the northern coal skink, however, includes parts of the Finger Lakes Region. According to New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's most recent *New York State Amphibian and Reptile Atlas*, you can find coal skinks in Chemung, Tioga, Schuyler, Steuben, Tompkins, Seneca, Yates, and Ontario Counties.

Northern coal skinks look much different from most lizards. Instead of having keeled scales and a rough, dry appearance, coal skinks, as well as five-lined skinks, have smooth scales. Their bodies—about five to seven inches long—are glossy, like some snakes. But unlike snakes, skinks and other lizards can close their eyes.

Eumeces anthracinus anthracinus, the coal skink's scientific name, refers to the anthracite-coal-colored band that runs along its body from snout to tail tip. "Eumeces" means "nice length or height" in Greek. When Spencer F. Baird named this species in 1850, perhaps he was happy that he hadn't found a larger lizard! Thinner white bands beautifully offset those coal-dark bands against a light brown or grayish background. Young skinks are more intensely

colored than adults, sporting iridescent blue tails. Breeding males, on the other hand, have a distinctive brick-red tint around their chin and throat. Females lay four to eleven eggs as early as late April, or as late as the end of June.

If threatened, skinks, like many other lizards, detach their tails to confuse predators. One account I read reported that even after a juvenile jettisoned its blue tail, the tail kept on wriggling. Now there's a distraction!

Coal skinks feed primarily on insects, centipedes, spiders, and worms. They live in moist woodlands near streams or ponds. Much like desert lizards, northern coal skinks lounge in the sun to raise their body temperature on cool days. On a field trip last fall with the Cornell Herpetological Society, several Land Trust members were treated to looks at seven adult and two juvenile northern coal skinks. The day was cool and drizzly, making the normally skittish reptiles sluggish, and far easier to see.

Elusive as they are, northern coal skinks aren't endangered or even threatened in New York or Pennsylvania. They are on the endangered species list for Maryland, however, and are listed as rare in Virginia and threatened in Georgia.

—Karen Edelstein



A sleek northern coal skink forages in leaf litter.

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FALL 2003 CALENDAR

Landowner Workshop Series

- **Thursday, September 25th, 7:30 - 8:30 pm**, in Canandaigua at Wood Library, 134 North Main Street, Canandaigua, New York
- **Wednesday, October 1st, 7:30 - 8:30 pm**, in Naples at Naples Library, 118 South Main Street, Naples, New York
- **Tuesday, October 7th, 7:00 - 8:00 pm**, in Skaneateles at Library Hall, 49 East Genesee Street, 2nd Floor, Skaneateles, New York
- **Tuesday, October 14th, 7:30 - 8:30 pm**, in Ithaca at Tompkins County Public Library, 101 East Green Street, Borg Warner Room, Ithaca, New York

Friday, October 10th, 2:30 pm: Dedication of the McIlroy Bird Sanctuary. Call the office for details.

Saturday, October 25th, 9:00 am - 11:00 am: Fall Hike at the Wesley Hill Nature Preserve. Meet at the Gulick Road parking lot. Grab your sturdy boots and join us for a moderately strenuous hike to the bottom of Briggs Gully for a walk among the 125-150 year old white pines and hemlocks. The hike will include walking in the stream and a moderately steep scramble back to the top. Options for a less strenuous return hike will also be available. For more info call the Western Lakes Chapter office at 585-394-4189.

Saturday, November 15th, 10:00 am – 12 noon: Late Fall (or Early Winter!) walk at the Steege Hill Preserve in Big Flats. From route 17 in Big Flats, take exit 49. Turn south from the exit ramp and go to Olcott Rd. At T intersection, turn right on Rt. 64 (unmarked), and right again on Rt. 352. Turn left on So. Corning Rd., cross the river, and turn left on Steege Hill Rd. Go about 1 mile and pull into the parking lot on the left, just before the pipeline cut. (Or park off the pavement on the shoulder of the road.)

See our web site for maps and photos of the preserves.

WALKS GO, RAIN, SUN OR SNOW. PLEASE BRING SNACK AND WATER, AND WEAR SUITABLE SHOES. CALL THE LAND TRUST AT (607) 275-9487 FOR DETAILS.