



working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes region

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Land Trust Acquisition Expands State's Largest Wildlife Management Area

Encompassing more than 11,500 acres of undeveloped land southwest of Ithaca, the Connecticut Hill Wildlife Management Area is the largest wildlife management area in the state of New York. Thanks to a recent property acquisition by the Land Trust, it's about to get even bigger.

This recent acquisition includes fields adjacent to house and barn as well as portions of forested hillside which connects with Connecticut Hill WMA.

Conservation Easements Protect Prime Farmland in Cayuga County

According to the American Farmland Trust, more than 24 million acres of agricultural land in the U.S. have been lost to residential or commercial development over the past 30 years.

ou and Christina Lego know this all too well. The siblings own adjacent farms at the corner of Center Street Road and Parcell Road in the town of Sennett, Cayuga County. After watching many neighboring farms sold to developers, Lou and Christina recently agreed to protect their two properties in perpetuity by donating conservation easements to the Land Trust. The pair of easements will protect approximately 95 acres of prime working farmland in an area with intense development pressure. *continued on page 5* Partnering with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), the Land Trust recently moved quickly to purchase an 86-acre parcel of land adjacent to Connecticut Hill that was listed for sale. The property is located on County Road 6 in the town of Catharine, Schuyler County, and abuts the northwest edge of the wildlife management area's boundaries. *continued on page 4*

Lou and Merby Lego on their organic farm which serves as the main source of food for the Restaurant at Elderberry Pond



"Algae worries the new normal?" This was the grim headline that recently greeted me as I scanned a Rochester news website. It was no surprise to me, though, as it was just the latest in a series of recent headlines that noted the increasing number of algae outbreaks (both toxic and otherwise) in our Finger Lakes and elsewhere in New York State.

oxic blue green algae that is harmful to humans was spotted in the waters of Canandaigua, Conesus, Honeoye, Owasco, and Seneca this summer. In addition, other forms of algae seemed to be more abundant throughout the region, including in Skaneateles Lake, which is known for its purity. So what's going on? While I'm by no means an authority on water quality issues, I am able to ask plenty of questions and also observe what's going on where land and water meet. There seems to be a healthy consensus that phosphorous and soil particles carrying phosphorous into our lakes are a major part of the problem.

For years, watershed groups and soil and water conservation districts have been working together with landowners and local officials to address this problem. The development of detailed farm management plans and the use of techniques such as buffer strips along waterways have been used to address the issue with some success. Unfortunately, the problem has gotten much more challenging because of the increasing intensity of our summer rain storms.

The railroad was washed out just south of Ithaca this summer, and downtown Penn Yan was swamped last summer. Before that, it was Owego that suffered punishing floods, and the list goes on and on. Storms this intense also carry tons and tons of soil into our waters.

I observed this at the beginning of the summer, when I drove from Ithaca to Auburn at planting time. It was just after a severe storm and topsoil had been washed from recently planted corn fields onto the shoulder of the state highway and also into nearby Cayuga Lake, leaving a visible brown "bathtub ring" in the waters close to shore.

The issue of runoff isn't just limited to our farms, though. I've also seen how the development of home sites on the steep wooded hillsides overlooking the lakes



can lead to a significant increase in runoff. At the south end of Canandaigua Lake, landslides have become increasingly common along with development.

And in our cities, there's a lot that we can do to improve our current approach to dealing with runoff, which now largely consists of funneling it through storm drains that dump huge volumes of water directly into our lakes with a full load of nutrients.

This summer's headlines are a call to action that we must all collectively answer. As we continue to protect lands that are vital to our watersheds, the Land Trust also looks forward to working together with our many partners to bring about a more robust and more comprehensive effort that will ensure the future of our precious lakes.

Andrew Zepp Executive Director Finger Lakes Land Trust

Land Gifts Yield Funds for Conservation

The Land Trust recently welcomed two separate donations of land in Steuben County. Both properties were donated with the understanding that the land gifts, or tradelands, would later be sold by the Land Trust, with the proceeds to bolster its conservation efforts.

There are different kinds of tradeland arrangements between donors and land trusts [see side-bar]. Both of the Steuben County properties fall into the category of what are called "conservation tradelands." As such, they will both be sold with a Land Trust conservation easement attached, protecting the environmental integrity of the local landscape.

In the town of Wayne, resident Pam Schneider bought and then donated to the Land Trust three contiguous lots, totaling 17 acres. The property has nice views of Keuka Lake from the southeast. Once farmed, the land has grown into young woods in the last twenty or thirty years.

The subdivision lots were created in the 1980s but never seriously developed. There is one camp and garage, but little else. Schneider recently saw an opportunity to buy these lots adjacent to her land and then to give them over to the Land Trust.

A conservation easement will limit development to one home on the 17 acres. At press time, this property is under contract to a potential buyer who plans to build a retirement home on the land overlooking Keuka Lake. His house will be one, where three might have been.

Pam Schneider's conservation-driven decision has helped to reduce rural housing sprawl in her neighborhood.

In Prattsburg, Steuben County, the Land Trust now owns approximately 200 acres of forested land with a headwater stream. The generous donation comes from a family that wishes to remain anonymous.

Some of the land was reportedly used once as a potato farm. The tract was later acquired by the donor family and served as their retreat for decades.

The former potato fields were planted with conifers that have now grown up in such a way as to present a mix of forested areas and open areas. Otherwise, the land features hardwood forest and some shrubby tracts of hawthorn and goldenrod.

Traversing the property is a headwater stream in the Chemung River watershed that contains habitat for juvenile brook trout. The property also has a pond and an old foundation where a farmhouse once stood. Perhaps the most attractive feature is an entry lane lined by towering sugar maples that have surely witnessed a good deal of the property's history.

The Prattsburg land will be sold with an attached conservation easement limiting future development to a single home-site with provision for outbuildings associated with the home. The easement will also allow for a recreational cabin somewhere on the property. *continued on page 4*

Tradelands & Conservation Tradelands

So, what exactly is a tradeland? Tradelands are properties that are donated to the Land Trust to generate revenue for the organization's conservation programs. For example, the Land Trust accepted the donation of a home in Ithaca's Fall Creek neighborhood that was sold and the proceeds used to support the organization's land protection and stewardship programs. The property had no particular conservation value beyond what it could contribute in terms of monetary support and the donors understood this very well.

More recently, the Land Trust has received several donations that are considered "conservation tradelands." These are also properties that are donated with the understanding that they will be sold. However, in this case a conservation easement is placed on the property to ensure that significant natural resource values are maintained in the future.

A good example of this type of project happened in 2008, when longtime member Sarah Newman donated a 50acre parcel of second growth forest in the Town of Danby, Tompkins County. The property was sold subject to an easement that limited development to a single home. As with all other easements, the Land Trust continues to monitor this property on an annual basis.



Management Area continued from cover

This parcel features mature hardwood forests of beech, oak, maple, and hickory with scattered pines and hemlocks. The property also includes fields that were farmed until recently and now are covered with a mix of grasses and wildflowers. Addition of this land to the adjacent wildlife management area Connecticut Hill is host to a wide variety of songbirds, as well as wide-ranging mammals such as fishers and black bear.

Connecticut Hill is also an important component of the Emerald Necklace, a proposed greenbelt linking 50,000 acres of existing conservation land in an arc around Ithaca, from the

will significantly enhance public access to state land since the property has nearly 1,000 feet of level road frontage.

Funds for the purchase were obtained through an interest-free loan from the Norcross Wildlife Foundation. The Land Trust will own the property until sufficient funds are available to allow for purchase of the land by NYSDEC. At that point, the property will transfer to the state and become part of the Connecticut Hill Wildlife Management Area.

With elevations reaching 2,000 feet, Connecticut Hill is a popular destination for hikers, birders, and hunters, as well as winter activities such as snowshoeing and

cross-country skiing. The Finger Lakes Trail wends its way through Connecticut Hill, connecting to both the Van Lone Hill Loop Trail and the Bob Cameron Loop Trail within the wildlife management area. In total, Connecticut Hill contains approximately nine miles of designated hiking trails, and many more miles of dirt roads and access lanes.

The terrain of the area is diverse and includes mature hardwood forests, open meadows, and a series of ponds and streams. Recognized as one of the state's Important Bird Areas,



Finger Lakes National Forest in the west to the Hammond Hill State Forest in the east. The Emerald Necklace is a key conservation priority for the Land Trust.

"This acquisition helps ensures the integrity of one of our region's largest intact forests and also enhances public access for outdoor recreation," said Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "We intend to protect additional land in this area with a particular focus on linking Connecticut Hill to other nearby conservation lands."

This is the second time in the past 12 months that the Land Trust has partnered with the NYSDEC to expand the Connecticut Hill Wildlife Management Area. Last fall,

the Land Trust purchased a 16-acre tract about two miles south of the Krause property that is surrounded on three sides by Connecticut Hill and has frontage on a perennial stream that flows into nearby Cayuta Lake.

The Land Trust is currently raising funds to cover costs associated with this latest acquisition. Please contact our Director of Development & Communications Kelly Makosch at (607) 275-9487 if you would like to make a contribution in support of this project. —Jeff Tonole

Land Gifts Yield Funds for Conservation continued from page 2

Unlike the case of the Schneider tradeland in Wayne, where the proceeds from the eventual sale of the property will be used to further the Land Trust's conservation efforts generally, the Prattsburg donors had specific ideas about how they wanted the proceeds distributed.

After covering transaction costs and a contribution to the Land Trust's stewardship fund associated with the easement—standard procedure with almost any easement—the proceeds from a sale will be split two distinct ways.

Half of the proceeds will go to the advancement of the Land Trust's efforts to provide educational opportunities throughout the Finger Lakes through a variety of means, including guided field trips, public workshops, web-based information and programs, brochures, and place-based site interpretation such as informational kiosks. The other half of the proceeds will be used for the support of programs for urban youth who lack opportunities for engagement with the natural world to better connect them with nature and the outdoors, and to provide them with related educational opportunities.

"Generous donations of lands like these really help to further our conservation goals in two ways," said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp. "First, by selling the properties subject to a conservation easement, we can help reduce the amount of rural sprawl in an area that could use some help; second, proceeds from the sale of these properties give us more leverage in continuing our work throughout the Finger Lakes."



Cayuga County continued from cover

When Lou and his wife Merby bought their farm in the mid-1980s, they joined a robust farming community. "The entire area consisted of working farms, and everybody knew each other. We would gather at different farms to celebrate holidays," said Lou. But one by one, nearby farms began to disappear as farmers struggled to make a living. As few of their children showed interest in working the land, these famers sold all or a portion of their properties. The main buyers were developers seeking to turn farmland into subdivisions. Lou points to a huge, relatively new housing development just south of his farm as an indication of the development pressure in the area.

Lou and Merby own and operate the Elderberry Pond restaurant and farm. The farm, which spans both sides of Center Street Road on the west side of Parcell Road, has been certified organic since 1999. The farm features a diverse array of crops—fruit (including an apple orchard with dozens of heirloom varieties), vegetables, herbs, and cut flowers. They also raise pigs and chickens in several acres of pasture.

The farm features modern touches, such as two solar greenhouses that allow for year-round farming, along with historical elements that date back to the mid-1800s, including a one-room schoolhouse and a stone building that once housed a community butcher and smokehouse. Today, Lou and Merby use the stone building as a country food store, selling seasonal produce from the farm during the summer and fall.

The popular restaurant opened in 2004 and was built using wood, stone, and other materials collected on the farm and from other old houses in the area. The restaurant takes advantage of the fresh seasonal ingredients grown on the farm and from other local sources to craft a farm-to-table menu that changes almost daily. Lou and Merby's son Chris, a culinary school graduate, serves as the executive chef of the restaurant.

After years of visiting her brother Lou and sister-in-law Merby, Christina and her husband Jeff Shingleton bought the farm on the east side of Parcell Road when it came up for sale in 1991 and moved up from Washington, DC. The property features a house and horse barn on the north side of Center Street Road and pasture land on the south side. When Jeff and Christina retired in 2011, they sold the northern portion of their property and bought an 80-acre farm in Virginia. They leased the remaining pasture land to a local farmer.

The property that the couple purchased in Virginia was subject to a conservation easement. "We were delighted to discover that almost all of the land around us is protected by conservation easements," said Christina. "It's a point of honor among our land-owning friends."

Jeff and Christina are now in the process of selling their remaining property in Sennett, but before doing so, they wanted to protect it with a conservation easement to ensure that it remains undeveloped farmland. A friend from the area, Bill Hecht (whose photos have graced many issues of The Land Steward), connected them with the Land Trust, and Lou and Merby followed suit.

For both families, sustaining the rural character of the area was paramount in their decision to protect their land with conservation easements. "I served on the Town Planning Board for some years and was astounded at the amount of farmland development," said Christina. "We firmly believe in the importance of local agriculture," added Lou. "Preserving this land's past, present, and future as a working farm is the most important thing we can do."

—Jeff Tonole

The Restaurant at Elderberry Pond. For more information, visit http://www.elderberrypond.com

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SCENES from Around Our Region...

A Green Heron spotted at the Roy H. Park Preserve

A hidden gem in Tioga County, the King Preserve is home to a beautiful tributary of the East Branch of Owego Creek. 6 • THE LAND STEWARD





An interpretive kiosk at the new West River Preserve, town of Italy, Yates County



Devoted volunteers, board members and interns helped to complete the new hiking trail at the Hinchcliff Family Preserve on Trailblazer Tuesdays this past summer.

Kids crossing the creek during Story Walk at the Ellis Hollow Nature Preserve

PRESERVE PROFILE: Hinchcliff Family Preserve

Newly opened to the public in August 2015, the Hinchcliff Family Preserve comprises 206 acres of forest, fields, and rugged gorges on the site of a longtime family farm peering over the eastern shore of Skaneateles Lake. The preserve offers impressive vistas, diverse and biologically rich habitats, and a unique window onto the human history and changing natural landscape of the site and the region.

NATURAL HISTORY

The Hinchcliff Family Preserve consists of two sections. The main tract, which encompasses 196 acres, extends from Spafford Landing to just north of Glen Haven on the east side of Skaneateles Lake. A new 1.4mile trail loop in this part of the preserve passes mostly through northern hardwood forest at various stages of succession. Watch and listen here for Wood Thrushes, Scarlet Tanagers, and other breeding songbirds in spring and summer. The trail also winds



is a 120-foot-wide corridor extending eastward from Route 41 for about ³/₄ of a mile, then connecting to the Ripley Hill Nature Preserve, a property acquired by the Central New York Land Trust with the assistance of the **Finger Lakes Land** Trust. In the future, the Land Trust intends to develop the corridor into a hiking trail linking the Hinchcliff Preserve with Ripley Hill. The Hinchcliff Family Preserve is separated by one parcel from the Land Trust's High Vista

past mixed hemlock-hardwood forest, as well as several ephemeral and perennial streams, gullies, and waterfalls. Grassy clearings offer habitat for sparrows and other opencountry birds, as well as sweeping views of the wooded slope and the lake. Along the way, you will also see remnants of former habitation and work at the site—the foundation of an old dairy barn, a 1937 Chevrolet army truck possibly used by the Civilian Conservation Corps, and a grand stone fireplace and chimney that once served as the centerpiece of the Wickwire family home. The other piece of the preserve Preserve to the south.

The Hinchcliff Family Preserve is a key part of a growing greenbelt of preserved land around the southern end of Skaneateles Lake. Land protection here and throughout the watershed is vitally important because the lake serves as the source of drinking water for the city of Syracuse and several other communities.

HISTORY

The land that now forms the Hinchcliff Family Preserve was formerly part of a farm operated by the Burns family, who continue to own and farm neighboring land. In 1938, about 64 percent of the land within the current preserve boundary was in active agricultural use, while only 36 percent was forested. At that time, the farm included a full dairy operation,



including cultivation of corn and hay to feed the cows. Now, over 83 percent of the preserve is forested, while only 17 percent is open fields.

The purchase and protection of the land have been made possible through broad support from the community, including a leadership gift from the Hinchcliff family, and by a grant from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Since acquiring the property in 2013, the Land Trust has added the trail, a large parking area, scenic overlooks with benches, and an interpretive kiosk to the site. A permit-based deer hunting program will be allowed in the fall; please visit www.fllt.org for the latest information on trail closings.

DIRECTIONS

The Hinchcliff Family Preserve lies at the end of Covey Road off Route 41 in the town of Spafford in Onondaga County.

From Skaneateles, take Route 41 south for 14 miles, then turn right onto Covey Road. The preserve's parking lot lies at the end of the road.

From Ithaca or Cortland, take Route 13 north to Route 281 north, then take a left onto Route 41 north in Homer. Stay on Route 41 north for about 11 miles, then take a left onto Covey Road to the preserve.

Covey Road is unpaved, steep and only seasonally maintained; it is not plowed in the winter. Passage may be difficult under poor weather conditions. Note also that the hiking loop is also steep in some sections. —*Mark Chao*



New Service Links Farmers & Landowners

The majority of the Finger Lakes region, like much of central and western New York, is defined by agriculture.

Despite the overall decline in the number of farms in the US, and the loss of important farmland to development, agriculture remains a huge component of our economy, and a way of life.

In the spring of 2014, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County and Groundswell Center for Local Food and Farming introduced the Finger Lakes LandLink project. The project was initially piloted in Tompkins County, but includes all 14 counties of the Finger Lakes. The LandLink project addresses a pressing need for beginning and established farmers alike: access to good farmland. While the Finger Lakes region has seen renewed energy around local food and organic agriculture, land is persistently the biggest barrier for beginning farmers and for farmers looking to expand their farming operations. This barrier, however, is not for lack of land, but is more often caused by a lack of information.

To this end, Finger Lakes LandLink provides a platform for landowners to post land availability and for land seekers to post their land and farming needs via a searchable online database (www.fingerlakeslandlink. org). The goal of the project is to facilitate successful connections between farmers and landowners—where under-used land can be put into agricultural production and support local farm businesses. Additionally, the program seeks to build a robust local food economy through the proliferation of successful small-scale farms in the region.

Program directors are currently seeking more landowners interested in leasing or selling farmland to farmers. For every piece of land listed on the site, they have two land seekers. In order to facilitate more successful connections and to ease the land access barriers for beginning farmers, they hope that more landowners will consider listing farm property on the Finger Lakes LandLink website.

If you have any questions or need instruction on how to use the website, please contact Ian Bailey (coordinator) at idb6@ cornell.edu or Monika Roth (Cooperative Extension Agriculture Program Educator) at mr55@cornell.edu.

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New Ithaca Bakery Bread Cards <u>Avai</u>lable

ITHACA BAKERY is generously offering bread cards to all current Land Trust members again this year. The bread card entitles members to one FREE loaf of bread per month with a \$5 minimum purchase at the 400 N. Meadow Street

location only. Please visit the Land Trust's main office at 202 E. Court Street in Ithaca if you would like to pick up your bread card.



Plan today, save the lands and waters you love tomorrow.

Create your legacy by investing in the Land Trust through a gift from your estate. Join the White Pine Society and discover how you can conserve the places you call home, maximize your philanthropic giving, and meet your financial goals.

> To learn more, please call Kelly Makosch at the Land Trust office at (607) 275-9487.

A CLOSER LOOK

The Ghost in the Woods

This was a great summer for Ghost Pipes (Monotropa uniflora). These plants bloomed everywhere, cool and pale, lighting the forest floor with their odd nodding flowers. Aboveground, they are striking and ethereal. Happy bumblebees visit Ghost Pipe flowers for nectar, and incidentally transfer pollen on their furry heads. Gradually the flowers blacken, stiffen, and stand up like poppy pods. By the end of the season, the plants are shakers full of tiny seeds.

All that sounds normal enough, for a flower. But it's underground that something surprising is happening. You may have heard that Ghost Pipes are parasites of trees. It's true that Ghost Pipes are parasites, but not of trees. They are parasites of the underground mycelium of mushrooms.

Yes, mushrooms. Ghost Pipes tap into a vast underground network of mycorrhizal fungi, which some call "nature's internet." A great many kinds of fungi make up this network. Their invisibly fine mycelium connects with the tips of tree roots, and grows out through the surrounding soil to scavenge nutrients. Most familiar forest mushrooms are the fruits of these fungi: chanterelles, boletes, and amanitas, among others.

It's a pretty sweet deal: trees contribute up to a fifth of the sugars they make through photosynthesis to their fungal partners; the fungi pay back in gifts of water, nutrients like phosphorus and nitrogen,

KATHIE T. HODO

and protection from disease. Almost all forest plants participate in mycorrhizal networks, collaborating with multiple kinds of fungi all at the same time. The network is supported by big trees, and nurses little ones until they get going.

Pale Ghost Pipes aren't green because they don't photosynthesize; they make no sugars to contribute to a fungus partner. However, they have cleverly persuaded fungi to donate both sugars and nutrients without receiving anything in return.

A Ghost Pipe's favorite partners are species of *Russula* and *Lactarius*. These charming and distinctive mushrooms come in an array of pleasing colors and would seem easy to identify. They have brittle flesh, neat, attached gills, and white, spiky spores. Most field guides will try to convince you this red one is *Russula emetica*. But most guides conveniently leave out all the *other* red ones—*dozens* of species of them—that differ in the subtlest ways. The incredible diversity of mycorrhizal *Russula* species has so far defeated all the mycologists who would like to put them in order. Presumably a Ghost Pipe knows its friends better than your average taxonomist.

Dig up a Ghost Pipe and you'll find a gnarled ball of stubby roots. They are mycorrhizal roots colonized by a *Russula* or a *Lactarius*. If you had super microscope eyes, you could zoom in and see that the fungus and plant have together created special root tips built for nutrient exchange. The fungus pokes into root cells in the same way you'd poke your finger into a balloon without bursting it—that close connection is where the sugar and nutrients flow. Zoom out again, way out, and you'd find that same fungus connected to one or more different trees, and maybe it's made a cheerful red mushroom to disperse its spores, too.

You might know some other nonphotosynthetic plants in our woods: Bear Corn (*Conopholis americana*) and Beechdrops (*Epifagus americana*) attach directly to the roots of oaks and beeches without any need for fungi. But like Ghost Pipes, almost all orchids begin their lives completely dependent on mycorrhizal fungi, and only later develop the ability to photosynthesize... a story for another day.

Some have denounced Ghost Pipes as creepy—for their thievery and their deathly whiteness. That seems unkind to me; I think parasites play important roles in nature. Anyway, our understanding of mycorrhizal networks is new and growing. It's clear these networks have enormous impacts on both forest and agricultural ecosystems, and therefore the functioning of planet Earth. When you next meet a Ghost Pipe, let it remind you of the beautiful and unseen collaboration happening under your feet. —*Kathie T. Hodge*



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Finger Lakes Land Trust

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Autumn 2015 Calendar



Saturday, October 24, 6:00–8:00pm: Owl Prowl-Roy H. Park Preserve-north

entrance, town of Dryden. Join Jason Gorman, the Land Trust's Nature Preserve Manager, for a kid-friendly hike to listen for owls and other creatures of the night. This will include a short hike, so please wear sturdy shoes. The moon will not quite be full, but should provide enough illumination to light the way. Please feel free to bring a headlamp or flashlight, but we will do our best to trust our eyes and ears. **FROM ITHACA:** Take Rt. 13 North towards Dryden. Go approx. 12 miles and turn right on Irish Settlement Rd. Continue on Irish Settlement approx. 4 miles to find the NORTH parking area–where the boardwalk is—on the left (approx. 0.5 mile after Hammond Hill Rd).

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

Walks go rain, sun or snow. Please bring snacks and water and wear sturdy shoes. Call the Land Trust at (607) 275-9487 for details or visit www.fllt.org/events.