



The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes Region

Vol. 27, No. 1 • Winter 2014 -15



BILL HECHT

3,000+ feet of Cayuga Lake Shoreline Protected!

This new year, the Land Trust announces a remarkable conservation easement on more than 3,000 feet of rare pristine shore frontage on Cayuga Lake, south of Union Springs.

This 58-acre shore property easement is connected, by family history, to Great Gully Farm. In December 2012, the Land Trust concluded a conservation easement on 650 adjacent acres of farmland and forest, including a large portion of Great Gully itself, with its spectacular waterfalls. Both easements protect land once owned by the late Harris McIntosh, who passed the land to his children.

The new easement conserves an impressive stretch of shorefront around the mouth of Great Gully Creek—particularly impressive with its unbroken, old-growth tree line along the shore. Towering sycamore trees shade the broken shale beaches, with 150-year-old red and white oaks standing close behind. The shorefront includes a small cove, so secluded that it brings to mind a time before settlers. The shoreline provides habitat for Bald Eagles, Osprey, and a variety of water fowl.

This conservation easement, which includes a family home on the waterfront, is the gift of the Harris McIntosh Trust. The beneficiaries of the trust include the four children of Harris and Elizabeth McIntosh: Harris Jr. "Scott," John "Jock," Daniel, and Elizabeth "Samantha." Jock passed away before the easement could be concluded, but he was active in the initial phases several years ago, when he and his siblings began discussing plans for the future of their property.

Vince McLaughlin, Vice President and Trust Officer of KeyBank National Association and the Trustee of the Harris McIntosh Trust, stated simply: "The family's
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Easement Gift Secures Wildlife Habitat Near Canandaigua Lake

IN December of last year, the Land Trust completed an important conservation easement agreement with Philip Cusick, a resident of Connecticut and a seasonal visitor to the Finger Lakes, protecting 181 wooded acres in the town of Italy, Yates County.

The protected property shares 2,385 feet of boundary with New York State's High Tor Wildlife Management Area, an area comprising 6,100 acres of public conservation land. High Tor spans portions of Ontario and Yates Counties and is recognized by National Audubon as one of New York's Important Bird Areas. This terrain is also recognized as a priority project within New York State's Open Space Plan.

The conservation easement will ensure the integrity of a parcel that is uniquely situated within both the Canandaigua Lake Watershed and the Upper Flint Creek Watershed. The property encompasses a diverse mix of mature woodlands, meadows, and brush land. The land provides habitat for a variety of wildlife, including wide-ranging species such as the black bear.
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The property encompasses a diverse mix of mature woodlands, meadows, and brush land.



NIGEL KENT

From the shores of Cayuga Lake to the wilds of High Tor Wildlife Management Area and the state forests of Ithaca's Emerald Necklace, the Land Trust is working with partners to create networks of open space that will stand the test of time. Within this issue of *The Land Steward*, each of six recently completed land protection projects adds to existing blocks of conservation land.

Four of the projects are associated with the Land Trust's efforts to secure the region's largest blocks of intact forest, while the other two involve our efforts to protect Finger Lakes shoreline and undeveloped land close to the lake.

We've been working at these sites for years, and the fruits of our labor are increasingly evident. Near Canandaigua Lake, for example, we've conserved ten parcels in the vicinity of High Tor, building upon an already substantial investment of public resources. By expanding protected open space with pristine streams and unbroken forest, we retain sufficiently wild landscapes for Bald Eagles and black bears, among a huge variety of other wildlife species. These areas are also vital to those of us humans who simply must have these places to reconnect with nature and to restore our spirit.

Similar efforts are underway in the vicinity of Ithaca, as we patiently assemble the Emerald Necklace that will ultimately link 50,000 acres of existing public

conservation lands. Near Skaneateles Lake, our new Hinchcliff Family Preserve is a key link in an emerging greenbelt that in time will extend around the southern half of this gem of the Finger Lakes.

Closer to the lakeshore, it is more challenging to assemble blocks of protected land because of greater development pressure—more challenging, but no less important. On the eastern shore of Cayuga Lake, we've been successful in adding to conserved land at Great Gully in Springport and also to the south, in Lansing. Elsewhere in the region, we're working on similar projects at places such as the Owasco Flats and Bluff Point on Keuka Lake.

As the articles in this issue suggest, we're making good progress toward the creation of a regional network of conserved lands. While this is an incredibly ambitious goal, and there are many challenges facing us, I'm increasingly optimistic about our chances for success. As I travel across the region, I meet more and more people who agree with what Land Trust members already know: this is simply work that must be done for the good of us all.

Andrew Zepp,
Executive Director, Finger Lakes Land Trust

Preservation With a View

With the help of heavy equipment, a long-lost scenic vista was reclaimed at the Land Trust's new Hinchcliff Family Preserve on the southeast end of Skaneateles Lake.

The abandoned, partially collapsed house at the end of Covey Road in Spafford, Onondaga County, needed to come down in preparation for the development of the preserve's primary public access point at the same location. In conjunction with the demolition, the Land Trust removed old oil tanks and some oil-contaminated soil from the site under the guidance of staff from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Now, visitors to the new preserve can drive or walk down to a view of the lake over field and trees.

Special thanks go to Land Trust member George Thomas of Skaneateles, who helped guide the Land Trust through the process of dealing with the abandoned house and the associated oil tanks and contaminated soil.

The Hinchcliff Family Preserve features a mile of hillside overlooking Skaneateles Lake's eastern shore. It includes several rugged gorges as well as mature forest and several meadows that feature scenic views of the lake. The property is part of a growing greenbelt that will ultimately extend in an arc around the southern half of Skaneateles Lake.

Several volunteer work days are planned for this spring in order to prepare the preserve for a formal opening sometime this year. Please contact our Land Steward Jason Gorman at jasongorman@fllt.org if you would like to be notified of work days when they're scheduled.



CHRIS OLNEY



Land Trust Receives State Grant to Protect Canandaigua Farm

The Land Trust recently received a competitive two million dollar grant through a state-run farmland protection program to protect Catalpa Farm, a sweeping 596-acre crop farm in Canandaigua.

The farm is located along the east side of Route 332, just north of the city. This heavily traveled road serves as the main traffic artery between Canandaigua and I-90, and the greater Rochester area. Because Catalpa Farm has city water, sewer, and fiber optic cable, the property faces development pressure from many directions.

Funds for the project came from the state's Farmland Protection Implementation Program. The program provides protection for viable farmland from future non-farming development through the use of conservation easements that will conserve eligible properties, such as Catalpa Farm, as farmland perpetually.

Since 1996, New York has awarded nearly \$195 million for farmland protection projects, assisting 223 projects with local partners in 29 counties. The State Department of Agriculture and Markets administers funds for the program.

Nestled in the hollow of Trenchman's Hill north of Canandaigua, this farm has seen changes over its history. William Pritchard started a dairy farm in the late 1800s. It remained a dairy until the late 1970s, when it was split into two separate farms by Roger and Edson Pritchard. Chris and Gary, sons to Roger and Edson continued to grow each individual farm through the 1980s and 90s. Recently, Gary's son Seth purchased the half owned by his cousin Chris, effectively reuniting the land as one farm.

The current crop rotation consists of grain corn, soybeans, soft red winter wheat, mixed alfalfa grass hay, and clover hay. This year the farm started growing malting barley to support the growing craft beer industry in the state.

Over the years, the Pritchard family has upgraded the machinery used on the farm, purchasing larger equipment to help improve efficiency. The larger equipment has allowed them to farm more acres using less labor and energy. Most of the equipment is outfitted with GPS guidance, which allows for more efficient use of fertilizers and seeds, and also saves wear and tear on equipment and operators.

This technology allows the fields to be micromanaged, as opposed to treating the fields uniformly. So, for example, the equipment can take soil samples throughout the field, and then an area needing fertilizer can be pinpointed and mapped, allowing for localized application. This level of farming efficiency is important ecologically, as the farm drains into Beaver Creek and Padelford Brook, a primary tributary to the Canandaigua Outlet.

These prime farmlands will remain in agriculture for generations to come, protected by a conservation easement held by the Land Trust. The Town of Canandaigua has pledged additional financial support for this project. The commercial development in this area and along Route 332 has grown over the last decade. Seeing this trend, the Town of Canandaigua and the Pritchard family want to ensure that this prime farmland stays in agriculture for the general good of the community.

"Farming is an important component of our local and regional economy that provides jobs and supports local business," said Pam Helming, Canandaigua Town Supervisor. "As the Town of Canandaigua continues to grow, it is imperative that we strike a balance between farmland protection and responsible development."

—Elizabeth Newbold, Land Protection Specialist

Easement Gift Secures Wildlife Habitat Near Canandaigua Lake

continued from cover

The easement agreement will prohibit subdivision of the land, while allowing for the construction of a single home on the property as well as agricultural use and selective harvest of timber.

Philip Cusick bought the property in 2006 from his sister, Carol Cusick Fenton and brother-in-law, Thomas P. Fenton, who had owned the property since the 1970s. Carol and Tom planted trees, created open spaces and hiking trails, and for many years enjoyed the ever-evolving beauty of their hill-top property. Philip decided to undertake the easement in honor of Carol and Tom, naming it the "Fenton Easement."

"It was an honor to work with Philip to protect this property," said Elizabeth Newbold, Land Protection Specialist for the Land Trust. "From the start, it was very clear that this property is a treasure and I am glad that we could help Philip protect it in honor of his sister and late brother-in-law."

The Fenton conservation easement marks the 114th easement held by the Land Trust and adds to the more than 16,000 acres already protected by the organization.

"This is a wonderful gift," said Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "Protection of this land will secure a large contiguous block of wildlife habitat, while also helping ensure Canandaigua Lake's water quality."

The completion of this project is the Land Trust's tenth in the vicinity of the High Tor Wildlife Management Area. Earlier accomplishments include the acquisition of the northern half of Conklin Gully, a popular destination for hikers; the acquisition of frontage on the West River, a destination for anglers and paddlers; and its partnership with the Town of South Bristol to establish Carolabarb Park, well-known for its scenic overlook just west of the wildlife management area.

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Katie Henderson of the law firm of Donald A. Schneider in Penn Yan, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.

Popular Trail Secured Through Easement Donation

Hammond Hill State Forest is well known as one of the best places for cross country skiing in Tompkins County. An extensive network of trails traverses miles of public forest land and provides opportunities for skiers of every skill level.

For years, many skiers have accessed these trails from a parking lot

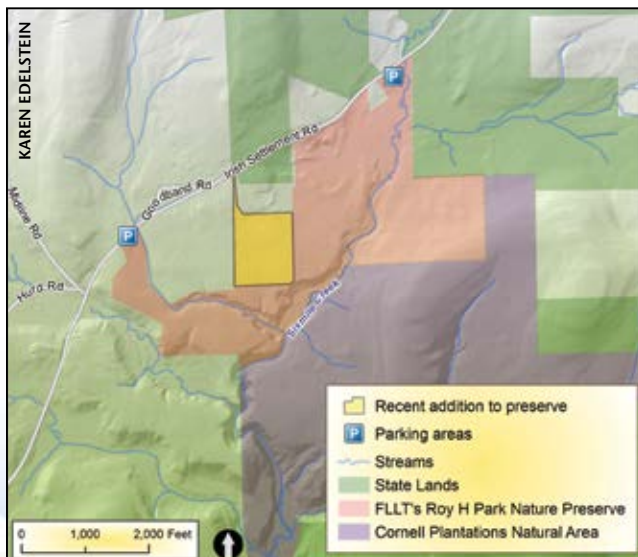
on Hammond Hill Road. Most of these skiers were unaware that a portion of the entry trail crosses private land owned by Ann Leonard.

At the end of 2014, Ann completed the donation of an easement to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation that ensures continued public access to 1,000 feet of this

heavily used trail and also maintains a scenic corridor for 100 feet on either side of the trail.

The Land Trust applauds Ann for her generous gift and the NYSDEC for taking action to secure a key link in a growing network of trails and conservation lands in this area.

Park Preserve Grows Through Land Purchase



Thanks to the recent addition of 25 acres of adjacent forest, the Land Trust's Roy H. Park Preserve has grown to 242 diverse acres bordering Six Mile Creek, the source of Ithaca's drinking water supply. This popular preserve is located within the Emerald Necklace Greenbelt, just east of Ithaca. It borders both Hammond Hill and Yellow Barn State Forests and features access to the creek, hiking trails, and a universally accessible boardwalk and wetland overlook.

This latest addition to the Park Preserve is entirely forested with a mix of hardwoods and hemlock. It was identified as a priority for protection due to its proximity to the creek as well as its context within a large block of intact forest.

Funds for the purchase came from proceeds of the Land Trust's *Shoreline to Summit* capital campaign as well as a grant from Tompkins County's Capital Reserve Fund for Natural, Scenic, and Recreational Resource Protection. Additional fundraising is underway to provide for the long term stewardship of the site.

Information about the Roy H. Park Preserve may be found on the Land Trust's website at: http://www.fllt.org/protected_lands.

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Scott A. Forsyth of the law firm Forsyth & Forsyth in Rochester, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.



Lansing Couple Donates Easement on Land Overlooking Cayuga Lake

The character of our region is defined by water as much as it is by the land. The very shape of the hills and valleys of our area was formed by waves of ice advancing and retreating for millennia. Today, water remains ever present. It wells up from rocky hillside seeps, filters through wetlands, cascades down rocky glens, and rushes down to the sapphire lakes—the hallmarks of our region.

With over 4,200 feet of seasonal streams flowing across it and draining directly to Cayuga Lake, the Koplinka-Loehr property in the Tompkins County town of Lansing is one of many places where water flows so freely.

The Land Trust has recently negotiated a conservation easement on 46 acres owned by Mike and Carrie Koplinka-Loehr, just north of Myers Point on Cayuga Lake's eastern edge.

Were it not for the dedication of the Koplinka-Loehrs in protecting the future of their land, their property might soon be under tremendous pressure of development. The property is only 20 minutes from downtown Ithaca in the rapidly developing town of Lansing. And its position atop the lakeshore cliffs could afford beautiful views north up the lake if a future owner were to clear the trees.

But Mike and Carrie chose a different path for their land—one that enriched them more spiritually than materially.

Carrie's love of nature was nurtured by her youthful experiences roaming a large property next to her childhood home in Westchester County. As time passed, the forests and ponds on that property made way for a community college—a worthy purpose in a beautiful setting, but the peace and serenity were gone. "If falling in love with something is akin to falling in love with someone, I guess it began then: a sense of wonder and a calling to protect what can't speak for itself," said Carrie recently.

After searching for years for their dream property, Mike and Carrie purchased acreage in Lansing and began living out their vision as stewards of their own land. Until the 1960's, much of the property had been farmed but has since grown into brushy fields and forest. The Koplinka-Loehrs carefully sited a small, solar-powered home on part of the property that was neither too steep nor too wet. They work with a local forester to better understand sustainable forest management practices and are improving the health of their forest while, at the same time, harvesting firewood to warm their home during cold winters. They are working with soil conservation professionals to address erosion around some old culverts

installed years ago, and they hope to rejuvenate some aging orchard trees.

At the end of 2014, Mike and Carrie's dream took another significant step forward when they donated a conservation easement to the Land Trust. Their easement will ensure that, no matter who owns the land going forward, it will remain available to provide a home for a family as well as for the plants and animals that inhabit the forest and fields. The easement strikes a careful balance between allowing continued residential use of the property and protecting sensitive, highly erodible soils from activities that would

accelerate erosion and negatively impact water quality in Cayuga Lake. Most of the property will be maintained as forest, where timber harvesting can occur subject to oversight by the Land Trust. About 10 acres of the property will be available for agricultural management.

The Land Trust focuses its work in areas recognized as important to the unique character of the region. The Koplinka-Loehr property is next to land already conserved by the Land Trust under a separate conservation easement. Together, these two properties include nearly 100 acres of a Tompkins County-identified Unique Natural Area on the hillside above the eastern shore of Cayuga Lake, opposite Taughannock Falls State Park.

Keeping both properties out of potential development protects not only the water quality of the lake, but also preserves the natural esthetic of the landscape, with a view of natural shorefront across the lake from Taughannock Park, enjoyed by visitors to one of the region's most popular parks.

Andy Zepp, Land Trust Executive Director, expressed the organization's gratitude, saying: "Our work wouldn't be possible without the dedication and vision of families like the Koplinka-Loehrs. We thank them for their commitment to the land and to our region."

—Kris West, Senoir Field Representative

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Dan Hoffman of Ithaca, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.



SCENES

from Around Our Region...

The Land Trust's 510-acre Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve from Thatcher's Pinnacles in the town of Danby, Tompkins County

BRIAN MALEY

TOM REIMERS



ANDY ZEPP

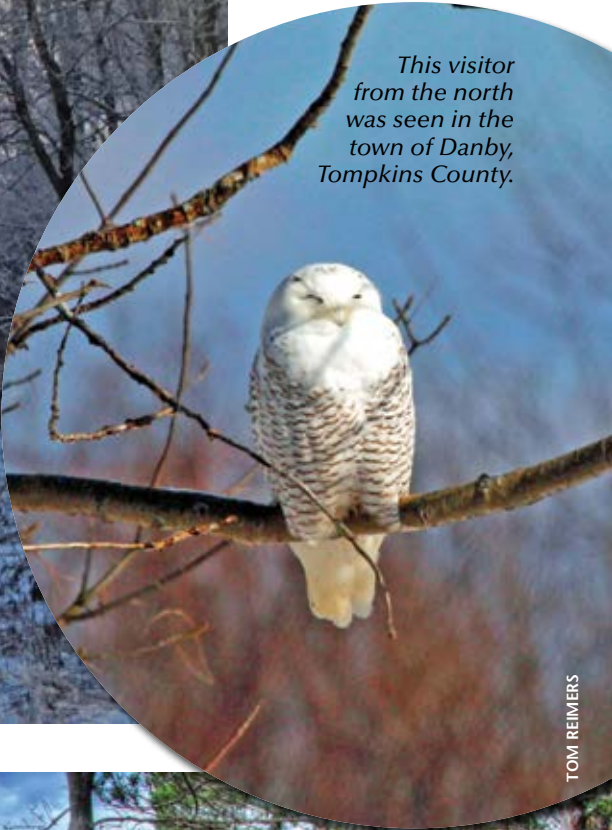
Ithaca College interns Joe Kubis and Ben Albert with Land Steward Jason Gorman taking a brief respite from maintaining the scenic vista at the Stevenson Forest Preserve in the town of Enfield, Tompkins County



DAVID KOTOK



A frigid morning along Fall Creek – the largest tributary to Cayuga Lake, and a Land Trust conservation focus area



This visitor from the north was seen in the town of Danby, Tompkins County.

TOM REIMERS



Photo taken from the overlook at the Wesley Hill Nature Preserve in western Ontario County



3,000+ feet of Cayuga Lake Shoreline Protected! *continued from cover*

desire was to develop a way to preserve the conservation values of the property in such a way that future owners might also enjoy the property's rich amenities."

Harris McIntosh grew up in the village of Cayuga, leaving as a young man for an education at Yale. After other ventures, he established himself as president of Toledo Scale in Toledo, Ohio, the preeminent scale company in the nation at the time. There he met and married Elizabeth Knight, and they raised their family in the Toledo suburb of Perrysburg, Ohio.

But he was drawn back to his boyhood in the Finger Lakes.

He brought his family to the lake in summers. When he could, he bought farmland and lakeshore property in Union Springs, and he built a summer home for himself, his wife and children on the property newly conserved with the Land Trust. The children all fondly remember wandering the lakeshore and taking gully walks, crossing Route 90, to reach the falls.

Protecting the land from future development was one of Harris's chief goals, according to his son Daniel, who owns and runs Great Gully Farm. Harris and Elizabeth were both stewards of the land they owned—farm fields, forest, gully, lakeshore—and their children inherited a family ethic of land preservation.

The terms of the conservation easement are straightforward and reflect a strong family commitment to the ideals of their parents: tillable field remains tillable, and wildlife habitats and shoreline remain pristine. There are provisions to allow continued single family residential use and limited property improvements, provided they are confined to a 5.94-acre building envelope. The McIntosh family believes this initiative

will allow enjoyment of the property by future generations and will serve to preserve its natural beauty and wildlife habitats.

Conservation easements take time to develop, as family owners discuss priorities among themselves and with the Land Trust. It takes both a personal commitment and, finally, a legal, contractual commitment. This one has been maturing for several years, and everyone involved is happy with the outcome.

"The family is impressed with the Land Trust's experience, knowledge, and reputation," Vince McLaughlin said. "The Finger Lakes Land Trust readily acknowledged and understood the unique conservation values of the property, and they suggested a structural solution in which the family felt great comfort."

Any conservation easement the Land Trust engages in becomes a long-term project and a long-term commitment of resources. The preservation of this particular Cayuga Lake shorefront was well worth the time and effort. The McIntosh family has a strong sense of land conservation, and they recognize the importance of the lakeshore and farmland they inherited from their parents.

The Land Trust thanks and celebrates Scott, Dan, Jock, and Samantha for their vision of what this stretch of Cayuga Lake shore has been and should continue to be.

—Eben McLane

The conservation easement recently donated by the Harris McIntosh Trust includes more than 3,000 feet of pristine shoreline on Cayuga Lake.



The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Tim Lynn of the law firm Centolella Lynn D'Elia & Temes LLC in Syracuse, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.



Acquisitions Expand Local State Forests



During the past few months, the Land Trust completed the transfer of two parcels to New York State as additions to Yellow Barn and Sugar Hill State Forests. The projects had been in the works for several years and could be concluded when funds from the state's Environmental Protection Fund were made available for the purchases.

IN Tompkins County, 87 acres were added to Yellow Barn State Forest in Dryden. This land was purchased by the Land Trust in 2010 in conjunction with additional acreage that was added to the Roy H. Park Preserve. In total, the Land Trust acquired 169 acres—retaining lands on the east side of Irish Settlement Road for the Park Preserve and transferring lands on the west side of the road to the State Forest.

This latest addition to Yellow Barn features a mixed forest of hardwoods, pine, and hemlock, as well as wetlands bordering Six Mile Creek and areas of early successional habitat. The parcel connects Hammond Hill and Yellow Barn State Forests and has the potential to host a trail extending from the Land Trust's Park Preserve to Yellow Barn Road.

In Schuyler County, the Land Trust acted at the request of the state's Department of Environmental Conservation to purchase 139 acres from the Dickerson family in 2012. This land is almost surrounded by Sugar Hill State Forest and includes frontage on Glen Creek, one of two tributaries that create the famous gorge at Watkins Glen.

This property is almost entirely forested and is traversed by two abandoned lanes that now serve as recreational trails. The parcel lies close to the Finger Lakes Trail. Acquisition of the tract by the NYSDEC will eliminate an "inholding" in the public forest, simplifying forest management and eliminating the threat of development in this environmentally sensitive area.

The Land Trust was able to secure these at-risk properties through the use of funds available from its revolving Land Protection Fund as well as an interest free loan from the Norcross Wildlife Foundation. Funds realized from the sale of these lands to the state will now be used to facilitate other land protection projects around the region.

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Understanding the Conservation Easement

Throughout the Finger Lakes region, the Land Trust seeks to protect land of important conservation value.

The Land Trust has a special interest in working with landowners wanting to donate a conservation easement on their properties to protect their lands against the uncertainty of future development.

A conservation easement (CE) is a flexible tool, designed to protect the property in a way that is compatible with the landowner's wishes for the future. It is a legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified Land Trust or a public body—such as a municipal, county, state or federal conservation agency—that will protect the character of the land into the future. These organizations, known as "holders" of a CE, are responsible for monitoring the terms of the agreement and ensuring compliance.

Conservation easement donors retain the right to sell or lease the land and otherwise use the land in accordance with the agreement. Most easements held by the Land Trust typically provide for traditional agricultural and forestry uses. In some cases, environmentally sensitive portions of the property are delineated by survey, as are residential or farmstead areas associated with a dwelling.

Interested landowners may donate a conservation easement on either the entire property or a portion of it. Provided that certain criteria are met, easement donors may benefit from both a federal tax deduction (based on the appraised value of the donation) and a state property tax credit.

The Land Trust is grateful for the more than 100 families in our region who have donated conservation easements to ensure the future of their properties. These landowners have a strong commitment to the land as well as a clear vision for the Finger Lakes of the future.

Additional information about conservation easements and associated tax incentives may be found on the Land Trust's website at: http://www.flit.org/protect_your_land/easement.

Our appreciation for gifts in honor of...

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Our deepest gratitude for thoughtful gifts in memory of...

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Land Trust Wish List

- Digital Single Lens Reflex (SLR) Camera to help us make this newsletter even more beautiful
- Talented volunteer photographer(s) in the Southern Tier and Skaneateles areas for high quality digital photography of Land Trust properties

A CLOSER LOOK

THE WILD TURKEY: Thanksgiving Dinner or Courageous American Icon?

The Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) is surely the most American of birds. Both a totem animal and a major source of protein for many native North Americans, it gave the Europeans a foothold in the New World and has become synonymous with Thanksgiving. No less a luminary than Benjamin Franklin praised its courage – much greater, he thought, than that of the Bald Eagle.

The natural history of the turkey is intimately intertwined with human history. The subspecies found in the eastern United States (*M. g. silvestris*) was hunted by native tribes, who used fire to create the patchwork of mature forest, young forest, and meadows that turkeys prefer. Another subspecies, now assumed extinct, was domesticated in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica; a third was domesticated in the Southwest.

When this newfangled bird was brought back to England, it was called a “turkie,” perhaps in reference to its supposed “Eastern” origins. (In many European languages – including, ironically, Turkish – the word for “turkey” is related to the word for “India.”) About a century after this domesticated fowl was brought to Spain by the conquistadors, it was brought back to America by the Pilgrims.

The Wild Turkey has certain biological quirks that allow it to live closely with humans but which sometimes bring it into conflict with people. It does not defend a home territory against others of its own kind; rather, it lives in relatively large flocks organized by a strict pecking order. Furthermore, it seems to readily accept people into this order, assigning each human a “gender” and a place in the hierarchy. A turkey may therefore behave submissively, aggressively, or even seductively toward people, depending on how they are perceived.

Turkey aggression can be rather frightening: a male, known as a “tom” or “gobbler,” can be up to 25 pounds and four feet long and, as Ben Franklin noted, seems to have no fear. Gobblers acclimated to people may behave quite differently than those in the wild. Although birds in the rural Finger Lakes seem to be a pretty docile bunch, it is prudent to minimize human-turkey conflicts by never giving the birds access to food (including spilled birdseed)

and making sure that you and your neighbors always assert your dominance.

Turkeys have contributed greatly to human welfare, though the reverse has not always been true. The five subspecies of Wild Turkey originally ranged over most of what is now the continental United States, but their populations were devastated by overhunting and the wholesale conversion of forest into farmland; they disappeared from New York by the 1840s. However, the

tide began to turn in the early 20th century, when many farms in the Northeast were abandoned and reverted to forest.

Around 1948, a population crossed into western New York. In 1959, some of those birds were trapped and released in other parts of the state. Today, there are estimated to be ten times as many Wild Turkeys in New York as there once were in the entire country.

Paradoxically, the same changes that brought the Wild Turkey back are also contributing to a recent decline in its numbers.

Turkeys spend most of the year in hardwood forests, where they feed on acorns, seeds, fruits, roots, grasses, and invertebrates. However, since the turkey nest is little more than a hole scratched in the ground and the poults have no defenses against predators, hens prefer to lay their eggs and raise their young in areas with dense ground cover; adults often use the same areas to hide from predators, including hunters. As the forests of the Northeast mature, they contain ever fewer hiding places. The recent cold, rainy springs have also been hard on turkeys. Poults sometimes succumb to the weather; additionally, when they are wet, they emit an odor that makes it easier for predators to find them.

The turkey gets an undeservedly bad rap. In common parlance, “turkey” means “a fool” or “a failure.” It’s true that the barnyard turkey is rather awkward and self-important, but its indigenous cousin is a very different bird. It is well-known to hunters as a worthy adversary, swift, elusive, and crafty. It is also surprisingly beautiful, with iridescent feathers and a head covered with fantastic crenellations of bright-colored flesh. We should give thanks for Ben Franklin’s “true original Native of America,” without which we would not be where we are today.

—*Jacqueline Stuhmiller*



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Spring 2015 Calendar

Saturday, March 28, 2:00 – 4:00pm: Tree Identification Walk at the Roy H. Park Preserve SOUTH, Town of Dryden. Akiva Silver, naturalist, landscaper, and outdoor educator, will lead a walk that will focus on tree identification, natural history, wildlife value, the role of invasive plants, as well as survival uses of trees and shrubs. The walk will last two hours or more so please come prepared with appropriate clothing and footwear for the weather and terrain. **FROM ITHACA**, take Rt. 13 north towards Dryden. Go approximately 12 miles and turn right on Irish Settlement Rd. Continue on Irish Settlement approximately 5 miles (you will pass the NORTH parking area on the left) to find the SOUTH parking area on the left just after Goodband Rd. If you get to Midline Rd. you've gone too far. PLEASE park on Goodband Rd. if the parking lot is full; there is not adequate space to park on the shoulder of Irish Settlement Road.

Saturday, May 16, 8:00am: Morning Bird Walk at Van Riper Conservation Area/Whitlock Nature Preserve, Town of Romulus. Co-sponsored and led by Eaton Birding Society.

Located on the western shore of Cayuga Lake, the Van Riper/Whitlock Preserves provide a unique opportunity to listen for and observe a variety of resident and migratory birds. Bring binoculars if you have them. Beginning birders welcome! **FROM THE SOUTH:** The preserves are approximately 23 miles north of Ithaca; 2.6 miles north of County Rt. 138; and 2 miles north of the Thirsty Owl winery. The gravel parking area is on the right side of Rt. 89. **FROM THE NORTH:** The preserves are approximately 15 miles south of Seneca Falls; ½ mile south of Swick Road; and 800 feet south of North Cayuga Lake Road. The gravel parking area is on the left side of Rt. 89. There are brown binocular signs along the road, in both directions, announcing the entrance to the preserve. Parking is right next to the green preserve sign.

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.

