

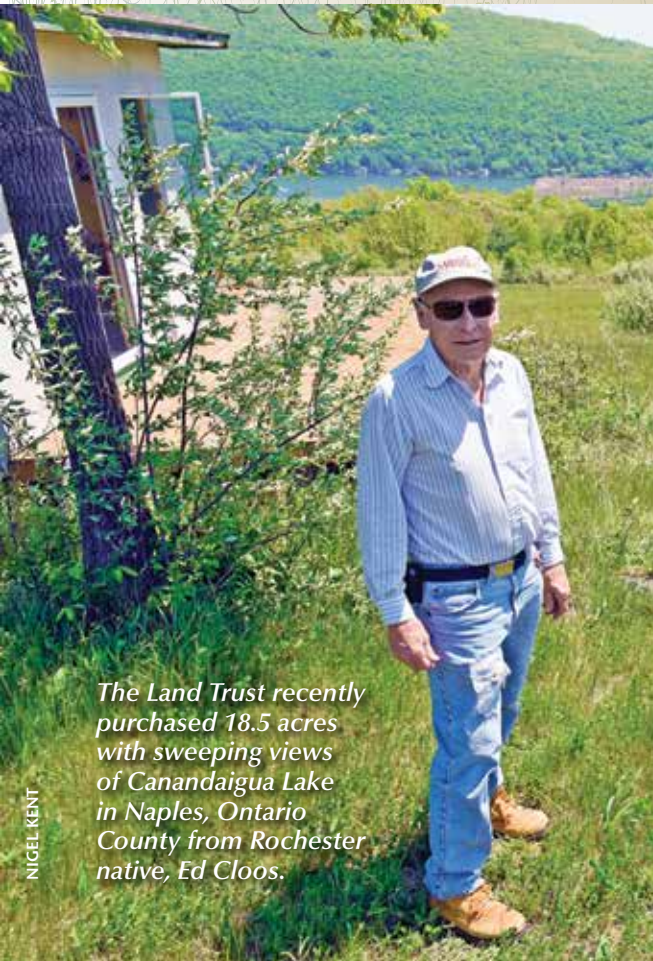


The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes region

Vol. 28, No. 4 • Autumn 2016



The Land Trust recently purchased 18.5 acres with sweeping views of Canandaigua Lake in Naples, Ontario County from Rochester native, Ed Cloos.

NIGEL KENT

A Growing Network of Conserved Lands at the South End of Canandaigua Lake

The hillsides at the south end of Canandaigua Lake are well known for their scenic beauty. Increasingly, however, these same slopes are being developed as home sites, degrading the view and adding runoff to the lake below.

The Land Trust recently took action to ensure that a particularly scenic 18-acre parcel will not be developed. The property features meadows with sweeping vistas of Canandaigua Lake and the West River Valley as well as half of a rugged gorge and hillside woodlands above State Route 21 on Greisa Hill Road in Naples.

The property is part of a growing network of conserved lands in this area. Across Greisa Hill Road are hillside meadows protected by a conservation easement held by the Land Trust. Just downhill is an additional woodland already owned by the Land Trust as well as the state's High Tor Wildlife Management Area. And just a stone's throw to the north is South Bristol's popular scenic overlook and Carolabarb

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Bear Swamp Creek Acquisition Adds to Protection of Skaneateles Lake

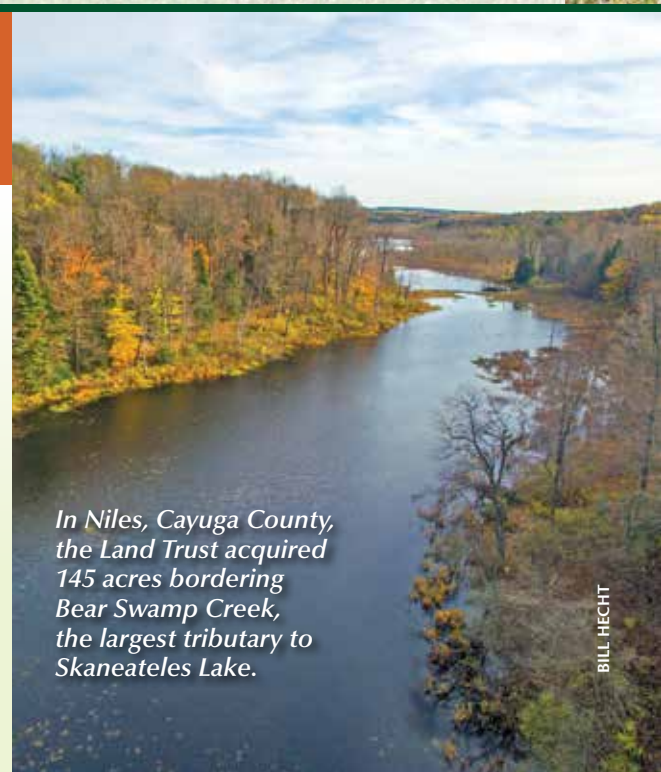
This summer, the Land Trust acquired 145 acres of forest, fields, and wetlands bordering Bear Swamp Creek in the town of Niles, Cayuga County. The creek is the largest tributary to Skaneateles Lake, and its protection has been a Land Trust priority for many years.

Protecting 1,600 feet of frontage on Bear Swamp Creek will help in the general effort to keep sediment and unwanted nutrients from washing into the lake. Some acres of the upland portion of the newly-acquired property are currently leased to crop farming, but the extensive forested slope down to the creek and the creek's associated wetland borders will provide an important buffer, protecting the tributary's health.

The new property borders Bear Swamp State Forest on two sides, and it touches a large Land Trust conservation easement that also protects a healthy stretch of the creek as it flows north to the lake.

With this purchase, the Land Trust has helped to conserve a total of four miles of streambank along Bear Swamp Creek, considered one of

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In Niles, Cayuga County, the Land Trust acquired 145 acres bordering Bear Swamp Creek, the largest tributary to Skaneateles Lake.

BILL HECHT

Ithaca temporarily lost its rail line last year because of too much water—a flash flood washed out the tracks and also damaged a nearby state highway and a number of homes. Similar damage occurred across the region, running in a narrow band through the southern Finger Lakes.

Honeoye Lake

NIGEL KENT

PERSPECTIVES

This year, farmers are challenged by a severe drought that threatens their livelihood and public officials are worrying about drinking water supplies. Crops wither as our local streams run at record low levels.

While both of these situations are due to extreme variations in weather, they're also exacerbated by changes we've made to the land. Over the last 200 years, we've drained wetlands, channeled streams, and created a vast network of drainage ditches and pipes that have a profound impact upon the way in which water moves across our landscape.

In the case of floods, the loss of wetlands reduces our landscapes' ability to absorb excess runoff and release it gradually over time. Similarly, straightened streams, roadside ditches, and the filling of floodplains all serve to reduce the land's ability to retain runoff and instead increase the likelihood of flood damage. Today, storm runoff drains much more quickly from our fields and forests than it did in the past.

In times of drought, these same changes have also made our water supplies more vulnerable as we've reduced our landscape's capacity to retain and store water over time. Wetlands that act as reservoirs have been eliminated or dramatically reduced—increasing the impact of droughts like the one we've had this year.

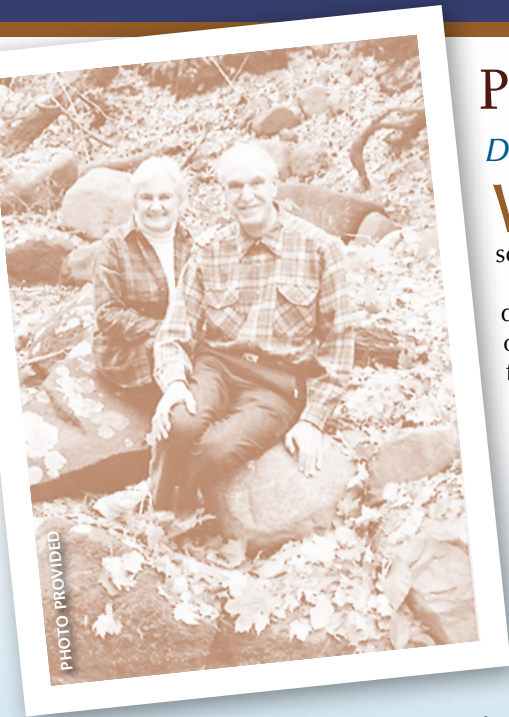
This problem has been 200 years in the making and won't be solved overnight. A long-term public/

private partnership and a substantial commitment of financial resources will be needed to "re-plumb" the Finger Lakes to address these issues and restore more resilience to our landscape. In the face of a changing climate that poses more extremes, the time to act is now.

The Finger Lakes Land Trust is already working with partners to address this issue. At our Wesley Hill Nature Preserve, we recently partnered with the Ontario County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Upper Susquehanna Watershed Coalition to construct vernal pools that will slow down runoff into nearby Honeoye Lake while providing habitat for a variety of amphibians. At the Owasco Flats, we've partnered with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to restore floodplain habitat and reduce runoff into nearby Owasco Lake.

These projects are modest in scale but we're just getting started. We look forward to working with our partners to tackle this challenging issue. Look for more information on this topic in upcoming issues of The Land Steward.

Andrew Zepp,
Executive Director, Finger Lakes Land Trust



Protecting Six Mile Creek

Dorothy Rinaldo always had the best time hiking with her husband Peter.

When an opportunity presented itself to honor his memory by preserving 128 beautiful acres on Midline Road in Dryden, she embraced the opportunity. "Peter and I enjoyed so many years enjoying the woods," Dorothy reminisced. "I wanted to share it with others."

The new preserve is just downstream from our popular Roy H. Park Preserve. Featuring a diverse landscape of meadows, forests, and wetlands, the preserve joins a growing complex of conservation lands that also includes a Cornell Plantations Natural Area and two state forests.

The property protects more than 12,000 feet bordering Six Mile Creek and several of its tributaries. Gorgeous in all seasons, Six Mile Creek serves as the source of drinking water for the city of Ithaca.

"I'm delighted the Finger Lakes Land Trust exists so some of these beautiful places can be preserved," said Dorothy.

The Finger Lakes Land Trust is grateful to Dorothy for providing lead support to purchase the property. To honor Peter's memory, the property will be known as the Peter M. Rinaldo Preserve.

Thanks to Dorothy's generous lead gift and broad support from the community, the Land Trust has raised \$247,000 of the \$300,000 needed to permanently conserve this special place. This is a rare opportunity to protect drinking water and a beloved outdoor destination. Please contact Kelly Makosch at (607) 275-9487 or kellymakosch@flit.org to make a gift toward this project and to learn more.



A Growing Network of Conserved Lands at the South End of Canandaigua Lake *continued from cover*

Park—which the Land Trust protects with a conservation easement.

This latest addition to the Land Trust’s holdings was sold by Rochester resident Ed Cloos, who utilized the property as a retreat and a place to grow grapes for more than 40 years. Mr. Cloos agreed to sell the land for less than its appraised fair market value—preferring to forego additional profit so that he would know that the land would be well cared for in the future.

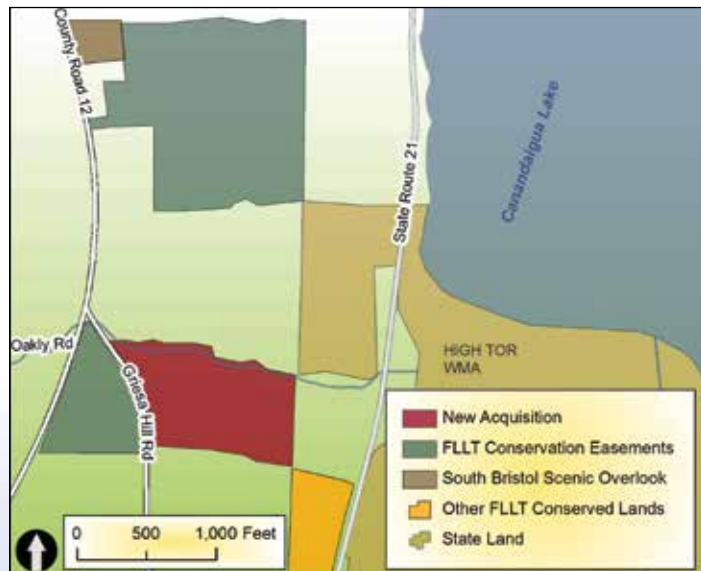
“Ed’s love and commitment to this land were evident immediately,” said Land Protection Specialist Elizabeth Newbold. “After several decades of hard work and management, he had many stories to share about Bald Eagles landing on the lower meadow with their recently caught meal, the Bobolink birds that nested in the fields in the summer, and the always evolving fresh grape market in the region. Ed’s motivation to protect the land is tremendous and ensures that such a special place will remain available for others in the future to have similar stories of wildlife and open space.”

The Cloos acquisition is the 13th land protection project the Land Trust has completed in the vicinity of the south end of Canandaigua Lake. In addition to this newest preserve, the Land Trust also owns and manages the Great Hill and West River Nature Preserves. The organization has also partnered with the Town of South Bristol to establish nearby Carolabarb Park; Ontario County to acquire Grimes Glen; and with New York State to add several parcels to High Tor Wildlife Management Area.

The Land Trust intends to develop a scenic overlook on the property and a modest parking area. A fundraising goal

of \$140,000 has been set and half of the funds have already been raised through generous contributions from supporters. Please contact Kelly Makosch at (607) 275-9487 or kellymakosch@fllt.org if you would like to make a gift toward this project or would like to learn more.

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



Why the Eagles Returned: A Presentation by Peter Nye

Thursday, October 13 • 7:00 PM • Cornell Lab of Ornithology
159 Sapsucker Woods Road • Ithaca, New York

For 36 years, Wildlife Biologist Peter Nye led New York State's Endangered Species Unit for the Department of Environmental Conservation where he was deeply involved in numerous raptor projects including extensive work on Peregrine Falcons, Osprey, Short-eared Owls, Golden Eagles, and Bald Eagles. During this time, he led the effort to successfully restore Bald Eagles to New York State.

On October 13, Peter will explore the biology, remarkable comeback, and

current status of Bald Eagles in NYS and elsewhere. Come with questions!

Peter was a leader of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services Northern States Bald Eagle Recovery Team, is currently a member of the select international working group on Sea Eagles and climate change, and teaches a graduate course in Wildlife Management at the University of Albany.

For more info, call the Land Trust at (607) 275-9487.



MARIE READ

Emerald Necklace Grows Through Land Gift

A recent donation of 28 acres of hillside forest in the town of Richford in Tioga County is the latest link in the Emerald Necklace, and more particularly, the latest of several Land Trust projects that conserve the headwaters of the West Branch of Owego Creek. The property, generously donated by Michael Barnes, will eventually be conveyed to New York State and will become part of Robinson Hollow State Forest.

Diverse tree species such as beech, white pine, hemlock, yellow birch, and cherry can be found on the property, which the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) identified as a priority in the Tri-County Unit Management Plan for Robinson Hollow State Forest. Adding this property to the state forest will help consolidate state ownership, and build wildlife habitat connectivity.

Forested hillsides in headwater areas are important in maintaining both water quality and quantity by reducing erosion and moderating water flow especially during storm

events and spring runoff. A seasonal stream flows from the Barnes tract to the West Branch of Owego Creek, which is the highest quality eastern brook trout stream in our region. As water moves from the Barnes property to the main stem of the creek it flows through a wetland complex identified by DEC as important juvenile brook trout habitat. A 12-acre portion of this wetland was protected through another donation to the Land Trust in 2013, which we are in the process of transferring to DEC—also as an addition to Robinson Hollow State Forest.

The Barnes project makes a significant addition to the network of lands protected by the Land Trust in this watershed which includes the Goetchius Wetland Preserve, the King Nature Preserve and six properties that remain in private
continued on page 9

The Land Trust is working with the State of New York to protect 28 acres in Richford, Tioga County, safeguarding the West Branch of Owego Creek.



FLT

Third Easement Donation Ensures Character of Mark Twain's Summer Home

IN May of this year, Katherine and Thomas Roehlke donated a 20-acre conservation easement to the Finger Lakes Land Trust, completing a conservation project envisioned by George Howell, Katherine's late father and leader in the Elmira community. The Roehlke's is the third conservation easement donated to protect lands surrounding Quarry Farm from encroaching development. Their donation brings the total acreage of conserved land around Quarry Farm to more than 235 acres.

Located on a scenic hilltop just north of downtown Elmira, Quarry Farm served as writing retreat for Samuel Clemens, the author well-known as Mark Twain. The Clemens family summered on the property with relatives for over 20 years. During these visits, Mark Twain spent much of his time writing his masterpieces *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in an octagonal study built expressly for him near the main house. Quarry Farm is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is owned and managed by Elmira College as a home for visiting Mark Twain scholars.

The Roehlke's conservation easement allows the family to continue living on the property while protecting field and forest habitat immediately next to Quarry Farm. Like other conservation easements held by the Land Trust, the Roehlke's easement keeps the land in private ownership and on local tax rolls. Protecting the Roehlke's property will help to protect the water quality of a creek flowing to the Chemung River and, eventually, the Chesapeake Bay.

This project is part of an ongoing effort by the Land Trust to conserve lands in the vicinity of the Chemung River and its valley. The conservation effort is supported, in part, through a grant from the United States Forest Service Private Forest Stewardship Initiative. The Roehlke's easement donation represents the fifth conservation easement in Chemung County, which is also home to two of the Land Trust's public conservation areas—Plymouth Woods and Steege Hill Nature Preserves.

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Jim Miller of the law firm Miller Mayer, LLP in Ithaca, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.

Bear Swamp Creek Acquisition Adds to Protection of Skaneateles Lake *continued from cover*

the region's most pristine watercourses. Other protected lands along the stream include the Carpenter's Falls State Unique Area, the Land Trust's Bahar Nature Preserve, and three privately owned properties that have entered into conservation easement agreements with the Land Trust.

Acquired in a partnership with the New York State Department of Environmental Protection, the new tract will be added to the adjacent Bear Swamp State Forest when state funds become available. The Land Trust frequently works through partnerships such as this to leverage resources for conservation and to complement public conservation programs. The Land Trust increasingly works within these partnerships, embracing shared conservation interests with the state and local organizations.

Bear Swamp State Forest lies within one of Audubon New York's Important Bird Areas, with special emphasis on forest species. The forest is a popular destination for outdoor recreation and has an extensive network of multi-use trails.

Funding for this purchase comes from a grant from the Allyn Foundation and from the Land Trust's "Forever Fund." The latter is an internal revolving loan fund used to facilitate time-sensitive land purchases. When the land is eventually sold to New York State, proceeds from that sale will return to the "Forever Fund," enabling future conservation projects.

"We are grateful for the generous support of the Allyn Foundation and to all of our members for helping to make this project possible," said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp. "This new acquisition along Bear Swamp Creek helps ensure Syracuse's drinking water supply and protects critical fish and wildlife habitat as well. Adding more protected forest and stream land to the state forest complex can only please those who value it for recreation and the sheer pleasure of exploring wild, undeveloped land."

Bear Swamp State Forest and its creek are located within a proposed greenbelt extending around the southern end of *continued on page 10*

"This new acquisition along Bear Swamp Creek helps ensure Syracuse's drinking water supply and protects critical fish and wildlife habitat as well."



In July, paddlers journeyed to the Staghorn Cliffs on Skaneateles Lake where the Land Trust has protected 1,350 feet of shoreline.

SCENES

from Around
Our Region...

DARIN HARRISON



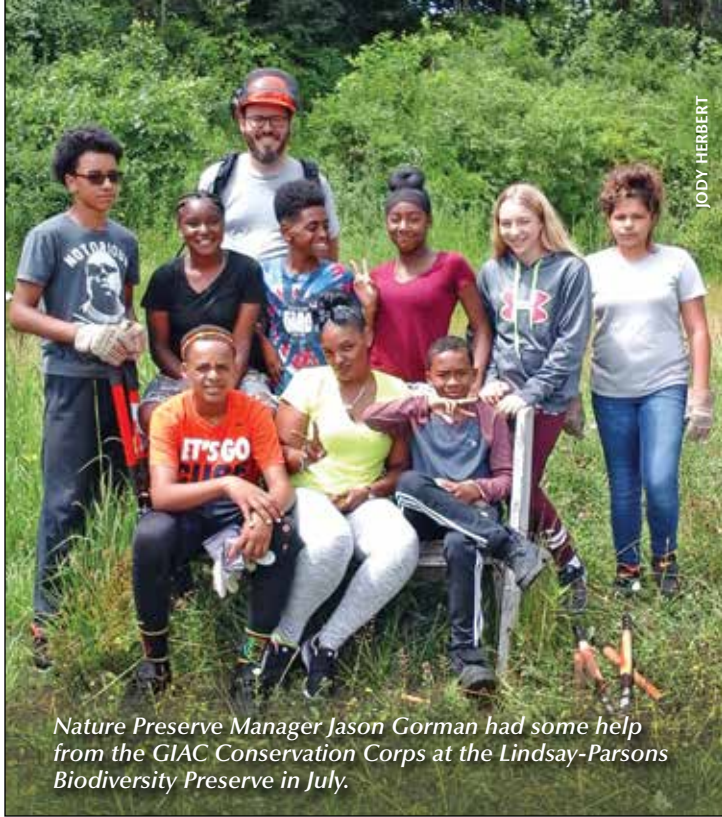
CHRIS OLNEY



ANDY ZEPF

The Land Trust recently took its first steps in creating a new publicly accessible nature preserve on the shore of Otisco Lake in Spafford, Onondaga County, by removing an old seasonal cabin.

RICK LIGHTBODY



JODY HERBERT

Nature Preserve Manager Jason Gorman had some help from the GIAC Conservation Corps at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in July.

Thanks to a partnership with the Canandaigua Lake Watershed Association, Finger Lakes residents enjoyed a stream exploration at Grimes Glen County Park in Naples, Ontario County.



LINDSAY MCMILLAN

Cornell University Biology Professor Tom Seeley led a live honey bee behavior demonstration in June at the Roy H. Park Preserve in Dryden, Tompkins County.



Conservation Easement Expansion Adds to Protected Lands in Seneca Lake Watershed

The view from the top of the fire tower on Sugar Hill, west of Watkins Glen, displays all of the wondrous natural beauty of the Finger Lakes—forest-covered hills, grassy meadows, gorges, wetlands, and lakes large and small.

It was the grandeur of this landscape that inspired Stephen and Kathryn Trechter to buy 59 acres in the town of Orange, Schuyler County, adjacent to the Sugar Hill State Forest in 1978. After living in various places around the Midwest and East Coast, the Trechters found a place to settle down in the Finger Lakes. “We had never lived in an area with physical beauty like this,” said Stephen.

For many years, the Trechters operated an organic herbal products business called Sugarhill Farm on their property. Their products were generally sold at local festivals and markets, and they also sold herbs to Wegmans stores in Corning and Elmira. When the Trechters decided to step away from the business in 2007, a neighbor and family friend took over, and Sugarhill Farm remains in operation today.

Based on a recommendation from forester Michael DeMunn, the Trechters donated a conservation easement on their property to the Land Trust in 2005. A conservation easement is a legal agreement that sets limits on property development while allowing the land to remain in private ownership, and landowners may also be eligible for tax benefits. Furthermore, the agreement “runs with the land,” meaning it applies to both present and all future owners of the property.

When the Trechters originally contacted the Land Trust about a conservation easement, founding board member Betsy Darlington was the Director of Land Protection. “Betsy is a kindhearted, wonderful soul,” said Kathryn. “She walked us through the process, and it was exactly what we wanted in terms of protecting the land.”

Recently, the Trechters had the opportunity to purchase 25 acres adjacent to their existing property, and they jumped at the chance. This new parcel has now been added to their existing conservation easement.

“We’re grateful to Steve and Kathryn for continuing their commitment to conservation,” said Land Trust Executive

Director Andrew Zepp. “Protection of this land will help ensure the integrity of one of the region’s largest blocks of forestland while also helping to safeguard water quality within Watkins Glen and Seneca Lake.”

The Trechters’ 59-acre parcel and the adjacent 25-acre tract were originally a single property, but they were split apart by a previous owner. The smaller property was purchased by a woman from New Jersey, and her two daughters inherited the undeveloped parcel when she passed away. The Trechters eventually became friends with the daughters.

“We asked them to give us the right of first refusal if they ever decided to sell the land,” said Kathryn. “So they called us last summer and said, ‘We’re going to sell, and we really want you to buy it.’ They knew that we would be true



“The land has given us so much,” said Kathryn.

“It’s the least we can do to sustain and protect it.”

to the land and protect it from development.”

The Trechters’ original property is surrounded on three sides by the Sugar Hill State Forest. Now that the two parcels are reconnected, the property is completely surrounded by state forest land. The Finger Lakes Trail, which meanders through the Sugar Hill State Forest, passes through a forested portion of the Trechters’ property.

The newly combined property encompasses a diversity of habitat ranging from farm fields and shrub land to mature hardwood and coniferous forests. Two ponds on the property attract abundant birdlife, including Hermit Thrushes and the occasional Golden Eagle. In terms of wildlife, the Trechters have seen deer, foxes, coyotes, and even a black bear that wandered into their shed to nibble on sunflower seeds intended for their birdfeeders.

Although the Trechters are now retired and doting on their grandchildren, they remain avid stewards of the land. “The land has given us so much,” said Kathryn. “It’s the least we can do to sustain and protect it.”

—Jeff Tonole

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney David Tyler, of counsel to Gutman & Reiter in Ithaca, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.

Logan Hill Nature Preserve Now Open to the Public

On September 10, Land Trust staff and volunteers were joined by preserve donors Betsy and Dick Darlington to formally dedicate the Logan Hill Nature Preserve in Candor, Tioga County.

Now open to the public, the preserve borders Catatonk Creek and offers stunning views of the surrounding hills, visible from the new 2.5 mile hiking trail.

The 285-acre Logan Hill Preserve, one of 40 nature preserves owned by the Land Trust, features diverse habitat for wildlife. Visitors can walk directly from the village of Candor and venture through young and old forests, grassland and meadow habitat, and an elevated wetland that hosts southern species such as tupelo and cucumber magnolia trees. The unique blend of land cover provides an ideal environment for an interesting range of birds. Open fields host nesting Bobolinks; shrubby, successional areas provide a home to Prairie Warblers and Woodcock; and dozens of manmade vernal pools provide excellent breeding grounds for wood frogs, salamanders, and other amphibians.

Betsy and Dick Darlington bought 300 acres of land atop Logan Hill in 1972, and in 1990, donated the first ever conservation easement held by the Land Trust. Betsy, Dick, and their daughters, Lois and Jean, wanted to ensure the permanent protection of their family's property and donated 285 acres to the Land Trust in February of 2015. The remaining 15 acres are still owned by the Darlingtons and are protected



Preserve donors Betsy and Dick Darlington

through a conservation easement.

Public parking is limited as Logan Hill Road is a minimally maintained seasonal road. The public is welcome to park in the public parking area next to the high school. Visitors will then need to cross Main St. and walk up Water St. Once



Nature Preserve Manager Jason Gorman led an inaugural 2.5 mile hike at the dedication on September 10.

past the village of Candor's water tower driveway, continue heading up Logan Hill Rd. for approximately 0.5 mile to the trailhead on the right, a few yards past the turn. Look for yellow paint blazes and enjoy your hike through the stunning collection of fields and forest.

Emerald Necklace Grows Through Land Gift *continued from page 4*

ownership and are protected under conservation easements. But that's not all. "Put in the greater context of its surroundings, protecting this property contributes to larger landscape level conservation goals," says Kris West, Senior Field Representative for the Land Trust.

This property lies in the Chesapeake Bay watershed where actions to protect water quality, such as conserving this property and the headwaters of Owego Creek, are contributing to a coordinated conservation strategy between the federal government and all six states in the watershed.

Finally, the property is the latest link in the Emerald Necklace, a priority project area identified in the New York Open Space Plan and the Land Trust's strategic plan which includes connecting, through both acquisition and conservation easements, 50,000-acres of public lands that form an arc along the hilltops surrounding the south end of Cayuga Lake.

The Land Trust is excited about protecting the Barnes property because the project contributes to a number of our priorities including protection of habitat connectivity, water quality and consolidating public land within two priority landscapes—the Emerald Necklace and the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

This project was supported in part by a grant from the Upper Susquehanna Conservation Alliance (USCA) and the United States Forest Service. USCA is an alliance of 50 organizations and 176 members working collaboratively on conservation projects in the Chesapeake Bay headwaters region in New York.

—Alli Sribarra

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Serena Weckel-Purtell of the law firm Levene, Gouldin, &Thompson, LLP in Vestal, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.



Bear Swamp Creek Acquisition Adds to Protection of Skaneateles Lake *continued from page 5*

Skaneateles Lake. On the southeast side of the lake, the Land Trust last year dedicated the 200-acre Hinchcliff Family Preserve—200 acres covering a mile of hillside overlooking the lake and now featuring a 1.4-mile hiking trail.

Ongoing Land Trust efforts are keenly focused on the use of conservation easement agreements with willing and interested landowners to secure hillside lands in this area, especially those adjacent to Bear Swamp State Forest and its critical tributary to Skaneateles Lake.

In the meantime, this new acquisition increases the appeal of Bear Swamp to wilderness-lovers and helps to maintain the pristine quality of the creek's waters.

—Eben McLane

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Ken Holden of the law firm Hancock Estabrook, LLP in Syracuse, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.

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

Leah Balslev Ginsparg
FROM
*Laura Jones and the
Ginsparg-Jones Family*

**Richard "Rick"
Harrison**
FROM
Jay Harrison

Trudie Kaslauskas
FROM
Neil and Mary Hieber

Jerry Nykiel
FROM
Vincent Nykiel

Janice B. Ryan
FROM
Richard Ryan

Spencer Silverstein
FROM
*Art Kaufman and
Rick Barton*

Abby Stone
FROM
*Timothy and
Rosemary Moran
Union Springs Central
Class of 1973*

Our appreciation for gifts in honor of...

Holly Gregg
FROM
Stephen and Barbara Montgomery

Paul Salon and Barbara Jastran
FROM
*Diane Bonaccorsi
George and Jan Frantz
Tami Magnus
Harvey Nubaum
Steve Smolen*

Maura Kinast
FROM
*Carl Crumley
Susan Eslinger
The Hummel Family*

Tom Kline
FROM
Valessa Souter-Kline

**Frances Jacobus-Parker and
Marius Hauknes**
FROM
Susan Buck-Morss

Molly McLeod
FROM
Jeff Katris

Jeanne Mercier
FROM
Sarah Mercier Hurlbut

New Ithaca Bakery Bread Cards Available

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.



Did you know you can save lands and waters during your lifetime with a gift from your retirement assets?

If you are 70 1/2 or older, you can make direct distributions of up to \$100,000 per year from your IRA to the Finger Lakes Land Trust. These distributions can be counted towards your Required Minimum Distribution, and you won't need to include the distribution as part of your taxable income (nor would you claim a charitable deduction). A direct distribution to the Land Trust may result in lower taxable income and thus may allow you to remain in a lower marginal tax bracket and avoid a phase-out of itemized deductions and exemptions.

Please consult your tax advisor to learn more about how both *you and the Land Trust can benefit from gifts of assets during your lifetime.*



To learn more, contact Kelly Makosch at the Land Trust office at (607)275-9487

A CLOSER LOOK

The Wild Side: Bewitched by Witch-hazel

While trees and the flowering herbs that grow at their feet monopolize most of the botanical limelight, shrubs must not be overlooked. They unfurl some of our prettiest flowers, supply much of our tastiest and energy-rich fruit, offer nesting habitat for birds, and provide shelter during harsh weather to creatures great and small. Among Finger Lakes shrubs, one species stands out, not so much as the best for housing and feeding animals or floral color, but as the weirdest. I refer to *Hamamelis virginiana*, better known as witch-hazel.

Witch-hazel has the peculiar habit of opening its flowers for business not in warm, sunny spring or summer, but during cold, hard November or December. It's bizarre. "Winterbloom" is a name for this plant. So is "snapping alder," for the fact that the leaves resemble those of alders and their fruits open with loud cracks. When witch-hazel pods burst, the bullet-like seeds may shoot ten or twenty feet.

Why blossom in autumn or winter when pollinators are scarce? It's an open question. Certainly with nothing else in bloom, witch-hazel has little trouble attracting the attention of whatever insects are active. Studies have shown that for witch-hazel, Cupid's errands are carried out by a variety of cold-weather fliers, among them fungus gnats, parasitic wasps, and hoverflies.

As in all so-called higher plants, pollen delivers the sperm that fertilize eggs cradled in ovaries. An odd thing about witch-hazel embryos is that after they're created, they're put on hold. It's winter, after all. The plant is virtually shut down physiologically and in no position to manufacture fully developed offspring. So the embryos are archived until spring. Then they begin developing in earnest.

Botanically, witch-hazel is a lone wolf, at least in New York state. It has no close relatives here. Most of its kin live in Asia, although a second, smaller kind of witch-hazel occurs in the American South. Sweetgum trees, ranging from Dixie northward to the coast of Connecticut, also hail from the same off-beat family.

When I was a child, my mother treated major body aches in the household with witch-hazel rubdowns. The liniment, still sold in drugstores, wafts a distinctive medicinal smell that inspires faith (possibly misguided) in its curative powers. Witch-hazel essence, which also turns up in toothpaste and facial cleansers, is distilled from the twigs. Oddly, there's little or no whiff of the final,

astringent product in the plant itself. Old-time pharmacists made witch-hazel lotion by pulverizing young twigs and roots and steeping them in alcohol. Regarding genuine health benefits, the jury remains out.

There are several stories explaining how witch-hazel got its name. The most colorful (and perhaps least reliable) is that the plant, flowering around or after Halloween and with its crooked growth habit, gangly yellow blossoms, and explosive seedpods, was historically associated with witches. Dowsers, also known as water-witchers,

sometimes choose forked sections of witch-hazel as divining rods.

More credible theories center on the word *wych*, an old English sound-alike of "witch." The witch-hazel found by early English settlers in northeastern North America likely reminded them of the wych-elm (*Ulmus glabra*), a widespread English tree, and of English hazels (genus

Corylus), which are close relatives and look-alikes of our native American hazelnuts. "Wych" is an old word for "water." It probably refers to the English tree's tendency to grow in wet places. "Wych" also derives from the same linguistic root as "wicker" and may refer to the plant's bending stems. Either way, witch-hazel's striking name likely has no connection to women who don black pointed hats and traverse the night sky on broomsticks.

When looking for witch-hazel, keep your eyes peeled for many-trunked bushes, some as tall as you are, or taller, with brown or gray-brown bark. In November and December, the broad, glossy leaves will be down, but rummage on the ground or in the snow and you may find a few. Observe the leaves' distinctive wavy edges. If the flowers are out, you'll see that they're yellow and adorned with four long, skinny, arthritic-looking petals.

One more thing. Witch-hazel is singular in that its flowers and ripe seedpods (the fruit, literally, of the previous year's flowers) appear at the same time. The capsules are hard and knobby, angular but vaguely spherical, and measure about a half-inch across. Watch out for them. Hike through a patch of witch-hazel at the moment the seeds are fully ripe, and bullets may come a-flying!

—Edward Kanze

This article originally appeared in the news magazine *The Adirondack Explorer*.



PAUL SCHMITT

Finger Lakes Land Trust

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Autumn 2016 Calendar



Lick Brook

BRIAN MALEY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2:00-4:00pm: *Tree Identification Walk with Akiva Silver—Sweedler Preserve at Lick Brook, town of Ithaca.*

Join Akiva Silver of Twisted Tree Farm for a walk that will focus on 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:** Follow Rt. 13 south to just past Buttermilk Falls State Park. Turn left on Sandbank Road. At Y intersection, bear right on Town Line Road. Park immediately on the right side of the road (before the bridge). Sweedler Preserve is to the right, Thayer Preserve to the left.

Except in the event of extreme weather, walks go rain, sun or snow. Please check our Facebook page or our web site for updates at www.fllt.org/events.

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