



The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes region Vol. 30, No. 4 • Autumn 2018



NIGEL KENT

Land Trust and Town of Gorham Form Partnership to Protect Prime Farmland in Canandaigua Lake Watershed

In mid-August, the Land Trust and the Town of Gorham closed the deal on a partnership to secure the permanent protection of 51 acres of prime farmland in the Canandaigua Lake watershed.



FLIT

The property is located between Jones Road and Twitchell Road in Gorham, which lies in southern Ontario County above the eastern shores of Canandaigua Lake. The partnership is centered on a conservation easement, purchased from previous owner Joe Christofferson, stipulating that the land is to remain available for farming in perpetuity. The easement also provides a buffer along a small stream that passes through the property. The town provided over \$85,000 in funding for the purchase of the easement. The Land Trust will hold the easement and provide resources for ongoing stewardship of the parcel.

The property has been sold to neighboring farmer Joe Zeiset, subject to the easement. Mr. Zeiset has also agreed to provide a small stretch of land to the town as a scenic pull-off.

These agreements are significant not only for the scenic, historic, and conservation value of the land, but also for the extraordinary vision and proactive role of the Town of Gorham. Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp says, "The Land Trust is grateful for the town's commitment to conserving open space. Without their leadership, this project would not have been possible."

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Owasco Lake, seen from the Land Trust's new preserve

The scrape of a bulldozer's blade last month marked the opening of a new chapter in the Land Trust's efforts to conserve our region's land and water resources. At our preserve on Owasco Lake, staff from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently created two seasonal wetlands in what was abandoned farmland.

These wetlands are expected to provide habitat for a variety of wildlife while also helping to filter runoff to nearby Owasco Lake. While we've worked with the service to create and restore wetlands before, these were the first where our actions were guided as much by the goal of enhancing water quality as the goal of creating wildlife habitat.

To address the pressing issue of toxic algae, the Land Trust is working with partners to secure those undeveloped lands that are most vital to the health of our lakes, for example, the undeveloped shoreline and adjacent bluffs of our preserve on Owasco.

While the protection of sensitive lands is an important strategy for ensuring a healthy watershed, it's clear that land protection alone will not be sufficient to address toxic algae. So, the Land Trust will continue to complete land protection projects and will also partner with public conservation agencies and lake associations to restore wetlands and stream buffers, and explore new

techniques to mitigate runoff from farm fields and road ditches.

During the coming months, we'll be closely monitoring the new wetlands at the preserve. The Land Trust will also be working with partners on our next wetland/runoff mitigation project, which is located in the Skaneateles Lake watershed. Elsewhere in the region, we're actively working with partners to identify similar projects that will complement our conservation easement and land acquisition projects.

For 200 years, people have been taking the kinks out of streams and draining wet areas. It's time to put them back.

Andrew Zepp
Executive Director, Finger Lakes Land Trust

Land Trust and Town of Gorham Form Partnership to Protect Prime Farmland in Canandaigua Lake Watershed *continued from cover*

Under the direction of Town Supervisor Fred Lightfoote, the Town of Gorham has long sought to conserve farmland and scenic vistas. The town has codified this commitment through a Farmland, Open Space, and Resource Conservation Plan, as well as zoning ordinances that limit subdivision and development in high priority open space areas.

"The Town of Gorham has been

trying to protect the quality of Canandaigua Lake water as well as open space and active farmland throughout the town for many years now," Lightfoote says. "This project accomplishes all three of these goals, which are very important to the new and former owners of the property as well. They are to be commended.

"My hat is off to all who worked on this project, as well as the many past

and present members of the various boards of the town whose vision, determination, and persistence placed the town in a position to help bring the project to fruition." —Mark Chao

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Laura Smith of the law firm Harter Secrest & Emery, LLP in Rochester, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.

Collaboration Fulfills Conservation and Education Goals

Spurred by a donor's interest in conservation and education, the Finger Lakes Land Trust recently purchased 32 acres in the Canandaigua Highlands, a priority area for the Land Trust highlighted in our recent, Lakes, Farms, & Forests Forever conservation agenda.

The property was conveyed to the Finger Lakes Community College Foundation as part of the Finger Lakes Community College's East Hill Campus (FLCC EHC) through a unique partnership that conserves important open space and provides new resources for conservation education.

When a parcel of land adjacent to the EHC in Naples, NY went up for sale, an anonymous donor saw a connection between the available parcel and the conservation and education mission of EHC, which includes a research station, hiking trails, and areas for camping. FLCC uses the field station to inspire and educate the next generation of conservationists, offering programs and courses in wildlife management, natural resources conservation, and forestry. However, the Finger Lakes Community College Foundation (the Foundation), which owns the East Hill Campus via a donation, had never purchased property before. That's where the Finger Lakes Land Trust comes in: the donor provided a lead gift to purchase the parcel and the Land Trust conveyed the property to the Foundation. The conveyance includes deed restrictions which make sure the land continues to be used for conservation education and outdoor recreation, and also requires a forest management plan. The Land Trust contributed its real estate know-how and land conservation knowledge to bring the deal to a close, while FLCC will continue to meet its conservation education mission.

"Each of the parties involved brought different expertise to the table," says Zachary Odell, Director of Land Protection for the Land Trust. "This project represents an important collaboration with common goals: conserving the land and encouraging conservation education."

John VanNiel, Professor of Environmental Conservation at Finger Lakes Community College notes that, "The addition of this property to our existing East Hill Campus will have immediate impact on several of our courses. With 32 additional acres, this increases the range of wildlife management projects we can undertake with students. And since the land has been managed differently than the existing campus, forestry students will be able to compare and contrast the forests and, over time, we will see the benefits of forest management practices."

This project also contributes significantly to other conservation efforts in the area. It is near the High Tor Wildlife Management Area, a priority area identified in New York State's Open Space Conservation Plan. It is also part of an Audubon Important Bird Area. Adding this parcel to EHC adds to forest and open space connectivity and eliminates the very real threat of subdivision in an area with close proximity to the village of Naples. With the Finger Lakes Trail already crossing through the East Hill Campus, the added parcel will also support outdoor recreation opportunities.

Odell says, "Ultimately, this project reflects a commitment from all the partners to landscape scale conservation, protecting habitat and connectivity for a wide range of species, while also promoting the kind of conservation education and recreation that will inspire students to conserve our region into the future."
—Alli Sribarra

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

The partnership will conserve 33 acres of woodlands within an Audubon Important Bird Area and in close proximity to High Tor Wildlife Management Area



Partnerships Expand Hiking Opport

Longtime Land Trust Members Donate Trail Easement at Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve

In 1998, Land Trust members John Smith and Polley McClure moved into their West Danby home and quickly became acquainted with the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve. Their property borders the preserve, which has grown over the years through acquisitions of neighboring properties and now stretches over 546 acres.

About six years ago, beavers began to flood a wooded area on the preserve, adjacent to the property where John and Polley live. The beavers dammed an existing drainage system which killed a large area of trees and flooded part of the yellow trail. Thinking the flooding might only be temporary, John and Polley allowed the Land Trust to reroute the yellow trail onto the southern edge of their property.

It seems the beavers are here to stay, and in the act of building their home they created what is now known as the North Beaver Pond—home to a variety of wildlife including Wood Ducks, Kingfishers, and Great Blue Herons. After discussions with Land Trust stewardship staff, John and Polley agreed to formalize the rerouted segment of the yellow trail, which now guides visitors around the pond and offers ample opportunities for wildlife viewing.

Since hikers generally favor loop trails over an out-and-back, John and Polley also allowed for a new trail segment to run through the east end of their property to complete the loop between the the yellow trail and the orange trail on the east side of the preserve. The trail easement, a perpetual legal agreement, allows hikers and other visitors to use these southern and eastern sections of John & Polley's land to access the trails.

Polley now chairs the Friends of Lindsay-Parsons group, a volunteer corps dedicated to the care and maintenance of the preserve. John is also a dedicated land trust volunteer,

and continues to mow trails and fields, uproot honeysuckle, and construct bridges—all with his own equipment, including a John Deere 4066R tractor. You will often find John taking care of the trails with Tod Sukontarak, another preserve neighbor and dedicated Land Trust volunteer.

"We so love living next to the preserve, and we get so much from it that we wanted to give back so that other people can enjoy it," said Polley.



Polley McClure

FLIT



John Smith

FLIT

Land Trust Partnership Connects Two Nature Preserves Overlooking Skaneateles Lake

In 2011, the Central New York Land Trust (CNYLT)—with assistance from the Finger Lakes Land Trust (FLLT)—accepted a donation of 118 acres along both sides of Ripley Hill Road in the town of Spafford, and established the Ripley Hill Nature Preserve on one of the highest points in Onondaga County.

Two years later, FLLT purchased 206 acres of land along the eastern slopes above Skaneateles Lake in Spafford, and created the Hinchcliff Family Preserve. The Hinchcliff Preserve offers impressive lake vistas, diverse habitats, and a popular loop trail.

The bulk of the Hinchcliff Preserve lies downhill of New York State Route 41, but a long, narrow corridor of land was acquired on the uphill side of

Route 41. This corridor extends to the west boundary of the Ripley Hill Nature Preserve. The purpose of acquiring the corridor, which is nearly 3,700 feet long, but on average only 119 feet wide, was to establish a trail link between the two adjacent nature preserves.

Staff and volunteers from both FLLT and CNYLT, as well as local contractor Borotek, have been diligently working to create this mile-long link that will stretch from

The end result will delight visitors as they walk through different habitats including northern hardwood forest, wetland areas, and open fields, ending in a large hay field.

Ripley Hill Road through the western half of the Ripley Hill Preserve to the Hinchcliff Family Preserve.

The end result will delight visitors as they walk through different habitats including northern hardwood forest, wetland areas, and open fields, ending in a large hay field with spectacular views of Skaneateles Lake.

For updates and information on a formal trail opening planned for spring 2019, visit the Land Trust's web site at fllt.org, or sign up for our monthly newsletter at fllt.org/subscribe.



Volunteers from the Finger Lakes Land Trust and the Central New York Land Trust preparing the new trail

SCENES

from Around
Our Region...

CHRIS RAY



Late summer at the Sweedler Preserve at Lick Brook in Ithaca, Tompkins County



FULT

Volunteers and staff from the Land Trust joined former land owner Frieda Stopyro to formally open the Otisco Lake Preserve in Spafford, Onondaga County, in September.



FULT



Eric Rozowski and Carl Adams of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service take a break from habitat restoration efforts at the Land Trust's new preserve on Owasco Lake.



FLLT staff members Hannah George and Max Heitner were accompanied by a small group of goats during a site visit on privately conserved land in Cortland County.



The view from the Parker Nature Preserve in the town of Bath, Steuben County

More Local Governments Investing in Conservation

The first of a three-part series on the Land Trust's conservation partnerships

For over 28 years, the Land Trust has partnered with towns and counties across the 12-county Finger Lakes region to implement strategies for safeguarding our lands and waters. In recent years, growing development pressure, and its threats to water quality, agriculture, and scenic views, has prompted local governments to increase their conservation efforts.

Now, more than ever, municipal support is crucial for the Land Trust's watershed protection projects in the Six Mile Creek watershed. The source of the city of Ithaca's drinking water, Six Mile Creek is a conservation priority for the organization. To date, the Land Trust has protected over 1,450 acres in the watershed, including 19 conservation easements on privately owned land. Efforts have focused on the

of acres of existing public open space and encompasses more than 6,000 feet of frontage on Six Mile Creek. Approximately 80 acres of this parcel were added to the Land Trust's Roy H. Park Preserve, where a universally accessible boardwalk, funded in part by the Town of Dryden, guides visitors over wetlands and into Hammond Hill State Forest. The land is located on both sides of Irish Settlement Road

Recreational Resource Protection. The parcel is located in an ecologically sensitive area, containing over 900 feet of frontage on Six Mile Creek and more than 11,000 feet of additional frontage on tributaries to the creek. The City of Ithaca also allocated funds from its Watershed Protection Fund for this project.

"We are fortunate to have such a strong partner in the Finger Lakes Land Trust," said Katherine Borgella, Tompkins County Commissioner of Planning and Sustainability. "We know that they approach every project with professionalism and work to ensure that projects are thoroughly vetted and utmost consideration is given to crafting high-quality, impactful land protection strategies. We believe that investing in protecting our wetlands, stream buffers, forests and fields is a cost-effective means to achieving our bigger goals of flood resiliency, climate adaptation, farmland protection, tourism development and enhancing the quality of life for all."

The Land Trust also recently received state grant funding through the New York State Water Quality Improvement Project to purchase perpetual conservation easements and restore streamside buffers on three parcels in the Six Mile Creek watershed. This project will result in 300 acres of permanently protected land, including several thousand feet of frontage on Six Mile Creek.

Protecting our water quality by buffering our streams, creating new wetlands, and securing environmentally sensitive lands will continue to be a top conservation priority for the Land Trust throughout the Finger Lakes region.

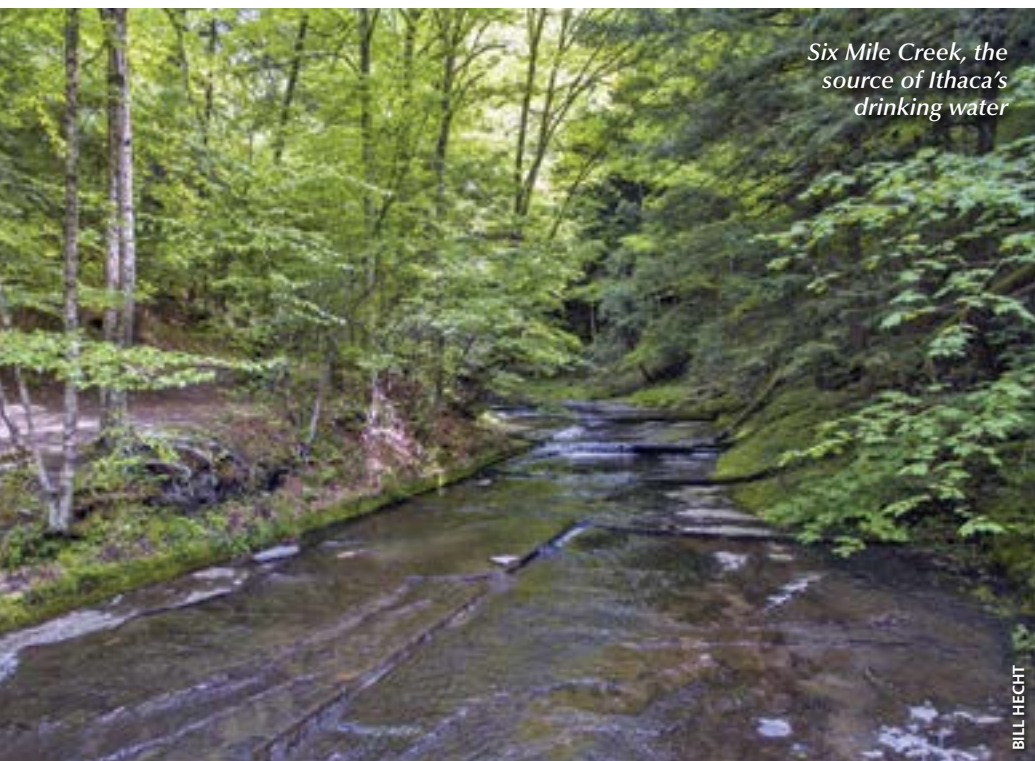
conservation of undeveloped lands which buffer the creek, helping to minimize erosion and nutrient runoff into Cayuga Lake.

Through partnerships with local governments, including the City of Ithaca and Tompkins County, the Land Trust was able to purchase a 169-acre tract of land in 2010 that links thousands

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and also borders Yellow Barn State Forest and Cornell University's Old 600 Natural Area. Tompkins County also committed funds in 2016

to help the Land Trust purchase 128 acres in the town of Dryden through an allocation from its Capital Reserve Fund for Natural, Scenic and



Six Mile Creek, the source of Ithaca's drinking water

BILL HECHT

Send Us Your Best Photos

The Finger Lakes Land Trust will celebrate its 30th anniversary in 2019—marking 3 decades of collective effort to save lands and waters. The celebration begins now with our 30th anniversary photo contest. In addition to great prizes, the winning photos will be featured in a printed book and on the FLLT's social media as it promotes conservation and recreation across the Finger Lakes. Categories include: Nature and People, Wildlife, Landscape, Young Photographer, and Mobile. All submissions must be taken on FLLT protected lands (fllt.org/map).

Visit fllt.org/contest for details!

TOM REIMERS

The season of giving is approaching!

Give the gift of conservation to friends and family with a Land Trust gift membership. Visit fllt.org/giftmembership and select “I wish to give this membership to a friend.”

The diagram shows five membership levels: \$35 (Blue Owl), \$100 (Green Butterfly), \$100 (Blue Owl), \$250 (Blue Owl), and \$500 (Blue Owl). Below this, a flowchart titled 'MEMBERSHIP LEVEL' shows a path from a \$100 membership to an 'Annually' option. Red arrows point to the 'Annually' option with the text: 'You can turn your donation into a gift membership for a friend!' and 'Choose annually to make the gift membership renew automatically!'. A checkbox labeled 'I wish to give this membership to a friend' is checked. Below the checkbox is the text 'Gift recipient information'.

Over \$60,000 Raised to Purchase Key Addition to Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve

The Land Trust acted quickly this summer when it learned that nine acres in the heart of its Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve were coming up for sale. A fundraising campaign, complemented by two existing grants, was quickly launched and completed within thirty days, thanks to donations from individuals within the region and beyond.

The addition, located in West Danby, borders Sylvan Lane and features shoreline on a kettle lake that currently hosts an active Great Blue Heron rookery. Protecting the property secures important wildlife habitat, helps maintain water quality, and sustains the integrity of the larger preserve.

The property is the 13th addition to Lindsay-Parsons. Future plans for the site include invasive species control, management of grassland habitat for nesting birds, and the creation of a formal, universally-accessible wetland overlook which will provide a unique opportunity to view and enjoy this beautiful natural area. Our sincere thanks to Tompkins County's Natural Infrastructure Program and the many generous members, supporters, and friends who helped us quickly reach our fundraising goal!

CHRIS RAY

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memory



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 IRA?

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. A direct distribution to the Land Trust can result in lower taxable income and may allow you to remain

in a lower marginal tax bracket.

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.

The American Chestnut, Back From The Dead

The scientist Jared Diamond has suggested that Europeans were able to conquer peoples on other continents (instead of vice-versa) at least in part because they kept livestock. Having lived side-by-side with their animals for centuries, Europeans had developed partial immunity to zoonoses such as smallpox; native Americans had no immunity and were decimated by the new diseases.

The story of the native American tribes is strikingly similar to that of the American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*). The chestnut was a common species in the deciduous forests of the upland Appalachian region, which stretches from Maine to northern Mississippi and includes southern New York. In the late nineteenth century, the chestnut blight fungus was accidentally introduced to New York City in a shipment of Japanese chestnut trees. The East Asian chestnut species evolved alongside the fungus and are mostly unaffected by it, but the American chestnut had no resistance to the unfamiliar pathogen. The fungus infiltrated cracks in the bark, carving deep cankers that quickly killed their hosts. The spores traveled at a heartbreaking pace, carried on air currents as well as on the feet and feathers of animals and the equipment of loggers, who cut down the surviving chestnuts—ironically, the very trees that might have had some natural resistance to the disease. By the mid-twentieth century, the American chestnut had disappeared from all but a few isolated areas.

The so-called “redwood of the East” was a keystone species and its loss changed the forests irreparably. The tree grew rapidly to a giant size – 100 feet high, four to five feet in diameter—and its spreading branches threw the forest floor below into deep shade. Moth caterpillars ate the leaves; the sturdy branches supported massive flocks of passenger pigeons; the large, abundant, starchy nuts fed bear, white-tailed deer, and wild turkey. Even in death, the tree shaped its environment. The fast-decaying leaves leached their nutrients into the soil and streams, while the rot-resistant branches fell into water and created hiding places for fish. It was a source of food and medicine for both Native Americans and Europeans, and the latter also fed its nuts and sprouts to their livestock. The bark was used for tanning leather; the straight, strong wood made everything from musical instruments to log cabins to railroad ties and caskets.

As the blight strangled chestnuts into skeletons, gaps opened up in the forest canopy and sun-loving plants flourished. The vacant real estate filled in gradually with birch, oak, tulip, hickory, and maple. But now there was less food for animals and humans alike. Acorns are smaller than chestnuts and their numbers fluctuate wildly from year to year; hickories and beeches are even more unreliable as mast producers. The passenger pigeon population was



American Chestnut in the Louise Arnold Tanger Arboretum, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 2009



American Chestnut in Mitchell County, North Carolina, 1914

already in steep decline, but the species might have survived if it had not relied so heavily on chestnuts for food and places to roost.

The passenger pigeon is now extinct, as is the subsistence culture of the Appalachians, but the chestnut is still alive, barely. Since the disease does not attack the root system, old chestnut stumps—

and there may be sixty million left in New York State—still doggedly send up sprouts, though these are quickly killed by the fungus, which lurks in other forest trees. Researchers, heartened by its persistence, have been working to bring it back from the dead for years. They have genetically altered the fungus to be less virulent, introduced a fungus-destroying virus into infected trees, and irradiated seeds in hopes of developing a blight-resistant mutant.

One program interbreeds

naturally resistant native chestnuts with each other; another has bred trees that are 1/16 Chinese, 15/16 American. Many of these methods work to some extent, but only William Powell's team at SUNY-ESF seems to have found a reliable solution: by transferring a critical gene from wheat to the chestnut, they have created transgenic trees that are blight-tolerant and, unlike the Chinese hybrids, adapted to their local environments. If the chestnut is re-introduced, it might even help to address another man-made environmental problem: climate change. Chestnuts grow remarkably fast, sequestering much more carbon than other species, and their hard, durable wood would be used in long-lasting products like furniture. Whether or not the resurrected chestnut can adapt to a rapidly changing climate, however, remains to be seen. The transgenic chestnut hopefully will be submitted to the USDA for full review in December 2018 and may be in a forest near you as early as mid-2020.

—Jacqueline Stuhmiller

Finger Lakes Land Trust

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