



The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes region

Vol. 30, No. 2 • Spring 2018



Rare Stretch of Owasco Lake Shoreline Protected

Like many of the Finger Lakes, much of the shoreline of Owasco Lake is lined with private residences and seasonal cottages. Fortunately, some stretches of undeveloped shore remain and the Land Trust recently protected 1,100 feet of this precious resource.

This latest acquisition is on the east side of Owasco Lake and features scenic bluffs, mature hardwood forests, meadows, and a perennial stream that runs through a gorge. The Land Trust will retain and manage the site as a public conservation area in the future. A proposed hiking trail will traverse

diverse habitats and provide excellent birdwatching opportunities and terrific views of the lake.

The 74-acre property was identified as a priority for protection through the Land Trust's systematic efforts to identify properties within the Finger Lakes region that feature 1,000 feet or more of

shoreline. The Owasco acquisition adds to a growing list of Land Trust protected properties featuring frontage on Canandaigua, Cayuga, Keuka, Otisco, Seneca, and Skaneateles lakes.

A \$950,000 fundraising campaign is underway to cover the purchase of the
continued on page 2

They say a picture is worth a thousand words and I couldn't agree more when it comes to the image of Cayuga Lake below. Taken by a Landsat satellite last year after a spring rainstorm, it vividly illustrates the increasing amount of sediment and associated nutrients that are being flushed into our beloved Finger Lakes.

Last year, we experienced harmful algal blooms (HABs) in each of our 11 lakes. While the exact causes may vary somewhat from lake to lake, leading experts agree that excessive nutrient loading is one of the critical issues we must address.

And the sources of these nutrients? Everything from fertilizer spread on our yards and farm fields to soil eroding from roadside ditches and construction sites. A systematic, long-term effort will be required to address this issue and must proceed in concert with a parallel effort to address other sources, such as improperly functioning septic systems.

For its part, the Land Trust is focusing more of its attention on this issue while still pursuing land protection projects that provide other benefits. As referenced in this issue of *The Land Steward*, we're already working with partners within the Owasco Lake watershed to restore wetlands that provide important wildlife habitat and also filter runoff to the lake.

Thanks to recent grants from New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation, we're



poised to secure key parcels within the watersheds of Cayuga Lake and Skaneateles Lake. Funds will provide for the acquisition of land and conservation easements, restoration of wetlands and floodplains, and the expansion of vegetated streamside buffers.

Addressing nutrient runoff is truly a monumental task but the good news is that we're not alone in this fight. We can look to other watersheds where sustained investments over time have been successful in addressing this issue.

As we move forward, we'll not only be restoring wetlands and protecting key parcels that are vital to water quality—we'll also be working to regenerate

streamside forests and create vernal pools. Please visit flt.org/volunteer if you'd like to get involved as a volunteer for future land protection projects.

Andrew Zepp,
Executive Director, Finger Lakes Land Trust

Rare Stretch of Owasco Lake Shoreline Protected *continued from cover*

property, public access improvements, wetland and wildlife habitat restoration, and to provide a contribution to the Land Trust's Stewardship Fund to support long-term management of the site.

Fundraising is already underway and includes lead gifts from the Fred L. Emerson Foundation and the Gallogly Family Foundation. Additionally, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, & Historic Preservation has indicated its intent to purchase a conservation easement to ensure public access to the site and its continued preservation.

During the coming year, the Land Trust will complete a management plan

and begin restoring wetlands and vernal pools through a partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These restored areas will enhance wildlife habitat and help filter runoff to the lake. The Land Trust will work with additional partners to control invasive, non-native plants and enhance a streamside buffer, by planting native trees and shrubs.

Once habitat restoration efforts are well underway, design of the hiking trail will begin. Completion of public access improvements and a ribbon cutting ceremony are planned for 2019.

"Thanks to the strong support of our partners and members, we were able to move quickly to conserve this beautiful stretch of shoreline," says Land Trust

Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "This property provides a rare opportunity to enhance wildlife habitat, filter runoff to the lake, and provide for public access to a scenic natural area. We're grateful to our donors and partners for making it possible!"

For more information and to make a gift in support of this project, please visit flt.org/owasco where you will find a video, maps, and photos of this beautiful new preserve.

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Virginia Calvert of Melvin and Calvert Law Firm PC in Syracuse, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.

Land Trust Completes Sixth Project on Bare Hill

Bare Hill holds a significant place in Seneca lore. Legend has it that a mighty serpent encircled an Indian village that once stood there—swallowing residents until it was slain by a brave young boy. In its death throes, the snake cleared the land and swept the hill bare.

The Land Trust recently acquired 14.5 acres on this iconic promontory overlooking Canandaigua Lake's eastern shore. Located in the town of Middlesex, Yates County, the property is in close proximity to New York State's Bare Hill Unique Area.

The Land Trust moved quickly to secure a purchase contract on this property when it was listed for sale in January. The organization was able to make this commitment with private donations for land protection projects within the southern half of the Canandaigua Lake watershed.

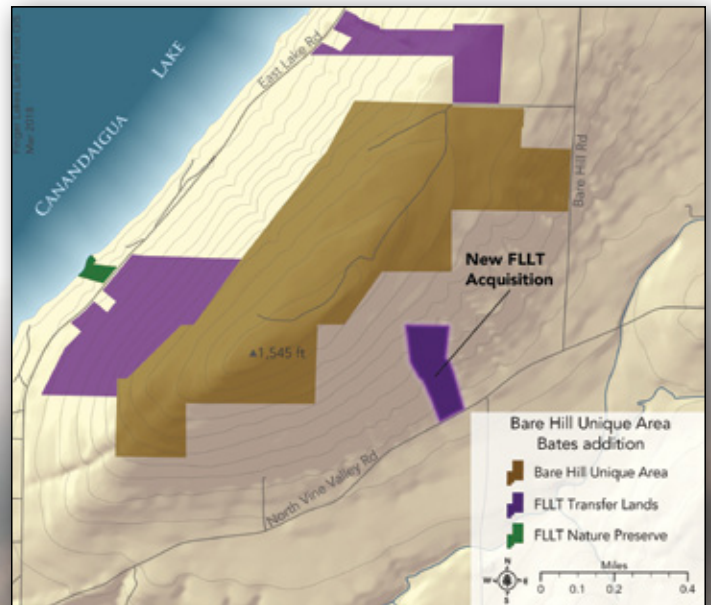
With nearly 400 feet of frontage on North Vine Valley Road, the almost entirely wooded property features a mature oak-hickory forest with scattered pines and maples. The portion of the property closest to the road still shows evidence of vineyard rows, but is now covered with groves of black walnut and black locust.

"This latest acquisition helps ensure the future of one of our region's most well-known landmarks," says Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "Conserving this land also helps maintain the integrity of Canandaigua Lake's watershed by securing steep slopes that are highly susceptible to erosion."

This project represents the Land Trust's sixth acquisition at Bare Hill. With the exception of a single lakefront parcel that will be retained as a nature preserve, land acquired here will ultimately be conveyed to New York State as additions

to the adjacent Bare Hill State Unique Area. The Land Trust hopes to work with the state, and other partners, to construct a "shoreline to summit" hiking trail on land that is already under conservation ownership.

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney John Polimeni of Canandaigua for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.



*Bare Hill, overlooking
Canandaigua Lake in
Middlesex, Yates County*

Land Trust Completes Addition to Bear Swamp State Forest

In partnership with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Land Trust recently added 145 acres of forests, fields, and wetlands to Bear Swamp State Forest. Located in the town of Niles, Cayuga County, the property borders 1,600 feet of streambank on Bear Swamp Creek, the largest tributary to Skaneateles Lake.

Protection of this property has been a Land Trust priority for many years, and the organization was able to acquire it in 2016 with funding from its internal Forever Fund and the Allyn Foundation. Proceeds from the sale of this parcel to the state will return to the Land Trust's Forever Fund, enabling future conservation projects.

Protecting Bear Swamp Creek will help in the general effort to keep sediment and unwanted nutrients from washing into the lake, a key conservation strategy intended to decrease the number of toxic algae outbreaks.

With this project, the Land Trust has helped conserve a total of four miles of streambank along Bear Swamp Creek, considered one of the region's most pristine watercourses. Other protected lands along the stream include Carpenter 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.

Partnerships like this leverage resources for conservation and complement public conservation programs. The Land Trust increasingly works within these partnerships, embracing shared conservation interests with the state and local organizations.

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.

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. Learn more about Bear Swamp, as well as other destinations for outdoor recreation within the Finger Lakes region, at gofingerlakes.org—a new web site created as a public service by the Land Trust. Go Finger Lakes features more than 50 mapped locations with 650 miles of trails.

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.



*Bear Swamp Creek,
the largest tributary to
Skaneateles Lake*

BILL HECHT

Property Donation Protects Land and Water, and Furthers Land Trust Mission

A generous donation of a 183-acre parcel in the town of Prattsburgh, Steuben County, will enable the Land Trust to both protect the property from development and raise funds for additional land conservation.

Originally a potato farm, the property was purchased by Rochester residents Harry and Barbara Grace in the early 1970s as a weekend retreat. The property straddles two hilltops separated by a valley containing an extended stretch of Tenmile Creek, a brook trout stream that empties into the Cohocton River.

In addition to more than a mile of frontage on the creek, the property consists of a mixed hardwood forest, several stands of conifers, a small pond, and about 40 acres of agricultural fields currently leased to a local farmer.

The Graces built a modest cabin with views down the Tenmile Creek valley, including the hilltops near Avoca that are more than nine miles to the southwest. They also acquired some additional acreage over time to create a buffer against encroaching development. Despite being largely weekend residents, the Graces were active in the local community.

"It was a labor of love from the beginning," said Debby Grace, the couple's daughter. "They went there every weekend year-round—they had to snowshoe in to the cabin in the winter—and put an incredible amount of energy and effort into the land."

Harry passed away in 2003, and Barbara's visits grew less frequent in subsequent years. But she expressed a strong desire to keep the property intact. "She made it very clear that she didn't want the land divided up," said Debby.

After Barbara died in early 2017, Debby contacted the Land Trust to explore options for protecting the property. The Grace estate and the Land Trust ultimately agreed to a "trade land" donation. In this type of transaction, the property owner donates the land to the Land Trust, which in turn agrees to sell the land subject to a conservation easement limiting future development. After covering the transaction and

stewardship costs, the proceeds from the property sale are used to further the Land Trust's conservation mission in the Finger Lakes region.

The proposed conservation easement for the Grace property will create an environmental protection zone along the creek, allow sustainable agriculture and forestry, limit future subdivision, and constrain future development to a single additional home.

"This gorgeous piece of land was the love of their life," said Debby. "I'm happy we were able to protect it."

—Jeff Tonole

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

Leave Your Legacy Planned Giving Seminars in June

Learn about tax-advantaged ways to build charitable gifts into your estate plan.

THURSDAY, JUNE 7—12:00 pm – 1:30 pm in ITHACA

Tompkins County Public Library—BorgWarner Room, 101 E. Green Street
Join the Land Trust and the Tompkins County Library Foundation for an informative workshop led by Kim Rothman, a partner of the law firm Miller Mayer LLP's Trusts and Estates practice group. A light lunch will be provided.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13—12:00 pm – 1:30 pm in CANANDAIGUA

Wood Library—Hamlin Meeting Room, 134 North Main St.
Join the Land Trust and the Wood Library for an informative workshop lead by Jim Terwilliger, PhD, CFP®, Senior Vice President for the Wealth Strategies Group at Canandaigua National Bank and Trust. A light lunch will be provided.

Please RSVP to Mary at 607-275-9487 or marymulks@fltt.org so we know how much lunch to order.

NIGEL KENT

Land Trust Awarded \$2 Million in State Grants for Projects in Skaneateles and Cayuga Lake Watersheds

The Land Trust was awarded \$2 million in state grant funding through New York State's Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP). The WQIP program funds projects that directly address documented water quality impairments or protect a drinking water source.

A total of \$1.4 million was awarded for land conservation and restoration efforts on several parcels within the Skaneateles Lake watershed. The Land Trust will use the funds to permanently protect approximately 300 acres using a combination of land acquisition and conservation easements. Plans to restore wetland areas and create streamside buffers will contribute to drinking water protection within the watershed.

The Land Trust also received \$641,000 to place perpetual conservation easements and restore streamside buffers on three parcels in the Six Mile Creek watershed, the City of Ithaca's drinking water supply. This project will result in 300 acres of permanently protected lands, including 125 acres in the town of Caroline, Tompkins County, which includes several thousand feet of frontage on Six Mile Creek.

The funds come at a critical time for the Finger Lakes region, which has seen an increasing number of toxic algae outbreaks. Outbreaks threaten human health and

pet health, as well as the region's tourism economy. As development pressure increases, the Land Trust is working to counter these threats by saving sensitive lands, buffering our streams, creating new wetlands, and protecting our last undeveloped shorelines.

"We are grateful for this commitment by the state," said Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "This funding will allow us to conserve lands that are vital for water quality while also supporting the restoration of streams and wetlands."

Protecting our region's clear waters is central to the mission of the Land Trust. In 2016, the Land Trust published *Lakes, Farms, & Forests Forever*—a report highlighting ten priority conservation strategies to protect the region's lakes and curtail the sprawling rural development threatening our best farmland, scenic vistas, water quality and recreational resources. To read the report and learn more, visit www.flit.org/ten10.

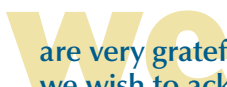
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memory



are very grateful for gifts of all sizes and promise to use them wisely to protect more land and water. In particular, we wish to acknowledge everyone who generously gave \$100 or more in 2017.* Please accept our heartiest thanks!

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Thanks to the contributions of over 2,400 members,
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21,000 acres—ensuring scenic vistas, local foods, clean water
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A CLOSER LOOK

Red and Gray Foxes

Some species have culture-specific meanings: for example, although we think of dogs as loyal companions, other cultures condemn them as unclean or dangerous. However, certain animals have earned consistent reputations for themselves. Foxes are notorious around the world for cunning, from the shape-shifting vixen-women of Japanese folklore to the trickster Fox of Native American myth and the smooth-talking fox of Aesop's fables. Foxes are intelligent, though not obviously more intelligent than other canids. They seem wily to us only because we associate their appearance and behavior with those of deceitful humans, and because they prefer to live in the same places and eat the same things that we do.

New York is home to two fox species, the red (*Vulpes vulpes*), and the gray (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*).

Gray foxes generally inhabit warmer and more wooded environments; red foxes, with their luxurious coats, thrive in colder, more open landscapes. Canids usually hunt socially, running down animals and disemboweling them. However, foxes are solitary hunters: they stalk and pounce on their prey, killing with a single bite to the neck. Consequently, they move not with the frankness of dogs but the stealth and agility of cats. Masterful at evading predators (coyotes, bobcats, owls, humans), they have light, flexible skeletons that allow them to run very fast for short distances and slip into tiny spaces. The red fox can be a foot and a half at the shoulder, but it weighs on average no more than a substantial housecat.

Furthermore, the fox simply *looks* sly. We naturally identify shorter, more neotenous faces (which we prefer to breed into our own domestic dogs) with trustworthiness. The red fox in particular seems suspect because its muzzle is strikingly long, an adaptation that maximizes its olfactory powers. The golden, catlike eyes of foxes may look devilish to us, but light-colored irises and slit pupils are common among ambush hunters; vertical pupils seem to help predators follow their prey in low light. However, unlike cats, which are strict carnivores, foxes are very versatile omnivores, not at all fussy about what they eat: small mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish, invertebrates, eggs, fruit, acorns, and carrion.

The gray fox was once the more common fox in New York. However, thanks to deforestation and urbanization, the red fox has become dominant in many areas. Red foxes are the more adaptable and opportunistic species, preferring the mixed and edge landscapes that humans tend to create. The red fox's tolerance of human presence, combined with its indiscriminate diet, means that it is

more likely to make a nuisance of itself by eating the food that we leave behind (pet food, garbage, compost) or raiding our henhouses and rabbit hutches. A fox that finds itself surrounded by easy prey may kill indiscriminately and leave the carcasses behind. This propensity for surplus killing has led some people to conclude that the animal kills for pleasure, though it probably intends to cache the uneaten carcasses for later use.

If red foxes have gained some ground from anthropogenic changes in the landscape, they have lost in other ways. After gray wolves were extirpated, coyotes became apex predators. Coyotes compete with foxes for many of the same resources and will kill them if they get the chance, so an increase in coyote populations has resulted in a decline in fox populations. In this hostile

environment, gray foxes have the advantage. They are not only more aggressive than their red cousins but eat more vegetable matter, so their diet overlaps less with that of coyotes. In addition, they are able to evade predators (as well as find eggs and nestlings to eat) by climbing trees. Unlike the claws of most canids,



Red Fox

PETE WIEDMANN



Gray Fox

FORESTWANDER, CC-BY-SA 3.0

their claws are sharp, curved, and semi-retractable, and their rather short forelegs can rotate inward to hug tree trunks.

Humans have unfairly projected their own fears on foxes for millennia, but there is something genuinely unsettling about vulpine behavior of late: foxes are being seen in places that they do not belong. Warming global temperatures mean that the range of the gray fox is gradually expanding to encompass ever-higher latitudes and elevations. The red fox is also inching northward with each successive year, outcompeting and preying upon the much smaller arctic fox. Ultimately, it is not the foxes that we should fear, but ourselves. —Jacqueline Stuhmiller

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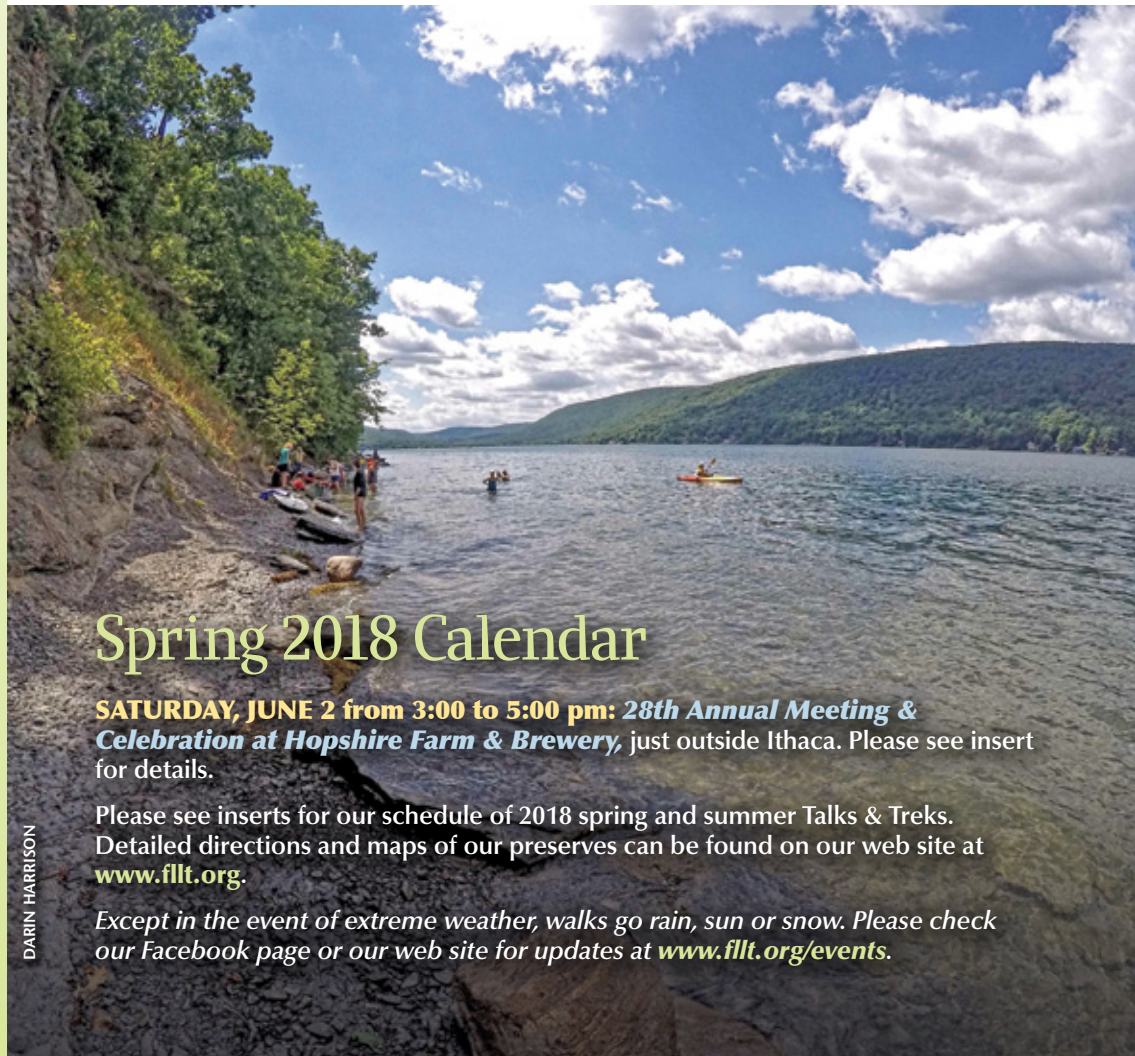


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SATURDAY, JUNE 2 from 3:00 to 5:00 pm: 28th Annual Meeting & Celebration at Hopshire Farm & Brewery, just outside Ithaca. Please see insert for details.

Please see inserts for our schedule of 2018 spring and summer Talks & Treks. Detailed directions and maps of our preserves can be found on our web site at www.fllt.org.

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.