



# The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes region Vol. 31, No. 4 • Autumn 2019

## Land Trust Launches New Five Point Initiative to Protect Water

*An outbreak of harmful  
algal blooms on Owasco  
Lake in September 2017*

*In response to increasing water quality concerns, the Land Trust is launching a new initiative to expand the organization's current water protection efforts. Toxic algae outbreaks within each of the Finger Lakes have generated alarming headlines over the last few years. Their persistence is motivating the Land Trust to take immediate action to protect our lakes and streams.*

**T**oxic algae, also referred to as harmful algal blooms (habs), are actually cyanobacteria—naturally occurring organisms that thrive in relatively still, warm waters rich in nutrients. When algae blooms form and cyanobacteria degrade, many release algal toxins including microcystins that can be harmful to aquatic and human life. At concentrated levels, these toxins pose a serious threat to the water quality in our lakes.

Since 2017, each of the eleven Finger Lakes has experienced at least one outbreak of toxic algae and for most of our lakes it has become a regular, annual occurrence. While research into the specific causes of outbreaks in our region is still underway, there is growing consensus that excessive nutrients from agricultural fields, as well as roadside ditches,

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*Steak and apples—both are produced on Finger Lakes farms highlighted in this issue of The Land Steward, and I am pleased to report that I've enjoyed steak from the Birdsall Farm near Skaneateles Lake and more than a few apples from Indian Creek Farm in Ithaca.*

Locally grown foods are full of flavor and more nutritious as there is less time between harvest and your table. Local farms provide us with the scenic vistas our region is known for and frequently encompass natural areas that harbor a diversity of wildlife.

For many of us, these farms also provide us with memories that last a lifetime—whether that is picking apples on a crisp autumn afternoon, visiting a local farm stand or market, or sampling a taste of the region's award-winning wines and ciders.

Agriculture is also an important part of our regional economy, contributing more than \$1 billion annually and sustaining many local communities.

For all these reasons, the Finger Lakes Land Trust is committed to conserving our best farmland. We also recognize that to maintain the health of our lakes, we have to make every effort to promote farming practices that minimize nutrient runoff and pesticide use.

This is no small challenge but one we must tackle, as we all cherish our lakes and abundant local food supply.



Andrew Zepp  
Executive Director  
Finger Lakes Land Trust

## Land Trust Launches New Five Point Initiative to Protect Water

*continued from cover*

*Cayuga Lake, looking south, where the Land Trust has protected 1,900 feet of undeveloped shoreline at its VanRiper Conservation Area and Whitlock Preserve*

poorly maintained septic systems, and other sources, all play an important role.

Climate change may also be playing a part. Shifting weather patterns, including increasingly intense rain events that sweep nutrients into the lakes and hotter summers, create conditions favorable to cyanobacteria. Researchers suspect that invasive quagga mussels might also be altering the balance of nutrients within the lakes in a way that favors these outbreaks.

While important questions remain to be answered, there is a clear need to reduce excess nutrients washing into our lakes. After a late spring “gully washer,” one need only look out over the south end of most of our Finger Lakes to observe the substantial sediment plumes flowing from the lakes’ major tributaries.

### The Land Trust is reaffirming our commitment to protect the region’s clean waters by escalating our work in five strategic areas:

#### Greater Emphasis on Lakeshore & Stream Corridor Protection

Protecting lakeshore is a longstanding priority of the Land Trust and the organization already protects lakeshore properties on seven of the eleven Finger Lakes. With support from New York State and private funders, the Land Trust has been increasing efforts to save our last remaining undeveloped lakeshore as well as protect pristine frontage on key tributaries. Recent lakeshore acquisitions include significant projects on Owasco, Skaneateles, and Otisco lakes and the Land Trust is currently working to protect additional shoreline on Cayuga and Seneca lakes.

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# Land Gift Protects Spectacular Views and Expands Emerald Necklace

The path from Dr. Ann Boyer's house is hard to find, because it doesn't get as much use as it has in the past. Her commute is one reason for this—Dr. Boyer splits her time between New York City, where she operates a drug treatment program, and Summerland Farm, which is what she calls her 163-acre property in the town of Caroline, just northeast of the Potato Hill State Forest.

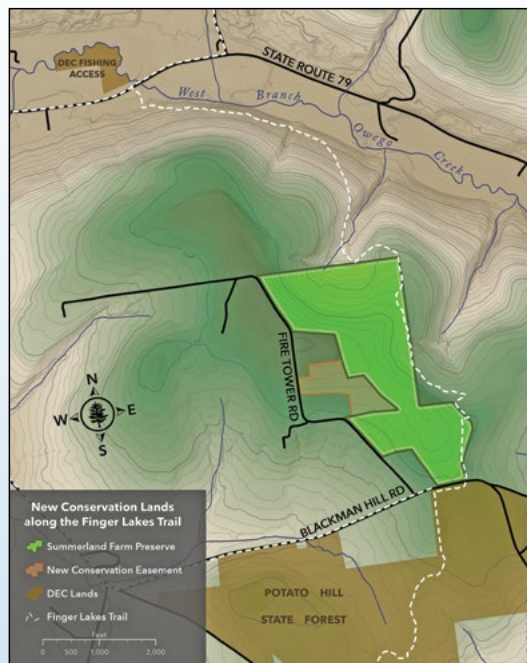
But with a little bushwhacking, we eventually make our way to a rise she refers to as Bobolink Hill. "There are so many bobolinks that nest in the tall grass every year," said Dr. Boyer. "It's one of my favorite places here."

Dr. Boyer recently donated the vast majority of Summerland Farm—138 acres, including Bobolink Hill—to the Land Trust, along with a conservation easement on 15 of the 25 acres she is keeping.

"This is an incredible and generous gift from Dr. Boyer," said Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "The views from this property are stunning."

Indeed, one of the most spectacular features of the property is its highest point—a knoll in the middle of a large meadow with sweeping views of the surrounding landscape, extending 25 to 30 miles on a clear day.

We are walking toward that viewpoint from Bobolink Hill



as Dr. Boyer details the history of the land. The property was originally part of a 500-acre parcel used primarily for pastureland and potato farming. There was a commune on the property during the 1970s, but it was gone by the end of the decade.

Around that time, Dr. Boyer visited a friend who was renting a house on the property and immediately fell in love with beauty of the landscape. Meanwhile, following the demise of the commune, the owner was in the early stages of a plan to subdivide the parcel into five-acre lots.

Using an inheritance from her mother and a purchase option that was built into her friend's lease agreement, Dr. Boyer was able to acquire the property before the subdivision plans reached fruition. "As much as I wanted a place in the country," she said, "it was even more

important to me to keep this land undeveloped."

Dr. Boyer has remained true to this ideal over the past three decades. With the exception of a barn that was eventually converted into a house, no other structures have been built on the land. About half the property consists of a meadow that has historically been mowed for hay by a local farmer. The remainder of the parcel, mostly in the northern portion, is woodlands.

*continued on page 9*

# Over 600 Acres of Farmland Protected in Skaneateles Lake Watershed

*Part of the Finger Lakes region's charm, and indeed, its good fortune, is its rich agricultural landscapes—ones that provide an abundance of healthy foods. Residents and visitors alike are the beneficiaries of the many farmers who take pride in producing quality fruits, vegetables, meats, dairy products, and much more. For Heather and Dennis Birdsall of Homer, that product is pasture-raised beef.*

**H**eather and Dennis are first generation farmers who bought their original 143 acres in 2002 when they started their beef operation. Their farm, located along State Route 41 and Ripley Hill Road, has since grown to 628 acres and spans both Cortland and Onondaga counties. In August, the Land Trust completed two conservation easement agreements on their farm, one in each county. The easements will ensure the farm is not subdivided as residential development spreads south along Skaneateles Lake.

Entirely situated in the Skaneateles Lake watershed, Birdsall Farm is surrounded by steep hills and deep valleys above southern Skaneateles Lake's eastern shore. The headwaters of Grout Brook, a principle tributary to the lake, flows through the property. Here, a herd of Hereford cattle graze in pasture, high above the lake. Given the sensitive nature of the watershed, the Birdsalls have invested heavily in farming practices that meet water quality protection requirements. In recognition, Heather and Dennis received the 2015 Skaneateles Lake Watershed Agriculture Program Environmental Steward of the Year award.

The farm is located in a priority protection area for the Finger Lakes Land Trust (FLLT) and is within four miles of approximately 4,000 acres of protected land, which includes a shared border with the Central New York Land Trust's Ripley Hill Nature Preserve, FLLT's High Vista and Hinchcliff

Family preserves, as well as three other properties subject to conservation easements.

Heather and Dennis continue to purchase neighboring parcels and grow their farming operation. Their beef products can be found at local restaurants and markets including the Anderson Farmers Market on State Route 281 in Homer, Number 5 Restaurant in Binghamton, and Pita Gourmet in Cortland.

"Protection of this farm is particularly important because of its proximity to Skaneateles Lake and a growing network of conservation land," says Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "We're grateful to the Birdsalls for their commitment to the land and we look forward to working with other farmers in this area to conserve more land."

Funds for the project came from the state's Farmland Protection Implementation Grant program (FPIG), administered by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. The Land Trust will hold and enforce the easements, protecting the land from ever being developed. Conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements that permanently limit future land use in order to protect the land's conservation values. Lands subject to conservation easements remain in private ownership, on local tax rolls, and available for traditional uses such as farming and hunting.



# Land Trust Partners with New York State to Protect Additional Land in the Chemung River Valley

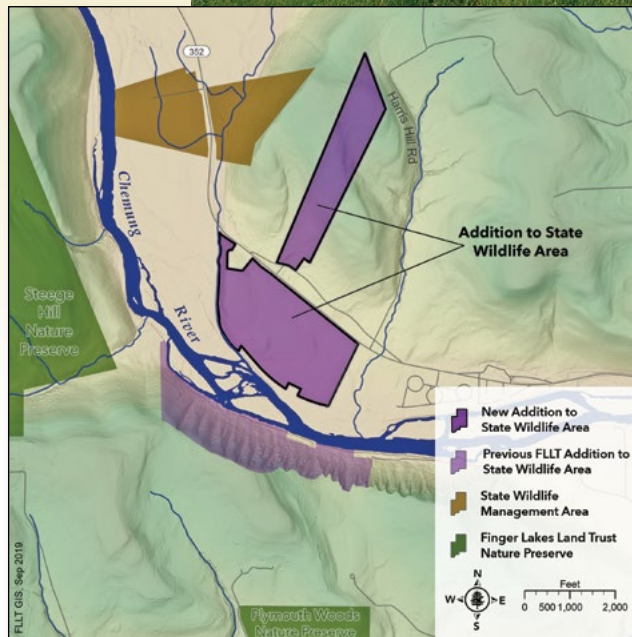
The Land Trust recently purchased more than 200 acres in the Chemung River Valley from the Smith family. This is the Land Trust's seventeenth conservation project in the Chemung River watershed. Following the Land Trust's recent acquisition of cliffs known locally as the Palisades, this project is the second completed with the intention to transfer the land to New York State's newly created Big Flats Wildlife Management Area (WMA).



Driving along New York Route 352 from Corning to Elmira, travelers shadow the path of the Chemung River through its broad floodplain—a landscape dominated by open recreational and agricultural lands and framed by steep, forested slopes. Travelers with a more adventurous inclination can paddle this stretch of river, far removed from highway noise and the bustle of civilization. Here, they will experience the valley from a completely different perspective, one where ravens and eagles soar the ridgelines, black bear and fisher roam the forests, Green Herons perch near the shoreline, and bass hide in swirling pools.

The Smith family, whose ownership dates back to at least three generations, refers to the recently purchased property as the “Pickaway” because its rocky soils had to be picked over before they could be cultivated. The current generation of Smith siblings agreed to sell the property to the Land Trust as an addition to the newly established wildlife management area, in part, to honor their mother's love and commitment to protecting this land that she loved.

The property includes large rolling fields south of the NYS Route 352,



set against the dramatic backdrop of the Palisades, along with a portion of a steep wooded side slope on Harris Hill, north of the highway. The land was once part of a diverse local farm operation and hosted orchards and free range chickens. An abandoned rail bed of a trolley line that once provided service between Elmira and Corning skirts the property boundary along Sing Sing Creek. More recently, the fields have been cultivated for soy and corn, and black bear have been observed emerging from culverts that still underlie the abandoned rail bed.

The Chemung River Valley and its neighboring hillsides have long been recognized by both public and private conservation partners as important for

its functional floodplain, and myriad wildlife and recreational resources unique in our region. Development of the floodway has been curtailed by local regulations to prevent hazardous flooding when the river overruns its banks. The Chemung River Valley is named a priority conservation project in the New York State Open Space Plan. Local planners and advocates view the river as an important recreational asset, if approached wisely and responsibly.

In 2017, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) took a bold step toward furthering conservation efforts in the Chemung River Valley by establishing the Big Flats Wildlife Management Area, centered on nearly 130 acres previously owned by the New York State Department of Corrections. The arrival of NYSDEC into the valley as a landowner and manager strengthens existing partnerships involving the Land Trust, Chemung County, the Town of Big Flats and other private conservation organizations which share interests in open space protection and public access to recreational resources. The Land Trust will continue to facilitate expanding the size of the WMA as land becomes available from willing sellers.

*The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney John Alexander of the law firm Sayles & Evans in Elmira, NY, for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.*

### New Initiative to Create Natural Buffers Along Our Streams

Many streamside areas have been cleared of trees and shrubs to allow for agriculture or development. To restore this important natural filter system, the Land Trust will plant trees and shrubs along streams in areas that will be permanently protected. Considerable follow up may be needed to ensure these plantings can withstand competition from invasive shrubs.

### Restoring Streams & Wetlands to Slow Down Storm Runoff

For nearly 200 years, drainage systems in our region have been enhanced by each generation—in an attempt to dry farm fields and developed areas in the spring and to keep our roads from flooding. At the same time, these efforts have the dual-effect of increasing nutrient runoff to our lakes. To restore some of the resilience of our original landscape, the Land Trust will work with partners such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to restore filled wetlands and streams that have been straightened. On a pilot basis, we will also create detention basins to slow storm water runoff during intense weather events.

### Create an Educational Resource Hub About Toxic Algae

The Land Trust is curating an educational resource at [fllt.org/water](http://fllt.org/water) to provide easily accessible information about toxic algae and demonstrate steps individuals can take to reduce nutrient runoff. Staff will be updating the information available on the site regularly and will also be out in the field meeting with landowners, community organizations, town officials and others.

### Strengthen Partnerships & Pilot New Programs with our Lake Associations

Each of our eleven Finger Lakes is served by a non-profit lake association or watershed group. The Land Trust is committed to working in partnership with these organizations. For example, we recently developed a formal agreement with the Skaneateles Lake Association and The Nature Conservancy to ensure the coordination of our efforts and maximize our collective impact in the Skaneateles Lake watershed. We will be working in



*The Land Trust supported a joint project between the Ontario County Soil & Water Conservation District and the Town of Geneva to install retention ponds at the Kashong Conservation Area in Geneva. The ponds are designed to control flooding and erosion caused by stormwater runoff at this conserved area where the Land Trust holds a conservation easement.*

partnership with the Canandaigua Lake Watershed Association to launch a new series of watershed-based educational programs during 2020. Elsewhere in the region, we will tailor our approach to complement and strengthen local watershed protection efforts to ensure the best result.

Each of these programs will be coordinated with the other elements

of the initiative to create synergy and maximize impact. As these efforts move forward, we'll share periodic updates through *The Land Steward* and our monthly e-newsletter. You will also be able to find the latest information at [fllt.org/water](http://fllt.org/water).

## Conservation Success in the Susquehanna River Watershed

Many of our region's residents are unaware that approximately 40% of the Land Trust's service area is located within the watershed of the Upper Susquehanna River. From downtown Cortland to the hills south of Ithaca to the valley of the Cohocton River, all of these lands drain to the Susquehanna and ultimately to the Chesapeake Bay.

Through our Corning office, the Land Trust has already focused on water quality in this vast landscape. In fact, we recently secured 4,000 feet of frontage on the Chemung River and several thousand feet along the Owego Creek.

Now, we are partnering with the Upper Susquehanna Coalition to restore formerly grazed streamside wetlands along Owego Creek and also pursuing the protection of additional shoreline along the Chemung. These efforts will continue and will be coordinated with our efforts to conserve and restore similar sites in the Finger Lakes.

# Land Trust Secures Conservation Puzzle Piece near Honeoye Lake

*In the valley at the south end of Honeoye Lake is the 2,000-acre Honeoye Inlet Wildlife Management Area (HIWMA).*

**I**T is home to a diverse range of animals including river otter, songbirds, raptors, and many species of fish. Wooded hillsides flank the valley, which contains equally diverse wildlife habitats such as wetlands, grasslands, and a lagoon.

The Land Trust purchased two adjacent parcels here this past summer, with the ultimate goal of transferring the land to the state as an addition to the wildlife management area. Located between the HIWMA and a large tract of conservation land secured by The Nature Conservancy, these two pieces will help to connect a 5,660-acre complex of conservation lands that also includes Harriet Hollister Spencer State Recreation Area, Cumming Nature Center, and the Land Trust's Wesley Hill Nature Preserve.

Both properties, totaling 42 acres, consist of frontage on East Lake Road and very steep mixed hardwood forest overlooking the inlet and lake. Protection of these parcels helps to secure the hillside's soils and will prevent erosion by prohibiting development.

The 5,660-acre complex of protected lands are identified as a priority conservation project in the New York State Open Space Plan. By conserving lands with state and non-profit partners, the Land Trust has helped to create one of the most extensive areas of connected conservation lands in the Finger Lakes region.

The parcels were purchased with funds from the Land Trust's "Opportunity Fund." A revolving, internal loan fund that supports timely acquisitions on projects where interim funding is critical. Proceeds from the sale of these parcels to the state will support future land and water conservation projects.



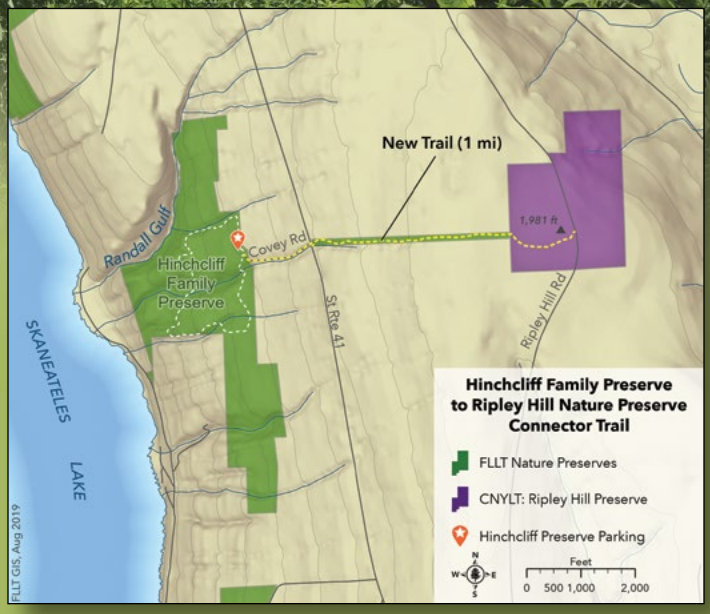
CHUCK FEIL



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

# Land Trust Partnership Links Two Nature Preserves Overlooking Skaneateles Lake

Staff and volunteers from the Finger Lakes Land Trust (FLLT) and the Central New York Land Trust (CNYLT) recently completed the construction of a ¾-mile hiking trail connecting the FLLT’s Hinchcliff Family Preserve and the CNYLT’s Ripley Hill Nature Preserve in the town of Spafford, Onondaga County. Visitors to the Hinchcliff Preserve can now walk up Covey Rd. (a short seasonal dirt road), carefully cross State Rte. 41, and hike to the best view of Skaneateles Lake! Beyond the vista point, the trail guides hikers through diverse forests and wetlands on the Ripley Hill Preserve. Here, the trail stretches for another ¼ of a mile through the preserve to Ripley Hill Rd. More information and a trail map can be found at [fllt.org/hinchcliff](http://fllt.org/hinchcliff).



CHRIS RAY

## Indian Creek Supports Farmland Protection

*Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp and Steve Cummins, owner of Ithaca’s Indian Creek Farm*

Indian Creek recently contributed \$1,000 to the Land Trust to advance farmland protection efforts within the region. Indian Creek Farm is protected with a conservation easement held by the Town of Ithaca and located within the West Hill Wildway—a proposed greenbelt that extends the length of the town and includes both natural areas and farms.



# Land Gifts Yield Funds for Future Conservation

*The Land Trust welcomes generous donations of land to further its conservation mission.*

Recently, the Land Trust sold two of these gifted properties to conservation-minded buyers. Each of the properties were originally donated with the understanding that they would be sold subject to a perpetual conservation easement and the proceeds would fund future conservation efforts.

One such property was donated to the Land Trust this year by an anonymous family who is very committed to conservation in the Finger Lakes. The 41-acre property is located in Schuyler County near the Great Lakes-Chesapeake Bay watershed divide in the hills between Watkins Glen and Corning. It features successional fields, mixed northern hardwood forests, two small woodland ponds and part of a headwater stream tributary to the Chemung River. The property was just sold subject to a perpetual conservation easement limiting development.

The Land Trust also received a donation of 183 acres on Rosy Hill Road in Prattsburgh, Steuben County. This property includes over a mile of frontage on Tenmile Creek, mixed northern hardwood forests, conifer plantations, and a small pond. The property is located in a predominantly forested area linking wildlife habitat in the Bristol Hills with state forests north of Hammondspport and is near another Land Trust easement property.

The property was originally in the estate of Barbara Grace who passed away in 2016. Her daughter donated the property to the Land Trust to honor her mother's strong desire to have her land preserved. The property was recently sold subject to a conservation easement that protects the creek, allow for sustainable agriculture and forestry, and limit future subdivision.

Proceeds from the sale of both properties will be used to cover project costs, contribute to the Land Trust's stewardship fund, and support future land and water conservation projects.

"Generous donations of lands like these help to further our mission in two important ways," said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp. "First, by selling a property subject to an easement, we can help protect its conservation values and second, proceeds from the sale provides an important source of funding for future conservation work throughout the Finger Lakes."

*The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Aaron Mullen of the law firm Mullen Associates PLLC in Bath, NY, for providing pro bono legal services in support of the Grace estate project.*

## Land Gift Protects Spectacular Views and Expands Emerald Necklace continued from page 3

The Land Trust intends to establish a nature preserve on the property that will be open to the public. The primary access point will be where the Finger Lakes Trail (FLT) enters the property off of Blackman Hill Road. Just over a half-mile of the FLT runs along the eastern edge of the property; it was rerouted from nearby Fire Tower Road in 2009.

As we approach the knoll, I ask Dr. Boyer about Summerland Farm, the name she gave to the property. "My grandmother founded one of the first homes for unwed mothers and their children in the United States," she said. "It was in Brooklyn, but each summer she would move everybody to a place in the country called Summerland. Even though she died when I was five years old, I remember Summerland vividly: wooden picnic tables, a fast-moving stream, twisty winding paths. That's the inspiration."

The property—to be called the Summerland Farm Nature Preserve in honor of this cherished memory—will be an important new jewel in the Emerald Necklace, a network of conserved lands that extends in an arc around Ithaca. The preserve is near three state forests, another Land Trust preserve, a natural area owned by Cornell University, and three properties protected by Land Trust conservation easements.

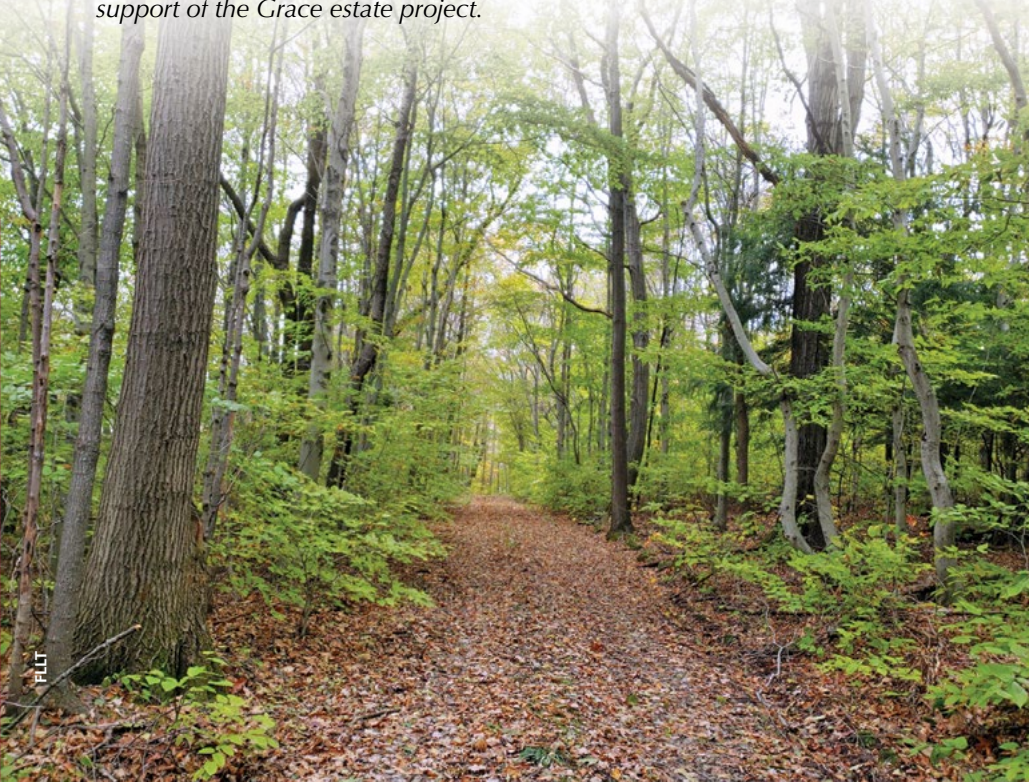
We reach the summit and take in the expansive views. "To be able to keep a place this beautiful from development," said Dr. Boyer, "and now knowing it will remain that way... I feel very fortunate."

So do we.

—Jeff Tonole

*The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney David Loftus of Skaneateles, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.*

*Those who would like to contribute to the project to cover direct costs or to provide for long term stewardship of the land should contact Director of Development Kelly Makosch at (607) 275-9487 or [kellymakosch@flt.org](mailto:kellymakosch@flt.org).*



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

**Bob Ducket**  
FROM  
*Mark Malys  
Kris Scholl and  
Brooke Oropallo*

**Jon W. Erickson**  
FROM  
*The Lamb Family*

**Richard S. Guthrie**  
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*Martha and  
George B. Day*

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# memory

## Our appreciation for gifts in honor of...

**Ed Finegan**  
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**The Marriage of  
Patty Stell and Jim Wolfe**  
FROM  
*Mary Allhusen and  
Sandy Doigt*

# honor



### 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*

# A CLOSER LOOK

## SASSAFRAS: Cinnamon Wood, Ague Tree, Smelling Stick

*In 1603, two ships set out from England to what is now Maine on the so-called Great Sassafras Hunts. Backed by the adventurer Sir Walter Raleigh, they were on a quest to find new sources of the sassafras tree (*Sassafras albidum*), the only spice endemic to North America.*

Along with tobacco, it was the primary export of early Jamestown. Meanwhile, French and Spanish explorers were also ransacking forests along the eastern seaboard in order to meet the unquenchable European thirst for sassafras root. Raleigh was imprisoned for treason a few months later, but the trade in sassafras continued unabated, almost driving the tree to extinction.

Sassafras grows from New England to northern Florida and as far west as Texas (though the sassafras hunters of 1603 found none in Maine, to their great dismay). Although it can attain great heights in more southern climes, in New York, sassafras is usually a medium-sized tree of sandy soils and disturbed areas. It colonizes abandoned farm fields and fencerows, re-grows vigorously after fires, and spreads by rooting. Its leaves are charmingly off-kilter and, unusually, take one of three forms: some are elliptical, some are mitten-shaped, and some are three-lobed, like tridents. The leaves continue to march to their own drummers as they change colors in autumn; they may turn pale yellow or dark gold, vibrant red or hot pink, maroon or purple, or shades of orange or brown. The fruits are velvety blue-black ellipsoids seated on bright red pedicels, like tiny eggs in egg cups. What attracted the early explorers was not the tree's beauty, however, but the sweet aroma that earned it the nickname "cinnamon wood." According to one legend, Christopher Columbus was able to find the New World because he smelled sassafras growing there.

The distinctively flavored leaves and roots of the sassafras have long been used in cooking. The Choctaw used the ground leaves to thicken and spice their stews, a tradition that lives on in the filé powder of Louisiana. The roots have been used to flavor beverages such as sarsaparilla and root beer, chewing gum, and liqueurs, and to scent soaps, perfumes, and



dentifrices. However, it was the reputed medicinal properties of a tea made from the roots that created the wild European demand for sassafras. The tea was believed to be a universal panacea, able to treat everything from syphilis to acne, flatulence to the plague. It could restore virility, fertility, and even youth.

The mellow, warm smell and taste of sassafras—properties which probably helped to convince Europeans of its medicinal properties—come largely from safrole, a volatile compound that is designed to deter insects and is also found in cinnamon, black pepper, cocoa, and nutmeg. Safrole is produced by the tree in order to discourage insect attack, and sassafras has long been used as a natural pesticide. The oil was used by both Native Americans and Europeans as a dewormer and delicer, and its wood has been traditionally used for beds and chicken roosts. But safrole, it turns out, is also a neurotoxin and hepatotoxin—ironically enough, since it was once promoted as a curative for liver ailments. Although the FDA outlawed the use of safrole in 1960 because high doses were found to cause cancer in rats, it

has, paradoxically, recently shown some promise as an anti-cancer agent. Sassafras tea is still used in the Appalachians as a tonic and blood purifier.

The North American sassafras, once on the brink of extinction because of overharvesting, has since recovered and is probably more common now than it was before European settlement. However, two related trees, one endemic to South America and one to southeast Asia, are threatened by modern sassafras hunters. The trees are being felled at an alarming rate for their valuable roots because safrole is the chief ingredient in the hallucinogenic drugs MDA (known on the street as "sassafras") and MDMA ("molly" or "ecstasy"). The demand for these drugs is rising and the trees in many areas of Asia are critically endangered, which only makes them more valuable to drug cartels. A synthetic source of safrole might be the only thing that saves the trees from extinction, but it is difficult to develop a viable industry when ecstasy is illegal in most countries of the world.

—Jacqueline Stuhmiller

# Finger Lakes Land Trust

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Kris West, *Senior Field Representative*  
Aquillah White, *Bookkeeper/  
Administrative Assistant*

**Newsletter Editor:** Edie Jodz

**Newsletter Layout:** Leigh Dezelan





## Advisors:

*Forestry Consultant:* Michael DeMunn  
*Stewardship Advisor:* Betsy Darlington



**GOFINGERLAKES™**  
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[gofingerlakes.org](http://gofingerlakes.org)

 [instagram@gofingerlakes](https://www.instagram.com/gofingerlakes)  
 [instagram@fingerlakeslandtrust](https://www.instagram.com/fingerlakeslandtrust)  
 [facebook.com/FingerLakesLandTrust](https://www.facebook.com/FingerLakesLandTrust)  
 [@FLLandTrust](https://twitter.com/FLLandTrust)

Ph: 607-275-9487 • email: [info@fllt.org](mailto:info@fllt.org)



## Finger Lakes Land Trust

202 E. Court Street  
Ithaca, NY 14850

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# Autumn 2019 Calendar

## 30th Anniversary Party!

Thursday, December 12  
5:30-7:30pm, Museum of the Earth  
1259 Trumansburg Rd., Ithaca

Let's celebrate 30 years of successful conservation in the Finger Lakes together. Drinks and light refreshments will be served. This event is free and open to anyone interested in the Land Trust's conservation work.

Member of  
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