



The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes region

Vol. 31, No. 1 • Winter 2019

Land Gift Launches Effort to Protect Keuka Lake Tributary

Thanks to a generous donation of land from Art and Kay Wilder, the Land Trust now owns a half mile of frontage on Big Gully Creek—a tributary to Keuka Lake that has carved a three mile long gorge.

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FLIT



CHRIS RAY

The popular Black Diamond Trail

Partnership Protects Land Bordering Black Diamond Trail

A newly acquired forested parcel in the town of Ulysses, Tompkins County, located between the popular Black Diamond Trail and the Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway/New York State Route 89, is now protected thanks to a partnership between the Land Trust, Tompkins County and New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (NYS Parks).

A favorite among cyclists, runners, and cross country skiers, the Black Diamond is a 10.5-mile multiuse trail that runs from Cass Park in Ithaca to Taughannock Falls State Park in Ulysses. The area between the trail and the Scenic Byway, which offers beautiful views

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It's hard to believe that 30 years have flown by since a dedicated group of volunteers convened in Cornell University's Fernow Hall to hear a young graduate student share information about Land Trusts and conservation easements.

That graduate student was me and I can still remember the commitment and enthusiasm that was expressed in response to my brief slide show (yes, this was before power point).

That commitment and enthusiasm is even greater today and many of the people who attended that first meeting are still involved with the Land Trust. They've been joined by several thousand more who are equally committed to the future of our region's lands and waters.

Today, every Land Trust member can look back with pride at more than 21,000 acres of conserved land, a network of over 40 publicly accessible nature preserves, ongoing educational programs that are free and open to the public, and an effective stewardship program that manages the lands under our care.

After receiving my master's degree, I moved on for more than a decade of conservation work elsewhere. But I returned like many of us do, drawn by the beauty of our lakes and the diversity of our landscapes. I was also drawn back by the Land Trust's potential to have a positive impact on these places.

I see this impact within Ithaca's Emerald Necklace where we've added several thousand acres to this growing greenbelt; in the growing network of conserved lands at the south end of Skaneateles Lake; along the banks of the Chemung River; in Canandaigua's productive farmland that would otherwise be lost to development; and in many other cherished places across our region.

I invite you to celebrate the Land Trust's 30th year by taking time to visit our conserved lands to become rejuvenated and inspired so that together, we can do even more during the next 30 years.

Andrew Zepp
Executive Director, Finger Lakes Land Trust



Land Gift Launches Effort to Protect Keuka Lake Tributary *continued from cover*

The Wilder gift features a portion of the gully, as well as adjacent upland forest and open areas of meadow and brush. The property is located just north of Branchport and was partially used as a gravel mine until 15 years ago.

The 28-acre property is one of the last two parcels associated with the farm that had been in the family for 150 years. Art and Kay hold fond memories of family outings to the gully, and they chose to ensure the future of this very special place through their donation to the Land Trust.

"We're grateful to the Wilders for their generous gift," says Executive Director Andy Zepp. "This is a classic Finger Lakes gorge that is truly a gem. Their gift will allow others to experience this unique natural area and it will also help maintain water quality within Keuka Lake."

A hike up Big Gully yields glimpses of scenic waterfalls, towering shale cliffs, and mature hemlock and hardwood trees. The flat beds of shale are punctuated by glacial "erratics"—boulders deposited by the last glacial advance. It's a fascinating walk that is possible at the height of summer when the creek level is low.

The Land Trust will now make it a priority to reach out to other landowners near Big Gully. The organization hopes that a combination of acquisitions and conservation easements can be secured over time to ensure protection of the entire gully and adjacent areas that provide buffer.

The organization is also raising funds to create public access to this site and contribute to the Land Trust's Stewardship Fund to cover costs associated with long-term



Members of the Botsford and Wilder families along with friends, including Miss Kitty Rose. Photo from 1937. Donor Art Wilder is 3rd from the right.

management. For information about making a contribution to this effort, please contact Kelly Makosch at kellymakosch@flt.org.

Due to safety and liability issues, this preserve will remain closed to the public until site improvements are complete.

Land Trust Receives \$3 Million in State Grants for Water Protection Efforts

The Land Trust was awarded over \$3 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.

The Land Trust will leverage these grants by raising over \$1 million in matching funds through private donations from individuals and families. These dollars will supplement the total cost of multiple conservation projects planned in the Cayuga, Otisco, and Skaneateles lake watersheds.

A total of \$921,000 was awarded to acquire land and conservation easements for properties around the southern end of Cayuga Lake. These projects will protect at least 260 acres and over 21,000 feet of streambank along Fall Creek and other tributaries to the lake. Together, the projects will reduce nutrient runoff that contribute to harmful algal blooms.

The Land Trust is also receiving \$1,690,575 to acquire land and conservation easements within the Skaneateles Lake watershed, resulting in the protection of at least 400 acres and over 16,000 feet of streambank. By protecting key tributaries, these projects will also reduce the amount of runoff entering the lake.

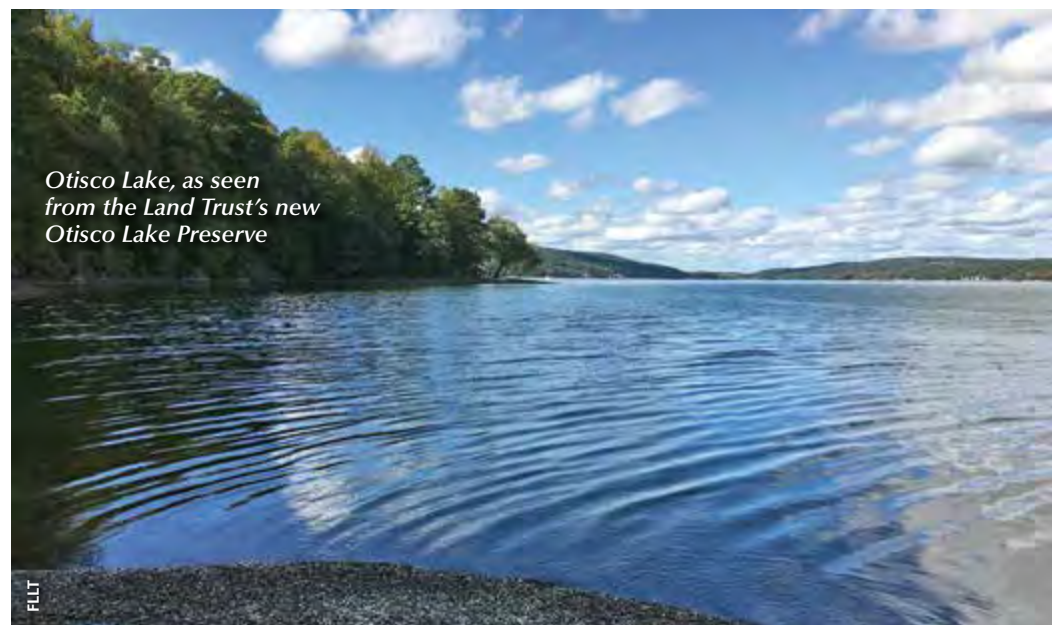
An additional \$407,500 was awarded to acquire a 34-acre property with a half mile of shoreline on Otisco Lake. This project will protect and

restore riparian buffers and wetlands that help remove sediment and nutrients from entering Otisco Lake.

"We're grateful for the state's commitment to protecting our land and water," said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp. "These funds were made available through a program that was just created last year. We're

glad to see that the Governor and our legislators are responding to the threat of toxic algae."

To make a gift in support of these projects, please contact Director of Development and Communications Kelly Maksoch at (607) 275-9487 or kellymakosch@fltl.org.



Partnership Protects Land Bordering Black Diamond Trail *continued from cover*

of Cayuga Lake and surrounding farmland and vineyards, has come under increasing development pressure.

The property features towering hardwoods, more than 2,000 feet of frontage on the Black Diamond Trail, and more than 1,700 feet of frontage on the byway. The property was identified as a conservation priority because of the natural buffer it provides between the trail and the state highway. The land will ultimately be conveyed to NYS Parks as an addition to its holdings when funds become available.

Acquisition of the property will build upon cooperative efforts by the Land Trust, NYS Parks, Tompkins County, and the towns of Ulysses and Ithaca to create a natural corridor along the trail. Several years ago, the Land Trust supported NYS Parks' acquisition of 70 acres

of forest in this area which included the "missing link" needed to complete this section of the Black Diamond.

The property features towering hardwoods, more than 2,000 feet of frontage on the Black Diamond Trail, and more than 1,700 feet of frontage on the byway.

"The Black Diamond is a tremendous resource for the community," said Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "By working together with our partners, we're creating a greenbelt that will ensure the character of the trail while securing habitat for wildlife and helping to maintain water quality within Cayuga Lake."

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney William Shaw of the law firm Shaw & Murphy, PLLC in Ithaca, NY for providing pro bono services in support of this project.

Land Donation Adds to Protection of Skaneateles Lake

The MacKenzie land gift features steep hillsides covered with sugar maples.

In November 2018, the Land Trust acquired approximately six forested hillside acres on the west side of North Glen Haven Road in the towns of Niles and Sempronius. The land, donated by Anne MacKenzie and Frank Girardi, is adjacent to Bear Swamp State Forest.

Conserving the property will help protect Skaneateles Lake—the source of drinking water for the city of Syracuse—by prohibiting development on its steep slopes. Ongoing Land Trust efforts are keenly focused on securing hillsides in this area, known as the Skaneateles Highlands, especially those adjacent to Bear Swamp State Forest and its critical tributary to the lake, Bear Swamp Creek.

The Land Trust is considering options for long term conservation of the land including the possible transfer of the property to the state as an addition to Bear Swamp State Forest. This is the fifth conservation project the Land Trust has completed in the vicinity of the state forest, which is identified as a priority project within New York State's Open Space Plan. It is also part of an Audubon-designated Important Bird Area and hosts a popular network of recreational trails and features extensive wetlands and rare flora.

Other protected lands in the area 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. Bear Swamp State Forest and its creek are located within a proposed greenbelt extending around the southern end of Skaneateles Lake. On the southeast side of the lake, the Land Trust owns the 200-acre Hinchcliff Family Preserve, the High Vista Preserve, and the Cora Kampfe Dickinson Conservation Area.

"We are pleased our contribution will benefit the public with respect to water quality and outdoor recreation, as well as preserve the forested environment for the flora and fauna that inhabit this beautiful region in which we are privileged to live," said Anne MacKenzie.

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

Addition to Dorothy McIlroy Bird Sanctuary Protects Fall Creek

Located in the town of Summerhill in Cayuga County, the Dorothy McIlroy Bird Sanctuary sits on a high plateau, bisected by Fall Creek near its headwaters.

Due in part to its high elevation and in part to a western ridge that blocks prevailing winds, the sanctuary is colder than nearby areas, supporting a diversity of northern plant species that aren't often found in the Finger Lakes. Fens along both sides of Fall Creek give way to northern peat swamp forests—another rarity contributing to the distinct flora and fauna of the preserve. Here you may see Dark-eyed Junco, Hermit Thrush, Winter Wren, Canada Warbler, and Mourning Warbler, while hemlock and yellow birch dominate the forests.

Now, the Fragnoli family has donated a 1.5-acre parcel that will bring the total acreage of the preserve to 260.5 acres. Roland “Frog” Fragnoli

lived in Homer, NY from 1954 until his death earlier in 2018 and was a beloved member of the Homer community. He purchased the property in 1964. “He thought it was a perfect place to take his three girls camping,” says Margaret Fragnoli, Frog’s wife of 63 years. This small lot really is ideal for outdoor recreation. It features 700 feet of frontage along Fall Creek; is close to the road for easy access; and is located just south of a public fishing area.

Adding this lot to the Dorothy McIlroy Bird Sanctuary means further protection of Fall Creek—the source of Cornell University’s drinking water—along both sides of the stream. This is important for protecting water quality near the headwaters of the creek before

it flows into Cayuga Lake further south.

“This project highlights a local person contributing not just to the expansion of a preserve, but to protecting water quality, too,” said Max Heitner, Land Protection Specialist for the Land Trust.

“Well,” Margaret Fragnoli says, “his [Frog’s] girls were not big campers, but he would be extremely happy to know that his land will be preserved and incorporated into the bird sanctuary.”

—Alli Sribarra

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

The addition, pictured in the lower portion of this photo, squares off the southern boundary of the McIlroy Bird Sanctuary.



Celebrating 30 years of Conservation in the Finger Lakes fllt.org/30years

JOHN SUTTON



The Land Trust's Cora Kampfe Dickinson Preserve features 1,300 feet of shoreline on Skaneateles Lake. Across the region, more than two miles of lakeshore have been protected through acquisition and the use of conservation easements.

The Land Trust is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, marking three decades of collective effort to save the lands and waters of our region. What began as a vision to create a regional land trust has led to the protection of over 21,000 acres of the Finger Lakes' undeveloped lakeshore, rugged gorges, rolling forest, and scenic farmland. Highlighted here are some accomplishments and people who made it happen....



STEVE KNAPP

BETSY DARLINGTON

Members of the Land Trust's Preserve Management Committee at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in Tompkins County. Now spanning more than 500 acres, this preserve was established in 1995. It is one of 43 preserves now owned and managed by the Land Trust.



HARRY LITTELL

Betsy Darlington—founding board member, long-time director of land protection, easement and land donor, and volunteer extraordinaire!



BETSY DARLINGTON

The Land Trust's founding president Carl Leopold and past board member Ed Hart on a site visit in 2004.



PROVIDED

Jim Kersting—past Land Trust president, long-time volunteer, and easement donor at the Land Trust's Wesley Hill Preserve in 2001.



View from the Argetsinger Vineyard overlooking Seneca Lake. The Land Trust purchased a conservation easement on this land with financial support from New York State's Department of Agriculture & Markets. To date, the organization has protected more than 5,000 acres of farmland from development.

Conservation Easement Protects 89 Acres within Ithaca's Emerald Necklace

89 forested acres in southern Tompkins County are now permanently protected through the use of a perpetual conservation easement. The property, located on Jackson Hollow and Scherer Roads in the town of Newfield, is adjacent to the Land Trust's existing 265-acre Charles Spencer Nature Preserve and falls within the Emerald Necklace—a priority project in New York State's Open Space Plan.

The Land Trust acquired the property in May 2017 along with an additional 70 contiguous acres that were immediately added to the Charles Spencer Preserve. The remaining 89 acres were sold subject to an easement limiting development to a single home. The easement will allow sustainable timber harvest but prohibits subdivision.

The Land Trust pursued protection of the land in order to secure valuable wildlife habitat and also enhance public access to its existing preserve. The property features a mature forest composed of oak, maple, ash, and beech, with scattered pines. It also includes a portion of the headwaters of a tributary to Cayuta Creek and the Susquehanna River.

Protection of the property expands the network of conserved lands known as the Emerald Necklace. The

Emerald Necklace is an ambitious effort to link 50,000 acres of existing public open space that extends in an arc around Ithaca—from Finger Lakes National Forest in the west to Hammond Hill and Yellow Barn State Forests in the east. These lands host 78 miles of the Finger Lakes Trail, two Audubon-designated Important Bird Areas, and several dozen Tompkins County-designated Unique Natural Areas.

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





Conservation Easement Helps Protect Ithaca's Drinking Water

The Land Trust permanently protected 167 forested acres within the towns of Dryden and Caroline through the use of a perpetual conservation easement. Nearly all of the property is located within the Six Mile Creek watershed, the source of Ithaca's drinking water.

The land was donated to the Land Trust in June of last year, and was recently sold to a private individual subject to an easement prohibiting subdivision. Timber harvesting will only be allowed under guidelines that demonstrate how water quality will be maintained, and development will be limited to a single recreational cabin. The property does not include road frontage and is accessed by a legal right-of-way.

This land donation was made in memory of Helen Edwards, who had deep connections to Ithaca and a long professional history at Cornell University. It was her intention to donate the land before she died prematurely from cancer.

As development pressures in the Finger Lakes region increase, the Land Trust is working to counter threats to water quality by buffering our streams. Protection of undeveloped lands allows for absorption of storm water and its gradual release into streams such as Six Mile Creek. Large, intact forested parcels also help minimize erosion and runoff through their extensive root systems which help bind soil together.

The City of Ithaca has committed to sourcing its drinking water from Six Mile Creek. In 2015, the City initiated a \$35 million dollar project to rebuild the 112 year-old drinking water treatment facility, refurbish the drinking water supply line, upgrade facilities at the dam and intake structure, and

dredge the reservoir and siltation pond upstream of the reservoir. Maintaining high quality water in Six Mile Creek is a priority.

This is the Land Trust 26th protection project within the Six Mile Creek watershed. In addition to conservation easements on private lands, the organization also owns the Roy H. Park and Peter M. Rinaldo Nature Preserves—both of which border Six Mile Creek.

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Alexandra Davis of the law firm Coughlin & Gerhart, LLP in Ithaca, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.

Our appreciation for gifts in honor of...

Dale & Nancy Anderson FROM <i>Kurt Anderson</i>	Betsy and Dick Darlington FROM <i>Lois Darlington Sally Perreten</i>	Hannah George FROM <i>Albert George</i>	Diane and Ken Morton FROM <i>Ranjita Morton</i>	Jan and Susan Suwinski FROM <i>Cherry Valley Carriage Association Judy Sobczak</i>
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John Connelly FROM <i>Gilbert and Harriet Sweet</i>				

memory

A CLOSER LOOK

The Many Lives of a Tree

Our hero has no voice, nor even a beating heart, but still its life tells an epic true story—a tale of humble origins, devastating misfortune, a remarkable comeback, years of glory, and ultimately, downfall.

This story began many decades ago with an acorn falling to earth on Logan Hill in Candor. It germinated and grew into a red oak tree. Then a person came and cut it down.

But the red oak, like many other tree species, had evolved a response to such catastrophic injury. Even as a mere stump, it retained stored energy in its roots, as well as living growth tissue called meristem. The truncated tree urgently rallied these remaining resources to create new photosynthesizing capacity.

Multiple shoots resprouted from the bark of the cut stump. These shoots soon bore leaves—perhaps the largest leaves that the tree would ever have, all the better to ramp up photosynthesis as quickly as possible.

In time, the shoots thinned out, leaving only the hardest six. Over the next several decades, these trunks took on a tidy symmetry and gentle outward lean, each claiming sunlight and shunning the shadows cast by others.

Eventually the base expanded to about seven feet across. Each of the six trunks attained its own diameter of more than two feet. Each grew to about 90 feet tall. And that is how this red oak grew from an acorn and then again from a stump into surely the grandest, most distinctive tree among countless others at the Logan Hill Nature Preserve.

Then came this year's rains. From July through September, the Southern



Tier got about 24 inches of rain, more than twice the historical average for these months. It figures that the soil must have become completely saturated and perilously soft.

Then—the winds. The region got three straight days of high wind, averaging 20 miles per hour and gusting to 30, during October 11-13.

Maybe it was a particularly strong gust that did it. Maybe it was only the subtlest breeze, tipping the balance after the days and decades of cumulative stress, plus the simple force of gravity on those massive tilting trunks, that finally ripped the anchoring roots from their weakened substrate.

We can conjecture that one trunk fell first, destabilizing the base and triggering the immediate fall of the others. Four crashed all the way to the ground. The other two remain hung up in the branches of neighboring trees. Looking from above, we now see a gap



in the textured canopy, almost perfectly round, with the trunks radiating from the center like spokes from a hub. Looking up from the ground, where just recently the sun barely peeked through the dense branches and leaves, we now see only open sky.

At the base of the fallen tree, a root cluster hangs exposed on each trunk. No root mass remains evident in the middle—only a deep pit full of water and mud. This suggests another part of the story. Whereas the tree before resprouting had one trunk and one set of roots, each of the multiple trunks after resprouting seems to have developed its own differentiated root system. Thus each trunk probably channeled the products of photosynthesis downward to its own network of roots, while in parallel, each root cluster sent water and nutrients up its own trunk.

So we could say that this tree's life, almost cut short, not only recovered but became six lives in one, divergent yet entwined to the end.

The resilience of any tree has its limits. Further resprouting would be highly improbable after such total uprooting. The final chapter of the red oak's story will likely unfold quietly, as the trunks decompose into hummock ridges and eventually vanish into the forest floor.

Meanwhile, neighboring trees will reach in, and the next generation of seedlings and saplings will rise from below. As their branches gradually close the canopy again, so too will they fill the sunny gap with new stories, each in its own way echoing the timeless themes of the red oak's many lives in one—growth, loss, persistence, triumph, and ceaseless striving to the light. —Mark Chao



Finger Lakes Land Trust

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BRIAN MALEY

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