



The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes region

Vol. 32, No. 4 • Autumn 2020

Partnership Secures Otisco Lake Shoreline

A rare stretch of undeveloped shoreline on Otisco Lake is now conserved forever thanks to a partnership between the Land Trust, Onondaga County, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC).

BILL HECHT

The Land Trust recently acquired the 35-acre property with 2,300 feet of lakeshore at the very south end Otisco.

The property features meadows with scattered trees as well as several shallow ponds, two seasonal tributaries to the lake, and forested wetlands. Flocks of waterfowl utilize the area during migration and herons are frequently observed feeding in the ponds. The site also provides habitat for Bald Eagles.

The Land Trust acquired the land from the estate of William "Bill" Henderson. Henderson purchased the

land back in 1942 at a public auction. He was 15 years old at the time and rode his bicycle to the auction. Henderson subsequently maintained the land for 76 years until his passing in 2018.

NYSDEC provided significant funding for the project through its Water Quality Improvement Project Program. The Land Trust also secured a grant from the Onondaga Lake Natural Resource Damage Assessment Fund. Onondaga County will own and manage the site as a public conservation area while the Land Trust will retain and monitor a

perpetual conservation easement.

During the coming months, the Land Trust will work with partners to plant approximately 600 native trees and shrubs to serve as buffers to the lake and two tributary streams. The Land Trust will also work with Onondaga County to develop a long-term management plan that provides for the restoration of wildlife habitat as well as appropriate public access for hiking, wildlife observation, and fishing.

The property will remain closed to the public until restoration efforts are complete. It is anticipated that the

continued on page 2

PERSPECTIVES

For most of us, it feels like a long time since the start of the pandemic. Many have taken to our parks and trails to help manage anxiety, reconnect with nature, and get a distraction from the frequently grim news of the day.

WE have noted the increased usage of our trails and received plenty of feedback: “My family found solace in your nature preserves,” said one member. “The trails have allowed me to relieve my stress,” said another. Your trails have been “something of a lifesaver,” said a third.

We are glad to see that the public is enjoying and valuing our trails and preserves. We are grateful for our dedicated corps of volunteers and staff who steward these lands for the benefit of everyone. Thank you!

We also recognize that we need to conserve and maintain more of these areas—for the benefit of the wildlife that lives there, as well as us humans that need wild places as well.

Toward that end, the Land Trust is currently preparing several new preserves that offer trails to accommodate the public, including our Owasco Bluffs Preserve near Auburn that features scenic lakeshore

views and our new Botsford Nature Preserve near Branchport that will provide access to a rugged gorge. Similar work is also underway in Canandaigua, where a new nature preserve will be opened to the public sometime in 2021.

These are just a few of the ways in which the Land Trust is connecting people with nature and providing opportunities to get outdoors. We look forward to a future when everyone in our region has easy access to a nearby natural area.

We also look forward to seeing you out on the trails this fall!

Andrew Zepp
Executive Director, Finger Lakes Land Trust



STEFANIE DELANEY

New nature preserve overlooking Canandaigua Lake

Partnership Secures Otisco Lake Shoreline

continued from cover

site will be conveyed to the county and formally opened for public access sometime during 2021. To watch a beautiful aerial video and learn more about the project, please visit fllt.org/otisco20.

NYSDEC Commissioner Basil Seggos celebrated the acquisition, saying that, “Through New York’s Water Quality Improvement Project grant program, New York State is making strategic investments to protect and enhance water quality for the benefit of our environment and public health. DEC is

proud to partner with the Finger Lakes Land Trust and Onondaga County on the conservation of this shoreline parcel to enhance public access to recreation opportunities, protect habitat for a diverse array of wildlife, and to safeguard water quality in Otisco Lake as a public drinking water source.”

Onondaga County Executive Ryan McMahon added, “Onondaga County remains committed to securing and protecting sources of clean drinking water for our community. This newly acquired property, which will be added

to the Onondaga County Parks system, will ensure that Otisco Lake continues to be a source of safe drinking water to the residents of Onondaga County.”

This is the Land Trust’s second conservation project in the Otisco Lake watershed. The organization opened its 36-acre Otisco Lake Preserve in 2015. Located in the town of Spafford on the west side of the lake, this preserve protects over 1,300 feet of undeveloped shoreline and has a hiking trail that leads visitors down a steep hillside to the shore.

Land Trust Raises Funds for Conservation through Land Donation in Ithaca's Emerald Necklace

When dedicated Land Trust members go above and beyond their unwavering support to make donations of land, conservation in the Finger Lakes receives an enormous boost. Thanks to the generosity of Cornelia "Nelly" Farnum and Jack Booker who recently donated their 97-acre property and home in Caroline, Tompkins County, future land and water protection projects have an important source of funding.

IN 2011, Nelly and Jack donated a conservation easement on their property where they shared a home for over 30 years. The property includes a steeply sloping forest with a cascading creek and a beautiful 19th century Greek Revival surrounded by gorgeous native plant gardens. Just last year, they donated the property to the Land Trust with the clear understanding that it would be sold to a private buyer subject to the easement, the sale of which would fund future conservation efforts. Proceeds from the sale were placed in the Land Trust's Opportunity Fund, a dedicated account created by the organization to make time-sensitive acquisitions possible.

The Farnum-Booker property lies within the Emerald Necklace, 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 property is also located within Tompkins County's Caroline Pinnacles Unique Natural Area and in close proximity to other protected lands, including Shindagin Hollow State Forest and a Cornell Botanic Gardens natural area. The Finger Lakes Trail is easily accessed just south of the property on White Church Road.

"Although we always knew that a



MAX HEITNER



FLLT

conservation easement was "forever," the depth of the significance of having a CE on our land became even clearer after there were new owners," said Nelly and Jack. "Without a CE in partnership with the FLLT, the

same level of certainty about the permanence of the land's protection could not have been achieved. The CE solidified a perpetual connection between ourselves and the land we loved."

The Land Trust would like to extend their sincere thanks to Nelly and Jack for this generous gift which will continue to benefit future generations for many years to come.

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

Land Trust Acquires 38 Acres in the Owasco Flats



The Owasco Flats looking north toward Owasco Lake—the recently protected property is in the upper right, bordered by the inlet.

The Owasco Inlet weaves its way northward from the upper reaches of Tompkins County, through Cayuga County, until it empties into Owasco Lake. A mix of farmland and wetlands along the inlet are locally referred to as “the flats,” the final area of filtration prior the inlet’s release into the lake.

The Land Trust recently purchased 38 acres in the flats containing 785 feet of frontage along the Owasco Inlet from the Estate of David Hall. The property is primarily comprised of agricultural fields, is adjacent to Owasco Flats Wildlife Management Area, and is in close proximity to other conservation lands owned by Cayuga County and the City of Auburn.

When funds become available, the Land Trust will partner with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) to transfer the parcel to the Owasco Flats Wildlife Management Area. An important area ecologically, the flats are part of the

National Audubon Society-designated Greater Summerhill Important Bird Area (IBA), and visitors often find Bald Eagles soaring overhead. Protection of lands in this area also safeguards the water quality of Owasco Lake by filtering runoff to the inlet.

The Land Trust intends to partner with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to conduct wetland restoration activities on the land prior to conveyance to NYSDEC. Conversion of pasture lands to wetlands will enhance the water filtration capacity of the watershed and create excellent habitat for birds and other wildlife.

“The Land Trust puts a lot of effort into the conservation of farmland in

the Finger Lakes,” said Max Heitner, Director of Conservation for the Land Trust. “But we also recognize that agriculture is not the ideal use of land everywhere, and the Owasco Flats area is a great example of a place that has more to offer the community as a water filter and home for wildlife.”

This is the Land Trust’s fifth land protection project at the Owasco Flats. The area is popular for both paddling and birdwatching. Information about visiting the flats can be found at www.gofingerlakes.org, a resource created by the Land Trust to encourage people to get outdoors.

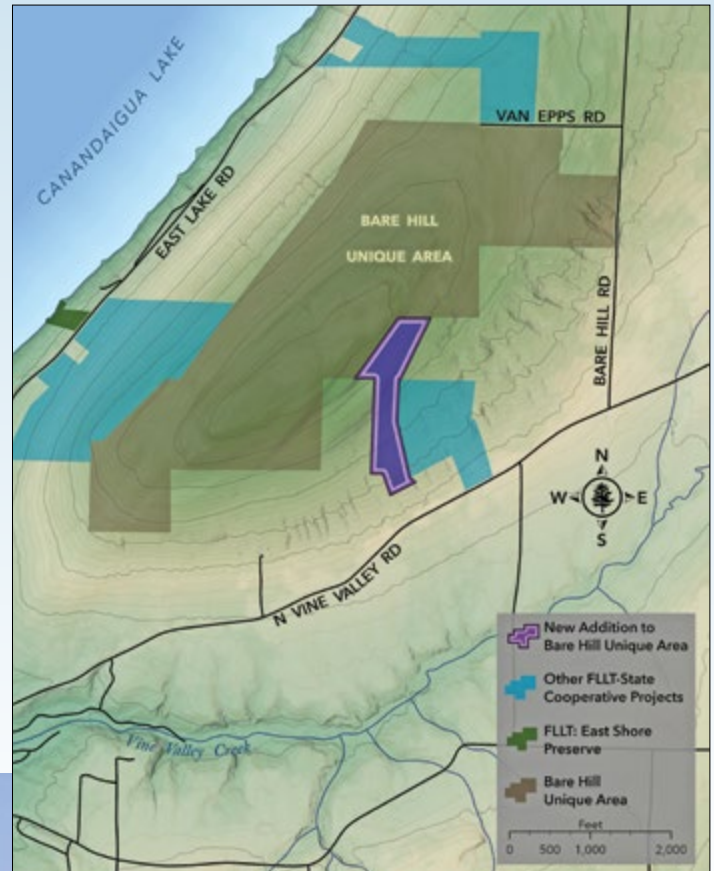
Land Trust Completes Eighth Acquisition on Bare Hill

The Land Trust acquired 20 wooded acres on the steep southeast-facing slope of Bare Hill—an area that has long been a priority for protection by the Land Trust. Bare Hill dominates the southeastern shore of Canandaigua Lake and is recognized for its cultural significance in the creation story of the Seneca Nation. New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) owns and manages 393 acres on Bare Hill's summit as a State Unique Area.

The property provides an important connection between state lands and two other parcels previously acquired by the Land Trust. When public funds are available, all three parcels will be transferred to NYSDEC as a single 45-acre addition to state ownership that will create a connection to North Vine Valley Road. This process of patiently stitching together smaller properties to enhance protection of intact habitats and public access to our region's natural beauty is emblematic of the Land Trust's approach to conservation in the landscape focus areas identified in our strategic plan.

Elsewhere in the Canandaigua Lake watershed, the Land Trust owns and manages five nature preserves including the recently acquired 100-acre Canandaigua Vista property in the town of Canandaigua. The organization has worked in partnership with Ontario County to establish Grimes Glen County Park, the Town of South Bristol to create Carolabarb Park, and with NYSDEC to enhance protection of Conklin Gully and High Tor Wildlife Management Area. Additionally, the Land Trust holds conservation easements on 22 properties here, representing more than 900 acres conserved in private ownership and remaining on local tax rolls.

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 this project.



Bare Hill, the iconic promontory overlooking Canandaigua Lake's eastern shore, where the Land Trust recently secured 20 acres.

The view from the Otisco Lake Preserve in Onondaga County, where the Land Trust has protected over 1,300 feet of wild shoreline on the west side of the lake.

SCENES

from Around Our Region...

MAX HEITNER





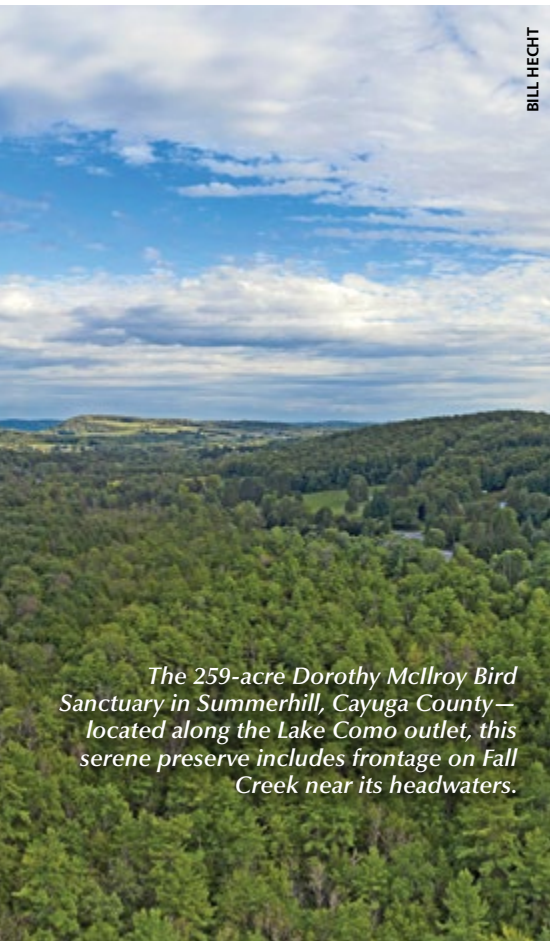
DAN DIGIOVANNA

Starry night at the West River Preserve, located near the south end of Canandaigua Lake



BRIAN MALEY

The Land Trust's Sweedler Preserve at Lick Brook in Ithaca, Tompkins County



BILL HECHT

The 259-acre Dorothy McIlroy Bird Sanctuary in Summerhill, Cayuga County—located along the Lake Como outlet, this serene preserve includes frontage on Fall Creek near its headwaters.



BILL HECHT

The growing Land Trust staff on a field trip to the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in West Danby, Tompkins County

Vernal Pools Created within Skaneateles Lake Watershed

Throughout history, humans have proven to be innovative and efficient, and one needs to look no further than local agriculture to see how farmers in the Finger Lakes have created technologies and implemented practices to improve crop yields and farmland production.

For years, one of the biggest concerns for farmers has been how to drain their fields and move water off their land as quickly and efficiently as possible. The Finger Lakes region has signs of this throughout, including drainage tiles underneath farm fields that flow into deep roadside ditches, quickly moving water off roadways and carrying it into our streams and lakes.

In some areas, there is an opportunity to counter these efficiencies by giving stormwater a place to settle and filter out pollutants before they enter our creeks and lakes. At a Land Trust-owned conservation area on the east side of Skaneateles Lake, the Land Trust has done just that. In partnership with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, five vernal pools were created to retain water on the property prior to its release into Skaneateles Lake, the unfiltered drinking water source for local communities and the city of Syracuse. This area, also known as the Staghorn Cliffs, is contiguous to the organization's Cora Kampfe Dickinson Preserve and contains some of the most pristine shoreline remaining in the Finger Lakes

region.

Vernal pools do more than protect water quality. They are also important wildlife habitat—providing temporary wetlands for a variety of insects, amphibians, and reptiles. Birds flock to the pools as a seasonal source of food and water. When the Land Trust launched its five-point water quality

initiative in 2019, these were the types of projects the organization envisioned to enhance its typical land conservation work. The ability to protect water quality and improve wildlife habitat with key local partners is what the Land Trust hopes to continue to do throughout the Finger Lakes region with the support of its members and donors.

A constructed vernal pool at the Land Trust's Logan Hill Nature Preserve in Tioga County



HARRY LITTELL

Bob Werner, longtime Finger Lakes Land Trust board member, advisor, and dear friend, passed away on September 13 following a brief battle with cancer.

AS both an expert scientist and committed Skaneateles Lake advocate, Bob encouraged the FLLT to increase its focus on land and water protection projects along the lake's major tributaries—especially Grout Brook. During his involvement with the

FLLT, the organization protected nearly 2,000 acres within the watershed.

Bob is survived by his beloved wife Jo, his children and grandchildren, and the very many friends he made along the way. We will miss his quiet determination and infectious smile.

Land Trust's GoFingerLakes.org Web Site Adds Two New Locations

The Land Trust recently added two new locations to its outdoor recreation web site, Go Finger Lakes: the Finger Lakes Museum and Ganondagan State Historic Site. Visit gofingerlakes.org to learn more about exploring these Finger Lakes gems.



Double Your Impact with Our \$100,000 Matching Gift Challenge

Finger Lakes Land Trust members do so much each year to support our conservation work in the region. Thank you! This year, your support will go even further, advancing land and water protection across the region. An anonymous family will match any increase over your 2019 giving dollar for dollar, up to \$100,000. Not a member yet? All new gifts will be matched 1:1.

Please give generously today at fltl.org/give so that we can protect more land and water in the beautiful Finger Lakes region.



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.



Public Comment Period Open as Land Trust Applies for Accreditation Renewal

The Land Trust is applying for accreditation renewal through the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance.

The Commission invites public input and accepts signed, written comments on pending applications. Comments must relate to how the Finger Lakes Land Trust complies with national quality standards. To learn more about the accreditation program and to submit a comment, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org.

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Nature and the Microcosm of Snails

Our protected natural areas are teeming with life. Highly complex interactions take place continually between the plants, animals, fungi, microbes, and physical elements.

While ecologists have untangled some of the science surrounding the main players with key roles in keeping balance, mysteries remain about the seldom-seen molluscan denizens of natural places that play an active role in supporting the ecosystem: the land snails.

By day, most land snails and their close relatives, the slugs, keep hidden in the leaf litter and under rocks and logs. About 95% of our snail species in North America measure less than 5 millimeters in width. Finding them is a challenge even for expert malacologists (scientists who study snails). Among the most common questions are: “What are the snails doing? What purpose do they serve?”

Though tiny, native land snails (those endemic to our region, which is the majority) perform myriad ecological services that support natural areas. While some are invasive, these tend to hang out around areas of human habitation. Fortunately, the majority of our 115 species in New York State are native, thriving in places with minimal human influence.

Land snails spend most of their time in the leaf litter layer. There, they consume the dead and decaying vegetation, helping to decompose it. With the nutrient-rich feces they leave behind, snails play a role in soil formation. As environmental clean-up crews, snails’ nutrient-cycling activity extends also to fungi, and some species even specialize as consumers of dead animals. From insects to mammals, snails and slugs rasp away at soft tissues, leaving exoskeletons and bones clean, all the while enriching the soil with their droppings.

Snails and slugs are also known to play a role as pollinators. As with insects, the sweet nectar of flowers lures them in. As they visit each blossom, pollen grains stick to their bodies and shells and are transported to the next bloom, delivering pollen that can lead to the plant’s reproduction. Slugs are known to pollinate wild ginger and Trillium flowers. Remarkably, they do their pollination services when most insect pollinators are inactive, that is, during the nights and rainy days, when the slugs are most active.

Scientists have hardly scratched the surface of this phenomenon of snail and slug pollination, known as malacophily. To date, one scientific study has been published on a species of snail in India that specializes in nectar feeding—and pollination—of one species of

morning glory. Researcher Khoisnam Sarma and his colleagues showed that on rainy days, a small snail was successfully pollinating more flowers than by bees.

In addition to supporting vascular plants, snails and slugs are also recognized for their role in fern and bryophyte spore dispersal. As with malacophily,

endozoochory—seeds or spores ingested, then pooped out later as viable entities—is also poorly studied in slugs and snails. A study by Steffen Boch and colleagues revealed more than half of fern and bryophyte spores consumed by slugs successfully germinated after passing through the gut.

Snails themselves are rich in essential nutrients for many animals. A snail’s soft tissue is high in calcium and protein; the shell itself contains calcium and protein, and also serves as a good source of these nutrients for animals that can digest shell. Firefly larvae, some adult beetles, toads, salamanders, snakes, birds, and mammals rely on snails and slugs for all or part of their nutritional needs.

Even after a snail has died, its shell may persist for some time in the environment. By doing so, it provides a handy shelter for various species of insects, referred to in this case as “snail shell adopters”. Some insects use the shell as a winter retreat. Others use it as housing for their larval and pupal stages. Mason bees (*Megachilidae*) are solitary bees that sometimes lay their eggs in snail shells. After laying a single egg inside, the female bee constructs a mud, pebble, and plant-material barrier to seal the opening. The shell plus its bee-made door offers a perfect little nook to protect the egg as it develops, and eventually emerges as an adult.

Indeed, the lowliest of critters play an indispensable role in sustaining nature, and the need for more research on their life habits is clearly needed. When an organism is shown to serve a key part of a biological process, the argument for its conservation becomes more valid. Climate change and loss of habitat are major threats to land snails and slugs. Thanks to the work of the Land Trust, habitats throughout our region are protected. Whether or not visitors of the properties realize it, the snail communities are doing their jobs, right beneath our feet. The next time you enjoy a walk at one of the land preserves, take a moment to reflect on the quiet, hidden, yet invaluable members of the ecosystem—the snails and slugs.

—Marla Coppolino



MARLA COPPOLINO

Finger Lakes Land Trust

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Autumn Events

fllt.org/events

NIGEL KENT

*Barnes Gully,
town of
Canandaigua*

Join Executive Director Andy Zepp online to learn about Land Trust's conservation projects in your area, with plenty of time for questions. All programs start at 7:00pm and registration is required. Visit fllt.org/events for details.

Eastern Lakes (Owasco, Skaneateles, & Otisco)
Greater Ithaca & the Cayuga Lake Watershed
Keuka & Seneca Lake Watersheds
Western Lakes (Canandaigua & west)
Southern Tier & the Chemung River Corridor

Tuesday, November 10th
Thursday, November 12th
Tuesday, November 17th
Thursday, November 19th
Tuesday, November 24th