



The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes region Vol. 32, No. 3 • Summer 2020

Acquisition Links Preserves Overlooking Skaneateles Lake

With the recent purchase of 75 forested acres, the Land Trust has created a 2.25 mile-long corridor of conserved land overlooking the eastern shore of Skaneateles Lake.

This latest acquisition links the High Vista and Hinchcliff Family nature preserves, extending protection in an area of steeply sloping hillsides that are vital to the health of Skaneateles Lake and the quality of Syracuse's drinking water supply.

The property is located at the Onondaga/Cortland county line adjacent to Vincent Hill Road, and just west of State Route 41. It is tucked within an extensive forested landscape that features a number of rugged ravines and is home to a diversity of birds—earning recognition as one of the state's Important Bird Areas. Bald Eagles are resident here as are a number of different warbler species.

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Land Trust Protects Over 500 Acres of Farmland Overlooking Watkins Glen

Dave Barber operates a 518-acre dairy farm in Schuyler County on land that his family has been farming for four generations, dating back to 1910. The farm sprawls across the hillside east of the village of Watkins Glen and affords spectacular views of Seneca Lake and the gorge in Watkins Glen State Park.

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CHRIS RAY

We are glad this issue of *The Land Steward* presents good news from across the region—a welcome respite from the seemingly endless stream of grim news we have all been hearing during the past few months.

While the pandemic has made our conservation work more challenging, our staff and volunteers have persevered and the results speak for themselves. Now, we have conserved forever:

- More than two miles of forested hillside overlooking Skaneateles Lake;
- Another link in Ithaca’s Emerald Necklace;
- A fourth generation farm overlooking Watkins Glen protected with a perpetual conservation easement;
- Nearly 100 acres with sweeping views of Canandaigua Lake—soon to become our newest nature preserve, open to everyone.

Despite the challenges, our work continues. And it will tomorrow, next month, next year, and beyond. Focused and sustained effort is the key to successful conservation. The continued support of our members ensures that we have the resources we need to conserve more of our land and water resources.

Thanks for renewing your support of the Land Trust during these challenging times. Your contributions really make a difference!



Andrew Zepp
Executive Director, Finger Lakes Land Trust



Acquisition Links Preserves Overlooking Skaneateles Lake

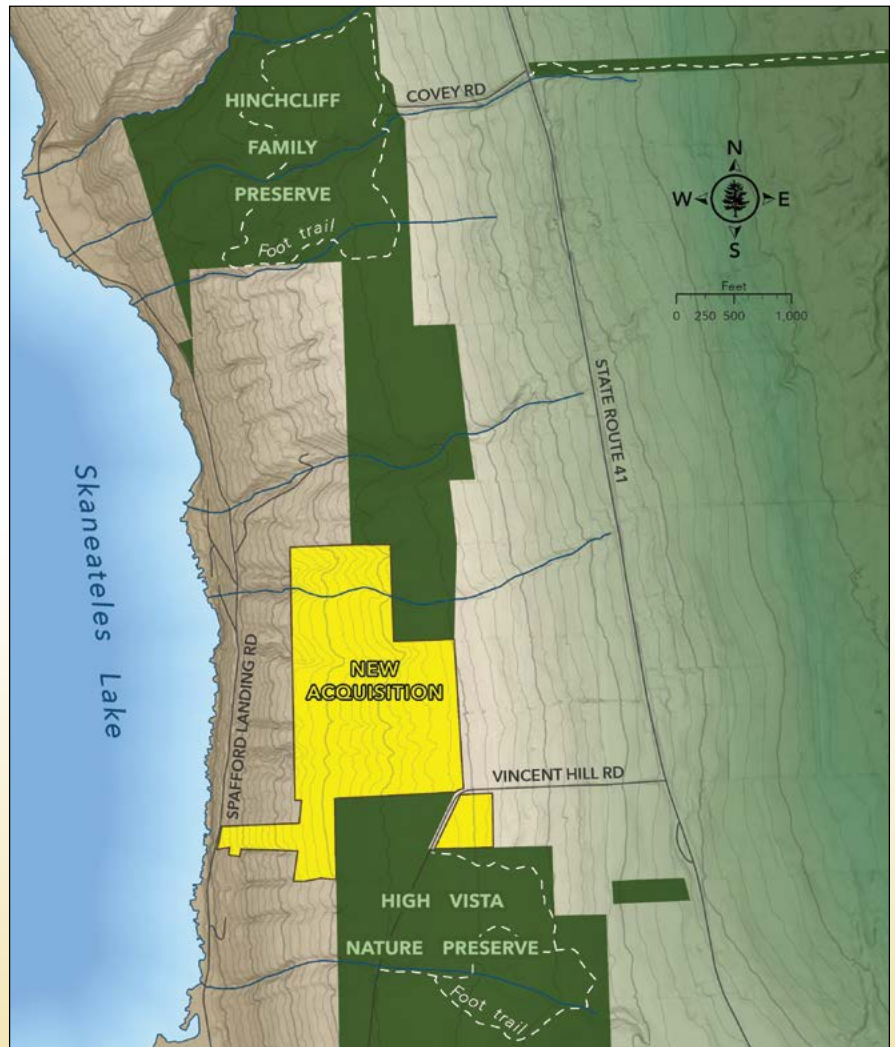
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“The steep, forested hills at the south end of Skaneateles Lake are a special place to me,” said Dave Birchenough, President of the FLLT Board of Directors and Skaneateles resident. “Preserving an area so important to lake ecology while expanding the public hiking trail network is our legacy for the next generations.”

The culmination of successful negotiations to purchase the land was the result of years of effort. The south end of Skaneateles Lake is a focus area for the Land Trust, and both staff and volunteers have spent countless hours educating landowners about options for conserving their land while also gaining a better understanding of their goals for the land and their family.

After an inventory of the site’s natural resources, the Land Trust will design and construct a hiking trail that will link the existing trail systems within the High Vista and Hinchcliff preserves. The long-term goal is to extend the trail system south and west to eventually link up with trails in Bear Swamp State Forest.

The Land Trust is actively fundraising to cover the cost of acquiring the land, construct the new hiking trail, and provide for long-term stewardship. Learn more about the project and check out a video highlighting the property at fllt.org/highlands. To make a gift in support of this project, please contact Senior Director Kelly Makosch at (607) 275-9487 or kellymakosch@fllt.org.





Land Trust Protects Over 500 Acres of Farmland Overlooking Watkins Glen *continued from cover*

Not surprisingly, Dave has been approached over the past few years by developers offering to buy some or all of his farmland, with the intention of turning it into housing tracts. And given the challenges currently facing small dairy farms, including a prolonged period of extremely low milk prices, it would be tempting for Dave to take the money and run. But he was adamant about one thing: “I didn’t want to see it get developed.”

The good news is that, with the help of the Land Trust, the Barber farm recently received a \$1.14 million grant from the State of New York under its Farmland Protection Implementation

two had an agreement under which Dave would inherit a portion of the farm and purchase the remainder from the estate. While his uncle’s will was going through probate, Dave reached out to the Land Trust about protecting the farm.

After taking over management, Dave began upgrading the farm’s dairy operations with an eye toward long-term growth. He expanded the dairy herd from 30 to 100 cows and built a new, more-efficient milking parlor. Within a year of completing those upgrades, the farm increased its milk production tenfold.

In addition to the improvements

COVID-19 pandemic “put the icing on the cake,” said Dave. “It’s the worst it’s ever been.” So the FPIG grant approval came at a particularly critical time for the farm.

The conservation easement helps improve water quality and wildlife habitat through the designation of 100 acres of the farm as a Resource Protection Area. This includes forested buffers on the slopes of St. John’s Creek and steep hillsides adjacent to Queen Catharine Marsh Wildlife Management Area.

Dave indicated that the grant application process required some patience. Because the farm is partly located in the town of Hector and partly in the town of Montour Falls, it needed two town board approvals, as well as the Schuyler County Planning Board, before it even made it to the state level. Not to mention the surveys, appraisals, and soil inspections that were also part of the process.

But because of his love for the farm, Dave Barber remained focused and persistent, and he says it was all worth it in the end. “It’s good to know the farm will still be here, no matter what.”

—Jeff Tonole

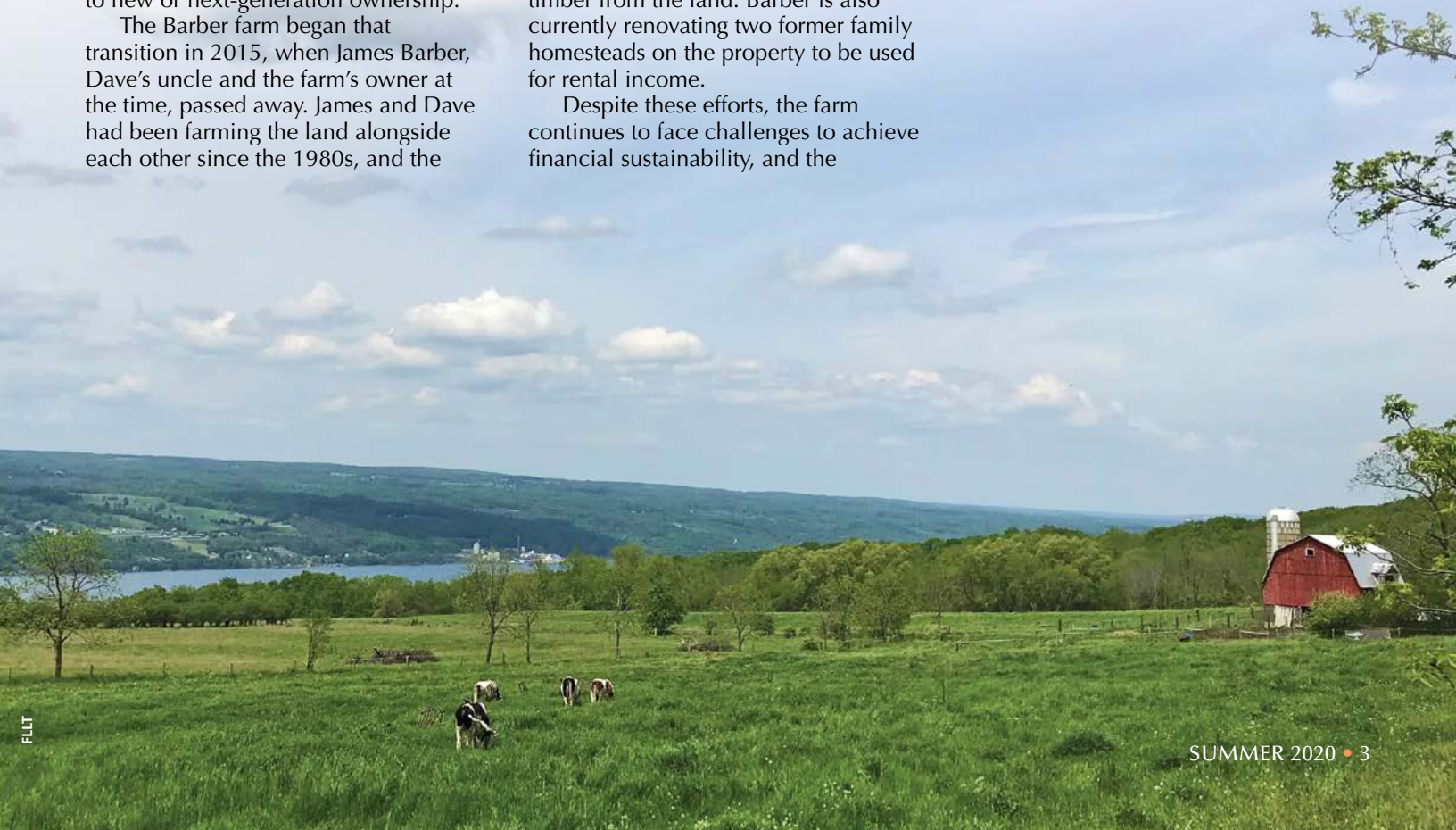
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Grants (FPIG) program. The grant establishes two perpetual conservation easements on the land—to be administered by the Land Trust—that prevents future development, while providing funds to help support the farm’s operations in a time of transition to new or next-generation ownership.

The Barber farm began that transition in 2015, when James Barber, Dave’s uncle and the farm’s owner at the time, passed away. James and Dave had been farming the land alongside each other since the 1980s, and the

to the dairy business, Dave took steps to further diversify the sources of income for the farm. He implemented a new rotational grazing scheme for his growing herd of beef cattle, sold hay and grain as feed to other local farmers, and selectively harvested some timber from the land. Barber is also currently renovating two former family homesteads on the property to be used for rental income.

Despite these efforts, the farm continues to face challenges to achieve financial sustainability, and the





View of the Bahar Nature Preserve and Skaneateles Lake. The new acquisition is located on the right side of the photo.

Expansion of Bahar Nature Preserve Adds to Protection of Skaneateles Lake

BILL HECHT

With funding from New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), the Land Trust recently added 1.5 acres to its Bahar Nature Preserve in Cayuga County. This property includes more than 200 feet of natural shoreline along Skaneateles Lake, with beautiful north-facing lake views and 100 feet of frontage along Bear Swamp Creek—Skaneateles Lake's largest tributary.

This recent acquisition expands the network of conserved lands that help maintain the high water quality of the lake—an important goal of the Land Trust's work and also of the NYSDEC. The state's Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) program funds projects that address water quality impairment or protect drinking water sources. This property is entirely forested, which provides an important riparian buffer for the lake. It also filters nutrients, traps sediment, and provides flood control during intense rain events, all of which protect the water quality of the lake and, in turn, the source of drinking water for the City of Syracuse.

The natural water quality protection that this and other properties offer means that the city has not needed to invest in

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a costly water treatment filtration plant and that the lake continues to serve as a scenic and recreational spot for locals and visitors.

With lakefront access, this parcel would have been highly desirable for residential development, but with the

help of WQIP funding, the property will be added to the Land Trust's Bahar Preserve and conserved forever.

The preserve includes a beautiful ridge trail hike that features dramatic scenery such as the 100-foot deep Bear Swamp Creek ravine. The trail on the preserve connects to a trail in the Carpenter Falls Unique Area (a NYS-owned conservation area), giving visitors a chance for a "lake to falls" hike.

—Alli Sribarra

Acquisition Adds to Public Lands

Less than 10 miles south of Ithaca lies the 7,337-acre Danby State Forest, a favorite recreation spot for area residents. Home to the popular 8-mile Abbott Loop, this tranquil forest is well-known for Thatcher's Pinnacles, a stunning lookout that offers sweeping views of the Cayuga Inlet Valley and the Land Trust's Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve.



Danby State Forest

In May, the Land Trust acquired 80 wooded acres off Eastman Hill Road in the town of Danby. The property borders Danby State Forest and is also adjacent to private property protected by a Land Trust conservation easement and two parcels of land previously acquired by the organization. Taken together, the Land Trust has protected more than 400 acres in this area.

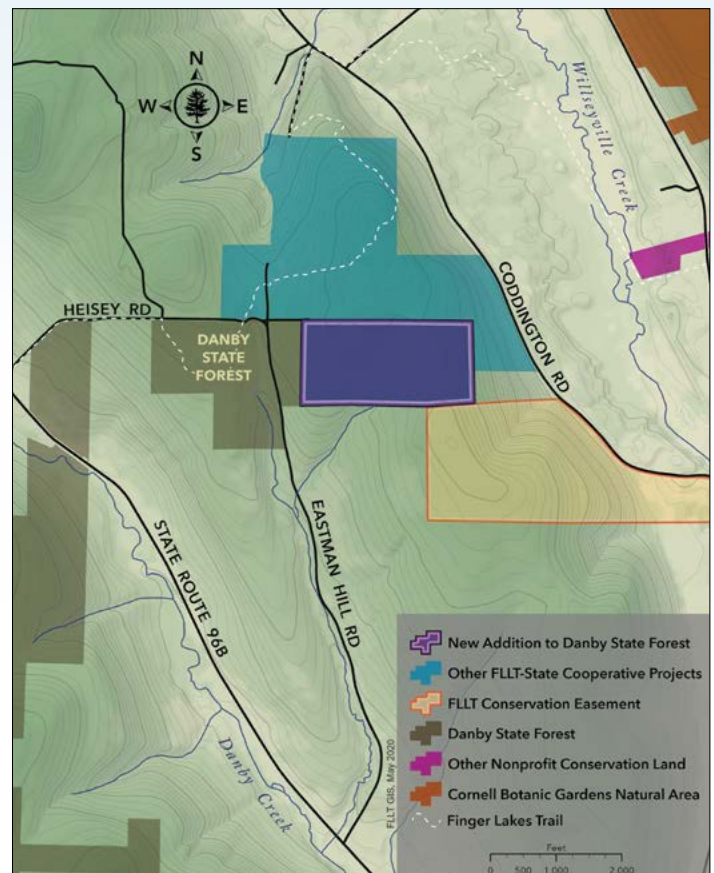
The property will be transferred to New York State as an addition to Danby State Forest when funds become available. In 2018, the Land Trust worked with the state to add 144 acres, including approximately one mile of the Finger Lakes Trail, to the state forest, and will soon transfer an additional 50-acre parcel here.

The new acquisition is located within a habitat linkage zone identified by New York State and includes headwater wetlands and seasonal streams that drain to Catatunk Creek, a classified trout stream and tributary of the Susquehanna River.

Protection of this parcel will also safeguard additional wildlife habitat 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 Emerald Necklace is also recognized as a priority project within New York State's Open Space Plan.

"Acquisition of this land adds to publicly accessible open space at a time when more and more people are getting out to visit our parks and conservation areas," says Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "We are right now seeing high level of public use of these lands across the entire Finger Lakes region."

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 Attorney Peter Miller of Ithaca, NY, for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.

Spring Bird Quest 2020

Every Memorial Day weekend since 2006,

volunteer Mark Chao has organized the Finger Lakes Land Trust Spring Bird Quest (SBQ), a celebration of our local birds and the Land Trust's role in protecting their vital habitats. This year, Mark conducted a modified SBQ, visiting Land Trust preserves alone and with his family. He documented his findings with notes and photos, which he presented on the Land Trust's website (www.fllt.org/spring-bird-quest-updates) and at a June 2 webinar. Here are some highlights...



The second half of May is probably the best time in our area to watch Neotropical songbirds, such as this **Blue-winged Warbler** at the **Genung Nature Preserve**, singing to attract mates and claim territories.

This fledgling **Common Raven** offered dazzling long views as it preened and played with a presumed sibling, all against the spectacular backdrop of Lick Brook gorge at the **Sweedler Preserve** in Ithaca.





This pair of **Common Mergansers** offered uncommonly close and picturesque views in **Fall Creek** at Campbell Meadow in Dryden.

MARK CHAO

Bald Eagles nest along Catatunk Creek near the **Logan Hill Nature Preserve** in Candor. We watched this eagle fly to a snag above the trail, pause and vocalize for a heart-stopping minute, then fly off with a long stick.



MARK CHAO



After nearly two solid weeks of unseasonable cold and slow migration, the weather finally turned on May 16. The south winds brought in many new arrivals, including this male **Blackburnian Warbler** at the **Genung Nature Preserve** in Freeville.

MARK CHAO



SUAN YONG

Suan Yong found this red-morph **Eastern Screech-Owl** “practically within touching distance” of the trail in Mary’s Woods at the **Goetchius Wetland Preserve** in Caroline.

Land Trust Acquires Property to Create a New Nature Preserve in Canandaigua

The Land Trust recently acquired 40 acres situated on rolling hills overlooking Canandaigua Lake's western shore. The property is located in the town of Canandaigua, just west of New York State Route 21, and is contiguous to a 50-acre parcel purchased by the organization last December. Together, the properties will become a new preserve—only minutes from downtown.

The land is noteworthy for its scenic views, diverse wildlife habitats, and location near the head of Barnes Gully. An existing network of hiking trails traverse the site and will provide easy access to open fields, oak-hickory woods, and a portion of the creek.

The organization is developing a long-term management plan that will guide public access improvements, building on the existing trail system and scenic overlooks. The site will open to the public sometime in 2021. The Land Trust also intends to work with the Town of Canandaigua on the future possibility of linking this conservation area to nearby Onanda and McJannett parks.

In addition to the 90 acres, the Land Trust negotiated contracts to conserve just over 8 adjacent acres with perpetual conservation easements that will buffer the preserve. Conservation easements are legal agreements that limit future development while allowing land to remain in private ownership and on the tax rolls.



The Land Trust is actively fundraising to cover the purchase of these lands, open the new preserve to the public, and steward the lands forever. Learn more about the project and watch a beautiful aerial video highlighting the property, at fllt.org/vista. To make a gift in support of this project, please contact Senior

Director Kelly Makosch at (607) 275-9487 or kellymakosch@fllt.org.

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

Land Trust Grant Program Benefits Rochester Youth

In 2015, the Land Trust received a 200-acre property in northern Steuben County from an anonymous donor with the understanding that the property would be sold subject to a conservation easement. The donor requested that some of the proceeds generated from the sale benefit inner-city Rochester youth by fostering their connection with nature.

Land Trust staff reached out to Rochester area non-profits and key stakeholders over the course of several years before implementing a grant program. Towards the end of 2019, a request for proposals (RFP) was issued and eleven worthy applications were received. After careful deliberation, a total of \$58,584 was awarded to six organizations:

Girl Scouts of Western New York (awarded \$15,000): The mission of GSWNY is to build girls of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place. This grant will be used to support *Creating Women Leaders of Tomorrow: A Program of Girl Scouts Camp Piperwood*. Specifically, these funds will help GSWNY replenish their inventory of necessary outdoor equipment, removing a significant barrier that often impacts low-income youth from accessing and enjoying the outdoors.



Seneca Park Zoo Society (awarded \$14,984): The Seneca Park Zoo is a 20-acre zoo located in Rochester. This grant will support the SPZS's Urban Ecologist Workforce Development Program, which aims to foster an environment in which youth can learn how to be advocates for the environment while exploring conservation-related career options.

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VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Jacqueline Stuhmiller

The Land Trust relies on a dedicated group of over 200 volunteers to help us protect the lands and waters of the Finger Lakes region. Every year, we recognize one of these special individuals for their significant contributions of time and talent.

Jacqueline Stuhmiller has been volunteering with the Land Trust since 2005. Her varied and insightful writings can be found in “A Closer Look,” the recurring natural history piece found among the pages of *The Land Steward*, including this issue.

A medievalist by profession and training, Jacqueline holds a B. A. in biology and her current research melds the two: she studies the ways that humans interacted with animals in the Middle Ages. Steeped in academic inquiry and armed with an interest in conservation, her writing often weaves together the intricate study of animals and plants with concurrent details of human history.

She came to her first editorial meeting while teaching at Cornell University and was assigned an article on the spotted salamander. Since then, she has written about everything from mammals, birds, and insects to trees, plants, and natural phenomena. Part of what makes Jacqueline’s commitment so appreciated by the Land Trust is that she continues to write “A Closer Look” articles from her home in Milwaukee, where she holds a teaching position at the



University of Wisconsin.

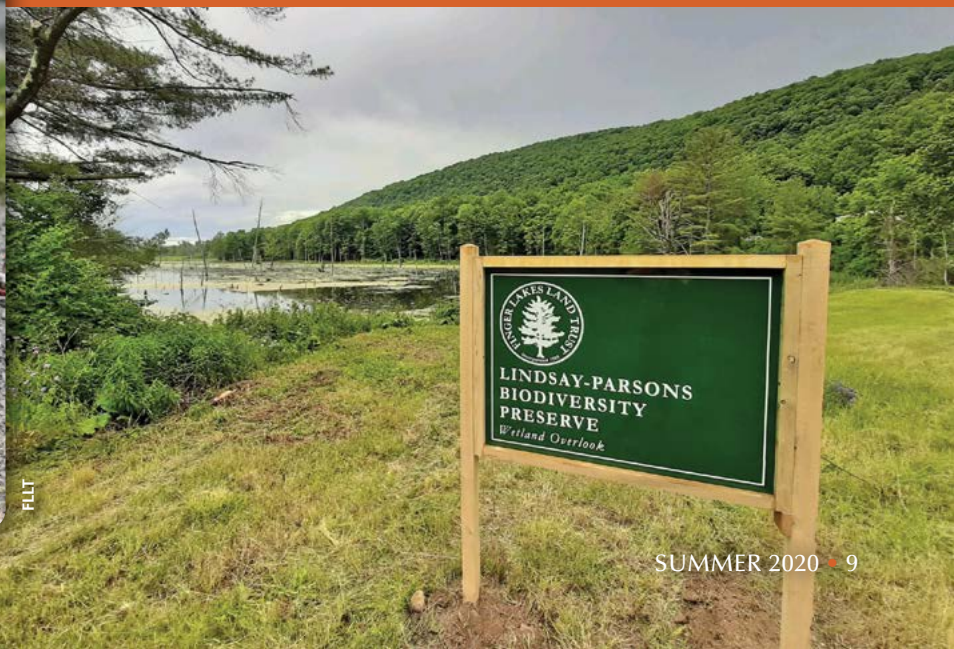
“I have moved around a lot, but I always have a deep affection for the Finger Lakes, where I lived for twelve years,” Jacqueline said. “I still miss the landscape. I can see that the FLLT is making material progress in preserving land, and I’ve reported on some of that progress. I know how hard everyone works, and how much they believe in the mission of the organization, and how much they are doing to create change. I barely do anything, and yet I still feel I’m part of a great team. I am assigned a subject that is always interesting, and then I get to tackle it in any way that I want. I get to read scientific papers and interview scientists, and distill everything down into a neat little aesthetically pleasing package. I can’t think of a better situation.”

We hope to continue to offer many more years of Jacqueline’s excellent writings on the natural history of the Finger Lakes region. Contributions such as hers help to increase awareness of the complexities of the natural world, highlighting the importance of conservation. Thank you, Jacqueline, for your commitment to the Land Trust!



THE WETLAND OVERLOOK AT THE LINDSAY-PARSONS BIODIVERSITY PRESERVE...

in West Danby, Tompkins County, has a new bench—perfect for wildlife observation. The wetlands are home to river otters, Great Blue Herons, Kingfishers, and many other creatures. The overlook can be found on Sylvan Lane next to the West Danby Firehouse. Directions and more info about the preserve can be found at fllt.org/lindsay.



Land Trust Grant Program Benefits Rochester Youth

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Montezuma Audubon Center (awarded \$13,600): The Montezuma Audubon Center protects birds and habitat using science, advocacy, education, and conservation. This grant will help the Montezuma Audubon Center expand its well-established conservation program, *For the Birds!*, to serve Rochester City School District students. *For the Birds!* is a place-based environmental education program that promotes awareness and appreciation of nature through the study of birds.

Center for Youth (awarded \$7,500): The Center for Youth works with children to create a more equitable community by creating opportunities, removing barriers, and promoting social justice. These funds will support their EarthWorks program, which utilizes neighborhood parks, school gardens, and local greenspaces for the academic, social, and emotional growth of urban youth.

Genesee Land Trust (awarded \$5,000): The Genesee Land Trust has protected over 6,000 acres in the greater Rochester area. These funds will support their Environmental Ambassadors program, which offers urban youth paid employment while gaining a deeper connection with nature. More specifically, this grant will help expand this program to include Leaders-in-Training, which are youth who already have Environmental Ambassadors experience but are looking for more responsibility, leadership training, and community building.

Inclusive Woods & Us (awarded \$2,500): Inclusive Woods & Us aims to increase equitable access to the outdoors for children, families, and communities of color from lower socioeconomic areas of Rochester as a way to improve the physical, mental, and spiritual health and academic performance of vulnerable populations. This grant will be used to expand the capacity of their day hike program, which serves inner city Rochester youth and their families.

The Land Trust is pleased to be able to offer funding for inner-city Rochester youth, who might not otherwise receive the opportunity to engage in exploration of the natural world. The Land Trust believes these grantee organizations are making a significant impact on their communities, and we wish them the best of luck in their future endeavors.

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memory

Tree Talk

We have always heard voices in the whispering of the wind through branches, and we have always imagined that trees are talking to, or about, us.

From the dendromancy of the Celts to the bodhi tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment, we imagine that trees, particularly large and old ones, must have great wisdom. Science and mythology are starting to converge as we are discovering that trees do talk, though unfortunately not about us.

Humans have a very poor sense of smell, and perhaps that's part of the reason why it took us so long to realize what was happening right beneath our noses. All plants, it turns out, communicate with each other using volatile organic compounds that often smell pleasant to us: botanical essential oils are, quite literally, messages in bottles. We don't know if trees share news about happy events, but they regularly warn each other about the imminent dangers of pests, herbivores, and drought. When the Southern Pine Beetle, now widespread in New York State, bores into a conifer, the insect releases aggregation pheromones that attract others of its kind to the feast. In response, the tree releases its own pheromones that both warn other trees of the threat and attract insect predators. The trees that receive this message increase their own production of sap so that invading insects are flushed out of their tunnels. The fresh smell of the woods is, at least in part, the smell of arboreal distress calls. Interestingly, humans intercept these messages without even realizing it: volatile organic compounds also stimulate the human immune system, which is why Japanese doctors prescribe "forest bathing" for their patients.

As esoteric as it may seem, the olfactory tree talk aboveground is still easier for us to understand than the conversations below the forest floor. This chatter takes place through the mycorrhizal network, a vast biological system comprised of the interconnections between the roots of vascular plants (such as trees, ferns, and grasses) and the "roots" or mycelia of certain mushrooms, including boletes, chanterelles, and puffballs. This gossamer lattice, which connects almost everything growing in the forest, has often been compared to the neurons in a brain or the linkages of the internet—some people have even dubbed it the "Wood Wide Web." It is so extensive that a teaspoon of healthy soil contains miles of fungal filaments, and so delicate that it can be permanently destroyed when the ground is compacted by heavy machinery.

Fungi do not photosynthesize and must absorb nutrients from their surroundings; trees, on the other hand, often need more nutrients than they can absorb by themselves. The mycorrhizal network allows seamless cooperation

between the two. Trees send excess sugar to the fungi and the fungi, which easily absorb nutrients through the vast surface area of their mycelia, send water and minerals back to the trees. The mutualism between vascular plants and fungi is not only overwhelmingly common worldwide but absolutely critical to the health of forests: trees that grow in soil that is too damaged to support fungi will wither and die. This partnership is unbelievably ancient; in fact, it



CHRIS RAY

might have originally helped plants colonize dry land 400 million years ago.

The mycorrhizal network isn't just a conduit for nutrients, however. Trees use the fungal crosslinks like subterranean telegraph lines, sending private communications to each other by way of chemical, hormonal, and electrical messages. Struggling saplings send out maydays; in response, large, established "mother" trees share resources with them. If one is suffering from drought or disease, it warns the others so that the forest can prepare itself for the coming fight. These communications move with lightning speed (if we think in terms of tree time): within a few hours, the neighbors have already heard the news.

We often imagine that trees compete with each other for limited resources in the same way that humans do. However, the forest is a progressive place and although trees tend to favor their kin, they also provide help to unrelated trees and even trees of different species. Everything thrives when the forest floor is shaded by a healthy canopy and when pests are under control. The trees, it turns out, still know many things that we do not.

—Jacqueline Stuhmiller

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cancelled. Please visit fllt.org/events for
future event announcements.*

MATT CHAMPLIN