



The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes region Vol. 32, No. 1 • Winter 2019-20

Lead Gift from Town of Canandaigua Launches Campaign for New Preserve

With a \$100,000 commitment from the Canandaigua Town Board, the Land Trust is launching a \$650,000 fundraising campaign to establish a new nature preserve featuring stunning views of the lake and surrounding hillsides.

Spanning approximately 100 acres, the scenic property is located just west of State Route 21 and north of Bristol Harbor Resort. It features mature oak-hickory woodlands as well as hillside meadows and frontage on Barnes Gully.

The property has been managed as a private conservation area in recent years and already features two miles of maintained trails. A prominent ridge on the property features several vista points overlooking the meadows and Canandaigua Lake, with distant views of the Lake Ontario Plain.

Over the course of the last decade, the Land Trust worked with the two owners of this site to develop a conservation plan that would ensure the future of this special place while meeting their financial needs. The Land Trust will acquire the majority of the land outright and two conservation easements will secure adjacent parcels that provide important buffer. These transactions should be completed by the spring.

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BILL HECHT

Partnership Expands State Forest and Emerald Necklace East of Ithaca

A quick look at any map of public lands in our region reveals a checkerboard ownership pattern which dates back to the early 20th century when some farms, abandoned during the Great Depression, reverted to public ownership. The result was often public land with strange, irregular boundaries that, in some places, looked more like swiss cheese than large, contiguous blocks of habitat. The properties that are still in private ownership but surrounded by public lands are referred to as inholdings. Since inholdings can limit public access and resource management options and increase management costs, acquiring them from willing sellers is a priority of the New York State Open Space Plan.

In 2018, a landowner of one of the largest inholdings in our region reached out to the Land Trust because she was interested in selling her land as an addition to the forest. The 140-acre parcel is almost entirely surrounded by Robinson Hollow State

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SCOTT LEVINE

As the Land Trust completes its 30th year, it is a good time to both celebrate three decades of conservation accomplishments and look to the future. I have been contemplating how the Land Trust might be different on its 60th anniversary.

First, if we are going to achieve our mission of ensuring scenic vistas, local foods, clean water and wild places for everyone, we are going to need to protect a lot more land. So, for starters, how about adding a zero to our current tally—taking the footprint of our conservation work from 24,000 to 240,000 acres? To do so will call for the commitment of a lot of additional resources, but given what is at stake, it is the right thing to do.

Threats such as climate change and invasive species require that we create contiguous networks of conserved land, connecting isolated nature preserves and easement properties. Plants and animals need the ability to move through our fragmented landscapes. We are making good progress at places like Ithaca’s Emerald Necklace, but we still have a long way to go.

To address toxic algae, we need to fundamentally change our relationship with water. In particular, we have to restore streams and wetlands along with adjacent forests that filter runoff. These actions will reduce the runoff of phosphorous and nitrogen to our lakes.

To take care of all the land we are planning

to conserve, we will also need to greatly expand our stewardship program—adding both staff and volunteers to effectively manage our lands, monitor our conservation easements, and implement habitat management projects.

We also need to engage our children to connect them with nature. Every child in our region needs to spend more time turning over rocks in a stream and running through the woods. If they don’t share our passion for the outdoors, our work will not stand the test of time.

This is a tall order and the Land Trust will need to continue to grow and gain additional resources if we are to meet the challenge. The stakes are high but so is our collective commitment to our region.

Andrew Zepp
Executive Director, Finger Lakes Land Trust

Lead Gift from Town of Canandaigua Launches Campaign for New Preserve

continued from cover

Once the land is acquired, the Land Trust will complete a detailed inventory and assessment of the site before developing a long-term plan to guide future management. Creating appropriate public access to the property will be a key focus of the plan as well as the continued maintenance of meadow habitat and associated scenic views.

The Land Trust is also working on the protection of additional land in this area as part of an effort to conserve lands bordering Barnes Gully and ultimately secure a wildlife corridor that links this new preserve with the Town of Canandaigua’s Onanda Park.

The fundraising campaign goal includes funds to cover costs associated with purchasing the land and completing two adjacent buffer easements, creating public access, and adding \$200,000 to the Land Trust’s Stewardship Fund to provide for future management.

If you would like to make a contribution to this campaign, or would like to learn more, please contact Director of Development and Communications Kelly Makosch at (607) 275-9487 or kellymakosch@flit.org.

Restoration Project Benefits Water Quality & Wildlife Habitat



Owego Creek is recognized as one of the region's premiere trout streams and its headwaters rise from the Land Trust's Goetchius Wetland Preserve—an area with rich bird and wildlife habitat. Located just east of Ithaca, this area is part of the growing Emerald Necklace, a priority project in New York State's Open Space Plan and a focus area for the Land Trust.

In 2019, the Land Trust added a key 20-acre parcel to the preserve that features 3,000 feet of frontage along the West Branch of Owego Creek. Much of this land was previously used as a pasture for livestock by the former owner. To reestablish a streamside forest and restore wetlands, the Land Trust partnered with the Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC) to control non-native invasive species like Japanese knotweed and to plant more than 2,000 native tree and shrub seedlings.

More than a dozen different species were planted, including trees such as

sycamore, basswood, and red maple and shrubs such as arrowwood, buttonbush, and spicebush. To enhance their survival and to reduce deer browse, each seedling was planted in an individual tree tube that will be removed after several years of growth. Funding for USC's Buffer Program was provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

When complete, the newly planted trees and shrubs will act as a buffer, reducing runoff while also creating new habitat for birds and other wildlife. "This project is a huge win for water and habitat quality here," says Lydia Brinkley,

Buffer Coordinator for the Upper Susquehanna Coalition. "Livestock is out of the wetland and stream, and the enhanced riparian and wetland areas will provide complexity for aquatic and terrestrial organisms that will be protected in perpetuity!"

During the next few years, Land Trust staff and volunteers will monitor the plantings on a periodic basis. They are easily visible from Flatiron Road, a local byway in the town of Caroline that borders the preserve and runs north from State Route 79 toward Hammond Hill State Forest.



Tree planting in action at the Goetchius Wetland Preserve in Tompkins County

LYDIA BRINKLEY

Woodlands Adjacent to Shindagin Hollow State Forest Protected

Through a new conservation easement, the Land Trust has joined Mr. Creighton Brown in protecting 63 acres of forested land adjacent to Shindagin Hollow State Forest in Caroline, Tompkins County.

The easement property is part of a larger tract that has long belonged to the family of Mr. Brown, who helped to plant conifers that have since grown tall there. Having inherited the land, Mr. Brown resolved to ensure that it will continue to be cherished and protected in its natural state in perpetuity. He contacted the Land Trust to explore options and ultimately, decided to grant the conservation easement to the Land Trust. Mr. Brown also conveyed another portion of the family property to the State of New York as an addition to Shindagin Hollow State Forest.

The easement property lies along Downey Road in the town of Caroline, adjacent to and visible from Shindagin Hollow State Forest. The entire tract is forested, with diverse native trees, including both hardwoods and conifers across a range of age classes. Ephemeral streams form on this land and flow into Willseyville Creek, which in turn joins Catatonk Creek, connecting ultimately to the Susquehanna River and Chesapeake Bay.

Almost all of the property has soils classified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as highly erodible or potentially highly erodible. The land also has about three acres of very steep slopes. The soils and terrain leave the land vulnerable to extreme stormwater runoff and erosion if trees were removed or if the ground were disturbed. Protecting this land

therefore has direct implications for water quality for multiple municipalities, as well as riparian and estuarine ecosystems across a vast stretch of the mid-Atlantic region.

The property connects not only to the state forest but also to another tract already subject to an easement held by the Land Trust. Thus, the new easement not only protects Mr. Brown's property, but magnifies the conservation value of neighboring lands by creating broader contiguous habitat for wildlife and also providing a buffer from development. More broadly, all these properties are part of the Emerald Necklace, an ever-expanding greenbelt around Ithaca and the southern Cayuga Lake area.

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.

—Mark Chao

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Dan Hoffman of Ithaca, NY, for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.

Land Gifts Expand Conservation While Providing Funds

In 2011, Tompkins County residents Cornelia Farnum and Jack Booker donated a conservation easement on their 97-acre property in the town of Caroline.

Eight years later, they decided to give their land, including the home they shared for over 20 years, to the Land Trust. The property includes a steeply sloping forest with a cascading creek, and a beautiful 19th century Greek Revival home surrounded by a diverse assembly of gardens protected by deer fencing.

“The Land Trust is so appreciative of Nelly and Jack for their clear commitment to land conservation,” said Land Trust Director of Conservation Max Heitner. “They have been easement donors, enthusiastic volunteers, and now have shown tremendous generosity by donating their long-time home. This organization only goes as far as people like Nelly and Jack take it.”

The Farnum-Booker property lies within the Land Trust’s Emerald Necklace focus area and Tompkins County’s Caroline Pinnacles Unique Natural Area. The property is also 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. The house and property will be sold subject to a conservation easement.

In late 2019, the Land Trust was also delighted to receive a donation of a 93-acre property from the Estate of Katherine Sutphin in the town of Groton, Tompkins County. Upon Katherine’s passing, a friend wrote, “Katie was a strong-willed woman who wasn’t afraid to blaze her own trail. Her kindness and compassion were legendary. She never turned her back on those in need. The world will miss her—as will I.”


The property features productive agricultural fields, mature woodlands and frontage on a tributary and main stem of the Owasco Inlet. The inlet is a priority resource to protect since its health impacts the water quality of Owasco Lake. The property will

be sold to a private buyer but will be permanently protected with a conservation easement that will limit development to a single home, prohibit subdivision, and allow for traditional agricultural and forestry practices.

Both of these generous donations were given to the Land Trust with the clear understanding that each would be sold subject to a conservation easement and that proceeds will fund future conservation efforts. Land gifts like these are an important conservation tool for the Land Trust and we’re forever grateful to our donors.

For more information on these projects, please call the Land Trust office at (607) 275-9487.

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 the Farnum and Booker project.



A tributary to the Owasco Inlet on the land gift from the Estate of Katherine Sutphin

SCENES

from Around Our Region...

BILL BANASZEWSKI



Keuka Lake, where the Land Trust recently protected a half mile of frontage on Big Gully Creek in the town of Jerusalem, Yates County



MATT CHAMPLIN

An aerial view of frozen Carpenter Falls Unique Area, Cayuga County, where the Land Trust owns and manages the 51-acre Bahar Nature Preserve

Former Land Trust President Jim Kersting led a hike at the Wesley Hill Nature Preserve, Ontario County, in celebration of our 30th Anniversary and the preserve's 20th Anniversary.



FLIT

BILL BANASZEWSKI



Female Cardinal in winter

Over 30 people joined us at the Sweedler Preserve at Lick Brook, Tompkins County, for the last hike in our 2019 30th Anniversary hike series.



RICK LIGHTBODY

Additional Land in Honeoye Lake Watershed Protected

In the summer of 2019, the Land Trust purchased two adjacent parcels totaling 42 acres at the south end of Honeoye Lake in the towns of Richmond and Canadice. Located between the Honeoye Inlet Wildlife Management Area (HIWMA) and a large tract of land secured by The Nature Conservancy, these two properties 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.



In October, the Land Trust acquired an additional 15.5-acre property in Canadice with significant frontage on West Lake Road. Directly adjacent to HIWMA, the parcel features a mix of fields and woodlands, buffers state-owned wetlands, and provides scenic views of the lake and surrounding hillsides.

All three properties will ultimately be transferred to the state as additions to the wildlife management area, increasing public access opportunities. Protection of these lands will also help ensure water quality within Honeoye Lake and maintain the land's role in filtering runoff.

This complex of protected lands is 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.

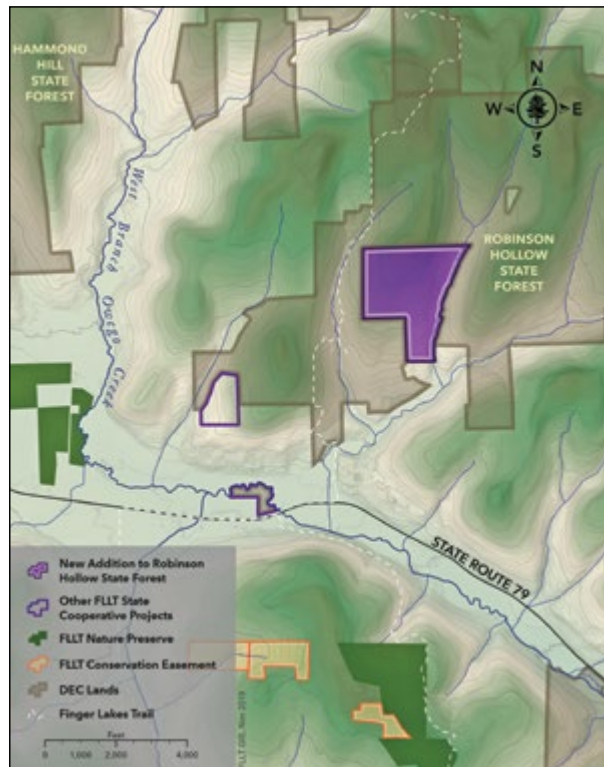
The parcels were purchased with interim funding from the Land Trust's "Opportunity Fund." This internal loan fund supports timely acquisitions on projects where temporary funding is critical. Proceeds from the sale of these parcels to the state will roll back into the fund to support future conservation projects.

Partnership Expands State Forest and Emerald Necklace East of Ithaca *continued from cover*

Forest in Tioga County. Given its size, shape, location, and its undeveloped character, it was immediately clear that this would be an ideal opportunity to partner with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The Land Trust quickly secured a contract with the landowner and an agreement from New York State that the property would transfer to state ownership when public funding is made available.

When land moves from private to public ownership, the Land Trust is always mindful of the potential impact this may have on local taxes. The organization contacted the Richmond Town Supervisor for his input and he supported this particular acquisition because it would prevent rural sprawl (which could drive up the cost of public services in this area) and because the impact to the town's bottom line would be largely offset by payments in lieu of taxes by the state.

Though the dairy barn that once stood on the property burned down decades ago, the habitat on the property echoes its agricultural past. Open fields near the center of the property, once used to pasture cows or grow crops, have been maintained



as open habitat to benefit wildlife. Steep slopes not suitable for farming occupy the western and eastern edges of the property. The hotter, drier western facing slopes are home to oak and pine, while eastern facing slopes support maple, ash and cherry. An observant visitor will notice the occasional tree stump, forest road, or cluster of planted conifers—again, echoes of past land use. With the passage of time, it is likely that the aspen and white pine growing on the field fringes will continue their march to the center of the property and woodland will once again carpet the land.

Until then, from the meadows at the crest of the hill, one can enjoy the views south across the valley of the West Branch of Owego Creek toward another forested side slope occupied by the Land Trust's newly established Summerland Farm Preserve, yet another stitch in the fabric of the Emerald Necklace.

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Don Crittenden of the law firm Harris Beach in Ithaca, NY, for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.

Partnership Expands Ithaca's West Hill Wildway

Overlooking the city of Ithaca, with a surprising view of the iconic waterfall at Buttermilk Falls State Park, lies the site of a former working farm once operated by the Babcock family. During its heyday in 1930s and 40s, the farm was a center of innovation that helped to create new methods for farming that benefitted many in the agricultural community during the Great Depression.

Many years later, present-day members of the Babcock family placed the last portions of the property on the market and, working in partnership with the Town of Ithaca, the Land Trust was able to purchase 73 acres in 2017. Since the town already owns three properties in the vicinity totaling 82 acres—Marcia's Woods Preserve, Gerda Knechtman's Glen Preserve, and Dress Woods Preserve—the two parties formed an agreement to conserve the land in partnership.

Located on Ithaca's West Hill, this latest acquisition features mature hardwood forest as well as areas of brush and a remnant meadow that provides scenic views of downtown Ithaca, Buttermilk Falls, and the Cayuga Inlet Valley. Approximately half of the property was transferred to the town in 2018. The second half followed in December 2019, both as additions to the town's conservation holdings.

These additions expand the West Hill Wildway—an emerging greenbelt located within walking distance of downtown Ithaca that extends from Robert Treman State Park to Bundy Road—and links Town of Ithaca conservation land with the Cornell Botanic Gardens' Coy Glen Natural Area. Conservation lands within the wildway also include the YMCA's environmental education facility on State Route 79, Land Trust conservation easements on Sheffield Farm, and portions of EcoVillage.

To date, the Land Trust has worked with partners to conserve approximately 600 acres within the wildway. Expansion of this green corridor safeguards water quality within the Cayuga Lake watershed, provides additional recreation opportunities, and contributes to uninterrupted wildlife habitat. As more lands are added, this beautiful rural landscape filled with fields, forests, and gorges will be conserved forever.

Grants from Tompkins County Support Protection Projects

The Tompkins County Legislature recently awarded the Land Trust three grants totaling \$132,500 from the county's Natural Infrastructure Capital Program.

The funds support the Land Trust's recent acquisition of Summerland Farm Preserve within the Emerald Necklace, a pending shoreline acquisition in the town of Lansing, and Creighton Brown's conservation easement donation highlighted in this issue of *The Land Steward*.

The Land Trust is committed to raising additional funds to match the county's contribution. The Natural Infrastructure Capital Program was created to support land and water conservation projects that advance goals set forth in the county's comprehensive plan.

These grants are the latest in a series that the county has made in support of Land Trust projects. "We received our first acquisition grant from the county more than a decade ago," recalls Executive Director Andy Zepp. "We're grateful for their support, which has been invaluable for leveraging additional resources for these projects."

The Natural Infrastructure Capital Program was created to support land and water conservation projects that advance goals set forth in the county's comprehensive plan.

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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

Inside the Goldenrod Gall

Wherever there's sunshine in our region—open fields, woodland edges, roadsides, or even untended urban lots—you are likely to find goldenrod, especially of the genus *Solidago*. If you've looked closely, you may have wondered about the round growths on many goldenrod stems. What are they? Why are they there? Is the plant sick? What's inside?

The round stem-balls are called galls.

They are the plant's response to the parasitic goldenrod gall fly, *Eurosta solidaginis*. The female fly lays eggs at the base of goldenrod flower buds. Upon hatching, larvae eat into the stem, whereupon they secrete chemical compounds that trigger the plant's meristem cells to form the gall. The gall grows around the larva, forming a hard outer layer and a softer fibrous interior. The larva eats the inner tissue and grows, but the plant is not harmed. The fly will have no other food throughout its whole life cycle, as adults lack mouthparts and do not eat at all.

In late fall, the larva chews a tunnel right up to the outer margin of the gall, but not all the way through. Then the larva enters diapause, waiting out the winter. The gall provides negligible thermal insulation, but the larva can still survive temperatures as low as -40 degrees Celsius. It freezes solid, but produces enough cryoprotective chemicals (glycerol, sorbitol, and trehalose) that vital components remain liquid within cells.

Then as the weather warms in spring, the larva pupates. The adult emerges in May or early June via the tunnel that it excavated the previous fall, pushing through the thin epidermal cap left at the opening. The fly now has only about two weeks to live, barely enough time to find a mate and start the life cycle anew. Capable only of weak flight, the fly never strays far from the goldenrod patch where it began life as an egg the previous year.

Researchers led by Warren Abrahamson at Bucknell University have determined that various races of *Eurosta solidaginis* show distinct preferences for particular goldenrod host species (*Solidago canadensis*, *S. altissima*, and *S. gigantea*). The female fly seeks out the preferred goldenrod species using chemical receptors on her feet, antennae, and even ovipositor. This choosiness means that within a single field or even in neighboring clusters of goldenrod plants, *Eurosta solidaginis* races may be reproductively isolated from each other. Such isolation raises the intriguing possibility that these races are already progressing toward speciation, right next to each other and



Goldenrod Gall
(*Eurosta solidaginis*)

GOLDENROD GALL (EUROSTA SOLIDAGINIS), RYAN HODNETT, CC BY-SA 4.0

practically right before our eyes.

As cozy and nourishing as it might seem for a larva, a gall does have its vulnerabilities. During summer, a parasitoid wasp called *Eurytoma gigantea* seeks out galls. The female wasp inserts her ovipositor through the gall's outer wall, laying an egg in the chamber that already holds the gall fly's larva. Upon hatching, the wasp larva devours the fly larva, then consumes gall tissue until it pupates.

Then a different threat to gall flies arises in fall and winter, as Downy Woodpeckers and Black-capped Chickadees peck open the galls to get at the fattened larvae inside.

In studying the relationships among flies, wasps, birds, and goldenrod, Abrahamson and colleagues have discovered still more fascinating dynamics. Where *Eurytoma* wasps are common, the fly larvae survive much better in large galls, whose walls are more difficult for the wasp's ovipositor to penetrate. Conversely, Downy Woodpeckers favor large galls, perhaps because they are more likely to contain a fly larva than a wasp larva, which is smaller and less nutritionally rewarding. The relative abundance of the wasps and woodpeckers may therefore define the direction of selection pressure for what sizes of galls are best for flies. More wasps mean that flies are more successful if they induce large galls. More woodpeckers means that flies do better if they induce small galls. Both wasps and woodpeckers together may create a stabilizing effect, in which natural selection most favors the flies that induce intermediate-sized galls.

Thus, the odd little balls that we see on goldenrod tell us about much more than just a single connection between an insect and a plant. They reveal a complex web of relationships among goldenrod, flies, wasps, and birds, bridging three trophic levels and spanning various levels of space and time. With patient scientific inquiry, our simple initial questions have led to wider answers, and eventually to profound interdisciplinary insights into anatomy, physiology, behavior, ecology, and indeed evolution itself.

—Mark Chao

Finger Lakes Land Trust

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