



AFOOT IN THE FIELD

A Resource for Conservation Landowners in the Finger Lakes Region

Summer 2020

Vol. 11 Issue 2

This summer we bid farewell to Hannah George, who many of you got to know during her three-year service as the FLLT's Conservation Easement Steward. Hannah finished her work with us in mid-June. We have the pleasure of welcoming Annabel Roberts-McMichael to our staff as her successor. Annabel is getting to know more properties and landowners each week. Hopefully you will all get to know her in the coming year.

The half-year or so that has gone by since the last issue of *Afoot in the Field* has been like no other. Economies, societies, and daily life have all been dramatically disrupted by the global pandemic. The loss of lives and health impacts are tragic. The suspension of livelihoods, social activities, and travel has had profound costs.

There are also silver linings that have emerged - families are spending more time together, and people have had a chance to do things they had put off for years. With humans hunkered down, wildlife populations and activity have expanded in many places around the globe, in some instances dramatically. As spring turned into summer, people began spending much more time outside exercising and enjoying nature.

Indeed, the Finger Lakes Land Trust has seen a huge spike in visitation to our nature preserves. The normal need to shake off cabin fever was made more acute by the pandemic. So this is an opportune time to point out a certain subset of FLLT conservation easement properties. Most properties subject to conservation easements or deed restrictions are privately owned and not open to the public. However, several easements are on properties that are owned and managed by county or town governments, or other non-profit organizations for public use. We are highlighting a few of these places in this issue.

For more ideas on places to hike and paddle, go to:

www.gofingerlakes.org
Have fun out there!
(while social distancing
of course...)

Chris Olney
Director of Stewardship



Nature Preserve - Conservation Easement Partnerships



Photo: FLLT

Not all conservation easement properties are privately owned - some easements ensure that public lands are maintained in a natural state for the benefit of the greater community. Four conservation easements and five deed restrictions held by the FLLT are on public preserves owned and operated by municipalities or other nonprofit organizations.

Hiawatha Island in Owego has a rich history as the largest island in New York State's stretch of the Susquehanna River. In 1993, a community group known as Owego Marketplace protected the island from development with a conservation easement granted to the Finger Lakes Land Trust. In addition to protecting wildlife habitat, the conservation easement ensures "that the public will forever be permitted regular access to the property, free of charge." Today, the island hosts nesting bald eagles, and is part of the nonprofit Waterman Conservation Education Center's wildlife refuge system.



Photo: Bill Hecht

The Bock-Harvey Forest Preserve in the town of Enfield is owned by the Finger Lakes Trail Conference (FLTC), protected by a Finger Lakes Land Trust conservation easement, and managed by the Cayuga Trails Club (CTC).

This unique partnership started in 2012 when the Bock family approached the Land Trust to help them protect their property.

Because of its importance for hikers and wildlife habitat connectivity, the FLLT engaged the FLTC and CTC to work together.



Photo: Cynthia Massicci



Photo: Hannah George

Above: Open meadow paths lead to old maple forest and the Finger Lakes Trail at the Bock-Harvey Preserve.

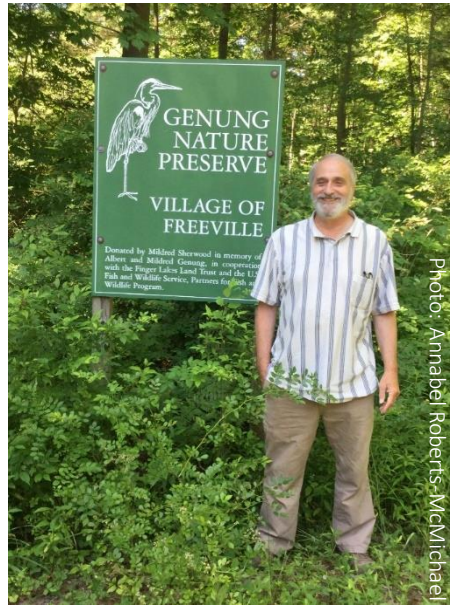
Left: Volunteer Steward Richard Bloss leans on a tree beside a Kashong Conservation Area pond in the fall.

Another example is the Kashong Conservation Area in Geneva, NY. This 84-acre nature preserve was originally owned and managed by Polly Spedding and her husband. In 2008, Polly and her children donated the property to the FLLT, with the understanding it would be conveyed to the Town of Geneva subject to a conservation restriction. The town honored the Speddings' wish to create a public park for education and quiet recreation, and the FLLT monitors the park to ensure it is conserved for public use forever.

Whether conserved lands are private or public, both play an important role in protecting habitat and improving the well-being of people.

LANDOWNER PROFILE: David Fogel

David Fogel is the Mayor of the Village of Freeville, which owns the 53-acre Genung Preserve. The property was originally donated to the Finger Lakes Land Trust and then, with prior agreement of the donor and the village, was donated to the village subject to a conservation easement.



FLLT: How did the Genung Preserve come to be?

DF: You might never guess it, but the property was a working dairy farm just 65 years ago; the rolling pastureland was all but devoid of trees. The farm was established in the late 1800s by Freeville's first family doctor, Homer Genung, a beloved community figure. For many decades, the farm's operation was overseen by farm managers for Dr. Genung and his son Albert Genung, a government agricultural economist who worked in Washington, D.C. After her own career in federal service in Washington ended in the 1970s, Albert's daughter Millie Sherwood moved back to the family home in Freeville. In 2005, Millie donated the now forested 53-acre Genung farm to the Finger Lakes Land Trust in memory of her parents. In 2007 the FLLT transferred the land to the Village of Freeville, subject to a conservation easement. That July, the newly named Genung Nature Preserve was dedicated.

FLLT: With one mile of undeveloped frontage on Fall Creek, wetlands, and forest habitat, the preserve provides important protections for nature. How does the Genung Preserve benefit the people of Freeville?

Since its public opening, the preserve has reigned as the crown jewel of our recreational assets. With the recent addition of the lower trail along Fall Creek, residents have ready access to the preserve and can now take in views across the creek to the heart of the village. The preserve provides a wonderfully idyllic refuge for all who walk its trails. That it lies so close to our streets and homes, like the creek itself inextricably woven into the fabric of the community, makes it all the more beneficial to Freeville's residents.

FLLT: What is it like to manage a public nature preserve that has a conservation easement held by the FLLT?

DF: It has been a pleasure to collaborate with the FLLT to manage the preserve. The partnership has been mutually beneficial, with the Land Trust providing valuable guidance. For many years, Freeville resident and planning board member Tom Cavataio has served as preserve steward, coordinating with the FLLT's Director of Stewardship Chris Olney and Conservation Easement Steward Hannah George.

Chris has been extremely helpful with all questions relating to the conservation easement, as when Freeville residents created the lower trail along Fall Creek including twelve wooden footbridges.

In 2018, the New York State Department of Transportation designed a new Route 38 bridge over Fall Creek. The FLLT board passed a special

resolution to facilitate the transfer of land within the conservation easement from the village to the state, allowing for the widening of the state highway in the vicinity of the bridge, and the extension of one of the sidewalks to meet the new trailhead. Restoration plantings were completed per the FLLT's suggestion.

FLLT: What are your long-term goals for the preserve? How does the conservation easement guide these goals?

DF: Having made the creek-bank sections of the preserve more accessible, we look forward to maintaining the entire natural area long-term with minimal intervention. Freeville residents envision the expansion of the preserve westward to Mill St., helping complete a circular recreation path passing through Mill Dam Park and along the Dryden Rail Trail. To achieve that goal, the FLLT and/or the village will have to acquire several acres of private land. Another long-term goal is to construct a footbridge over Fall Creek, connecting the preserve with Groton Avenue Park. The conservation easement provisions continue to guide village efforts to maintain and enhance the preserve. In keeping with the mission of the Land Trust, these provisions will help ensure the preservation of the precious natural area that was entrusted to us.

FLLT: As an elected leader, what insight can you share about the power of individuals and partnerships to improve their local community?

DF: The participation of village residents and others in the improvement of the Genung Nature Preserve has been extremely gratifying. Responding to a call for volunteers, a sizable crew waded into seemingly impenetrable underbrush near the creek to start clearing the lower trail in fall 2015. When footbridges were ready to be installed over a year later, more residents volunteered to help.

Tom Cavataio looks forward to the continuation of community involvement through the formation of "Friends of the Genung Nature Preserve," whose membership will hopefully extend beyond the residents of Freeville. This May, Tom and I heard from an Ithaca resident who was so taken by the beauty of the preserve that he offered to return, clippers in hand, to help keep the trails clear of overhanging vegetation. With that kind of dedication, the Genung Nature Preserve will surely remain a treasured destination for generations to come.



Photo: Annabel Roberts - McMichael

Critter Cams

A bobcat makes its way down the trail at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve.

Photo: FLLT

The Finger Lakes are full of wildlife, but unless we spend lots of quiet time in nature, we end up mostly unaware of their daily (or nightly) activities -- even if they live in our backyards. Motion-sensor cameras give us a rare view into the lives of animals when we are not around and help us see the importance of protected land as habitat. Here are some tips to help you set up a motion-sensor camera with a good chance of capturing wildlife images.

- If you're not sure where to start, look for key habitat features such as water, berry bushes, nut trees, and other food sources. Stream crossings such as a wide log or beaver dam may be used by a wide variety of animals.
- Hone in on animal signs such as footprints, rubs, scratches, feathers or fur, feeding areas, and droppings. These clues may indicate being near an animal's home or on a frequently used route.
- When you have identified a suitable location, try to aim the camera to the north to avoid having the scene backlit by the sun. Angle the camera slightly down so large and small animals alike will be in view. Clear vegetation or other objects that might move or blow in the wind and cause the camera to activate.
- You can try moving your camera to different areas of your property with each season, but patience is key! Give each spot several weeks before changing locations.





Do you have a motion-sensor camera on your conserved property?

Send us your favorite shots at info@fllt.org to share on our social media.

Conservation Easement Steward Staff Update

After three years as FLLT's Conservation Easement Steward, Hannah George moved to Colorado to pursue new adventures. Though this is a big move, the Finger Lakes will always be home for Hannah. With most of her family in the area, she will have many opportunities to return and explore her favorite nature preserve trails. To all of you who own or manage conservation lands, Hannah says, "It has been an honor to work with you. Thank you for your partnership with the Finger Lakes Land Trust and for your ongoing commitment to these beautiful lands we call home."

Joining us to fill the Conservation Easement Steward role is Annabel Roberts-McMichael. Annabel grew up in New Jersey and loves forests, botany, gardening and wild edible plants. Growing up, she explored the Finger Lakes on trips to visit her grandparents and always thought she would like to live here. After college, she worked for seven years on organic vegetable and dairy farms, including one on Seneca Lake. She is now completing a combined Masters at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, where she is studying both ecological forestry and indigenous peoples' land rights. She is excited to join the Land Trust's team and be part of our conservation work.



Photo: Chris Olney



Photo: Jeff Katris

This fox kit in the town of Lansing, Tompkins County calls this stretch of natural shoreline, with cozy rock caves, home.

The Finger Lakes Land Trust is a member supported non-profit conservation organization that works cooperatively with landowners and local communities to conserve forever the lands and waters of the Finger Lakes region, ensuring scenic vistas, local foods, clean water, and wild places for everyone.

Afoot in the Field is provided for landowners in the Finger Lakes who own conservation easement properties, or who are otherwise committed to land conservation and wildlife habitat protection. For questions or concerns regarding your conservation easement, please contact Chris Olney by calling the Land Trust at (607) 275-9487 or email chrisolney@fltl.org



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