



The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes region

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Recent Land Trust Acquisition Will Become Spectacular New Nature Preserve Overlooking Cayuga Lake

Looking over the new Cayuga Cliffs acquisition toward Myers Point and Ithaca

BILL HECHT

If you stand out on the point in Taughannock Falls State Park and look eastward across Cayuga Lake, you will see a steep forested hillside and two deep gorges. This scenic landscape will become the Finger Lakes Land Trust's (FLLT) latest nature preserve.

TO create this preserve, the FLLT recently completed the purchase of 200 acres on Ridge Road in the town of Lansing, Tompkins County, from Bill and Lee Sims. The Sims have owned the property since the 1980s and always intended to preserve it in some way; the FLLT was a natural fit.

The property has been an active farm since the 19th century, originally producing grains and Concord grapes (furrows from the vineyard can still be found onsite). By the 1930s, it had become a small dairy farm operated by Walter Calhoun, who eventually sold the land to the International Salt Company while retaining lifetime usage rights. The company had plans for a salt mining project below ground that never came to fruition.

Meanwhile, the Sims moved from Ohio to Lansing in 1980 and purchased a farm adjacent to the Calhoun farm. Within a couple of years, they acquired Calhoun's lifetime usage rights, and subsequently—when International Salt was in the process of divesting unused assets—the property itself. The Sims refurbished the 1830s farmhouse on the property, raised horses, and leased a portion of the land to local grain farmers.

continued on page 2

With guests in town for a weekend this past summer, we decided that Taughannock Falls State Park was the perfect place to introduce them to our Finger Lakes region.

Unfortunately, as we arrived we were greeted by state park employees waving us away—the park was already at full capacity and we had to look elsewhere for a spot by the lake on a sunny hot day.

On most of our lakes, access is quite limited unless you own a shoreline home or know someone who does. With more people visiting the Finger Lakes, and a warming climate, demands for shoreline access undoubtedly will continue to grow. For the future, we need to invest now to add to our system of parks and conservation areas to ensure that everyone can enjoy the opportunity to spend a day at the lake.

Away from the lakes, we have plenty of woodlands and countryside to explore but increasing public use of our trails and recreation areas has highlighted aging infrastructure and inadequate parking areas. During the pandemic, many have sought solace in the outdoors and this is a wonderful thing—we need to connect more people with nature! Additional investments will be needed, however, to ensure that

our parks and conservation areas are able to provide visitors with a safe, enjoyable experience.

These investments will pay many dividends, both in terms of our own health and wellness and the health of our \$2 billion tourism economy. The Finger Lakes Land Trust is doing its part. Each year, we open new nature preserves to the public and make access improvements to existing preserves. We are also partnering with towns, counties, and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation to create new parks and expand existing ones.

We clearly have a long way to go, but by working together we can create a future where everyone has easy access to our lands and waters.



Andrew Zepp, Executive Director



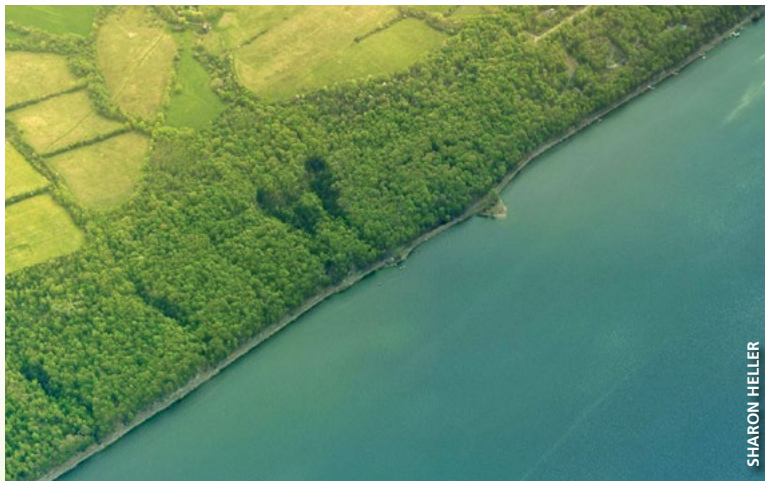
Recent Land Trust Acquisition Will Become Spectacular New Nature Preserve Overlooking Cayuga Lake *continued from cover*

More recently, when the Sims wanted to incorporate preserving the property into their estate planning, their attorney connected them with the FLLT, which recognized the opportunity to protect a stunning landscape in an area experiencing high residential development pressure.

The property is remarkable for its extraordinary natural beauty and diversity. The gently sloping meadow provides sweeping, panoramic views of Cayuga Lake, as well as Taughannock Point. The meadow gives way to a mixed hardwood forest of eastern hemlock, pitch pine, and red cedar. Within the woodlands are two spectacular gorges with waterfalls, both of which offer additional views of the lake. Several other streams wend through the property on their way to the lake.

Furthermore, the property includes 4,000 feet of shoreline along Cayuga Lake—a National Audubon Society Designated Bird Area—and parts of two Tompkins County Unique Natural Areas.

In addition to preserving this spectacular property—which they generously agreed to sell below its appraised value—the



SHARON HELLER

Sims are also donating a conservation easement on the 41 adjacent acres they still own, which will serve as a buffer for the preserve.

The FLLT is working on a management plan for public access in the new preserve, which is expected to open sometime in 2023. The plan will include trails that can be used for hiking and cross-country skiing, as well as opportunities for wildlife observation. With guidance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the FLLT

also intends to perform water quality restoration work, such as re-establishing wetlands and vernal pools on the property.

The FLLT has received grants from state and local agencies, as well as tremendous individual contributions from the local community in support of this project. If you would like to donate to the ongoing fundraising campaign, contact Senior Director Kelly Makosch at (607) 275-9487 or kellymakosch@fllt.org.
—Jeff Tonole

As of press time, the FLLT and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation are pursuing the protection of NYSEG's Bell Station property on Cayuga Lake. More at www.fllt.org/savebellstation.

New One-Mile Hiking Trail Added to Growing Network of Conserved Lands Overlooking Skaneateles Lake

After much planning and preparation, the Finger Lakes Land Trust (FLLT) formally opened a new one-mile hiking trail connecting its High Vista Nature Preserve to its Hinchcliff Family Preserve near the south end of Skaneateles Lake. FLLT board members, staff, supporters, and key volunteers gathered for a ribbon-cutting ceremony in August to celebrate the trail and other public access improvements.

The trail is located in a scenic area of steep forested hillsides which play a crucial role in protecting the water quality of the lake, the source of drinking water for the city of Syracuse. In July 2020, the FLLT purchased 75 wooded acres in Cortland and Onondaga counties, linking the two existing nature preserves, just west of State Route 41. With this latest acquisition, the organization has created a 2.25 mile-long corridor of conserved lands overlooking the eastern shore of Skaneateles Lake.

Stewardship staff and our dedicated FLLT "Trailblazer" volunteers installed box steps on a steep portion of the trail and used locust trees from the property to build and install footbridges. The woodland trail can now be accessed from a High Vista Preserve trailhead on Vincent Hill Road in the town of Scott, or from within the Hinchcliff Preserve in the town of Spafford. The trail is open during daylight hours for quiet nature observation and low impact recreation such as hiking, trail running, and snowshoeing. With the addition of the connector trail, ambitious hikers can now travel over 4.5 miles between the two preserves.

Ongoing efforts by the FLLT focus on securing hillsides in this area, known as the Skaneateles Highlands. Its extensive upland forest provides habitat for a diversity of birds and also prevents erosion and nutrient loading in the lake. Other protected lands in the area include Carpenter Falls State Unique Area and the FLLT's Bahar Nature Preserve and Cora Kampfe Dickinson Conservation Area.

The organization is actively fundraising to provide for long-term stewardship of this land. To make a gift, please contact Senior Director Kelly Makosch at (607) 275-9487 or kellymakosch@fllt.org. Watch a beautiful aerial video highlighting the property at fllt.org/highlands.



FLLT Nature Preserve Manager Jason Gorman with volunteer Tom Fairhurst and board member Patty Weisse at the August ribbon cutting ceremony for the new trail.

Neighbors Join Forces to Protect 250 Acres on Virgil Mountain

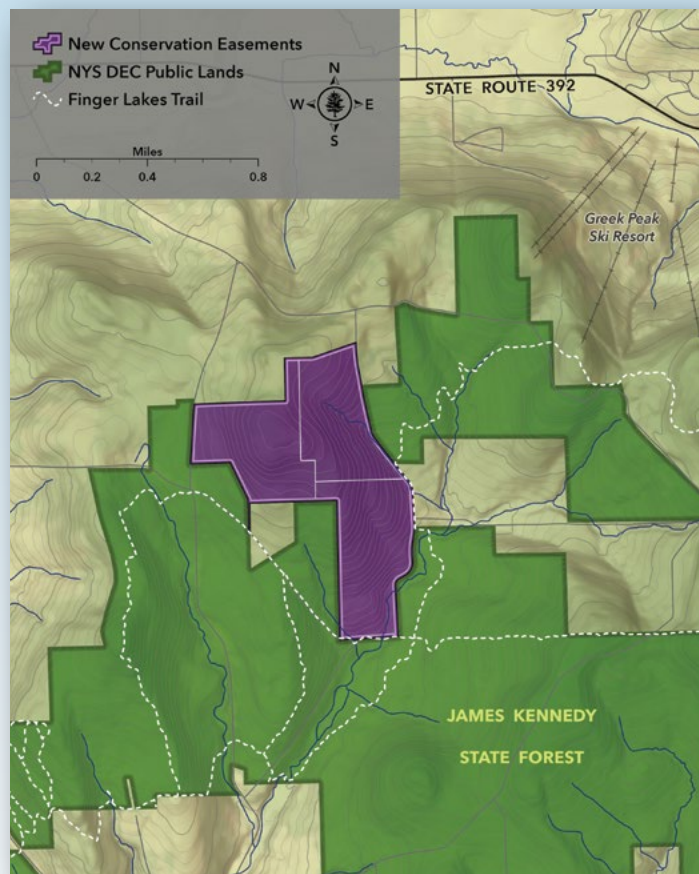
The Finger Lakes Land Trust (FLLT) recently completed a unique protection project in the town of Virgil, Cortland County, which permanently protects 250 acres of land with conservation easements. Almost entirely surrounded by James Kennedy State Forest, the land consists of three properties owned by a group of friends who manage the area collectively. These three families—Ed Robinson, Scott and Lisa Snyder, and Jim, Carole, and Dale Lathrop—have been affectionately dubbed “The Virgil Mountain Three.” They decided to grant conservation easements that will protect their properties and allow them to continue managing their fields and forests to benefit wildlife. All have worked diligently with FLLT staff to bring these projects to completion.

Ed Robinson and Jim Lathrop met over 30 years ago, introduced via Jim’s coworker and Ed’s childhood best friend. In 2004, Ed was living in England when Jim contacted him about purchasing land on Virgil Mountain. Ed bought the land, sight unseen, from the previous owners, whose only stipulation was that he keep the land forested. Scott Snyder joined the trio about five years ago, and the landowners began managing all three properties collectively and working together to improve wildlife habitat.

Over the years, the Virgil Mountain Three have worked together and with partners including the Upper Susquehanna Coalition, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to manage the property as wildlife habitat. They have turned areas of their fields into pollinator habitat, pruned old apple trees so they continue to produce fruit for wildlife, created young forest clearings, and installed vernal pools. They have also used the land for maple syrup production, leek harvesting, hunting, and recreation.

The properties are within the Susquehanna River watershed and are primarily forested, with smaller areas of agricultural fields and pollinator meadows. The parcels are adjacent to Kennedy State Forest, and the Finger Lakes trail borders a portion of the area. The conservation easements will allow the landowners to continue managing forests and fields on these properties while protecting these natural resources in perpetuity and providing a conserved buffer to the publicly accessible state land.

Mr. Robinson explained his motivation behind protecting his property with a conservation easement: “From a macro perspective, our world is changing rapidly and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Large expanses of healthy green space are vital and will only become more important in



the long-term future. From a micro perspective, our little project is a drop in the global bucket of need for conservation, but on a local basis, it will continue to make a meaningful difference. Having spent thousands of hours working on the land, and thousands of dollars on several habitat projects, it makes sense to allow the land to mature and evolve over time into a diverse home for myriad creatures. My son can enjoy the property and hopefully improve it for generations to follow.”

FLLT staff have repeatedly been struck by the degree of cooperation, dedication, and co-management occurring on these properties, and are thrilled to be protecting such a large contiguous piece of land.

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

Wildlife habitat, agricultural fields, and forests on top of Virgil Mountain are now protected from development.



Canandaigua Highlands Overlook Open to the Public

Visitors can now enjoy panoramic views of the south end of Canandaigua Lake from atop a scenic overlook on Griesa Hill Road in Naples.

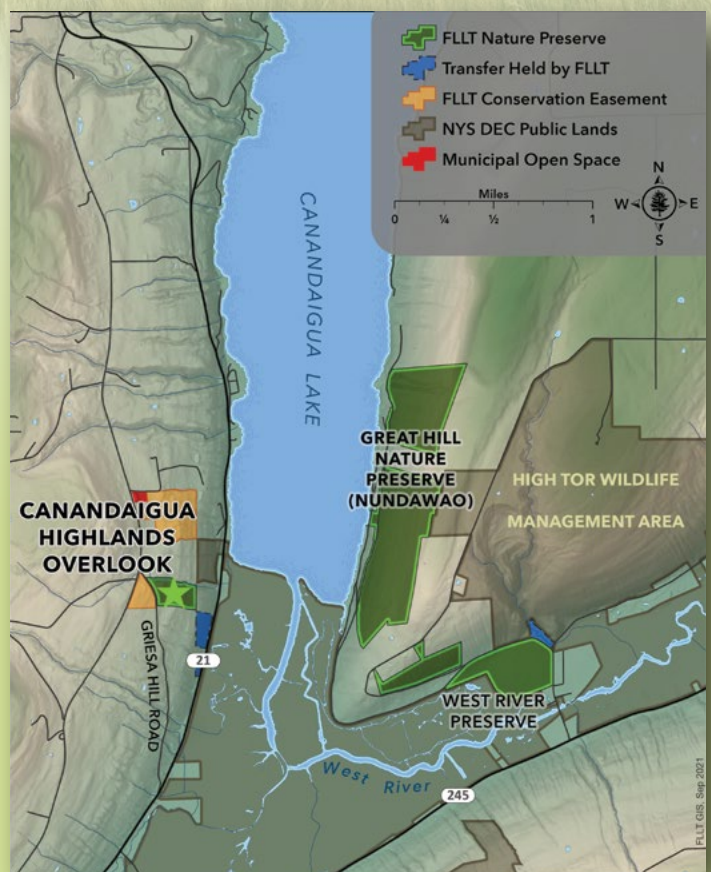
Take in the sights of Bare Hill, South Hill, and the Finger Lakes Land Trust's (FLLT) Great Hill Nature Preserve (Nundawao) while enjoying this tranquil and rustic landscape surrounded by rolling meadows and forested hillsides. Bald Eagles have been observed here soaring overhead as well as Bobolinks nesting in the fields below.

The FLLT purchased this 18-acre property in 2016 from Rochester resident Ed Cloos, who utilized it as a retreat and a place to grow grapes for more than 40 years. Mr. Cloos agreed to sell the land for less than its appraised fair market value, preferring to forego additional profit so that he would know that the land would be well cared for in the future.

Several habitat restoration efforts and site improvements were completed this year, including the removal of non-native invasive shrubs and the remnants of an old vineyard. A small parking area and bench now welcomes visitors to the overlook during daylight hours. Please note there are no trails on the preserve and visitors are advised to stay in the overlook area.

The Canandaigua Highlands Overlook is part of a growing network of conserved lands at the south end of the lake. To the west of Griesa Hill Road are hillside meadows protected by a conservation easement held by the FLLT. Just downhill are additional woodlands owned by the FLLT as well as the state's High Tor Wildlife Management Area. And just a stone's throw to the north is South Bristol's popular scenic overlook which adjoins Carolabarb Park, also protected with a conservation easement held by the FLLT.

More information, including a map and directions, can be found at fllt.org/canandaiguaoverlook.



Partnership with Town of Big Flats Protects 1,000 Feet of Chemung River

The Finger Lakes Land Trust (FLLT) and the Town of Big Flats recently protected 1,000 feet of streambank on the Chemung River along with six acres of adjacent floodplain forest. The parcel borders State Route 352 and provides important wildlife habitat for a diversity of songbirds, raptors, and waterfowl.

Thanks to an anonymous donor, the property was originally acquired in 2017 by the FLLT and protected with a perpetual conservation easement. In July, the parcel was conveyed to the Town of Big Flats who will manage it as a public conservation area. The easement will ensure the integrity of forests bordering the river and also allow public access for kayaking and canoeing. Conservation easements are legal agreements that limit development while protecting environmentally significant resources.

The property joins a growing network of lands protected by the

FLLT in the Chemung River watershed, including the Steege Hill and Plymouth Woods nature preserves, also in Big Flats.

"We are delighted to have the opportunity to work with the Town of Big Flats again to conserve this area's impressive natural resources while making them accessible to the public," said Finger Lakes Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "This is a win-win for everyone."

"We're thrilled to work with the Finger Lakes Land Trust," said Town of Big Flats Supervisor Ed Fairbrother. "This project will secure public access

on the river for many generations to come."

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney John Alexander of the law firm Sayles & Evans in Elmira, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.



LARKIN RYAN

Genesee Valley
Greenway State Park

Five New Locations Added to GoFingerLakes.org

The Finger Lakes Land Trust recently added five new locations to its outdoor recreation web site gofingerlakes.org, including the Cayuga Waterfront Trail, Genesee Valley Greenway State Park, James Kennedy State Forest, Letchworth State Park, and Ontario Pathways.

The site was created to help residents and visitors discover the best locations in the region for hiking, mountain biking, paddling, cross-country skiing, and other outdoor adventures.

Visitors to the site will find maps, photos, directions, and information on state forests and parks, nature centers, rail trails, and other prime conservation lands available for public recreation. Visit gofingerlakes.org to learn more.



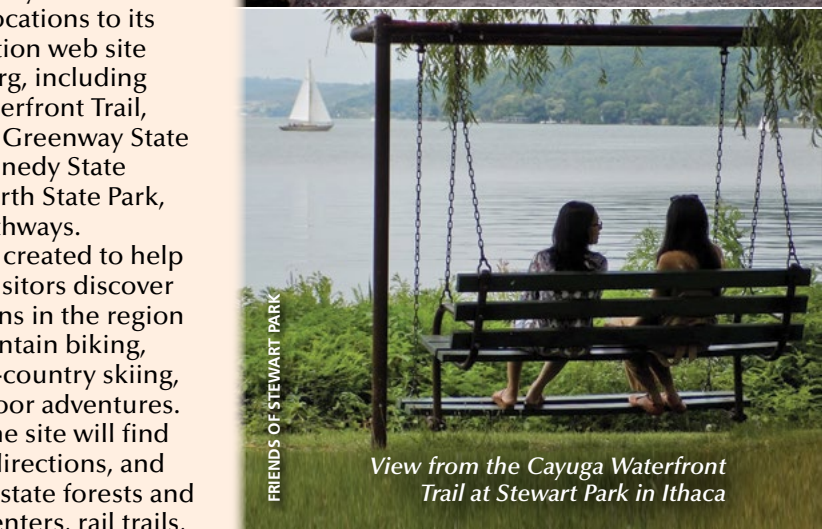
CHRIS RAY

James Kennedy
State Forest



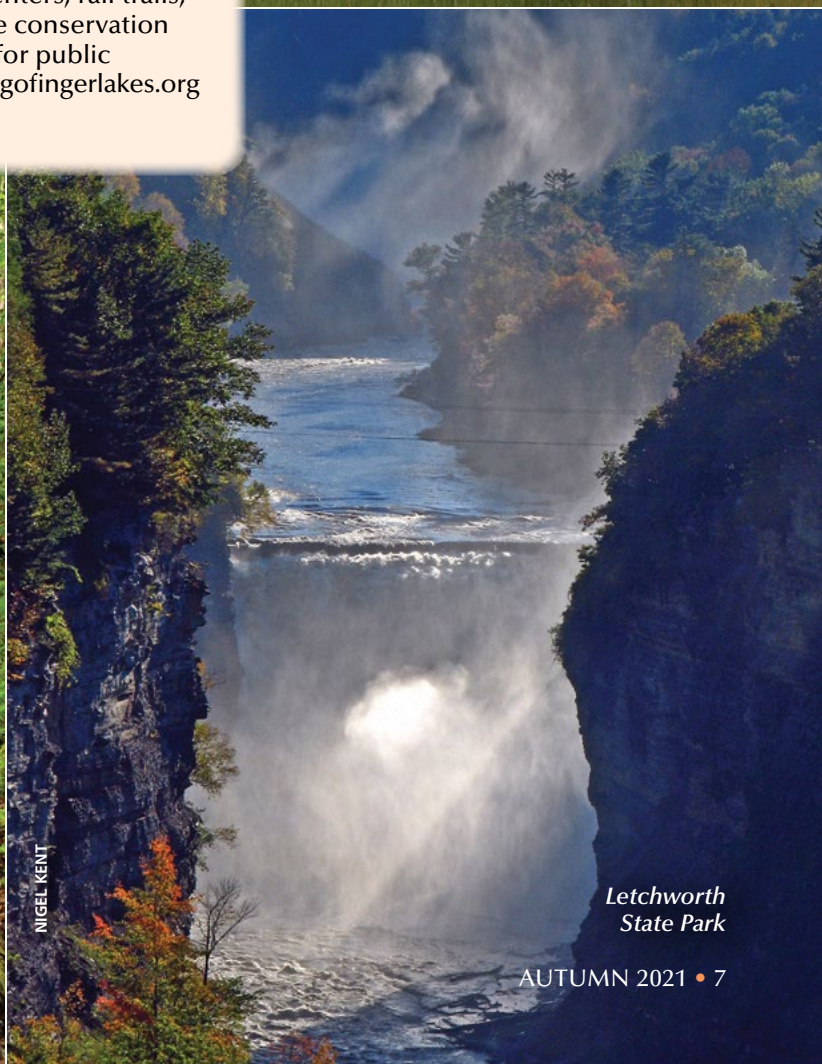
STEPHANIE BUCKLEY

Ontario
Pathways



FRIENDS OF STEWART PARK

View from the Cayuga Waterfront
Trail at Stewart Park in Ithaca



NIGEL KENT

Letchworth
State Park



CHRIS RAY

Steege Hill Steward Bob Corneau Retires From Many Years of Service

Recently “retired” volunteer preserve steward Bob Corneau has been hiking around the Finger Lakes Land Trust’s (FLLT) Steege Hill Nature Preserve in Big Flats since his youth.

When FLLT took ownership of the property in 2001, Bob singlehandedly maintained over 7 miles of trails and acted as a local guide and highly knowledgeable naturalist for the preserve. Did you know that a segment of the BBC special, ‘In Cold Blood’ was filmed at Steege Hill? Bob got to meet David Attenborough, and helped guide him and the film crew to find timber rattlesnakes on the preserve. Bob has spent countless hours improving the visitor’s experience and never asked for much, other than the occasional lunch at Tag’s Restaurant. Bob is rooted in the local community and helped to keep FLLT informed of what was happening around the area. Steege Hill would not be the remarkable place it is today if not for Bob. We are immensely indebted to him and will be forever grateful for all the work he has done on Steege Hill. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your years of service and support! It will take many to replace the efforts of one.

Ninth Acquisition at Bare Hill Adds to Protected Lands Overlooking Canandaigua Lake

Bare Hill stands like a sentinel overlooking Canandaigua Lake’s eastern shore, creating one of the most impressive landscapes in the Finger Lakes region. It is an area well-known for its cultural significance in the creation story of the Seneca—Onöndowa’ga:’ in their own language. Legend has it that a mighty serpent encircled a village that once stood at Bare Hill, swallowing residents until it was slain by a brave young boy. In its death throes, the snake cleared the land and swept the hill bare.

In August, the Finger Lakes Land Trust (FLLT) acquired 27.7 acres of oak-hickory forest on Bare Hill in the town of Middlesex, Yates County. This is the organization’s ninth project in the area, where it has been focusing efforts to protect land from development. Acquisition of this property provides an important buffer to state lands on Bare Hill and another parcel previously acquired by the FLLT.

The organization intends to transfer the property to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) as an addition to Bare Hill Unique Area. Addition of this property to state land will enhance wildlife habitat protection, help safeguard water quality in Canandaigua Lake, and increase public access to recreational opportunities. In the future, the FLLT hopes to work with the state and other partners to construct a hiking trail on nearby conserved lands from the lakeshore to the summit of Bare Hill.

Elsewhere in the Canandaigua Lake watershed, the Land Trust owns and manages the Great Hill Nature Preserve, West River Preserve, and the East Shore Preserve at Bare Hill. The organization has worked in partnership with Ontario County to create Grimes Glen County Park, with the Town of South Bristol to create Carolabarb Park, and with DEC to enhance protection of High Tor Wildlife Management Area.

*Bare Hill overlooking
Canandaigua Lake*



NIGEL KENT

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 2020 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 fllt.org/give so that we can protect more land and water in the beautiful Finger Lakes region!

Finger Lakes Land Trust Earns National Recognition

The Finger Lakes Land Trust (FLLT) achieved its land trust accreditation renewal—joining over 450 accredited land trusts across the nation committed to professional excellence and maintaining the public's trust in its conservation work. The FLLT provided extensive documentation and was subject to a comprehensive third-party evaluation prior to achieving this distinction. The Land Trust Accreditation Commission awarded renewed accreditation, signifying its confidence that the FLLT's lands will be protected forever. For more information on the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org.

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 and Triphammer Marketplace locations. 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.

Our deepest gratitude for thoughtful gifts in memory of

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Our appreciation for gifts in honor of

Dave and Amy Allyn FROM <i>Somak Chattopadhyay</i>	Mark Chao FROM <i>Schmitt Real Estate</i>	Brian Zapf FROM <i>Elaine Quaroni</i>	Robert Thompson FROM <i>Andrea Thompson</i>
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Our Forever Work Our Forever Home

*Your gift will help us protect the lands and waters of the
Finger Lakes region, the special places we call home.*

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fllt.org/planned-giving or call (607) 275-9487.

BILL HECHT

A CLOSER LOOK

Little Monsters: Ambush Bugs Lying in Wait

A field of goldenrod in autumn, all abloom and aglow in the angled sunshine, might seem a perfect idyll for pollinators.

Wandering from flower to flower, stopping here and there for a sip of nectar or a load of pollen... it really is quite the life for a late-season butterfly or bee. But the fragrant welcoming sea of yellow blossoms also obscures a mortal threat, as terrifying and monstrous as something out of a Hitchcock movie or a blood-chilling creature feature.

Unseen and deadly, ambush bugs are waiting. And they are everywhere.

There are two species of ambush bugs in our region, *Phymata pensylvanica* and *Phymata americana*, which are almost indistinguishable from each other except for some small details of shape. With their fearsomely thickened and hooked forelimbs, plated exoskeletons, red compound eyes, and knobbed antennae, our local ambush bugs really do look like little monsters, kind of a cross between a praying mantis and Shrek.

Males are small (about 3/8" long) and mostly black on the upper side, while females are larger (up to 1/2" long) with yellow-green and brown bands. Scientists believe that ambush bugs can choose flowers for an optimal camouflage match, and even change their colors to blend in wherever they land. Their small size and cryptic coloration, combined with the ability to remain absolutely motionless, makes ambush bugs very difficult to spot as they lie in wait for prey. They prefer flowers with very small blossoms, such as goldenrods and milkweeds, but will go anywhere that pollinators frequent.

They take insects of all shapes and sizes, from tiny sweat bees and flies to yellowjackets, bumble bees, and butterflies. Ambush bugs can capture and consume prey up to ten times their size. Ambush bugs wait until their unwitting targets come within reach, and then grab the prey with those hooked forelegs. The ambush bugs use their tubular mouthparts to inject both paralyzing poison and digestive enzymes into the prey, immediately silencing any struggle and then liquefying the insides and allowing for ruthlessly efficient consumption, like sipping a cocktail through a straw.

Ambush bugs belong to the taxonomic family Reduviidae (assassin bugs), within the order Heteroptera (true bugs). There are over 100 species of ambush bugs

in the world. Though common throughout the continent, ambush bugs have been a taxonomic mystery in North America, as scientists are still sorting out their distribution and phylogeny. While 17 species and 11 subspecies have been documented, scientists are still finding undescribed species and noting inconsistencies and errors in past species descriptions and identification of museum specimens. A team at the University of California at Riverside is now pursuing a full taxonomic revision of *Phymata* in North America, supported by molecular analysis.

Ambush bugs emerge in our region in July and remain present throughout the goldenrod blooming season, into October. Once you get accustomed to looking for ambush

bugs, you might well start to find them practically anywhere there are flowers and pollinators. Ambush bugs are often found in pairs, with the male riding on the female's back, lurking and feeding together. You might also find ambush bugs in actual copulation, side by side with the undersides of their abdomens twisted to face each other. Ambush bugs in our region have one generation per year, as

eggs are laid in the fall and hatch during the next summer.

Perhaps a bit like a successful human couple, male and female ambush bugs strengthen their pair bond not merely by spending time together, but also by sound communication. They produce vibrations by stridulation (rubbing together) of parts of the thorax. Remarkably, ambush bugs also apparently produce sounds to attract prey. They are capable even of mimicking sounds that they hear, all the better to draw the interest of other insects that communicate with each other through specific acoustic signals. Slovenian entomologist Matija Gogala has documented how one species of ambush bug (*Phymata crassipes*) can actually "converse" with a person, responding to sounds and even matching the duration of spoken syllables and whistles!

And so, with a bit of patient and attentive searching, you might not only start to see ambush bugs all around, but also come to admire them as something much more than a predator and antagonist. Yes, you could say they are monsters, but like Shrek and Godzilla, they are singularly fun to watch and even to root for.

—Mark Chao



MARK CHAO

Finger Lakes Land Trust

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Visit our Facebook page and web site at fllt.org/events for future event announcements.

The West River Preserve, dedicated to Don and Skippy Raines, in Italy, Yates County