



The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

BELL STATION SHORELINE PROTECTED



PETER CARROLL

Thanks to tremendous public support, the Land Trust recently acquired the 500-acre Bell Station property on Cayuga Lake. Once slated for a nuclear power plant, this scenic site features 3,400 feet of pristine shoreline, quiet woods, and striking waterfalls.

Upon closing, Land Trust staff and volunteers cleaned up the shoreline and worked with a contractor to complete basic improvements to the property's network of interior woods roads. The shoreline is now open during daylight hours for low-impact recreation including hiking, bird watching, and fishing. Dogs are permitted but must be on a leash at all times.

The Land Trust will only serve as

an interim owner of this property and work is now underway to transfer it to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). DEC will establish a new public wildlife management area here that will encompass the shoreline and approximately 300 acres of associated upland.

The Land Trust is also working with a variety of partners to explore the feasibility of utilizing additional fields associated with Bell Station for a

combination of continued agricultural use and solar energy production.

Additional information about the Bell Station project may be found at fltt.org/savebellstation.

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Jim Miller of the law firm Miller Mayer, LLP in Ithaca, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.

Betsy Darlington will not like this column. Not one to shine a spotlight on her many accomplishments, Betsy played an integral role in the formation of the Finger Lakes Land Trust.

One of the organization's founders, she also served on its inaugural board of directors and as the full-time director of land protection in an unpaid capacity for 20 years! Upon retirement from this position, she has continued to serve as an active volunteer, participating on three committees and acting as a steward of the Logan Hill Nature Preserve which she and her family donated.

33 years and many conservation wins later, I am moved by Betsy's many contributions to the Land Trust. Equally remarkable, is that as she was doing all this, Betsy also volunteered at Ithaca's Belle Sherman Elementary School, providing nature education to 3rd and 4th graders. After 50 years of service, she is retiring from this important role.

We are grateful to Betsy for her dedication to conserving our lands and waters and for instilling her joy of nature in the hearts and minds of so many children. This work is especially important today as children are spending more of their time in front of a computer screen and less in the outdoors.

The value of these efforts was captured by Senegalese forestry engineer Baba Dioum when he said, "In the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught."

All of us at the Land Trust recognize Betsy for her tremendous contributions. And we'd also like to express our gratitude to every educator, mentor, and parent who takes the time to be with children in the outdoors, educating them about our environment and sharing some of the passion that we have for our natural world. Thank you.



Andrew Zepp, Executive Director



Betsy resting on a tupelo tree at the Logan Hill Nature Preserve

Land Trust Applauds Transfer of Land to Onondaga Nation

The Land Trust applauds New York Governor Kathy Hochul's June announcement that more than 1,000 acres in central New York's Tully Valley will be returned to the Onondaga Nation, creating a sanctuary for fish and wildlife.

"This is a tremendous milestone," said Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "We applaud everyone involved and strongly support this effort. The Land Trust hopes to have opportunities to work with the Onondaga Nation and other Haudenosaunee Nations on similar projects in the future."

The agreement to return the land was forged by representatives

of the Onondaga Nation, New York State, and the U.S. Department of the Interior. The land transfer is being undertaken as part of a settlement agreement with Honeywell, Inc. for past damage to Onondaga Lake. The property will be subject to a conservation easement held by New York State.

The Tully Valley property to be transferred encompasses a mix of

fields, forests, and wetlands with extensive frontage on Onondaga Creek. A diversity of wildlife is present and native brook trout are found on a portion of the site.

To see Governor Hochul's full press release, visit <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-us-department-interior-and-onondaga-nation-announce-one-largest-returns-land>.



ANDY ZEPP

Extraordinary Gift of Land & Historic Home

The Land Trust recently received the donation of a historic 200-year-old fieldstone home along with more than 140 acres of woodlands adjacent to Robert H. Treman State Park. This generous gift was made by Tompkins County resident Margaret Bald, who passed away in 2020.

The Bald family resided on the property since 1950. Margaret, who was an artist, cared deeply about nature and wanted to ensure that the woods and home she loved would not be lost to development. She made plans to conserve her land through her will.

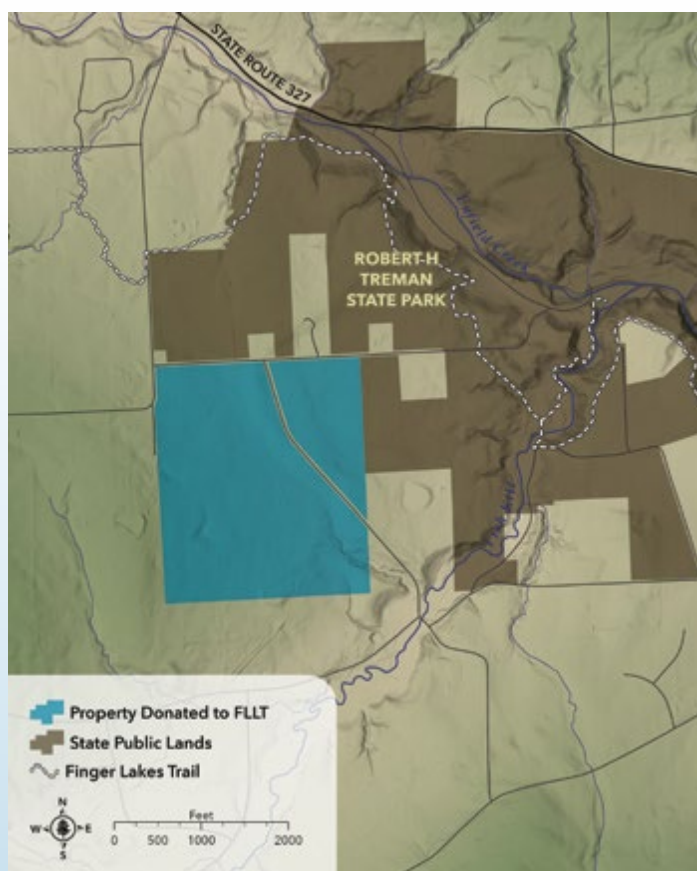
"This is an extraordinary gift," said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp. "The property is truly a special place and its location within Ithaca's Emerald Necklace makes it even more significant. We're grateful to Margaret for her foresight and generosity."

The historic fieldstone home needs a complete restoration. With guidance from Historic Ithaca, the Land Trust is listing the home for sale along with a 3.5-acre lot. Deed restrictions will be placed on the property at the time of sale to ensure that the character of this local landmark is maintained.

The site's 140 acres of woodlands border the state park and include extensive frontage on Stone House and Woodard roads in the town of Enfield. The property hosts areas of mature timber as well as successional shrubland. All of the land is located within the Enfield Creek and Cayuga Lake watersheds. Protection of this land will help ensure water quality in Treman State Park's nearby public swimming area.

Over the course of the next year, the Land Trust will work with state park officials, the Cayuga Trails Club, and the Finger Lakes Trail Conference to develop a long-term plan for conserving the land and to create a hiking path that will connect with the Finger Lakes Trail.

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Jim Miller of the law firm Miller Mayer, LLP in Ithaca, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.





WATERSHED PROTECTION & Farmland Preservation in SKANEATELES HIGHLANDS

The Land Trust recently acquired a conservation easement on the 234-acre Casa Farms property in the town of Niles. The property features panoramic views of Skaneateles Lake and 925 feet of road frontage on Glen Haven Road.

Casa Farms contains a mix of habitats including successional forests, shrublands, agricultural fields, and a hemlock-hardwood swamp. It also features almost 6,000 feet of frontage on Hooker Brook, which drains directly into Skaneateles Lake, the unfiltered drinking water supply for over 200,000 people in the city of Syracuse. Over 200 acres of the property feature soils that are classified as prime or of statewide significance for agriculture.

As part of the conservation easement, 20 acres of the property are designated as an environmental protection zone to protect water

quality in the lake. One hundred feet of natural vegetation will be maintained along the brook, providing natural habitat and filtering runoff.

Conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements that permanently limit future land use in order to protect the land's conservation values. Lands subject to conservation easements remain in private ownership, on local tax rolls, and available for traditional uses such as farming and hunting.

The property is located within the Southern Skaneateles Lake Forest and Shoreline Conservation Priority

Area established by New York State's Open Space Plan. It is also part of the Skaneateles Highlands, a priority focus area of the Land Trust which currently features the organization's Bahar, High Vista, and Hinchcliff Family nature preserves.

Additionally, the Casa Farms property is in close proximity to Bear Swamp State Forest and Carpenter Falls State Unique Area, owned and managed by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

Funding for the project was provided by DEC's Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) program which has helped the Land Trust secure conservation lands that protect water quality throughout the Finger Lakes region.

—Max Heitner

Over 70 Acres in Canandaigua Lake Watershed Protected

What makes for rugged and steep terrain also makes for breathtaking scenery in the Bristol Hills, located between Canandaigua and Honeoye lakes. The rolling wooded hillsides in this area are home to Bristol Mountain Ski Resort and the 1,035-acre Stid Hill Wildlife Management Area, among other recreation and conservation lands.

IN May, the Land Trust acquired 71 wooded acres in the Bristol Hills, in the town of Bristol, Ontario County. The property shares its western boundary with the Stid Hill WMA and contains 5,365 feet of streambank on two tributaries to Canandaigua Lake.

The property is defined by a mixed hardwood forest, part of the Bristol Hills landscape which is identified by the New York Natural Heritage Program as the largest occurrence of Appalachian oak-hickory forest in the

state. When funds become available, the Land Trust intends to transfer the property to New York State as an addition to Stid Hill WMA.

Conservation of this property will prevent future subdivision that would fragment wildlife habitat connectivity and disrupt recreational opportunities. The Stid Hill WMA offers multiple outdoor activities such as hiking, biking, and wildlife viewing.

Other nearby protected lands include the Land Trust's Canandaigua

Vista and Wesley Hill nature preserves, three properties protected by FLLT conservation easements, and Ontario County Park at Gannett Hill.

"This is a great addition to a growing network of conserved lands in the Bristol Hills," said Finger Lakes Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "Acquisition of this land will secure significant habitat, help protect Canandaigua Lake's water quality, and expand recreational opportunities."

The Stid Hill Wildlife Management Area with Bristol Mountain Ski Resort in the background

BILL HECHT

The eastern shore of Owasco Lake from the Owasco Bluffs Preserve in Niles, Cayuga County

SCENES

from Around
Our Region...

Great Blue Herons at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in West Danby, Tompkins County

LONG CREEK PHOTOGRAPHY

Youth from the Learning Trust staff at the Biodiversity Preserve



CHRIS RAY

the Tompkins County
Web met with Land
the Lindsay-Parsons
ty Preserve to learn
out natural history.



JASON GORMAN



Installation of a footbridge, designed and built by students from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, at the newly acquired Bell Station property in Lansing, Tompkins County

CHRIS RAY



A small waterfall found along the trail connecting the Land Trust's High Vista and Hinchcliff Family preserves in Cortland and Onondaga counties

CHRIS RAY

Observations from Bioblitz 2022

Thanks to All Who Participated!



In search of insects with Jason Dombroskie at the Roy H. Park Preserve

Over Memorial Day weekend (May 28-30, 2022), nature enthusiasts fanned out on preserved lands across the region for the Finger Lakes Land Trust's Bioblitz. Using the iNaturalist platform to log and identify their finds, observers collectively compiled over 900 records at 18 Land Trust preserves and protected areas, covering at least 400 species of plants, fungi, and animals.

The Land Trust also hosted three events at nature preserves in Tompkins County, welcoming people back to in-person nature hikes after the COVID-19 pandemic. On Saturday, David Werier led a plant walk at the Sweedler Preserve at Lick Brook. There, he and a dozen participants explored the distinctive flora along the steep, sunny slopes and thin soils of the gorge, such as early saxifrage, cut-leaf goldenrod, and smooth Solomon's seal.

continued on page 10



*Bioblitz participant Larry Jensen was the most prolific observer in this year's Bioblitz, compiling more than 273 observations of at least 162 species. Among them was this Antlered Crane Fly (*Taniptera dorsalis*) from the Plymouth Woods Nature Preserve—a first iNaturalist record for Chemung County and one of only four in the Finger Lakes region.*



Searching for wetland birds at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve

New County Park Established in Onondaga First in More Than 20 Years!

Representatives of the Land Trust recently joined county and state officials and the members of the Otisco Lake Preservation Association to formally open the new Otisco Shores Conservation Area—the first new Onondaga County Park to be established in more than 20 years.

With support from a grant from New York State's Water Quality Improvement Program, the Land Trust acquired the 35-acre property two years ago. The parcel features 2,000 feet of shoreline at the south end of Otisco Lake and provides habitat for waterfowl, Ospreys, and Bald Eagles. The site was originally acquired with prior understanding that it would be conveyed to the county for future management, subject to a perpetual conservation easement held by the Land Trust.

Before transferring the land, the Land Trust planted hundreds of native trees and shrubs and established a mowed path to provide access to the lakeshore. This new park is now open to the public during daylight hours and is well suited for an easy hike, wildlife watching, and fishing.



Land Trust
Director of
Conservation
Max Heitner

Board Member and
Former U.S. Congressman
Jim Walsh speaking at the
Otisco Shores Dedication



Our appreciation for gifts in honor of

Amy Butler
FROM
Margaret Martin

Mark Chao
FROM
Schmitt Real Estate

June Fisher
FROM
Cynthia Harnett

Judi Cermak
FROM
Ellen Polimeni

Echo and Frankie
FROM
Michelle Menter

Patricia Peterson
FROM
Walt Scott

Our deepest gratitude for thoughtful gifts in memory of

Robert Bayer, Jr
FROM
Sharon Campbell
and
Nicholas Quarrier

David Goodling
FROM
Linda and Chris
Christensen

**Daniel landoli
Miner**
FROM
Mary Morley

Jason M. Bell
FROM
Ann Kaminski

**G. William "Bill"
Gregory**
FROM
Scott Gregory

Andrejs Ozolins
FROM
Diana Ozolins

Percy Browning
FROM
Anonymous

Tom Kerschner
FROM
Kim Ferrie

**Gina and Bard
Prentiss**
FROM
Miriam Lerner

**Richard and
Rowena Dawson**
FROM
Maria Porta and
Shawn Sullivan

Catherine Mancini
FROM
Michael Mancini

Ryan Rector
FROM
Jack and Sharon
Fredericks

Cynthia Garrett
FROM
Eben McLane

Thomas R. Mayo
FROM
Steven and
Louise Gee

Chaya Spector
FROM
David Hirsch

Observations from Bioblitz 2022

continued from page 8

That same afternoon, Jason Dombroskie and Loren Jones led a family-focused insect walk at the Roy H. Park Preserve. Kids and families spread out along the trail, finding, examining, and photographing myriad insects, from fuzzy yellow *tenucha* moth caterpillars to orange-blazed sawflies to a deer fly whose dazzling multicolored compound eyes everyone got to see close up.

Finally, on Monday, Mark Chao led a bird walk at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve, where he and almost two dozen participants had long looks at a singing Blue-winged Warbler and Bobolink, plus briefer encounters with Prairie Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warblers, and dozens of other specialties of the preserve's open edges, wetlands, and woods.

Many thanks to all who participated in the bioblitz and the walks!
—Mark Chao



Botanist David Werier discussing plant ecology at the Sweedler Preserve



Finger Lakes Forever

Our \$20 million capital campaign is making important investments in land and water conservation, habitat restoration, and our Stewardship Fund.

The goals are big and so will be the rewards!

Please consider making a special campaign gift before September 30 and a generous Finger Lakes family will match your campaign contribution dollar for dollar, up to \$250,000.

Learn more at flt.org/forever or call (607) 275-9487.

Maybe It's a Lake Sturgeon!

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Cayuga and Seneca Lakes were known for their sea serpents, though these cryptids have become a bit scarce in recent years.

Scientists of the day speculated that they must be relicts, ancient marine reptiles that survived the eons by hunkering down on the depthless, frigid lake bottoms. The theory sounds plausible enough, until one realizes that the Finger Lakes were only formed 10,000 years ago, at the end of the last Ice Age. Whatever Old Greeny may be, it's probably not a mosasaur.

It's not hard to understand how stress, the power of suggestion, bad weather, low light, and imperfect vision might have conspired to make people see what was not there. But perhaps we shouldn't dismiss these reports altogether. After all, there's at least one ancient monster that is known to live in Cayuga Lake: the lake sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*). The *Acipenseriformes*, which include sturgeons and paddlefish, have not changed their anatomies significantly for 200 million years. They look appropriately primitive and quite martial, with long bodies shaped like missiles and heavy skulls that resemble barbed arrowheads. Although they aren't very closely related, they also share a number of traits with a far more ancient group of fish, the sharks.

Sturgeons, like sharks, have tough gray skin and asymmetrical tails. This asymmetry, very unusual among fish, provides vertical lift, which helps sharks chase down their prey and allows sturgeons—which can be over seven feet long and weigh more than 300 pounds—to move their gigantic bodies without too much effort. Both species have flexible cartilaginous skeletons instead of bony ones, though for different reasons. Bone is heavy, so sharks remain agile by ditching the weight and attaching their swimming muscles directly to a web of tough collagen fibers encasing their bodies. But sturgeons don't need to be particularly fast, as their prey (invertebrates, shellfish, and the occasional invasive goby) hardly move.

They do, however, need to protect their young, even more vigilantly than most fish do. Sturgeon live well over a hundred years and take fifteen or twenty years to mature; even then, they may spawn only every half-decade. Rather than using bone on the inside, for structure and muscle attachments, sturgeon use them on the outside, for protection. The precious young fish are unpalatable to most predators because they are covered with sharp, ossified scales known as scutes. As the fish grow, the scutes turn into racing stripes of rivets along their sides, until as adults they are so large that nothing, beyond a few pesky sea lampreys, can touch them.

Perhaps it's significant that the lake sturgeon began to disappear at about the same time that the Finger

Lakes monsters did. These giant, razor-sharp fish, which once made up a staggering ninety percent of the fauna of the Great Lakes, tore up the nets of fishermen and were considered to be useless bycatch. Their carcasses were burned like cordwood to power steamboats



New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Aquatic Biologist Emily Zollweg-Horan holding a lake sturgeon

until people developed a taste for their flesh and roe. Dams, pollution, dredging, and outrageous overfishing decimated their numbers. There were no sturgeon reported in Cayuga Lake after 1961. By 1983, they were listed as a threatened species in New York. The monster sightings seem to have stopped by then, too.

It's satisfying to close the book on the Finger Lakes cryptids by simply proclaiming them to be particularly large sturgeons. However, this theory doesn't stand up to scrutiny. For one thing, there's no historical record of sturgeon in monster-heavy Seneca Lake. On the other hand, sturgeon definitely inhabited monster-poor Oneida Lake. The Finger Lakes creatures also seem to have had an aggressive streak, but sturgeon are known to be docile, even personable, and their toothless mouths are only threatening if you're a zebra mussel. Finally, since the sturgeon population of the Finger Lakes has made an astounding comeback in recent years, thanks to the heroic efforts of the NYSDEC, you'd think we'd be seeing more sea monsters, not fewer of them. So the mystery remains. Whatever Old Greeny is, it might not be a sturgeon, either.

—Jacqueline Stuhmiller

Finger Lakes Land Trust

Officers:

Fred Van Sickle, *President*
Karen Meriwether, *Vice President*
Maria Fernandez-Gaige, *Secretary*
Bill Eggers, *Treasurer*
Lindsay Ruth, *At-Large*

Board Members:

Amy Allyn	Marjory
Lynden Archer	Rinaldo-Lee
Beth Dann	Wade Sarkis
David Fernandez	Myra J. Shulman
Hadley Lundback	Jan Suwinski
Sean O'Keefe	Kristin Swain
Kevin Parker	Jim Walsh
	Patty Weisse

Staff:

Andrew Zepp, *Executive Director*
Meghann Andrews-Whitaker, *Director of Operations*
Julia de Aragón, *Development Associate*
Jason Gorman, *Nature Preserve Manager*
Max Heitner, *Director of Conservation*
Edie Jodz, *Assistant Director of Development*
Kelly Makosch, *Senior Director*
Kaitlyn Marrin, *Operations Associate*
Eric Mastroberti, *Land Steward*
Barry Miller, *Development Associate*
Amy Olney, *Conservation Projects Manager*
Hailey Nase, *Conservation Easement Steward*
Chris Olney, *Director of Stewardship*
Chris Ray, *GIS Projects Manager*
Kate Riley, *Land Conservation Specialist*
Gretchen Salm, *Land Conservation Support Specialist*

Newsletter Editor: Edie Jodz

Newsletter Layout: Leigh Dezelan

Advisors:





Forestry Consultant: Michael DeMunn
Stewardship Advisor: Betsy Darlington



GOFINGERLAKES™

FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

gofingerlakes.org

 [instagram@gofingerlakes](https://www.instagram.com/gofingerlakes)
 [instagram@fingerlakeslandtrust](https://www.instagram.com/fingerlakeslandtrust)
 [facebook.com/FingerLakesLandTrust](https://www.facebook.com/FingerLakesLandTrust)
 [@FLLandTrust](https://twitter.com/FLLandTrust)

Ph: 607-275-9487 • email: info@fllt.org



Finger Lakes Land Trust

202 E. Court Street
Ithaca, NY 14850

Return Service Requested

NON-PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
TRUMANSBURG, NY
PERMIT NO. 1

Upcoming Events

Storytellers Circle and Hike at Bare Hill with Ganondagan

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24 AT 10:00 A.M.

Join the Finger Lakes Land Trust and Canandaigua Lake Watershed Association at Bare Hill Unique Area for a traditional Storyteller's Circle, delivered by interpreters from Ganondagan Seneca Art & Cultural Center. Attendees will hear about the legend of Bare Hill and other important aspects of Hodinohso:ni' life. Attendees are invited to stay for a short hike and scavenger hunt.

[See full details at fllt.org/events](http://fllt.org/events)



NIGEL KENT