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# The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST



## Over 1,000 Feet of Seneca Lake Shoreline Conserved Forever

*30 acres on Seneca Lake with 1,080 feet of undeveloped shoreline was recently donated to the Land Trust by the estate of Robert Kriss, who passed away in 2021. Robert was a resident of Geneva who enjoyed outdoor recreation and had a deep connection with the natural environment.*

**T**he property is located in the town of Fayette, Seneca County, just three miles south of Geneva. It is comprised of two parcels set in an agricultural landscape on the northeastern side of Seneca Lake. A 10-acre wooded shoreline parcel is separated by a rail line from 20 additional acres that feature woodlands, brush, and a farm field.

The property's natural shoreline is of particular significance for fish

and wildlife. In contrast to the lakeshore homes with docks located to the north and south, the shoreline here is dominated by towering oaks, maples, and hickories. The sound of waves lapping on the shore is at times punctuated by the cry of an eagle and the cackling of geese. The woodlands are also particularly valuable to migratory songbirds that feed on insects that hatch in the lake during the spring migration.

*continued on page 2*



# PERSPECTIVES

*We are thinking a lot about carbon these days at the Land Trust—specifically how to sequester more carbon in forests that also provide a home for wildlife, filter water running into our lakes and streams, and offer everyone opportunities for outdoor recreation.*

**W**ith that in mind, we have a unique opportunity to create a network of conserved lands that will extend across the region from Pennsylvania's Allegheny Mountains through the Southern Tier and Ithaca's Emerald Necklace to Cortland County, Tug Hill, the Adirondacks, and beyond.

Bits and pieces of this network already exist and hold great potential for carbon storage. For example, the Land Trust and its partners have been focused on the Emerald Necklace for more than a decade and are working to link 50,000 acres of existing public open space surrounding the south end of Cayuga Lake.

In some areas, forest will need

to be restored to buffer our streams and to ensure connective corridors for wide-ranging wildlife. We have already initiated these efforts in several areas and are learning valuable lessons about how we can most effectively restore woodlands that face strong competition from non-native invasive species and voracious deer populations.

Creating connections will be key if we are to allow plants and animals to migrate northward in response to climate change. Our state forests occupy many hilltops but are separated by valleys that remain in private ownership. Before these intervening areas are developed, we must create viable corridors through

the use of conservation easements and select acquisitions.

This will be a monumental task and will take many years of collective effort. As we proceed, we will celebrate successes along the way, such as the recent dedication of the Eberhard Nature Preserve—a wonderful addition to the Emerald Necklace that will forever conserve an unbroken forest.



Andrew Zepp  
Executive Director

## Over 1,000 Feet of Seneca Lake Shoreline Conserved Forever

*continued from cover*

The Land Trust will manage the property as the Kriss Family Nature Preserve. Due to the site's limited access by land, public access will be by boat only at this time. Protecting undeveloped shoreline is one of the organization's top strategies for safeguarding water quality and providing public access to

**"Undeveloped shoreline is scarce in the Finger Lakes and it's so important for wildlife and the health of the lake."**

the area include the Bishop Nature Preserve, which provides access to the Cayuga-Seneca Canal Trail, as well as the Kashong Conservation Area, which is owned and managed

our region's lakes.

Other Land Trust-protected lands in

by the Town of Geneva.

"We are grateful for this tremendous gift to the Land Trust, the community, and Seneca Lake," said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp. "Undeveloped shoreline is scarce in the Finger Lakes and it's so important for wildlife and the health of the lake."





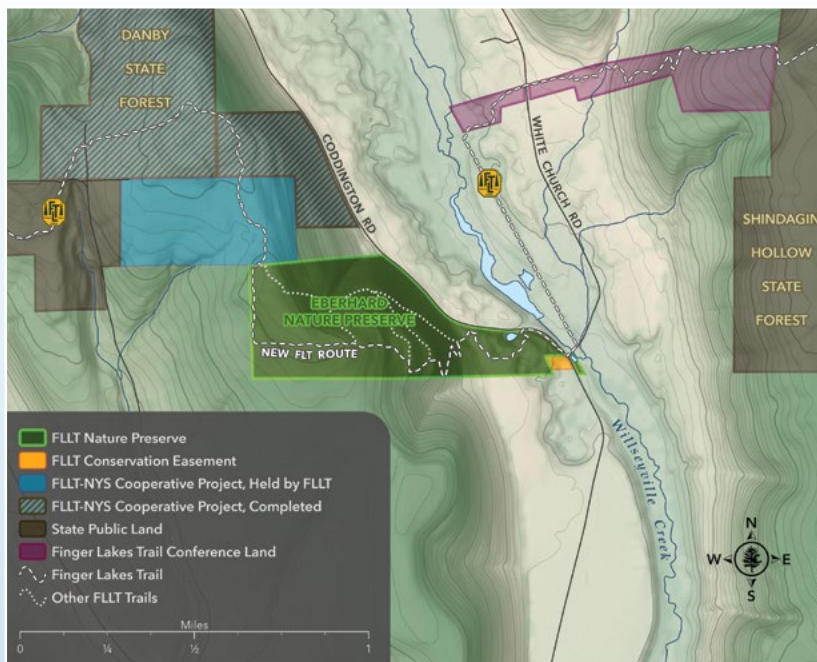
L-R: Roger Hopkins, FLLT Land Steward Eric Mastroberti, Carol Hardy, Polley McClure, and Deb Nero cutting the ribbon at the opening of the Eberhard Preserve.

# NEW NATURE PRESERVE IN Ithaca's Emerald Necklace

**T**hanks to Anatol and Carolyn Eberhard's generous donation of their woodland property and the tireless efforts of our volunteers and staff, hikers can now enjoy new trails in the Emerald Necklace.

The Eberhard Nature Preserve is located east of Ithaca at the south end of Coddington Road in the town of Caroline, Tompkins County. The preserve features mature hardwood forests that rise abruptly and steeply from the Willseyville Valley onto flat-topped Eastman Hill.

The new preserve is adjacent to several parcels the Land Trust purchased previously with the understanding that they will be added to Danby State Forest. Taken together, these protected properties create an unbroken corridor of conserved lands. Taking advantage of this fact, the Finger Lakes Trail Conference recently re-routed the existing Finger



Lakes Trail through the new preserve with help from the Land Trust. This new route is much more secure and eliminates a road-walk.

Earlier this fall, the Land Trust installed a parking area and interpretive kiosk with support from Tompkins County's Capital Reserve Fund for Open Space and Recreation, the Community Foundation's Hullar Family Fund, and the Finger Lakes Trail Conference's Sidote Trail Preservation Fund.

The Land Trust continues to reach out to other landowners

within the Emerald Necklace as part of our ongoing effort to create a continuous corridor of protected lands that will ultimately link 50,000 acres of existing public open space.

For directions and additional preserve information, please visit [flt.org/eberhard](http://flt.org/eberhard).



# Enhancing Public Access to the Chemung River

*The Land Trust purchased two acres with 190 feet of frontage on the Chemung River in the town of Big Flats, Chemung County. The Land Trust intends to convey the property to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation as an addition to the Big Flats Wildlife Management Area.*

**T**he property is immediately adjacent to 211 acres acquired by the Land Trust in 2019 which the organization also expects to transfer to the state. Addition of the recently acquired property to the wildlife management area will improve outdoor recreation opportunities by providing public access to the river.

By protecting this property from development, the Land Trust is helping to safeguard the scenic view from the Chemung River enjoyed by paddlers and anglers. This stretch of the river between Big Flats and Elmira passes under the



steep Palisades, a long sinuous cliff hundreds of feet high that looms over the southern shore.

This is the FLLT's 18th project in the Chemung River watershed where the organization has contributed to a growing network of conserved lands. Other protected lands nearby include the Land Trust's Steege Hill, Plymouth, and Kehoe nature preserves, the newly created Big Flats Wildlife Management Area, and the Nature Conservancy's Frenchman's Bluff Preserve.

## Partnership with New York State Enhances Protection of Honeoye Lake

**T**hanks to a partnership between the Land Trust and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), three parcels totaling 57 acres in the towns of Canadice and Richmond, Ontario County, have been added to the Honeoye Inlet Wildlife Management Area.

The three separate parcels near the south end of Honeoye Lake were purchased by the Land Trust in 2019 with interim funding from the organization'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 support future conservation projects.

Two of the properties include frontage on East Lake Road and consist of steep mixed hardwood forest overlooking the inlet and lake. A third parcel located on West Lake Road buffers adjacent state-owned wetlands and provides scenic views of the lake and surrounding hillsides. Protection of these three properties will help ensure water quality within Honeoye Lake and maintain the

land's role in filtering runoff.

"Protecting water quality and preserving wildlife habitat are top priorities for DEC and our conservation partners across the state," DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos said.

"Once again, DEC is partnering with the Finger Lakes Land Trust on acquisitions that will enhance the State's Wildlife Management Area network and these lands' recreational and environmental benefits for New Yorkers."

"These acquisitions expand recreational opportunities while helping to ensure water quality," said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp. "We are delighted to continue our productive partnership with the DEC."

DEC purchased these parcels from the Land Trust utilizing the State's

Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), a critical resource for environmental programs such as land acquisition, farmland protection, invasive species prevention and eradication, recreation access, water quality improvement, and environmental justice projects.





# Partnership with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Restores Wetlands in Owasco Flats

*In 2020, the Land Trust purchased a 38-acre property along the Owasco Inlet in the town of Moravia. Previously owned by the Hall family, the land was originally wetland, but had been mostly converted to farmland by channels for water diversion and drainage.*

**N**ow, thanks to a fruitful partnership among the Land Trust and other agencies, this tract will return to wetland, with major benefits for both wildlife and local residents.

Even before the purchase, the Land Trust sought out the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to discuss working together to restore the property to wetland. Gian Dodici of USFWS's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and Max Heitner of the Land Trust have led the planning and implementation of the restoration.

The effort has involved the creation of a berm at a corner of the property, blocking the flow from ditches that converge there. Water gathering behind the berm will flow slowly over into the DEC's Owasco Flats Wildlife Management Area (OFWMA) to the north. Pothole swales have also been excavated to hold water in the central portion of the property. Within the next several years, vegetation will respond on the flooded land, and there will be emergent marsh habitat on the property.

The Land Trust intends to transfer the property to the

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) for integration into the OFWMA. DEC has been closely involved with the Land Trust and the USFWS in wetland restoration planning.

The expansion of wetland habitat in the Owasco Flats is a big win for wildlife. This area hosts a diverse community of fish, including northern pike, walleye, and rainbow trout, whose spring runs attract crowds of fishermen along the inlet. Home to many bird species including Cerulean Warbler, American Bittern, and Least Bittern, the Flats are part of the Greater Summerhill Important Bird Area, as designated by the National Audubon Society.

The wetland restoration also offers immeasurable benefits to the lake and the people who use it. Nearly 70 percent of Cayuga County's water supply comes from Owasco Lake, and in turn, over half of the lake's water filters through the inlet. Wetlands hold and filter runoff from developed lands and agricultural fields upstream of the inlet, thus playing a vital role in helping to ensure water quality in groundwater and in the lake. —Mark Chao



*A contractor excavates shallow water wetlands in an area previously drained for agriculture.*



# Protecting Over 2,000 Feet along the West Branch of Owego Creek

*Tucked away in the pastoral landscape of southeastern Tompkins County lies the Goetchius Wetland Preserve, a mix of wetlands, open grassland, and forested areas in the town of Caroline. The preserve is a popular destination for nature enthusiasts, owing to its diverse array of plants and wildlife, including many species of wetland-dependent birds.*

**I**N November, the Land Trust acquired four acres directly to the east of the preserve off of Flat Iron Road. The parcel features 2,120 feet of frontage on the West Branch of Owego Creek, a high-quality brook trout stream that separates Caroline from the town of Richford in Tioga County.

The property has been added to the Goetchius Preserve which now stands at 88 acres and spans both Tompkins and Tioga counties. Protection of the property will improve water quality in Owego Creek and further downstream in the Susquehanna River and Chesapeake Bay watersheds. The bay is a focus of multistate and federal efforts to protect and improve water quality, and is also an important factor in the Land Trust's conservation efforts.

In partnership with the Upper Susquehanna Coalition, the Land Trust recently initiated an extensive restoration effort on the preserve to reestablish a streamside forest and wetlands on an adjacent 20-acre parcel acquired in 2019.

This is the 24th project completed by the Land Trust in

the Owego Creek watershed, where it has protected 1,420 acres to date. Owego Creek has priority conservation status with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Its headwaters support a native brook trout population and provide critical juvenile-rearing habitat.

Owego Creek's headwaters are also located in the Emerald Necklace, an effort to link 50,000 acres of existing public open space that extends in an arc around Ithaca—from the Finger Lakes National Forest in the west to Hammond Hill and Yellow Barn state forests in the east. These lands host 78 miles of the Finger Lakes Trail, two Audubon-designated Important Bird Areas, and several dozen Tompkins County-designated Unique Natural Areas.

*The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Richard Ruswick and the law firm Levene, Gouldin & Thompson, LLP in Ithaca, NY, for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.*





# Partnering with SUNY-ESF on Chestnut Reintroduction Effort



*The Land Trust has partnered with the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF) and the American Chestnut Foundation to plant 20 American chestnut saplings at the Owasco Bluffs Preserve, just south of Auburn on the east shore of Owasco Lake.*

**T**he American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) was once a keystone tree species in the forests of southern and central Appalachia, including much of the Finger Lakes region. Not only were the trees plentiful, but they grew quickly and to enormous size. Chestnut wood is straight-grained and rot-resistant, making it ideal for everything from building foundations to fine furniture. Additionally, humans and wildlife alike once heavily depended on the nuts as a major food source. Chestnuts were traditionally eaten roasted, ground into meal, or even steeped as a coffee substitute. Indeed, thanks to its forest dominance, timber quality, and food production, it is difficult to overstate the historic significance of the American chestnut to the ecology, culture, and economies of the region.

Sadly, in the early 20th century, an introduced fungal infection known as chestnut blight moved swiftly through the wild American chestnut population, nearly decimating it over the course of about 50 years. Plant pathologist William MacDonald has called the effects of chestnut blight “one of the greatest recorded changes in a natural plant population caused by an introduced organism.”

Despite its decline, the American chestnut is not extinct. The species continues to remain as an understory tree in some forests and a few blight-resistant mature specimens do exist. The Land Trust and its partners hope that this planting will be the first in an effort to maintain the genetic diversity of wild chestnut stock while research efforts to permanently ensure the future of this important tree species continue.

—Chris Ray



# Land Donation Protects Skaneateles Lake Water Quality

**AT** the southern end of Skaneateles Lake, the rugged hillsides of the Skaneateles Highlands rise above the surrounding landscape to form an area of exceptional scenic beauty. In October, Cortland residents Karen and Chet Seibert donated a 15-acre parcel of hillside forest in the southwestern corner of the highlands, off Glen Haven Road. The property is dominated by sugar maples and features multiple creeks that flow directly into Skaneateles Lake, the unfiltered drinking water supply for the city of Syracuse.

Protection of this parcel will safeguard the lake's water quality by prohibiting development on its steep slopes. Development pressures are steadily increasing in the watershed and upland portions of this landscape play a critical role in stabilizing soils and preventing erosion and sediment loading into the lake.

When asked why they wanted to donate their property for conservation, Karen and Chet said, "We want to protect the precious land and pure water for future generations."

The 15 acres are adjacent to an existing property

acquired by the Land Trust in 2020 from Cayuga County and in close proximity to another parcel donated by Anne Mackenzie and Frank Girardi in 2018. All three parcels are directly to the east of Bear Swamp State Forest.

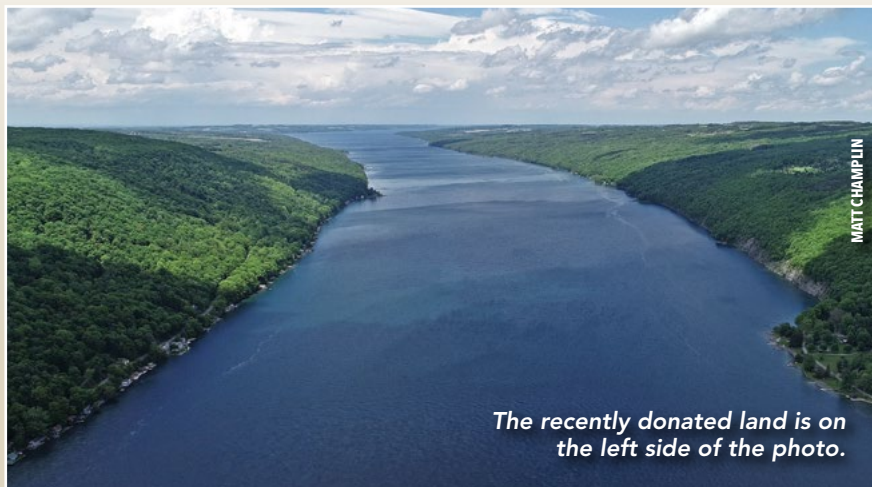
In addition to protecting water quality, creating a network of conserved lands at the south end of the lake ensures the scenic character of the area and safeguards wildlife habitat. The Land Trust will now consult with the

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to discuss a long-term conservation plan for the property.

Bear Swamp State Forest has been identified as a priority conservation project within New York State's Open Space Plan, is part of an Audubon-designated Important Bird Area, and features an extensive network of

trails and roads that are open and enjoyed by the public. Other protected lands in the area include Carpenter Falls Unique Area, the Land Trust's Bahar Nature Preserve, and the 236-acre Casa Farms, conserved with a conservation easement in 2022.

—Max Heitner



*The recently donated land is on the left side of the photo.*

MATT CHAMPLIN

## Finger Lakes Ecology Series

### Regional Experts on Key Conservation Challenges

*The Land Trust is hosting a series of online presentations given by local experts on threats to our land and water. Free and open to the public, topics will cover harmful algal blooms, invasive forest pests, and the impacts of deer on forest ecosystems.*

#### How Deer Shape Forest Ecosystems and Current Management Options

Brendan Quirion, Wildlife Biologist, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation  
Thursday, February 9 • 7:30 pm

#### Current and Emerging Threats to Our Forests by Invasive Insects and Diseases

Mark C. Whitmore, Forest Entomologist and Director of the New York State Hemlock Initiative  
Cornell University, Dept. of Natural Resources and the Environment  
Thursday, March 16 • 7:30 pm

#### Harmful Algal Blooms in the Finger Lakes

Lisa Cleckner, Director of the Finger Lakes Institute  
Hobart and William Smith Colleges  
Tuesday, April 4 • 7:30 pm

**For more information and to register, visit [fllt.org/events](https://fllt.org/events).**

NIGEL KENT



# Historic Stone House in Tompkins County to be Restored, Future Secured Through Preservation Agreement

*The Land Trust sold a historic 200-year-old fieldstone home and 3.5 acres in the town of Enfield to a private buyer. Sale of the property was contingent on the conveyance of a preservation easement to Historic Ithaca that will ensure that the architectural, historic, and cultural features of the house will be retained and maintained in perpetuity.*



**T**he property was originally donated to the Land Trust in June by Tompkins County resident Margaret Bald, who passed away in 2020. The home, built in the 1820s, will now be restored with guidance from Historic Ithaca to ensure its character will be preserved.

Proceeds from the sale of the house will be used to fund future Land Trust conservation projects. Other protected lands nearby include the Bock-Harvey Forest Preserve, the Land Trust's Stevenson Forest Preserve, and two properties protected by conservation easements.

*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.*

## Matching Gift Challenge Raises \$100,000 for Conservation



*A generous family offered the Finger Lakes Land Trust a \$100,000 matching gift challenge this past fall.*

**T**he challenge was designed to encourage new members to join the Land Trust, and existing members to increase their giving, by matching these new gifts dollar-for-dollar.

The challenge was a terrific success! Together, we quickly raised an additional \$100,000 that will go to work right away protecting lands and waters across the region. Our biggest thanks to the generous family who provided the challenge and to you for helping us advance conservation in the Finger Lakes.

## Our Stewardship Team Is Growing, and Needs a Truck!

*The Land Trust is hoping for a donation of a pickup truck in good working condition with a reasonable number of miles.*

**A** mid-size truck is preferred, but a full-size truck is welcome. Extended cab and 4-wheel drive are also preferred, but not essential. If you have a truck to donate, please contact Senior Director Kelly Makosch at [kellymakosch@fltt.org](mailto:kellymakosch@fltt.org) or (607) 275-9487.



## Our deepest gratitude for thoughtful gifts in memory of

**Robert Bayer, Jr**  
FROM  
Mrs. Leslie Bayer

**Betsy Brewer**  
FROM  
Geoffrey and  
Virginia Wickwire

**Joseph C. Buck**  
FROM  
Louise Buck and  
Charles Buck

**Edward Davis**  
FROM  
Steven and Brenda  
George

**Tom Davis**  
FROM  
Christopher and  
Hazel Gunn

**Rick Elster**  
FROM  
Doug and Myrna  
Flatt

**Tom and Patty  
Davis**  
FROM  
Alison Zepp

**Gene Endres**  
FROM  
Rodney Bent  
Patricia and Edwin  
Braus

Jim Mazza and  
Nancy Osborn  
Edward and Joan  
Ormondroyd  
Edward and Linda  
Stewart  
Lisa Wichman and  
Fouad Makki

**Clare Fewtrell**  
FROM  
Paul Feeny and  
Mary Berens  
Rodman Getchell  
and  
Janice Plante

Joye Jones  
Dennis and  
Elizabeth Regan  
Antonette and  
Benjamin Sacco  
Carol Weissmann

**George K. Fraley**  
FROM  
Kathy Briggs

**Cynthia Garrett**  
FROM  
Eben McLane

**Douglas V. Hatch**  
FROM  
Kitty Hatch  
Lois and S.E. Hatch  
Eric Huppert  
Robin Lickliter

**Charles I. Lake**  
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Barbara S. Lake

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FROM  
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Mary Dolan  
Ed and Robin  
Dubovi  
Donald Brian Elitzer  
Catherine Feldman  
Bob and Joyce  
Herman  
Barbara and Steve  
Presser  
Nathan and Susan  
Robfogel

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FROM  
Michael Mancini

**Daniel landoli  
Miner**  
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Brett Capshaw  
Roy and Fran  
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Sarah Evelyn and  
Alexander White  
Barbara A. and  
Steve Johnson  
Laurel Vincent

**Lorenzo Moonan**  
FROM  
Robert and  
Maureen Lamb

**Nancy Morse  
Robinson**  
FROM  
Cynthia Stewart

**Fred Scholl**  
FROM  
Roger F. and  
Patricia Beer  
Megan Detor  
Jean Eaton and  
Family  
Dan Fisher and Lori  
Ruhlman  
Janet Frank  
Dorothy Herzog  
Debbie Meyer  
Katie Murphree  
Haidee Oropallo  
Kerry Schwartz  
Karl and Lisa  
Sichelstiel

**Horst Schwinge**  
FROM  
Sigi Schwinge

**Bernard Zollo**  
FROM  
Nancy Palvino  
Mary J. Stiffler

## Our appreciation for gifts in honor of

**Dennis Barrett**  
FROM  
Jo Ann Smith  
and  
William C. Payne

**Betsy Darlington**  
FROM  
Roald and Eva  
Hoffmann

**Andrej and Lily  
Dovciak**  
FROM  
Mary and Ken  
Gleason

**Professor Charles  
Driscoll**  
FROM  
Joe and Marie  
Grasso

**Hannah George**  
FROM  
Al George  
and  
Judith Van Allen

**Benjamin Hoffman  
and Phoebe  
Koenig**  
FROM  
Molly Watson

**Jill Johnston, RN**  
FROM  
Joe and Marie  
Grasso

**Kristen Kamfjord**  
FROM  
Lauren Hannan  
Shafer  
Patricia Zesch

**Kristen Kamfjord  
and  
Jeff Thomas**  
FROM  
Anne Bathalter  
Pam Gibson  
Julie and Peter Hill  
Sia Ruppert

**Wade Leftwich**  
FROM  
Frances Branham

**Christine McCall**  
FROM  
Rachel Fishman

**Christine and  
Andrew**  
FROM  
Kelsey Martinez

**Gene Endres**  
FROM  
Greg Bostwick  
and  
Julia Bonney  
George Dillmann

**Zaq and Eileen  
Mowrey-Floss**  
FROM  
Meghan Caldwell

**Marjory Rinaldo-  
Lee and  
David Lee**  
FROM  
Mary and Stephen  
Colucci  
Mary and Thomas  
Johnson

**Lindsay Ruth**  
FROM  
Marjorie  
Ellenbogen

**The Joynt Children**  
FROM  
Suzanne Klink

**Dr. Paul Torrisi**  
FROM  
Joe and Marie  
Grasso

## 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.

Planned gifts come in many forms and can help you  
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# A CLOSER LOOK

## The Clone Ranger Rises Again

### *The Resilience and Adaptive Flexibility of the Quaking Aspen*

**F**or most deciduous trees, winter is a time of metabolic dormancy. As sunlight dwindles and as snow and frozen soils leave water inaccessible, these trees cease to photosynthesize and grow. But there is one exception, a tree species full of peculiar and wonderful adaptations, not only in winter but year-round, a unique beauty and indeed a mind-boggling record-setter.

So let's consider some of the many reasons to appreciate the quaking aspen.

Quaking aspens are distinctive in that their trunks and branches can carry out photosynthesis throughout their lives. Their thin bark allows sunlight to pass through to the cortex, where cells contain chlorophyll. This adaptation allows the aspens to convert the sun's energy to sugars and starches even when leafless in winter.

Both the tree's common name and its scientific name (*Populus tremuloides*) refer to how aspen leaves tremble even in the slightest breeze, collectively creating shimmering ripples of motion, spectacular especially when the leaves are golden in fall. The leaves move in this way because their stems (petioles) are flattened perpendicular to the leaf blades and thus lack rigidity. It is less clear why quaking aspen leaves have evolved to quake in the wind. Scientists have posited that the movement moderates the distribution of sunshine through the crown, or that it ensures air circulation for optimal photosynthesis, or that it inhibits damage to the leaves by insects.

Quaking aspens reproduce mostly asexually, via horizontal growth of roots and sprouting of new stems. What appears to be a grove of many quaking aspen trees is thus usually a single organism, called a clone. This explains why the many "trees" in a single aspen stand all tend to leaf out in spring and change color in autumn at the very same time.

An expansive root network allows the many trunks and crowns throughout a clone to share water and soil nutrients that may be unequally distributed. A wide-ranging mature root system also allows aspen clones to resprout after landslides and fires, which might take out most or all of the trees above ground, but rarely completely destroy the roots below.

Aspen clones can spread prodigiously if sunlight and soil conditions permit. Indeed, the most massive known

living thing in the world is a quaking aspen clone in the Wasatch Mountains in Utah. Named "Pando" (Latin for "I spread"), this aspen stand has expanded from a single seed to its current extent of about 107 acres and 47,000 trunks. Scientists estimate that Pando weighs 14 million

pounds. Pando is probably also extremely old—indeed, possibly the oldest known organism on Earth. Plausible conjectures of Pando's age range from thousands to tens of thousands of years and upward. But it is currently impossible to determine precisely when Pando's seed first germinated.

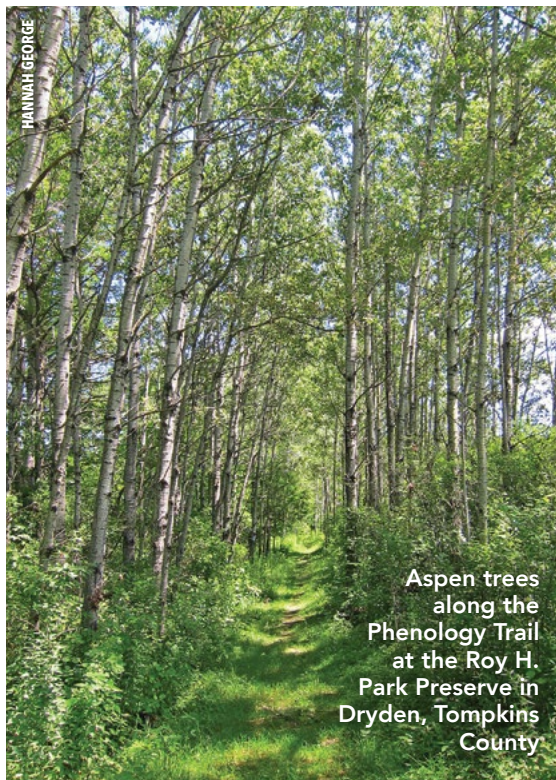
Quaking aspens reproduce sexually as well. Each aspen clone is either male or female, with outwardly similar sexual organs called catkins. Catkins of male trees each produce millions of pollen grains, which are carried away by the wind. Catkins of female trees produce ovules, which, when fertilized by the pollen, become tiny, fluffy seeds. These seeds too are dispersed by the wind. Most do not survive, but those that land on a favorable bed of soil germinate within a few days.

Given this versatile adaptive and reproductive toolkit, allowing

for both *in situ* resiliency and opportunistic dispersal, it's little wonder that the quaking aspen is the most widely distributed tree species in North America. It ranges from Alaska throughout Canada and the Great Lakes states to the Atlantic, and south through the Sierra Nevada and Rocky Mountains to Mexico, growing in an unusually wide range of habitats, from dry, rocky alpine slopes to wet lowlands. Throughout their range, quaking aspens are vital pillars of their ecosystems, providing high-quality habitat for a wide range of wildlife from bears to Golden-winged Warblers. They are an especially important source of sustenance for Ruffed Grouse, who feed on the budding catkins throughout the winter.

Quaking aspens are common in our Finger Lakes region. Look for them especially in relatively open areas, such as successional fields and recently logged forests. They're easiest to spot at a distance in fall, when all the leaves in a clonal stand turn gold at once. But even now in winter, you can find them by that distinctive bark, which is light greenish on younger trees and newer branches, and white with black scars on the trunks of mature trees.

—Mark Chao



Aspen trees  
along the  
Phenology Trail  
at the Roy H.  
Park Preserve in  
Dryden, Tompkins  
County



## Finger Lakes Land Trust

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Forestry Consultant: Michael DeMunn  
Stewardship Advisor: Betsy Darlington



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# Upcoming Events

## Finger Lakes Ecology Series

### Regional Experts on Key Conservation Challenges

Three online presentations offered February-April will cover harmful algal blooms, invasive insects, and the impacts of deer on forest ecosystems. See page 8 for more details, or visit [fllt.org/events](http://fllt.org/events).

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