



# Afoot in the Field

RESOURCE FOR CONSERVATION LANDOWNERS



GREAT GULLY, CAYUGA COUNTY, MATT CHAMPLIN

SEEING A SKINNY, two-foot tall serviceberry or white oak sapling in a plastic tube or wire cage (to protect it from browsing deer and rabbits) is a sign of hope, and to me, a symbol of the healing power of nature. It is an image that invokes a sense of investment in the future.

Over the past couple years, I have seen more and more of these native tree and shrub plantings as the Finger Lakes Land Trust and our partners in conservation engage in an increasing number of habitat restoration projects. Some of these projects are on lands owned and managed by FLLT and some are on private property subject to a conservation easement. The goal is simple – improve habitat for wildlife, and improve and protect the quality of water flowing in streams and into the Finger Lakes, Lake Ontario, and the Chesapeake Bay.

Whether it's an inexpensive planting of a few trees along a bare streambank or a carefully designed stream reconstruction project involving heavy machinery and special permits, our collective actions can make a big difference for wildlife and water resources. I invite you to learn more about habitat enhancement and water quality protection, and perhaps plant a tree along streambank.

**Chris Olney**  
Director of Stewardship



# FLLT & Water Quality

**IT IS EASY TO SEE** the importance of water quality in the Finger Lakes region. The 11 Finger Lakes provide drinking water to over one million people, recreation and tourism ventures for more, and home for a multitude of wildlife. Bald Eagles, trout, and lake sturgeons, all rely on the lakes.



From top: Sediment runoff at Owasco Lake inlet after a storm; Bill Hecht. Harmful algal bloom along Cayuga Lake shoreline; Jeff Katris.

flow of water on the way to lakes.

In addition to development pressure, climate changes make us more susceptible to extreme droughts and flooding events. These extremes overflow

FLLT is committed to conservation efforts with individual landowners, farmers, lake associations, and municipalities. One of the main ways that FLLT promotes water quality is by protecting lands from development, allowing natural buffers to be retained.

Water quality is impacted by land development. Impervious surfaces, such as asphalt, and improperly sized bridges, culverts, and ditches can all interfere with the water patterns. When precipitation doesn't have a chance to seep into the ground, it can run off of the landscape quickly, carrying soil, nutrients, and contaminants. Unlike drainage ditches and sewage pipes, natural features such as forests, wetlands, and riparian buffers absorb, filter, and slow down the

our systems and make runoff even more prevalent. All contributing to the increase of toxic algae blooms or harmful algal blooms (HABs) in the Finger Lakes region. These blooms are caused by increased nutrient levels, from a mixture of fertilizer runoff, roadside ditch erosion, and leaking septic systems, mixed with a combination of warm temperatures and calm waters. Droughts and floods also exacerbate this as they contribute to increasing levels of run-off.

FLLT partners with organizations to help protect critical lands for water quality. Partners such as:

## NYS WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (WQIP) PROGRAM

- Provides funds for projects that protect drinking water sources and improve water quality.
- Provides funding to protect properties with water frontage in public water supply areas.
- FLLT has conserved 503 acres with support from WQIP to date.

## UPPER SUSQUEHANNA COALITION (USC) RIPARIAN BUFFER PROGRAM

- Assists landowners with conservation in the northern headwaters of the Chesapeake Bay watershed for conservation including riparian buffers.



PETE WIEDMANN

## WINTER PLANNING FOR YOUR SPRING PROJECTS

Winter is the best time to plan for the spring and summer months. Take time on a dark winter day to dream of warmth and sunshine.

Maybe you are planning to plant crops next season, create a garden, remove invasive species, or take on a restoration project. Do you envision enhancing your property's biodiversity, catching water run-off, creating trails, or something else?

With any projects on your conservation land, I am happy to answer questions about what is allowed on your conservation easement. Please do not hesitate to reach out.

Email me at [haileynase@fllt.org](mailto:haileynase@fllt.org)

I'd love to chat!



**Hailey Nase**  
Conservation  
Easement  
Steward

# Where Does the Water Go? What Can I Do?

**ONE OF THE EASIEST WAYS** to have an impact on your property is to watch where the water goes. During a rain storm or after snow melt, where does water pool? What areas on your property have consistent water flow? From your property, does the water go into a sewage drain, a roadside ditch, a stream, a creek, a wetland, or a lake? Is the water clear or carrying debris? Once you know the pathway of the water, you can better direct your water quality improvement efforts.



CHRIS RAY



CHRIS RAY



CHRIS RAY

## LANDOWNERS

Some ways you can help enhance the water quality on your property include:

- Reducing the use of fertilizer and waiting until the fall to apply
- Maintaining your septic system in working condition
- Creating a rain garden with native plants and grasses
- Seeding bare ground to decrease soil runoff
- For more tips please see:

*The Homeowner's Lawn Care and Water Quality Almanac* by Cornell Cooperative Extension. You can find a link through the QR code in the right column.

## FARMERS

Reaching out to your local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is a great way to learn more and establish a plan for your farm.

Helpful measures include:

- Planting cover crops between harvests
- Minimizing fertilizer applications
- Planting permanent vegetation at erosion-prone locations
- Establishing planting buffers around waterways
- Capturing and containing runoff on the farm

## LANDOWNERS WITH WATER FRONTAGE

In addition to leaving an unmowed buffer next to streams and lakes, you can work with organizations like:

### Trees for Tribs

The Buffer in a Bag program provides free tree and shrub seedlings to establish or improve stream buffers for properties with at least 50 feet along a waterbody. Applications start mid-February. More information at NYS DEC.

### NY Partners for Fish and Wildlife

Provides private landowners assistance with restoration projects to protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their associated habitats.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

### FLLT WATER HUB

Check out [fllt.org/water](http://fllt.org/water) to learn more about water quality issues facing the Finger Lakes region. The website provides resources and educational materials about toxic algae blooms, and shares our 5-point initiative in response to increasing water quality concerns. You will also find maps of the 11 individual watersheds!

## FLLT VIDEOS

See the [FLLT YouTube page](#) for videos about roadside ditches with Dr. Rebecca Schneider, Cornell University, and stream restoration with Gian Dodici of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

## LINKS

Scan the code below for links to:

- NYS Water Quality Improvement Program (WQIP)
- Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC)
- Trees for Tribs
- Partners for Fish & Wildlife
- FLLT videos and water pages
- More resources



# Landowner Interview

## SUSAN COMPTON & JOHN SAYLOR

**DRYDEN, NY • 64 ACRES conserved • 4,050 FEET along Owego Creek**  
**550 TREES & SHRUBS planted**

Susan and John donated a conservation easement in 2021, establishing a Riparian Buffer Zone along the West Branch of Owego Creek, to protect, maintain and enhance habitat and water quality. The work was supported by the DEC Chesapeake Bay Program Riparian Buffer Grant. In the fall of 2020, the Upper Susquehanna Coalition planted 350 trees and 200 shrubs in protective tubes along both sides of the creek.



From top: Susan Compton and John Saylor on their property; Michael Ludgate. Riparian buffer planting along Owego Creek; Hailey Nase.

### What made you interested in conserving your land?

We wanted to protect the wildness of the property. When land along the creek was available we bought it to protect it from being developed or logged. Mainly, we did not want a house or septic system built near the creek. The easement was a great step to ensure the creek stays protected.

### How did you get started with the creek

### restoration project and the riparian buffer plants?

We found an old, rusty culvert in the creek that we were hoping to remove. We knew if we were going to mess with the creek, we should know what we were doing. So we reached out to FLLT who helped us get in contact with Gian Dodici from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Gian removed the culvert and stabilized the bank to mitigate the negative impact. Later we worked with the Upper Susquehanna Coalition to plant trees and shrubs to stabilize the banks of the creek and improve the habitat.

### What tips do you have for landowners interested in riparian buffer projects?

Talk to FLLT, they helped us get connected with other organizations. FLLT made it a piece of cake for us, they greatly helped us protect our property.

### What are your future hopes for the property?

We hope that the planted trees and shrubs along the creek survive and thrive, and that the Eastern brook trout flourish.

*Susan is a marriage and family counselor. John is retired from Cornell University library. Susan says there is nowhere else they would like to live: they love the water and the trees. Fun fact: John ran the Boston Marathon yearly between 1984-1996.*



Dogwood sapling in protective tubing at Kehoe Preserve; Chris Ray. Riparian planting by USC on Compton-Saylor property; Hailey Nase.

# When Should I Call FLLT?



**Contact us anytime** that you have a question about your conservation easement property. Some activities will require FLLT's input or approval. It is always better to ask before starting your project! Specifically, please contact us...



Before **selling** your property



Before **building** on your property



Before **cutting trees** or harvesting timber



Anytime you have a **question** or are unsure what your conservation easement allows

You can call the FLLT office at (607) 275-9487, or email us:

**Chris Olney**, Director of Stewardship, [chrisolney@flt.org](mailto:chrisolney@flt.org)

**Hailey Nase**, Conservation Easement Steward, [haileynase@flt.org](mailto:haileynase@flt.org)

**Afoot in the Field** is provided for landowners in the Finger Lakes region who own conservation easement properties or who are otherwise committed to land conservation and wildlife habitat protection.

**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."



## FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

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