



The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

Land Trust Launches Bluff Point Conservation Effort Through Two Land Purchases



BILL HECHT

A well-known scenic area overlooking Keuka Lake, Bluff Point divides the lake into two branches, creating its distinctive Y shape.

Here, the Land Trust recently launched a new initiative to conserve lands significant for their ecological value, water quality, and scenery, with the purchase of two properties featuring 57 acres of hillside forest.

Both parcels contain mature hardwoods and pine, as well as several rugged ravines created by tributaries to Keuka Lake. The parcels are not

adjacent to each other but are in close proximity, and both feature frontage on East Bluff Drive.

The Land Trust intends to develop a hiking trail on one of the parcels that will be open to the public during daylight hours. The trail will be developed after a natural resource inventory and management plan for both properties

continued on page 2

It has been said that a person who plants a tree plants a hope. For the Land Trust, our hope is that in the future, all our streams and wetlands will be bordered by galleries of native forest and shrubs that filter runoff while providing habitat for a diversity of wildlife.

It is with this hope in mind that the Land Trust is working with partners to establish and expand these vegetated buffer areas at sites across our region. Tree and shrub plantings yield multiple benefits. In terms of water quality, they play a role in binding up nitrogen and phosphorous while stabilizing soils to limit erosion and increase groundwater recharge. Trees also play a role in addressing climate change. It is estimated that in one year, a mature live tree can absorb up to 48 pounds of carbon dioxide.

Over the past few years, the Land Trust has completed eight tree-planting projects, all of which play a role in buffering streams or wetlands. We are learning a lot through these projects. First and foremost, we've learned that it is relatively easy to plant a tree but it's a taller order to get that tree to its fifth birthday.

Competing vegetation, non-native, invasive plants, and high deer populations all present challenges in nurturing seedlings and saplings to become mature trees. Protecting the plantings from deer and managing competing vegetation require years of focused stewardship.

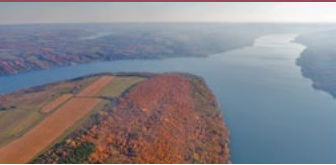
With that said, early success is evident at places like

the Otisco Shores Conservation Area. Though still very much a work in process, visitors can see a variety of tree species that are thriving and reaching for the sky thanks to a partnership between the Land Trust, local volunteers, the Otisco Lake Preservation Association, and Onondaga County.

At Otisco Shores, one can see nature reclaiming areas of lakeside lawn that are becoming more diverse and abundant with life with each passing year. A new tree canopy is bursting forth and runoff to the lake is being reduced.

It will take many years and perhaps a lifetime to achieve our vision. In the meantime, we celebrate the rewilding of the Otisco Shores Conservation Area and marvel at the resilience of tenacious seedlings that make it past the deer and the invasive shrubs to claim their place in the sun—with a little help from our stewards.

Andrew Zepp
Executive Director



Land Trust Launches Bluff Point Conservation Effort Through Two Land Purchases *continued from cover*

has been completed.

The two purchases were made possible by an anonymous donation, proceeds from the Land Trust's Finger Lakes Forever capital campaign, and a loan from the organization's internal revolving fund. The Land Trust has thus far raised \$374,000 toward its goal of raising \$610,000 to cover the costs of the purchases, along with public access improvements, and a contribution to the organization's stewardship fund to provide long-term care of the parcels.

With these two purchases, the Land Trust has completed three land protection projects on Bluff Point including an earlier donation of a perpetual conservation easement. A conservation easement is a legal agreement that limits future

development while allowing the land to remain in private ownership.

As the Land Trust develops a publicly accessible nature trail, the organization will also reach out



to additional landowners on Bluff Point to identify other sensitive land protection opportunities. Both conservation easements and

acquisitions will be considered.

"As a Land Trust Board member, I have come to recognize the long-lasting impact of land conservation," said Vice-President Karen Meriwether.

"And as a member of the Keuka Lake community, I am thrilled with how many people are joining the effort to protect our beautiful lake and the quality of our water. The East Bluff acquisitions are such an important step in this ongoing effort."

To date, the FLLT has conserved more than 390 acres within the Keuka Lake watershed. In addition to its recent acquisitions on Bluff Point, the FLLT owns and manages the Botsford Nature

Preserve at Big Gully in the town of Jerusalem and holds additional conservation easements on prime farmland near Penn Yan.

Conservation Easement Protects Family Vineyard in Ontario County

TONY RUSSO

Dale Shaw still remembers her grandparents harvesting grapes by hand on her family's property located in the rolling hills between Canandaigua and Honeoye lakes. Woodlands, meadows, crop fields, and a small vineyard have been managed by her family since the land was first purchased in the 1940s.

When it was time for her parents to retire, Dale took over operations at the farm where she has lived her entire life. She is the third generation to live and work on the Ontario County property, a cherished way of life she shares with her husband Glen.

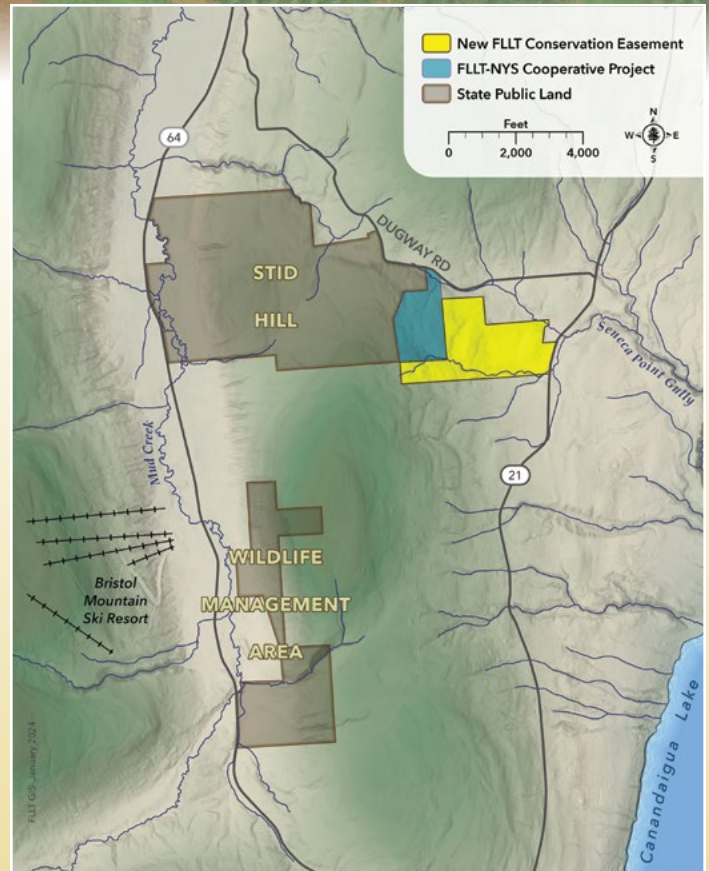
Dale and Glen mainly grow Concord and Niagara grapes which they sell to Welch's for grape juice and to Randall Standish Vineyards in Canandaigua. They also grow Catawba and Noreit varieties. When they are not planting, pruning, or harvesting grapes, they are hard at work managing fields and woodlands on the property.

Located on State Route 21 and Dugway Road, the property is situated in the towns of Bristol, Canandaigua, and South Bristol. The land borders a neighboring parcel the Land Trust recently acquired and intends to transfer to New York State as an addition to Stid Hill Wildlife Management Area. When the Shaws learned that the Land Trust was conserving their neighbor's property, they decided to secure their family's legacy and generously donated a conservation easement.

The easement will protect 158 acres of the Shaw's property, including over 100 acres of forest, eight acres of vineyards, as well as additional croplands. The easement will also safeguard more than 4,000 feet of frontage on two tributaries to a stream that flows into Canandaigua Lake, benefitting a public drinking water supply serving approximately 70,000 area residents. With this latest easement, an uninterrupted corridor of conservation land extends from State Route 21 to State Route 64.

"The land has always been our first priority," said Dale. "It's nice to know that it's still going to be here after I'm gone."

Transaction and stewardship costs associated with the project were covered by a grant from The Nature



Conservancy's Resilient and Connected Grant Program, which supports the protection of lands and waters that provide linkages for climate change-driven wildlife migration.

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS are voluntary legal agreements that permanently limit future land use in order to protect the land's conservation value. Lands subject to conservation easements remain in private ownership, on local tax rolls, and available for traditional uses such as farming and hunting. Currently, the Finger Lakes Land Trust holds 187 easements on more than 19,000 acres. For more information on conservation easements, visit fltl.org/easement.

Rare Undeveloped Canandaigua Lake Shoreline Protected

In October, the Land Trust accepted the donation of two perpetual conservation easements on eight acres in the town of South Bristol, Ontario County, from local residents John and Josephine Ingle. Located on Canandaigua Lake's western shore just south of Seneca Point, the forested lakefront property contains just over 350 feet along a pristine undeveloped cove.

The two easements protect habitat for wildlife such as herons and Bald Eagles and also prevent development on the *continued on page 10*



KATE RILEY

New Addition at Cayuga Cliffs Enhances Access and Provides Additional Habitat

The Land Trust recently acquired 24 acres adjacent to the Sims-Jennings Preserve at Cayuga Cliffs, along the eastern shore of Cayuga Lake in the town of Lansing. The property has more than 1,200 feet of frontage on Ridge Road (State Route 34B) and mostly consists of open meadows. This parcel will soon host the entrance to the preserve as well as a memorial pollinator garden.

Just 15 minutes from Ithaca, the 224-acre Sims-Jennings Preserve at Cayuga Cliffs features mature woodlands, extensive meadows, and 4,000 feet of wooded bluffs overlooking the lake. Acquired by the Land Trust in 2021, plans are underway to open the preserve to the public later this year. A planned 3-mile hiking trail will traverse the woodlands and meadows, offering gentle grades and a unique recreation experience including two overlooks.

This new acquisition emerged from conversations with the late John Thompson starting in 2019. After John's passing in 2021, the Land Trust continued discussions with



CHRIS RAY

John's daughter Tamara Thompson, and her partner Kevin Sullivan. Tamara and Kevin generously agreed to a bargain sale of the property, requesting the inclusion of a memorial pollinator garden to honor John's legacy. Tamara added, "We are thrilled to be a part of this project that will finally provide a nature preserve, hiking trails, and a pollinator garden to Lansing."

With the acquisition now complete, the Land Trust hired a contractor to demolish an abandoned house

on the property and develop a parking area and trailhead. Installation of an interpretive kiosk and development of the pollinator garden will follow.

Funding for this project includes an allocation from the Land Trust's recent Finger Lakes Forever capital campaign; a contribution from the estate of Margaret Bald; and grants from Tompkins County's Capital Reserve Fund and New York State's Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation.

—Beatrice Gartenberg

CONSERVATION EASEMENT DONATION PROTECTS Scenic Family Land in the Southern Tier

AMY OLNEY

West of Elmira and south of Corning, a mosaic of forests and farms define a scenic rural landscape that inspired long-standing community members Stuart (Stu) and Lucy Schweizer to permanently protect their land. In December, Stu and Lucy donated a conservation easement to the Land Trust, protecting their 182-acre property in Southport, Chemung County, including a tiny 3.5-acre portion in the adjacent town of Caton, Steuben County.

The couple have lived on the property since 1976 when they purchased their first 10 acres as parents of three young children. Over the following decades, they slowly acquired neighboring parcels that went up for sale in the area, colloquially known as “Dutch Hill.”

Entirely located within the Chemung River basin of the

Chesapeake Bay watershed, the property contains approximately 70 acres of forest, 12 acres of wetlands, and 16 acres of grassland that provide habitat for a diversity of birds and other wildlife. Agricultural fields on the property are leased to local farmers who harvest hay for their herd of beef cattle.

The easement will protect these natural features by limiting development while still allowing for agricultural activities. The property also features approximately 4,400 feet of frontage on seasonal tributaries to nearby Mudlick Creek. Erodible soils that are adjacent to these waterways would be highly susceptible to accelerated stormwater runoff and erosion damage that could adversely affect water quality if trees and vegetation were removed or the soil disturbed.

“We love having had the privilege

to live and raise our family in such a beautiful and unspoiled area,” Stu said. “We view the easement as the best means to ensure this area remains that way well beyond our lifetimes.”

New York’s portion of the Chesapeake Bay watershed is comprised of the Susquehanna River and Chemung River watersheds. Protecting lands and waters in the Southern Tier is a critical focus of the Land Trust’s ongoing conservation efforts to improve water quality in the Finger Lakes region and beyond. Other protected lands in the area include the Land Trust’s Steege Hill and Plymouth Woods nature preserves as well as the Big Flats Wildlife Management Area, owned and managed by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

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. The 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. Thank you to everyone who participated and particularly to the generous family who provided the challenge to help us advance conservation in the Finger Lakes region.

CHUCK FEIL

Conservation Partnerships Plant Over 1,000 Trees to Protect Water Quality

CHRIS RAY

In fall 2023, the Land Trust and partners completed two restoration projects designed to protect water quality by planting native trees and shrubs on recently protected private lands in Ontario and Cayuga counties.

Building on a conservation success from early 2023, Land Trust staff, volunteers, and a contractor planted nearly 400 trees and shrubs along 5,000 feet of a tributary that flows into Owasco Lake on private property in Scipio, Cayuga County. The organization protected the 160-acre property in January 2023 with a conservation easement that limits development and requires the maintenance of vegetated stream buffers.

Mostly a mix of agricultural fields, the property has expansive views of the lake and the surrounding area, including the FLLT's Owasco Bluffs Nature Preserve on the opposite shore. Establishing native trees at this site will enhance wildlife habitat, promote plant diversity, and create an important stream buffer to reduce nutrient runoff to the lake. Owasco Lake provides drinking water to over 40,000 people in Cayuga County, including the city of Auburn.

Planted species include sugar maple, black cherry, white oak, white pine, and silky dogwood. Funds for the project came from a grant from New York's Environmental Protection Fund and the NYS Conservation Partnership

Program, as administered by the Land Trust Alliance.

In November, 700 native trees were planted in partnership with The Nature Conservancy on a property conserved by the Land Trust in Manchester, Ontario

County. Staff from both organizations participated in the planting, which The Nature Conservancy funded as part of an effort to scale up tree planting across New York State. Planted tree species include red oak, red maple, black willow, black gum, and American sycamore.

The newly created buffer will safeguard water quality by filtering runoff to a stream on the property, located in a landscape of rolling hills and farmland just north of the New York State Thruway. The Land Trust

received the property as a donation from the estate of Margaret Morris in February 2023 with the understanding that it would be sold subject to a conservation easement that protects its natural resources and limits subdivision. Proceeds from the sale of the property will be used to cover project costs and also support future land conservation efforts in the region.



Longtime Land Trust Member Leaves an Enduring Gift to Conservation

Longtime Land Trust supporter, cherished Ithaca community member, and herbalist Becca Harber first offered to volunteer for nature preserve maintenance activities in 2005, nine years after becoming a member. When the organization acquired a conservation easement on Ithaca College's Van Buskirk Gulf Preserve in 2010, Becca offered to be the volunteer steward, routinely walking the property to ensure the long-term integrity of the agreement.

Becca passed away unexpectedly in November of 2022, but her contributions to the Finger Lakes live on. In 2019, she indicated her intention to leave her home and nearly two acres in Newfield, Tompkins County, to the Land Trust



upon her passing. This bequest was granted with the understanding that the property would be sold to a private buyer and the proceeds used to fund future conservation projects. With the help of a local realtor, the house is now under contract.

A new bench and plaque honoring Becca's memory was installed at the Land Trust's Sweedler Preserve at Lick Brook in Ithaca. The bench can be found along the blue trail where visitors can enjoy

lovely waterfall views.

The Land Trust is forever grateful to Becca for her generosity and decades of commitment to the Land Trust's mission, which will have long-lasting effects throughout the Finger Lakes.

Land Trust Supports Efforts to Reconnect Haudenosaunee with Ancestral Homelands

When Europeans arrived in North America during the late 15th century, what is now known as New York State was home to many distinct groups of Indigenous peoples.

Inhabiting portions of the Finger Lakes region were the Haudenosaunee, a confederacy of nations including the Gayogohó:nq' (Cayuga), Kanien'kehà:ka (Mohawk), Onyota'a:ká (Oneida), Onoñda'gegá' (Onondaga), and Onödowá'ga' (Seneca). But over time, U.S. policies, designed to remove Indigenous people from their lands, resulted in the systematic devastation of these cultures.

Today, there are growing efforts to strengthen and share native languages and culture among the Haudenosaunee people. In the summer of 2023, the Finger Lakes Land Trust was honored to provide partial support for two such programs designed to immerse the Gayogohó:nq' and the Onödowá'ga' in their respective cultures.

The Gayogohó:nq' Learning Project (GLP) is a partnership of

Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working to promote awareness and practice of the Gayogohó:nq' language in its ancestral homeland. In August 2023, the GLP held a weeklong camp at Cornell University's Arnot Teaching and Research Forest, located in Schuyler and Tompkins counties, to immerse Gayogohó:nq' students in their native language.

Students of all ages came to the region from all over the U.S. and Canada for the first time to experience their ancestral origins. Efforts to revitalize the Gayogohó:nq' language carry immense importance as there are currently fewer than 10 living first-language speakers.

In Ontario County, the Ganondagan State Historic Site is the original site of a 17th century Onödowá'ga' village and home to the Seneca Art & Culture Center, a Seneca Bark Longhouse, and a

series of interpretive trails. Friends of Ganondagan, a non-profit organization formed to support the site, held a four-day Edge of the Woods Youth Camp designed to welcome Seneca (and other Haudenosaunee) youth to their homelands and place of origin while providing cultural immersion opportunities. A highlight of the camp was a paddle from the West River to Canandaigua Lake to visit Bare Hill, or Genundewah in their own language, which overlooks the lake's eastern shore. The Onödowá'ga' regard Bare Hill as central to their origin story.

The Land Trust utilized funds from a generous donor to support these programs. For more information on Ganondagan State Historic Site, visit ganondagan.org. Information on the Gayogohó:nq' Learning Project can be found at gayogohono-learning-project.org.

Acquisition Expands Salmon Creek Bird Sanctuary in Tompkins County

Established as a collaboration between the Land Trust and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in 1988, the Salmon Creek Bird Sanctuary features a rich floodplain forest and wooded hillsides.

Located in the town of Lansing, Tompkins County, the preserve features frontage on Salmon Creek, bordered by towering sycamores, black walnuts, and a diversity of other trees.

The Land Trust recently purchased 7.5 acres as an addition to the sanctuary, which now encompasses 40 acres. The new, wooded addition has permanent and seasonal streams that flow through the property on their way to the creek, a major tributary of Cayuga Lake.

A one-mile stretch of Salmon Creek and its adjacent woodlands has been designated as an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society. In the past, the site has

hosted nesting Cerulean Warblers and a variety of other neotropical migrant songbirds. To minimize disturbance, there are no trails at the preserve, although birding opportunities can be accessed from Salmon Creek Road.

Protection of this latest addition will safeguard habitat for birds and other wildlife, secure scenic views from adjacent public roads, and buffer water quality within Salmon Creek.

Funding for the project came from the Land Trust's Finger Lakes Forever capital campaign and the estate of Margaret Bald.

Salmon Creek

CHRIS RAY

Sponsored by the Finger Lakes Land Trust and the Finger Lakes Institute

A CONVERSATION WITH PULITZER-PRIZE NOMINATED AUTHOR



About Phosphorous and the Health of Our Lakes

March 5, 2024 • 7:30 PM • Free Virtual Event

Join Dan Egan, Pulitzer Prize-nominated author of *The Devil's Element: Phosphorus and a World Out of Balance* and *The Death and Life of the Great Lakes*, for a conversation about the role of phosphorus in our daily lives, how it impacts our environment, and its role in shaping agriculture.

Dan Egan for many years covered the Great Lakes for the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. Now he writes occasional long-form pieces about climate change for national media outlets, including the *New York Times*, and is a senior water policy fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's School of Freshwater Sciences. He is the author of THE DEVIL'S ELEMENT: PHOSPHORUS AND A WORLD OUT OF BALANCE and the *New York Times* best seller THE DEATH AND LIFE OF THE GREAT LAKES. Twice a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, he has won the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Award, John B. Oakes Award, AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Award, and J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award. A graduate of the Columbia Journalism School, he lives in Milwaukee with his wife and children.

DAN
EGAN

INFORMATION AND REGISTRATION AT [FLLT.ORG/DANEGAN](https://fllt.org/danegan)

MATT CHAMPLIN

Our appreciation for gifts in honor of

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Thank you to John Smith and Polley McClure

Many thanks to longtime Land Trust members John Smith and Polley McClure for their dedication to the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in West Danby, Tompkins County. John and Polley are neighbors of the preserve and have played an integral role in its stewardship over the years.

In fall of 2023, John worked with staff member Eric Mastroberti to remove a tire dump on a new addition to the preserve. The tires, which were then hauled away for disposal, weighed an astounding 11.57 tons.

The new parcel, acquired by the Land Trust in the spring of 2023, is located off Station Road and represents the 14th addition to this growing conservation area. Learn more about the Lindsay-Parsons Preserve at flit.org/lindsay.



ERIC MASTROBERTI

Our deepest gratitude for thoughtful gifts in memory of

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Rare Undeveloped Canandaigua Lake Shoreline Protected *continued from page 4*

property, located in an area of intense development pressure. Open space in this area is quickly disappearing, threatening water quality, wildlife habitat, and public lake access.

To date, the Ingles have protected over 80 acres of their land holdings. The family donated an easement in 2010 on 73 acres of woodlands and fields located on a portion of their property furthest from the lakeshore.

"Josephine and I take great pleasure

in being part of the Finger Lakes Land Trust and helping to preserve this very special region that we are blessed to live in," said John Ingle.

"This is an incredible gift and we are grateful to John and Jo Ingle for their commitment to conservation," said FLLT Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "Canandaigua Lake's shoreline is almost entirely developed and this conservation easement will ensure the future of one of the last undeveloped

coves on the lake."

Additional conserved lands in this area include the Stid Hill Wildlife Management Area, three private properties protected with conservation easements granted to the FLLT, and the organization's Canandaigua Vista Nature Preserve.

A CLOSER LOOK

White as Snow: Long-tailed Weasels in Winter

For most mammal-watchers in the Finger Lakes, the Long-tailed Weasel is among the last common species to check off one's life list. It's little wonder, as weasels are shy, usually silent, often underground, and most active at night. In winter, seeing them is all the more challenging, as they acquire camouflage as white as the frozen landscape. Typically, we observe no trace of their presence except their tracks in the snow.

But meanwhile, a rich, peculiar, and dynamic life history is unfolding out of our view.

Long-tailed Weasels have the largest range of any weasel in the Western Hemisphere, from the southern United States to southern Canada. In the northern part of their range, including our Finger Lakes region, Long-tailed Weasels overlap with Least Weasels (*Mustela nivalis*) and Short-tailed Weasels (*M. erminea*), but stand apart by their larger size (11-17 inches long) and proportionally longer tails. The size difference partially explains ecological niche separation, as the smaller weasels succeed better in pursuit of meadow voles and other comparatively puny prey. Long-tailed Weasels also exclude other weasel species by fighting them off, especially at the southern limits of the range overlap.

Long-tailed Weasels do not hibernate. In colder climes, including New York, they molt from brown coats with off-white undersides into pure white in winter, except for black tail tips. White pelage against a snowy backdrop helps the weasels to evade detection by both predators and prey. The dark tail tip helps to shift the aim of aerial hunters, such as hawks and owls, away from a weasel's vital organs.

The timing and extent of winter molt appears to arise more from genetic predisposition than from physiological changes triggered by the weather, with more northerly populations turning white earlier, and more southerly populations keeping brown patches throughout the winter.



Therefore, scientists speculate that reduced snow cover from climate change could leave our white winter weasels much more vulnerable to predation.

This white fur is short and relatively poor for insulation. Furthermore, because of their long spines, weasels cannot curl into a ball for heat retention as dogs and cats do. As a result, Long-tailed Weasels, even though they do spend much of the winter in moderate temperatures underground, must constantly generate body heat.

So they eat voraciously—up to a third of their body weight per day. Long-tailed Weasels strongly prefer rodents, shrews, moles, and small rabbits. When prey is abundant, Long-tailed Weasels kill more than they can immediately consume. They cache their surplus in burrows or sometimes even in trees.

They often hunt by lying in wait next to burrow entrances to ambush prey. They can also hunt underground, applying their keen hearing and sense of smell as well as formidable speed and maneuverability in tight spaces, chasing and cornering victims, then dispatching them with a bite that crushes the windpipe. Long-tailed Weasels sometimes even kill large rabbits and fowl in open spaces above ground by leaping on, grasping tenaciously with all four feet, and delivering lethal bites to the

nape or skull.

Long-tailed Weasels are solitary, except during the breeding season from July through August. Males usually have multiple mates; females sometimes do as well. Copulation lasts 1 to 4 hours. Soon after fertilization, the female's reproductive system goes dormant. Embryos do not implant until the following spring. Most development occurs during just the last month of gestation, and finally, a litter of 4-6 kits is born between mid-April and mid-May, just when prey is becoming most active and abundant again.

With some understanding of their movements, we can readily find and identify the distinctive tracks of Long-tailed Weasels in winter. The weasels bound along, deftly placing their rear feet just where the front feet landed and lifted a moment before. Thus, they leave just one tidy pair of pawprints close together, then another pair onward after the next leap, and so on. Long-tailed Weasels can also confound trackers by doubling back, looping around, varying their stride length, dragging their tails, and/or disappearing into a burrow. Actually spotting a weasel at the end of the trail takes uncommon luck and patience. But the marks in the snow are their own reward—a revealing record of marvelous animal energy, agility, and adaptation.

—Mark Chao

Finger Lakes Land Trust

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