



Vol. 37, No. 4 • Autumn 2025

The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

LAND TRUST PROTECTS OVER 200 ACRES of Organic Farmland in Yates County

Among the scenic expanse of farmland in Yates County lies Christiansen Farms, a third-generation, NOFA-NY-certified organic dairy and crop farm owned and operated by Guy Christiansen and his sons Tim and Ryan.

Presently, the farm ships its milk to the Upstate-Niagara Cooperative, in which the Christiansens are owner-members. They also grow several crops, including corn, soybeans, soft red wheat, soft white wheat, and alfalfa. The soft red wheat and soft white wheat are sold to Wegmans Food Markets for use in their artisanal bakery products.

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The Finger Lakes Land Trust now owns and manages a network of nature preserves that encompasses approximately 7,000 acres across the region. We also oversee and monitor conservation easements and deed restrictions on private lands that extend across an additional 21,000 acres.

And increasingly, we are working with a variety of public and private sector partners to address a range of issues, including water quality and invasive species, and to expand opportunities for people to connect with nature.

Not surprisingly, land stewardship is frequently on our minds! Our stewardship efforts are currently focused on maintaining and improving the health of our natural resources while hosting the public on an ever-expanding network of trails and conservation lands.

The centerfold of this issue of *The Land Steward* is dedicated to our stewards, both staff and volunteers. This summer was particularly busy, and the weather was often unforgiving. Despite the heat, we worked on developing a new trail and parking area at our new Waldershare Acres Nature Preserve on Keuka Lake's Bluff Point; completing a native garden for pollinators at the Sims-Jennings Preserve at Cayuga Cliffs; preliminary work on what will be our first universally accessible trail at the Roy H. Park Preserve; mowing large meadows



across the region; maintaining trails; and beating back invasive species.

From everyone at the Land Trust, thank you to all the volunteers who helped out on our conservation lands so far this year! Your dedication is inspiring, and our preserves highlight your commitment and hard work.

Thanks to the generous support of our members, our stewardship capabilities have grown significantly in recent years. But there is always more

to do, and every year brings new challenges. Please consider making a contribution to the Land Trust's Stewardship Fund to help ensure that our conservation efforts stand the test of time.

Andrew Zepp
President

LAND TRUST PROTECTS OVER 200 ACRES of Organic Farmland in Yates County

continued from cover

In July, the Land Trust protected 246 acres at Christiansen Farms, using a grant awarded by the Farmland Protection Implementation Program (FPIG), administered by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. FPIG funds were used to purchase three agricultural conservation easements protecting three non-contiguous parcels.

One of the three parcels in this project, which includes over 100 acres, is adjacent to forested wetlands that extend north to the Keuka Lake Outlet. The terms of the conservation easement establish a forested buffer zone along this section and the popular Keuka Outlet Trail.

Located within commuting distance of several Finger Lakes communities, including Penn Yan, the farm sits between Seneca and Keuka lakes in an area of increased

development pressure. The Land Trust is committed to protecting farmland in this area with a focus on water quality and scenic lake views.

This is the second Land Trust conservation project completed at Christiansen Farms, where the organization has protected over 650 acres with FPIG funding. To date, the organization has protected 2,281 acres in Yates County, 1,266 of which are prime farmland.

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.

Conservation Easement Protects Portions of Two Major Watersheds

In 1988, Jim Povero and Sandy Yahner purchased a little over 200 acres of agricultural land in the Town of Virgil, Cortland County. While maintaining their jobs as schoolteachers in Marathon, the couple raised mules and donkeys, grew hay for local farmers, and tried to start a Christmas tree farm by planting a bunch of evergreens. (The Christmas tree farm never took off as a business, but it did create a lovely forest on the property.)

Jim and Sandy reached out to the Land Trust in the mid-1990s to discuss a conservation easement on the property as part of their estate planning. A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and an organization, such as the Land Trust, that limits or prohibits development on a property in perpetuity while maintaining private ownership.

However, the easement was never completed at that time. Thirty years later, the couple reconnected with the Land Trust and decided to donate the easement.

The land plan in the easement divides the property into three zones—a 68-acre agricultural zone, currently being leased to local farmers; a 128-acre forest management zone, which features a hardwood forest, shrubland, and successional meadows; and a six-acre residential zone, which includes Sandy's art studio and a hopyard that Jim maintains.

One of the unique features of the property is that it straddles the divide between two major central New York watersheds. The western half of the property, which includes the farmland and residential area, is in the Cayuga Lake watershed—part of the Lake Ontario watershed. The eastern half, which is largely forested, is in the watershed of the

Susquehanna River—which flows into the Chesapeake Bay.

The conservation easement adds to a collection of protected lands in the area. The property is near two state forests—Tuller Hill State Forest, to the east, and James Kennedy State Forest, to the south. There are also several other parcels nearby that are protected by Land Trust conservation easements.

Costs associated with this project were secured by grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Federation and the Upper Susquehanna Coalition. In addition to the grant funding, the Upper Susquehanna Coalition has partnered with the landowners on habitat restoration projects, including planting trees and creating vernal pools. These projects are designed to increase wildlife habitat, protect water quality, and enhance migration corridors.

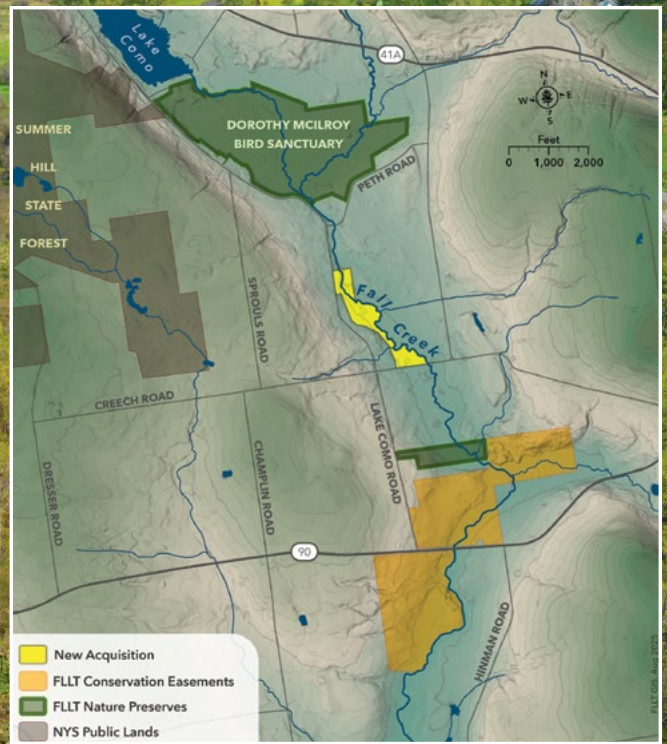
Now retired after decades of teaching, Jim and Sandy are continuing to enjoy the land they have permanently protected from development. Sandy rides her mule on trails throughout the property—"one of my favorite things," she said—while Jim tends to his hop growing and other projects. "Sometimes I take the four-wheeler out and just...look around," he said. "It's wonderful."

—Jeff Tonole



Landowners
Sandy Yahner and
Jim Povero

Land Purchase Secures Over 3,000 Feet of Wetland Habitat Along Fall Creek



The Land Trust purchased 26.5 acres of wetlands containing 3,440 feet along Fall Creek in the scenic town of Summerhill, a rolling landscape of farmland, verdant hills, and valleys.

The source of Cornell University's drinking water, Fall Creek meanders for approximately 33 miles through Cayuga and Tompkins counties, beginning near Lake Como and eventually flowing into Cayuga Lake.

The new acquisition is located in close proximity to public conservation lands, including Summerhill State Forest and the Land Trust's Dorothy McIlroy Bird Sanctuary.

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McIlroy Bird Sanctuary. This area supports native brook trout, and a portion of it is located within one of New York's Important Bird Areas. The newly acquired property will be left in its natural state and managed by the Land Trust as

wildlife habitat.

Funding for this project came from the New York State Water Quality Improvement Projects

(WQIP) program and a generous Land Trust member. The WQIP program funds projects that directly address documented water quality impairments or protect a drinking water source.

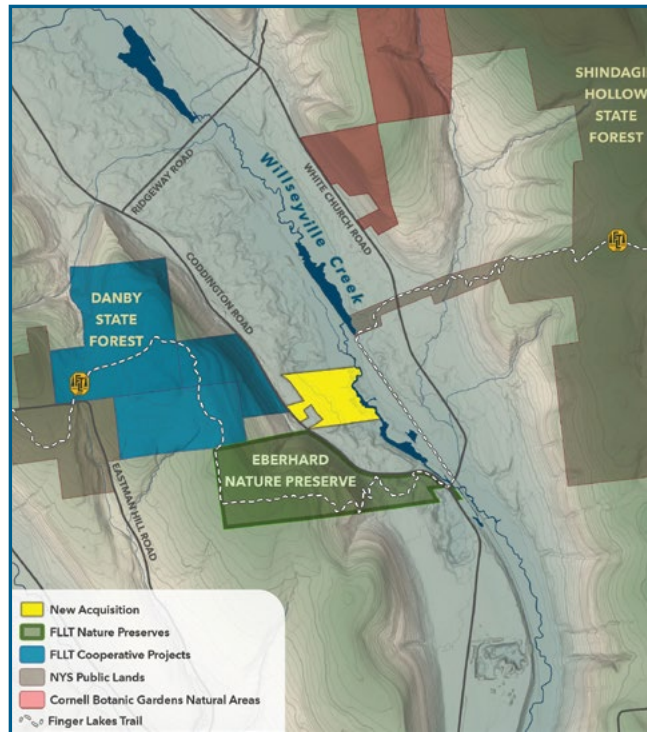
Fall Creek continues to be a focus area for the Land Trust's water quality protection efforts. Last September, the organization utilized WQIP funds to purchase a conservation easement safeguarding a 260-acre parcel in Summerhill with 10,000 feet along the creek, just to the south of the new acquisition.

Partnership Adds New Link to Ithaca's Emerald Necklace

The Land Trust added a new link in the Emerald Necklace with the purchase of 35 acres nestled in the Willseyville Valley in the town of Caroline, Tompkins County. This latest acquisition is near the organization's Eberhard Nature Preserve and adjacent to a recent addition to Danby State Forest.

With 1,460 feet of frontage on Willseyville Creek and 23 acres of wetlands, the property is part of the White Church-Willseyville Swamp, a Tompkins County Unique Natural Area which serves as the headwaters to Catatonk Creek, a classified trout stream. Across this valley lies a Cornell Botanic Gardens Natural Area and the 5,318-acre Shindagin Hollow State Forest. This entire landscape can be traversed by the Finger Lakes Trail which skirts the newly acquired property along an old railroad bed before turning toward Shindagin Hollow.

The Land Trust intends to transfer the parcel to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) as an addition to Danby State Forest. Partnerships with New York State are a key component of the Land



Trust's efforts to expand public access to outdoor recreational opportunities while safeguarding water quality and wildlife habitat. This is the fourth project the organization has undertaken to assist DEC with the expansion of Danby State Forest, where it has added nearly 200 acres to date.

The Emerald Necklace is a proposed greenbelt linking 50,000 acres of existing conservation land in an arc around Ithaca, from the Finger Lakes National Forest in the west to the Hammond Hill State Forest in the east. Together, these lands host 78 miles of the Finger Lakes Trail, two National Audubon Society-designated Important Bird Areas, numerous Finger Lakes Land Trust Preserves and conservation easements, several state forests and parks,

and dozens of Tompkins County-designated Unique Natural Areas. The Emerald Necklace is also recognized as a priority project within New York State's Open Space Plan.

This acquisition was made possible by funds allocated from the Land Trust's Opportunity Fund, an internal revolving fund utilized for time-sensitive acquisitions.





SCENES

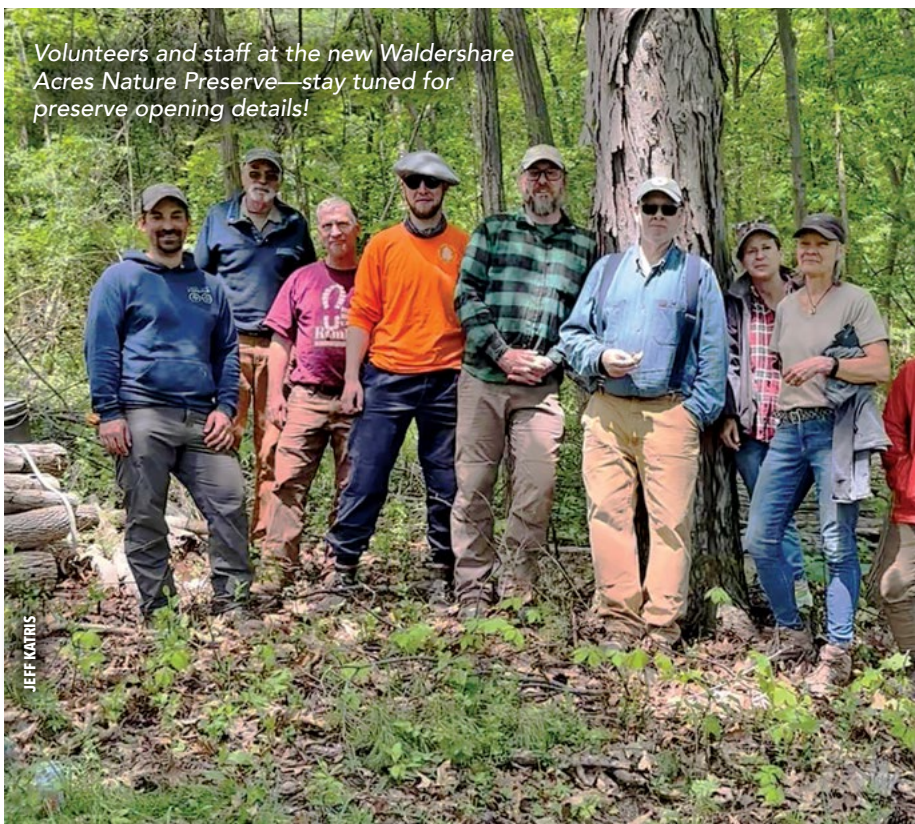
from Around
Our Region...

Volunteers John Rizzo and George Thomas removing debris at a new conservation area on Skaneateles Lake



The Land Trust worked with a local nursery to design and plant a pollinator garden at the Sims-Jennings Preserve at Cayuga Cliffs

FILE



Volunteers and staff at the new Waldershare Acres Nature Preserve—stay tuned for preserve opening details!

JEFF KATZIS



CHRIS OLNEY



Land Trust staff member Danaka Olsen sawing a downed tree at the Thayer Preserve



BLAKE ENOS

Stewardship staff removing invasive non-native honeysuckle at the Goetchius Wetland Preserve



ERIC MASTROBERTI

Canandaigua Vista Preserve Expands with New Addition

The Land Trust recently purchased 22 wooded acres as an addition to its popular Canandaigua Vista Preserve.

Just a short drive from downtown Canandaigua, the preserve features nearly 1.5 miles of trails that weave through mature forests and open meadows that offer glimpses of Canandaigua Lake from multiple vista points.

The greater Canandaigua area has experienced accelerated landscape fragmentation, which makes movement from one forested area to another more difficult for wildlife. The expansion of the preserve, which now stands at 112 acres, safeguards additional habitat for woodland birds as well as a portion of a wildlife corridor to the nearby Stid Hill Multiple Use Area.

Protecting additional forested acres above Canandaigua Lake is also essential for reducing erosion and preventing runoff from entering nearby waterways. The Canandaigua Vista Preserve safeguards part of Barnes Gully, a deep gorge that flows to nearby Onanda Park before entering the lake.

The Land Trust is also working in partnership with the Ontario County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD)

to construct vernal pools at the preserve. These seasonal wetland depressions reduce flooding by capturing runoff, act as a food source for birds and other wildlife, and boost groundwater as their contents seep underground. Four pools were constructed in 2024, and work is currently ongoing to create more this year.

This project is part of the Land Trust's Hemlock to High Tor Initiative to create a greenbelt of conserved land connecting Hemlock Lake in the west to the High Tor Wildlife Management Area at the south end of Canandaigua Lake. This conservation initiative was launched in 2024 to address increasing development pressure in the western Finger Lakes and in recognition of the region's impressive natural and outdoor recreational resources.

The Canandaigua Vista Preserve is open from dawn to dusk for nature observation and low-impact recreational activities such as walking, hiking, and cross-country skiing. More information can be found at fltt.org/canandaiguavista.

\$100,000 Double Your Impact Challenge!

An incredibly generous anonymous donor is offering \$100,000 in matching gifts for any new members or donations that are an increase over the previous year.

HOW CAN YOU PARTICIPATE?

Increase Your Giving: Gifts above previous year donations will be matched. So, if you gave \$100 last year and give \$200 this year, we will receive an extra \$100 from our anonymous donor!

Join: For any new member who joins (at any level of membership from \$35+), we will receive a matching gift for that new member. So, **if you join at the \$100 membership level**, we will receive another \$100 from our anonymous donor!

Give a Gift of Membership or Ask a Friend to Join:

Give a gift membership to a friend or family member in an amount that exceeds your 2024 giving or encourage them to join the Land Trust! Visit fltt.org/giftmembership for more information.

Use the envelope enclosed in this newsletter or go to fltt.org/give to double your impact and conserve forever the lands and waters of the Finger Lakes region, ensuring scenic vistas, local foods, clean water, and wild places for everyone—while we still can!

STEWARDSHIP TEAM

Gets an Upgrade

In conjunction with ongoing strategies to reduce its fossil fuel use, the Land Trust recently installed a 4,000-watt rooftop solar array on a garage at its Owasco Bluffs Nature Preserve.

Used as a workspace and for equipment storage by the organization's stewardship team, the building is now supplied with electricity for crucial carpentry and repair projects.

Electrification of the building has improved the efficiency of our stewardship team and its ability to care for the Owasco Bluffs Preserve and other public conservation areas within the eastern Finger Lakes region. Owasco Bluffs overlooks the eastern shore of Owasco Lake, protecting over 1,100 feet of undeveloped shoreline as well as wetlands, meadows, and a rugged gorge. A one-mile trail guides visitors through fields and forests, ending at a wooded hillside with spectacular lake views. Visit flt.org/owascobluffs for more information.

Funding for this project was provided by the Stanley W. Metcalf and D. E. French Foundations.

OUR FINGER LAKES FOREVER Challenge Match Met!

In the spring, the Land Trust announced an exciting planned giving challenge to more than double the number of bequest commitments to benefit future conservation efforts.

Land Trust leaders Fred and Susan Van Sickle generously offered to contribute \$1,000 to the Land Trust for every new planned gift commitment or notification. We are pleased to announce that we have reached and surpassed our goal, with 33 new commitments since the challenge began.

We give sincere thanks to everyone who generously made commitments to the organization and its mission by including the Land Trust in their will and notifying us of their intentions. We were notified of planned donations of land, homes, and stocks, as well as monetary contributions of all sizes.

The Land Trust is committed to conserving forever the lands and waters of the Finger Lakes region. Part of making this possible is securing funding for years to come. Planned giving is one of the most effective tools to ensure continued support for the critical work we are putting into motion today.

This planned giving challenge enabled the Land Trust to put planned giving in the spotlight, and it provided the momentum needed to launch an ongoing effort to grow the organization's Stewardship Fund. This fund is diversified and professionally managed to provide long-term income for the stewardship of our growing number of nature preserves and conservation easements.

"We are so grateful to our many fellow Finger Lakes Land Trust super fans for taking action to help protect our Finger Lakes forever! Generations to come will benefit from your foresight and generosity."

—Fred and Susan Van Sickle

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New Ithaca Bakery Bread Cards Available



ITHACA BAKERY is generously offering bread cards to all current Land Trust members again this year. The bread card entitles members to one FREE loaf of bread per month with a \$10 minimum purchase at the 400 N. Meadow Street and Triphammer Marketplace locations. Please visit the Land Trust's main office at 202 E. Court Street in Ithaca if you would like to pick up your bread card.

Our appreciation for gifts in honor of

Dalia Bosworth

FROM

Pam Kelly

Ingrid Comella

FROM

*Dr. C. Vivian Lorenzo
and Mr. Marek
Przezdziecki*

Sandra B. Hill

FROM

Cynthia Mannino

Diane Kohl

FROM

Priscilla Freedman

Chris Olney

FROM

Tom and Lisa Cavataio

Robert

FROM

David Asermily

The Wedding of

Daria Sparks and

Colin Clark

FROM

Stephen W. Decker

Judy and Don

Tennant's 50th

Anniversary

FROM

Jim and Betta Hedlund

Andrew Zepp

FROM

Yohko Tsuji



Our deepest gratitude for thoughtful gifts in memory of

Joseph R. Bish

FROM

Rose Bish

Gwendolyn Isham

Melanie Jordan

Phyllis Palmer

Sylvia Tomaras

Pat and Walter

Blackler

FROM

Peter and Karen Strom

John Boslett

FROM

Andrew Boslett and

Lindsay Tarnoff

Bruce, Bobby, Susie

and Nancy

Alison Tarnoff

Jacquelyn Tarnoff

Kenneth Tarnoff

Lawrence Campanelli

FROM

Amy Campanelli

Susan Estabrook

FROM

Laura Rodormer

Janice L. Gates

FROM

Anonymous

Karen Hynson

FROM

Anonymous

Linda DiLouie

Linda Owens

Margaret Studt

Jim Kersting

FROM

Lakeland Rovers

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Joe Lamendola

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Triphammer Wine

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Dr. Scott Stewart III

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Suzanne Spencer

Mark Wesselink

FROM

Shanan Raines

Walter Westfall

FROM

Mark Podhajsky

Janet and Paul Smith

Lily and Peter

Van Haverbeke

Donald Westfall

OUR FINGER LAKES FOREVER Challenge Match Met! continued from page 9

As the Land Trust continues to expand its conservation lands, the organization will continue to welcome planned gifts that provide a strong foundation for future conservation efforts. By letting us know about your planned gift, you'll become a member of "Our Finger Lakes Forever Society"—a new planned giving society for those who have notified the land trust of their intention to make a future gift. By making a planned gift, members join a community

of forward-thinking individuals invested in securing a lasting future for conservation. Whether through your will, retirement accounts, or property, your gift will have a meaningful impact and ensure that your values endure.

To notify us of your bequest plans, please contact Development Specialist Karinna Browning at karinnabrowning@flt.org or (607) 275-9487 or visit flt.org/plannedgiving.

Incomparable, Innumerable, Imperiled

The life history and conservation status of monarch butterflies

One of the continent's great wildlife spectacles is playing out this month, as monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*)—surely our most iconic and universally beloved insects—make their way south by the millions.

The migration is astonishing in its sheer spatial scope, as monarchs across North America east of the Rockies converge on flyways, their flight paths narrowing until they arrive at just a handful of patches of oyamel fir forest in the mountains of central Mexico. Imagine tens of millions of butterflies packed into the area of a few football fields, and you will have an idea of their median estimated density. The Aztecs and other ancient Mesoamerican peoples revered the monarchs and celebrated their annual arrival, considering them to be incarnations of the souls of fallen soldiers. But North American scientists did not even know the location of the Mexican wintering roosts until the mid-1970s. (Monarchs that breed west of the Rockies migrate to the California coast, where their numbers are much smaller, though still staggeringly impressive.)

Monarchs spend winter in semi-hibernation and suspended reproductive development under the ideally cool, humid, sheltered conditions of the oyamel forests. Then, around the beginning of March, warming temperatures trigger sexual maturation. The monarchs rouse themselves, mate, and then head north again. Back in the southern United States, returning female monarchs find milkweed, lay eggs, and finally finish their long life's journey, eight months and thousands of miles after it began.

But within scarcely one month, an entire new monarch cycle has spun out, from eggs to caterpillars to chrysalises to emergent adults. The new first-generation adults then find their way further north, where this remarkably fast process repeats with the year's second and third generations. We can see these short-lived summer generations, especially the third in July and August, throughout the Finger Lakes and as far north as southern Canada.

That brings us back to the migratory generation, comprising the great-great-grandchildren of the migratory monarchs seen in the previous fall. Adults that emerge in August and September do not reproduce, instead focusing entirely on nectaring to build fat reserves for migration. Monarchs of the migratory generation not only tend to be heavier than those of the summer generations, but also have larger and longer wings.

Monarch breeding success and survival are extremely variable from year to year. Assessing monarch population numbers, therefore, poses complex methodological challenges, requiring rigorous separation of signal from noise, as well as removal of sampling bias, to determine actual trends. It can also be difficult for lay readers to make sense of dramatic but often unnuanced news reports of steep population drops in some years and outwardly encouraging increases in others.

Still, there is a well-established consensus among monarch scientists about a real and alarming decline over the past three decades.

Because summer breeding populations are so far-flung, and because density is so difficult to quantify precisely in the oyamel forests, the area of winter roosts is the best index for comparing annual population sizes. Using this approach, the Mexican government and conservation partners observed that between 1993 and 2003, the coverage of winter roosts exceeded 10 acres in all years but one, reaching a peak of 45 acres in 1996-97. Since 2009, however, winter roosts have covered less than 10 acres every year except one, and have fallen below 5 acres in half the surveys. Declines in the western population appear to be even more drastic.

Recent research has revealed numerous possible causes of the apparent decline – disappearance of native milkweed from farms because of expanded use of the herbicide glyphosate; loss of nectar sources on migration flyways; proliferation of non-native tropical milkweed, which does not die back in fall and therefore delays the onset of normal winter metabolic changes, and also provides prolonged harbor for a protozoan parasite; illegal logging in the oyamel forests; and climate change, whereby warmer temperatures trigger sexual maturity and activity too soon.

Most likely, monarchs are suffering from all of these stressors at once, to varying degrees in different parts of their range. Therefore, in addition to further research, monarchs need targeted practical and political action across the continent from landowners, farmers, gardeners, and policymakers. One major opportunity lies in the balance in the coming months, as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service considers listing the monarch as a threatened species, with expanded federal protection. After two comment periods, a decision is due by December 2025.

—Mark Chao



Finger Lakes Land Trust

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Upcoming Events

*The south end of
Canandaigua Lake*

Hemlock to High Tor Information Sessions

The Land Trust is hosting three information sessions to discuss its Hemlock to High Tor Initiative, an ambitious plan to accelerate land protection and stewardship efforts in the western Finger Lakes. Join us to learn more about conserving this forested landscape which extends across 114,000 acres from Hemlock Lake to the High Tor Wildlife Management Area at the south end of Canandaigua Lake.

Wednesday, November 5, 2025, at 6:00 PM

Naples Village Hall • 106 South Main Street • Naples, NY 14512

Wednesday, November 12, 2025, at 7:30 PM

Pittsford Community Center • 35 Lincoln Ave • Pittsford, NY 14534

Thursday, November 20, 2025, at 6:00 PM

Honeoye Public Library • 8708 Main Street • Honeoye, NY 14471

These events are free and open to the public. Visit flt.org/events to learn more.