



The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

Conservation Project Advances Protection of Skaneateles Lake

Open fields, farms, and rolling hills stretch for miles within the lands around Skaneateles Lake, creating an idyllic rural setting cherished by many residents and visitors to the area.

Within this landscape, 90 acres at Eastmere Farms are now permanently protected with a conservation easement held by the Land Trust. Located along East Lake Road and Pork Street in the town of Skaneateles, the property contains a mix of woodlands, wetlands, and agricultural fields used to grow both corn and hay. The eastern portion of the property features 4,744 feet of frontage along Shotwell Brook, a significant tributary to Skaneateles Lake, and 2,662 feet on an unnamed tributary to the lake that passes through the western edge.

The easement will safeguard these tributaries,

protecting the quality of water entering Skaneateles Lake, a drinking water source for residents of Syracuse and surrounding communities. Additionally, several ponds and a restored wetland capture stormwater, leading to a significant reduction in sediment entering the lake.

This property adds to a growing corridor of conserved land in this area, including the Land Trust's newly created Shotwell Brook Conservation Area, just a short distance upstream, and an adjacent private property protected with a conservation easement.

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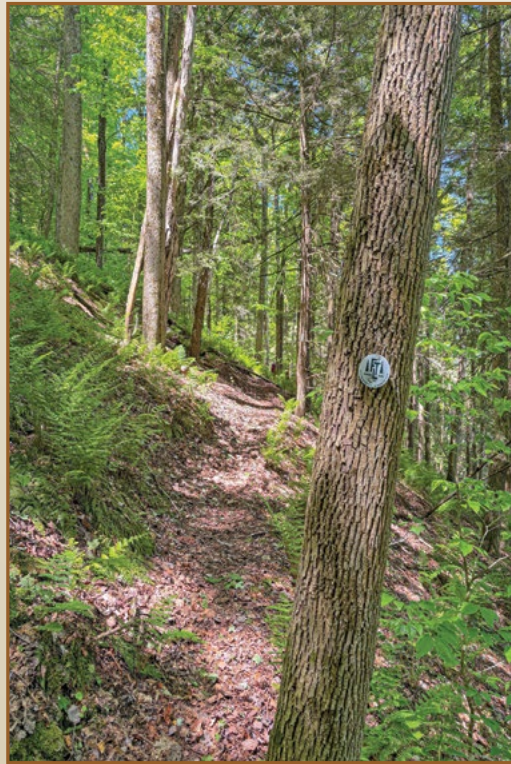


I recently completed a 78-mile hike on the Finger Lakes Trail through Ithaca's Emerald Necklace—a trek that I had completed twenty years ago when the Land Trust launched a long-term initiative to connect 50,000 acres of existing conservation land that extends in an arc around the south end of Cayuga Lake. I was interested in observing what had changed and what remained the same.

I was pleased to find that the Necklace was largely as I remembered it—a wild green corridor of mostly forest, located just 15 to 30 minutes from my home. The Emerald Necklace still represents a tremendous natural and recreational resource that we can enhance to maintain clean waters; ensure resilience in the face of climate change; and better connect residents and visitors alike with our natural world.

What I most appreciated was exploring over 5,000 acres of wildlands that the Land Trust and its partners have conserved since my last hike. Highlights included a conservation easement property that secures a scenic parcel adjacent to Finger Lakes National Forest as well as the Land Trust's Eberhard and Summerland Farm preserves.

While I was heartened by the conservation successes that were evident, I was also troubled by the health of the forests I traversed. Hemlock, beech, and ash trees all showed clear signs of decline or mortality due to non-native, invasive species. I also knew of the specter of the oak wilt fungus that has been found in



the western Finger Lakes.

Our commitment to conserving the land must not stop when the deed to a protected natural area is recorded. We must collectively focus more effort on addressing the invasive species that are decimating our woodlands. By supporting programs like the New York State Hemlock Initiative, we can accelerate new techniques and strategies to ensure that our native forests continue to thrive in the future.

For its part, the Land Trust will continue to make our nature preserves accessible to researchers who are working on new approaches to these problems. We also work with partners such as the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and the NYS Forest Owners Association to develop a more robust and comprehensive approach to

improving the health of our forests.

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read "Andrew Zepp".

Andrew Zepp, President

Conservation Project Advances Protection of Skaneateles Lake *continued from cover*

"The completion of this project stands as a significant milestone for our community, demonstrating the unwavering commitment to safeguarding the source of drinking water that sustains the City of Syracuse," said Syracuse Mayor Sharon F. Owens. "This achievement reinforces the essential responsibility we share in protecting and preserving this critical resource for current residents and for generations to come."

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Amanda Lefton said, "Protecting the source of unfiltered affordable drinking water for the City of Syracuse is a wise investment to sustain reliable, abundant, and clean water into the future. DEC is proud to partner with the Finger Lakes Land Trust to preserve the Skaneateles watershed's clean water at its source and applaud Governor Kathy Hochul for leading in water infrastructure investments across New York State."

Funds from New York State's Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) program and private donors were used to purchase a perpetual conservation easement to protect the property. The WQIP program funds projects that directly improve water quality or habitat, promote flood risk reduction, restoration, and enhanced flood and climate resiliency, or protect a drinking water source.

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. The easement on the Eastmere property limits future development to a single residence and allows for continued agricultural use while providing for vegetated buffers adjacent to streams and wetlands.

Universally Accessible Trail Opened AT THE ROY H. PARK PRESERVE

In early May, Land Trust staff, volunteers, and members were joined by town, county, and state representatives to celebrate the completion of public access improvements at the Roy H. Park Preserve in Dryden, Tompkins County.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony marked the reopening of the preserve's north entrance, where new, universally accessible features, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, are available to all visitors.

The new improvements include two scenic overlooks as well as trail extensions that provide easy access to wetlands which are home to beaver, waterfowl, and other wildlife. In addition, the existing boardwalk has new leveling and handrail modifications; the parking area contains two accessible parking spots; and there is improved access to the adjacent Hammond Hill State Forest.

The Roy H. Park Preserve borders Yellow Barn and Hammond Hill



state forests and the Cornell Old 600 Natural Area, making it an important connector in a larger array of some 8,000 acres of protected land. The preserve is also located in the Emerald Necklace, a proposed greenbelt linking more than 50,000 acres of existing conservation land in an arc around Ithaca. The Land Trust purchased the parcel of the Roy H. Park Preserve that hosts the boardwalk in 2010, creating the first link in

the Emerald Necklace, while also acquiring additional lands that were added to Yellow Barn State Forest.

2026 marks the 20th anniversary of the Emerald Necklace initiative. To learn more, visit flt.org/emerald20 for maps, photos, and more.

"Walking the new trail at Roy H. Park Preserve was a powerful reminder of why expanding access to nature matters so much," Assemblymember Anna Kelles said. "It is clearly a

thoughtfully designed trail, expanding access for everyone to experience the unique wetlands, forests, and wildlife habitat of the preserve. By making these landscapes more accessible, the trail ensures that more people, regardless of mobility or disability, can fully experience the peace, connection, and renewal that nature provides."

Visitors to the Roy H. Park Preserve can utilize a 1.6-mile trail network that weaves through forests, meadows, wetlands, and a scenic stretch of Six-Mile Creek, as well as a one-mile trail connecting the boardwalk to the trail system at Hammond Hill. The preserve is open year-round from dawn to dusk for low-impact recreational activities and wildlife observation. More info can be found at flt.org/park.

The Land Trust received funding for this project from the Tompkins County Tourism Capital Grant program, the New York State Conservation Partnership Program, a collaboration between the Land Trust Alliance and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, and gifts from individual donors.

New York State Acquires Babcock-Hovey Scout Camp

In a win for water quality, Governor Kathy Hochul recently announced the acquisition of 284 acres at the former Babcock-Hovey Scout Camp in the Town of Ovid, Seneca County.

The property contains 2,800 feet of Seneca Lake shoreline and is located between the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) Willard Wildlife Management Area and the New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation's Bonavista State Park.

The Land Trust supported

this project in the early stages of the negotiations by funding an appraisal of the property's value. The acquisition was made possible by an allocation from the state's Environmental Protection Fund, a dedicated funding source created in 1993 to support environmental programs, including

land conservation, clean water, and community parks.

The parcel includes cabins, lodges, a dock to Seneca Lake, and other recreational infrastructure. The property is currently closed as DEC develops a plan for providing public access. Future plans will be announced as they become available.

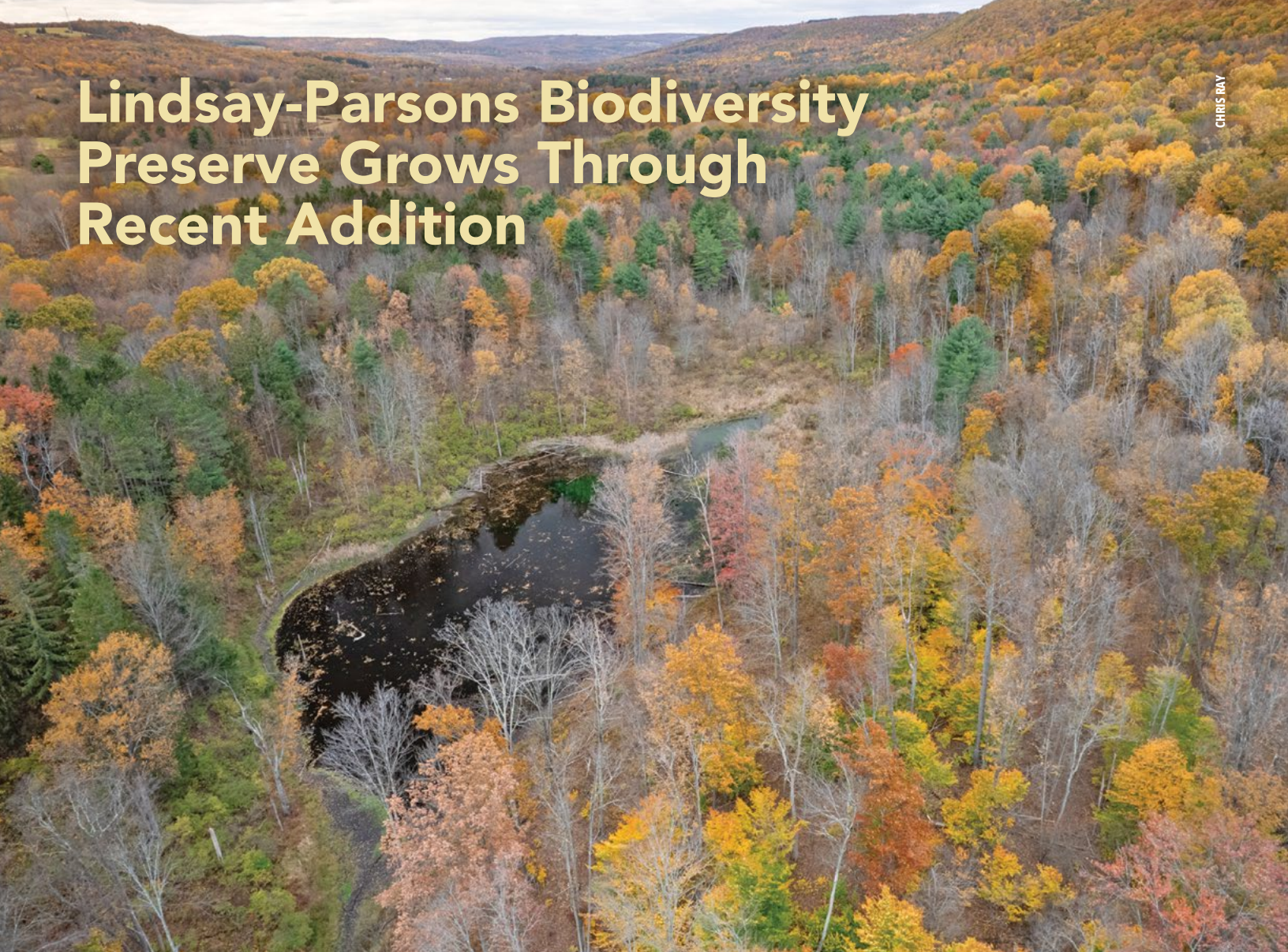
Land Trust Welcomes Summer Intern

The Land Trust is pleased to host intern Christopher Woody for the summer of 2026. The internship program is designed to provide a complete introduction to all aspects of the organization's work, including land protection, stewardship, communications, fundraising, and operations activities. Christopher is a senior at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, NY. He is pursuing a degree in Environmental Studies and brings strong knowledge and experience to the Land Trust!



Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve Grows Through Recent Addition

CHRIS RAY



The Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve was established in 1996 as the world's first temperate zone preserve for research in biodiversity and chemical ecology. Today, it is a popular site for watching birds and other wildlife and is also well known for its scenic views.

The preserve is located just south of Ithaca, spans the mile-wide floor of the Cayuga Inlet Valley, and stretches up adjacent glacially steepened hillsides.

With support from private contributions and a grant from New York State's Water Quality Improvement Project Program, the Land Trust recently completed the purchase of 83 acres—the 15th acquisition for this diverse nature preserve.

This latest addition reflects the diversity of the area in that it features wetlands bordering the Cayuga Inlet, a natural kettle pond, and woodlands

in varying stages of maturity. The property has long been a priority for protection as it borders the existing nature preserve on two sides as well as Danby State Forest.

"The addition of this property closes an important gap between our nature preserve and Danby State Forest," said Kate Riley, the Land Trust's Director of Conservation. "We were pleased to receive an outpouring of support from the Town of Danby and West Danby residents."

Though now wild land, the property was once farmed. The Land Trust purchased the land from siblings Carol Osadchey and Wayne Walding,

who grew up on the land back when it was a chicken farm that also produced wheat and oats. They both retain a strong connection to the land and are glad that it will be conserved.

With this latest addition, the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve now spans more than 630 acres. The preserve features nearly four miles of trails that traverse both fields and forest, providing access to several ponds and a lake. Additional information may be found at flit.org/lindsay.



Promising News for Our Hemlock Trees

BRIAN MALEY

The New York State Hemlock Initiative (NYSHI) recently announced some promising news regarding biological controls for the hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA). The silver fly species, *Leucotaraxis argenticollis*, was documented for the first time five years post-release at a site in Steuben County near Bath, representing the first established population in New York State.

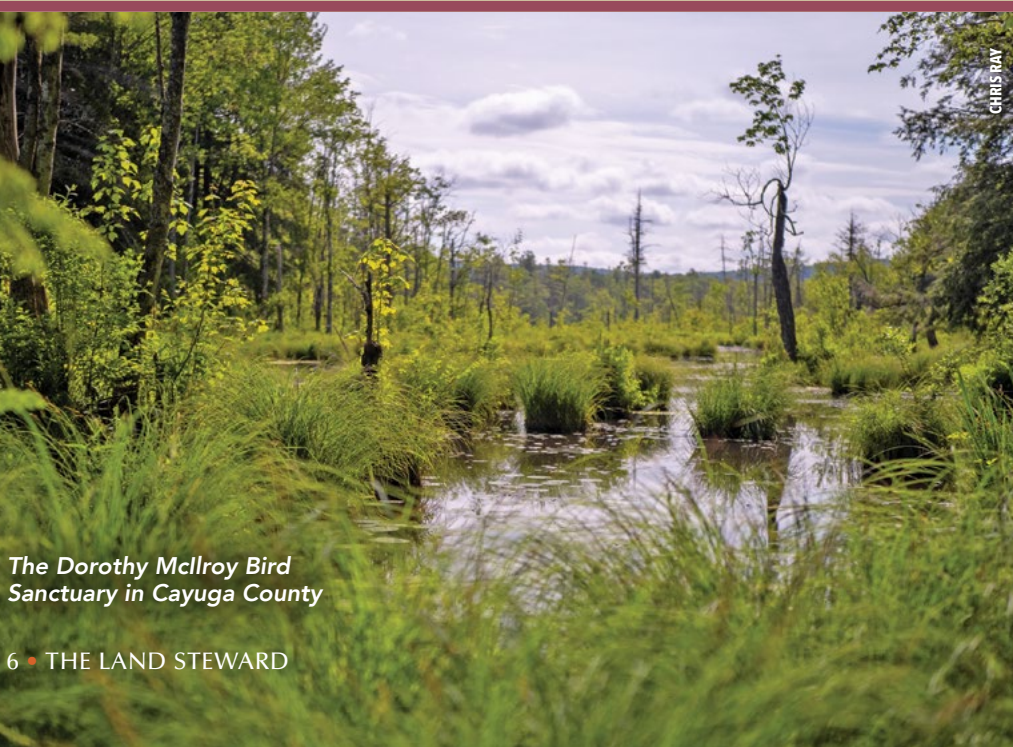
Two species of silver fly, *L. argenticollis* and *Leucotaraxis piniperda*, and two species of beetles, *Laricobius nigrinus* and *Laricobius osakensis*, have been introduced by the NYSHI to control populations of the HWA, an invasive, non-native insect pest that is decimating stands of our native Eastern hemlock. The Land Trust has partnered with the NYSHI to release the silver fly at four nature preserves—three in Tompkins County and one in Ontario County.

Laricobius nigrinus is the other biocontrol predator that has been introduced by the NYSHI and has already demonstrated its ability to establish and expand populations in New York. The Land Trust has supported the release of these beetles at its nature preserves in Seneca and Tompkins counties. *L. nigrinus* was confirmed to be established at two release sites, including the Land Trust's VanRiper Conservation Area and a private property, and has dispersed to the Bahar, Ellis Hollow, and Thayer preserves.

"*Laricobius nigrinus* releases began in New York State in 2008, and we're now seeing widespread establishment and dispersal across public and private land. They are so plentiful in some areas, like the Finger Lakes and Lower Hudson, that we find them in most places we look. The recent silver fly detection gives us additional hope that biological control will be successful in the long run," said Nick Dietschler, Researcher, Cornell University's New York State Hemlock Initiative.

As we hope for the successful establishment and expansion of these predator populations, Land Trust stewardship staff will continue to treat select stands of hemlock trees to ensure their continued survival in the face of the HWA onslaught. Effective biological control takes time, and chemical treatment is an essential tool to protect trees while biological control predator populations grow.

For more information about the New York State Hemlock Initiative, visit blogs.cornell.edu/nyshemlockinitiative.



The Dorothy McIlroy Bird Sanctuary in Cayuga County

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Partnerships Lead to Additions to State Parks and Conservation Lands



JULIE BERTRAM

Parcel Added to Bare Hill Unique Area

The Land Trust recently completed the sale of a 14-acre parcel on Bare Hill to New York State, adding the property to the adjacent Unique Area that is managed by the Department of Environmental Conservation. This is the ninth cooperative acquisition that the Land Trust has completed at Bare Hill, utilizing its Opportunity Fund to provide the financial resources needed to complete these time-sensitive acquisitions. The fund is then replenished when these parcels are sold to the state.

Well known in the region for its cultural significance in the creation story of the Seneca Nation, Bare Hill peers over the eastern shore of Canandaigua Lake in the town of Middlesex, Yates County. Over 500 acres at this conservation area offer hiking, bird watching, cross-country skiing, and other outdoor recreational opportunities. Protecting land in this area ensures wildlife habitat, water quality, and scenic views.

The Land Trust currently owns one additional parcel that awaits conveyance to the state and is pursuing the protection of several additional properties at Bare Hill through either acquisition or the use of conservation easements.

Addition to the Black Diamond Trail Enhances Public Access

In 2024, the Land Trust purchased 23 acres in the town of Ulysses, Tompkins County, from the Cayuga Nature Center. The land supports a mix of meadows and woodlands located along the Black Diamond Trail. This past spring, the organization sold the parcel to the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), which owns and manages the trail.

The property provides a buffer to the trail, and OPRHP is

interested in creating a midway access point on the parcel with parking, restroom facilities, and a water fountain. This is the Land Trust's second project completed with OPRHP to add land to the Black Diamond Trail, an 8.4-mile multi-use trail network currently connecting Taughannock Falls State Park in Trumansburg and Cass Park in Ithaca.

Partnering with OPRHP to add land to state parks continues to be a priority for the Land Trust. Other recent projects include an addition to the Ganondagan State Historic Site, and pending additions to Harriet Hollister Spencer State Recreation Area and Robert H. Treman State Park.



CHRIS RAY

Ontario County Soil and Water Conservation District Recognized as Conservationists of the Year

At its annual meeting in June, the Land Trust recognized the Ontario County Soil and Water Conservation District (OCSWCD) as its Conservationists of the Year. OCSWCD is a county agency that provides technical assistance to residents, farmers, and municipalities to manage water quality, prevent soil erosion, and conserve forest and wildlife habitats.

Over the past two years, the Land Trust partnered with OCSWCD to install several vernal pools at its Canandaigua Vista Preserve with the goal of adding wildlife habitat and improving trail conditions.

OCSWCD provided engineered plans and a portion of funding to install four vernal pools in 2024 and again in 2025. The pools have since been observed hosting various species such as wood frogs and spotted salamanders, as well as acting as a water source for resident and migrant birds. They also have vastly improved muddy trail conditions at the preserve, as excavated soil was used to build up the trail in an area that was prone to flooding after heavy rain.

Partnerships such as these are a big part of the Land Trust's success in providing public access to outdoor recreation, safeguarding water quality, and enhancing wildlife habitat. Thanks to the Ontario County Soil and Water District and their commitment to our natural resources!

Land Trust President Andy Zepp (center) with Tucker Kautz (L) and Jeremy Paris (R) from the Ontario County Soil and Water Conservation District



John Abbott Named Volunteer of the Year

Also in June, the Volunteer of the Year Award was presented to John Abbott of Big Flats. John began volunteering on the Steege Hill Nature Preserve hunting patrol over 15 years ago after seeing a volunteer recruiting poster at work. Steege Hill, located in Big Flats, is the Land Trust's largest nature preserve and is home to nearly eight miles of hiking trails. John recently began spending part of the year in Virginia with his wife, Marilyn, and prior to that, worked at Corning Inc. in various engineering and analysis capacities.

John remembers visiting Steege Hill before there was a parking area, and visitors parked along the road. About eight years ago, John took over leading the hunting patrol and kept meticulous records and a spreadsheet that kept things very organized. He even provided graphs of volunteer hours for year-to-year comparisons. John was very good at sending occasional reminders throughout



Land Trust Nature Preserve Manager Jason Gorman and Volunteer of the Year John Abbott

the hunting season to the dozens of volunteers who patrol the preserve. He often hiked with a GPS device and mapped all the old logging roads on the property. There are likely areas of the preserve that only John has visited!

Now that John will not be living nearby full-time, there will be a huge need for others to patrol the preserve more often and to coordinate the group. Just a few years ago, he contributed 40 hours—roughly one-third of the requirement! We are incredibly grateful for all the effort John contributed over the years. The Land Trust cannot do the work we do without our amazing volunteers.

—Jason Gorman

Note: while the Land Trust oversees a deer management program that provided more than 500 free permits for access to preserves last year, hunting is prohibited at the Steege Hill Nature Preserve.

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OAK WILT IN THE WESTERN FINGER LAKES

What Landowners Need to Know

Oak forests are a defining feature of the Finger Lakes landscape. Oak-hickory forests are the second most abundant forest type in New York State, providing wildlife habitat, protecting water quality, shading our trails and streams, and contributing to the scenic beauty that makes the region so special. Today, these forests face a growing threat from oak wilt, a fungal disease that has been confirmed in several areas around the Canandaigua Lake watershed. Oak wilt disrupts a tree's ability to transport water and nutrients, often leading to rapid decline and death.

Confirmed infections have been found in the towns of Middlesex, Italy, Naples, South Bristol, and Bristol, prompting increased monitoring and management efforts by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Quarantine zones have been established around affected areas to help prevent the movement of infected oak materials and firewood. To help local residents learn more, the Land Trust recently partnered with the DEC, the Western Finger Lakes Chapter of the New York Forest Owners Association, and the Town of South Bristol to host a public workshop on oak wilt. More than 50 landowners, community members, and municipal leaders attended.

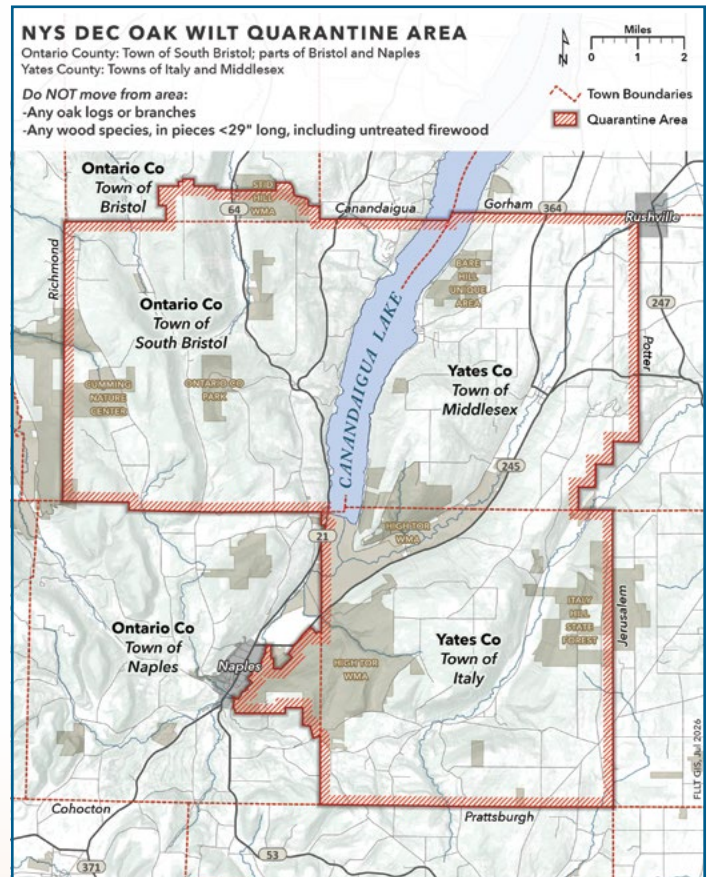
Oak wilt spreads underground through interconnected root systems and above ground when sap-feeding nitidulid beetles carry fungal spores to fresh wounds on healthy oak trees. Red oaks are especially vulnerable and can die within just a few weeks of infection. Because beetles can be attracted to fresh tree wounds within minutes, DEC recommends avoiding oak pruning from March through September and minimizing tree damage from mowers and construction equipment.

Just as important as preventing the disease is recognizing it. Oak wilt symptoms typically begin in the upper canopy, where an infected tree will rapidly lose more than 50% of its leaves during the spring or summer. Leaves that fall to the ground are typically brown around the edges with green remaining towards the center. Branches typically die back from the top of the tree downward but may also progress from where a tree was wounded, and infection began.

Oak trees in the Canandaigua Lake watershed have faced several challenges in recent years, including spongy moth defoliation (2020–2022) and drought conditions. Together, these stressors may have contributed to oak decline—the slow, general dieback of branches that can eventually lead to tree mortality. Oak decline is often mistaken for oak wilt, and many oaks throughout the region are showing signs of decline as a result of environmental stressors.

DEC crews have already devoted more than 850 hours to aerial surveys, monitoring, and management at seven oak wilt sites in the Finger Lakes region. Staff recently conducted an aerial survey of the Canandaigua Lake watershed to identify trees showing signs of possible infection and plan to conduct another survey in August. Trees identified as suspicious from the air will be inspected on the ground, sampled, and tested to confirm whether oak wilt is present.

Although 2025 saw the highest number of oak wilt infections reported in a single year in New York State,



How You Can Help Protect Our Oaks

- **Avoid pruning oak trees from March through September.** Fresh wounds can attract beetles carrying oak wilt spores.
- **Don't move firewood or oak material from quarantine zones.** Moving infected firewood is one of the ways oak wilt can quickly spread to new locations.
- **Watch for oak wilt symptoms**, including wilting leaves, browning leaf margins, and premature leaf drop.
- **Report suspected infections to the DEC at foresthealth@dec.ny.gov.** Early detection gives forest managers the best chance to contain new outbreaks.

presenters emphasized that the disease is not yet a landscape-scale threat, and that rapid detection and response can help contain new outbreaks.

Protecting the Finger Lakes' oak forests will require vigilance from landowners, foresters, and communities alike. By recognizing the signs of oak wilt, following DEC recommendations, and reporting suspected infections early, we can help slow the spread of this disease and protect these iconic forests for future generations.

—Lindsay McMillan

Clubmosses: Tiny Giants

During the Carboniferous period (359-299 million years ago), the area that is now the Finger Lakes was located near the equator and covered with dense tropical swamp forests.

Giant dragonflies, millipedes, and predatory amphibians lived among trees that were as tall as modern ones but strange and primitive: seed ferns, giant horsetails, and strange scale trees with leaves growing directly out of their trunks.

Today, although the sharks and mangroves are gone, many of the lineages that first evolved in the Carboniferous are still endemic to our region, though much reduced in size. The majestic eagle-sized dragonflies and sofa-length millipedes have been replaced by more modest specimens, and horsetails and ferns now don't grow much more than waist-high. The once-mighty scale trees have shrunk to the Lycopodiaceae, or clubmosses: a closer look reveals that these delicate little plants, often resembling conifer seedlings, are entirely covered by tiny leaves, just like their giant ancestors were. Their so-called "clubs" are strobili, or spore cases, which tend to resemble candles or cattails, though some species, such as the Shining Clubmoss (*Huperzia lucidula*), lack clubs altogether.

Spores are not seeds: they contain only genetic material. Seeds, on the other hand, are complete packages, embryos supplied with food reserves. Clubmoss spores have a high-tech lipid coating that repels water very effectively, allowing them to travel on the wind and germinate only when the conditions are right. Native Americans and early colonists used these spores as dusting powder for babies; later, they were used to coat surgical equipment. Their high oil content makes them both highly lipophilic—they were used as a fingerprint powder—and highly flammable. When mixed with air and ignited, they produce spectacular fireballs, a property appreciated by Native shamans, early flash photographers, and stage magicians.

After the spores fall to the earth and are buried in soil, each one develops into a gametophyte or prothallus, a strange, fleshy organism that only survives if it forms a mycorrhizal relationship with a particular fungus. The fungus tunnels into its walls and feeds it digested organic matter like a mother bird feeding its nestling. This peculiar little pairing can remain underground for up to two decades until the prothallus

develops both male and female organs. It fertilizes itself—unless another prothallus manages to sneak its own genes in—and a new clubmoss finally emerges from the soil.

These ancient plants live on the edge, in acidic and nutrient-poor habitats, the only places where they can compete for resources. Soils here tend to contain soluble, highly reactive aluminum, highly toxic to most species, but clubmosses are able to sequester it safely in their tissues. Since they grow slowly and rely on the presence of water, undisturbed soil, and friendly fungi, any environmental alterations—from reforestation to soil pollution to the loss of wetlands—can be disastrous: a third of the eleven species native to the Finger Lakes are vulnerable for one reason or another. *Diphasiastrum complanatum*, Northern ground cedar, has additionally been a victim of its own beauty. This species, endangered in New York State, grows in delicate clusters, all connected by one trailing runner: pull them up and you have a perfect holiday decoration, but one that may have taken several decades to mature.

Clubmosses aren't defenseless, though their weaponry is often unsuited to the world that they find themselves in today. They produce potent alkaloids, chemical weapons that their ancestors evolved hundreds of millions of years ago to fend off the first terrestrial herbivores; nothing will touch them except starving deer, a few opossums, and some specialized slugs and snails. In large doses, alkaloids are poisonous, but in small doses, they can be medicinal, and Native Americans used club moss to treat many ailments. The aluminum that it contains makes the plant a very effective mordant, or dye-fixer, but its alkaloids can poison the unwary dyer.

Often used in bonsai, terraria, and crafts to recall the giant trees that they once were, it's easy to regard the Lycopodiaceae as homey and harmless. Better to think of them as ancient and alien: bristling with poisons and metals, friends of fungi, resigned (I like to imagine) to living undercover on the fringes of a modern world.

—Jacqueline Stuhmiller



Dendrolycopodium dendroideum

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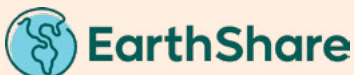
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UPCOMING EVENTS

Nature Photography at the Roy H. Park Preserve Friday, October 2, 2026 - 4:30 to 6:30 pm

Join fellow photographers for an evening at the Roy H. Park Preserve in Dryden, Tompkins County, with photographer and Land Trust GIS Program Manager Chris Ray. Photo enthusiasts of all levels are welcome, and we will explore different types of nature photography from macro to landscape. Advanced camera gear is not essential, but it is recommended to bring a camera with manual controls and a tripod.

Registration is required. Visit fllt.org/events to learn more.



CHRIS RAY