



VOLUME 17 ISSUE 2
SUMMER 2026

Afoot in the Field

RESOURCE FOR CONSERVATION LANDOWNERS



LOGAN HILL PRESERVE; BILL HECHT

HAVING BEEN on the staff of the Finger Lakes Land Trust for nearly 18 years, I've had time to build a nice list of my "favorite people" who I've come to know through the conservation work that we do. These are folks who are a joy to know, are giving of their time and talents, are pleasant to be around, and who have enriched my life. At the top of the list is Betsy Darlington.

Betsy is a remarkable person and a land conservation hero. She was among the group who came together in 1989 to share their enthusiasm for protecting land and natural resources in the Finger Lakes region, and formed the first Land Trust board of directors. She volunteered for years to teach kids about nature at a local school. And most remarkably, for twenty years, Betsy did land protection and stewardship work for the Land Trust as if she were a full-time employee. In reality, she did it as an unpaid volunteer – now that's commitment!

I was hired when Betsy "retired," and she generously helped acclimate me to the places, people, and tasks involved with our nature preserve and conservation easement stewardship work. She has remained active with the Land Trust in many ways ever since. Betsy embodies the Land Trust's mission, and deserves to be recognized and celebrated.

Throughout this issue, I hope you will get a sense of the fantastic person Betsy is, her love for nature, and her continued impact on the Land Trust.

Chris Olney
Director of Stewardship



Since the Beginning

BETSY DARLINGTON played an integral part in the creation, development, and success of the Finger Lakes Land Trust (FLLT). Betsy was at the Ithaca City Conservation Advisory Council meeting when Andy Zepp, a Cornell University graduate student at the time, presented the idea of creating a local land trust. Andy advised those who were interested or wanted to learn more to talk to him afterwards; of course, Betsy did.

As the Land Trust was established and began its work to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes region, Betsy wore many hats. She helped the first board of directors of the Finger Lakes Land Trust and was the vice-president for many years. Former board president Brad Edmondson stated, “There would be no Land Trust without Betsy.”

In 1990, Betsy led the way for conservation easements as she and her husband Dick donated the first easement to the Land Trust, protecting their 225-acre property in Candor. They worked through the complexity of drafting an easement, trying to find a balance between natural preservation and human use.

They later went on to donate most of that land to establish the Logan Hill Nature Preserve.

Scott Sutcliffe, a conservation easement grantor, recalls Betsy being the voice of the Land Trust, serving as the main contact for conservation questions.

Betsy worked tirelessly to negotiate conservation easements and help acquire land for public nature preserves. Most of the easements that Betsy worked on have remarkably accurate hand-drawn maps of each property.

Betsy served as the Director of Land Protection until 2008, when she stepped into a stewardship advisor role. She said, “I used to wake up thinking about the Land Trust and go to bed thinking about the Land Trust, then wake up and do it all again.” It is astonishing to look back at the hours of work that Betsy put into the Land Trust.

Since semi-retiring in 2008, Betsy has been a stewardship and newsletter advisor. Betsy continues to encourage and support staff, joining events, trail work, and invasive species removal. Most recently, Betsy joined staff on the annual monitoring visit of her conservation easement property.



CHRIS OLNEY

FAREWELL!

I first learned about the Land Trust in Fall 2017 during a conservation biology course at Ithaca College where Chris Olney presented. A year later, I spent a semester as a nature preserve intern for Jason Gorman, the Nature Preserve Manager. When I found out they were hiring a Conservation Easement Steward in 2021, I was elated for the opportunity to be back in Ithaca.

In just 5 years, the Land Trust has added 45 conservation easement properties, 4 deed restrictions, and a Senior Conservation Easement Steward, Margaret Royall, to the team to help with monitoring. I am so proud of the work we've done and feel fortunate to have played a small part.

July 31st marked my last day. I have moved to Portland, Maine, because my husband started a new job there.

Best Wishes!

Hailey Nase

Former
Conservation
Easement
Stewardship
Manager



From top: Betsy and Dick Darlington at Cayuga Shores Wildlife Management Area; Jean Darlington. Betsy Darlington pulling autumn olive; Jason Gorman

Betsy's Passions

BETSY ALWAYS has a smile on her face, but it definitely gets bigger and brighter when she is with her family, walking outside, birdwatching, or sharing her knowledge. Betsy's genuine love for plants, animals, and people make her so great at land conservation.



FLLT



FLLT



FLLT

LAND CONSERVATION

Betsy's work was mission-focused, protecting the Finger Lakes for the future. In those first 20 years, Betsy helped to establish:

Conservation Easements

- 71 conservation easements
- Totaling almost 5,000 acres
- Spanning 11 counties

Nature Preserves

- 26 nature preserves
- Totaling 3,700 acres

INVASIVE SPECIES REMOVAL

Removing invasives and enhancing wildlife habitat has been a part of Betsy's impact at FLLT.

Garlic Mustard

Garlic mustard is an invasive plant that takes over forest floors, outcompeting native species and threatening biodiversity.

Betsy had an intense focus, almost a personal mission, to remove garlic mustard. The best approach is to pull up the plant, before they seed to prevent further spreading.

TEACHING

One of Betsy's superpowers has been sharing her knowledge. Whether it was leading a group of students on a plant identification walk or bird watching with friends, Betsy was extremely generous with her wisdom.

Talks & Treks

The Land Trust continues to share knowledge through our Talks & Treks series. Upcoming trips include Fantastical Fungi, Nature Photography, and a Fall Foliage Hike. Check out flt.org/events.

WELCOME!

Growing up in Trumansburg near Taughannock Falls and Cayuga Lake, I learned early how deeply people connect with the land they care for and the places they call home. After serving with the Peace Corps alongside rural farmers in Senegal, earning a doctorate in soil biogeochemistry, and stewarding land in the Genesee Valley, I'm excited to return home and get to know the landowners who protect the Finger Lakes' farms, forests, and open spaces. I hope to continue the Finger Lakes Land Trust's collaborative approach to conservation easement stewardship. I look forward to learning each property's story and supporting your goals for the land.

All the best,
Maura Slocum

Conservation
Easement
Stewardship
Manager



CHRIS OLNEY

Nature Stories with Betsy

THERE IS no shortage of stories about Betsy and her connection and love of nature. Here are a few stories and memories of experiencing nature with Betsy.

ASHLEY MILLER, Founding FLLT member

I fondly remember walking a property with Betsy when she dropped to her knee, put her head in a hole in the ground, took a large sniff, and declared that it was a fox's den due to the musky smell. We were so excited by the discovery. I am grateful to have that knowledge from Betsy.



From top: Betsy at picnic at Smith/McClure property. Jason, Betsy, and Margaret at Darlington's cabin; Chris Olney.

BRAD EDMONDSON, Former FLLT President

I went on a salamander mating and migration walk on a very rainy spring night at the Stevenson Nature Preserve. Everyone was in rain jackets with flashlights and headlamps. In the pouring rain, Betsy shined her flashlight on a tennis ball sized mound of mating salamanders. Seeing how thrilled Betsy was at the discovery amplified the experience.

JASON GORMAN, FLLT Nature Preserve Manager

When we were building the Logan Hill Nature Preserve, every time Betsy saw a plant or flower she had never seen, she would say that even after visiting the property for 40 years, she was amazed every time she discovered something

new. She said the same thing when we were out there just this past May. Her love of nature and the land is so genuine and contagious. Volunteers still talk about doing garlic mustard pulls with her back in the day.

MIKE DEMUNN, Forester and former FLLT Volunteer Manager

Betsy was instrumental in preserving land by coordinating people, collecting information, and bringing her devotion and enthusiasm to keep things rolling. I would find places like Stevenson, Lindsay Parsons, and Steege Hill, take Betsy out there, she would collect plant and animal lists, and we would appeal to landowners to save them as nature preserves. We would listen to the landowners' stories, like Elizabeth Stevenson's family riding on the property in a horse and buggy, and they would be so happy when their property was protected. We were a great team. She has always been so detail-oriented, organized, and determined. I always tell her she is my hero when I see her, and she, then, says the same to me.

SARA KERSTING, Former FLLT Volunteer

In the early days, Betsy would lead FLLT nature hikes and my husband Jim and I learned 80% of what we know about nature from her on those hikes. She openly shared her friendship, knowledge, and sense of humor, and we have always enjoyed her company immensely.



From top: Betsy and Jason at Logan Hill Preserve. Betsy Darlington and Tom Reimers by big cherry on Ripley Hill Trail; Chris Olney

When Should I Call FLLT?



Contact us anytime with questions about your conservation easement property. Some activities will require the 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@fllt.org

Maura Slocum, Conservation Easement Stewardship Manager, mauraslocum@fllt.org

Margaret Royall, Senior Conservation Easement Steward, margaretrovall@fllt.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."



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