THE LAND STEWARD

Newsletter of the Finger Lakes Land Trust

Vol. 13, No. 4 | *working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes Region* | Fall 2001

SPECIAL ISSUE: THE CHEMUNG VALLEY WATERSHED

Steege Hill: Our Newest Preserve

There's little pretension, no unwarranted claim, in simply calling our newest nature preserve "Steege Hill." Just look at a map. Steege Hill is massive: a great green bulwark rising straight above a sharp, north- and east-facing bend in the Chemung River not far from Big Flats; you can see it from miles around. And now the Land Trust owns the bulk of it.

Steege Hill's acres have been long awaited. We first heard of the property almost 10 years ago, walked its broad hilltop and clambered down the glens on its southern verge. Dream on, we thought— we were still a fledgling organization, and an acquisition of this order was beyond us. So for years while the property lingered on the market we'd mention it to conservation-minded large-acreage buyers we heard of through the grapevine, hoping one of them would buy it, then put a conservation easement on it.

But now we've expanded into the southern rivers region—called after the broad and beautiful Canisteo, Cohocton, Chemung, Tioga, and Susquehanna rivers that skirt the southern reaches of the Finger Lakes—and Steege Hill is our flagship and anchor, both. Thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor, we recently purchased 800 acres of this 960-acre hill.

Steege Hill and its neighbors look entirely familiar to the Finger Lakes dweller. True, that's a river glittering in the valley. But the hills of the southern rivers, like those among the lakes,

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Photo by: Julie Gosse

View of Steege Hill, looking south across the Chemung River. The preserve starts a little uphill of the utility line cut.

Photo by: Julie Gosse

Aerial view of the Chemung River looking southeast from above Harris Hill, around 1930. Photo printed with permission of the Chemung County Historical Society, Elmira, NY.

Chemung River Watershed

"We are perched on a hilltop that overlooks a…world of green valleys, shining rivers, sumptuous forests and billowy uplands, veiled in a haze of distance." – Mark Twain, Elmira, NY, ca. 1880s

Rivers possess a certain mystique. Maybe it's because they bring us scents and sights—from upriver or from other times. Take, for instance, the mastodon tusk that greeted the Delaware Native Americans when they arrived in this river valley in 1756. Half buried in the silt, the piece of 10,000-year-old bone reached into the sky, its shape reflecting the curve of the river bend. The tusk is gone now, but the Delaware name for the "Place of the Big Horn" has remained: Chemung.

The Chemung River begins where the Cohocton and Tioga rivers join just west of the city of Corning. It winds east through farm fields and mega-malls to Twain's Elmira, then dips south to join the Susquehanna River near Athens, Pennsylvania.

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JOIN US FOR A HIKE AT STEEGE HILL. SEE PAGE 12 FOR DETAILS.

Sign Of The Lone Pine

Celebrate success. It's good advice, often dispensed by organizational management gurus to help build team spirit. But what kinds of success should we celebrate? When we commemorated our first decade in land protection, we shared our story of success by celebrating the wonderful diversity and beauty of the acres of land protected in our nature preserves and conservation easements. This, after all, is our primary mission, right?

Perhaps. Certainly the standard measure of "acres saved" is an important indicator of how well we're succeeding. Since our beginning in 1990 with 328 acres, we have steadily added to our protected lands; and the rate of annual additions has accelerated in recent years. In fact, we anticipate our largest increase ever in 2001 with over 1,400 acres in targeted additions to our nature preserves, bringing our total to almost 6,300 acres.

But this touches only the surface. Unlike some of the national conservation groups that specialize in "buy and transfer" methods of saving land, local land trusts like ours primarily work on the principle of "buy and hold." There is great value in the work done by "buy and transfer" groups (such as the Trust for Public Land), who—as facilitators and sources of capital—can act quickly to buy threatened habitats and sell them later to state or local governments as protected parklands or wilderness areas. It's good work, but it's only part of the process of protecting land.

In contrast, the "buy and hold" strategy requires that a land trust mature in multiple ways in order to provide a high standard of ongoing stewardship for their protected lands. This requires that we exercise the self-discipline to raise stewardship and legal defense funds to establish endowments for perpetual care of the land. Even more significantly, it requires that we develop local constituencies committed to safeguarding our protected lands down through the centuries.

Conservationist Billy Campbell notes that the buy and hold method diverts financial and human resources from the core mission of "saving as much land as possible as soon as possible" but that it does a much better job of combining strategic habitat protection with building dedicated trans-generational constituencies and relationships with local and regional institutions potentially involved in landscape-scale protection and maintenance— even as the decades and centuries go by.

The Finger Lakes Land Trust is in the business of protecting land over the long haul. That's why we are proud of our success both in increasing our ability to identify and acquire significant parcels for protection and in building our membership base (we've climbed steadily to over 1250 now), developing relationships with local officials, community groups, and conservation partners, and providing education on the long-term benefits of responsible stewardship.

To do all of that, we've had to invest our resources in volunteer training and support staff— as well as in educating ourselves in how to do this work together with sufficient wisdom and vision to keep us strong and viable in the years to come.

We need your help to continue this success story. Our basic membership fee covers the newsletter costs and a small portion of our operating expenses. That's why, once yearly in late fall, we ask our members to contribute to our annual appeal— a major source of funding to accomplish our land conservation and stewardship goals.

We have an ambitious land protection agenda to meet this coming year and it will require your financial support to do it well. If you haven't responded in previous years, we hope you can opt in this year. When you receive our annual appeal, we hope you'll join our "buy and hold" club and be a part of our continuing success story.

—Gay Nicholson

The Land Trust's New Office Manager: Abbey Chernela

Abbey Chernela had a telephone crisis on his hands, but remained cool and gracious toward a writer making his complicated existence more complicated with a barrage of questions. Abbey is the Land Trust's new office manager. He is responsible for everything from scheduling maintenance and repair of the building to sustaining the orderly flow of the myriad activities within. "That includes everything from opening the mail in the morning to answering the telephone (We laugh; there has been a steady stream of phone interruptions.), processing donations, tracking financial transactions, supervising office interns and volunteers, and more." That "more" includes coordinating events such as the recent Keuka Lake cruise and the upcoming fall picnic. For that, Abbey will secure the space, oversee publicity, see to the refreshments, keep records, and do the accounting. But as he's quick to point out, "Such events are the brainchild of the Special Events Committee, and the success of those events would not be possible without the tremendous effort of its six highly motivated volunteer members."

Contained and comfortable in khaki shorts and off-white T-shirt emblazoned with the Land Trust logo, Abbey spoke warmly of his new colleagues. "In the non-profit sector you generally meet neat people, but the folks here are a cut above; they're intelligent; they're articulate; and they put the mission above their individual issues."

Photo by: Kat Lieberknecht.

Although he's always had a love for the earth, Abbey had never been an "aggressive environmentalist." But after

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Seeing the Forest AND the Trees: Working Forest Conservation Easements

Over the past 250 years, the landscape of the Finger Lakes has transformed again— and again. After the Revolutionary War settlers cleared the forests so thoroughly that trees remained only around riverbanks, in swamps, and on steep slopes. The land was farmed intensively into the early 1900s, but as agriculture moved on to the Midwest, the forests slowly came back. Today, more of our region is forested than at any time since the American Revolution. You could even say that we live in a recovered landscape.

As our forests mature, timber harvesting is becoming a significant part of our rural economy. And as more landowners begin to manage their forestlands for goods and services, there will be an expanded role for land conservation groups. How can land trusts help communities and landowners protect the full range of environmental, economic, and community values associated with forests? One possibility is a new type of conservation easement: the working forest conservation easement.

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified organization—like a land trust— that permanently limits the uses of the land in order to protect specified conservation values. Conservation easements are the most widely used land protection tool available to landowners. They can be designed to protect farmland, wildlife habitat, scenic views, water quality, or just about anything that people and communities value. Currently, we hold 36 conservation easements. All of these easements are what folks in the trade call "open space" easements—the plain vanilla cone of conservation easements. Under open space easements, landowners limit their rights to engage, for example, in mining, subdivision, residential and commercial development, or similar activities.

Working forest conservation easements (WFCEs) add another layer of complexity. They are designed for forests that are actively managed for goods and services such as timber, recreation, and water supply protection. Unlike traditional open space easements, WFCEs guide forest management in order to protect specified forest values—water quality, biodiversity, wildlife management, and timber quality.

WFCEs require land trusts to augment their level of expertise. For instance, if we held a WFCE, we would need to have a staff member who was familiar with issues faced by forest landowners: marketplace pressures, harvest complications, storm or insect damage, and more. We'd need either the ability to review and critique forest management plans and the capability to monitor the property— or the funds to hire a professional forester to do it for us.

Today, staff time and funding limit our ability to draft, steward, and enforce WFCEs. But it's something to think about for the future. As landscapes and land use change, we must be ready to move forward with new conservation programs.

The reforestation of the Finger Lakes landscape presents us with a second chance to live here sustainably. Our forests provide innumerable products and services, from clean air to biodiversity, from beautiful views to timber. Let's use the recovery of our forests as the inspiration to create a culture and an economy that respects and stewards nature. Working forest conservation easements may be one of the first steps.

— Kat Lieberknecht

he moved here from New York City, he quickly became sensitive to the issues. "I notice garbage more," he grins, "and cigarette butts on the sidewalk. My consumption of natural resources has probably gone down 50 per cent. Our thermostat is kept at 66º; I use half as many paper towels as I used to, and much less water." His partner of 19 years, Miles Cigolle, finds Abbey's new concerns contagious. "He comes to our events, and I've taken him to two of our preserves." They share a sense of awe about the Land Trust's impact. "We were at an art fair in Hammondsport recently," Abbey recalls. "Someone recognized the stately white pine logo on my T-shirt and thanked me for the organization's wonderful work. Miles was quite impressed."

Abbey left his position as grants and contracts administrator for the American Foundation for AIDS Research— where he had worked ten years— to move here with Miles who, as a graduate of Cornell (and an architect), yearned to return to Ithaca. Much to their delight, they have found a house in Ithaca designed by one of Miles' old professors.

Abbey grew up in Great Neck, Long Island, attended college for a year, then dropped out. "It was the 70s," he laughs. "I grew long hair, became a flower child, and lived in San Francisco for a while." Miles persuaded him to complete his education; along the way, he distinguished himself at Hunter College and Rockefeller University, in perception research.

Then a friend persuaded him to join the war against AIDS. "A number of my friends had died; I literally jumped into the trenches." Bringing with him the wealth of experience he gleaned from that fight, Abbey has jumped equally whole-heartedly into the critical struggle to protect land here at the Land Trust.

— Caissa Wilmer

Steege Hill: Our Newest Preserve

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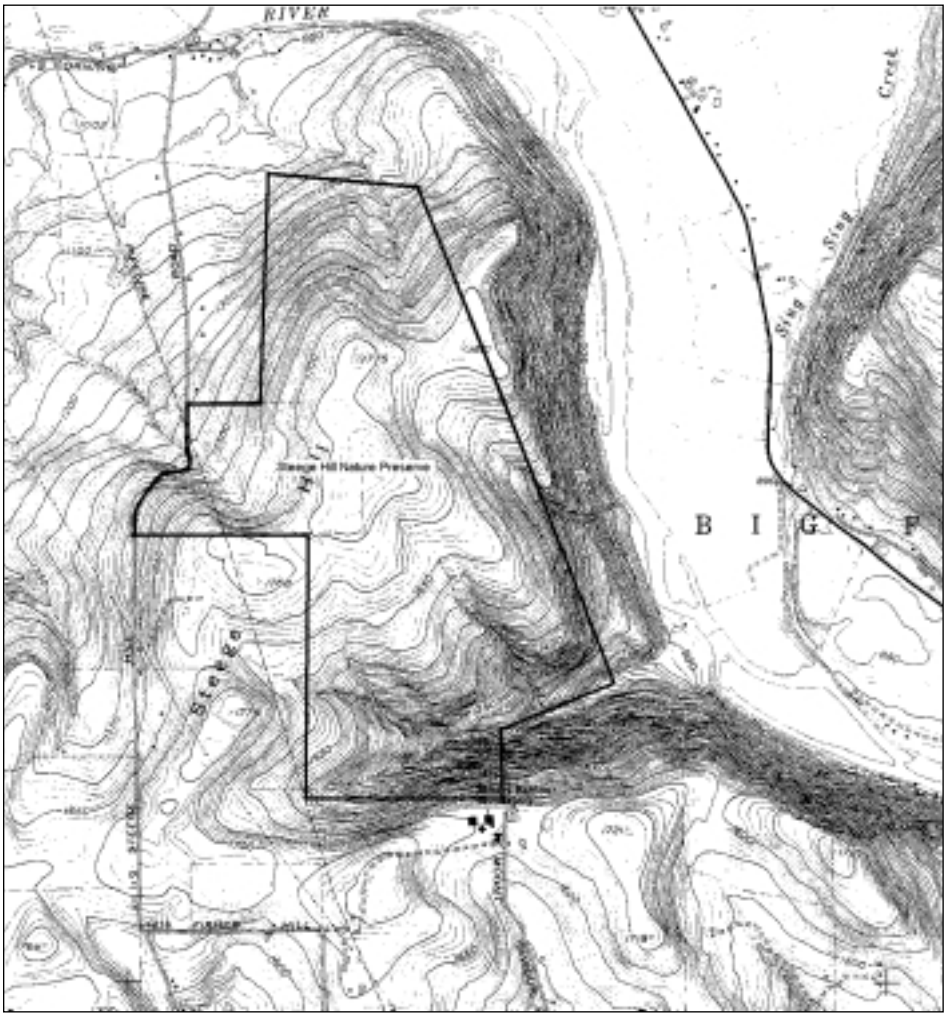

The outline shows the Steege Hill Nature Preserve.

have the same abrupt profile, then go suddenly flat (almost!) on top. Indeed, like those of the Finger Lakes, they aren't hills— exactly. Long before the ice ages, the original plain— the Catskill Delta— bore networks of streams and rivers that cut gently across the deep pile of not-quite-horizontal strata underlying the region. These streams and rivers shifted about, capturing one another even as the eons wore on. Finally, the recent glaciers overrode everything, ravaging many features but magnifying others. They turned that once-broad plain into deeply cleft and sculpted troughs, then poured rivers through them.

Much more recently Steege Hill itself was ravaged. In the mid-seventies the property was logged— badly enough that finally the Town of Big Flats stopped the work and passed the first local ordinance in New York State to regulate logging. Yet time— and rain, and a replete seed bank from the forest that was taken— have begun the healing. Although some weedy "exotic aliens" have taken hold, a young forest is growing again on the hill. (Give it a hundred years or so, and then come back and see— it'll be magnificent.)

In that forest we can read a story, not only of natural succession and the competition of exotics, but a "north meets south" story as well. On rocky, south-facing slopes gnarly old oaks, hickories, pitch pine, sweet fern, trailing arbutus, and tons of huckleberry evoke the great southern forests that sweep on to the highlands of Georgia (and make, we presume, for great bear habitat). Yet in the glens, trees of vast northern forests— maple, hemlock, and yellow birch— dominate, along with the lovely, liquid songs of winter wren and hermit thrush.

We've even got habitat for a couple of rare "herps"— the small, elusive coal skink, the only true lizard in our area, and the timber rattlesnake, threatened in New York. [See "A Closer Look," page 11]. (But not to worry about those snakes.

Long before the ice ages, the original plain— the Catskill Delta— bore networks of streams and rivers that cut gently across the deep pile of not-quite-horizontal strata underlying the region.

Steege Hill is so big, it took land committee members 16 hours to walk the entire boundary.

Just follow a few simple rules, including: watch your step, don't walk around at night without a flashlight, don't stick your hand in a burrow, and don't try to pick one up.)

Bordering our preserve is 750 acres owned by the Mount Saviour Monastery— adding, of course, to its value for wildlife protection. Indeed, such lands are of incalculable worth in this age of fragmented landscapes and diminishing habitat.

Steege Hill is so big, it took land committee members 16 hours to walk the entire boundary (during two visits) before we purchased the property. You won't need to spend nearly that long, of course, to discover what a treasure this preserve is. Stay tuned for news on when the dedication will be, and join us for our first public hike on Sunday, November 18 [See page 12 for more information and directions].

—Mary M. Woodsen

Every Day Is Thanksgiving

Thanking the Earth, the plants, animals, the wind, rain, sun and moon isn't part of our daily ritual. That is, unless we are of the Haudenosaunee, the people who have lived in this part of the world far longer than others.

Since ancient times, the Haudenosaunee (or the Six Nations of the Iroquois) have given a Thanksgiving Address before and after every ceremonial or governmental gathering. This past July, I witnessed Peter Jemison, manager of Ganondagan State Historic Site, delivering the address in the Seneca language at Ganondagan's Native American Festival of Dance and Music.

Though I could not understand his words, I knew in general what Peter was saying, as he had shared some translations with me beforehand. Though speakers vary some in their details, I'm sure Peter followed the general pattern by greeting and thanking the people who gathered there, by giving thanks for their safety and good health, and by declaring that their minds were one. Then he proceeded to thank all our "relatives": Mother Earth, the fish, the plants, the food plants, the medicine herbs, the animals, the trees, and the birds. He thanked the Four Winds that bring us fresh air, the Thunderers who bring rain, Brother Sun, Grandmother Moon, the Stars, the Enlightened Teachers and the Spirit Protectors. And he concluded by thanking the Creator who is responsible for all these gifts.

I won't venture too far into trying to interpret the Haudenosaunee way of life. That is for them to do. But Peter Jemison says that the sense of relationship is important. As one translation of the Thanksgiving Address puts it, we have the responsibility "to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things."

Now we know that our relationship with Mother Earth is in deep trouble. Perhaps we need to look to the original people for some guidance, maybe even some roots.

As non-Indians, our ancestors, or at least predecessors, came here and changed this land in so many ways in their attempt to make it like Europe, to turn it into money. Now we know that our relationship with Mother Earth is in deep trouble. Perhaps we need to look to the original people for some guidance, maybe even some roots. Just as recent immigrants learn our laws, livelihoods, and language, maybe we can learn important things about living in this region from those who were here before us. And perhaps our relationships with the Haudenosaunee and other native peoples would improve as well.

In honoring the great natural systems of the Earth that all life depends on, we can honor the other organisms that live here with us, appreciating those qualities that make them unique and which they contribute to the world. We can acknowledge how our bodies and senses are in a constant interchange with the air, water and soil. We can give thanks to the plants and animals that give up their lives that we may live. We can recognize that everything else is affected by us and we are affected by everything else. And we can see that we are not better than other creatures— just different.

Each of us could devise our own thanksgiving honoring the natural world, then share it with others. It could change us— our lives, our culture, our political and economic decisions, our children, our relationships with our brother and sister organisms that share so many genes with us, born of the same mother. Following the Haudenosaunee practice of giving daily thanks for the sustaining matrix of life can help us discover the power of gratitude in our lives.

Several translations of the Thanksgiving Address are available. One, by Seneca leader Clayton Logan, is at the beginning of Treaty of Canandaigua, *edited by Peter Jemison and Anna Schein. Or look for* Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World *in both English and Mohawk; it is based on the "original inspiration" of Mohawk Chief Jake Swamp. A third, very abbreviated version is in the beautiful children's book,* Giving Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message, *by Chief Jake Swamp; it's gorgeously illustrated by Cayuga/Tuscarora painter Erwin Printup, Jr.*

"Every day is Thanksgiving," Erwin Printup, Jr. told me as he signed my copy of Giving Thanks.

— Tony Ingraham

Consider a gift that grows with time…

Please consider including the Land Trust in your will or estate plan. Provide for the future of the Finger Lakes Region by making a new will, modifying your existing will, or by including the Land Trust in your revocable trust. Below is some sample language for an unrestricted bequest for general purposes:

I hereby give, devise, and bequeath to the Finger Lakes Land Trust, Inc., a non-profit corporation in New York State, for its general purposes {__ dollars} {__ percent} {all the rest, residue, and remainder of my estate}.

Working and Playing with the Land Trust

Photo by: Susan Hurwitz

Lenore and Vern Durkee enjoy the view at the Land Trust's cruise on Keuka Lake.

Photo by: Betsy Darlington

Volunteers from the Learning Web program donate some "sweat equity" while doing trail work at the Ellis Hollow Nature Presreve.

Photo by: Jim Kersting

Steve Marshall and Bob Guthrie help to remove three dilapidated sheds at the Wesley Hill Nature Preserve.

Photo by: Susan Hurwitz

Ed and Joan Ormondroyd at the Keuka Lake cruise.

Abandoned Fawns

The Memorial Day weekend of 2001 wasn't much for weather and barbecues—but it was a day for a hard wildlife survival lesson on the Finger Lakes Land Trust's Parker Nature Preserve that surrounds our property in Bath.

I was up and out early that morning. Despite the chill and rain, I began filling our bird feeders. Then I heard a loud bleating sound coming from the woods, and when it began to harmonize I knew what ever this was, there were two. I listened for a moment, finished up with bird feeding, and decided I'd better investigate—for whatever it was, it sounded distressed. I'd gone only about 60 yards into the woods when I spotted two little (very little) fawns, standing on wobbly legs, wet, cold and very lonely for their mom. Knowing that fawns should be left alone when found, I headed back up to the house. If the mother was out for a morning snack she would be back shortly and I didn't want to scare her from her fawns.

But the cries continued. Fawns don't usually bleat so continuously. I went into the house and told my husband about it. He told me to leave them alone; the mother would be back. Although I hoped for this, something was nagging at my heart—saying the mother wasn't coming back.

I went about my daily routine, finding myself stopping every five minutes to go outside to listen. I was so worried I couldn't concentrate on anything and was driving my husband crazy with my running in and out of the house.

It was now 11 a.m., and something needed to be done. Although it was a holiday, I managed to get hold of two conservation officers—and less than an hour and a half later they were there. The way my luck goes I figured the fawns would stop bleating when the officers arrived and I would be marked as a loony lady who likes to bother people on holidays because she thinks she hears things in the woods. But on cue and harmonizing, the cries continued. Within 15 minutes the officers were back in the yard, each one holding a tiny fawn in his arms. As we patted their little heads and looked at their hooves, only the size of your thumb, they explained that the fawns were very cold and malnourished and had been without their mom— who had probably been hit by a car— for almost a week.

Many of us have seen young animals in the woods. Bunnies, fawns, turkey chicks— we coo about how cute and tender they look. But to be born and survive in the wild isn't easy— and our two fawns didn't make it. One died during transport to a wildlife rehabilitation center, the second shortly after arriving.

It's a fundamental rule that we should leave wildlife to care for itself and its own. Even so, I often think that if I had brought them up from the damp woods earlier and warmed them, the fawns might have made it. Yet the experience also made us aware of how grateful we are for the Land Trust's preservation of land and habitat. Surviving isn't easy for young animals. But with the Land Trust on their side, there are places for them to be wild forever.

—Pamela A. Maurey

Major Gasoline Spill at the Lindsay-Parson Biodiversity Preserve

At 8:45 AM on June 29, about 2700 gallons of gasoline spilled onto the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve when a speeding gasoline tanker truck went off the highway and rolled over three times before settling upside down. Downslope and nearby is Coleman Lake, which in turn drains into Cayuga Inlet. Emergency crews from 17 communities in four counties responded, along with the Department of Environmental Conservation and an environmental company, hired by the DEC to start the cleanup. Many workers were there into the night. The road was closed off and three nearby homes evacuated. The potential for a major human and environmental catastrophe was great, but thanks to the skill of the many emergency workers, there were no explosions or fires.

Photo by: Betsy Darlington

Gas tanker that spilled 2700 gallons of gasoline onto the Lindsay-Parson's Biodiversity Preserve.

Monitoring wells have been placed below the site and are being tested periodically for gasoline. Scientists from Cornell, led by Chris Caudill, spent July 9th collecting macro-invertebrates from fifteen locations in Coleman Lake. This will give us a baseline to compare with in the future, should gasoline eventually get to the water. No sheen was on the water, and there was no odor of gasoline at the lake. If gasoline turns up in any of the monitoring wells, the team will come back again, to slog through the water and deep bottom muck and collect more samples.

—Betsy Darlington

VOLUNTEER PROFILE

The Eyes and Ears of the Western Lake Chapter

Jim Fralick is "the eyes and ears on the ground" for the exceedingly active and productive Western Lakes Chapter of the Land Trust, says Kat Lieberknecht. Always on the lookout for likely parcels of land for preservation around Canandaigua Lake, he was instrumental, along with the chapter's Meg Ewing, in securing the donation of the 220-acre Great Hill Preserve that rises above the southeast end of that lake. [See *The Land Steward*, Spring 2001.]

He is persistently out and about, talking to neighbors, friends, and residents of the area about the work of the Land Trust, making the activities of the chapter more visible, involving as many people as possible in those activities, and organizing fundraising events for new acquisitions and stewardship.

A native of New York—he grew up in North Syracuse—Jim's expertise as an economist has taken him to many parts of the globe; he has seen firsthand the devastation being wrought against the earth's forests, and he is determined to save some part of them. His personal focus is the forested hillsides around Canandaigua Lake, where he and his wife, Ellie, have spent their summers for the past 20 years, and where they were determined to retire.

As soon as they did so, Jim joined the Canandaigua Lake Pure Waters, Ltd. association, of which he is now president. In 1999, he led a coalition of residents and organizations to stop a jet ski race on the lake. The effort was successful, but the coalition let the race go forward in order to test the water before, during, and after the event. The results showed levels of hydrocarbon pollution many times higher than those permitted by state and federal regulations. Those data now are being used nationally to curb jet ski activity on public waters.

Jim's energetic dedication to land preservation led to his appointment as chair of Canandaigua's Green Space

Photo provided by: Jim Fralick

Committee. His position on the board of the Canandaigua National Bank extends his connections into the financial community. As secretary of our board and member of its finance committee, he brings a substantial network of association and influence to work for the Land Trust—with a personal focus on Canandaigua Lake and the Western Lakes Chapter.

During a highly successful career, Jim served on the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve system and held a variety of administrative posts—domestic and international—with Morgan Stanley & Co. for more than 15 years. He is presently a visiting professor in Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship.

Jim acknowledges that his son-in-law, Tom Page, who works for the Eagle Valley Land Trust in Colorado, "opened his eyes to land trust work," and he adds, "The combination of Tom's insights and my experiences at home and abroad, led me to pledge that after I left Morgan Stanley, I would volunteer my time to the conservation and land trust movement." And he is proving true to his word many times over.

—Caissa Wilmer

Funds for Land Protection— and You, Our Members

The Land Trust comes to each of its members just two times a year to ask for financial support.

The first time is for your annual membership renewal, which varies according to the month in which you first became a member of the Land Trust. The second time is each November when we send out an annual appeal to all of our members, asking for any additional support each of you can give.

If you belong to national environmental organizations, it may seem as if you're getting appeals almost every month in support of one campaign or another. At the Land Trust we try to keep our appeals to a minimum. Of course, many folks do make special contributions from time to time, often to commemorate weddings and births or to memorialize loved ones. Too, sometimes members who are involved with special projects (such as stewardship or land acquisition) make generous contributions to the Land Trust in support of those projects.

But our regular requests to all members, come just twice a year. So when that annual appeal letter arrives in November, remember it's only the second time we've asked you this year. Please give if you can— as generously as you can. Thank you for your support.

—Merry Jo Bauer

CONSERVATION LAND FOR SALE:

ABUTTING FINGER LAKES NATIONAL FOREST:

34-acre parcel on Chicken Coop Hill Rd., to be sold with conservation easement. 9-acre woodlot, 25 acres open fields with sweeping views. Trumansburg School District. Call (607) 387-8080.

Photo by: Kat Lieberknecht

Professor Harry Greene of Cornell University prepares to coax a timber rattlesnake out of a cotton bag as a rapt audience watches. Dr. Greene's presentation on the biology and characteristics of rattlesnakes was one of the twelve programs that was part of this summer's Chemung Valley Talks & Treks series.

Chemung River Watershed

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Explore the river floodplain near Elmira, and you'll find a historical marker for the Battle of Newtown. Here, in August of 1779, General John Sullivan and company defeated the local Seneca nation, along with the British and colonial Tories. Sullivan's troops continued north, burning Seneca villages, cornfields, and orchards, and forcing the rest of the Iroquois nations from the region. The Battle of Newtown opened the Finger Lakes Region for settlement by Americans of European descent, including many soldiers who had received tracts of land as payment for service during the Revolutionary War.

Along the river, settlers established the villages of Elmira and Corning in the early 1800s. The river powered early industry and provided a mode of travel for goods and people. By mid-century, both were thriving cities. Timber and farm products traveled down the Chemung River to the Susquehanna River and on to Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, DC.

Some of the seeds have gone to the Boyce Thompson Institute at Cornell University, where plant physiologist and Finger Lakes Land Trust founding president Carl Leopold is trying to germinate these prehistoric seeds.

Now and then the river asserts itself and wipes the human infrastructure clean. During the flood of 1972, heavy rains from Hurricane Agnes flooded Elmira, Corning, and other river towns for days. Afterward, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built flood control systems throughout the region, and both Elmira and Corning were substantially renovated. The Chemung is on hold— for now.

But concrete retaining walls and dams haven't stopped people from finding clues to the region's past. In 1999, paleontologist John Chiment and others excavated a mastodon and its surroundings from a pond in Pine Valley, in northern Chemung County. In addition to an almost complete skeleton of a 35-year old male mastodon, the muddy matrix from this site is providing a snapshot of life in the Chemung River watershed thousands of years ago. The search to find details about this swampy, post-glacial landscape has become an international effort: samples of mud surrounding the skeleton have been sent to elementary school students around the world, who are finding 10,000-14,000 year-old seeds, twigs, shells and insects in it. Some of the seeds have gone to the Boyce Thompson Institute at Cornell University, where plant physiologist and Finger Lakes Land Trust founding president Carl Leopold is trying to germinate these prehistoric seeds.

I credit my knowledge of the Chemung River watershed to our Talks & Treks series that took place this summer—-and to the local organizations and citizens (the Community Foundation of the Elmira-Corning Area foremost among them) who made it all possible. It was at one of our talks at the Chemung Valley History Museum that I heard the Twain quote that begins this piece. The Finger Lakes Land Trust is thrilled to work with local communities to protect the same views and landscapes that Twain loved so well.

— Kat Lieberknecht

More members = more protected land

IT'S THAT SIMPLE.

Help us spread the word! Ask a friend to join the Land Trust today. Or give a membership as a gift. Just use the enclosed membership form and envelope today.

BUSINESS PARTNER PROFILE

Performance Systems Contracting: Improving Human Habitat

Why does a Ph.D. field biologist like Jon Harrod become a building performance contractor? "Habitat loss and climate change are the two most critical issues facing us today," he says. "Organizations like the Land Trust do a good job of addressing habitat loss. I like looking at buildings and thinking about how they work, so I decided that energy use—relating, of course, to climate change—was where I could make the biggest difference."

That's why Jon joined Performance Systems Contracting. PSC provides energy audits, new construction consultations, and home improvement services such as furnace upgrading, insulation, and air sealing. PSC's office, and president Greg Thomas' home, are at Ecovillage in Ithaca where Greg designed the heating system for this 30-family co-housing community. PSC helps customers deal with high energy consumption, drafts and cold rooms, mold and mildew, and ice dams; as a New York State Energy Star partner, they can help folks get low-interest financing for their services.

"We start by getting to know the building with a thorough basement-to-attic walkthrough," says Jon. "We analyze the heating system, insulation, and energy bills. Then we work to develop the most cost-efficient long-term strategy for reducing energy bills while keeping the building comfortable and pleasant." Sometimes—depending on the building—the expensive upgrades you might think you need, like new windows, aren't as cost effective as replacing appliances and lights with more efficient ones.

Greg and Jon recently completed an energy audit for the Land Trust's Leopold Center. It seems our archaic steam heating system, with its uneven distribution and two huge old boilers (one a converted coal burner), is inefficient. We're looking forward to making the Leopold Center a greener home.

To find out more about PSC, call 607-254-6073 or visit <www.pscontracting.com>.

—Gail Blake

Photo by: Kat Lieberknecht

John Harrod measures a window as part of PCS's energy audit of the Leopold Center.

Our sincere thanks for

GIFTS IN HONOR OF

Jim Kersting,

on the occasion of his retirement, from:

Dr. L. K. Quinsland ❧ Anne Van Ginkel
William and Valerie Yust ❧ Michael and Susan White
Margot and Gary Long ❧ Donna C. Rubin
W. Kent Winchester

Wish List

A garden cart or wheelbarrow
&"Cat's paws" (nail pullers)

Need the Perfect Gift
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In Memorium

Our deepest thanks for generous donations in memory of

Guy Johnson, from ***Jean Elizabeth Johnson***

The Timber Rattlesnake *(Crotalus horridus)*

I have to admit, the occasional buzz of cicadas caught me off guard. So did the dry rustle of oak leaves. I knew that timber rattlesnakes *(Crotalus horridus)* were shy creatures that only rattled when threatened and only struck out of defensiveness. Yet still I was nervous.

I'd been trekking through a wooded hillside high above the Chemung River along with about ten other prospective "snake watchers" and three or four rattlesnake experts. At last we came to the den site— a pile of flat, scattered rocks— on the south-facing slope of the hill. Quietly, we gathered around, straining our eyes. She was right there—but she wasn't easy to spot. Her golden skin, dappled with a yellow-brown pattern, was nearly invisible in the leaf-filtered sunlight. Finally one, then another, then all of us saw her: a velvety-smooth timber rattlesnake, stretched out in the warm sunshine. Our experts agreed that she probably was a pregnant female.

Photo by: Harry Greene

A timber rattlesnake.

The bottom part of the snake's two-foot long body was tucked behind a rock, so I couldn't see her rattle, a series of loosely attached, interlocking hollow segments composed of keratin. But with binoculars I could make out her pit organs— a small dent between each eye and nostril that is used to detect heat radiation given off by mice, chipmunks, and other prey.

I was glad to see a pregnant female. Female rattlesnakes don't breed until they're about nine or ten years old— and then only once every three years or so; with each pregnancy they bear an average of only nine live young.

I was glad to see a pregnant female. Female rattlesnakes don't breed until they're about nine or ten years old— and then only once every three years or so; with each pregnancy they bear an average of only nine live young. This bare-bones reproductive strategy works well if you're a predator having few predators of your own. But it works less well if you're prey to human bounty hunters and curio collectors. New York's bounty on rattlesnakes was abolished in 1971, yet habitat destruction, poaching, forest disturbance by recreational users, and—let's face it—persecution still prevent the rattler's recovery.

The fear of snakes is pervasive in our culture. But snakes have an important role to play in nature. It's time for a new story—one that appreciates timber rattlesnakes as fellow inhabitants of this region, rather than demonizing them as dangerous, otherworldly creatures.

After all, rattlesnakes used to be a symbol of independence and courage in this country. Rattlesnakes—like the bald eagle and the grizzly bear—only live in the Americas, so when Europeans first moved into this continent, they found them fascinating. Colonial leaders saw the timber rattlesnake as symbolic of America's virtues. For just like the colonies, the rattles produce no sound individually, but united they can be heard by all. And while the rattlesnake does not attack unless provoked, it is dangerous to step on one. The motto "Don't Tread On Me," along with an image of a rattlesnake, adorned several Colonial-era flags, and the rattlesnake became the symbol of colonial rebellion against England.

So let's thank timber rattlesnakes for the great job they do in helping keep rodents (and other critters) in line— and thus helping keep ecosystems in balance. Rattlesnakes will never be "charismatic megafauna" like fuzzy panda bears and regal panthers, but they have a sleek, subtle beauty of their own. And while their quiet nature may make them difficult to find in the wild, this same attribute should remind us that timber rattlesnakes would prefer to co-exist peacefully with humans. And that's worthy behavior to imitate, for sure.

—Kat Lieberknecht

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FALL 2001 CALENDAR:

Sunday, September 23, 1-6 PM: Fall Picnic at Stewart Park in Ithaca. Bring friends and family; new members can join for 1/2 price! Cornell Raptor Program will show their birds. Music by Your Friends and Neighbors. Bring a dish-to-pass and your own table setting.

Saturday, September 29, 10 AM to 12:30 PM: The Gift of the Grape at Randall-Standish Vineyards, 5506 State Rte. 21, Canandaigua. Join us for a tour of a grape-crushing facility and learn about the Lake Friendly Farms Program. Sample freshly pressed juices.

Sunday, October 7, 2 PM: Fall Foliage Hike at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve, led by Betsy Darlington. Take route 13 south from Ithaca, then 34/96 to West Danby. Park in the lot on left, at top of second hill after Sylvan Dr.

Sunday, November 18, 1 PM: Steege Hill, At Last! Our first nature walk at our newest preserve (see page 1)! From route 17 in Big Flats, take exit #49 and go south on Olcutt Rd., then right on route 352. Turn left on So. Corning Rd. (next to some new condos), then left on Steege Hill Rd. (soon after going over the Chemung River). Go up the hill. Preserve entrance is marked by a closed gate, just beyond house #544. Park on the shoulder.

Wednesday, December 12th, 4-7 PM: Holiday Party at the Mural Lounge in the Clinton House, 116 N. Cayuga Street, Ithaca. Join us for music, hors d' oeuvres and wine.

WALKS GO RAIN, SUN OR SNOW. PLEASE BRING SNACKS AND WATER, AND WEAR STURDY SHOES. CALL THE LAND TRUST AT (607) 275-9487 FOR DETAILS.