



THE LAND STEWARD

Newsletter of the Finger Lakes Land Trust

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working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes Region

Autumn 2006

An Emerald Necklace in the Making

Land Trust Embarks on Multiyear Conservation Project in Highlands Around Ithaca

The City of Ithaca is ringed, in part, by a broken string of public forest highlands, stretching from the Finger Lakes National Forest in the northwest to Hammond Hill State Forest in the east. These highlands once were cleared and farmed, but after gradual retirement of much of the area's marginal farmland over the last 50 years or more, most of the landscape has now returned to forest.

As part of its conservation mission throughout the Finger Lakes, the Land Trust has begun a long-term project known as the Emerald Necklace. The plan is to identify, preserve and manage lands that, when strung together and added to the existing public holdings, will make a bright green necklace of pristine forest arcing below the south end of Cayuga Lake. The twofold aim of the project is to protect the ecological integrity of these beautiful highlands and to make the public aware of the extraordinary resources available there. Working with a variety of public and

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MARIE READ ©

Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in West Danby is just one of the many natural areas within the Emerald Necklace already under Land Trust protection

Tompkins County Secures 439-Acre Farm With Land Trust Support

With support from state and federal grants and the commitment of farmer Don Howser, Tompkins County recently purchased its first agricultural conservation easement. The Land Trust assisted the county in protecting more than 400 acres in the Town of Lansing, helping to keep a family farm in business and out of the way of creeping development pressures.

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KATHERINE BORDELLA

The 439-acre Howser Farm was secured through Tompkins County's first agricultural easement

State and Federal Tax Legislation Provide New Incentives for Conservation Easements

Recent actions at the state and federal level have significantly expanded tax incentives associated with the donation of a conservation easement.

New York State's new conservation easement tax credit will provide landowners with reimbursement of up to 25 percent of local taxes paid on land under easement on an annual basis. Since the reimbursement will be made by the state, this new incentive will not affect local property tax revenues.

At the federal level, the pensions bill recently signed into law also includes additional incentives for prospective easement donors. The bill increases the maximum allowable deduction for an easement donation from 30 to 50 percent of adjusted gross income. Farmers may deduct up to 100 percent of their income. The bill also extends from five to 15 years the "carry forward" period during which the deduction can be taken.

These provisions will be effective for donations made from January 1, 2006 to December 31, 2007. After that, the law will revert back to previous provisions, unless Congress takes action prior to the deadline.

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PERSPECTIVES



For all of us who care about the clean waters of our Finger Lakes, Maryland State Senator Bernie Fowler has a cautionary tale that deserves our attention.

Fowler grew up on the shores of the Patuxent River, a major tributary to the Chesapeake Bay.

He recalls being able to see his feet easily while standing chest high in the river, searching for crabs as a boy. By 1988, water quality in both the river and the bay had declined significantly since the days of his youth. Fowler vowed to use his position as a senator to fight for cleaner water in these areas.

To call attention to the condition of these waters, he started an annual “wade-in” to gauge the river’s clarity. For almost a decade, visibility steadily improved, from a low of eight inches to a high of more than 44 inches. To some degree, this improvement reflected substantial public investments as well as private initiatives to control runoff within the river’s watershed.

Unfortunately, since a high point in 1996, water clarity has generally declined as intensive development pressures have outstripped conservation efforts. Today, 60 million gallons of

wastewater flow into the Patuxent. This flow includes excessive amounts of nitrogen and phosphorous which serve to upset the river’s nutrient balance and foster the growth of algae.

Today, Bernie Fowler fears for the future of his beloved river, just as an increasing number of Finger Lakes resident share these same fears for our beautiful lakes. While our development pressures are nowhere near those of central Maryland, they are growing and bringing with them growing threats to our water quality.

According to Canandaigua Lake Watershed Program Manager Kevin Olvaney, there are now proposals for up to 1,000 new homes coming into the Canandaigua Watershed during the next 10 to 15 years. This intensity of development may have a profound effect on water quality, particularly when homes are built on steep hillsides or in close proximity to streams and wetlands.

Rooftops and paved roads serve to accelerate runoff rather than letting rainfall absorb into the ground. Design standards and careful construction techniques can minimize some of these impacts, but we will fail our lakes if we do not take action now to ensure their future.

While our region is blessed by an abundance of open land, development frequently takes place on those lands that are the most environmentally sensitive. Who doesn’t want to live near the water or on a hilltop with an outstanding view of the lake?

To ensure the future of our lakes, we must ensure the protection of those wetland areas, streamside corridors, and steep wooded hillsides that are vital for the maintenance of water quality. Through the use of conservation easements, we can keep these lands in the hands of local families while securing their conservation values.

More support for both private and public land conservation is needed. In addition, local governments must ensure that their building and subdivision codes are adequate to protect fragile lands. Does your town call for a streamside buffer zone for new construction? Lastly, we need to better understand the health of our lakes. Before it gets too cold, wade out into the lake and look for your feet!

—Andy Zepp

An Emerald Necklace in the Making

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Aerial view, south of Ithaca, displays the rolling highlands typical of the Emerald Necklace

private partners, the Land Trust hopes to establish the Emerald Necklace as a model for similar land protection efforts in the northeast.

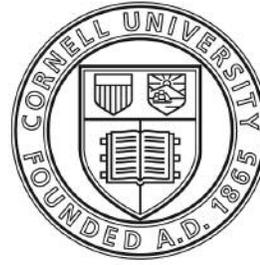
“Essentially what we’re launching is an ambitious project that will go on for many, many years,” said Land Trust Director Andy Zepp. “But the concept is a simple one: through a combination of conservation easements and limited acquisitions, we can secure this crescent of forested hills that serves so many purposes.”

The highlands are the source of clean headwaters feeding Cayuga Lake as well as a portion of the Susquehanna River watershed, and as such are vital to the well-being of area residents. The ecological significance of the forest is highlighted by the presence of two National Audubon-designated Important Bird Areas and more than 20 unique natural areas identified by Tompkins County’s Environmental Management Council. An

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Cornell University and Finger Lakes Land Trust: Partners for 18 Years... and Counting

From its inception, the Land Trust has had a close, if always informal, relationship with Cornell University.



In 1989, Andy Zepp, then a student in Cornell's Department of Natural Resources, submitted a proposal for a land trust as his master's degree project. That same year, the Land Trust was officially incorporated by Dr. Carl Leopold of the Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research. It wasn't until January 2003 that Andy returned to Ithaca in order to take on the role of Executive Director of the organization that he had helped establish 15 years earlier.

Many of the Land Trust's advisors, both formal and informal, hold academic positions at Cornell, and some of them regularly bring students to the preserves on field trips. Students from both Cornell and Ithaca College help with such projects as building trails or removing nonnative invasive plants, and the Cornell Herpetological Society performs a species inventory at least once a year. Two years ago, the Land Trust completed the Cayuga Critical Areas Project, an inventory of significant land resources within the Cayuga Lake Watershed, with the help of a Cornell graduate student.

Given this long history of collaboration, the formal partnership announced by Cornell Plantations and the Land Trust on June 27 was a natural next step. The two groups will work together to protect natural areas within Tompkins County. In addition, Cornell has committed \$125,000 to the Land Trust for the acquisition of new land. Thanks to this partnership, Cornell's scientists will gain access to both local knowledge and local natural areas, and the Land Trust will have Cornell's scientific expertise at its disposal.

The two groups are currently working together to identify land parcels for possible acquisition. Highest priority will go to areas that contain unique habitats and/or rare species, especially if they are contiguous with existing natural areas. No formal decisions have been made yet, but according to Dr. Nancy Ostman, Cornell Plantations Natural Areas Program Director, the fen complex in Fall Creek Valley — home to rare species such as the American globeflower — is a

very likely possibility.

On the other hand, Dr. Tom Eisner, J.G. Schurman Professor of Entomology, Neurobiology and Behavior at Cornell and a member of the Land Trust's Advisory Council, believes that, considered from an ethical point of view, everything is worth preserving. "Land deserves to be saved because it exists," he said. "It's just intrinsically valuable."

Protected areas that are candidates for land additions include Cornell's Slaterville 600 Preserve and the Land Trust's Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve. It is perhaps appropriate that the latter is both a symbol and a product

unusual invertebrates.

The Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve enjoys the dual distinction of being both the world's first temperate-zone bioprospecting preserve (most bioprospecting goes on in the tropics) and the product of the Land Trust's first big fundraising effort. A three-way contract between Cornell, the Land Trust and pharmaceutical giant Schering-Plough ensures that the Land Trust will receive royalties from the sale of any economically viable compounds found on the preserve.

Unfortunately, the pharmaceutical industry's interest in bioprospecting has

Thanks to this partnership, Cornell's scientists will gain access to both local knowledge and local natural areas, and the Land Trust will have Cornell's scientific expertise at its disposal.

of Cornell-Land Trust cooperation, as well as a firsthand example of the great things that can happen when a grassroots organization collaborates with a major research university.

The story of Lindsay-Parsons began in 1994, when Cornell students on a field expedition at nearby Michigan Hollow in the town of Danby turned up a surprising find: the fungus that produces cyclosporin, a drug regularly given to organ-transplant patients. It was the first time that the sexual form of the fungus had been identified. Tom Eisner, co-founder of the Cornell Institute for Research in Chemical Ecology, came up with a revolutionary idea. What if the Land Trust created a preserve that could also be used for research in chemical ecology? After some searching, they found a diverse and relatively untouched plot of land for sale in West Danby that contained everything from mature forests to kettle ponds, black bears to

waned in recent years, a development that Tom Eisner sees as a grave mistake. "It's incredible shortsightedness, but it's a temporary thing," he said. "They're going to realize that they are not nearly as good as nature has been at designing drugs."

The formation of the Cornell-Land Trust partnership has not come a moment too soon, as land prices continue to rise and the Finger Lakes region becomes more and more attractive to developers. Even if bioprospecting never comes back into fashion, Dr. Eisner is optimistic about the prospects for conserving land in the Finger Lakes region: "We're in a terrific condition because there's still so much land ready to be saved."

— Jacqueline Stuhmiller

Land Trust Seeks to Add Acreage to Biodiversity Preserve

With a contract to purchase 16 acres of mature forest in hand, the Land Trust is poised to extend protection of its Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity to more than 530 acres. This latest acquisition is particularly significant in that it will complete the preserve's northeastern boundary.

Acquisition of the property, owned by David Galat, will



With the proposed purchase of the Galat property and the completion of the Raymond easement earlier this year, the Land Trust will have ensured the contiguous nature of the forest on this hillside adjacent to the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve

secure a corridor of unbroken forest extending south from Station Road along the high ridge that includes Thatcher's Pinnacles, a popular overlook from the Abbott Loop of the Finger Lakes Trail.

The property to be acquired is bordered by protected land on three sides and features a mix of mature hardwood forest and stands of hemlock. The tract also contains the headwaters of a small stream that flows from the property and joins the Cayuga Inlet.

"This addition borders thousands of acres of conservation land," said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp. "We're delighted that David Galat chose to work with us to conserve this property. The acquisition helps to ensure the overall integrity of the existing preserve."

The Land Trust is committed to raising \$35,000 to cover the cost of the acquisition and to provide for stewardship costs associated with the property. Cornell University has already committed \$10,000 toward this goal through its recent grant to the Land Trust (see related article in this issue). Please contact the Ithaca office if you would like to contribute to this project or would like to learn more.

The Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve is located just south of Ithaca outside the hamlet of West Danby. This sprawling sanctuary features a diversity of wildlife habitats including fields and forest, as well as several ponds and streams. The preserve is a popular destination for hikers and birdwatchers who enjoy the several miles of trails that the preserve has to offer.

An Emerald Necklace in the Making

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extraordinary variety of wildlife, including wide-ranging species such as the black bear, call these hills home. These highlands also provide many recreational opportunities. For hikers, the Finger Lakes Trail wanders through much of the Emerald Necklace. Bird watching, camping, hunting, fishing, biking, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling are popular in varying degrees throughout the area.

Fifty-thousand acres of public land are already secure from future development in the Emerald Necklace. The largest emeralds are the Finger Lakes National Forest and the state-owned forests of Texas Hollow, Connecticut Hill, Danby, Shindagin Hollow, Hammond Hill and Yellow Barn. Smaller, but no less significant, gems include Robert H. Treman and Buttermilk Falls State Parks, several Tompkins County Reforestation Lands and seven Finger Lakes Land Trust Nature Preserves. In all, the necklace spans three counties: Schuyler, Tompkins and Tioga.

The Land Trust can point to the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve, Sweedler Preserve at Lick Brook and

Stevenson Forest Preserve as three examples of its own contributions to the growing necklace. All three protect landscapes that are remarkable in themselves for their beauty and their unique possibilities for ecological research and education as well as recreational use. Sweedler and Stevenson contain segments of the Finger Lakes Trail, providing hikers with the cool tranquility of the forest. The Land Trust has plans in the works for future acquisitions and conservation easements to increase the acreage for this and other kinds of public use all along the Emerald Necklace.

A quick look at a map makes it clear just how close these protected public lands are to each other and how realistic a prospect it would be to link them. The Land Trust aims to strengthen the necklace by securing lands between the larger tracts of forest, effectively creating a green corridor across these hills.

The first step in the long-term process of completing the necklace involves working with landowners as well as recreational groups and government

offices to forge a consensus as to which lands are the highest priorities for conservation. Ecological importance, importance to the connectivity of the necklace and scenic beauty are but three of the factors that must be weighed in determining key pieces of land to conserve.

One phase of this initial process is complete: the latest draft of New York State Open Space Conservation Plan cites the Emerald Necklace as one of its conservation priorities, noting the increasing pressures of housing development in the area on forest habitat and recreational opportunities. According to the draft, "By consolidating existing state holdings while also ensuring linkages between these sites, there is the potential to create a world class ecological, recreational and educational resource."

In addition, the Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan has endorsed conservation of much of the area, and several town planning boards have expressed interest in achieving the same goals within their municipalities.

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Steege Hill Preserve Hosts Sir David Attenborough's "Life on Earth"

A segment on rattlesnakes for "Life in Cold Blood"—the final episode of Sir David Attenborough's famed BBC series "Life on Earth"—was recently filmed at our Steege Hill Preserve in Big Flats. The producer of the episode, zoologist James Brickell, and two photographers were there for two weeks. Attenborough himself was there for a couple of days with yet another crew of photographers, along with Professor Harry Greene from Cornell, the world's leading expert on pit vipers (whom the BBC flew back from his research site in Brazil) and Harry's research associate and former student, Rulon Clark, who has been studying the timber rattlesnakes at Steege Hill for several years.

The program sends its teams all over the world to film marvels of the natural world. Recently, James was in Argentina, for example, where they filmed an anaconda giving birth *under water*.

When asked "Why here? Why Big Flats?" James explained that, in reading a large number of research papers in preparation for the program, he came across Rulon Clark's work on



POLLY SMITH-BLACKWELL

Life on Earth crew members preparing to "shoot" Sir David Attenborough (center-right) interviewing Cornell University Professor Harry Greene (center-left)



BETSY DARLINGTON

(from left to right) Steege Hill Preserve Steward Bob Corneau and photographer Luke Barnett with the producer of this Life on Earth episode, zoologist James Brickell

rattlesnake hunting behavior. Further investigation led him to conclude that this would be an ideal place to film—and would simultaneously put him in direct touch with both Rulon and Harry. (James confided that Harry Greene has long been one of his heroes, along with Attenborough himself.) Harry will be proofing the text.

So, what does a film crew do during a "shoot"? On one of the days, volunteer steward Bob Corneau and this writer kept them company for several hours. (Bob was overseeing their activities and keeping these nice young "chaps" on the straight and narrow.) In this case, they set up two cameras aimed at rattlesnakes, and then sat there in the shade of the forest, listening to songs of hermit thrushes, wood pewees, and pileated woodpeckers, and leaves crackling under the tiny feet of rattlesnake fodder. We chatted about this and that, but mostly we just sat there and enjoyed the place.

It turned out that, on their very first day at the preserve, photographers Luke Barnett and Mark MacEwan got *exactly* the shots they needed—of a wild rattlesnake ("Hank"—named after Hank

Williams) catching an unsuspecting chipmunk and later, striking at, but missing, a mouse. This is the first time this behavior has ever been captured in a movie (at least one that we, the public, will be able to see) without any manipulation of either predator or prey by the photographers. No fancy tricks or stunts with this crew! So why didn't they pack up and go on to their next site? Well, they wanted to try for more—though they did say how much they loved being in this beautiful, peaceful place.

— Betsy Darlington

Acquired in 2001 through the generous support of an anonymous donor, Steege Hill is the Land Trust's largest nature preserve, encompassing 800 acres of forested hillside just south of the Chemung River between Corning and Elmira. In addition to its resident timber rattlesnake population, the preserve hosts black bear, porcupines, and numerous songbirds.

Please see the Autumn 2006 calendar listings on the back cover for our Nature Walk at Steege Hill on Saturday, November 11, at 10:00 am.



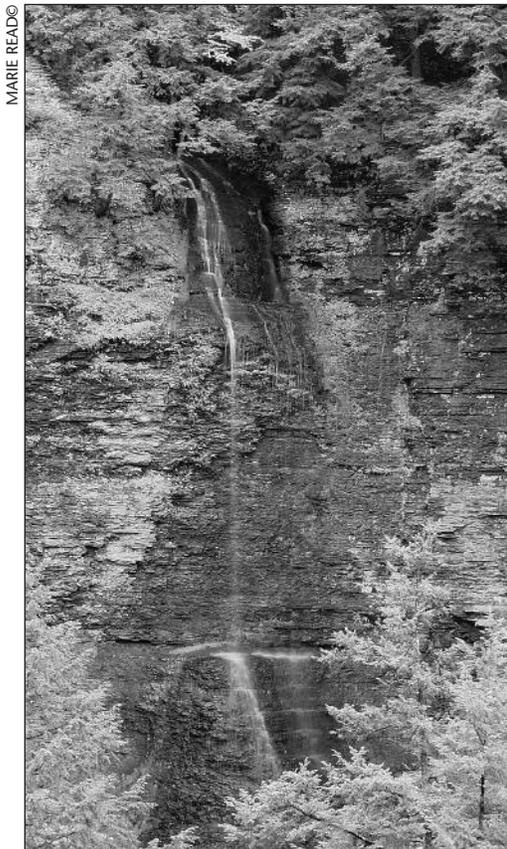
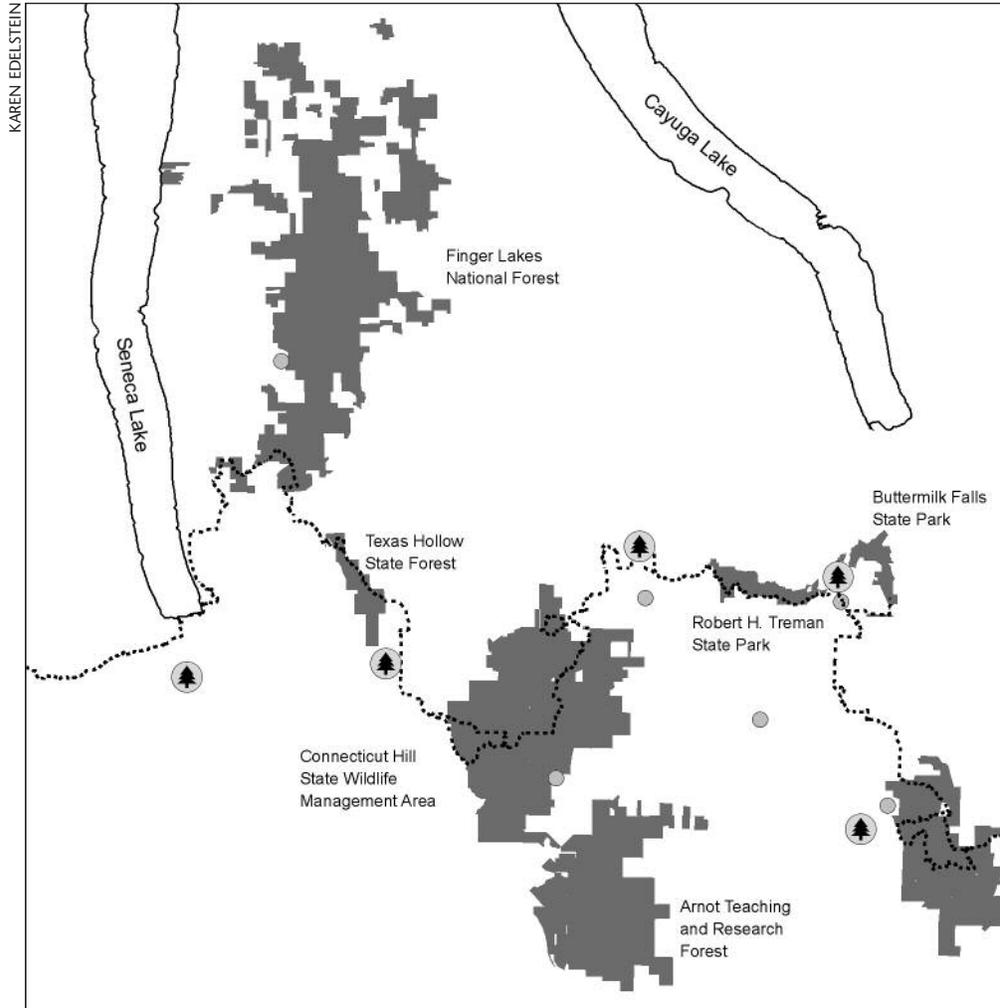
BOB CORNEAU

Cameraman filming a timber rattle snake

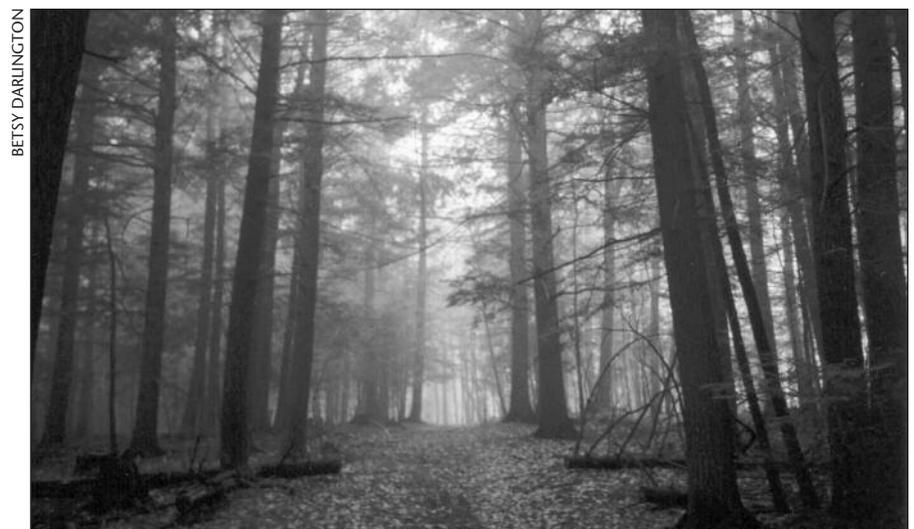
Scenes from the Emerald

Some facts about the Emerald Necklace:

- spans 3 counties and 12 towns
- contains 96 miles of the Finger Lakes Trail
- encompasses more than 60,000 acres of protected open space
- includes two National Audubon-designated Important Bird Areas and more than 20 county-designated Unique Natural Areas
- protects an important source of clean water feeding both Cayuga Lake and the Chesapeake Bay
- shelters an extraordinary variety of wildlife including wide-ranging animals such as the black bear

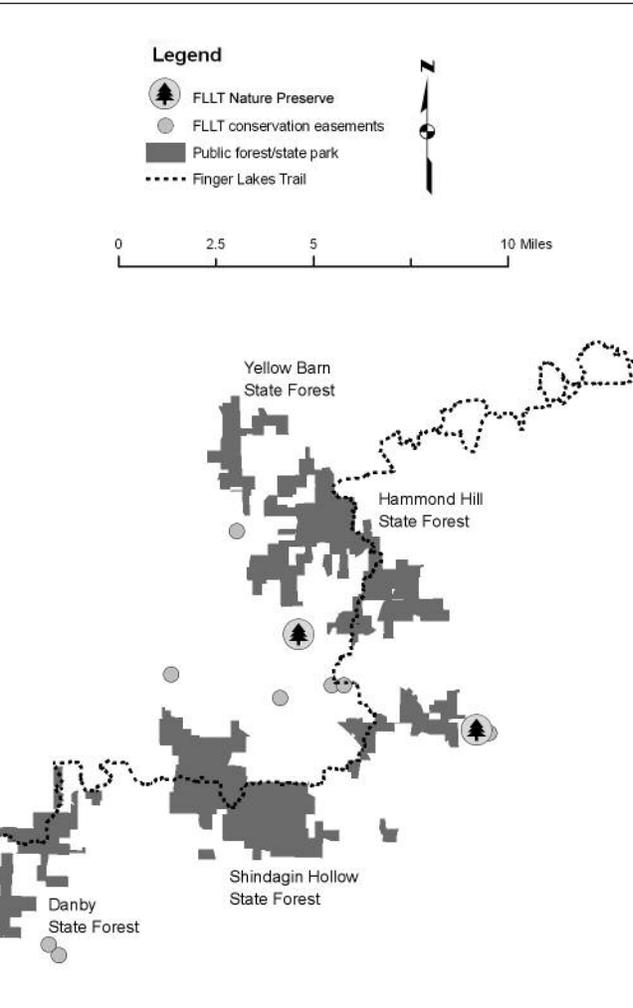


140 ft. waterfall tumbles through Lick Brook Gorge at the Sweedler Preserve



The Stevenson Forest Preserve

Necklace



EMILY EISMAN



Young hikers enjoying the "Sunset Symphony" walk at Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve

MARIE READ©



Waterfall on upper Six-Mile Creek in the Town of Dryden, Tompkins County – 1 of 13 properties within the Emerald Necklace now protected by a Land Trust conservation easement

MARIA HARRISON



View of the Emerald Necklace from Danby State Forest

MARIE READ©



The Goetchius Wetland Preserve in Slaterville Springs

Eagles Return to Conserved Lands

It has been a good year for bald eagles here in the Finger Lakes and elsewhere in New York.

According to Sean Hanna, a regional director for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, eagle populations continue to increase, with the state this year hosting more than 120 breeding pairs.



This is a far cry from the 1970's, when the state had only a single nesting pair, on Hemlock Lake. Thanks in part to a reintroduction program sponsored by the NYSDEC and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, populations have rebounded and eagle sightings are now being reported from throughout the region.

Starting in 1976, state and federal officials introduced eagle chicks from Alaska to the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge and several other sites around the state. "The program was one of the most successful programs upon which DEC has embarked," Hanna said. "Never in my wildest dreams would I have believed it would have been as successful as it has been."

Today, eagles are establishing new nest sites throughout the state. This year found eagles returning to nest at two sites conserved by the Land Trust. The Waterman Nature Center reports that eagles have returned to Hiawatha Island, a patch of wildness in the Susquehanna River on which the Land Trust holds a conservation easement. Located in Tioga County, Hiawatha is the largest island in the river within New York State.

At the Land Trust's Steege Hill Preserve in Chemung County, eagles are increasingly observed soaring above the Chemung River as they have established a nest on nearby private land. Volunteer Steward Bob Corneau reports a recent sighting of a juvenile eagle perched above the preserve's pond.

The Land Trust applauds the successful efforts of our wildlife managers to restore our eagles and to support this burgeoning population. We will continue to secure those lands that provide suitable habitat for these majestic birds of prey.

An Emerald Necklace in the Making

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The next step for the Land Trust is to coordinate efforts with the three counties, the eight towns within the Emerald Necklace and other concerned partners, such as local sporting and community groups, the Finger Lakes Trail Conference, the NYS DEC and Cornell University, among many others. This phase will involve the Land Trust in energetic outreach efforts to explain the project goals, establish a dialogue to further identify priority lands and determine areas of mutual interest.

Although the Land Trust plans to conserve land within the Emerald Necklace through limited purchases, the scope of the project requires a greater role for conservation easements, which would protect lands from development and further fragmentation of habitat while keeping them in private ownership. One case in point is an easement donated over a year ago by Vic and Elaine Mansfield of Hector, Schuyler County. The Mansfield's 70-acre property abuts the Finger Lakes National Forest; their generous donation extends protection to more contiguous,

unbroken forest habitat and effectively enlarges the biggest emerald in the necklace.

At the time of the donation, the Mansfields described their desire to help maintain and expand "ecological havens." There are many of these havens to protect, expand and link together, and it will take many owners like the Mansfields to help achieve these goals.

The Mansfield easement, like most others held by the Land Trust, allows for selective timber harvesting, partly in recognition of traditional land use throughout Finger Lakes forests. "One of the many goals of this project is to promote sound forestry practices that will contribute to the local economy while ensuring forest health," said Andy Zepp.

Despite the rich natural resources available to the public along the Emerald Necklace, only the Finger Lakes National Forest has a high profile outside the immediate area — most people are unaware of the superb mountain biking at Shindagin Hollow State Forest or the cacophony of frogs at the Land Trust's

Goetchius Wetland in Slaterville Springs, much less the quiet tranquility of the Martin Preserve in Catharine.

"Part of the challenge in embarking on this project is fostering greater awareness of the public value of these highlands," said Andy Zepp. "Most people don't even realize what's out there. So ultimately, the Emerald Necklace is much more than a simple land protection project."

The Finger Lakes National Forest has the highest profile of any of the public lands within the Emerald Necklace and is well-known both within and without the region as a recreational and educational resource. Interpretive sites scattered throughout the National Forest make it easy for visitors to find their way around and take full advantage of what the land offers.

State parks within the Emerald Necklace are also relatively user-friendly. But large blocs of state forest land are virtually unknown to most people and lack even basic interpretive sites. A vital

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DONOR PROFILE

Land Trust member Mark Chao hatches bird-a-thon fundraiser

Near the end of last winter, with thoughts fixed on spring, Mark Chao hatched an innovative idea to raise money for the Land Trust. Chao, an Ithacan and a Land Trust member since 2004, decided to hold a bird-a-thon, an event where people pledged a set amount of money for every species of bird that Chao saw or heard over a single weekend. He chose the third weekend in May, as he expected to find passing north-bound migrant birds as well as breeding birds on territories. And there was a catch: the birds had to be sighted on a Land Trust preserve or easement.

In the end, the scheme Chao cooked up in his idle time netted the Land Trust close to \$2,900. The event was so successful that Chao and Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp have discussed making the bird-a-thon an annual fundraiser and expanding the number of participants to anyone who is interested.

The bird-a-thon idea appealed to Chao for two main reasons: First, knowing he'd be looking for birds at that time, he thought his birding could also serve a good cause besides his own enjoyment. And second, by counting bird species, Chao wanted to draw people's attention to the outstanding diversity of birds at

Land Trust sites.

"The Finger Lakes Land Trust preserves and easements are the premier sites in the area for finding birds, in terms of variety and the presence of locally-rare or threatened species," said Chao. For example, the cerulean warbler, a bird considered for the Endangered Species Act, can be found on Land Trust holdings such as the High Vista Preserve, south of Skaneateles Lake, just south of the Cortland/Onondaga County line. Also, the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in West Danby, Tompkins County, is probably the only publicly-accessible site in the region where worm-eating warblers breed.

On the weekend of May 20 and 21, Chao and two companions, Ithacans and Land Trust members Bob McGuire and Jane Graves, visited 12 Land Trust sites over the weekend. Still, in spite of cold temperatures, wind, rain, and sleet, which suppressed bird activity, Chao saw or heard 86 species, only 14 short of the 100 species he expected to identify.

Chao mainly targeted the Cayuga Bird Club for donors this year. The club has about 150 members, but he also posted an announcement on the club's list serve that boasts 400 subscribers.

While Chao pledged a dollar per



Land Trust member and bird enthusiast Mark Chao

species of his own money, 30 other people also pledged.

"People were happy to have an opportunity to support the Land Trust and to support me," said Chao. "Most of the donors were people who already give to the Land Trust. I am hoping that we will get an even greater number of people participating next year."

Considering the initial success of Chao's bright idea, next year's bird-a-thon looks to be a winner as well.

"We are working with Mark to expand the bird-a-thon in 2007," said Zepp. "We are reaching out to Rochester, Syracuse, and really all the birding communities in this part of the state to make this a truly regional effort."

—*Krishna Ramanujan*

An Emerald Necklace in the Making

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long-range strategy of the Emerald Necklace project will be working with state and local government agencies, along with volunteer community groups, to make those lands that can tolerate greater recreational use more accessible to the public. Increasing the number and quality of interpretive sites, as well as other amenities such as parking, would go a long way in providing greater enjoyment and wiser use of these forests.

"We believe that people will support the Emerald Necklace," said Andy Zepp, "if we can show that securing these lands is not just a wonderful thing for our

quality of life — the quality of our water, for example — but also a boon to local economies through increased awareness of the Emerald Necklace as a recreational resource."

The Emerald Necklace project will be years in the making. It will require an unprecedented web of cooperation and partnership between the Land Trust, private and public land owners, government agencies and communities. Because it will be essentially a grassroots effort — would you have it otherwise? — progress will necessarily be measured in small increments as we work to finish

the necklace for our children and grandchildren.

— *Eben McLane*

There is a GIS map and more photos of the Emerald Necklace in this issue's centerfold on pages 6-7

The Land Trust has established a special fund to support conservation efforts within the Emerald Necklace. Please contact the Ithaca office to learn how you can help support this effort.

Tompkins County Secures 439-Acre Farm With Land Trust Support

continued from cover

Located on State Route 34, the Howser farm is especially significant in that it includes prime agricultural soils, extensive scenic road frontage, and a portion of the Locke Creek Corridor — a county-designated unique natural area.

“This farm is right in the heart of one of the county’s agricultural resource focus areas,” said Tompkins County Planner Ed Marx. The county’s comprehensive planning process has painstakingly identified areas recognized as most important for agriculture, with an emphasis on the preservation of both economic health and scenic open space.

The Land Trust assisted the county by commissioning appraisals of the property, assisting with drafting of the easement and documentation of the land’s condition, and by co-authoring an approved grant application to the federal government’s farm and ranch protection program.

“We’re delighted that Tompkins County is taking action to conserve open space identified through its planning process,” said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp. “We recognize the hard work that county planning staff put into this project and applaud Don Howser for his commitment to the future of his family’s farm.”

State and Federal Tax Legislation Provide New Incentives for Conservation Easements

continued from cover

Land Trusts from across the state and across the country worked with the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) to lay the groundwork for passage of these incentives. As the national organization of land trusts, LTA represents the interests of local land trusts on state and federal policy issues.

For additional information on the new tax incentives, please contact Rocci Aguirre at the Land Trust’s Ithaca office. The Land Trust will also share information about these new incentives at a series of public workshops to be held around the region during the coming months. *See calendar listings on back cover.*

We are deeply grateful for donations in memory of:

<i>David Cottle</i> From Stephen and Ann Marie Ahrns ... <i>Arthur J Fogerty</i> From Mary Jane Fogerty ... <i>Christopher Gulick</i> From Richard, Laura, and Jessica Gulick	<i>George W. Hamlin II</i> From Thomas Hamlin ... <i>Emma Kay</i> From Ann Mittermeyer ... <i>Loretta Nester</i> From Harry McCue	<i>Lloyd Rogers</i> From John Rogers ... <i>Gerald S. Silkiewicz</i> From Deborah Banikowski and Buffalo Area Office Staff ... <i>Adrian M. Srb</i> From Jozetta Srb
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Our sincere thanks for a gift from

...
John McCormick and Morgan Russell
honoring the guests at their wedding.

Our sincere thanks for a gift in honor of the weddings of

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Karen Frutiger and John Stewart
From
Joanne Greenwood Darren Baun
...
Lizzie Simkin and Nick Boyar
From
Robert T. Palmer

Thank you for making our 2006 Talks and Treks Series a Success!

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WISH LIST

Digging shovels
Pick-axes and Mattocks
(Tools must be in good repair)

A CLOSER LOOK

The Raven's Tale

What is it about the raven that has so long captured people's attention?

Edgar Allen Poe's, "The Raven," made this bird famous in our culture as a symbol of death. But perhaps the raven's exceptional intelligence spurred Poe into writing about this curious creature. The raven's intelligence is one of the most fascinating characteristics of this bird, and it manifests itself in a wide variety of ways.

It is less common in the Finger Lakes region than another member of the Family *Corvidae*, the American crow, but the common raven (*Corvus corax*) is nonetheless a bird you'll see sooner or later if you hike enough in central New York and parts north and east of here. According to Kevin McGowan at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the best time to see ravens in the Finger Lakes area is between January and May, and the best locations are the gorges of Taughannock Falls and Robert H. Treman State Parks.

Though ravens and crows are superficially similar, they can be distinguished by several features: size (crows range from 17 to 21 inches in length, while ravens run 22 to 27 inches), tail shape (the raven's is wedge-shaped, while the crow's is not), bill shape (the raven has a heavy, "Roman nose" shaped bill; the crow's is slender), and throat feathers (the raven's are shaggy, the crow's are sleek). In addition, the raven's call is more of a croaking, *cr-r-ruck* sound; and in flight, the raven (unlike the crow) alternates flapping and gliding.

When they are not roosting communally at night, ravens tend to be solitary, which makes them more difficult to spot than gregarious crows and grackles. But in fact, ravens are one of the world's most widespread birds. They've been found in widely differing habitats in North America, Central America, Eurasia and Northern Africa.

That ravens can survive in a variety of climates — Arctic, temperate and desert — is a clear testament to their adaptability, if not their intelligence. We see it in the many ways they've adapted to human presence and expanded their numbers in recent decades, even in urban areas. Because of early-20th century human



The Raven's heavy, Roman nose-shaped bill is one of several features that helps distinguish it from its cousin, the American Crow

attempts to wipe out ravens, their numbers dropped to all-time lows. Although ravens are still considered threatened or endangered in several northeastern states, they're now reoccupying much of their former range. The variety of ways that ravens find food, and the variety of things they consider to *be* food, gives them great adaptability. The raven is an ideal opportunist; it scavenges for carrion and garbage, it eats berries and other fruit from trees, and it catches and eats a wide range of insects and rodents.

Ravens will literally follow top carnivores as they hunt in order to scavenge on the eventual kills. The birds even follow farm machinery, having learned that as the machines move through fields, they stir up an abundance of rodents and insects. We also see raven intelligence when one bird finds a carcass and calls for other ravens, and by sheer force of numbers, the birds gain access to the food source and intimidate competitors.

Ravens display a great deal of play-like behavior, especially young birds (making it more likely that the behavior is, indeed, pure play). A 1998 paper reported that this play includes dropping and then catching objects while in flight, caching inedible items (including shiny objects

such as coins), pecking predators, such as large hawks, on the tail (becoming increasingly bolder about doing so, the more often they get away with it), playing "tug-of-war" with other ravens, and sliding down inclines on their bellies.

Surprisingly, ravens are songbirds, even though they have four-foot wingspans (making them the largest of the world's approximately 5,000 songbird species). Regardless of their size, ravens have distinct songbird characteristics, including the four-toed arrangement that allows them to perch and the specialized vocal apparatus that allows them to sing. Although you may find the raven song less melodious than songs of many of our well-known, smaller songbirds, their repertoire of vocalizations is quite remarkable.

The raven in Poe's poem — a bird steeped in the folklore and superstition of death — intones over and over the single word "Nevermore," leaving the poet powerless to purge from his mind his lost Lenore. This vision of the common raven takes into account only one aspect of this complex and fascinating bird, which is perhaps making a comeback in the Finger Lakes.

— George Dillmann

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AUTUMN 2006 CALENDAR

Tuesday, October 24, 7:30 pm: *New Conservation Opportunities in the Western Finger Lakes.* Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ontario County, 480 Main Street, Canandaigua, NY

Join Executive Director Andy Zepp and Field Representative Betsy Landre to hear about new tax incentives associated with conservation easements and current Land Trust projects in the Western Finger Lakes.

Saturday, November 11, 10:00 am: *Nature Walk at the Steege Hill Preserve.*

Join Betsy Darlington and Bob Corneau on a late fall walk through this 800 acre preserve above the Chemung River in Big Flats. From Rt. 17, take exit 49. Go south on Olcott Rd. Turn right on Rt. 64, then right on Rt. 352, next left on South Corning Rd. Cross bridge and go left on Steege Hill Rd. for 1.1 miles. Gate marks entrance, near gas pipeline. Parking area on left.

Tuesday, November 14, 7:00 pm: *New Conservation Opportunities in the Eastern Finger Lakes.* Skaneateles Community Center, 97 State Street, Skaneateles, NY

Join Executive Director Andy Zepp to hear about new tax incentives associated with conservation easements and current projects in the Eastern Finger Lakes.

See our web site for maps and photos of the preserves.

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.