



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 2007

Land Trust Completes Yearlong Survey and Conservation Plan for Owasco Flats

Just north of the Village of Moravia and below glacially carved ridges and steep hillsides lies Owasco Flats. This unique flat land in southern Cayuga County has as its main feature a stream snaking through 1500 acres of agricultural fields, fern and buttonwood marsh, rare oak-hickory bottomland forest, dense red maple swamps and much more. Known as Owasco Inlet, the stream is the main tributary to the sixth largest of the Finger Lakes, Owasco Lake, which supplies water for 70 percent of Cayuga County's population, including the City of Auburn and the Town of Owasco.

Owasco Flats offers far-reaching ecosystem resources that are priceless. The area boasts some 50 tree species among the 360 species of plants, and wild habitat for many birds, reptiles, mammals and fish. Along the trails of the Owasco Flats Nature Reserve, on Rt. 38, local residents line the banks of the inlet to fish for trout, yellow perch, northern pike, walleye and small mouth bass. It's a family tradition for many.

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BILL HECHT

The Land Trust's recent Conservation Plan for Owasco Flats includes recommendations for restoring the Inlet's capacity to filter water entering Owasco Lake

FLLT Helps State Acquire New Addition to the Emerald Necklace

Looking at a map of public open space lands within the Finger Lakes region, it is hard to miss the rough, uncut jewel shape of the Connecticut Hill Wildlife Management Area lying just 16 miles southwest of Ithaca on the Tompkins-Schuyler County line. At over 11,000 acres, Connecticut Hill is the largest Wildlife Management Area in the state and is a centerpiece gem among the other spectacular lands that make up the Land Trust's Emerald Necklace campaign.

For the multitude of wildlife species that roam the terrain, or stop for rest on their seasonal migrations, or for the diverse plants that root in the soil, it is the large size and habitat integrity of Connecticut Hill that makes it so important. With habitat fragmentation and increasing development pressure throughout the Finger Lakes, large tracts of protected, undeveloped land like Connecticut Hill and other state forests are becoming

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BILL HECHT

The Leyes acquisition secures land within the Cayuta Lake Watershed and is part of one of the region's largest unfragmented forests

Board Member Steps Up For Owasco Flats

Land Trust board member Howard LHartnett fondly recalls that his late grandfather urged him to invest in land as "they're not making it anymore." Hartnett recently acted on his grandfather's advice when he purchased 11.4 acres of Owasco Flats floodplain at a Cayuga County tax sale auction.

He purchased the land with conservation in mind, not personal gain. Shortly before the auction, the Land Trust became aware that this environmentally significant parcel was slated to be sold. Given the tract's road frontage and proximity to the center of Moravia, there was concern that it might be purchased, filled, and then re-sold for development.

Given state interest in acquiring the land for incorporation into a new wildlife management area, the Land Trust initially sought to have the parcel withheld from the auction. The Land Trust was rebuffed, however. Hartnett attended the auction,

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PERSPECTIVES

We started our trek on a foggy morning among old vineyard rows on a hill in Schuyler County. Splashes of color from goldenrods and asters brightened the landscape. We crossed rolling hills split by gorges and waterfalls — a landscape that was once dominated by pastoral meadows but was now dominated by seemingly endless hardwood forests.

It was on the second day that I realized how far 78 miles is: the length of the Emerald Necklace around Ithaca. I began with creaky knees and a preoccupation with my workday schedule. But by the end of that second day, I appreciated both the durability of my knees and the ability of the natural world to inspire me and to put things in their proper perspective.

I was hiking with a diverse group as part of the Land Trust's Emerald Necklace Hike and Lecture Series. Participants ranged from twenty-somethings to eighty-somethings. Some joined us for

just a day; a handful for the whole week. We hailed from the Ithaca area as well as further afield — from elsewhere in the Finger Lakes and one hiker from Pennsylvania. All shared the desire to get out and experience the crescent of forested hills that surround Ithaca.

Our hike was frequently punctuated by surprises: old cellar holes marking long gone farms, the rugged grandeur of the Cayuta Outlet Gulf, the towering pines and hemlocks of Shindagin Hollow, a remnant fruit-bearing American chestnut tree within the Land Trust's Stevenson Preserve, and a barred owl coaxed from the forests of Connecticut Hill by one of our number, John Fitzpatrick of Cornell's Laboratory of Ornithology. These were just a few of the many highlights of our trek.

Perhaps what was most impressive was that we were able to have the full experience of 78 miles of largely wild landscape while just a stone's throw from Ithaca and many other towns.

However, as we hiked close to Ithaca we did get a sense of encroaching development: stretches of trail where an off-road path no longer existed and where we hiked along new roads among new homes.

For me and my fellow Emerald Necklace trekkers, these stretches of trail seemed to underscore the need to act now to protect our natural forest and open space resources. Future conservation of the hills and valleys of our region will increase wild habitat for the plants and animals that give the Finger Lakes area its special character.

Our Emerald Necklace trek relied on the generosity of a number of private landowners who maintain the Finger Lakes Trail. Thanks as well to the tireless efforts of the Cayuga Trails Club and the Finger Lakes Trail Conference to maintain this outstanding footpath. I think it's a footpath to our future.

 —Andy Zepp

Expanded Environmental Protection Fund Will Benefit Land Trust

Land conservation-minded citizens and organizations around New York State can be encouraged at the recent news that next year's state Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) will receive a substantial increase over the current fiscal year's figure, and that yet another major increase will take place the following year. These increases will greatly benefit environmental conservation efforts around the state, including those of the Finger Lakes Land Trust.

The EPF was created in 1993 to provide a steady, reliable source of funding for environmental programs in New York State. Most monies for this fund come from revenues from the NYS real estate transfer tax, and receipts from this tax have gone up significantly over the last few years.

During the recent legislative session, the Environmental Protection Fund Enhancement Act was passed by both chambers of the state legislature. Governor Spitzer signed the measure in late July, authorizing \$250 million in fiscal year 2007-08, a \$25 million increase over the 2006-07 appropriation.

Soon after this budget enhancement passed, the governor signed legislation that will continue the growth trend. The EPF will swell to \$300 million by 2009. This figure represents a doubling of the fund in just the last three years.

A wide range of projects — over 60 categories of environmental programs — is funded every year by the EPF, including such efforts as local waterfront revitalization projects, environmental education at zoos, pesticide reduction, municipal recycling and open space acquisition.

Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp is delighted with

the new developments out of Albany. "We applaud Governor Spitzer and the legislature," he said. "The Environmental Protection Fund is vital to conservation organizations throughout the state, and it has certainly bolstered our own efforts to conserve open space lands around the Finger Lakes."

As one of New York's 75 members of the nationwide Land Trust Alliance, the Finger Lakes Land Trust stands to benefit directly from the increased appropriations. The 2007-2008 State budget includes a \$1 million appropriation for the New York State Conservation Partnership Program. This innovative grant program has helped the Land Trust cover land acquisition transaction expenses, launch the Emerald Necklace greenbelt project, hire a land protection specialist and bolster organizational planning and development.

The EPF also supported the Land Trust's recent acquisition of the Gathercole property on Canandaigua Lake. Future EPF funds will be used to support acquisitions at Carpenter's Falls in the Skaneateles Lake Watershed, and wetlands at the south end of Canandaigua Lake.

Finally, through funding from the EPF, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation has provided past grants in support of Land Trust property purchases at Wesley Hill Preserve above Honeoye Lake and the Bahar Preserve on Skaneateles Lake.

The state government's commitment to expanding the EPF sounds a particularly bright note for future Land Trust projects.

— George Dillmann

New Preserve Celebrated in Freeville

What happens when the generosity of one person, a small municipality, two non-profits and a government agency work together to protect land? The result, in the Tompkins County Village of Freeville, is a lovely public space that was dedicated July 14 with a deeply felt, small town celebration.

The new Genung Nature Preserve, along a mile of Fall Creek, one of Cayuga Lake's chief tributaries, is now open for people to explore a loop trail, listen to the birds and enjoy a quiet respite from the noise of everyday life.

Mildred (Millie) Sherwood donated her 53-acre family farm in memory of her parents, Albert and Mildred Genung. The property is now owned by Freeville and is permanently protected with a conservation easement held by the Land Trust, with financial help from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. The conservation easement allows improvements to the property that will benefit future public access.

In 2006, Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp marked out a trail route and the Dryden Youth Conservation Corps made the trail, including several bridges. Freeville resident Tom Cavataio installed a boardwalk over a muddy stretch, and his Cub Scouts put up bird boxes. This forward-looking community of fewer than 600 people pulled together to help make it all happen, for the benefit of present and future generations.

Millie and her three sisters, along with many other relatives and village residents, were at the dedication. Millie reminisced about the farm, while the village historian, the deputy mayor and others gave interesting and moving comments about the new preserve.

A small parking lot is just off the southwest side of NYS Route 38, and the trail starts from there. The trail loop wanders through shrubby areas, a grove of musclewood (or ironwood) trees along the bank of Fall Creek, some of the wildest hawthorn trees you will ever see, then larger hardwood trees such as swamp white oak, red oak, sugar maple, basswood and shagbark hickory. Listen and watch for the many birds that find the place a great refuge, especially in the spring — ovenbirds, northern



BETSY DARLINGTON

Millie Sherwood (second from the left) and her three sisters at the recent dedication of the 53-acre Genung Nature Preserve in the Village of Freeville

waterthrushes, chimney swifts, northern rough-winged swallows, ruffed grouse and even pine warblers, to name a few.

Go take a look and a listen!

— Betsy Darlington

To visit the Genung Nature Preserve from Ithaca, take Route 13 going north. Just past NYSEG, turn left on Route 366. In Freeville, turn left on Route 38. The Preserve starts on your left, right after you cross the bridge over Fall Creek. It extends all the way to West Dryden Road. Parking area is on left side of road, just off Route 38.



Are You Planting Seeds for the Future?

YOU can Plant Seeds ... Seeds for Land Conservation
Make a Gift from Your Estate to the Land Trust.

Your Bequest Will Help Keep Natural Areas Natural For Future Generations So that They May Inherit Protected Lands!

Finger Lakes Land Trust ~ protecting land since 1989.

Contact: Jan Hesbon, Director of Development; janhesbon@fllt.org; (607)275-9487

Board Member Steps Up For Owasco Flats

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eventually prevailing over another bidder who intended to develop the property.

According to Hartnett, conclusions from the Land Trust's Owasco Flats Conservation Planning and Stakeholder Survey Project made him understand the need to act. He says, "We as the community of Moravia and Owasco Lake need to step up to the plate to ensure that

there is no further adverse development of the Flats." A long-time resident of Moravia, Hartnett adds that the Finger Lakes Region is "some of the most beautiful country in the world."

"Howard's willingness to step forward to secure this land is an extraordinary act of leadership," says Land Trust executive director Andy Zepp. "I can't

say that I'm surprised, however, as Howard has already demonstrated his strong commitment to both our region and the Land Trust."

The Land Trust will now work with Hartnett and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to facilitate transfer of the property to the state.

Land Trust Completes Yearlong Survey and Conservation Plan for Owasco Flats

continued from cover

Designated as part of the Greater Summerhill Important Bird Area, the Flats have produced numerous sightings of bald eagles, cerulean warblers and least bitterns — all threatened or endangered species and relatively rare to our area. The spotted turtle, a species of conservation concern for New York, is just one of the many fascinating reptiles in residence.

Before 19th-century farming activity drastically altered the Flats' hydrology — the pattern of water-flow throughout the area — the overall terrain served as a necessary floodplain that filtered sediments and maintained Owasco Lake's good water quality.

In the late 1940s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers answered a call to reduce flooding in Moravia and drain the Flats for farming. They straightened and deepened the inlet, further separating the stream from the old flood plain, effectively disabling the natural wetland filters for most of the water entering Owasco Lake.

"A natural channel will flood when the water gets high," said Mark Whitmore, a forest ecologist, consultant to the Land Trust and commissioned author of a study of the Owasco Flats ecology and resources in May 2007.

He pointed out that when the ancient stream flooded, it dumped sediments and nutrients in the flood plain, allowing the wetlands to essentially filter the water. "By channeling the stream, they made it harder to flood," he said.

Now sediments and nutrients from various sources, including sewage treatment, run more or less straight into the lake. Modern stream adaptations have reduced water quality over time, with phosphorous linked to excessive growth of aquatic plants and the sediment buildup at the lake mouth requiring regular dredging.

As Owasco Lake's water quality has declined, especially in recent years, public and private stakeholders hope that a careful conservation plan for Owasco Flats might maintain and even restore the natural area's invaluable ecosystem, passing on that ecosystem's service to lakeside residents.

To this end, the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board commissioned the Finger Lakes Land Trust in 2006 to undertake a yearlong study of the ecology of the Flats, identify key conservation issues and conduct a survey of stakeholder and landowner perspectives concerning the area.

With Mark Whitmore's report in hand, a steering committee comprised of local and state government representatives and members of local citizen groups identified important conservation issues for the Flats, including water quality, public recreation access and wildlife management.

The landowner survey that followed revealed that most of the stakeholders and landowners involved wanted to conserve the Owasco Flats, with emphasis on improving the water quality of the Owasco Inlet watershed and the lake itself.

"The community as a whole really values the Flats for the recreational opportunities it provides — the fishing, hunting and trapping — rather than for the development potential," Whitmore explained. "They love it, but there is no real plan for the future."

Until now.

From the analysis and survey, the Land Trust made a number of recommendations suggesting steps to protect and enhance the natural resources of the area for the public.

For starters, the Land Trust recommended that the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation should proceed with their plans to protect land in the Flats by creating a



MARK WHITMORE

The flora of the Owasco Flats is remarkably diverse, with over 360 species identified with the expert assistance of F. Robert Wesley (above), a field botanist affiliated with Cornell University

Wildlife Management Area, purchasing lands from willing owners.

Another Land Trust recommendation emphasized seeking funds for ongoing stewardship of the Flats, needed for recreation planning, controlling invasive plants, restoring the natural hydrology to the flats and overall site management.

It was also recommended that the state and other stakeholders consider restoring the stream and reconnecting it to its floodplain, so it could resume a more natural hydrologic cycle. To this end, the steering committee suggested that the Army Corps of Engineers be invited to see if they can restore the inlet to a more natural configuration, as they have recently undertaken similar efforts in other areas.

A further recommendation is to restore wetlands, forested swamps and emergent marshes on both public and private lands to re-establish the Owasco Inlets' buffering capacity, or the ability to filter water, and thereby improve the quality of water entering the lake.

Expanding on his report on the Flats, Whitmore said: "We also felt the water quality issues should be addressed not only by looking at the Owasco Flats and the inlet but by developing a comprehensive plan for the watershed as a whole, looking at the larger area in relation to water quality."

Finally, to maintain continuity into the future, the steering committee is expected to meet regularly and discuss land and water issues related to Owasco Flats and its regional influence.

"We're most grateful for the support provided by the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board, as well as the commitment of all of our partners who participated in the project," said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp. "By bringing together the key stakeholders of this project and working collectively towards the protection of this vital wetland, the Land Trust has assumed a new role that will enable us to take on more ambitious projects in the future."

—Krishna Ramanujan

FLLT Helps State Acquire New Addition to the Emerald Necklace

continued from cover

increasingly vital as wildlife corridors connecting one natural greenway to another.

The Land Trust is committed to expanding the Emerald Necklace string of protected lands and always searches for innovative ways to do so.

Roxanne Leyes recently sold her 42 acres abutting Connecticut Hill in the Town of Catharine to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). The story of this sale is particularly significant because it illustrates an important case of conservation cooperation between an individual property owner, a local nonprofit organization and a large state bureaucracy.

When Roxanne first approached the Land Trust about conservation options for her parcel of land, time was already a commodity that was running thin. Interested in protecting the property and the ecosystem that she clearly was passionate about, Roxanne showed up for our site visit of her land armed with hot coffee, fresh donuts and a look that said, "I need options, and I need them now!"

With Cayuta Lake in the distance, a boundary that adjoined Connecticut Hill and clear conservation values throughout the property, it was easy for us on the site visit to understand the need for this land's protection.

Finding the right way to realize Roxanne's ideas for her property in this case proved to be more complex. In cases where landowners have a need to sell their property for practical reasons and want a conservation alternative to consider, the Land Trust is typically brought into the discussion. Buying properties outright, however, is frequently beyond the limited resources that the Land Trust has available.

In this case, the Land Trust was able to get a clear vision of what Roxanne wanted to see happen to her land and was able to facilitate a conversation with New York State DEC about the possibility of state acquisition of her property, especially, as her land bordered state-owned Connecticut Hill.

As in any real estate transaction, timing is always a concern. It is even more critical in a State-funded acquisition project, where a landowner knows the peculiar quirks and practical details of working with the state agencies, just as it is important for the state to understand the pressures that a landowner may be facing. For Roxanne, the key issue was the future of her small greenhouse and nursery operation that occupy a portion of her property. As much as she wanted to do what was right for the land, she still needed to be able to make a living.

Through careful negotiations the Land Trust helped move the process along until the parties were comfortable with each other and then stepped away to let the transaction take its course. While these negotiations are never easy or quick, the staff of the DEC Region 7 Bureau of Real Property made every effort to expedite the deal: they responded with understanding of the many sensitive issues involved and quite capably brought the purchase to a close in a timely manner.

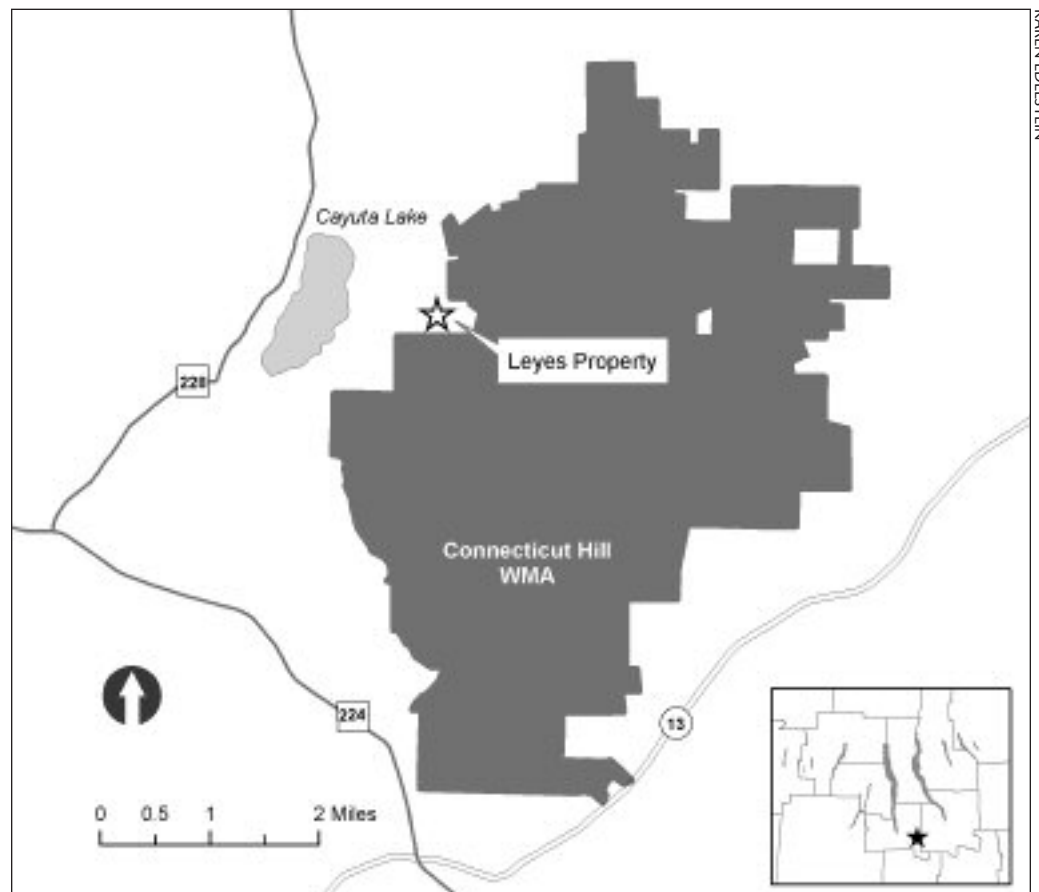
In the end, Roxanne was able to achieve her goals of protecting the bulk of her property, through State conservancy, while still maintaining the lot containing her greenhouses and nursery business.

For the State it seems that this project will have a bigger impact yet, as a nearby landowner well aware of Roxanne's transaction has now agreed to join her by adding a portion of his land to Connecticut Hill.

A relatively small addition of land to a large expanse of forest may not seem much. But for the Land Trust, a case like this becomes a motivating example of creative land conservation, cooperation, and the successful balance between the needs of the private landowner and the future of the ecological fabric of our region.

Roxanne Leyes' little jewel represents the true value of the Emerald Necklace and is a beautiful addition to the string of gems already in place.

—Rocci Aguirre



Scenes' from the Emerald Necklace...

This issue's centerfold is dedicated to the participants and volunteers of our recent Emerald Necklace Hike & Lecture Series.

MARSHA ZGOLA



Finger Lakes National Forest District Ranger Michael Liu and Finger Lakes Trail Conference President David Marsh take a break while hiking through Texas Hollow State Forest on day one of the hike series

MARSHA ZGOLA



An enthusiastic group just before hitting the trail on the first day of the hike

RICK LIGHTBODY © 2007



Yea, we made it!

RICK LIGHTBODY © 2007



Day three took hikers through Treman State Park

RICK LIGHTBODY© 2007



The Sweedler Preserve at Lick Brook served as a beautiful backdrop for the dedication of the Cayuga Inlet Conservation Area

RICK LIGHTBODY© 2007



Roger Hopkins and Louise Adie on day five

RICK LIGHTBODY© 2007



Saturday's hikers stop to re-fuel at a road crossing

RICK LIGHTBODY© 2007



Above: From left to right: Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp, Mark Whitmore, Emiley King, Brad Edmondson, and Mike Ciborowski hiked all 78 miles of the Finger Lakes Trail that traverses the Emerald Necklace. Congratulations!

RICK LIGHTBODY© 2007



Left: Peter Marks (right) leads a discussion on local plant communities at Shindagin Hollow State Forest

A Sacred Place Protected – Strong Local Support Completes Carpenter’s Falls Fundraising Campaign

With a strong showing of support from the Skaneateles community, as well as conservationists from throughout the Finger Lakes and beyond, the Land Trust achieved its fundraising goal of \$400,000 to support the protection of Carpenter’s Falls and other lands in the Skaneateles Lake Watershed.

The campaign supported the permanent protection of a mile-long corridor along Bear Swamp Creek, from Carpenter’s Falls to the shore of Skaneateles Lake. After nearly ten years of effort, the Land Trust acquired a 29.4-acre parcel to complete the greenbelt earlier this year.

Land Trust volunteer and former board member Scott Winkelman spearheaded fundraising efforts and led many field trips to Carpenter’s Falls and its adjacent woodlands. Winkelman says, “As a life-long resident of Skaneateles, Carpenter’s Falls has always been a sacred place to me, and to my family and friends.” He adds that the community recognized that it “was about time that we permanently set aside this unique natural area for the enjoyment of ours and future generations.”

In addition to supporting acquisitions at Carpenter’s Falls, the Campaign also provided support for a key addition to the Land Trust’s High Vista Preserve on the east side of Skaneateles Lake. Campaign funds are also supporting long-term stewardship of these areas and educational programs for landowners within the Skaneateles Lake Watershed.

The Finger Lakes Land Trust is profoundly grateful to Scott Winkelman and to everyone else who so generously supported this special campaign. Thank you to all of the donors to the Campaign for Carpenter’s Falls and the Skaneateles Highlands.



BETSY DARLINGTON

BENEFACTOR (\$10,000+)

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Carolyn Winkelman
P.J. and Karen Winkelman

Board Developments

We are delighted to announce new board member Doug Sutherland. Doug is the managing partner in Franklin Properties LLC, a Syracuse-based firm that specializes in urban redevelopment. He is a graduate of Susquehanna University (B.A. 1974) and New York University (Real Estate Investment Analysis 1986) and has lectured at Syracuse University, SUNY ESF and elsewhere on urban housing and development issues. Doug lives in Skaneateles with his wife Nancy Kramer and currently serves on the Village of Skaneateles Planning Board. He has previously served two terms on the Skaneateles Village Board.



New Board Member Doug Sutherland

Doug attributes his interest in conservation to his father, with whom he spent most spring Saturdays, as a youngster, fly-fishing in northern Pennsylvania. "Even at a young age, I was aware that many of my favorite places were being changed for the worse through poor development practices," he said. Doug declares that his interest in the Finger Lakes Land Trust grows out of that concern that we are losing many of the best places to thoughtless development. "The challenge we face across the Finger Lakes Region lies in creating preservation models that are both economically and politically sustainable for the long haul," he said. "The Finger Lakes Land Trust can and should play a defining role in advancing this kind of preservation model. For me, that is really exciting."

Thanks for joining us Doug!



Tompkins Trust Company (TTC) President & CEO Greg Hartz (left) with TTC Chairman and Land Trust Advisory Council Member Jim Byrnes (right), presenting Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp with a check for \$5,000 in support of the Land Trust's recent acquisition of 117 acres bordering the Cayuga Inlet within the Emerald Necklace Greenbelt. The Land Trust greatly appreciates this commitment of support and is nearing its goal of raising \$200,000 for this project.

Ellis Hollow Nature Preserve Parking Lot Completed!

The Land Trust would like to thank everyone at the Town of Dryden for the new parking lot at the Ellis Hollow Nature Preserve. The Town Highway Department did an excellent job and deserve kudos for their efforts. **Thank You!**

FRIEND (\$1-99)

Richard Alciati
Barbara Amsler
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John and Joan Behrens
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Pat Vanderbrook
The Village Teasel
Keith R. Welch
William Wheatley
Peter White & Mary Socci
Mary Wingerath
Charles Woodruff
Duncan Wormer & Barbara
Benedict
Georgianna Young

To the best of our knowledge, this list is accurate and complete. We regret any mistakes or omissions.

THANK YOU

DO YOU OWN AN IRA?

Are YOU Older than 70_?!
Before December 31, 2007?!!

If you answer YES to all, then YOU own an asset that can make a wonderful gift to the Land Trust.

Who, Me?

IRS regulations permit a gift up to \$100,000 from your IRA to the Land Trust.

If YOU are age 70 _ ... and IF YOU act before December 31, 2007.

You will not be taxed on this Qualified Charitable Distribution But you must ACT soon!

Contact Jan Hesbon, FLLT Director of Development phone 607-275-9487 or email: janhesbon@fllt.org



ITHACA BAKERY BREAD CARDS ARE IN!

Through the continued generosity of the Ithaca Bakery, the Land Trust is pleased to announce that this year's Bread Cards are now available. This benefit entitles members of the Finger Lakes Land Trust to one free loaf of bread per month with a \$5.00 minimum purchase. Please call the Land Trust Ithaca office at 607-275-9487 or stop by, and get yours today.

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The Land Trust wishes to thank every person, organization, and business that made the Emerald Necklace Hike and Lecture Series a success. In particular, we'd like to thank:

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Ree Thayer
for hosting the dedication of the Cayuga Inlet Conservation Area

Susan Rausch
for hosting the Finish Line Celebration at the end of the hike

Finger Lakes Trail
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David Marsh

Dave Schurman
for mowing the field for our Finish Line Celebration

Rick Lightbody
for beautiful and captivating photos of the series (see pages 6 & 7)

A CLOSER LOOK

A Symphony of Insect Songs

*Further in summer than the birds,
Pathetic from the grass,
A minor nation celebrates,
Its unobtrusive mass*

—Emily Dickinson

Nearly everyone who lives in the temperate zone notices that insects begin singing in late summer, well after the songs and calls of birds and frogs have declined. Emily Dickinson's poem about crickets captures the sentiment of this phenomenon, and makes the point that while the "minor nation" of grassy singers are hidden from sight, their amazing symphony of sound is heard and felt by all.

You may wonder why the insect chorus appears so late in the season. The answer is simple: nearly all our singing insects — crickets, katydids and cicadas — over-winter as eggs that hatch in the spring. It then takes several months for the nymphs to grow and mature. It is the adults that sing, but most don't sing for long. Many succumb to the first frosts of autumn, while others, such as the big black field crickets, doggedly persist, but only until freezing weather finally takes its toll.

So, you may ask, "Why are these insects singing, and how do they make their sounds?"

The songsters are all males, and they are singing to attract females. In this respect they are much like birds and frogs, where males use song to attract members of the opposite sex.

With crickets and katydids, males rub their wings together to produce sound. Generally, a scraper-like structure on one wing is drawn across a file-like structure on the opposite wing. Cicadas use an entirely different method. They have special organs called tymbals at the base of their abdomens, and membranes within the tymbals are stretched and then released in rapid succession to produce their buzzy, rattling calls.

Making sense of the insect chorus is a challenge. The first step is to learn the basic differences between the groups.

Cicadas sing during the day from the trees, especially during the hot "dog days" of late summer. Their loud and penetrating songs are buzzy and pulsating. Songs of most species start soft, grow louder, and then "fizzle out" at the end. The Linne's Cicada is common in our area and its rapidly-pulsating song can be heard in city parks and woodlots. In the forest, especially in pine stands, one is likely to hear the thin, penetrating "buzz-saw" call

of the Dog-day Cicada, a unique song familiar to all who frequent the woodland trails.

Katydid (including the meadow katydids, small grasshoppers with long, filamentous antennae) may sing both day and night, although many species mostly at night. They have harsh, nonmusical songs made up of ticks, buzzes, rattles, scrapes or shuffles. The katydids are the "percussive musicians" of the insect world. Especially in cities and villages, the harsh *ch-ch-ch* of the Common True Katydid is hard to miss on warm late summer

nights. Venturing into meadows, one will no doubt become aware of the loud song of the Sword-bearing Conehead, an incessant and rather overwhelming *tst-tst-tst-tst-tst* . . . that makes it difficult to hear other singing insects.

Crickets are the melody-makers of the insect symphony. Their musical chirps and trills are generally a pleasure to hear (although several species have buzzy and rather nonmusical songs). The Fall Field Cricket is the familiar black cricket that makes its way into homes during the autumn. Its song is a repeated series of loud metallic chirps. The Carolina Ground Cricket is a tiny dark-brown cricket with a buzzy, sometimes stumbling trill. It sounds off in short grassy areas and ditches.

Of all the crickets, my favorite group is the Tree

Crickets, delicate songsters with elongate bodies and lacy wings that are held straight-up as they sing. As their name implies, many species sing from trees, but others sing from shrubs or meadow vegetation. The gently pulsating musical trills of the Snowy Tree Cricket (a shrub singer) is familiar to nearly everyone, being perhaps the most relaxing insect song of the chorus. Most of our other tree crickets produce continuous, tinkling trills that form a musical backdrop for the insect symphony, serving to counteract the harsh notes of the katydids and bring balance to the chorus, like yin and yang.

—Lang Elliott



Singing Broad-winged Tree Cricket

WIL HERSHBERGER ©

Learn to identify local insect species in a new book and CD series by Lang Elliott and Wil Hershberger: www.songsnotinsects.com

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AUTUMN 2007 CALENDAR

Sunday, November 11, 1:30 PM: End of Fall Nature Walk at Steege Hill Nature Preserve, led by Bob Corneau and Betsy Darlington.

DIRECTIONS TO STEEGE HILL: From route 17 in Big Flats, take exit 49. Turn south from the exit ramp and go to Olcott Rd. At T intersection, turn right on Rt. 64 (unmarked), and right again on Rt. 352. Turn left on So. Corning Rd., cross the river, and turn left on Steege Hill Rd. Go about 1 mile and pull into the parking lot on the left, just before the pipeline cut. (Or park off the pavement on the shoulder of the road.)

See our web site www.fllt.org 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.