



THE LAND STEWARD

Newsletter of the Finger Lakes Land Trust

Vol. 15, No. 3

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes Region

Summer 2003

McIlroy Bird Sanctuary Grows With Recent Gift!

Thanks to the recent donation of a beautiful 28-acre tract by Dr. & Mrs. James Bugh of Cortland, our Dorothy McIlroy Bird Sanctuary has grown to 156 acres in size.

Located along the upper reaches of Fall Creek in the Town of Summerhill (Cayuga County), the preserve harbors a number of bird and plant species considered rare or uncommon in the region. The Sanctuary's wetlands also play an important role in maintaining the water quality of Fall Creek, a major tributary of Cayuga Lake as well as the water supply for Cornell University.

The McIlroy Preserve is mostly a boreal swamp forest at the outlet of Lake Como.

The preserve is in a pocket on the high plateau that runs from Locke to Homer. Because of its elevation and the protection provided by a slight ridge to the west, this site is, on average, just a bit colder than the surrounding area. The plants and bird life in the preserve are more typical of the Adirondacks than of the Finger Lakes. Ecologist Matt Young says that the preserve and the surrounding area support some of the highest bird diversity in the state. The preserve also contains one in the chain of rich fens along Fall Creek (see "A Closer Look," this issue).

The Bugh donation protects additional wetland habitat and also provides critical upland buffer between extensive wetlands along Fall Creek and cottages located along the shores of nearby Lake Como. Reflecting on his decision to donate the land, Dr. Bugh, a retired geology professor at SUNY Cortland, said, "It's a unique geological area that I'd like to see preserved." Adds Betsy Darlington, Director of Land Protection, "It's a spectacular piece of land and we're deeply grateful to the Bughs for their generous gift."

Photo by: Lang Elliott



The McIlroy Preserve provides habitat for numerous breeding birds, such as the Scarlet Tanager.

Photo by: Betsy Darlington



Meadows, wetlands, and forest on the Bugh addition to the McIlroy Bird Sanctuary

The new parcel is on the northwest side of the preserve. A portion of the addition consists of rich forested fen like much of the rest of the preserve, with hummocks of hemlock and yellow birch, and carpets of sphagnum moss, ferns and wild flowers. The tract also includes old fields and young woods with rolling glacial kame-and-kettle topography. (Kames are ridges or mounds of stratified drift deposited by glacial meltwater; kettles are hollows of glacial origin.) A small, seasonal lane crosses the addition, providing access to several cottages on Lake Como—and giving the Land Trust much improved access for the preserve.

The Land Trust is now proceeding with plans to provide better access to the preserve by constructing a boardwalk and an observation platform overlooking Fall Creek. To minimize impact on the wetlands, the trail will follow old logging roads. An interpretative display will educate visitors about the preserve and the unique nature of its wetlands.

The Land Trust is also working to protect additional wetlands in the area. If you are interested in learning how you can support this effort, please contact the office.

— Gail Blake

PERSPECTIVES



My spring hike at the Land Trust's Sweedler Preserve at Lick Brook seemed, at first, remarkable simply for how little had changed since the last time I was there, nearly 10 years ago. Aside from the

occasional fallen tree or rockslide, the gorge and its surrounding woodlands appeared exactly as I remembered them. The sunny oak woodlands still stood in stark contrast to the deep shade of the hemlocks nearby. While fresh shale layers had been exposed by the spring thaw, the gorge looked as rugged as ever.

It was downstream from the waterfalls that I noticed the first change. In among the trees, I noticed a plaque mounted on a boulder. Upon further inspection, I found that it honored the Babcock family for their donation of land encompassing a portion of the gorge to Cornell University. As I continued my hike on the Finger Lakes trail, I came across a row of new green signs; signifying the boundary of contiguous lands recently acquired by New York's Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation as an addition to Robert Treman State Park.

I remembered back to my first visit to Lick Brook fifteen years ago, when I was struck by the fact that this spectacular natural area is just four miles from downtown Ithaca. While the lands were well cared for then, they were also at risk from encroaching development. Since then, the concerted actions of public and private organizations working with conservation-minded landowners have ensured that the gorge and its surroundings will still inspire future generations.

The story of Lick Brook's conservation is one that we can expect to be repeated in the future.

Lands at Lick Brook have been protected through outright donation, conservation easement, purchase, and land exchange. Today, three conservation organizations own and manage land at the site, while a fourth (the Finger Lakes Trail Conference) maintains the trail that provides access. Each of these organizations plays a key role in ensuring the future of this natural area.

The story of Lick Brook's conservation is one that we can expect to be repeated in the future. The level of partnership evident at Lick Brook will be required if we are to be successful in conserving those landscapes that truly define our region.

The Land Trust is already working on a number of projects that reflect this approach. In the western lakes, we are working with municipal and state officials to add to public lands in the area. Along the Finger Lakes trail corridor, we are starting an outreach effort with the trail conference to educate landowners about conservation easements. In the Ithaca area, we are also working with a variety of partners to conserve additional lands along Six-Mile Creek, one of that city's water supplies.

All of these projects are likely to require years of effort. But if you get the chance to spend an afternoon at a place like Lick Brook, I'm sure you'll agree that it's worth it.

— Andrew E. Zepp, Executive Director

*Our sincere appreciation
for generous contributions
in memory of...*

...

David H. Gluck
from
Candace E. Cornell

...

Virginia Allen Sibley
from
Rosalie Cummings

The Staff at Albert R. Mann Library



Photo by: Betsy Darlington

Elizabeth Silvia, our hardworking, conscientious, and always-cheerful student intern from Ithaca College, who served as our events coordinator during the spring semester

CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR

“Doc” Smith, Conservationist of the Year

“IT’S DISTINCTLY POSSIBLE THERE WOULDN’T BE A RATTLESNAKE LEFT IN THE ELMIRA AREA IF IT WERE NOT FOR ART SMITH,” SAYS RULON CLARK, A GRADUATE STUDENT STUDYING THE TIMBER RATTLESNAKES IN THE LAND TRUST’S STEEGE HILL PRESERVE.

Dr. Arthur Smith, an erstwhile ophthalmologist, is “a world class naturalist, a dedicated conservationist, and a good friend,” adds Clark. And he’s the Land Trust’s Conservationist of the Year.

Art Smith urged the Land Trust to acquire the 800 acres of Steege Hill, which contains one of our area’s last remaining populations of timber rattlesnakes. He went with Betsy Darlington to walk the property with potential conservation buyers, pointing out the vital nature of the habitat and helping with site visits to see the rattlesnakes.

“No one knows the habits and biology of timber rattlesnakes as well as Art,” says Clark. “He showed us the snakes’ denning and basking areas—their most sensitive and necessary habitats. He helped us find individuals to implant miniature radio transmitters in. I hiked the preserve with Art in early spring, before the snakes emerged. He tied some orange flagging on a tree and said to come back in May. Sure enough, come May, we found a large black male timber rattlesnake about 5 feet from Art’s flag and three others nearby.

“Art was 80 a few years ago. I’ll be grateful if I’m half as able as he when I’m 80. I think he’s so well preserved because he’s spent a lifetime in the woods. He’s a hiker, hunter, and fisherman, but foremost, he’s an observer—as astute an observer of wildlife as any professional naturalist or ecologist I’ve known. He has a propensity for timber rattlesnakes, but his general

wildlife knowledge is thorough.”

Art’s daughter, Polly Blackwell, agrees: “Thanks to my father, I have become passionately involved in the study and preservation of the timber rattlesnake. During the ‘snake season,’ he and I spend hours together looking for and observing snakes. Along the way, there’s always a wildflower that wasn’t there the week before, a tree just starting to bloom,

or tracks that indicate a coyote’s behavior. With Dad, there’s always a lesson to learn.”

Art Smith has made splendid gifts of land—hundreds of acres of prime wildlife habitat—to the Nature Conservancy and the Tanglewood Nature Center and Museum where he feeds the geese on the pond, cleans and installs the bluebird houses, cares for the resident rattlesnakes, and leads nature walks.

Clark says, “Art’s been around the world fishing and hunting, but I think his favorite spot is the prime rattlesnake habitat he manages for the Tanglewood Nature Center in Elmira and the Nature Conservancy preserve that he patrols rigorously,

arresting trespassers who may harm the snakes. He tirelessly draws attention to the plight of these animals, promoting their conservation and correcting misinformation. He’s a community icon; twenty years ago, a snake spotted in someone’s backyard might have been killed; today, people call “Doc” Smith, who gently relocates the snake to appropriate habitat.”

— Caissa Willmer

Photo by: Betsy Darlington



Art Smith (right) accepting the Conservationist of the Year Award from executive director, Andy Zepp

*Our sincere thanks
for a gift in celebration of
the birth in Pakistan of...*

...
Araminta Kahn
from
Betsy Darlington

*We are deeply grateful for
birthday gifts in honor of...*

A. Thomas Vawter
from
Jean McPheeters
...
Betsy Darlington
from
Lois Darlington

**OUR SINCERE THANKS
FOR A CONTRIBUTION
IN HONOR OF...**

...
Rich Stumbar
from
Margaret Dyer

VOLUNTEER PROFILE: BARB & MEG

Barb and Meg, Volunteer Team of the Year

BARBARA HAMLIN AND MEG EWING, THE LAND TRUST'S CO-VOLUNTEERS OF THE YEAR, SHARE A PASSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF WILDLIFE HABITAT. TOGETHER, THEY MADE AN UNSTOPPABLE TEAM IN PURSUIT OF THE \$200,000 GOAL OF THE LAND TRUST'S NATURE'S GIFT CAMPAIGN—A GOAL THAT WAS SUBSTANTIALLY EXCEEDED!

Barb is a fundraiser par excellence. Meg has a charisma and enthusiasm for conservation that has helped build an exceptional body of volunteers for the chapter.

Western Lakes volunteer Jim Kersting admires Barbara's dogged persistence. "She had her sights on the \$200K goal all the time," he remarks. "When we started last summer, we were contacting potential donors we knew personally, but who

Barb is a conservationist at heart... She would have made a great ambassador.

were not familiar with the Land Trust. We got lots of 'not available' replies to invitations to events where we planned to present the Land Trust story. Barb said, 'We're not stopping until we reach our goal.'

"We were getting only 25% of what we hoped to get from our donors," Jim continues. "Barb added names to the list, added more events, and she must have

taken 20 donors to lunch when they couldn't get to events. She brought her vast fund raising experience to bear, teaching us a great deal and instilling lots of confidence in us all. She's a conservationist at heart. She has a great sense of humor and a grace and style that was clear at the holiday "thank you" event she and husband Steve hosted at their home for the donors. She's a diplomat. She would have made a great ambassador."

Barb Hamlin, in her turn, admires the approach of Meg Ewing. "Meg is a thoughtful, determined person. She sees a need, considers the best approach, and moves forward. The printed pieces we needed were ready when I arrived; Meg understood what was wanted, consulted the committee, then got the materials printed. Meg has a charming public presentation style and a passion for the land trust concept. Both make her an excellent speaker as well as one-on-one solicitor. Plus she has a great sense of humor and she's bright!

Meg has a passion for the land trust concept... Plus she has a great sense of humor.



Barb Hamlin (left) and Meg Ewing accepting the Volunteer of the Year Award from president John Rogers

Photo by: Betsy Darlington

"Another endearing aspect is her love of her boys and husband, George. She really loves their artistic, sports, and academic activities. She's a great Mom!"

Jim and Sara Kersting have a similar regard for Meg and her ability to recruit like-minded conservationists. The volunteers she has brought on board still serve as the backbone of the Western Lakes Chapter.

Sara remembers "the first meeting—ten years ago—that I attended in the old Naples library, a tiny musty room. I showed up at the urging of Steve Lewandowski—father of the Western Lakes Chapter—and found three people in an intense discussion. One of them was Meg. I went to the meeting because of Steve, but I stayed and became totally involved because of Meg."

Between them, Barb and Meg catalyzed their volunteers, got the Land Trust story out to the Western Lakes area, and led the Western Lakes Chapter to realize \$266,000 for land conservation.

— Caissa Willmer

Can One Person Make A Difference?

In a world of monster vehicles, superpower strutting, micro-and macro-terrorism, and mega-cartels in control of the media, we can be forgiven for asking.

Still, “one person” doesn't have to mean “a person all alone.” With the help of the extraordinary people of the Finger Lakes Land Trust, I was able to do one small act that made a difference: I gave a conservation easement to the Land Trust in 1990.

Truth will out—I did it for my own selfish reasons. But first: what difference did it make? It was the first easement in the Ithaca area. It gave us faith in the Land Trust, which since that time has protected nearly 7000 acres of natural treasures. It helped draw the attention of conservationists and public officials alike to the preciousness of the Six-Mile Creek Valley. The public initiative that followed now protects large areas of this ancient valley and has nourished a movement toward public planning and responsibility for our natural heritage.

As the Land Trust has grown in visibility and scope, it has engendered creative private-public collaboration all over western New York State—collaborations that have established natural refuges, offered opportunities for young and old to work together in achieving the satisfactions of conservation, and organized projects and treks and parties for green-leaning people to walk, eat, talk, play, learn, and get wet and dirty together. The strength of our local efforts helps encourage the nationwide network of land trusts, conservancies, and sustainable agriculture and forestry movements.

*Conservation
is all about
thinking
100 years
ahead.*



So let's go back to my selfish reasons for giving the easement. Can you think of something you gave away more than a decade ago that still brings you deep pleasure almost daily? Just about every walk in the Six-Mile Creek Natural Preserve “surprises me with joy,” to borrow C.S. Lewis's phrase. And it's definitely a surprise the way the private little thought still sneaks up on me that I had something to do with the survival of this place of re-creation for people, plants, wildlife, and the meander of the stream (and I for one love encountering happy dogs out there; like the land, I don't have to own them to enjoy them).

Make no mistake: the biggest difference the easement made was to ME. First, it saved me from heartbreak.

Aging, my kids grown and gone, I couldn't take proper care of the land and the 1830's farmhouse; to sell the place meant certain loss of our beloved fields and woods to the inexorable development creeping outward from town. In 1988, I returned from a year of study leave and had a heart-stopping experi-

ence. You know that first blustery fall day, when frost has come and the leaves are whirling away, and the garden is just calling out that it needs to be put to bed? That day I gathered the tools and went to the garden and, looking up to rejoice in the sky, I saw a bunch of brand-new houses that hadn't been there at all when I went away, and hadn't been visible



Photo by: Betsy Darlington

This photo of Nancy Gabriel, on the left, with former Board Member Ashley Miller, appeared in our very first issue of the Land Steward, in October 1989, shortly before Nancy donated her conservation easement protecting land adjacent to the Ithaca City Reservoir along Six-Mile Creek.

behind the trees and brush bordering the garden. With the foliage gone, they were right there!

The next difference was in my family. When I learned of the brand-new Finger Lakes Land Trust, I composed a careful speech to my children (then in their twenties and living in California). “This place has been your home; it is the greatest asset I have to bequeath to you; and if I put this easement on it, its dollar value will decrease. I cannot do this unless you, my children, give me permission to do so.” My eldest daughter's reaction was one of those surprises of enduring joy: “Wow, Mom! What a relief! I knew you were struggling to keep the place going and was assuming I'd have to move back to help you because we CAN'T let them build on that beautiful land! Now the land will be safe and we all can relax!” (Shortly after this she moved back to Ithaca permanently.) More than solving a problem, this decision created a new bond of respect and appreciation among family members, friends, and colleagues.

Conservation is all about thinking 100 years ahead. While I certainly won't be here then, nor will anyone who knew me, for whatever life span does remain to me I can, gratefully, picture the turtles and foxes and pileated woodpeckers and kingfishers making a peaceful living along a beautiful, healthy creek.

— Nancy Gabriel

Scenes

from our Nature Preserves...



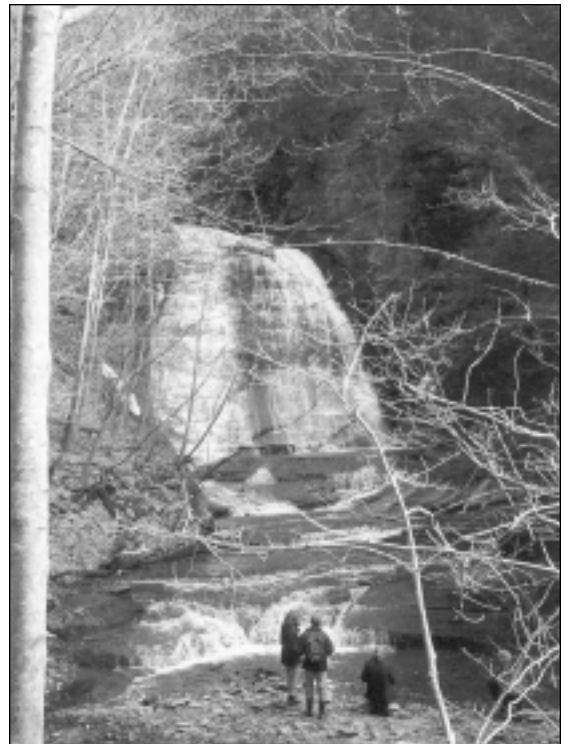
Annual Celebration hike in Briggs Gully at the Wesley Hill Preserve: l-r: John Rogers, Mike Cartwright (leader), Bob and Hope Corneau, Eileen Maxwell, Tom Reimers



Sara Kersting, dwarfed by an ancient hemlock at the Wesley Hill Preserve.



Above: Volunteers at the Thurber Preserve in McLean (Town of Groton), installing locust post ATV barriers.



Right: Spring nature walk on the Finger Lakes Trail at the Sweedler Preserve at Lick Brook, near Ithaca



Above: Volunteers gathered at Steege Hill for trail clearing.

Below: Water quality sampling in Coleman Lake, at the Lindsay Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in Danby.



*“Never take things for granted...
whenever you feel that there
isn’t an ounce of good in the world,
just take a walk down this path.”*

*—Comment from Visitors Log
at Sweedler Preserve at Lick Brook*



The Parker Preserve in the Town of Bath affords hikers a variety of habitat types, as well as interesting stone foundations of long-gone barns.



The cathedral-like majesty of the Stevenson Forest Preserve in Enfield provides visitors (like volunteer Michael DeMunn, shown here) with a refuge from the summer heat, and the noise and bustle of life.

LEGISLATIVE NEWS — SUMMER 2003

ALBANY, N.Y.

In a highly dramatic showdown, Governor Pataki used his line-item veto to reject most of the budget bills presented to him by the Legislature. The Legislature, in turn, voted to override his veto — something rarely done in this state. It was all the more remarkable in that the Republicans control the Senate, the Democrats control the Assembly, and the two chambers rarely agree. But this time they did!

Lawmakers restored \$33 million to the main environmental budget item, the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), thus maintaining its annual budget of \$125 million. That money is used in three ways: acquisition and protection of open space (\$62 million); parks and state land stewardship (\$45 million); and solid waste and recycling programs (\$17 million). The “open space” category includes both farmland protection (\$12 million) and the New York State Conservation Partnership land trust grants program administered by the Land Trust Alliance (\$250,000). Given the State’s current budget woes, these outcomes are considered extremely positive.

Not all the news was good, however. Lawmakers agreed to “sweep” the EPF of accumulated cash to the tune of \$43 million. The EPF is a dedicated fund that gets its revenue from the Real Estate Transfer Tax. In most years, that tax raises more than the \$125 million appropriated for EPF projects; for this reason and because it takes time to use these funds, cash tends to build up in the fund. Repeated sweeps over the years mean that more EPF funds have been spent for unrelated activities than on environmental projects. Maintaining the integrity of the EPF and making sure it is used for the purposes for which it was created remains a priority for New York’s conservation community — one which will surely be addressed again NEXT year.

As we described in the Spring 2003 issue, eight states’ Attorneys General have asked the Federal Appeals Court to block

the Bush Administration’s new “Clear Skies” rules, (which took effect on March 3, 2003) until a trial was held to determine if “Clear Skies” was in violation of law. (The “Clear Skies” proposal would allow polluting factories and utilities to upgrade facilities without installing the clean air mechanisms formerly required by the Clean Air Act.) The Court did not grant the stay, but promised an “expedited review” of the original case. Sources in New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer’s office anticipate the trial to be held within the next few months.

Republican Senator Mike Nozzolio, who represents parts of Ontario, Cayuga, Monroe, and Tompkins County, recently announced that he had secured a \$1 million dollar grant from New York State (2002-03 fiscal year) to support the creation of the Finger Lakes Institute. The Institute, to be located at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, will focus initially on environmental issues specific to the Finger Lakes. It will partner with and help coordinate the efforts of local governments, lakeshore property owners’ organizations, watershed protection groups, and other regional environmental research centers in using the results of its research. The Institute will also study social, economic, and cultural issues in the Finger Lakes.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

We’ve discussed the proposed “Charitable Giving Act (H.R. 7)” which would provide tax incentives and deductions to donors both of land and of conservation easements, in a previous issue of the *Land Steward*. Though it didn’t reach the floor during the 107th Congress, the Charitable Giving Act is back this year and will likely be voted on before the July 4th recess.

There is much legislation being discussed in Congress just now. The Healthy Forests Restoration Act and a comprehensive energy bill are among them. Neither has yet been passed in both houses of Congress.

— *Merry Jo Bauer*

WESTERN LAKES CHAPTER UPDATE

Land Protection

We are engaged in ongoing land protection projects with landowners in the western lakes area. We’re negotiating three conservation easements and are meeting with four other landowners to discuss land conservation strategies.

During the coming year, we’ll invite landowners from the Bristol Hills, Canadice-Hemlock Lakes, South and Bare Hills (Canandaigua Lake) and Hi Tor areas to conservation easement information sessions. If you’d like to attend one, or know someone we should invite, call the WLC office (585-394-4189).

Up and Coming

This fall we’ll host several hikes at the Bishop, Great Hill, and Wesley Hill Preserves. Check the website (www.flit.org) for updates, or call the chapter office at (585) 394-4189.

Give the office a call at (585) 394-4189 for more information or to get involved in your land trust. And—thank you!

Nature’s Gift

The Nature’s Gift Campaign team, co-chaired by Barbara Hamlin with Meg and George Ewing, wants to break \$300,000 before winding up this summer.

Talks & Treks

The Chapter’s Talks & Treks program will feature 12 events this year. You and your kids can not only learn something new about our local environment and wildlife, but you can help support the Land Trust by bringing a friend and encouraging them to become a member. The program was put together with the efforts of many volunteers and the support of the Shopping Bag and Eastern Mountain Sports. See insert for details.

Jim Kersting
Chair, Western Lakes Chapter

Stewardship and the Role of Planned Giving

The Finger Lakes Land Trust has already taken on the commitment of ensuring the permanent protection of 23 nature preserves and 41 properties subject to conservation easements. Today, almost 7,000 acres fall under the Land Trust's stewardship programs. In addition, the pace of our land protection efforts is actually accelerating! According to Director of Land Protection Betsy Darlington she is "busier than ever" with a multitude of projects.

Stewardship involves a broad range of activities. At its preserves, the Land Trust must provide for proper resource management while also providing for some degree of public access. Trails must be maintained, non-native invasive plant species controlled, and boundary lines posted. As more of the countryside is developed, we also expect that we'll

need to spend more time educating preserve neighbors about the Land Trust and its preserve policies. Conservation easements must be monitored on an annual basis and, in the event of a violation, the Land Trust must be prepared to enforce the terms of the easement.

To provide for these activities, the Land Trust must ensure that its financial resources grow along with its commitments. Toward this end, we are continually adding funds to the organization's stewardship endowment. A painless and meaningful way in which you can help the Land Trust provide for the future is to include the Land Trust in your estate plans. A bequest to the Land Trust will also allow us to expand our work with conservation-minded landowners who may be interested in donating a conservation easement, but lack the financial

means to make a contribution to the endowment.

There are many options for making a planned gift to the Land Trust. Bequests can be made by allocating a specific amount to the trust, leaving a percentage of your estate or naming the Land Trust as the recipient of the residue after other legacies have been made. Donors can also name the Land Trust as a conditional beneficiary in the event that someone who has been named as a beneficiary is not living at the time the donor's will is probated.

Please contact Andy Zepp at the Ithaca office at (607) 275-9487 if you would like to learn more about planned giving options and how you can help ensure the stewardship of our most cherished places.

— Andy Zepp

VOLUNTEER THANKS

THREE CHEERS TO ALL OUR VOLUNTEERS!

For your hard work at the Leopold Center, the Western Lakes Chapter office, and Nature Preserves, and helping with educational and fundraising events;

For leading, helping with, or giving inspiring, entertaining walks or talks;

For serving on committees or as stewards of our conservation easements and nature preserves;

For legal or technical help and expertise;

For many hours of technical support;

For his beautiful reading from his father Aldo Leopold's book, A Sand County Almanac: Carl Leopold;

For giving an inspiring performance at our April fundraiser: the Ariadne String Quartet (Susan Waterbury, Rebecca Ansel, Debra Moree, Elizabeth Simkin); and for hosting the event in their lovely home: Joan and Ted Hullar;

For providing their expertise in historic preservation, for renovations to the Leopold Center: Sarah Adams and Victoria Romanoff;

For creating marvelous works of art of our nature preserves: Dylan Fitzpatrick;

For organizing and promoting this year's Talks & Treks series in the Western Lakes area: Wendi Cartwright, Cathy Gardner, George Ewing, Peter Stahlbrodt, Elaine Dalconzo-Growe, Kathy Jurgens;

For hosting recent Western Lakes events: Peter and Betty Stahlbrodt, Sue Rea, and John and Anne Fayko.

Thank You, Chapter Chair Irene Brown

After many years of tireless service, Irene Brown will be stepping down as Chair of the Seneca Lake Chapter.

Irene, an active and generous supporter of the Land Trust since 1989, recently served on the Hector Town Board and continues to be an indomitable voice on local environmental issues.

We would like to thank Irene her past leadership and look forward to many more years of her guidance and support.

FOR SALE

Conservation Easement Land with
Seasonal Cabin for
Sale 48 acres adjoining
King Nature Preserve.

Call Betsy at 607-275-9487

BUSINESS PARTNER PROFILE

CONTENTO'S

As we continue our cleanup of the Mcllroy Preserve, Contento's remains endlessly patient and helpful to us.

Most waste companies call residential and light commercial waste hauling their bread and butter. After all, the trash never stops coming. But unlike its traditional waste-hauling peers, Contento's of Cortland is primarily a C&D—a "construction and demolition"—company. When an old building stands in the way of progress in Cortland County, Contento's gets a call.

Contento's is also a good friend of the Land Trust. So far, Contento's has donated the use of four 30- and 40-yard containers for Land Trust clean-ups at the Mcllroy Bird Sanctuary. Over two days, more than 60 volunteers filled two containers with metal for recycling, and two with general rubbish.

Since it began 53 years ago, Contento's has tackled many challenging projects. The old Methodist church on Church Street in Cortland presented a 120 foot steeple. A Chinese restaurant on Main Street in Cortland was attached to another building. Wood, metal, and concrete; brick, shingles, and sheetrock: Contento's does it all.

When an old building comes down in a country like China, virtually every component is salvaged, even down to the nails. But in the US, most C&D debris winds up in landfills. Dismantling costs generally exceed the value of windows, doors, wood framing, plumbing fixtures, and other building materials. There's not even much of a market for C&D bricks. The culprits are varied: the economies of scale in manufacturing, mass

merchandising, and the psychology of our times. A new plastic light fixture made in Taiwan is better than a cast metal one salvaged from an old house.

This is changing slowly. Today, there are roughly 3,500 C&D recycling centers in the US. Contento's is one of them. Contento's sorts and bales iron, brass, and copper for sale to scrap metal processors. And occasionally a demo project offers greater recycling opportunities. Contento's is waiting to hear about a potential demolition project—

more accurately characterized as dismantling—involving an old stone mill in Moravia. Hand-hewn beams will be carefully cut and stacked. Quarry-masoned stone will be cleaned of mortar and strapped to pallets. Some will be used on site for the construction of a bed-and-breakfast. The rest will be shipped out west, where it commands top dollar.

Business is relatively slow for Contento's right now. Gerald Contento Jr., the second-generation owner, attributes this primarily to the state of the economy. There aren't as many major new construction projects that require site preparation through C&D work.

But the company is "hanging tough," he says. Regardless of the economy, the C&D business is perpetually fueled by acts of God. Fire doesn't pay attention to the stock market.

As we continue our cleanup of the Mcllroy Preserve, Contento's remains endlessly patient and helpful to us. The Land Trust has a true friend in the waste business in Cortland County.

— Rich Sheiman



Above: Volunteers Brian Wasser, Martin Schlaepfer, and Scott Winkelman wrestling old tires out of the mud at the Mcllroy Preserve

Right: Contento's roll-offs and two muddy volunteers – a Cornell student and C.J. Kilgore



Photos by: Betsy Darlington

A CLOSER LOOK



FANTASTIC

Fens

Photo by: Rich Sheiman

In the tradition of Marco Polo and Howard Carter, Matt Young may be the greatest discoverer to come out of Upstate NY since Joseph Smith discovered the golden plates of Mormon. Two years ago, there were roughly 20 documented fens in the Finger Lakes basin. Fens are groundwater-fed wetlands that support a number of rare plant species. Matt Young has found eight more and is still looking. One of these he nominated to the Finger Lakes Land Trust and it became the Dorothy McIlroy Preserve.

Fortunately for fen finders, there is a science to predicting their location. Barbara Bedford, a Senior Research Associate at Cornell's Department of Natural Resources, is one of the authors of the Hydrogeologic Setting (HGS) Framework. This recently published model considers the influence of topography on groundwater discharge, along with other factors such as mineral content and pH, in the formation of rich fens. Matt Young and others have applied the HGS Framework in the field as a roadmap. One of the recently discovered fens contains the first documented instance in the Cayuga Lake Basin since the 1970s of long-bracted orchid.

Rich fens are among the most remarkable natural phenomena in the temperate zone. In one small plot of earth at a local rich fen, Bedford helped identify 106 plant species. Rare orchids, sedges, and other threatened species may bloom from the mineral laden soil. Bedford goes out on a limb to describe rich fens as "the most floristically diverse herbaceous community on the planet."

The northeast corner of Tompkins County and southeast corner of Cayuga County may have the densest concentration of fens in the country. There are more fens in this small area than in five nearby states combined. Fens are extremely rare in the Adirondacks and Southern Tier. So why is this region so fantastic? In a word, 'glacier'. The fen density in Groton, Dryden

Left: Fen indicator species, the endangered Spreading Globe Flower, Trollius laxus

and Summerhill clearly has something to do with the way a mile-high glacier danced and died in our midst about 10,000 years ago. Kettles, kames, eskers, and minerotrophic soils, nourished by pulverized rock from the Niagara escarpment, have allowed ordinary wetlands to become exotic fens.

Fens are distinct from bogs. Most notably, fens rely on groundwater for their nutrients and bogs rely on rain. Bogs are more acidic and therefore support less biodiversity. Both are generally peatlands, although the peat at a bog is generally much deeper. A core sample from a quivering mat of sphagnum moss at the Malloryville bog measured an amazing 33 feet deep. Carbon dating was able to show that 4,100 years ago this spot morphed from a fen into a bog. The peat mass presumably grew into a hummock that eventually cut off its access to groundwater.

Fens are fragile. Beavers are their nemesis. So are people. That is why the research to classify them is so important, as are the public and private efforts to protect them. The Nature Conservancy's Von Engel Preserve in Dryden maintains an elaborate boardwalk system that allows visitors to experience the fen without damaging it. A similar boardwalk system is being planned for the Finger Lakes Land Trust's McIlroy Preserve.

I asked Barbara Bedford which local fen is her favorite. In the spirit of protecting these fragile postage stamp sized ecosystems from reckless visitors she replied "there are several, but I'm not going to tell anyone."

— Rich Sheiman

Photo by: Rich Sheiman



Ecologist Matt Young discovered this rich fen ("Young's Fen") in the Fall Creek watershed

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SUMMER 2003 CALENDAR

JOIN US FOR THIS SUMMER'S Talks & Treks—See Insert

If you are interested in helping us build the boardwalk at the McIlroy Bird Sanctuary in August and September, please call us: (607) 275-9487. We especially need volunteers with carpentry skills or tools.

Sat., Aug. 2, 7-9 PM: EVENING AMBLE at the Stevenson Forest Preserve. Led by Betsy Darlington. From route 79 between Ithaca and Watkins Glen, go south on route 327. At the curve to the southeast, turn right on Trumbull Corners Road. The preserve parking area is located approximately 1/2 mile down the road, on the right. Bring flashlight!

Sat., Sept. 13, 10 AM: WILD WONDERS at the Parker Preserve. Led by Pam Maurey and Betsy Darlington. Go west from Watkins Glen, following signs to Hammondsport and Tyrone. Just before Tyrone, turn left on route 226. Just past the Bradford School, go right on Yawger Hill Rd., then left (in "downtown" Bradford) on Telegraph Rd. (a small sign points to "Bath"). Take this to Velie Rd., turn right and park on the left in mowed parking area, just before the curve.

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

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