



THE LAND STEWARD

Newsletter of the Finger Lakes Land Trust

Vol. 18, No. 2

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes Region

Spring 2006

Neighbors Band Together to Protect Land Near Canandaigua Lake

When Marion Myers thought about the future of the 64-acre parcel of land in her father's estate, she wanted it kept the way she remembered it — a natural place, wooded with evergreens and deciduous trees, hilly, and with a lovely view overlooking Canandaigua Lake.

Her wish came true when she and her friends and neighbors from childhood formed the Richard M. Morse Conservation Club (named after her father who died in 1999) and purchased the land near the western shore of the lake in the Town of South Bristol, Ontario County. They signed an agreement with the Finger Lakes Land Trust in late December 2005 to preserve the land through a conservation easement.

"It completes my dream for the land, which is that it will be green forever and that people will care about it and take care of it," said Myers.



MARK WHITMORE

One of the many scenic vistas on the former Morse Estate

While Myers now lives in Chicago, the 19 other members of the club, including children of her father's friends, mostly live near the easement and will care for the land on Seneca Point, as the area is called. The club is invested in managing this rich tract.

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MARK WHITMORE

A picturesque stream, surrounded by mature forest, rambles through the Raymond-Smith property

New Conservation Easement Adds To Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve

During the last glacial period in Tompkins County, the Wisconsin Ice Sheet cut the existing valleys deeper and steeper. A beautiful example of the topography left by this huge event is the Land Trust's newest conservation easement, donated by Monica Raymond and Todd Smith. About 20 acres in total, the land lies on the northern edge of the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve on Station Road in West Danby.

A few less dramatic events than the Wisconsin glacier visited this small piece in the last 10,000 years. As the glacier receded, humans moved in. Successive waves of increasingly technologically advanced groups populated the area. Some historians say that around the 16th century the region's population was greater than it is now. The first Europeans arrived in the 17th century, and though they farmed and logged, they mostly left this steeply pitched parcel alone.

Monica Raymond bought the land in 1985. She and her husband, Todd Smith, the easement donors, have been friends of the Land Trust for many years. In 1997, they built two plank-and-log bridges for walkers to more comfortably traverse some muddy spots in the Lindsay-Parsons Preserve, both to make the walk easier and to protect vegetation.

Their easement features a variety of ecological systems. The glacier cut through an existing valley and created slopes facing in all the directions of the compass. The wetter

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PLEASE JOIN US FOR THE LAND TRUST'S 17TH ANNUAL MEETING ON SATURDAY, APRIL 29TH AT THE SKANEATELES COUNTRY CLUB (SEE INSERT FOR DETAILS)



PERSPECTIVES

With the Land Trust's two latest conservation easements, we're now working in partnership with 53 families to provide

for the long-term protection of their properties. While The Land Steward typically provides an overview of these projects, most people don't realize all that leads up to the signing of a conservation easement. The easement process can be complex and requires thoughtful consideration by both the landowner and the Land Trust's representatives.

In some cases, the Land Trust contacts individual prospective easement donors as part of a systematic effort to reach out to landowners in strategically targeted areas. In other cases, a landowner contacts us with interest in conserving their land. In either case, the Trust must determine whether the project merits our long-term commitment of stewardship resources. If the answer is "yes," discussions proceed, outlining possible terms and basic facts about conservation easements.

These conversations may last less than a year, but they may extend for many years and involve multiple generations and family members. Frequently,

such discussions focus on potential uses of the land far out into the future, as it is important that the easement document incorporate flexibility for unforeseen circumstances.

While discussions with landowners occur, the Trust begins to explore funding for the project. In addition to stewardship funds to monitor and enforce the easement in the future, there are often direct expenses associated with surveys and detailed assessments of properties. In some cases, the landowner covers these costs, and in others, the Land Trust raises funds from elsewhere to cover expenses.

In most easement projects, a land survey is required to distinguish "active use" areas such as a residential lot from a natural area such as a forest. Once the survey is completed, a "baseline documentation package" is completed for the property; this set of maps, photos, and detailed descriptions provides a snapshot of the condition of the property at the time of the easement grant.

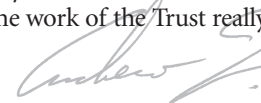
Prior to recording an easement, attorneys for both the donor and the Land Trust review proposed language, while counsel for the Land Trust also reviews the property's title to ensure that

it is not encumbered by liens or any other unresolved issues. Thanks to the generosity of a number of attorneys in the Ithaca area, the Land Trust benefits from *pro bono* legal services for many of our projects.

Once the easement deed is signed and recorded at the county office of records, the process is complete. Or is it? In actuality, the recording of the easement serves as a starting point. From that point forward, the Land Trust works through a series of partnerships with the property owners to provide for its long-term care.

Staff and volunteers at the Trust work together to monitor each easement property annually and educate new owners about their easements and options for managing their land. A dedicated legal defense fund stands ready if the Land Trust needs to enforce an easement. Thankfully, this fund has not been used to date!

As you can see, the conservation easement process is an involved one. The actual crafting of an easement might take anywhere from one to ten years, and then the work of the Trust really just begins.

 —Andy Zepp

New Conservation Easement Adds To Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve

continued from cover

north-facing slopes have larger trees, many of them hemlocks. The drier west-facing slopes are covered with old, stunted oaks. In addition, the ice sheet's retreat left some interesting glacial terraces. A beautiful creek runs through one, shaded by mature hemlocks and oaks. Each area supports its own unique flora and fauna.

Monica built her house on the adjoining property with her own hands. She always loved to walk the property, hear the "he hoo, he hoo" of the owls, see the red efts, the many species of birds, the deer and other animals.

Regarding their decision to donate the easement, Monica discussed her desire to preserve the habitat. "In just the past few years, I've seen whole forests cut down and made into shopping malls. The sprawl is so huge and happening so rapidly. We decided we wanted at least to

protect our little property, to maintain the bio-diversity, to have a place where plants and animals can live unmolested. It's a comfort to know that the Land Trust will protect it in perpetuity."

Another motivation behind their donation, Monica explained, was to return something to the community. "Even though we've moved away, the progressive community in Ithaca has given us so much; we've learned so much from them. This is like giving a gift back."

The easement adds to the Land Trust's protection of this vital area and gives us all the opportunity to connect to a piece of our natural history.

—Margot Brinn



Easement donors Monica Raymond and Todd Smith

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Dick Ruswick for providing pro bono legal services in this transaction. Attorney Peter Miller, representing the easement donors, also donated a portion of his time.

State Adds To Bear Swamp Holdings

Through the recent acquisition of two parcels totaling 45 acres, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) has expanded its holdings at Bear Swamp State Forest. Though relatively small, both parcels were identified as priorities due to their unique characteristics.

One of the two parcels includes wetlands along Bear Swamp Creek, one of Skaneateles Lake's largest tributaries. Fed by groundwater as well as surface runoff, these wetlands harbor several rare plant species and also help to maintain the lake's water quality. The second parcel consists of upland forest and is surrounded by state land on all but one side. Its acquisition will reduce the threat of forest fragmentation and will simplify long-term stewardship of the site.

Bear Swamp State Forest spans more than 3,000 acres and is identified as a priority project within the state's Open Space Plan. The Forest includes one of the region's most pristine wetland systems, as well as an extensive network of cross-country ski trails. The site is also located within the Southern Skaneateles Lake Forest, identified by the National Audubon Society as an Important Bird Area.

The Land Trust is working with the NYSDEC in a coordinated effort to add to public lands in this area and also secure privately owned parcels through conservation easements. The Land Trust's own work to protect lands along Bear Swamp Creek over



ANDREW ZEPP

Bear Swamp Creek is one of the largest tributaries of Skaneateles Lake, the water supply for the City of Syracuse.

the years has resulted in the acquisition of the Bahar Preserve on the lakeside mouth of the creek and, more recently, the spectacular Carpenters Falls. Efforts are underway to add an additional parcel connecting these two, which would protect a mile-long corridor of the creek from future development.

Funding for the two recent NYSDEC purchases came from the state's Environmental Protection Fund.

Fundraising Goal for Grimes Glen Met – Parking Lot Cleanup Delays Acquisition

Through a groundswell of local support and an anonymous \$20,000 challenge grant, the Land Trust achieved its goal of raising \$150,000 for the conservation of Grimes Glen at the end of 2005. Funds raised will go to the acquisition of the heart of the Glen in partnership with Ontario County, ongoing site stewardship, and additional land protection work within the Grimes Creek watershed and other areas within the Canandaigua Lake watershed.

"The community rallied around the protection of Grimes Glen," said the Land Trust's Senior Field Representative Betsy Landre. A number of civic organizations made substantial gifts to the campaign, including the Naples Rotary Club, Naples Historical Society, Canandaigua Lake Watershed Council (an intermunicipal organization), Canandaigua Lake Watershed Alliance and the East Side Cottagers Association.

Five Star Bank (formerly Bath National) hosted a chicken barbeque in Naples to benefit the campaign, while photographer Nigel P. Kent of Rochester donated a series of original photographs of the Glen. Three were printed and framed as posters, then raffled off at the barbeque.

These contributions, and many additional gifts from local people and businesses, allowed the Land Trust to match an anonymous challenge grant that completed the fundraising campaign. The wealth of support, which included gifts from people around the state and beyond, seems clear testimony to the lasting impression that the Glen makes upon those who visit.

Protecting Grimes Glen is a goal shared by many in the community of Naples. Naples Historical Society President Beth Flory explained, "The Glen has been important to Naples' life and industry since the first settlers arrived and needed water power for their mills. The discovery in the late 1800s by geologist D.



Five Star Bank representatives present Land Trust staff member Betsy Landre (centered) with a check for the proceeds from a BBQ to help support the campaign to save Grimes Glen.

Dana Luther of an ancient tree fossil gives the Glen lasting geological importance. We're pleased to help the Land Trust with the purchase of Grimes Glen."

Plans to proceed with acquiring the property have been delayed because of an unresolved cleanup issue relating to the existing parking lot at the mouth of the Glen. The Land Trust is working with the owner of the site, Ontario County, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to resolve the issue prior to finalizing the purchase.

While this issue is being resolved, the Land Trust continues its efforts to protect other lands within the Grimes Creek watershed through the use of conservation easements. For additional information on this project, please contact Betsy Landre in the Land Trust's Canandaigua office.

PRESERVE PROFILE

Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve: a 500-acre Gem

My spouse, Beth Cohen, and I are new to the Finger Lakes area, having moved here this past summer. We lived in Buffalo for eight years, and we found a number of nice spots for hiking, birding, and being-out-in-nature, but we had to drive a ways to get to them. So, something we missed while living in Buffalo was good outdoor spots close by. Now, within a very short distance of our Ithaca home are several superb outdoor areas — one of which is the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve.

Well-known to residents in and around Ithaca, the Lindsay-Parsons Preserve has been pieced together by nine separate land transactions over the last ten years. The name chosen for this preserve was the result of an early monetary donation by Elizabeth Parsons Kirchner toward the project, in honor of her parents, Anne Marguerite Victoria Lindsay and Wilbur Fay Parsons. The initial transaction in 1995 was a 36-acre County of Tompkins donation to the Finger Lakes Land Trust. In the subsequent decade, two more land donations and six more purchases of various sizes have brought the preserve to its current size of nearly 500 acres. Most recently, the Land Trust received a conservation easement from Monica Raymond and Todd Smith of a 20-acre parcel abutting the preserve (see story on page 1).

All in all, the ecological diversity of this area is astounding; a vast array of plant and animal species make their homes here. Of help in this regard is the adjacent Danby State Forest, allowing for a larger area of unbroken wilderness. The Cayuga Inlet runs through the Lindsay-Parsons Preserve, providing for very rich, moist soil. In addition, several wetland areas feed the Inlet's tributaries within the tract. About four miles of hiking trails have been built within the preserve, and they take one through gently rolling grassland, thick forest, rich wetlands, and down into ravines. The elevation change can make the hike a vigorous one, especially on very warm or very cold days.

The preserve's rich diversity of habitats attracts a wide variety of birds, making for excellent birdwatching.

In addition to its sheer beauty, the preserve functions as a rare temperate-zone location for research in chemical ecology and bio-prospecting, thanks to the creative vision of Professor Thomas Eisner of Cornell's Institute for Research in Chemical Ecology, who in 1994 approached the Land Trust about such use for the area. What an unusual and wonderful opportunity it is for the Finger Lakes region to have this activity — normally carried out in humid tropical jungles — taking place in our own backyard!

My first foray into the preserve was with Director of Preserve Stewardship Betsy Darlington on a crisp, bright Saturday in January. Having heard that once-native river otter had been found in the preserve, we hoped very much to spot one or more of them, sliding down the frozen snow banks near one of the preserve ponds or ducking in and out of holes they'd cut into the thin ice that covered the ponds. For me, it would have been quite a treat to see these otters. When Beth and I lived in Buffalo, directly across the street from the Buffalo Zoo, the big excitement of 2004 for our "neighbor" was the opening of a river otter



BETSY DARLINGTON

Coleman Lake attracts otters, beavers, mink, osprey, and many other species

exhibit. It was great fun watching the zoo's two otters cavorting with each other in that naturalistic, yet still artificial, setting. And now I might actually get to see an otter in the wild!

We hiked in on the Blue Trail, and after some pleasant walking, the excitement built when we spotted otter tracks on iced-over Coleman Lake, interspersed with long indentations in the snow bank where the otters had slid on their bellies down to the hole in the ice they'd made. We didn't actually see any otters, however, in spite of assistance from Lindsay-Parsons Preserve Steward Geo Kloppel, whom we caught up with on our hike.

This shortcoming, though, didn't spoil the outing at all. The variety of terrain in the preserve is stunning, as are the sometimes sweeping views. The preserve seems to be bordered on the east and west by some of steepest hills I'd ever seen in New York State, at least west of the Adirondacks. But as Betsy pointed out, what I was actually looking at were "glacially oversteepened valley walls." The valley between them that composed the bulk of the preserve was created by glacial advance during the last ice age — the top of the distant walls had been the general elevation of the land prior to the ice's march into central New York. We hiked among other glacial features, including kettle ponds and glacial moraine hills.

I have next to no training at recognizing animal tracks, so I was fortunate to be accompanying Betsy, who identified squirrel, rabbit, deer, fox, and coyote tracks in the snow (substantial amounts of the latter two, much to my excitement). Mink and weasel tracks have also been seen there, Geo told us.

I highly recommend a visit to the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve, one of the true gems of the Land Trust's holdings in central New York!

— George Dillmann

DIRECTIONS TO THE PRESERVE: *From Ithaca, go south on Route 13; take left exit onto Route 34/96; go about 7 miles to the Preserve. Parking lot is about 1/2 mile south of Sylvan Drive and the West Danby Fire Station, and on the left (east side) of road, at top of the hill, opposite house # 2500.*

LEGISLATIVE NEWS – SPRING 2006

IN ALBANY

The Legislative scene in Albany begins each year with the Governor's budget proposals, and at the Land Trust we quickly look to see what the dollar amount will be for the EPF (the Environmental Protection Fund) from which most of the public money for environmental projects in New York derives. Financed by the Real Estate Transfer Tax (RETT), that budget line for the past few years has been \$125 million. Last year it was increased to \$150 million and this year the figure is \$180 million. Since the Chairs of both the Senate Conservation Committee (Republican Carl Marcellino of Long Island) and the Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee (Democrat Tom DiNapoli, also of Long Island) are supporting this, serious opposition is unlikely. The EPF provides funding for Open Space land acquisition and protection and includes \$500,000, jointly administered by New York State and the Land Trust Alliance, which provides grants in support of various land trust programs around the state. Additionally, the EPF funds Clean Water initiatives, Solid Waste/Recycling programs, as well as projects with state and local parks, zoos and botanical gardens.

Environmental awareness seems to be increasing in Albany as evidenced by

the introduction of the EPF Enhancement Act (S.6356) and (A.9283). Sponsored by the two above-mentioned Chairs, it calls for an increase in the EPF budget to \$300 million by 2008. The sole source of money for the EPF, the RETT was created specifically as a dedicated fund to pay for environmental projects after the defeat of the 1990 Environmental Bond Act. If \$300 million seems like a lot of money for land protection and acquisition, it is important to realize that development proceeds apace in every town in New York State, and when the land is gone, it's gone. We still have the opportunity to protect the land and the environment, and if the funding from Albany is there we may accomplish that.

In breaking news, the possibility of tax incentives for donors of conservation easements in New York State looms large. Under current law, when land owners agree to place their land under restrictions of a conservation easement, in most cases they still have to pay full local property taxes, while at the same time forfeiting any financial benefit they might get from their land through sale and development.

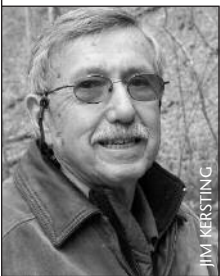
Now, in his Executive Budget, Governor Pataki has proposed an annual, refundable state income tax credit for conservation easement donors, amounting to 25% of their local taxes

paid on that land during the previous tax year. There would be no revenue loss to municipalities or school districts; savings to the landowner would come in the form of a state income tax credit. This is essentially an old proposal put forward by our state legislators, notably Senator Marcellino and Assemblyman DiNapoli, but the bills had little traction without being part of the Executive Budget. Now that the Governor has thrown his support behind the Conservation Easement Tax Credit, its chances for enactment are very good, greatly enhancing the prospects for conservation easements helping to protect our Finger Lakes.

IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

After seemingly interminable delays, the U.S. Senate passed legislation that would grant new tax incentives to donors of land or conservation easements. Also, the House of Representatives passed their version of a tax bill without charitable giving incentives. The House and Senate bills are now at the "conference," or "reconciliation," stage where differences will be hammered out and compromises made. In the end, hopefully, at last some new legislation of great benefit to the Land Trust community and the environment will be enacted.

— Merry Jo Bauer



Donald Raines
at Grimes Glen

IN MEMORIAM: Dr. Donald Raines

We are deeply saddened to announce that Board Member Don Raines passed away last month at the age of 80. A retired physician specializing in otolaryngology, Don has a host of credits and honors to his name. In addition to his commitment to protecting the natural landscapes of the Finger Lakes Region,

Don was an avid bird watcher and enjoyed spending time outdoors. "Don had a contagious enthusiasm for nature," said Land Trust Board President Jim Kersting. "Once, while walking the path at Grimes Glen on a May morning when the red trillium were abundant, Don in his soft-spoken yet passionate manner was so moved by the experience that I could not help but be carried away with him." In addition to his beloved wife of 58 years, Skippy Raines of Naples, Don is survived by five children and 12 grandchildren. We will all miss him.

OUR DEEPEST APPRECIATION FOR GIFTS* IN MEMORY OF DR. DONALD RAINES FROM:

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Robert van der Stricht
Julie Yoho-Williams

*Gifts received as of press time. Gifts received after press time will be listed in the Summer 2006 Land Steward

Scenes

from Our
Protected Lands

BETSY DARLINGTON



Winter landscape at the Goetchius Wetland Preserve

*“...secure for your
children and your
children’s children
some of these scenes
of special natural
beauty which are
still to be found...”*

– Charles Eliot, 1857-1897

MARK WHITMORE



Thanks to the efforts of friends and neighbors on the western shore of Canandaigua Lake, these woods will stay forever wild (see article at top of page 1)

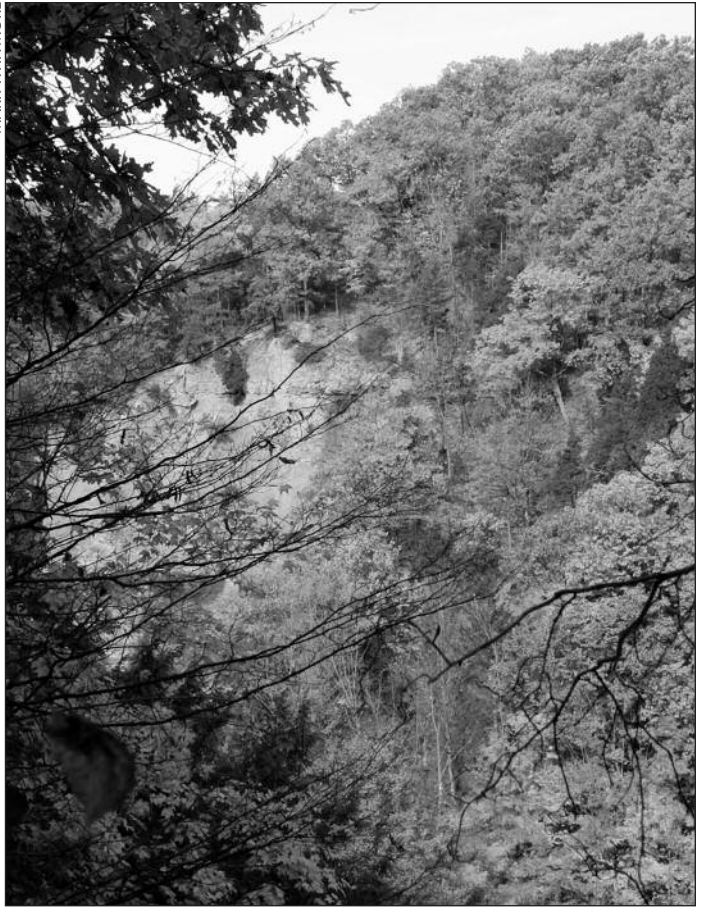
MARK WHITMORE



View of Canandaigua Lake from the Land Trust’s recent conservation easement atop Seneca Point (see article at top of page 1)



Recent easement donor Monica Raymond on her property bordering the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in West Danby (see article at bottom of page 1)



The 64-acre Seneca Point easement borders this magnificent gully, one of the largest on Canandaigua Lake (see article at top of page 1)



Vernal pools, such as the one pictured above at the Stevenson Preserve, are ideal breeding ponds for salamanders and frogs (see article on page 10)

*Our sincere thanks
for gifts in honor of:*

Robert E. and Barbara A. Hopkins

FROM

Roger and Ruth Hopkins

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Ed Marx

FROM

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Quimby

...

Peter and Betty Stahlbrodt

FROM

David and Linda Marsh

*We are deeply grateful
for donations in memory of:*

Jamie Ashmead

FROM

Jim and Sara Kersting

...

Holland Gregg IV

FROM

Douglas Sutherland

THANK YOU!

The Land Trust's work is made possible through the efforts of over 1600 members and supporters from over 30 states across the country. Your commitment to this region and the natural world has enabled us to conserve more than 8,000 acres of rolling hills, pristine forests, deep ravines, and productive farmland in the Finger Lakes region.

THANK YOU to all of our members and supporters and, in particular, those who gave leadership gifts in 2005.

Land & Conservation Easement Donors

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DONOR PROFILE

Donor Plans for the Future

Doug Beech, the planned giving officer for the Kansas 4-H Foundation, explained on the telephone recently that a planned gift — at least from the donor's perspective — should be thought of as a stop-and-think gift. "Whether it's \$10 or \$1 million, good planned giving should always involve good gift planning," said Beech.

And Beech should know; he's been planning gifts for the past 12 years. He went on to say, "A charitable bequest requires that a donor be pro-active and deal with issues such as retirement planning, estate planning, wills, trusts, beneficiary designations, etc."

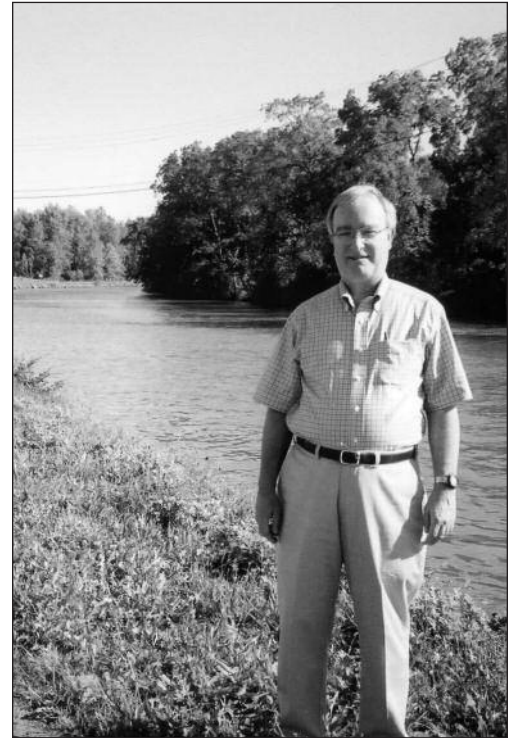
Beech recently included the Land Trust in his own estate plans, and he pointed out some of the benefits of doing so. "For people who want to include charity in their estate, there can be some significant tax savings for their heirs if the charitable bequest is funded through tax deferred retirement plans such as traditional IRA's, 401 (k) and 403 (b) plans or US savings bonds." In addition, "It is also making a profound statement to your heirs and those who knew you."

With all the worthy causes to give to, Beech said his reasons for choosing the Land Trust as a beneficiary had a lot to do with his connections to the region as a younger man.

"I'm originally from this region and went to college here. The incredible beauty of the Finger Lakes region has always touched me. It gives me tremendous satisfaction knowing that after I'm gone, I will continue supporting the important work of the Land Trust."

A relatively new member to the Finger Lakes Land Trust, Beech discovered the organization after reading about us in the Fall 2004 issue of the magazine, *Life in the Finger Lakes*. A graduate of Cornell with a master's degree in Agricultural Economics, Beech has lived in Kansas for the past 27 years.

—Abbey Chernela



Planned gift donor Douglas Beech

Neighbors Band Together to Protect Land Near Canandaigua Lake

continued from cover

"There are able hands in the group who are committed to it," said Myers. "There are hikers and picnickers and hunters, and so the use of the land will be carried on the way it was before."

"From our own personal experience, we knew what could happen if we didn't act," said George Hamlin, president of the conservation club and President and Chief Executive Officer of The Canandaigua National Bank and Trust Company, referring to development pressures in the area. "We wanted to protect part of what made Seneca Point so special."

After Myers approached Hamlin with the vision of buying the land in her father's estate for conservation purposes, Hamlin and Steve Swartout, secretary and treasurer of the club, became instrumental in carrying the project forward with the creation of a limited liability corporation and the enrollment of neighbors.

The land, which has been in Myers family since 1866, includes a pond and a

barebones cabin with a fireplace but no running water. The property also borders one of the largest gullies entering the lake. Morse cultivated apples and pears on the land and 200 more acres on Seneca Point. His great-great grandfather built the family home there in 1870, where Mr. Morse lived and died at the age of 93.

Morse's many interests included orchard keeper, writer, historian and fisherman. He also served many posts as a South Bristol town official. A graduate of Cornell University, Morse was regarded by all as "a true gentleman."

Now, memories of Morse as a fixture on Seneca Point can continue by preserving the land he loved. The Morse Conservation Club conservation easement is the Land Trust's 53rd and its seventh in Ontario County.

"The way the friends and neighbors banded together to preserve this land is wonderful," said Andrew Zepp, executive director of the Land Trust. "We all too



BETSY LANDRE

Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp congratulates Conservation Club President George Hamlin

often hear of neighbors lamenting the loss of cherished landscape. This project serves as a wonderful precedent that we hope will be replicated elsewhere in the region."

—Krishna Ramanujan

A CLOSER LOOK

The Elusive Spotted Salamander

The spotted salamander, *Ambystoma maculatum*, is a secretive denizen of eastern U. S. and southern Canadian woodlands. Although its looks are arresting — two rows of bright yellow spots on a dark body as long as your hand — it is all but invisible most of the year. Like all so-called “mole salamanders,” spotted salamanders spend most of their time underground in burrows that they find or dig themselves.

However, for a very short window of time in the spring, this reclusive animal comes out of hiding. Small depressions in the ground, dry or covered with snow for most of the year, fill with spring rains and form vernal pools. These ephemeral wetlands can't support hungry fish, so they are perfect breeding ponds for species like mole salamanders, wood frogs and fairy shrimp.

Responding to some signal — perhaps the temperature, or the flooding of their burrows, or even the sound of raindrops on the surface — on the first warm nights of spring, the spotted salamanders start to emerge and begin a synchronized migration toward the vernal pools of their birth, sometimes passing by perfectly good breeding ponds on the way. How do they know where to go? Scientists can't say for certain, but Kraig Adler, Cornell Professor of Biology, offers a guess: “They probably use odors and the Earth's magnetic field to orient, as do newts.”

The salamanders stay at their natal pools only long enough to mate and lay their eggs before returning home. The larvae remain in the ponds for several months, feeding on tiny invertebrates, until they trade their gills for lungs and grow legs that allow them to follow their parents on land. By this time, the vernal pools have dried up, reverting back to unobtrusive hollows in the forest floor. It may take more than five years before a juve-

nile reaches sexual maturity, but spotted salamanders can live more than thirty years.

The population of spotted salamanders in Tompkins County is healthy, thanks to good conservation practices. However, in other parts of the state, their status is precarious enough that they are listed as a “Special Concern Species” by the New York State

Department of Environmental Conservation. One threat that these animals face is the destruction of their breeding ponds. Since vernal pools are shallow and dry most of the year, they are often filled in or built over by homeowners and developers.

Another problem is water pollution, to which salamanders are exquisitely sensitive. Heavy metals and pesticides are deadly, but acid rain and snow are bigger threats in the northeast. Salamander eggs and larvae either die or develop abnormally if the pH of their ponds is too low. The Adirondacks in particular have been deeply affected by pollution: some lakes and ponds there have become so acidic that they

cannot support normal aquatic ecosystems.

Perhaps the most obvious, and in some ways the most easily addressed, threat to salamanders is automobile traffic. A heavily used road that cuts across a migration path can decimate a salamander population, and the amphibians are small enough to escape the notice of all but the most eagle-eyed motorist. Since neither human roads nor salamander migrations can be easily re-routed, one way to prevent a conflict of interests is to build road underpasses (sometimes called “toad tunnels”) or modify already existing culverts. The Cornell Plantations took the latter approach, building an animal directional fence that shepherds migrating amphibians into a culvert beneath Ringwood Road in Ithaca. Nancy Ostman, the Plantations Natural Areas Program Director, reports that although the toad tunnel has been quite successful, “there are still a cluster of deaths off of the end of the fence. Some animals will go the wrong way even if it is out of the way.” The Plantations also manages ponds near the Cornell golf course that are used by breeding amphibians. Because debris from road and golf course maintenance tends to collect in these ponds, the Plantations staff regularly dredges their perimeters, thereby ensuring that the water is deep enough for the amphibians to breed and the young to survive.

This spring, look — and drive! — carefully, and if you're lucky, you might catch a glimpse of the slow, inexorable vernal march of the spotted salamander.

— Jacqueline Stuhmiller



Spotted Salamander crossing the centerline of a highway in the Adirondacks

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Eben McLane
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Newsletter Layout:

West Hill Graphics, Inc.

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Legal Counsel: Elizabeth Bixler; Susan Brock; Dan Hoffman; Randy Marcus, Miller Mayer, LLP; Peter Miller; Richard Ruswick
Forestry Consultant: Michael DeMunn
Founding President: A. Carl Leopold

Western Lakes Chapter:

Jim Kersting, *Chair* 585-367-2301

Eastern Lakes Chapter:

Kris Scholl, *Chair* 315-497-3066

Keuka Chapter:

Debbie Koop, *Contact* 315-595-2523

Finger Lakes Land Trust

202 E. Court Street
Ithaca, New York 14850
Ph: 607-275-9487 • Fax: 607-275-0037
email: info@fllt.org • www.fllt.org

Western Lakes Office

120 North Main Street, Suite 40
Canandaigua, NY 14424
Ph: 585-394-4189

Finger Lakes Land Trust

202 E. Court Street
Ithaca, New York 14850



SPRING 2006 CALENDAR

Saturday, April 22, 10:00 am: Spring Cleaning at Carpenter's Falls on Skaneateles Lake. (See insert for details.)

Sunday, April 23, 1:00 pm: Garlic Mustard Pull at the High Vista Preserve on Skaneateles Lake. (See insert for details.)

Saturday, April 29, 11:30 am: Annual Meeting. Please join us for the Land Trust's 17th Annual Meeting at the Skaneateles Country Club on West Lake Street at the shores of beautiful Skaneateles Lake. (See insert for details and reservation form.)

Sunday, May 7, 1:30 pm: Garlic Mustard Pull at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in West Danby. Co-sponsored by the Finger Lakes Native Plant Society.

Saturday, May 13, 10:00 am: Garlic Mustard Pull at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in West Danby. Co-sponsored by the Finger Lakes Native Plant Society.

PLEASE SEE ENCLOSED INSERT FOR DETAILS ON OUR 2006 TALKS AND TREKS SERIES!!

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

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