



# The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes region

Vol. 28, No. 2 • Spring 2016

## At the 11th Hour, Land Trust Acquires Otisco Shoreline Property

*In January 2016, the Land Trust purchased its first property on Otisco Lake.*

Remarkably, the acquisition protects nearly a quarter-mile of shoreline, even as extreme scarcity and high prices nowadays almost always put lakefront acquisitions beyond the reach of preservation. And the story of the purchase—from a personal connection to a nearly lost opportunity to a second chance and ultimately to a climactic resolution—is as unusual and dramatic as the parcel itself.

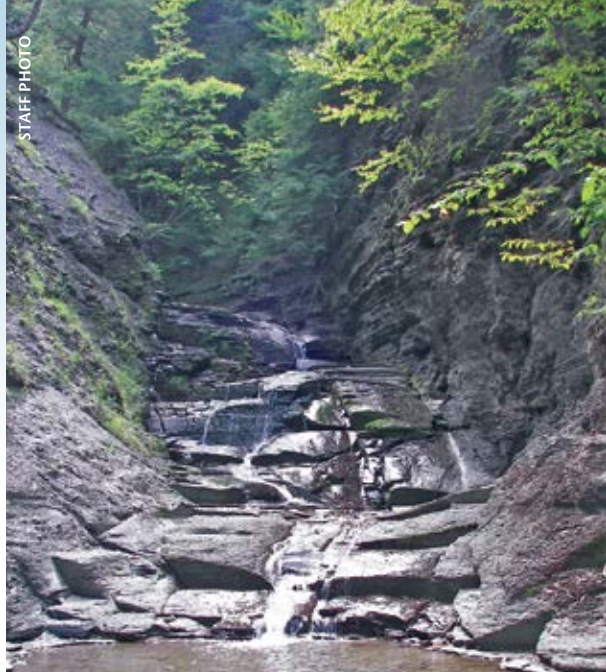
Otisco Lake, the easternmost of the Finger Lakes, lies within Onondaga County and serves as the source of drinking water for thousands of county residents. Descending steeply from Willowdale Road, the property comprises nearly 40 acres of mixed hardwood forest, including both early-successional woods and extensive mature stands, plus 1300 feet of shoreline, including a small gravel point. From this point, gently arcing coves extend both north and south, with views practically to both ends of the lake. The interface of woods and water provides ideal nesting and foraging habitat for Bald Eagles and Osprey.

The property had been up for sale since the beginning of 2015, but at an asking price prohibitive for the Land Trust. Then at the end of the summer, longtime Land Trust volunteer Rose Ann Gay, who serves with her husband Ron as land steward of the new Hinchcliff Family Preserve on Skaneateles Lake, renewed a long-dormant acquaintance with Jean Stopyro, the daughter of the seller. Gay learned not only that the property was still up for sale, but also that the family hoped to find a buyer who shared their commitment to land stewardship. Right at the opening of the next work week, Gay called the Land Trust, reminded staff of the listing, and briefed them on the family's conservation values.

Regrettably but unsurprisingly, the price was still prohibitive. But then, in mid-October, the price dropped. Suddenly it was within a range much more realistic for the Land Trust to make a bid. With Gay's help, the Land Trust communicated its serious interest to the Stopyro family. But alas, another bidder immediately pounced and met the asking price. That bid was accepted.

Still, there remained a brief period in which either buyer or seller could back out of that deal without penalty. Therefore the Land Trust's opportunity had not completely closed.

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STAFF PHOTO

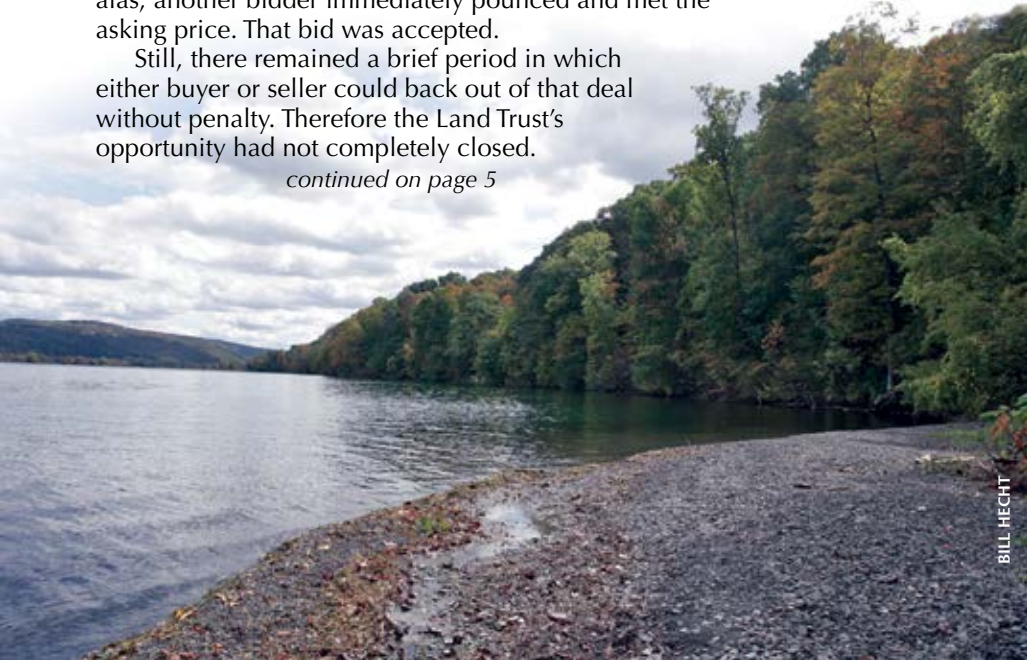
## Conklin Gully Protected After Seven-Year Effort

*Patience and persistence paid off recently when the Land Trust signed a deed conveying the northern half of Conklin Gully to New York State as an addition to the adjacent High Tor Wildlife Management Area.*

This transfer wrapped up a seven-year effort that began when the Land Trust learned 71 acres—including this portion of the gorge—were listed for sale. At the time, the property's owners were considering an offer from potential buyers who intended to subdivide this pristine property.

Conklin Gully is known to many residents of the western Finger Lakes as one of the region's premiere gorge walks—a perfect hike on a hot, summer day when you don't mind getting your feet wet. The gorge is impressive, flanked

*continued on page 2*



BILL HECHT

Everyone at the Land Trust celebrates when we announce the completion of a land protection project. Every issue of *The Land Steward* brings cause for further celebration, with another piece of our wonderful landscape protected forever.

But closing a land acquisition or conservation easement project is only the beginning of a long process that results in permanent conservation of land. Deeds and easements are mere pieces of paper without a strong institution backing up a conservation commitment.

As we add to the portfolio of land under our stewardship, it is critical that we're able to ensure proper care for these parcels. Managing 36 nature preserves and monitoring more than 120 conservation easements is a significant responsibility—and one that grows with each newly completed project.

With such concerns in mind, we celebrate our recent accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. What does this mean? The commission has completed a rigorous review of our policies, procedures, and practices, many of which relate to the long-term sustainability of our organization and the conservation projects we undertake.

The process involved a complete assessment of the organization based on Land Trust Standards & Practices—institutional benchmarks developed by the Land Trust Alliance—the national organization of land trusts. More information on this process can be found at [www.landtrustaccreditation.org](http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org).

Informed by best practices from across the country, we took steps to ensure the permanence of our work. In general, the process affirmed the effectiveness of our practices to date. But the review also enabled us to strengthen several policies and procedures and troubleshoot against problems before they occur.



All in all, it was a great deal of work, but well worth it. The Land Trust is here for the long haul and accreditation helps us ensure we're on the right track.

Andrew Zepp,  
Executive Director, Finger Lakes Land Trust

## Conklin Gully Protected After Seven-Year Effort *continued from cover*

by towering bluffs of shale and mature hardwood, hemlock, and pine forest. A spur trail connects the gully to the Bristol Hills Branch of the Finger Lakes Trail, allowing hikers to extend their visit and further explore several thousand acres of adjacent public land.

When the property first came on the market, representatives of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation expressed interest in acquiring the land but funding was not available. Thanks to a generous bequest from the late Albert B. Craig, Jr. of the Rochester area, the Land Trust was able to move quickly to negotiate the purchase.

Since the property was acquired by the Land Trust in April 2009, not much has changed out at Conklin Gully. Hikers continue to enjoy the area and wildlife, including ravens and black bears, continue to wander through this wild corner of our region.

Fortunately, state funding for conservation has been increasing recently and public funds were made available to

purchase the property from the Land Trust. Proceeds from the sale will be rolled over into the Land Trust's Forever Fund, a special land protection account that allows the organization to move quickly to acquire at-risk properties when they appear on the market.

In fact, the Land Trust is negotiating the acquisition of another nearby stretch of forest to add to High Tor Wildlife Management Area. The organization has already completed one similar transaction along West River and it holds another parcel on State Route 245 awaiting imminent transfer to the state.

In addition to these cooperative acquisitions with the state, the Land Trust has also created two nature preserves (named Great Hill and West River) adjacent to High Tor and holds several conservation easements. In total, the Land Trust has protected a dozen land parcels in this area, and hope remains for more good news during the coming year.

# Land Trust Earns Accreditation Status

*The Land Trust has achieved accreditation—a mark of honor in land conservation. The Land Trust Accreditation Commission awarded accreditation, signifying its confidence that Finger Lakes Land Trust lands will be protected forever.*

The Finger Lakes Land Trust is among 37 land trusts across the United States to achieve accreditation or to have accreditation renewed in February. The Finger Lakes Land Trust joins the 342 land trusts that demonstrate their commitment to professional excellence, helping to maintain the public's trust in their work.

"We appreciate this recognition," said Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "Through this process we completed a comprehensive review of our organization's programs, procedures, and activities. It helped us strengthen the Land Trust and ensure its long-term sustainability."

Each accredited land trust meets extensive documentation requirements and undergoes a comprehensive review as part of its accreditation application. The process is rigorous and strengthens land trusts with systems that help landowners and communities achieve their goals.

"It is exciting to recognize the Finger Lakes Land Trust with this distinction," said Tamara Van Ryn, Executive Director of the Commission. "Together, accredited land trusts stand united behind strong national standards ensuring the places people love will be conserved forever. In all, over 75 percent of private lands conserved by land trusts are now held by an accredited land trust."

## About the Land Trust Accreditation Commission

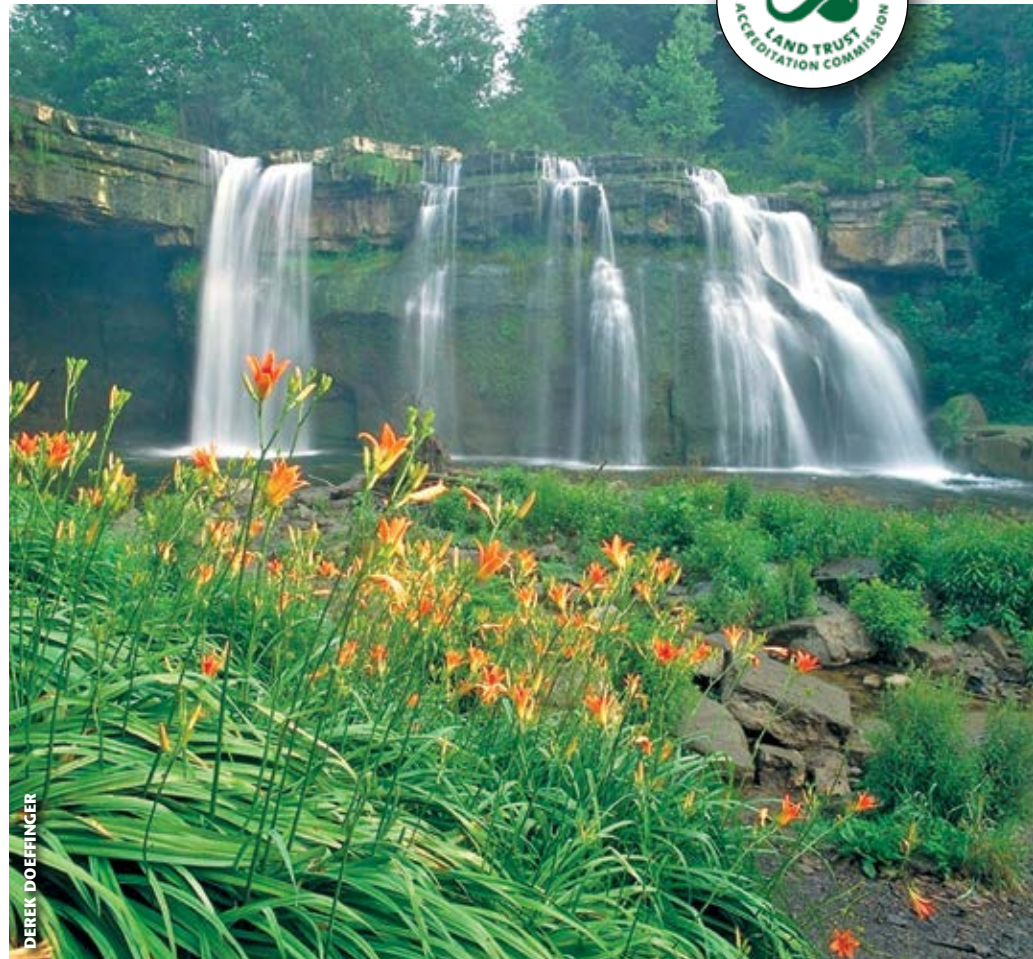
The Land Trust Accreditation Commission inspires excellence, promotes public trust and ensures permanence in the conservation of open lands by recognizing organizations that meet rigorous quality standards and strive for continuous improvement. The

Commission, established in 2006 as an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, is governed by a volunteer board of diverse land conservation and nonprofit management experts. For more, visit <http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org>.

## About the Land Trust Alliance

Founded in 1982, the Land Trust Alliance is a national land conservation organization that works to save the places people love by strengthening land conservation across America. The Alliance represents more than 1,100 member land trusts supported by more

than 100,000 volunteers and 5 million members nationwide. The Alliance is based in Washington, D.C. and operates several regional offices. More information about the Alliance is available at <http://www.landtrustalliance.org>.



DEREK DOEFINGER

# Land Conservation Workshops Planned

*Congress recently passed a \$1.1 trillion tax and spending bill that will make permanent an enhanced tax incentive for donations of conservation easements. Under this legislation, landowners who donate a conservation easement can claim a federal income tax deduction—an incentive that has increased the pace of land conservation by about 33% across the United States, exceeding one million acres per year.*

The Finger Lakes Land Trust was among the 1,100 land trusts to support the incentive through a collaborative, multi-year campaign headed by the Land Trust Alliance, the national land conservation organization that led the campaign for permanence.

Here in New York, easement donors may also benefit from the State's Conservation Easement Property Tax Credit, which provides reimbursement of 25% of school, town, and county taxes paid on land upon which a conservation easement was donated.

Staff members from the Land Trust will be participating in a series of free public workshops to introduce various options available to landowners interested in conserving their land and water.

## **Wednesday, May 11th from 7:00 pm–9:00 pm**

### ***Conservation Tools for Private Landowners***

*BorgWarner Room, Tompkins County Public Library, 101 E. Green St., Ithaca, NY*

Hosted by the Finger Lakes Land Trust and the Tompkins County Planning Department

## **Monday, May 16th from 6:00 pm–8:00 pm**

### ***Love Your Land? Learn about Land Protection***

*Human Services Complex Room 120, 323 Owego Street, Montour Falls, NY*

Hosted by the Finger Lakes Land Trust, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Schuyler County Planning Department, and the Upper Susquehanna Coalition

## **Monday, May 16th from 4:00 pm–5:00 pm**

### ***Land Conservation in the Montezuma Wildlife Complex***

*Montezuma Wildlife Refuge Center, 3395 Auburn Rd, Seneca Falls, NY*

Hosted by the Finger Lakes Land Trust and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation in cooperation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service

## **Monday, June 6th from 10:00 am–1:00 pm**

### ***Your Land, Your Conservation Opportunities***

*Glen Haven Historical Society, 7325 Fair Haven Road, Homer, NY*

Hosted by the Finger Lakes Land Trust, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondaga County, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service

## **Wednesday, June 8th from 6:00 pm–8:00 pm**

### ***Love Your Land? Learn about Land Protection***

*Naples Town Hall, 106 S Main St, Naples, NY*

Hosted by the Finger Lakes Land Trust and the Canandaigua Lake Watershed Association

*For more information, contact the Land Trust at (607) 275-9487 or [info@fllt.org](mailto:info@fllt.org)*



## Our appreciation for gifts in honor of...

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FROM  
Allan Chambliss

**Burch and Louise Craig**  
FROM  
Erik Lundback

**Gregory Craig**  
FROM  
Louise and Burch Craig

**Dick and Betsy Darlington**  
FROM  
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**The Bennett Family**  
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**Gary and Melanie Popick**  
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Dan Popick

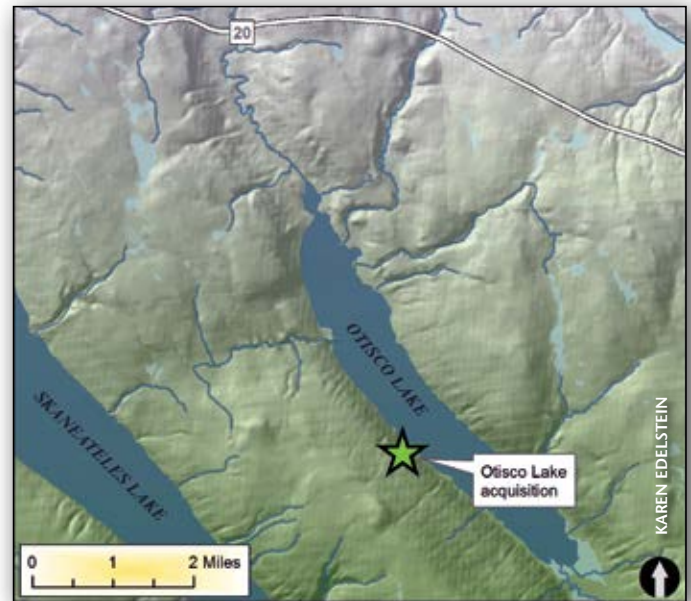
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FROM  
Paula Grant

**Mildred Sherwood**  
FROM  
Jan Bridgeford-Smith

**Matthew and Amy Widmer**  
FROM  
Susan Robinson

**Mark Zimmerman**  
FROM  
Jonathan Pragle

## Land Trust Acquires Otisco Shoreline Property *continued from cover*



The Land Trust's Director of Land Protection, Zachary Odell, secured a commitment from the Stopyro family to entertain a competing offer from the Land Trust.

Meanwhile, the Land Trust's Executive Director, Andrew Zepp, had to work fast and creatively to put the financial bid together. The Land Trust had previously been approached by a generous anonymous donor, who expressed readiness to buy a suitable property should one ever become available. On a Saturday in early November, Zepp cancelled his participation in another planned meeting to meet with this donor, who approved the use of the pledged funds for the Stopyro property. Then Zepp convened an emergency conference call that same afternoon with the Land Trust's Board of Directors, who registered their approval. When business reopened on Monday, the Land Trust placed its bid, barely within the final deadline before the original purchase would become final. The bid was immediately accepted.

The Land Trust has launched a \$400,000 campaign not only to buy this property but ultimately to open it as a public preserve. Funds will enable the Land Trust to build a parking area, create improved trail access down to the shore, and carry out other major maintenance work, including breakdown and removal of a wooden structure on the shore. The campaign will also add funds to the Land Trust's central Stewardship Fund to ensure the preserve's upkeep in the long term. Thanks to the initial gift of the anonymous donor, the campaign is already more than halfway toward its goal. To learn more or to donate, contact Kelly Makosch, Director of Development and Communications, at [kellymakosch@llt.org](mailto:kellymakosch@llt.org). —Mark Chao

*The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Carolyn Fame and Attorney Donald Snyder of the law firm Harter Secrest & Emery LLP in Rochester for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.*

## Our deepest gratitude for thoughtful gifts in memory of...

**Donald C. Ayling, Sr.**  
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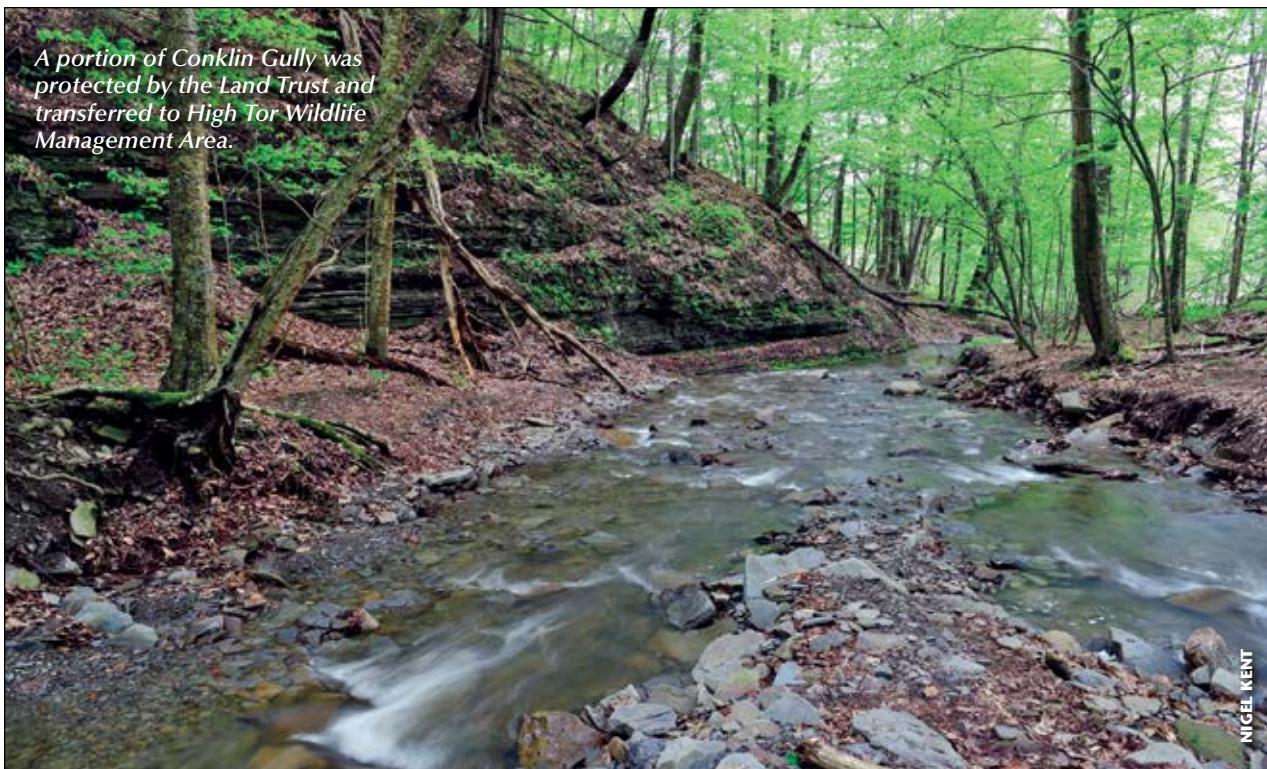
**Abby Stone**  
FROM  
Barbara Heil  
Aaron Kroh  
Sherry Murphy



# SCENES

from Around Our Region...

*Six Mile Creek cascading through the Roy H. Park Preserve*



*A portion of Conklin Gully was protected by the Land Trust and transferred to High Tor Wildlife Management Area.*

NICEL KENT

TOM REIMERS



*Land Trust members Don Wilson, Peter Marks and Myra Shulman at the Logan Hill Nature Preserve*



*Local residents Ben Farr and his dad volunteered their time on Christmas Day 2015 to replace the roof of the kiosk Ben built for his Eagle Scout project, years ago, at the Ellis Hollow Nature Preserve.*



*One of a number of beavers that reside at the Roy H. Park Preserve in Dryden, Tompkins County.*

# thank you

You helped make a difference this year! Thanks to the contributions of over 2,300 members, donors and volunteers, the Land Trust now protects over 18,000 acres—ensuring scenic vistas, local foods, clean water and wild places for everyone.

We are very grateful for gifts of all sizes and promise to use them wisely to protect more land and water. In particular, we wish to acknowledge everyone who generously gave \$100 or more in 2015.\* Please accept our heartiest thanks!

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# A CLOSER LOOK

## Behold the Lowly Land Snail

*When strolling through the forest, your attention might be drawn to bird songs in the canopy, whiffs of fragrant wildflowers, and the sight of animal tracks. What happens if we spend time looking for the less obvious animals, some of which might exist right under our hiking boots? Let's peer into the leaf litter to look.*

Slow down, observe carefully, and you'll be rewarded with a glimpse into the secret world of land snails.

Snails carry an unjustly poor reputation due to the invasive snails that damage crops and frustrate gardeners. Invasive snails arrived here accidentally from other countries. But did you know that there are around 115 species of land snails in New York State alone, and around 1,000 species in North America, and the vast majority are native and actually beneficial to the ecosystem?

Unlike invasive snails that ruin our prized plants, native land snails occupy an important position in the food web: near the bottom. Native land snails' diets consist of fungi and decaying vegetation, hence they serve as cleanup crews of the ecosystem. Gleaning calcium and other vital nutrients from decomposing matter, they in turn become an important food for so many animals, including many species of insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals.

Land snails are mollusks, a group that includes snails of the sea, clams, octopus, and squid. Land snails breathe air; their distant marine and freshwater snail cousins breathe through gills. Well adapted to life on land, snails have a protective shell and mucus secreted by their skin. Mucus, or slime, as it's often called, helps maintain adequate fluids in the snail's body. Land snails live in damp places—in leaf litter, under old logs, and in the top layer of soil—perfectly moist microhabitats.

Most land snail species in our area are tiny, measuring no more than 5 millimeters (one-fifth of an inch) at the greatest width of the shell. In fact, many species are *extremely* tiny, measuring just 1 or 2 millimeters, or about the size of a pinhead! For this reason, many people don't realize that there's a world of teeny animals underfoot.

Land snails are generally hermaphroditic, that is, they possess both male and female reproductive organs. When they mate, snails fertilize each other's eggs with sperm, and then each lays a clutch of eggs. Our native snails lay between three and 50 eggs per clutch.

Snail embryos develop within the eggs over a few weeks. When they hatch, the shell has one single whorl,

and as the young snail grows, the shell grows with it, in spiral form around a central point. Snails can't leave their shells, just as we can't leave our fingernails.

Did you know that slugs are snails too, only minus the shell? Slugs evolved adaptations for survival without a shell, such as producing thicker, gooier mucus than snails do, maintaining moisture and repelling predators.

And within snails' and slugs' bodies are systems not unlike our own. They have a digestive tract, kidney, lung, and a two-chambered heart. Find a translucent-shelled snail and you can even see its heart beating through the shell. Even those teeny, pinhead sized snails have a beating heart... a very teeny heart, of course.

Two sets of tentacles on the snail's head help them to find their way, food, and each other. The longer, upper pair are equipped with three different senses: vision, olfactory, and touch. The lower pair are for olfactory and touch.

Within the snail's mouth is a chitinous, ribbon-like structure called a radula.

Lined with thousands of tiny teeth arranged neatly in rows and columns, the radula acts as a file, to rasp the food of the snail.

Despite fabulous adaptations to land, snails are among the most sensitive animals to pollutants, including road runoff and acidic

rainfall. Land snail populations have dwindled in recent decades, in turn contributing to the decline of certain bird species. When we think of animal and ecosystem conservation, we should include land snails.

The next time you walk through the woods, take the time to slow down, sift through the leaf litter, and find some snails to appreciate. Even when you can't see them, you'll know there are thousands of tiny hearts beating throughout the forest.

—Marla Coppolino



### Join us for a Snail Walk!

Explore the fascinating world of land snails and slugs with Marla Coppolino on Saturday, July 30 at 10:00am at the Ellis Hollow Nature Preserve.

More information and directions can be found at [www.fllt.org/events](http://www.fllt.org/events).

# Finger Lakes Land Trust

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## Spring 2016 Calendar



*Mist along Canandaigua Lake*

NIGEL KENT

**Saturday, June 11th at 10:00 am: *The Land Trust's Annual Meeting and Celebration***  
at Indian Creek Farm, 1408 Trumansburg Road in Ithaca. This event will be followed by optional farm tours. *Please see insert for details.*

**PLEASE SEE INSERTS FOR OUR SCHEDULE OF 2016 SPRING AND SUMMER TALKS & TREKS SERIES.**

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

Except in the event of extreme weather, walks go rain, sun or snow. Please check our web site for updates at [www.fllt.org/events](http://www.fllt.org/events) or call the Land Trust at (607) 275-9487 for details.

