



# The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST



## Land Trust Completes Largest Conservation Project in Its 35-Year History

CHRIS RAY

*With the purchase of nearly 1,000 acres featuring one mile of frontage along the Canisteo River, the Land Trust has completed the largest conservation project in its 35-year history.*

**T**he 992-acre property is located in the towns of Erwin and Lindley, Steuben County, just southwest of Corning.

Containing forested hillsides, multiple streams, small meadows, and miles of existing trails, the land lies within a Habitat Linkage Zone identified by the New York Natural Heritage Program and is home to black bears and Bald Eagles. Visible from Interstate 99, the property has an elevation of 1,520 feet at its highest point.

Protection of this property will expand outdoor recreation opportunities, safeguard wildlife habitat, and enhance water quality in the Canisteo River and further downstream. The Canisteo is a tributary to the Tioga River in the Susquehanna River basin of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

The property acquired the name "Bad Bear Hill" many years ago when the previous landowner was planting trees  
*continued on page 2*



*Niraj Lama and Mary Boland care deeply about the Finger Lakes and the future of our planet. As the owners of Happy Earth Tea, they are committed to bringing ethically sourced and organic teas and herbal blends from around the world to their store in Rochester, NY.*

**I**n addition to providing direct financial support for the Land Trust, Happy Earth Tea is one of a growing number of businesses that contribute a percentage of their annual sales to support the Land Trust’s conservation efforts through the 1% for the Planet initiative—an association of businesses that donate 1% of every sale to environmental organizations.

Niraj and Mary use their business to spread the word about the Land Trust and raise awareness among their customers. Happy Earth Tea recently hosted an event at their storefront in Rochester’s South Wedge neighborhood to introduce the Land Trust and provide an opportunity for customers to learn more about conservation challenges and opportunities in our region.

The cost of conservation is increasing as land values escalate and the Land Trust’s stewardship responsibilities grow. Through efforts like 1% for the Planet, and direct giving to the Land Trust, we can increase the funding needed to ensure the future of our lands and waters.

Thanks to Happy Earth Tea and our growing network of business supporters, the Land Trust is also growing to meet the challenge of ensuring the future



PHOTOSYNTHESIS PRODUCTIONS

*Niraj Lama, co-owner of Happy Earth Tea in Rochester, a business that supports the Land Trust through 1% for the Planet.*

of our Finger Lakes and the landscapes that make it such a special place.



Andrew Zepp, President



## Land Trust Completes Largest Conservation Project in Its 35-Year History *continued from cover*

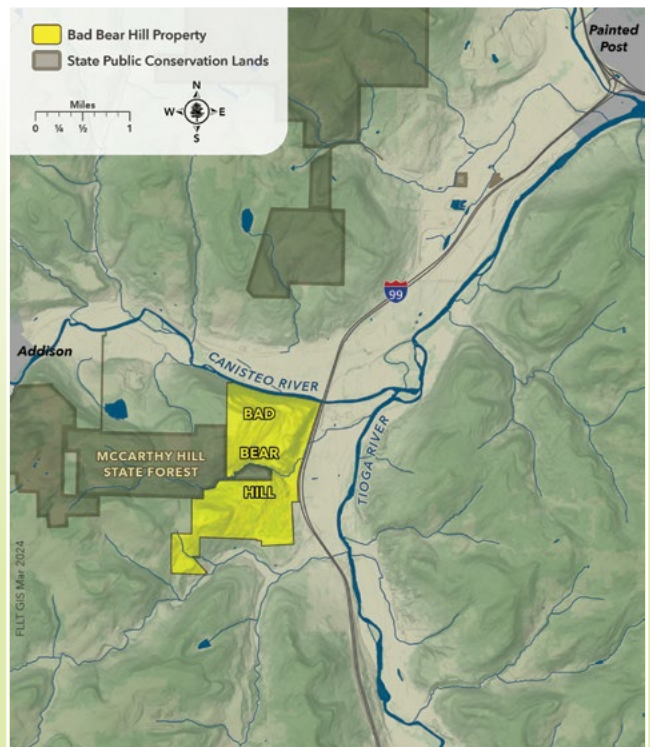
for reforestation. Plastic tree protectors were placed around the young trees to guard against depredation by the deer population. Unfortunately, curious bears found that the tree tubes were great chew toys, and pieces were found scattered throughout the forest.

The Land Trust intends to convey Bad Bear Hill to New York State as an addition to the adjacent McCarthy Hill State Forest which will more than double in size. After developing an interim management plan, the Land Trust will open the property to the public for daytime use some time during the next few months.

The purchase was made possible by the Land Trust’s Opportunity Fund, an internal revolving loan fund that is utilized for time-sensitive acquisitions, and replenished either through fundraising or the sale of land to a public conservation agency.

“This was truly an exceptional opportunity,” said FLLT President Andrew Zepp. “Our projects regularly involve working with multiple landowners to conserve the landscapes of the Finger Lakes and Southern Tier. This single acquisition is large enough to provide an immediate positive impact for multiple wildlife species while also providing local residents with room to roam.”

*The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Jim Miller of the law firm Miller Mayer, LLP in Ithaca, NY, for providing pro bono services in support of this project.*





# Land Trust Completes Tenth Acquisition at Canandaigua Lake's Bare Hill



NIGEL P. KENT

*During its 35-year history, the Land Trust has forged strong partnerships with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), as well as other state agencies, to secure public drinking water supplies, sequester carbon, and meet growing demands for outdoor recreation opportunities.*

**W**ith these quality-of-life factors in mind, both organizations work cooperatively to acquire land parcels that are ultimately added to state forests, wildlife management areas, and other public land holdings.

In February, the Land Trust purchased 63 acres on the western slope of Bare Hill, a scenic landmark that rises over 800 feet above the eastern shore of Canandaigua Lake. The site is well known in the region for its cultural significance to the Seneca (Onödowá'ga') who regard Bare Hill as central to their origin story.

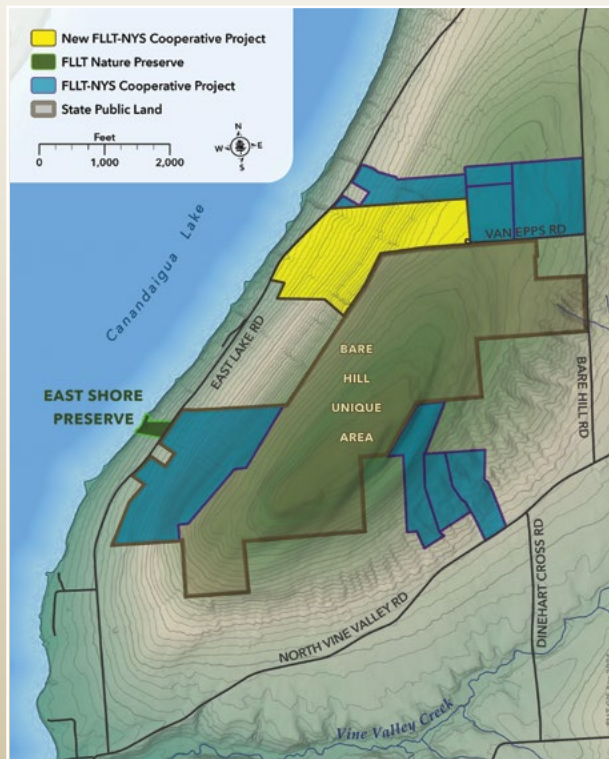
Located in the town of Middlesex, Yates County, the newly acquired property represents the Land Trust's tenth land acquisition at Bare Hill. The organization intends to transfer the parcel to the DEC as an addition to the adjacent Bare Hill Unique Area. Through this partnership, the Land Trust has protected a total of 322 acres at the site, beginning with its first 95-acre acquisition in 2007.

The addition of this undeveloped land to Bare Hill Unique Area will enhance wildlife habitat protection, help safeguard water quality in Canandaigua Lake,

and increase public access to recreational opportunities such as hiking and bird watching. Natural features on Bare Hill include mature oak-hickory forest as well as hilltop meadows that host a multi-use trail. Conservation of the site's steep slopes helps to ensure Canandaigua Lake's water quality by preventing erosion and runoff.

Funding for the project came from the FLLT's Opportunity Fund, an internal revolving loan fund that is available for time-sensitive acquisitions such as this project. The fund is then replenished either through fundraising, or, as in this case, the sale of the property to the DEC.

Elsewhere in the Canandaigua Lake watershed, the Land Trust owns and manages the Canandaigua Vista, West River, and Great Hill (Nundawao) Preserves. The organization has worked in partnership with Ontario County to create Grimes Glen County Park, with the Town of South Bristol to create Carolabarb Park, and with DEC to enhance the protection of Conklin Gully and High Tor Wildlife Management Area.





## \$4.5 Million in State Grant Funding Awarded for Water Protection Efforts

*The Land Trust was recently awarded \$4.5 million in state grant funding through New York State's Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP).*

**T**he WQIP program funds projects that directly address documented water quality impairments or protect a drinking water source.

\$4,464,000 was awarded for conservation projects within the Skaneateles, Owasco, Seneca, and Keuka Lake watersheds. A grant of \$1,384,000 will be used to support the acquisition and restoration of lands bordering Shotwell Brook, a significant tributary of Skaneateles Lake. Shotwell Brook enters the lake near the intake for the city of Syracuse's drinking water supply.

The Land Trust also received a grant of \$1,240,000 to support projects within the Owasco Lake watershed and \$1,840,000 for projects within the Keuka and Seneca Lake watersheds.

Projects supported by previous WQIP grants include the creation of the Otisco Shores Conservation Area on the eastern shore of Otisco Lake; the acquisition of pristine undeveloped shoreline on the eastern shore of Skaneateles Lake; and perpetual conservation easements on land bordering Six Mile Creek—the source of Ithaca's drinking water supply.

"The WQIP program continues to be an important source of funding for the health of our lakes," said Land Trust Director of Conservation Max Heitner. "We're happy to partner with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to secure sensitive lands and implement restoration projects to ensure water quality."



CHRIS RAY

## Land Purchase Secures Wetland Habitat and Adds to Protection of Cayuga Lake Watershed

*For many years, the Land Trust has focused its conservation efforts on protecting lands that protect water. The Finger Lakes have long been known for clean water, but nutrient-laden runoff—exacerbated by a warming climate—has resulted in declining water quality.*

**A**cquiring undeveloped shoreline, upland forests, wetlands, and stream frontage are some of the ways the Land Trust works to address growing concerns.

In February, the Land Trust purchased 26 acres located off Tucker and Iradell Roads in Enfield, Tompkins County, which contain ten acres of wetlands that attract abundant wildlife—over 65 confirmed species of birds and other fauna. The property, which also features 1,200 feet of frontage on a tributary to Taughannock Creek, will be added to the Land Trust's adjacent Lower Nature Preserve. Protection of this parcel not only secures this wildlife-rich habitat but also provides an upland buffer to Taughannock Creek, which flows into Cayuga Lake.

The preserve, which is currently managed for wildlife habitat, is unique among the Land Trust's 45 nature preserves. First purchased in 1997 from William Lower, the property was previously used as a bait farm and once hosted two dozen ponds that were used for baitfish production.

For more than 25 years, the existing preserve has been allowed to rewild. While the site still features shallow ponds, it also contains brushland, young forest, and natural wetlands. The addition of the newly acquired parcel to the Lower Preserve will expand the protection of existing wetlands in this area and double the size of the preserve to 49 acres.

Partial funding for this project came from New York State's Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP). The WQIP program funds projects that directly address documented water quality impairments or protect a drinking water source.



# Donation Conserves Diverse Property While Funding Additional Conservation

Thanks to the generous donation of 86 acres by the estate of Marjorie Morris, a diverse property in Ontario County will be permanently protected through a conservation easement.

**M**arjorie and her husband Drew were longtime philanthropists with an interest in both conservation and historic preservation. Before her passing, Marjorie made plans for their property to be left to the Land Trust through her will.

The property is located in the town of Manchester on County Route 7 and features productive farmland, wooded hills, and several wetlands and streams. Upon receiving the donation, the Land Trust completed an assessment of the site's natural resources, determining that a conservation easement could ensure the integrity of the land while allowing it to remain in private ownership. It was also determined that the site featured streams and wetlands that would benefit from the expansion of vegetated buffer areas.

To expand the buffers, two acres of farmland were retired and planted with 700 native trees and shrubs through a partnership with The Nature Conservancy. In addition, a conservation plan was developed that provides for continued agricultural use in other areas, sustainable forest management, a single home site, and a designated environmental protection zone to secure streams and wetlands.

The property is now under contract to be sold to the farmer who has leased the land for a number of years. Once the sale and easement have been completed, the Land



Trust will continue to monitor the land on an annual basis, ensuring that this diverse property continues to be available for agriculture while also providing excellent wildlife habitat.

Proceeds from the sale of the land will support other conservation projects across the region. The Land Trust is grateful for Marjorie's commitment to advancing land and water conservation in our region.

*Correction: an article in the Winter 2023-2024 issue of The Land Steward regrettably misstated the first name of Marjorie Morris as Margaret.*

## The Land Trust Is in Need of New Vehicles!

It's been a long run for Buttercup and Rahonda, the first official Land Trust staff vehicles. Donated in 2014, they have over 300,000 combined miles. For ten years they served Land Trust staff on site visits, stewardship projects, and meetings with partners all over our 12-county service area. But sadly, they are nearing the end.

The Land Trust is hoping for a donation of a pickup truck and car in good working condition with a reasonable number of miles. If you have a truck or car to donate, please contact Director of Development and Communications, Dawn Cornell at [dawncornell@flt.org](mailto:dawncornell@flt.org) or (607) 275-9487.



Nature Preserve Manager Jason Gorman and Director of Stewardship Chris Olney with "Buttercup" and "Rahonda" in 2014, the year the vehicles were donated.



# Partnership Addresses Threats to the Eastern Hemlock

In March, the Land Trust partnered with the New York State Hemlock Initiative (NYSHI), a project of Cornell University, and Ontario County Soil and Water Conservation District to release roughly 800 silver flies (*Leucotaraxis argenticollis* and *Leucotaraxis piniperda* species) at the Wesley Hill Nature Preserve in Ontario County to combat the hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA).

**S**ilver flies feed on HWA and show promise as potential biological controls when used with other methods.

The HWA, an invasive pest from Japan that threatens to kill the eastern hemlock found in many of the forests and gorges in the region, reached the Finger Lakes in 2008. In response, the Land Trust and NYSHI created a partnership to establish "biocontrol" populations on several nature preserves in the region. The silver flies are collected by the NYSHI from Pacific Northwest hemlock foliage and are abundant predators of HWA on the West Coast.



*The hemlock woolly adelgid produces white, cotton-like "woolly" masses at the base of hemlock needles where it feeds on stored nutrients.*



*Katie Lafler, Water Resources Technician for the Ontario Co. Soil and Water Conservation District, releasing silver flies on an infected hemlock tree at the Wesley Hill Nature Preserve in Ontario County.*

PHOTOS BY CHRIS RAY

# Ten New Locations Added to GoFingerLakes.org

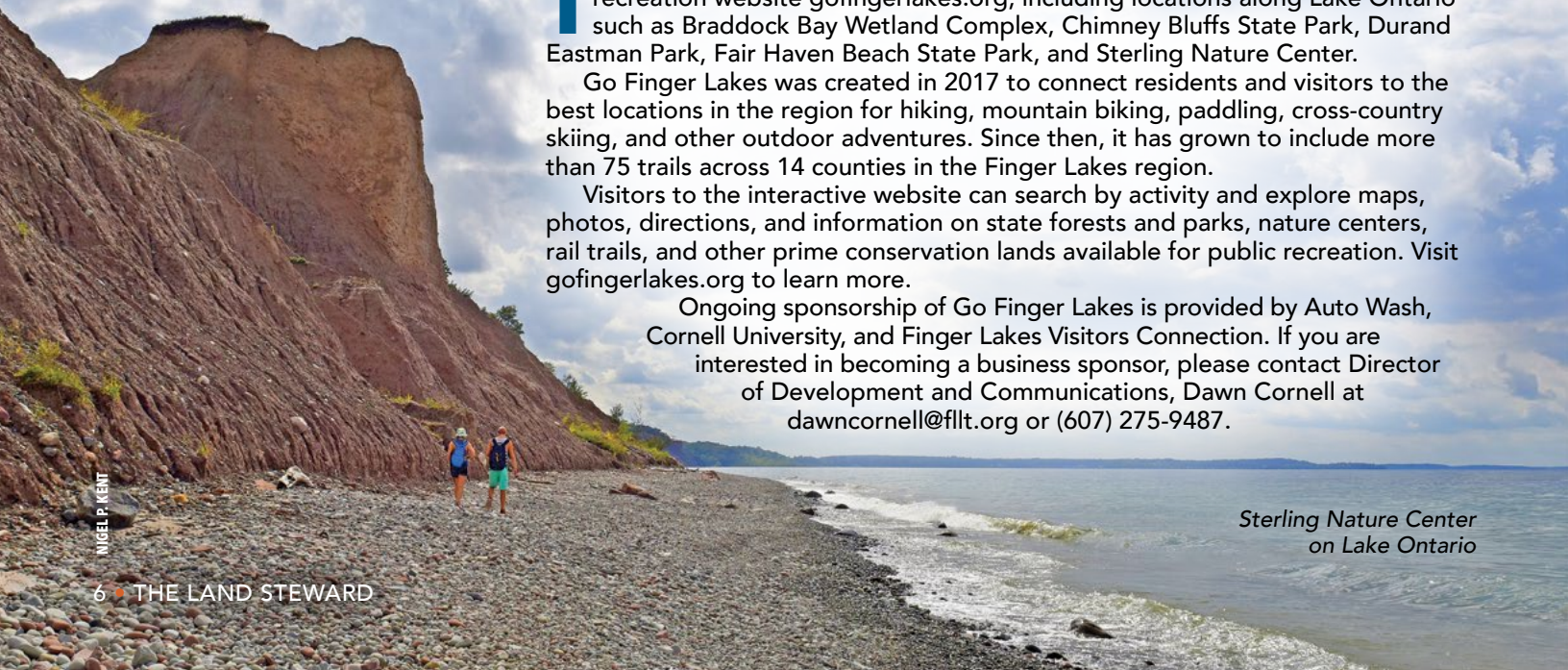
**T**he Finger Lakes Land Trust recently added ten new locations to its outdoor recreation website [gofingerlakes.org](http://gofingerlakes.org), including locations along Lake Ontario such as Braddock Bay Wetland Complex, Chimney Bluffs State Park, Durand Eastman Park, Fair Haven Beach State Park, and Sterling Nature Center.

Go Finger Lakes was created in 2017 to connect residents and visitors to the best locations in the region for hiking, mountain biking, paddling, cross-country skiing, and other outdoor adventures. Since then, it has grown to include more than 75 trails across 14 counties in the Finger Lakes region.

Visitors to the interactive website can search by activity and explore maps, photos, directions, and information on state forests and parks, nature centers, rail trails, and other prime conservation lands available for public recreation. Visit [gofingerlakes.org](http://gofingerlakes.org) to learn more.

Ongoing sponsorship of Go Finger Lakes is provided by Auto Wash, Cornell University, and Finger Lakes Visitors Connection. If you are interested in becoming a business sponsor, please contact Director of Development and Communications, Dawn Cornell at [dawncornell@fllt.org](mailto:dawncornell@fllt.org) or (607) 275-9487.

*Sterling Nature Center  
on Lake Ontario*



NIGEL KENT



# CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROTECTS Rural Retreat in Steuben County

*In 2007, when John Hatch and David Henderson bought approximately 140 acres in the Town of Pulteney, Steuben County, they envisioned a place for a rural family retreat. The property sits on a hilltop and affords views of the surrounding hills, fields, and forest land on the west side of Keuka Lake. But, notes John, “we had long-term preservation of the land in mind as well.”*

**S**even years later, John and David bought the 25-acre parcel across Town Line Road from their existing property, in the Town of Prattsburgh. The motivation for this purchase was to prevent a developer from building a subdivision on the property.

The two have now protected the combined property from development in perpetuity by donating a conservation easement on the land, which totals 167 acres. A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and an organization, such as the Land Trust, that limits or prohibits development on a property while maintaining private ownership. The Land Trust holds 188 conservation easements in the Finger Lakes region, many of which protect properties in rural areas from encroaching residential development.

John and David live in Trenton, NJ, where they are architects and partners in a firm that specializes in the sustainable redevelopment of urban buildings. While looking to find some acreage for a second home, the pair made a fortuitous visit to the Finger Lakes, where they were taken with the landscape, small towns, wineries, and people in the region.

After acquiring the property, John and David built a new home on the parcel's highest point. Leveraging their sustainable development expertise, they designed the home to be carbon neutral, using geothermal wells and solar panels as energy sources. “We produce much more power than we use,” said John.

The property also has an existing house built in the 1980s, overlooking a man-made pond. John and David are now in the process of renovating that house to have a similar zero-carbon footprint.

The section of the property with the two houses is the only area where residential construction will be permitted under the conservation easement. Agricultural land makes up about half of the remaining acreage, spanning Town Line Road, while the property is bookended by mature, diverse forest land. A seasonal stream runs through the eastern side of the property, which includes a few acres of wetlands along its southern boundary.

The property is near other protected lands, most notably between the Urbana and Italy Hill state forests. As such, the land may serve as protected habitat for wildlife moving between the two forests.

—Jeff Tonole

*The newly conserved property is depicted in the center of the photo.*



# thank you

**You helped us make a difference this year!** Thanks to your tremendous support, we have conserved over 32,000 acres, ensuring scenic vistas, local foods, clean water, and wild places for everyone.

*We are grateful for gifts of all sizes and use them wisely to protect land and water across the region. In particular, we wish to acknowledge those who gave \$100 or more in 2023.*

## **Land, Conservation Easement, and Real Estate Donations**

Guy, Ryan, and Tim Christiansen • Cornell University • Pat and Jessica Danial • Ellen Harrison • Sandy Hill • John and Josephine Ingle • Bill Jackson and Jeri Noel-Jackson • The Estate of Marjorie Morris • Debra, Reid, Tamara, and Tara Renner • Stuart and Lucy Schweizer • Dale and Glen Shaw

### **\$250,000+** Anonymous (2)

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

### **\$100,000+** Anonymous (3)

David and Amy Allyn • Daniel Konowalow and Marcy Rosenkrantz

### **\$20,000-99,999** Anonymous (5)

Joel D. and Jeanne Baines • Keith Batman and Barbara Post • Percy Edwards Browning Foundation • Burch and Louise Craig • Lynnette and Alan Eusden • Ellen Harrison • John and Josephine Ingle • J.M. McDonald Foundation, Inc. • Land Trust Alliance Northeast • Karen Meriwether and Thomas Snow • Park Foundation Inc. • Norma Platt • Robert F. Schumann Foundation • Thaler Howell Foundation Inc. • The Estate of Margaret J. Bald • The Firefly Fund • The Hullar Foundation • The Lew and Dawn Allyn Family Fund at the Community Foundation of Collier County • The Lilac Foundation • Tompkins County • Fred and Susan Van Sickle

### **\$10,000-19,999** Anonymous (1)

Allie and Mark Allyn • Roger and Diane Cass • Barbara Chase • Yvette de Boer • Ed and Robin Dubovi • Ann Dwyer • Edid Blume Charitable Lead Trust • Edward and Verna Gerbic Family Foundation • William Eggers and Deborah McLean • Clare Fewtrell • Marty and Cathy Gardner • Holland and Patience Gregg • Doug and Kip Hargrave • Margot Hughes • Joan Rothenberg Family Foundation • Laura Larson • Lloyd Lill • John and Candace Marsellus • David and Patricia Maule • Melvin and Mildred Eggers Family Charitable Foundation • Kevin and Jean Parker • Dave and Brenda Rickey • Marjory Rinaldo-Lee and David Lee • Kristin and Charles Swain • The Makowski Trust • Penelope Wickham and Thomas Kather • Josie Yunis and Marty Taylor

### **\$5000-9999** Anonymous (3)

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### **\$1000-4999** Anonymous (12)

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# Talks & Treks 2024

For detailed directions and registration information, visit [flt.org/events](http://flt.org/events).

## **Birds & Other Wildlife of the Roy H. Park Preserve**

**Sunday, May 26 at 8:30 AM**

**Roy H. Park Preserve, Tompkins County**

What better way to enjoy Memorial Day weekend than to explore woodlands filled with song? Join local birder and insect enthusiast Mark Chao at the Roy H. Park Preserve in Dryden in search of breeding birds, butterflies, native bees, and other wildlife of late spring.

## **Invasive Species Walk**

**Friday, June 7 at 4:00 PM**

**Sweedler Preserve at Lick Brook, Tompkins County**

Join Matt Gallo, Terrestrial Invasive Species Outreach Coordinator for Finger Lakes PRISM, on a walk at the Land Trust's Sweedler Preserve at Lick Brook during New York Invasive Species Awareness Week. Matt will discuss the impacts of invasive plant and insect species, including the hemlock woolly adelgid.

## **Nature Walk for Health & Well-Being**

**Saturday, June 8 at 10:00 AM**

**Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve, Tompkins County**

Discover the health benefits of nature with Peggy Hurley, DO—physician, avid hiker, gardener, and Master Naturalist. Peggy will guide us on a two-mile walk to explore the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve, home to a diverse variety of flora and fauna.

## **Trees & Plants of Wesley Hill**

**Saturday, June 22 at 10:00 AM**

**Wesley Hill Nature Preserve, Ontario County**

Learn how to identify some of our native plants and trees and what makes them ecologically unique with Cody Wilkes, Forester in the Conservation Department at Finger Lakes Community College, and Megan Aubertine-Wilkes, Wetland Ecologist.

## **Snail Walk**

**Saturday, June 29 at 10:00 AM**

**Bell Station, Tompkins County**

Come explore the fascinating world of land snails and slugs with malacologist and naturalist Marla Coppolino. This will be an appropriately slow walk to discover the secretive and hidden microhabitats of land snails and slugs.

## **Nature Sketching at the Hinchcliff Family Preserve**

**Saturday, July 13 at 10:00 AM**

**Hinchcliff Family Preserve, Onondaga County**

Join us for a morning of nature sketching with Robert McNamara, an accomplished Finger Lakes wildlife artist and naturalist, who has exhibited his artwork nationally and internationally. We will enjoy a slow walk through the preserve with stops for pencil and pen sketching. All skill levels are welcome!

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*Except in the case of extreme weather, walks go rain or shine—check our web site for updates. All events are free and open to the public, thanks to support from the M&T Charitable Foundation.*

# Get Outside with the Land Trust!



## Wildlife Corridors and the Land Trust

For the past 18 years, the Land Trust has been pursuing an ambitious goal to connect more than 50,000 acres of protected land in a U-shaped arc around Ithaca and the south end of Cayuga Lake. When the project—known as the Emerald Necklace initiative, reflecting the jewels of green space dotting the landscape—is complete, there will be an unbroken chain of protected land that will stretch from the Finger Lakes National Forest in the west to the Hammond Hill State Forest in the east.

While there are a multitude of rationales for this initiative—from protecting water quality in the area to expanding recreational opportunities—one of the most important factors driving the desire for interconnected green space is creating wildlife corridors. Connected habitats are critical for the daily and seasonal movements of wildlife amid the ever-growing encroachment of humanity.

Wildlife corridors are natural areas that connect habitats that have become fragmented by human activity and development. Disjointed habitat and restricted movement resulting from roads and other development typically lead to a significant number of negative outcomes for wildlife, which include but are not limited to:

- Isolated populations and a stagnation in genetic diversity;
- Degraded ecosystems and biodiversity, including a lack of seed dispersal;
- Limited habitat buffers for protection from predators and other external threats;
- The inability to migrate due to resource scarcity, wildfires and other natural disasters, and the effects of climate change;
- Increased interaction with humankind, to the potential detriment of both.

Creating wildlife corridors is a critical solution to these issues, especially as species will need to move north due to climate change. In addition to helping provide migratory routes as ecosystems shift, the corridors are themselves a habitat for an abundance of birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects, as well as native plant species that provide cover and serve as a food source.

The idea of connecting patches of natural habitat is a core principle of the Land Trust's mission, and this strategic focus applies throughout the Finger Lakes region, not just within the Emerald Necklace. For example, an emphasis on protecting existing farmland

through conservation easements not only helps prevent subdivisions and other residential development, but also provides connectivity between other protected lands.

Human-made wildlife corridors, such as underpasses and overpasses across major highways, can help connect habitat that has been disrupted by human development

while preventing potentially damaging interactions, such as collisions between animals and motor vehicles. However, the Land Trust is focused on restoring natural corridors wherever possible by protecting land that has yet to be developed or is being reclaimed by Mother Nature.

You only need to look as far as the Land Trust's most

recent acquisition, Bad Bear Hill (see cover page), to see an example of the organization's resolve to connect wild lands. The Land Trust's largest-ever property acquisition is adjacent to a state forest, which it will eventually join, and in near proximity to a wildlife management area and a state park.

While acting to preserve and enhance habitat connectivity locally, the Land Trust is also actively involved in protecting and restoring wildlife corridors on a larger scale. The Land Trust has partnered with the Wildlands Network, the Western New York Land Conservancy, and the Nature Conservancy on a proposal for a connected landscape between the Pennsylvania Wilds region and New York's Adirondack Mountains.

The accompanying map shows continuous habitat for wildlife to move from the Allegheny Plateau to the Adirondacks, stopping on their way through the southern portion of the Finger Lakes region. The partnership is seeking to make this linkage a major priority in the next update of the New York State Open Space Plan, as well as to incorporate a collaborative approach to connecting regional wildlife habitat.

Pulling back the lens even further, the Wildlands Network has embarked upon a comprehensive endeavor to connect wildlife habitat areas up and down the eastern seaboard. Known as the Eastern Wildway, the plan is to create wildlife corridors to reconnect fragmented habitat extending from Florida in the south to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in the north. The efforts of the Land Trust and its partners in Pennsylvania and New York are part of that broader plan.

For more information about the Wildlands Network, visit [wildlandsnetwork.org](http://wildlandsnetwork.org).  
—Jeff Tonole





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Members, partners, and volunteers are invited to join us! Visit [fllt.org/2024annualmeeting](http://fllt.org/2024annualmeeting) for more information.