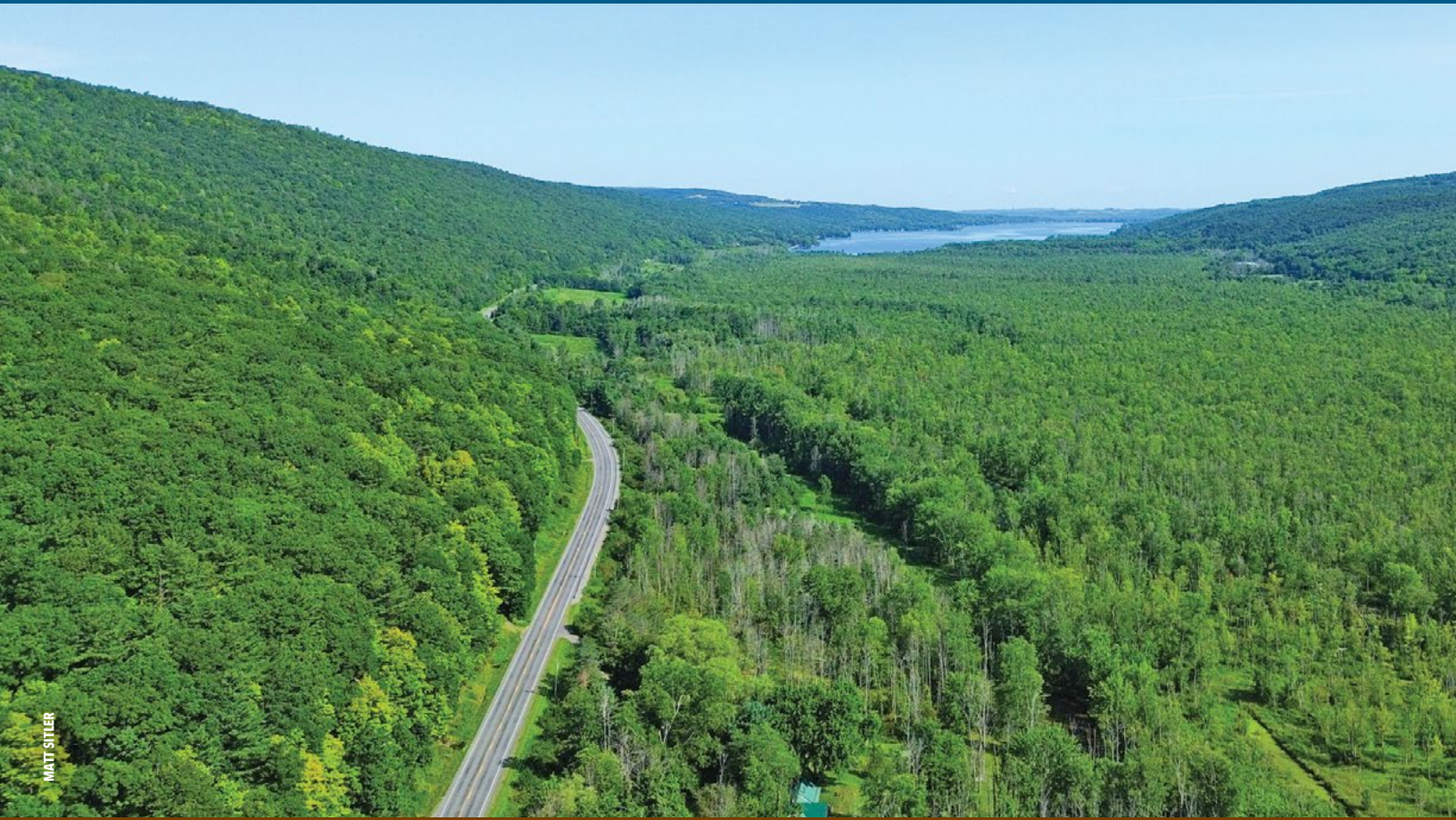




The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST



MATT STYLER

LAND TRUST MOVES QUICKLY TO SECURE PARCEL IN THE Heart of the Hemlock to High Tor Corridor

In December, Land Trust staff took action when 100 acres of forested hillside near the south end of Honeoye Lake was listed for sale. This noteworthy property is located in the heart of the proposed Hemlock to High Tor corridor and serves as a link between the Harriet Hollister Spencer Recreation Area and the Honeoye Inlet Wildlife Management Area.

An appraisal of the property was quickly commissioned and negotiations with the seller followed soon after. The interest of state conservation officials in acquiring the parcel was confirmed, and by the end of 2024, the Land Trust had secured a contract to purchase the property for its appraised value. The closing is expected by midyear and will be made possible by the use of the organization's Opportunity Fund—an internal revolving loan fund that is made available for time-sensitive projects like this.

In advance of the closing, a legal survey of the land will be conducted, and the property title reviewed by an attorney. In addition, staff are consulting with officials from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and the Department of Environmental Conservation to determine their interest in acquiring the land.

The property to be acquired encompasses steep hillsides located just west of the extensive wetlands at the south end of Honeoye Lake. A rugged gorge cuts through the property, providing water to the wetlands and beyond to the lake. In addition to its proximity to state-owned conservation lands, it is also near Muller Field Station, an educational facility owned and managed by Finger Lakes Community College.

continued on page 2

The Finger Lakes recently lost one of its champions when longtime Land Trust member and volunteer Jim Kersting passed away late last year.

Jim loved the outdoors. Whether he was cross-country skiing at Harriet Hollister Spencer State Recreation Area; pursuing a deer on his property; or paddling on nearby Canadice Lake, he valued every minute spent in nature. Fortunately, for the rest of us, Jim was equally committed to conserving our natural world.

Jim and his wife Sara joined the Land Trust in 1993 and both became involved in leading its Western Lakes chapter in the organization's early years. They also donated a conservation easement on their property in Canadice. Jim served multiple terms on the Land Trust's Board of Directors and led the organization as President for several years.

Combining his passions for conservation and outdoor recreation, Jim biked across the United States in 2008 with Brad Edmondson, another former Land Trust President and long-term member, to raise money for



Jim and Sara Kersting on their land in Canadice

the organization. This was one of many long-distance cycling trips he enjoyed. Jim's enthusiasm and great sense of humor made working with him quite fun. Even the most daunting challenges seemed attainable because of his unwavering positive attitude. Our Wesley Hill Nature Preserve is just one of many places that benefited from his attention and is enjoyed by many today.

I'll be thinking of Jim whenever I hike the trails at Wesley Hill and also as we expand our conservation efforts within the Hemlock to High Tor corridor—the landscape he called home and upon which he had a lasting impact.

Andrew Zepp, President

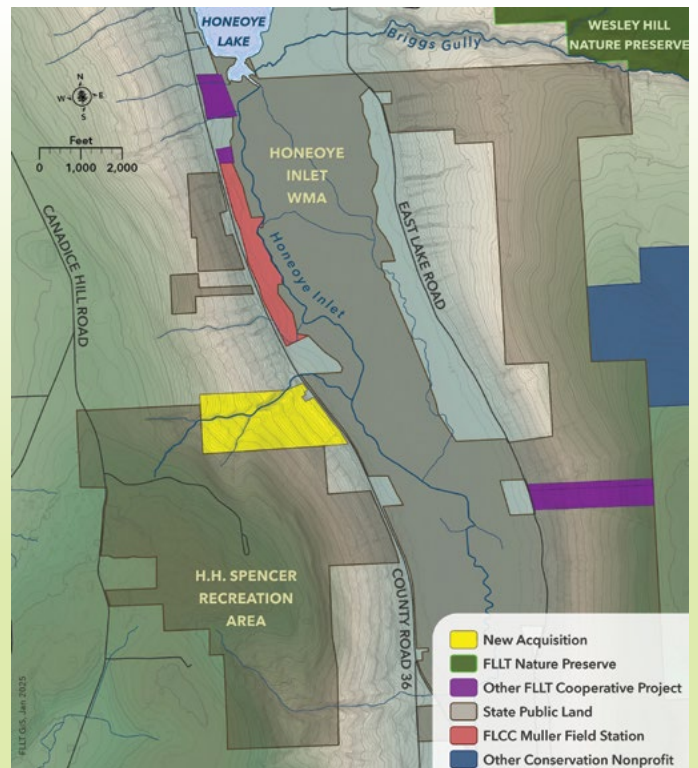
Land Trust Moves Quickly to Secure Parcel in the Heart of the Hemlock to High Tor Corridor *continued from cover*

This pending acquisition will add to a growing network of conserved lands at the south end of Honeoye Lake that includes extensive state conservation lands as well as the Land Trust's Wesley Hill Nature Preserve and the Cumming Nature Center.

The proposed Hemlock to High Tor corridor extends from Hemlock Lake in the west to the High Tor Wildlife Management Area in Naples. This area hosts one of the most extensive contiguous forests remaining in the Finger Lakes region. These forests play a vital role in stabilizing steep slopes and providing clean water for our lakes. They also harbor a diversity of wildlife, including wide-ranging mammals such as black bear, bobcat, and fisher.

The Hemlock to High Tor corridor is also a well-known destination for outdoor recreation. Popular activities include skiing at Bristol Mountain and Harriet Hollister Spencer Recreation Area, hiking the Bristol Hills branch of the Finger Lakes Trail, and paddling on Hemlock and Canadice lakes and the winding West River.

During the coming year, the Land Trust will expand its land protection efforts in this area while also working with partners to develop a long-term plan that dovetails land and water conservation with outdoor education and recreation, as well as traditional uses of this landscape.



Anonymous Donor Pledges \$500,000 Challenge Match to Support Shotwell Brook Conservation Area

Help Ensure Skaneateles Lake's Water Quality and Create Access to Nature

A generous anonymous donor has pledged a \$500,000 gift to help establish the Shotwell Brook Conservation Area, contingent on the Land Trust's ability to match this amount dollar for dollar. This challenge presents a unique opportunity for donors to double the impact of their contributions, ensuring the long-term protection of Skaneateles Lake's water quality and the creation of a publicly accessible nature preserve. With community support, this project will help preserve a vital watershed and provide lasting access to nature for future generations.

Revered for its sparkling blue waters, Skaneateles Lake is a vital resource for many communities and the source of drinking water for some 220,000 residents of Central New York. But today the lake faces increasing threats from development that would compromise its water quality and negatively impact its surrounding lands.

To protect the health of Skaneateles Lake, the Land Trust focuses on preserving lands within its watershed, particularly those that protect waterways feeding into the lake. Last fall, with strong community support, the Land Trust purchased 101 acres of open space just outside the village of Skaneateles.

The 101-acre property, located along U.S. Route 20, serves as a key entry point to both Skaneateles and the Finger Lakes region. Recognizing the increasing development pressures in the area, the Land Trust prioritized the acquisition of this land due to its proximity to Shotwell Brook, a significant tributary of Skaneateles Lake.

With over 1,000 feet of frontage on Shotwell Brook, the property features a mix of fields, wetlands, and woodlands. The Land Trust will preserve and manage the land in perpetuity as the Shotwell Brook Conservation Area, a publicly

accessible nature preserve. This project will enhance water quality by protecting the brook, which feeds directly into Skaneateles Lake. In addition, it will provide local residents with valuable opportunities for outdoor recreation and connection to

new and increased gifts to meet the match. Your donation to this project, whether it's a first-time gift or an increased contribution over your 2024 total giving, will directly support the creation of a 2.1-mile network of walking paths featuring a



This challenge match is a rare opportunity to have twice the impact on a project that will benefit Skaneateles Lake and its watershed.

nature. Before preparing the land for public access, the Land Trust will initiate ecological restoration efforts on the land through a partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This will include restoring and enhancing wetlands on the property, planting native trees and shrubs, establishing native grassland, and controlling non-native invasive pest species.

The Land Trust is deeply grateful for the generous \$500,000 challenge match to bring the Shotwell Brook Conservation Area to life. To unlock this transformative gift, we need

universally accessible loop trail, scenic overlooks and wildlife viewing areas, an interpretive kiosk and parking area, and long-term management of the site. This challenge match is a rare opportunity to have twice the impact on a project that will benefit Skaneateles Lake and its watershed.

Please visit flt.org/shotwellbrook to donate today and double your impact, or contact Dawn Cornell, Director of Development and Communications, at (607) 275-9487 or dawncornell@flt.org for more information.

CHRIS RAY



Land Acquisition Will Add to State's Largest Wildlife Management Area

With elevations reaching 2,000 feet, Connecticut Hill Wildlife Management Area (WMA) contains over 11,000 acres located across Schuyler and Tompkins counties and is one of the largest contiguous forests in the Finger Lakes region.

In December, the Land Trust purchased 30 wooded acres adjacent to the WMA in the town of Catharine, Schuyler County. Located off of Oak Hill Road, the property shares a boundary with a picturesque section of the Finger Lakes Trail which follows Cayuta Creek, a tributary of the Susquehanna River.

The Land Trust intends to ultimately transfer the parcel to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation as an addition to the WMA, expanding recreational opportunities in this area. Connecticut Hill is a popular destination for hikers, birders, and hunters, as well as winter activities such as snowshoeing and cross-country skiing.

Connecticut Hill contains approximately nine miles of designated hiking trails and many more miles of dirt roads and access lanes. Recognized as one of the state's Important

Bird Areas, the WMA is host to a wide variety of songbirds, as well as wide-ranging mammals such as fishers and black bears. It is also an important component of the Emerald Necklace, a proposed greenbelt linking 50,000 acres of existing conservation land in an arc around Ithaca, from the Finger Lakes National Forest in the west to the Hammond Hill State Forest in the east. The Emerald Necklace is identified as a priority project in New York State's Open Space Plan.

"This latest project is the fourth we've completed in this area," said Land Trust President Andrew Zepp. "Connecticut Hill encompasses one of the largest intact forests remaining in our region and hosts a diversity of wildlife. Places like this are increasingly important for many reasons—from water quality to carbon sequestration and providing the opportunity for people to connect with nature."

Land Acquisition Buffers Popular Black Diamond Trail in Tompkins County

The Land Trust recently acquired 23 acres in Ulysses, Tompkins County, located along the popular Black Diamond Trail. Purchased from the Cayuga Nature Center, the property is a mix of meadows and woodlands, situated along the rail trail near the Houghton Road crossing.

The Land Trust acted at the request of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), which owns and manages the Black Diamond Trail. The property provides a buffer to the trail, and OPRHP is interested in creating a mid-way access point on the trail with parking, restroom facilities, and a water fountain.

The Black Diamond Trail is an 8.4-mile multi-use trail currently connecting Taughannock Falls State Park in Trumansburg and Cass Park

The property provides a buffer to the trail, and OPRHP is interested in creating a mid-way access point on the trail with parking, restroom facilities, and a water fountain.

in Ithaca. Partnering with the OPRHP to add lands to state parks continues to be a priority for the Land Trust. In 2020, the organization transferred a 12-acre parcel in the town of Ulysses to the OPRHP which serves as a natural buffer between the trail and the Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway/New York Route 89. In Victor, Ontario County, the Land Trust acquired 15 acres in 2023, also at the request of the OPRHP. The parcel will eventually be transferred to the state as an addition to the Ganondagan State Historic Site to safeguard this

rural landscape from encroaching suburban development.

“Again, the Finger Lakes Land Trust has stepped up to support State Parks,” said Fred Bonn, Regional Director for Finger Lakes State Parks. “In this instance, their efforts will enable us to address a critical need for the Black Diamond Trail, namely a mid-point parking lot and bathroom facility like the one currently being constructed at Taughannock Falls. Parks looks forward to acquiring this parcel from the FLLT and then moving into design and construction in the next few years.”



State Acquisition Ensures Future of Camp Barton on Cayuga Lake

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation recently announced its acquisition of Camp Barton—a former Boy Scout camp that features 0.25-mile of shoreline on Cayuga Lake and 100 acres that host camp facilities, woodlands, and the scenic Frontenac Falls.

The new park will be opened to the public sometime later this year. The park will be managed by Three Falls LDC—a new non-profit organization that was created by the communities of Covert, Ulysses, and Trumansburg for the purpose of making this project possible.

The Land Trust supported the acquisition by working with the Baden-Powell Council of the Boy Scouts to

consider various conservation options, then working with state officials to advance the project and secure funding.

Kudos to all our public sector partners for stepping up in a big way to ensure the future of this lakeside gem!



Fall Matching Gift Challenge Raises \$100,000 for Conservation

This past fall, a generous family launched a \$100,000 matching gift challenge to amplify the Finger Lakes Land Trust's conservation efforts. The challenge aimed to inspire new members to join and encourage existing supporters to increase their contributions, with all new donations being matched dollar-for-dollar.

Thanks to your response, the challenge was a terrific success! Together, we quickly raised an additional \$100,000 that will go to work right away protecting lands and waters across the region! We're grateful to everyone who participated and to the family whose generosity made this possible. Thank you for your commitment to conservation in the Finger Lakes!

Public-Private Partnership Results in New Trails and Land to Be Added to Robert H. Treman State Park

Last fall, the Land Trust celebrated the opening of a 140-acre property adjacent to Robert H. Treman State Park in Enfield, Tompkins County. The parcel was donated to the organization in 2022 by the late Margaret Bald, a Tompkins County resident whose family owned the property since 1950.

Friends of Margaret joined staff from both the Land Trust and New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation to mark the occasion with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and a hike on the property, now known as Margaret's Woods. The parcel features a mix of fields and forest which contain many high-quality sugar maple and hickory trees as well as a 1.4-mile trail system that connects to the Finger Lakes Trail within the state park.

To honor Margaret's wishes for her land to be conserved, the Land Trust will donate the property to the state as an addition to Robert H. Treman State Park. Margaret's generous gift follows a tradition of philanthropy started by Robert Treman who donated hundreds of acres to establish the park, originally known as Enfield Glen State Park.

State Parks Commissioner Pro Tempore Randy Simons said, "As we continue celebrating the Centennial of the state park system, we are

thrilled to see this future expansion of Robert H. Treman State Park. In the philanthropic spirit of the Treman Family, we are grateful for the generosity of Margaret Bald and her family and to the Finger Lakes Land Trust for their continued partnership and conservation efforts so that future generations can continue to benefit from these natural resources and recreational opportunities."

For close to thirty years, local forester Mike DeMunn, who was a friend of Margaret's, was the caretaker

and forest manager of her woodlands. "These woods are very special to me, and I put so much care into the health of the trees," Mike said. "Now I can rest easy that they will remain into old age. I'm so thankful that it will be protected."

Margaret's Woods can now be accessed from a trailhead on Stonehouse Road in the town of Enfield and is open year-round from dawn to dusk for low-impact recreational activities such as walking, hiking, and nature observation.



Friends of the late Margaret Bald joined staff from the Finger Lakes Land Trust and NYS Parks for a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the opening of Margaret's Woods.



Staff and volunteers from the Finger Lakes Land Trust and NYS Parks on an inaugural hike at Margaret's Woods.



The late Tom Reimers, former Land Trust President and long-term member

Tom Reimers left a bequest for the Land Trust in his will which funded the purchase of a nine-acre wetland addition to the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in Tompkins County and provided for the organization's stewardship endowment.

FLLT

Two Simple Ways You Can Leave a Legacy for Conservation

Planned giving provides a meaningful way to support the Land Trust while meeting your financial and estate planning needs. Rather than giving from your current income, planned giving lets you designate future contributions from your assets to protect the lands and lakes you cherish.

Here are two simple and impactful ways you can leave a legacy:

BEQUESTS: By including the Finger Lakes Land Trust in your will, you can leave a specific amount, a percentage of your estate, or even property. Bequests often provide tax benefits, reducing estate taxes and ensuring your gift makes a greater impact. Adding a bequest to your will is simple and ensures that future generations will enjoy the Finger Lakes' beauty.

BENEFICIARY DESIGNATIONS: Naming the Land Trust as a beneficiary of your retirement accounts, life insurance, or IRA is another way to make a difference. These assets, often highly taxed when left to individuals, can be used to their full potential when gifted to a nonprofit. Updating your beneficiary forms is quick, easy, and doesn't require changes to your will.

You have dedicated time and effort to building your financial resources—together, we can protect the Finger Lakes forever. Consult an estate planning professional to explore your options and make a lasting difference. To learn more or notify us of your bequest, visit flt.org/planned-giving, or contact Dawn Cornell, Director of Development and Communications, at **(607) 275-9487** or dawncornell@flt.org.

Our appreciation for gifts in honor of

All who love the Finger Lakes FROM <i>Barbara S. Lake</i>	Philip Edgerton FROM <i>Bill and Valerie Yust</i>	Katherine Loeck FROM <i>Anonymous</i>	Leslie and Nico Schultz FROM <i>William Schultz and Elaine Cosseboom</i>
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Katy Dunlap FROM <i>Kevin Dick and Sandra Carroll</i>	Rick Lightbody and Carol Johnson FROM <i>Anonymous</i>	Dick Ruswick FROM <i>Vivian Lorenzo and Marek Przedziecki</i>	Anne and Ken Wolkin FROM <i>Bryan and Kathy Fick</i>
	Rick Lightbody, Carol Johnson, and Diana Leigh FROM <i>Robinne Gray</i>	Lindsay Ruth FROM <i>Marjorie Ellenbogen</i>	

Our deepest gratitude for thoughtful gifts in memory of

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The Epitome of Larchness: *The American Larch*

*Passing through a wood of larch trees,
I looked at larch trees, for the first time.*

*Larch trees made me lonesome.
Traveling made me lonesome.*

Hakushū Kitahara (trans. Hiroaki Sato)

Passing through a wood of larch trees,

The Japanese have their larches. So do the Siberians and the Mongolians, the dwellers of the Alps and the Himalayas. A traveler can circumnavigate much of the Northern Hemisphere by passing through larch trees, though he will have to walk through the most difficult and coldest terrain to do so.

The range of the American larch or tamarack extends from northern Canada down to the Finger Lakes. The tree's scientific name is *Larix laricina*: literally, "larchlike larch," the epitome of larchness.

The name of the genus is possibly of Gaulish origin. According to legend, while putting down a rebellion at a stronghold in the Alps, Caesar's soldiers found that a certain wooden tower was fireproof.

The Romans dubbed this marvelous wood *larix* after Larignum, the name of the settlement. Some larches are indeed resistant to fire, but this story sounds apocryphal.

I looked at larch trees, for the first time.

A larch in winter is bare and looks blighted. Don't be fooled. It is, most unusually, a deciduous conifer, the only one native to North America, apart from the bald cypress. It dropped all of its needles last autumn in a slow fire of gold; it is now dormant.

Trees must strike a balance between taking in nutrients and protecting themselves from the elements; the more inhospitable the climate, the more carefully the balance must be struck. As a general rule, conifers take the slow and steady approach, producing rigid, waxy, rolled leaves that are relatively inefficient at photosynthesis but tough enough to keep functioning year-round. There are downsides, though: shellacked leaves are an exorbitant expense, from a tree's perspective, and branches can break if the snow accumulates. Deciduous trees, on the other hand, pour their energy each year into producing big, soft leaves that harvest sunlight efficiently, but that are fragile and dehydrate easily. When the light becomes weak, they jettison them; snow falls right through the bare branches

of the dormant tree.

The larch has found a strategy somewhere in the middle. Its needles are only designed to last one season. Lacking an energy-expensive waxy cuticle, they are easy to grow and (once the reusable components are extracted in the autumn) easy to dispose of. Single-use, we might say.

In the spring, soft whisk brooms of asparagus green an inch long will sprout from its branches. These are followed by miniature cones sometimes no bigger than a thumbnail that start out as a glaucous maroon and eventually mature into a lustrous brown. These charming features, which give the tree its characteristically open, airy look, are an evolutionary response to adversity: short needles require less energy to produce, and small cones are less likely to be knocked off by fierce winds.

Larch trees made me lonesome.

If you see an American larch, your feet are probably wet or frozen, and you might be lost. These are the first trees to come creeping into a bog, spiraling their roots down into the peat. They

are often found with black spruce and the little plants that eke out a living in the acidic, exposed world of a northern wetland: bog laurel, pitcher plants, tiny orchids.

Traveling made me lonesome.

The larch is a tree of traveling. The Algonquian word for it, "hackmatack," means "wood for snowshoes." Native Americans used its root strings to sew birch bark canoes and its resin to seal them. European settlers found that the bog-born tree would not rot underwater and so used its wood for shipbuilding; the curved roots, in particular, made excellent boat ribs. Laid down over muddy tracks, its trunks stitched corduroy roads through the young country.

It even accompanied some on their final journeys. Before the Civil War, town cemeteries were sometimes planted with a single larch. Every winter, it seemed to wither; every spring, it was rejuvenated, just as the dead would be reborn on Resurrection Day.

—Jacqueline Stuhmiller

Editor's note: Within the Finger Lakes region, mature larch is relatively uncommon and can be found in some wetlands. European larch (*Larix decidua*) is similar and has also been planted around the region, including within state forests.



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Upcoming Event

Regional Conservation Update & Outlook (Online)

Wednesday, March 12 • 7:30 PM

Join FLLT President Andy Zepp for an online presentation on current Land Trust projects and initiatives as well as a discussion of current conservation challenges facing the Finger Lakes region, including harmful algal blooms, invasive species, and increasing competition for land.

Registration is required. Visit flt.org/events to learn more.

*The Wesley Hill
Nature Preserve in
Ontario County*