

The Resource

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTERN NEW YORK LAND CONSERVANCY

Fall 2014

land project updates

KEY DISCOVERIES FROM THE NIAGARA ESCARPMENT LEGACY PROJECT

The Land Conservancy's recently completed Niagara Escarpment Legacy Project was the first ever comprehensive study of the ecological and cultural features of the Niagara County portion of the escarpment. Funded by the Niagara River Greenway Ecological Standing Committee, the study was completed with Ecology & Environment, Inc. as a project partner, with help from the Niagara Frontier Botanical Society and other volunteers, and guidance from more than 40 stakeholders and municipal leaders. The study significantly increased what we know about the escarpment.

The escarpment in Niagara County is far from pristine. Its forests have been cut, its soils have been farmed, and its rocks have been mined. But the hundreds if not thousands of years of human use, combined with the unique geological features of the escarpment, have created diverse ecosystems that sustain a variety of important plants and animals.

The field surveys of 19 different sites during 2013 identified several protected species. These included three plants listed by New York State as threatened: yellow giant hyssop, big shellbark hickory, and smooth cliff brake fern. Three bird species listed as special concern by the state were found: the Cooper's hawk, vesper sparrow, and grasshopper sparrow. An amphibian found in the surveys, the blue-spotted salamander, is also on the species of special concern list.

Survey scientists also found indicators of three ecological communities considered locally rare; alvar shrublands, alvar woodlands, and oak openings. Alvars exist where there is a thin layer of soil covering limestone bedrock, and few have been noted in New York State outside of Jefferson County near Watertown. Oak openings are grasslands where oaks are the dominant trees and were maintained historically through wildfires



Colorful fall leaves on the escarpment

set by lightning or humans, grazing, low precipitation, and/or poor soil. Unfortunately, the vast majority of oak openings have been lost, and only a handful exist in the state.

The presence of these species and rare ecological communities indicate that the need for land conservation, including natural land and agricultural land, is high. The study identified five properties that are priorities for protection, and we have begun working with some of their owners to explore land protection opportunities.

Earlier this May we presented the key findings from the project at the Pekin Fire Hall in Sanborn. More than 70 people attended the event. Attendees voiced overwhelming support for the conservation recommendations in the report, as well as recommendations for more recreation space like new trails, parks, and publically accessible nature preserves. Many attendees also expressed interest in being involved in conservation efforts along the escarpment. Although the Land Conservancy's work on the study is complete, our work to protect the most important land along the escarpment is now enhanced by our increased knowledge about the resources that are most vulnerable and by our greatly expanded relationships with partners and landowners in the community.



A rare oak opening along the escarpment



Visitors at the Niagara Escarpment Preserve in Lockport

mission

The Western New York Land Conservancy is a regional, not-for-profit land trust that permanently protects land with significant conservation value in Western New York, for the benefit of future generations. We envision a future in which natural areas, working farm lands, wildlife habitat and scenic beauty are cherished and protected as part of the landscape and character of Western New York. The organization is one of 1,700 land trusts nationwide, including 90 in New York State, which have protected 40 million acres over the last 20 years.

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Nancy Smith with Friends
of Mill Road Co-Chair
Kathy Lasher

limo; the families who took their yearly holiday photos with the vista as the backdrop; and the cyclists and runners whose journey was enhanced as they paused to enjoy nature's glory. Now, daily, there are new stories: the young family having dinner at sunset; the bus of senior citizens on a fall foliage tour; and the bicyclist on a 750-mile journey from N. Carolina to Elma who made a detour for the view. It is THE place to watch a thunderstorm sweep across the valley or the aurora borealis perform its magic.

A second key to this success story was the broad, inclusive and ever expanding circle of project partners. It began with the Aurora Open Space Committee, whose sound research and analysis set the stage for the project. The landowners became key partners. Their initial reluctance to become a very public 'poster child' for open space preservation in Aurora gradually softened when they realized that this was perhaps the very best chance to accomplish something that they deeply valued, the long-term preservation of their family land. With the unanimous adoption of the Aurora Open Space Plan and support for the Mill Road Scenic Overlook as its natural next step the Town of Aurora was an essential partner.

The final key and the one that transformed the other stepping stones was generosity. Fifty-six committee members gave hundreds of hours of their time over three years. Members of the community volunteered their skills and talents – creating and updating a website, making videos to air on TV, selling tickets to a gala, and painting plein air to capture the beauty of the land. Local business leaders donated their services, and elected officials from our town, county, state and country lent their support to the quest. Local foundations added pivotal financial support, from early seed funds from the Hahn Family Foundation, to a large grant from the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, and finally from The John R. Oishei Foundation who helped us complete the project before the year-end's closing bell. The lion's share of the funding though came from individual members of our community, 359 in total, whose personal gifts made this project a reality.

Protecting land for future generations is not easy work. Each project has many facets and many junctures where it can be waylaid. The projects that make it to a ribbon-cutting do so because of a magical weaving of commitment, fortitude, and putting one foot in front of the other. My son Gordie recently gave me a beautiful image of one of Nelson Mandela's quotes that seems appropriate as we celebrate this success: "It always seems impossible until it's done." Thanks to all of the Mill Road partners who helped us accomplish the impossible.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy".

Nancy Smith, Executive Director



NEW BOARD MEMBER

GRACE MEIBOHM is the third-generation owner of Meibohm Fine Arts, a 113-year-old family art business. "The Art Shop" originally opened on Connecticut St. on Buffalo's West Side, but has been located in East Aurora since 1957. Grace is a graduate of Daemen College with a BFA in fine arts and received the 2013 distinguished Alumni Award for advancement in career. As a longtime supporter of the Land Conservancy, member of the Friends of Mill

Road and an outdoor enthusiast, many selections of art and exhibitions at the gallery showcase our region's natural heritage. Grace has been a life-long resident of the Town of Aurora contributing to her community as a past President of the East Aurora Kiwanis Club and past President of the Aurora Historical Society. She currently lives in West Falls.

events...

RECAP OF 2014'S OUTDOOR EVENTS

This year's events brought hundreds of people to our protected properties and other natural areas throughout our region. Take a look at a recap of just a few of those events below:

WILDFLOWERS AT THE NIAGARA ESCARPMENT PRESERVE

In early May the Land Conservancy hosted back-to-back wildflower hikes at the Niagara Escarpment Preserve in Lockport. The hikes were led by several volunteers, including Ed Fuchs, Joanne Schlegel, Matt Candeias, and Erin Redding. Attendees got to see the numerous spring ephemerals that make the preserve special, including red and white trillium, blue cohosh, wild ginger, blood root, and many more.



Spring wildflower hike at the Niagara Escarpment Preserve

WARBLER WALK AT FOREST LAWN

In mid-May the Land Conservancy, along with the Buffalo Audubon Society, jointly hosted a bird walk at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Buffalo. We searched for and found spring migrants, including many colorful species like the scarlet tanager, the neon orange blackburnian warbler, and the black-throated blue warbler.



Birdwatching at Stella

GARLIC MUSTARD CHALLENGE

From May through June the Land Conservancy and several teams of volunteers participated in the 2014 Garlic Mustard Challenge. We helped pull nearly 2,000 pounds of the invasive plant from Kenneglenn and the Lewiston Plateau. Along with volunteers at the Beaver Meadow Nature Center and the Reinstein Woods Nature Preserve, more than 5,000 pounds of garlic mustard was removed during the challenge.



VOLUNTEER CLEANUP DAY AT KENNEGLENN

In early August a large group of members joined the Land Conservancy in a summer cleanup day at Kenneglenn. Andrea Locke, the Coordinator for the Western New York Partnership for Regional Invasive Species

Garden cleanup crew at Kenneglenn

Management (WNY PRISM), gave a brief talk about invasive species in our region. After the hard work, our gardens look much better and discussions are underway for a task force to plan ways to include more native plants at Kenneglenn!

GEOLOGY AND CREEK HIKE AT KENNEGLENN

Again in early August Stan Radon, an engineering geologist with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, led a hike through Hunters Creek and the gorge at Kenneglenn. The hike is an annual event and is always a great way cool off on a hot summer's day.

KAYAKING THE LOWER NIAGARA RIVER

On the same day as the geology hike at Kenneglenn, Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper hosted a kayak tour of the lower Niagara River and offered the Land Conservancy several spaces on the trip. We launched from the future home of the Stella Niagara Preserve in Lewiston and ended at the docks in Youngstown. Once acquired and open to the public, the preserve will be a great place to put a kayak in the water or to stop on your kayaking trip down the river.



Kayaking from Stella to Youngstown

FALL BIRDWATCHING AT KENNEGLENN

Our final hike of the year was a fall birdwatching hike at Kenneglenn, led by our 2014 "volunteer of the year" Chuck Rosenburg. Chuck is a wetlands biologist at the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and one of the region's leading owl experts. Even with rainy weather, we saw many great songbirds as they began their migration south, including a magnolia warbler, a scarlet tanager, and two rose-breasted grosbeaks.



protecting

AWARD WINNING WINES COME FROM LAND CONSERVANCY PROPERTY

—By Larry Brooks, Land Conservancy Vice President



Deakin Farm Grapes

For many years, Jim and Penny Deakin owned a farm in Portland, New York, along the shores of Lake Erie in an area known for its vineyards. In fact, the town of Portland is almost directly south of the town of Vineyard, along Route 20, southwest of Dunkirk and Fredonia. Well-drained soils and the mild weather off Lake Erie make the Deakin Farm ideal for growing grapes. The Deakins worked with the Land Conservancy to put a conservation easement on their farm in 2005 because they didn't want their farm to be turned into a gravel pit like many other farms around it.

Eventually the Deakins sold their farm to William and Carrie McCausland. The McCauslands grow grapes on this farm on a Geneva double curtain 2-wire training system and they harvest them with a mechanical picker. The 2-wire training system makes it difficult for the mechanical picker to get all the grapes and it doesn't pay for them to pick the remainder manually. So they allow Land Conservancy member Lamont Beers, who met the Deakins through a wine club, to come in and pick manually; the grapes would otherwise be left for the deer and turkeys.



Lamont Beers' Wines

Last fall Lamont picked 175 pounds of Catawba grapes which he turned into eight and a half gallons of clear juice. He then uses the freeze concentrate method which leaves 30% sugar, the minimum for ice wine. At the annual gathering of the American Wine Society in Sandusky Ohio in 2013, Lamont's wine, a 2012 vintage, won the double gold medal in the amateur competition and also won an award for best dessert wine.

Lamont has been a member of the Land Conservancy for many years. He helps monitor our properties and chairs the newly formed Eden Farmland Protection Committee. Since Lamont doesn't have a license to sell his award-winning wines, you won't be able to buy any at the store. Instead, you'll have to bid on his wine basket at our next annual meeting silent auction!

PROTECTING THE W.D. HENRY FARM IN EDEN

Eden is one of the most productive agricultural regions in Western New York, and farming here is as important to the community's economy as it is to its way of life. You've probably been to the Eden Corn Festival, an annual summer tradition that showcases the town's farming heritage and draws thousands of visitors. Like many other places, important farmland in Eden is gradually being lost to development. Over the last few years we have been working tirelessly along with Town officials, a volunteer farmland protection committee, and local farmers to help protect farmland in the town. In 2012 we helped protect the 102-acre Surgenor Farm, then followed that with the 90-acre Meyer Farm in early 2014. We are now working to protect 250 acres of the 350-acre W.D. Henry Farm, a family farm symbolic of the beauty and productivity of the fertile Eden Valley.



The W.D. Henry Farm is located on NY Route 62, just south of Hamburg. It is, in fact, the first farm you encounter when entering Eden. The land has been continuously farmed for well over a century, since William D. Henry first brought his family to Eden to begin farming in 1888. The farm is now operated by fourth and fifth generation Henrys, Mark and Dan. In the spring, summer, and fall acres of corn, bell peppers, hot peppers, squash, greens, cabbage, and cucumbers rise from the rich soil on both sides of the road. In the winter, greenhouses grow seasonal and holiday potted crops—poinsettias, lilies, bulb crops and mums.

The farm is also home to several acres of woodlands and wetlands which improve local water quality, provide habitat for wildlife, and sustain important pollinators. Earlier this year, the NYS Department of Ag and Markets re-opened a funding program for farmland protection, and the Land Conservancy



First truck purchased by W.D. Henry & Sons – 1917

submitted a proposal for the W.D. Henry Farm. If funding is received, the Land Conservancy will be able to purchase a conservation easement on the 250-acre portion of the W.D. Henry Farm, protecting this farming heritage in perpetuity.

Become a Member or Renew Your Membership Today!

Please consider becoming a member during our 2014 New Member Drive or renewing your membership by returning the enclosed donation form with your generous contribution, or by visiting our online giving page at www.wnylc.org. Your tax deductible contribution today will become tomorrow's preserved and treasured places. Thank you!



thank you

TRAIL-BUILDING AT KENNEGLENN



With the help of many volunteers and the financial support of one donor, two Kenneglenn trails received major improvements this year. On Saturday, May 3, Eagle Scout candidate Jacob Mikula led a team of Scouts and parents to construct a footbridge over a muddy section of the trail between the Land Conservancy office and Hunters Creek. Jacob designed the footbridge and solicited material donations to build it. On Saturday, September 27, a team of fifteen volunteers and four staff members completed extensive work on the

trail leading to the Mossy Point overlook on Hunters Creek Gorge. The trail team widened the trail, removed vegetation blocking access, and built raised footbridges over muddy areas.

Our efforts are being guided by trail-building guru, Jon Sunquist. Jon has spent many hours evaluating and planning for the larger trail system at Kenneglenn. Our goal is to make all our trails more comfortable for visitors while also ensuring that they are sustainable in the long term and protective of areas with sensitive plant communities and high ecosystem value.

Each year we host hikes at Kenneglenn, including the annual geology hike through Hunters Creek Gorge. This year's trail work was all part of our ongoing effort to improve access to Kenneglenn and make the trail system easier to navigate. You can expect to see more organized hikes – and trail work – at Kenneglenn in the coming year.



GIVE A GIFT OF APPRECIATED STOCK TODAY!

There are many advantages of giving appreciated stock to the Land Conservancy instead of cash. According to an article in *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, donors of appreciated stock “can take an immediate tax deduction for the full market value of the stock and also avoid the capital-gains tax they would owe by cashing in the securities. Then, using the cash they might have otherwise donated, they can repurchase the same stock at a higher cost basis for capital-gains purposes.” Talk to your financial advisor today, and call the Land Conservancy at (716) 687-1225 if you have any questions. Thank you!



TO OUR LOCAL BUSINESSES AND SUPPORTERS!

The generosity of these local businesses and individuals has been especially helpful and greatly appreciated this past year. We would like to thank the following:

- William Schutt & Associates, LaBella Associates PC, Earth Dimensions, Inc., and C&S Engineers, Inc. for in-kind services donated to the Mill Road Scenic Overlook.
- The East Aurora Advertiser for publishing the acknowledgment of our Mill Road Scenic Overlook major donors.
- Paul Warner from American Paving for providing cost-conscious, on time, excellent quality work in constructing the overlook at Mill Road and refurbishing the parking lot at the Kenneglenn Nature Preserve.
- Kateri Ewing for designing and updating the Friends of Mill Road website.
- Ashkers Juice Bar and Bistro in Buffalo and Elm Street Bakery in East Aurora for donating great food and drinks to our events.
- Terry Belke from WGRZ Channel 2 News for creating and airing numerous “2 The Outdoors” videos about our work, including one about the Stella Niagara Preserve.
- Able Table Rental Company for donating the tent and West Herr Automotive Group for providing a podium and sound system for the Mill Road Scenic Overlook ribbon-cutting.
- Meibohm Fine Arts for assisting with events.

ACCREDITATION COMMENTS

We are pleased to announce that we applied to become a nationally accredited land trust on October 9, 2014. The Land Trust Alliance's land trust accreditation program recognizes land conservation organizations that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, will be conducting an extensive review of the Land Conservancy's policies and programs through 2015.

As part of this process, the Commission is inviting the public to submit signed, written comments on how the Land Conservancy complies with national quality standards. These standards address the ethical and technical operation of a land trust. For the full list of standards, see <http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org/tips-and-tools/indicator-practices>. To learn more about the accreditation program and to submit a comment, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org. You may also email your comment to info@landtrustaccreditation.org; fax it to The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, Attn: Public Comments, 518-587-3183; or mail it to: The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, Attn: Public Comments, 36 Phila Street, Suite 2, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866. The public comment period ends on November 22, 2014. Please note that while the Commission may share your comments with us, they will not reveal your identity to us.

updates

THE MILL ROAD SCENIC OVERLOOK IS NOW OPEN!



Construction of the roadside pull-off at the Mill Road Scenic Overlook is complete, and after a ribbon-cutting ceremony in late September, the pull-off is now open to visitors. This comes after a successful, multi-year, \$650,000 capital campaign to protect the 60-acre property and make access to its views safe and easy. The Town of Aurora now owns the property and the Land Conservancy holds a conservation easement on it, protecting it in perpetuity. A Western New York Southtowns Scenic Byway sign will be installed next spring.



Like past visionaries who protected and created our most cherished public parks and nature preserves, those who helped protect and create the Mill Road Scenic Overlook have left a legacy that will last for generations to come. You – the volunteers from the ‘Friends of Mill Road’ who worked tirelessly since the beginning, the many donors who contributed their hard-earned savings, the local businesses and foundations that invested in this project, elected officials who recognized the regional importance of protecting this iconic place, and the property owners who stewarded this land for many years – are modern visionaries. We thank you all!



DONATIONS STILL NEEDED TO MAKE THE STELLA NIAGARA PRESERVE A REALITY



A lot has happened at the future home of the Stella Niagara Preserve this year. In early June we hosted a well-attended public birdwatching hike at the property. In mid-July we hosted a fundraising hike there, and many people came out

to support the Land Conservancy and the project. In early August Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper hosted a kayak paddle down the Lower Niagara River, which started at Stella. These events are excellent examples of what an asset the property will become when permanently protected and opened to the public. But fundraising continues, and donors from the Buffalo-Niagara community are needed if the Stella Niagara Preserve is to be a reality.

Our most recent funding success for the Stella Niagara Preserve came in June when the project was awarded \$300,000 from the highly competitive U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Great Lakes Restoration Initiative through the Joint Venture Habitat Protection and Restoration Program. The grant was one of five given in the Midwest and Northeast Region for a total of \$960,000 all aimed at protecting, restoring, and enhancing wetlands and wildlife habitat. It was the only project selected in the Northeast Region. This award demonstrates how critically important protecting the Stella Niagara Preserve property is to the health of the entire Great Lakes ecosystem and the millions of people that call it home.

With this award in hand, the project is now on the home stretch. We have received more than \$2.6 million of the \$3.2 million needed to create the preserve. We hope to complete fundraising by the end of this year, which would allow us to open the Stella Preserve in 2015. Donations of all sizes are needed, and different naming and recognition opportunities are available to donors of \$10,000 or more. You can find out more about the project or donate online at www.wnyc.org. You can also send a check made payable to the “Western New York Land Conservancy” to P.O. Box 471, East Aurora, NY 14052. If you have any questions, please contact our Executive Director, Nancy Smith, at (716) 687-1225 or nancysr@wnyc.org. Thank you for your support!



LAND TRUST ALLIANCE ADVOCACY DAY IN D.C.

– By Larry Brooks, Land Conservancy Vice President

The national Land Trust Alliance, of which our Land Conservancy is a member, organized an advocacy day in Washington, D.C. in early April. I was fortunate to represent the Land Conservancy.

The primary focus of this advocacy day was to campaign for cosponsors for an important piece of legislation, S 526 and HR 2807. Since 2006, an enhanced income tax deduction has encouraged family farmers and landowners alike to get significant tax benefits for donating a conservation easement on their land. But it was temporary and the latest incentive expired in 2013. These two new bills included, among other things, making permanent the enhanced conservation easement tax incentive.



I was part of the New York State team which was led by the LTA's Ethan Winter and included our colleague Ben Gajewski from the Genesee Valley Conservancy. After one day's worth of training and briefings, the next day we had scheduled appointments with six New York State representatives and senators. Our team met with staffers from Brian Higgins' and Kirsten Gillibrand's offices and with Chris Collins. We asked that both Congressman Higgins and Collins be cosponsors of HR 2807 and they agreed. It was recently passed by the House.

Besides being a very personally rewarding experience, I came away with a new appreciation into the workings of our federal government. Our representatives are besieged by requests from constituents and they have to make decisions based on often conflicting requests. The Land Conservancy is deeply grateful to our representatives Collins and Higgins for their support of this bill which is an important tool in our work.

gifts

HONORARY GIFTS

*in honor of Mary McCutcheon
from Gillian Pountain
in honor of Heidi Gee
from Jennifer Teeter*

MEMORIAL GIFTS

*in memory of Gerhard Neumaier from Jim & Susan Collins
in memory of James Riopel from Mary McCutcheon*



LAND CONSERVANCY PROJECTS RECEIVE AWARDS

This year, two projects that the Land Conservancy contributed to won awards, the first awards in our history. The Clarence Greenprint Program was chosen for the Western New York



The Greenprint team receives the NY Upstate APA award
Section of the American Planning Association (APA) 'Award for Outstanding Planning in the Implementation Category' AND the New York Upstate APA 'Planning Excellence Award for Implementation'. The awards were presented at the WNY APA's annual dinner on May 15 and the Upstate APA's luncheon on September 18. The Clarence Greenprint is an open space preservation program funded by a \$12.5 million bond authorization, voted in by the town in 2002. To date, it has helped protect more than 1,300 acres of natural areas and farmland. The Land Conservancy helped develop the Greenprint and has assisted in planning and implementing the program for the past 14 years.

The Mill Road Scenic Overlook was chosen for the 2014 Preservation Buffalo Niagara award for landscape preservation. After several years of effort by the entire community, the Town of Aurora is the new owner of the 60-acre Mill Road Scenic Overlook property, and the Land Conservancy holds a conservation easement on it. Preservation Buffalo Niagara's 6th Annual Preservation Awards Ceremony & Luncheon, honoring the Mill Road Scenic Overlook and other winners, was held at on May 30 at Kleinhans Music Hall.

GET INVOLVED!

There are many ways to get involved with the Land Conservancy and to support our work. If you are interested in any of these opportunities, please contact Jajeane, our Development Director, by emailing him: jajeane.rose@wnylc.org.

Board and Committee Members: As a not-for-profit, the Land Conservancy is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. Board members devote their time and expertise to the work of the organization. Both Board members and non-Board members can serve on one of our committees that include Governance, Finance, Conservation, and Development. Would you or someone you know like to serve as a Board member or help with one of our committees?

Volunteers: The Land Conservancy needs volunteers. Each year we host several events and nature hikes. We clear trails, pull invasive plants, monitor our properties, and steward our properties. We do outreach at festivals and fairs. We send letters and newsletters to our members. This year we are especially looking for someone to help with maintenance around the office. Will you volunteer your time?

Donating Tools and Office Furniture: In the past, many people have supported the Land Conservancy by donating office supplies, furniture, and equipment. In addition to tools and office furniture, we need a podium for our events. Do you have any tools, furniture, or even a podium that you can donate to us?



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planned giving



“By protecting farmland and forests now, we can make our community better for generations to come. With the help of the Land Conservancy, my wife Jane and I can actually make this our legacy. We took the first step and placed the Land Conservancy in our will.”

- Paul Lehman, *Board President*

Join the growing number of people who donate to the Land Conservancy through planned giving. Take your first step by talking with your financial advisor or Land Conservancy Executive Director Nancy Smith today.