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## Somerset Family Protects Lake Ontario Land Forever

Thanks to a new partnership between the Western New York Land Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited Inc, and landowners, Tom and Susan Carestia, 63 acres on Lake Ontario in the Town of Somerset are now protected forever and habitat restoration is underway.

The Carestias first discovered their beloved property in March 2001 when Susan’s mother sent them a newspaper article about an online property foreclosure auction. Tom and Susan, who have always loved living by the water, traveled from Maryland to Somerset, where Susan grew up, to explore the property for the first time. They quickly realized they had stumbled upon a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The property was remarkable—a mixture of wetlands, farmland, shrubland, and successional and mature forest that are a haven for birds and wildlife of all kinds.

As the chilly Northwest winds swept across the lake toward them, Tom knew immediately, “We need to buy this place!” So, having sold their business in Maryland, packed their lives into a Ryder moving truck, and along with their two-year old daughter, moved to Somerset with the help of their eager family members in New York.

As residents of Maryland for nearly 20 years, Tom and Susan had witnessed the transformation of countless waterfront properties and watched as natural lands became more and more scarce. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation in Annapolis was headquartered near their home along Black Walnut Creek. The Foundation’s work inspired the Carestias and sparked an interest in waterfront preservation and natural resource protection.

As they settled into their new home in Somerset, Tom and Susan noticed many similarities between Lake Ontario and the Chesapeake Bay: both places are threatened by invasive species, water quality problems, and encroaching development. They knew that their Lake Ontario parcel was a diamond in the rough, and they yearned to restore its health and majesty, and ensure it would always stay natural or agricultural land.

The Carestias worked with the Western New York Land Conservancy, our region’s not-for-profit land trust, to protect the property with a perpetual conservation easement—a legal agreement that ensures that the property will never be subdivided or developed—ensuring that it will remain a stunning lakefront treasure for all future generations.

“Our region is blessed with access to 84% of the world’s surface fresh water,” said Land Conservancy Executive Director, Nancy Smith. “Restoring wetlands and protecting lands like the Carestia’s will safeguard clean water for our Great Lakes and beyond.”

Ducks Unlimited is a national organization whose mission is to conserve, restore, and manage wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people. Ducks Unlimited reached out to the Land Conservancy seeking land for a combined protection and restoration project. The Land Conservancy introduced Ducks Unlimited to Tom and Susan, who gave their blessing to doing the project on their land. Ducks Unlimited is now ready to restore eight acres of native grassland and five acres of emergent marsh in the southern portion of the Carestia’s property. The restoration area will also be planted to support our declining pollinators, like butterflies, bees, and other important species.

“Grasslands and marshes are important habitat for our region’s waterfowl. Unfortunately, over 60% of wetland habitat has been lost in the Lake Ontario watershed, and we work with our partners to help restore critical wetland habitat degraded every day.” said Sarah Fleming, Manager of Conservation Programs, for Ducks Unlimited. “We were grateful for the opportunity to work with the Carestias to restore these habitats on their property along Lake Ontario. We are excited to watch as waterfowl return to make this place their home, and help with improved water quality in Lake Ontario by reducing sediments washing off the former agricultural field.”

Tom and Susan couldn’t be happier about working with the Land Conservancy and Ducks Unlimited. “We are hopeful that our story will inspire others to cherish the magnificent waterfront along our Great Lakes. We want our success to pave the way for more land and natural resource protection in the region.”

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 future generations. The Land Conservancy envisions a future in which open spaces, working lands, wildlife habitat and scenic beauty are cherished and protected as part of the landscape and character of Western New York. The Land Conservancy is accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission and is one of 1,700 land trusts nationwide, including 90 in New York State. Land trusts have protected 40 million acres over the last 20 years. For more information on upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, or the mission of the Western New York Land Conservancy, please call (716) 687-1225 or visit [www.wnylc.org](http://www.wnylc.org).

**Ducks Unlimited Inc.** is the world's largest nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving North America's continually disappearing waterfowl habitats. Established in 1937, Ducks Unlimited has conserved more than 14 million acres thanks to contributions from more than a million supporters across the continent. Guided by science and dedicated to program efficiency, DU works toward the vision of wetlands sufficient to fill the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow, and forever. For more information on our work, visit [www.ducks.org](http://www.ducks.org).

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