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Our Region's 'Land Conservancy' Awarded \$70,000 from NYS Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) Grants

This week, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) announced \$1.8 million in Conservation Partnership Program grants for 55 nonprofit land trusts across the State. Representatives from the DEC joined conservation leaders from around New York to unveil the grantees at an event co-hosted by the Land Trust Alliance and the Hudson Highlands Land Trust. The grants are funded through NYS's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), and the Land Trust Alliance administers the Conservation Partnership Program in coordination with DEC. The Western New York Land Conservancy received two grants worth \$70,000 to support conservation in our region.

"Through partnerships with local land trusts, the Environmental Protection Fund provides critical support for open space programs across the state," said Commissioner Seggos. "These grants help local land trusts support our work to protect New York's peerless waters, lands, and habitats and preserve our state's natural resources, while leveraging even more resources communities can put to good use protecting these irreplaceable assets."

"Coming at a time when every effort makes a difference, this initiative enables land trusts, local communities and private landowners to better protect New York's most important water resources, farmlands, wildlife habitats and urban green spaces," said Andrew Bowman, president of the Land Trust Alliance. "New York's clear commitment to its Environmental Protection Fund sets a standard that can inspire other states to protect water quality, promote healthy communities, and address our changing climate. These are smart investments in our collective future. On behalf of the Land Trust Alliance and our supporters, we thank Governor Cuomo, Commissioner Seggos and the New York State Legislature for supporting these efforts."

One of the two grants awarded to the Land Conservancy will support The Owens Falls Sanctuary, a spectacular new 57-acre nature preserve in the Town of Aurora that features scenic waterfalls and habitat for rare plants and animals. The preserve helps maintain water quality in the Great Lakes and is linked to the historic Roycroft arts and crafts community. It was protected last year by the Land Conservancy after a year-long campaign.

Aurora Town Supervisor Jim Bach said, “The Owens Falls Sanctuary is an incredible asset in the Town of Aurora. This grant will make it possible for the Land Conservancy to further enhance the natural beauty of this very special place and do more transformative work in our region.”

The second grant will enable the Land Conservancy to develop a long-term, landscape-scale initiative to work with landowners and communities to protect land in the Buffalo Creek watershed. The watershed has some of the most important farmland and wildlife habitats in the region. It spans 11 municipalities, including West Seneca, Elma, Marilla, and Wales, and extends into Wyoming County. This project will include new land protection, expanded outreach and community engagement, and training for municipal and county government staff and elected officials.

“The Land Conservancy is uniquely positioned to work with multiple communities to protect natural land and safeguard water quality for the benefit of the entire region,” said Senator Patrick Gallivan, whose district is home to the Owens Falls Sanctuary, the Buffalo Creek watershed, as well as several of the Land Conservancy’s recent successes. “There’s no time to waste and the Land Conservancy’s work is revitalizing our community today.”

Nancy Smith, Executive Director of the Western New York Land Conservancy, said, “The Land Conservancy appreciates this significant investment of Environmental Protection Funds in our community. By saving our region’s most transformative places, our wildlife will have places to thrive and our residents and visitors will know the joys of spending time in nature. This support is vital to creating a healthy, vibrant Western New York.”

Both grants will help the Land Conservancy as they launch a new and innovative five-year strategic plan which prioritizes: expanding the Niagara River Greenway; protecting land in the most critical watersheds of the Niagara River; preserving some of the state’s most productive farmland; expanding partnerships with the region’s indigenous communities; working in urban communities; and enhancing the biodiversity and climate resiliency of 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.

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