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## Funding needed to turn a 140-acre forest on Grand Island into an iconic new nature preserve

The Western New York Land Conservancy and residents of Grand Island hope to create a new 140-acre forested nature preserve in the heart of the Niagara River. That dream came closer to reality this month when funding was committed by the Niagara River Greenway Ecological Standing Committee and the Gallogly Family Foundation, totaling more than \$700,000. This funding will be just enough for the Land Conservancy to purchase the property and open it to the public. The Land Conservancy is hoping to raise at least another \$600,000 to create an even better walking trail system, restore wildlife habitat, and help maintain the preserve in the long run.

"We have been very happy to work with the Land Conservancy to preserve this beautiful forest, which cleans our air and water and keeps us healthy," said Grand Island Supervisor Nate McMurray. "The preserve is right next door to the Nike Base Park (originally a US Army Nike missile base) and will give people access to another beautiful green space in Western New York. Now it will always be there for future generations to enjoy."

The 140-acre forest surrounds Assumption Cemetery on Whitehaven Road. It is currently owned by Catholic Cemeteries of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Buffalo. Catholic Cemeteries would like Assumption Cemetery to remain shielded from surrounding development, and have offered to sell the surrounding 140-acre forest to the Land Conservancy to help ensure that buffer exists far into the future.

"In his encyclical, Pope Francis calls on the Church and the world to acknowledge the urgency of our environmental challenges and to join him in embarking on a new path. We are working with the Land Conservancy to do just that," said Carmen Colao, Director of Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Buffalo. "This project will help ensure that the Assumption Cemetery is forever located in a peaceful and tranquil setting, surrounding by a vast and inspiring forest."

This land is incredibly ecologically important. It is one of the largest, undeveloped, privately-owned properties left on Grand Island, and one of the largest remaining forests in the entire Niagara River watershed. The property includes almost a mile of Little Sixmile Creek, a tributary of the Niagara River. The forest's landscape was carved by the last glaciers and massive pre-historic floods, leaving behind vast wooded wetlands reminiscent of cypress forests in the bayous of the Southeast. In fact, the combination of oaks and hickories is more typical of forest further south of New York State, and represents what may be a newly described plant community. This sprawling forest is also teeming with life. Passing migratory songbirds rest on the limbs of tall trees, while blue-spotted salamanders make their home on the forest floor below.

This forest also provides important 'ecosystem services' to the entire region. "The Great Lakes Basin contains 84% of the surface freshwater of North America," said Land Conservancy Nancy Smith, Executive Director. "This headwater forest is part of this much larger system, and protecting it will ensure that future generations can drink, swim, and fish from our Great Lakes."

In July, the Niagara River Greenway Ecological Standing Committee approved a grant of \$568,000 to help protect the forest. Then, in early August, Land Conservancy received an additional \$200,000 from the Gallogly Family Foundation to help create the new nature preserve. Once acquired, the preserve will be called the Margery Gallogly Nature Sanctuary.

“The preserve will be named after my grandmother who is an avid birdwatcher” said Kasey DeLuke of the Gallogly Family Foundation, and one of the newest Land Conservancy board members. “We are honored to be able to protect this majestic forest in her honor and create a legacy of conservation. Now and far into the future, children will be able to come here with their families to connect to nature.”

NYS Senator Chris Jacobs said “The Margery Gallogly Nature Sanctuary will safeguard important wildlife habitat, maintain water quality in the Niagara River, help prevent flooding on Grand Island, and add a critical new link of open space and outdoor recreation to the Niagara River Greenway. This will be a good for the quality of life of people who live here, and will attract visitors as well.”

According to Tim DePriest, Chair of the Greenway Ecological Standing Committee, “This project is a significant step forward in the creation of the Niagara River Greenway as envisioned with a network of interconnected conservation areas that allow visitors to enjoy and explore the natural beauty of the river corridor. In this case, those who venture into the new forest preserve will experience an ecosystem that represents what the area looked like hundreds of years ago with towering oaks and hickories dominating the island landscape.”

Once purchased and opened to the public, the new preserve will be only a few minutes from Buffalo and Niagara Falls. It will be a place where people of all ages can enjoy year-round recreation outdoors like hiking, snowshoeing, and cross country skiing. Residents and visitors will be able to take a peaceful walk on nature trails, view colorful songbirds during migration, and witness the frenzy of salamanders and frogs as they emerge each spring.

The Land Conservancy hopes to raise the additional \$600,000 needed by June of 2018. If you are interested in helping create the Margery Gallogly Nature Sanctuary, please contact the Land Conservancy at (716) 687-1225 or emailing [info@wnylc.org](mailto:info@wnylc.org). You can also donate now by sending a check with “Gallogly” in the memo line to the Western New York Land Conservancy, P.O. Box 471, East Aurora, NY 14052, or by donating online at [www.wnyc.org](http://www.wnyc.org).

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.wnyc.org](http://www.wnyc.org).

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