


Greenings

Celebrating Conservation & People



Spring 2017
Volume 50

A photograph of a dirt road winding through a forest. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating a hazy, golden atmosphere. The road is in the foreground, leading into the distance. The trees are tall and dense, with some showing signs of autumn. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

“We see this land as an important part of
our economy—people come to this region
to hunt, fish, hike and snowmobile.”

William Potter
Supervisor of the Town of Orwell

Conserving tradition

Creative partnerships make conservation possible

Mitch Yerdon has spent much of his life—40 years of it—out hiking these woods, hunting with friends and spending time at the camp. There have been bitterly cold mornings, up before dawn, where you can feel the cold snap at your eyeballs, making them prickle in the early light. Other times, there's been lunch over the stove at the camp, telling stories and discussing what it was like as a boy, to grow up here in Tug Hill.

One thing is certain. For Mitch, and those who belong to the Stavemill Hunting Club, LLC, a small hunt club, the lands they have historically leased is part of who they are; "it's become like family," remarked Mitch.

All that was put at risk when Harden Furniture, which owned over 3,000 acres of forestland the club leased in the towns of Redfield and Orwell, in Oswego County, sold the land to a forest investment company who in turn, needed to sell the land.

Once it's gone...

The towns, and the hunt club, recognized an opportunity to keep the land intact for hunting, fishing, snowmobiling and other recreational activities, rather than seeing it get chopped up by scattered development.

"We see this land is an important part of the economy—people come to this region to hunt, fish, hike, and snowmobile," explained the Town of Orwell Supervisor, William Potter.

The Conservation Fund, a national conservation organization, stepped up to purchase the land and transferred it to the State to become part of the State Forest System this past spring; the state continues to pay the property taxes as part of its conservation agreement with local towns in Tug Hill.



"It's a really good solution," said Michael Yerdon, President of the Stavemill Hunting Club, LLC. "Hunting is part of the culture and heritage of Tug Hill, and local camps are often a major part of that."

Not that easy

But even then, the hunt club might have lost its camp.

That's because state law requires that private leases be phased out even if they've been there for generations.

Working with The Conservation Fund, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, the Tug Hill Commission, and our land trust, a strategy was created to allow the hunt club to keep its camp and ensure the land wouldn't be developed in the future in an incompatible way.

Now, thanks to this creative plan, the hunt club will purchase six-acres of the land around their camp at the conservation value, subject to a conservation agreement held by Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust.

"We want to find a way to allow the important forest lands to be conserved for these uses, and honor the heritage of the long-term hunting camps," remarked Michael Yerdon, President of the Stavemill Hunting Club, LLC. "This is a great example of a partnership that's making that goal possible."

A path to a magical place

Have you sensed that Tug Hill's been missing something? As beautiful as it is, as lucky as we are living here, we've been lacking something that other special places treasure in their community and tout as economic development.

Unlike other areas, we haven't had a long-distance trail to allow people to experience the wildness, beauty, and solitude of Tug Hill.

Bob McNamara, a local naturalist and passionate birder, is working to change that. Bob, along with a dedicated group of volunteers, is leading a community effort to design, and construct, a 20-mile primitive hiking trail right down the center of Tug Hill.

A special place

Known as the core forest, this area is dense and at times hard to navigate—but it's full of beautiful mature trees, and the East Branch of the Fish Creek flows through the forest.

"This is a region where Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust has been partnering with a variety of stakeholders to protect this land for a long time," remarked Bob, who is also a board member for the land trust.

Locals know how special this place is, and in 2006 through a unique collaboration of local communities, hunting and other recreation groups, conservation groups and the state, over 45,000 acres were protected.

The deal secured the drinking water for the City of Rome, hunting and other recreational activities for the public, and allows timber management.

A partnership and shared vision

"It has been a real team approach to making this trail a reality," noted Bob,

"crossing lands owned by New York State (NYS), private lands subject to NYS easements requiring public access, and lands owned by The Nature Conservancy."

Until now the Tug Hill core forest has been devoid of a foot trail that is open to public access.

This trail will allow hikers and skiers to explore the heart of Tug Hill and visit a wide variety of wild Tug Hill landscapes.

The trail is off to a great start, with initial design and flagging taking place last fall to kick start the project. We can't wait to work with you to make this dream a reality.



Want to help?

If you'd like to volunteer with trail creation and maintenance, please call Lianna Lee or email her at tughilloutreach@nnymail.com.

You can spend as little as a couple of hours, or as much as a couple of days—we appreciate any time and talent you can offer.



7 ways to support local agriculture

What you say and do matters

Farms and farmers are part of the very fabric of Tug Hill. Whether it's the sweeping fields with far off views, or smaller ones, tucked on the edge of our community, these farms grow and produce much of the amazing food we put on our tables at home.

But farming doesn't happen in isolation. And neither does the farmland conservation work that many families need to pass the land on to the next generation. It's up to all of us.



As we head into the sunshine of spring we've rounded up seven ways you can support local agriculture:

1. **Buy local.** It sounds obvious, but visit local farmers markets and farm stands, buy local food when available in the grocery stores.
2. **Take a trip to an apiary, or a farm with beehives.** The honeybee is a small but mighty creature. Important food crops grow because bees pollinate them. Stock up on local honey and beautiful beeswax candles. Check out where to find them on the National Honey Board website, www.honey.com.
3. **Buy local liquor.** Grab a few friends and go visit a local winery or distillery. Many of the grapes, fruits, and hops that make your favorite wine or beer taste great are grown locally.
4. **Follow farmers or farmer blogs on social media,** and share how awesome your favorite farm is with your friends. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and even email can be a great way to introduce your friends to local businesses.
5. **Get political.** Support your farming community by reading up on local bills and legislation that are being voted on in your town, county or state. Feeling really fired up? You can call us at the land trust to get some talking points, or create a succinct message on your own to call or email your mayor, governor, or state reps to make your voice heard.
6. **Support farm-to-school programs.** Healthy local food is great for kids and great for our farms.
7. **Give a farmer a hug.** You've seen that bumper sticker right? Show your appreciation. Of course you should always ask first...



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You and the birds make conservation and kids thrive

How do you get a group of energetic second graders to be quiet for 15 magical minutes? Put up a bird feeder and wait for the birds to arrive.

Susan Jeffers, a teacher at Mount Markham Elementary School in West Winefield, NY, knows that birds can bring science to life—for many kids, it becomes a highlight in their day.

“Tangible, interactive learning is so important,” notes Susan. “We find the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust Bird Quest a spring highlight of our class.”

Research has shown that birds are a gateway to better observation and focus skills, important elements of education. It also can ignite a life-long passion for the out-of-doors.

As Susan said, “It makes the kids more aware about what’s going in the world around them.” Learning to love wildlife, and have a great time in school doing

it, is what the future of conservation is all about.

Through the Bird Quest students learn about the habits and habitats of birds, and how birds are important to our ecosystems.

Donations from local businesses including Noble Ace Hardware, Home Depot, Lowe’s of Watertown, Walmart Super Center, and White’s Lumber allows us to provide the bird seed and bird feeders, to over 30 schools and 15 homeschool families.

An excerpt from Land Trust Alliance article “Birdwatching from the School Window” by Rose Jenkins.

Wildlife connectivity project wraps up

Sometimes, what feels like a vast and pristine area can be taken for granted. The Black River Valley, a landscape comprised of rolling farms and deep forests, links our region to the Adirondacks providing crucial wildlife habitat for lynx, fox and bobcats.

It plays a big role in maintaining animal health and survival as they migrate and raise their young. But while it’s here today serving that purpose, there’s no guarantee it will be there tomorrow.

To aid in clarifying what areas are important to conserve, dozens of trail cameras were placed around northern Oneida County to document wildlife presence over the past year.

Gerry and Larry Ritter loved participating in the program.

“When we saw bobcat on our camera it was so exciting, we suspected these animals were out there, but this was solid proof.

We had no idea our land is so important to their survival.”

The next step in the project is for the partners to meet with landowners to review what was found, and explore how they might manage their land for wildlife as well as other goals; some have expressed an interest in discussing different land protection options as well.

By taking this proactive approach in partnership with local families, we are ensuring that animals such as the quiet and elusive bobcat have a strong chance of remaining part of the Tug Hill landscape.

A “simple gift” from the heart

When he was a young boy in the 1960's, Gordon Hayes, Jr. would go out exploring the most remote parts of Tug Hill with his dad. As a teen, every fall weekend they would be out with their dogs bird hunting.

His dad had a passion for wild flowers and a gift for photography. Together they would spend days traveling the “Hill” in spring in search of rare flowers.

Gordon recalls “those days” outdoors on Tug Hill as transformational, something that can't be replicated by the movies, TV, or a quick trip to the mall or arcade.

In short, “those days provided my father, my brother Nathan and me with a lifetime of outdoor memories and a deep love of Tug Hill.”

As Gordon grew and had a family of his own, Tug Hill continued to be the center of their outdoor adventures—

cross-country skiing in Osceola and hiking in the woods. “There is nothing like spending time with family, outdoors” reflects Gordon.

By leaving a gift in his will Gordon hopes to inspire conservation in the future. “It's a simple thing to do,” remarks Gordon, continuing “It comes from my heart.”

Gordon's gift will ensure that other young people will be able to fall in love with the wildflowers, woods, and nature of Tug Hill like he did.

Thank you Gordon for including us in your legacy—your love of the land will inspire many for years to come.

“Those days provided my father, my brother Nathan and me with a lifetime of outdoor memories and a deep love of Tug Hill.”

Thanks to you...

Thanks to you, this spring we will be working with local families and landowners to conserve dairy farms, woodlands and wildlife habitat, streams and wetlands.

Conserving one's land is a personal decision—often something that has taken years to culminate. It's the support of our members, people like you, who allow us the time and resources needed to make these dreams a reality.



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We're here for you...

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Facebook.com/Tug-Hill-Tomorrow-Land-Trust

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You're the best

Summertime supporter thank you hike and picnic

Have we told you lately how much we appreciate you?

We do, and we're so excited to thank you for your support, and for making land protection possible in our beloved Tug Hill. On **Saturday, July 22** we're inviting you to the Independence River for a relaxing summertime hike and picnic.

We'll provide a picnic lunch—you just need to bring a swim suit and towel. Bring your family—the more the merrier. To RSVP please give us a call at 315-779-2239 or email tughilloutreach@nynmail.com. Not a donor yet? No problem. Feel free to join our efforts with a contribution, we'd love to have you on our team.

Additional outings

MAY 20TH • 10AM – 2PM

Bird and Wildflower Discovery Walk – Stone Barn State Forest, Cleveland

Trilliums, violets and a heron rookery await you on this springtime adventure. Bring lunch, comfortable shoes and binoculars. Local bird and plant experts will be our guides. Perfect walk for teens and adults.

JUNE 17TH • 8AM – 10AM

Find the Really Cool Birds – Forest Park, Camden

Join birding expert Bob McNamara on this family-friendly walk. Bob will show us how to identify birds by their call too. We could see some really cool birds.

For more information on our events or programs please check out our website at TugHillTomorrowLandTrust.org or call the office at (315) 779-2239.

