

TUG HILL
TOMORROW



LAND TRUST

Greenings

Celebrating Conservation & People

SPRING/SUMMER 2023 • VOLUME 55



Conservation is vital for birds and people

We've seen the miraculous return of our feathered friends from their winter in the warm south and can now enjoy watching as they nest and raise new families. Birds inspire and uplift us with their energy, colorful plumage, interesting behaviors, various calls and songs, and the important ways they do their part to keep our world healthy.

Birds pollinate and spread seeds of many of the plants that provide us with food, with medicine, with wood and with clean, fresh air. They keep insect and rodent numbers in check, and they are valuable as prey for bigger birds and other animals. All services that humans also depend on.

But did you know we're seeing fewer and fewer birds — both migrants and year-round residents — every year? In fact, since 1970, according to a comprehensive 2019 study by *Science* magazine, North American bird populations have dropped by nearly 30 percent — a decline of approximately 3 billion birds — including common as well as less common birds, with the risk that our children will never be able to experience some of the birds we now do.

Without habitat protection, birds don't have a chance. And having fewer birds around us negatively impacts all of us — our surroundings, our livelihoods, our health. This is why your support for land conservation is so very crucial.

Your commitment keeps large areas of wetland, field and forest available as refuge for these vital creatures, along with the plants and animals they depend on, and that depend on them. Places full of soothing birdsong as we hike on forest trails or have a picnic near on a riverbank.

You make a difference by helping to secure all of the benefits that birds bring to our lives, our world. Thank you!

Amenities for you coming soon in some very special places

Can you feel the anticipation? Plans for making nature areas close to you accessible are underway, and we're excited to get you out and moving in forests, wet meadows, and grasslands later this year.



Bobolink

David S. Smith Public Conservation Area

Located in the Town of LeRay, this special place will likely become a "go-to" destination given its proximity to Fort Drum families. With mostly farms and commercial properties here, publicly accessible natural areas are few.

But safe public access will be on the way after a site plan detailing natural resources on the property is approved, and funding secured — providing parking, trails, and more for recreation and learning activities.

French Settlement Public Conservation Area

Thanks to Dr. Marvin Reimer's generous 2020 donation, this beautiful 121-acre property will be a neighborhood favorite. Its bird, beaver, and porcupine habitat has been caringly watched over by volunteer and neighbor, Kris Dimmick, and will soon hold parking, trails, and interpretive signage for the public to enjoy created by Art of Wilderness's Bob McNamara.

Mohawk Hill Public Conservation Area

Restored to open wetland by Ducks Unlimited, and donated to the land trust in 2022, this Town of West Turin site has sweeping views of grassland and shallow wetland habitats and is home to a variety of wildlife including Bobolink and many types of waterfowl.

Ducks Unlimited will provide maintenance on the property including mowing and other habitat improve-



Mohawk Hill School

ments as it gradually transfers these responsibilities to our land trust.

A NOAA National Severe Storms Laboratory installed last winter documented lightning strikes during lake effect snow events, adding vital information for understanding future storms.

For more information about these public conservation areas, or other trails and places to go, please refer to our website and eNewsletters.

If you'd like to help, please contact John Souva by email at jsouva@tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org.

French Settlement Public Conservation Area



Jeff Mandiga

New York's forest at a crossroads

Critical for wildlife, water, recreation and economy

Some of New York's most important wildlife habitat resides in large expanses of forest land. Tug Hill's forests are no exception.

The "Core Forest, the Heart of Tug Hill," that encompasses over 45,000 acres provides critical migration corridors for black bear, moose, and bobcat, and is the headwater supply for drinking water in the cities of Rome and Oneida.

These lands are part of a larger regional conservation effort spanning from Pennsylvania up to Canada. With extreme weather on the rise, wildlife now face challenges related to drought, heavy rains and flooding, and habitat fragmentation. The conservation of New York's woodlands

is central to the survival of resident and migratory birds, like the Scarlet Tanager, as well providing safe migration route for the shy lynx.

Data has shown that lynx require as much as 30 square miles for food, shelter and raising their young. Yet development unchecked in many forested regions puts the land—and the wildlife—at risk.

When factoring in how important forests and woodlands are for improving water quality and reducing flooding, as well as the multi-billion dollar recreation and forest economy, it's clear that conserving these lands couldn't be more timely.



Brenda Nellis, Boonville

New funding program advances forest conservation

The Forest Conservation Easements for Land Trusts Program is a new opportunity for private landowners looking to conserve their forested properties. The program is funded by the NYS Environmental Protection Fund and was expanded this year to \$1.35 million statewide.

New York State has a long history of land protection yet this program is unique in how it supports local forest owners to conserve their land.

Accredited land trusts raise money and apply for matching funds to support projects that address water conservation, wildlife habitat, support local forest-based economies, and slow down the pace and impact of climate change.

Your support is critical as our match for completing the overall project assessment and related documentation.

If awarded this year, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust will assist two families whose properties encompass 500 acres of forestland in the "Core Forest."

KIDS ARE THE FUTURE

Tug Hill nature backpacks help kids and families explore the outdoors

More resources for outdoor exploration are in kids' hands this year, with families spending more quality time together in the outdoors.

So far, seven libraries throughout the region each have two Tug Hill Explorer Backpacks. The backpacks are available for anyone to borrow and return.

One backpack focuses on birds, and the other focuses on animal signs and tracking. Tug Hill Explorer Backpacks contain books, tools, activities, and

equipment that will enrich any outdoor experience, with a list of suggested locations open to the public for adventures beyond the backyard.

As Tug Hill Explorer Backpacks are not eligible for interlibrary loan the plan is to work with donors and foundations to secure additional funding to supply the explorer backpacks to more local libraries and expand the offerings to include insects and pond/stream life.



Initial funding has been provided by the Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties, Stewart's Holiday Match Fund, and community supporters like you.



"People need nature. We know that. But what we often forget is that nature needs people who care..."

— Sally Smith, Verona Beach State Park Supervisor

Youth matter. So does nature. The combination is a "win."

In the southern region of the Tug Hill, there's a growing sense of purpose and excitement.

You might assume that the woodlands, meadows, and streams that comprise so much of the area are accessible to people from all walks of life, but that's not often the case. Public conservation lands with welcoming trails, in many areas, are few and far between.

Research has documented that youth are facing greater stress due to social isolation, falling behind in their studies due to the Pandemic, and lack of time in nature.

Being in nature can improve focus, build self-esteem, improve empathy, and foster greater success at school.

Partnerships between our land trust and State Parks in Verona Beach, and in the Town of Western, as well as

community organizations like Midtown Urban Community Center (MUCC) and Young Scholars LLP in Utica, are so important.

It's a step in providing outdoor experiences within the southern part of our region for those who, so far, have had little chance to experience the wonders of nature on a regular basis.

Sally Smith, Verona Beach State Park Supervisor, explains, "People need nature. We know that. But what we often forget is that nature needs people who care. By creating positive memorable experiences, these young people can grow up sharing their love of the outdoors with their family. The importance of saving these lands for future generations doesn't come from being 'educated.' It comes from the heart."



WHAT'S AT STAKE

Local families conserve Tug Hill's farms, while there's still time

Jonathan Northrop grew up on a dairy farm and dreamt of his own. But as surrounding farms were developed, and land prices increased, he worried his dream would be lost. Enter conservation.

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust worked with Jonathan and his family, and the county farmland protection board, to submit a successful NYS farmland protection grant. Now, 940 acres of farmland will be protected, in the

towns of Brownville, Clayton and Orleans.

"Jonathan's dad, Michael, conserved his family's home-farm in the towns of Adams and Rodman," explained John Souva, Land Protection/Education & Outreach Manager. "Like many farmers, Jonathan is now continuing his family legacy by protecting his own farm. We're so happy to be able to help." The Northrop Farm is one of 14 ongoing farmland protection projects.

FARMLAND STATS

14 Farms in the process to being conserved

2,964 Acres of farmland to be conserved.

108 Farms lost in Tug Hill totaling 99,824 acres between 2012–2017

National Agricultural Statistics Service

Giving can provide benefits beyond the land

Your support is what makes local conservation happen. Whether it's conserving farms, protecting wildlife habitat, creating new places for people to connect with nature, or providing opportunities for youth to find inspiration from nature, *it is you who make that happen*. As a community-supported land trust, we couldn't do this work without you. Thank you.

Tax-friendly, charitable gifts, make a big difference:

- ✓ **Donate appreciated securities**, like stocks, and avoid capital gains tax.
- ✓ **Make a qualified charitable distribution from your IRA** account and reduce income tax on your required minimum distribution.
- ✓ **Contribute monthly**. Monthly giving is easy to do and a great way to make an impact all year long. People contribute anywhere from \$5 to over \$100 or more per month.
- ✓ **Leave a bequest** to Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust in your will.
- ✓ **Recommend a gift** to Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust from your donor-advised fund.

- ✓ **Donate non-cash assets** such as real estate including land, houses, camps, or businesses. These donations can save you capital gain taxes and reduce your property liability.

Donate your time and talent:

- ✓ **Join us for programs or help in our office**. How about assisting with events or programs, or with publications and mailings? Volunteering is a great way to have fun and meet new people.
- ✓ **Want to donate materials or services in-kind?** If you know someone who wants to lend professional services, whether donating design services, gravel for a conservation area parking area, or lumber for a board walk, there are a lot of in-kind donations that make a big difference.



We're here for you...

Want to find out about new projects, family-friendly programs and hikes, conservation tips, and community events?

Sign up for our updates

TugHillTomorrowLandTrust.org

@TugHillTomorrowLandTrust

@tughillnature

@tughillnature

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Natalie Bogdanowicz, Montague
Chair

Melanie Parker Geurtsen, Rodman
Vice Chair

David Zembiec, Adams
Treasurer

Heidi Jones, Barneveld
Secretary

Robert Keller, Jr., Boonville
Immediate Past Chair

George Bibbins, Jr., Rodman
Director-at-Large

Susan Fassler, Amboy

DIRECTORS

Cary Fassler, Amboy

Laurie Frykholm, Rome

Dave Kohr, Pulaski

Norah Machia, Watertown

Lynn Murray, Copenhagen

Robert Quinn, Sackets Harbor

Zachary Wakeman, Pulaski

ADVISORY COUNCIL

Ben Coe, Watertown

Peggy O'Shea, Barneveld

Chris Welch, Barneveld

Bob McNamara, Constantia

Paul Miller, Blossvale

STAFF

Mark A. Pacilio
Executive Director

Emily Antonacci
Land Protection Manager

Linda Gibbs
Community Programs Director

Emily Males
Communications & Marketing Director

John Souva, III
*Land Protection/Education
& Outreach Manager*



Photographs: All photographs are taken by staff unless otherwise noted.

Front Cover: Tree swallow by Jeannine Eckel.

Share this newsletter with a friend or recycle.



Find your joy this summer

Birdwatch, walk, paddle, learn something new

Would you like to go on a relaxing walk in the woods? Perhaps you know someone who'd be interested in a pleasant paddle on a local pond or stream, or volunteering to help improve local trails.

This summer and fall you'll find a variety of programs and events throughout the Tug Hill region ranging from down in the Utica area, up towards Watertown, and in between.

Programs are designed to be fun, friendly, and a great way for you, your friends, and family to get outside into nature.

Want to learn more and stay up to date on all the fun?

Sign up to receive our free eNewsletter, follow us on Facebook, or check out the details for upcoming programs and events on our website: tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org/events.

Programs and outings are generally free thanks to the support of local businesses and people like you. We hope to see you soon.



A new trail is meandering through the heart of Tug Hill

The soon-to-be 20-mile Traverse Trail will take another leap forward this summer thanks to the help of volunteers, dedicated board and staff, and long-time partners. Last summer, the northern 10 miles of the trail was completed.

Tug Hill Tomorrow and Adirondack Mountain Club volunteers will work to complete the approximately 10 miles of trail starting from the Michigan Mills Road in the Town of West Turin, south through State Forest Preserve parcels, to its southern endpoint in the Town of Osceola. The trail will be open for non-motorized use once completed.

This is a remarkable volunteer effort, once again demonstrating love for Tug Hill. If you'd like to help out contact Lin Gibbs at 315-779-8240, x14, or email lgibbs@tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org.