

**2026 FALL/WINTER HIGHLIGHTS
& 2025 ANNUAL REPORT**



"A special part of our trips from California to Pulaski to see the folks, was to go up to camp and enjoy the quiet, walk the woods, play in the stream. We are glad this delightful place can be protected, and available to others."

**- Bill & Mabry Benson
Dimon & Rhoda Benson Public
Conservation Area, Locona, NY**

A scenic view of a river flowing through a forested area. The river is dark and calm, reflecting the surrounding greenery. On the left bank, there is a steep, rocky cliff face with visible horizontal layers of stone. A large, fallen tree trunk lies diagonally across the cliff face, partially covered in moss and ferns. The right bank is a rocky shoreline with many grey stones and some fallen leaves. The background is a dense forest with tall trees and lush green foliage.

DIMON & RHODA BENSON PUBLIC CONSERVATION AREA

Where Forests & Waterways



Endure

Along the winding banks of Little Sandy Creek, a new chapter in Tug Hill conservation has begun.

In 2025, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust permanently protected the 40-acre Dimon & Rhoda Benson Public Conservation Area on Center Road in Sandy Creek, ensuring this forested landscape will remain protected for the future.

At the heart of the preserve is Little Sandy Creek, where visitors can explore mature forests, follow the trails, and experience a Tug Hill woodland firsthand.

A Landscape Shaped by Water

Little Sandy Creek has shaped this landscape for generations, winding through the preserve while creating habitat for trout, native plants, and wildlife. More than a scenic waterway, the creek connects the preserve's forests with its wetlands, helping sustain the surrounding ecosystem.

More than a scenic waterway, the creek connects the preserve's forests and wetlands, supporting the health of the surrounding ecosystem.

Season after season, the creek changes with the landscape. Spring snowmelt swells its banks, summer shade keeps the water cool, autumn leaves nourish the stream's food web, and winter ice shelters life beneath the surface.

The surrounding forest provides shade and shelter for the creek, helping maintain the cool, clean water that trout and other aquatic life depend on.



Dimon and Rhoda Benson, whose love for this special place inspired its permanent protection.

From Family Retreat to Public Conservation Area

The property was purchased by Dimon and Rhoda Benson in December 1964 after years of visiting the area for picnics and outdoor recreation.

What began as a simple woodland retreat gradually became a place where family members fished the creek, walked the trails, planted trees, and enjoyed the changing seasons of Tug Hill.

Over the decades, the Bensons developed the camp with a remarkably light footprint. A modest cabin was built, trails were established, and spruce seedlings were planted, while the surrounding forest was allowed to grow and evolve naturally.

Their approach reflected a belief that the land's greatest value was not in what could be extracted from it, but in what could be experienced there.

- Continues on page 4

– Continued from page 3

Years later, Bill and Mabry Benson chose to donate the property to Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust so its conservation and recreational values could be maintained for the future. Funding support from the Central New York Community Foundation helped make the permanent protection of the preserve possible.

Support from the Shineman Foundation has also helped foster education, stewardship, and collaboration with surrounding communities as the preserve continues to evolve.

A Place that Continues to Evolve

As a public conservation area, the Benson preserve now offers opportunities for hiking, nature observation, birdwatching, and quiet reflection.

Its mature woodlands and Little Sandy Creek provide habitat for wildlife and contribute to the health of the surrounding watershed. Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust will maintain trails, steward the forest and creek habitat, and manage visitor access as the preserve welcomes the public.



Find your way to the Dimon & Rhoda Benson Public Conservation Area at 239 Center Road in Lacona

Permanent protection is only the beginning. Caring for the preserve is an ongoing commitment, with stewardship shaped by the needs of the land and the people who visit it.

Resilience for the Future

The story of the Dimon & Rhoda Benson Public Conservation Area is ultimately one of resilience: forests that have matured over decades, a creek that continues to flow clear and cold, and trails that invite new generations to explore.

By conserving this property, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust has added 40 acres of woodland and stream corridor to the region's protected lands. The preserve will continue to offer opportunities for recreation, wildlife habitat, and connection to the Tug Hill landscape.



Jim D

A Symbol of Healthy Habitat

The spotted salamander is one of many native species that depends on the healthy forests and clean waters of Little Sandy Creek. Protecting places like the Dimon & Rhoda Benson Public Conservation Area helps ensure this habitat endures for generations to come.



Forever Forests

There are few places in New York where forests remain as vast, connected, and wild as those found across Tug Hill.

These woodlands provide clean water, wildlife habitat, and opportunities to explore. As development continues to fragment forests across New York, protecting these landscapes has never been more important.

Protecting these forests means ensuring future generations inherit healthy ecosystems, abundant wildlife, and the opportunity to experience the same sense of wonder these forests inspire today.

A Lifetime of Stewardship

Few people understand that better than Dave and Uli Larrabee. For Dave, caring for Tug Hill's forests has been a lifelong calling. As a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Forest Ranger, he helped shape how people experience Tug Hill today.

Long before hiking became one of the region's most popular outdoor activities, Dave was instrumental in establishing and maintaining many of the trails that continue to welcome visitors into these forests, including the trail system through the spectacular Inman Gulf in Tug Hill State Forest.

The Larrabees permanently protected their property in Rodman through a conservation easement and have established the Trees & Trails Fund to help care for the lands and trails they value so deeply.

Now, they hope their commitment will inspire others to protect the places they love.

Today, they are encouraging others to consider protecting their land through a special conservation challenge. For every new donated conservation easement, the Larrabees will contribute \$1,000 to Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust to protect Tug Hill's forests, farms, and waters.

As Legacy Society members, Dave and Uli have also included Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust in their estate plans, ensuring their commitment to conservation continues into the future.

For Dave conservation has never been just a profession or a pastime. It has been a lifelong commitment. "Putting our land in a conservation easement, putting the Land Trust in our will, this is Dave's legacy," said Uli.



Carl Heilman

Soon, visitors to the French Settlement Public Conservation Area will find benches honoring Dave's lifelong dedication to Tug Hill's forests and trails. They will offer a place to pause in a landscape he spent decades helping others experience and appreciate—a fitting tribute to a lifetime devoted to the forests and trails of Tug Hill.

A Legacy That Lasts

For Dave conservation has meant more than protecting land, it has meant helping people discover it. The trails Dave helped create continue to invite visitors into Tug Hill's forests, inspiring future generations to value and protect the places they love.

The Larrabee challenge has already benefited the Land Trust three times: on a farm near the Joseph A. Blake Wildlife Sanctuary in Jefferson County; woods along the Black River in Lewis County; and woods, fields and a stream near West Canada Creek in Herkimer and Oneida counties.

When we protect a forest forever, we protect far more than trees. We preserve the wildlife, water, and natural heritage that make Tug Hill special, creating a lasting legacy for generations to come.

Is conservation right for you?

People choose to protect their land for many reasons to preserve a family legacy, honor loved ones, or ensure the forests, farms, and wetlands they cherish remain intact forever.

If you'd like to explore whether conservation is right for you and your family, contact Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust at 315-779-8240.

All conversations are confidential.

Bird Biodiversity Increasing at Keller Mohawk Hill

Restored grasslands and wetlands are creating important habitat for birds and other wildlife.

Grassland habitat has declined dramatically since the 1990s, affecting many bird species that depend on these open landscapes for food, nesting, and shelter. Species such as Eastern Meadowlark, Bobolink, Northern Harrier, Upland Sandpiper, and American Kestrel have all experienced declines as grasslands have disappeared.



At Keller Mohawk Hill Public Conservation Area, conservation efforts are helping to reverse that trend. Former agricultural fields have been restored to wide-open grasslands and wetlands, creating important habitat for birds and other wildlife.

The results are encouraging: the number and variety of bird species observed at Keller Mohawk Hill continues to grow. Migratory birds are discovering Keller Mohawk Hill as a place to rest and refuel during their seasonal journeys.

During spring and fall migration, shorebirds such as Semipalmated Plovers, Semipalmated Sandpipers, Greater Yellowlegs, and Solitary Sandpipers can be found foraging in the shallow waters of the ponds and marshes. Palm Warblers also stop to rest and forage before continuing their journey.

Other birds have made Keller Mohawk Hill their seasonal home. Eastern Meadowlarks, Eastern Towhees, Savannah Sparrows, Swamp Sparrows, Red-winged Blackbirds, Eastern Kingbirds, Chestnut-sided Warblers, Yellow Warblers, Veery, Red-eyed Vireos, and Bobolinks have all been observed on the property.

One particularly exciting sign of success is the increase in Bobolinks. Last year, six mating pairs were documented; this year, more than twelve pairs were observed!

The ponds and wetlands provide habitat for waterfowl including Canada Geese, Mallards, Hooded Mergansers, Wood Ducks, Buffleheads, and American Black Ducks. American Bitterns, Green Herons, and Great Blue Herons are now frequent visitors, while Wilson's Snipe, Virginia Rails, and Killdeer can be heard and seen throughout the wetlands.

The open fields also provide hunting habitat for Northern Harriers, Cooper's Hawks, and American Kestrels.

Since late March 2025, weekly visits have been made to Keller Mohawk Hill to document its bird diversity. In 2025, 41 bird species were observed. That number increased to 55 species this year.

Nine of the species observed are included on the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's list of Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Fish and Wildlife Species, including Northern Harrier, Upland Sandpiper, American Bittern, Cooper's Hawk, Vesper Sparrow, American Black Duck, Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, and Semipalmated Sandpiper.

Each new bird sighting is a reminder of the important role protected lands play in supporting wildlife. From migrating shorebirds to nesting Bobolinks, Keller Mohawk Hill is becoming an increasingly important haven for birds—and we look forward to seeing what the years ahead bring.





Wood Thrush

Laurie Frykholm



Mallard

Laurie Frykholm



American Tree Sparrow

Laurie Frykholm



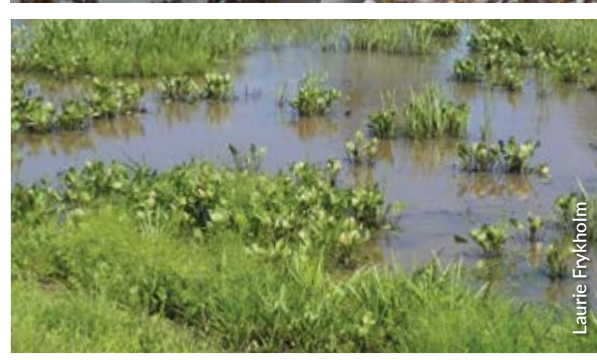
Grouse

Peter Cheresnoski



American Bittern

Laurie Frykholm



Laurie Frykholm



Goldfinch

Laurie Frykholm



Evening Grosbeak

Peter Rodman



White-throated Sparrow

Laurie Frykholm



Big Discoveries Begin Outside

**Kids are spending less time outdoors than ever before.
Thanks to your support, we're helping change that.**

Through free, family-friendly programs, children and their families have opportunities to slow down, explore nature, and experience the joy of being outside together.

Every hike, discovery, and shared adventure helps build a connection to the forests, farms, waters, and wildlife of the Tug Hill region creating memories that can inspire a lifelong appreciation for the outdoors.

Little Sprouts continues to grow

This summer, children and their families once again gathered for Little Sprouts Adventure Day, a program inspired by board member and volunteer Sue Fassler. Sue envisioned a program designed especially for young children, one that encourages families to explore, discover, and learn together in nature.

From searching for insects and animal tracks to proudly sharing feathers, leaves, and other treasures they found along the way, young explorers reminded us that some of the biggest discoveries begin with simple moments outdoors.

Every question asked and every new discovery made helps build a connection to nature that can last a lifetime.

Do you have an idea for a community program?

We'd love to hear it. Give us a call at 315-779-8240. Just like Little Sprouts, one person's idea can grow into something that inspires families and strengthens our community.

Volunteers are the heart and soul of Tug Hill

Are you looking to make a difference and have fun with friends and family? Volunteering is a great way to do that and there are many ways to get involved.

You can volunteer to help maintain trails, assist at community events, support outreach, lend a hand in the office, or share your photographs of Tug Hill's people, wildlife, farms, forests, and waters for our publications and social media.

Whether you have a couple of hours or can volunteer throughout the year, there's a place for you.

Together, we're protecting the places we love while inspiring the next generation to love them, too.

*Thank you for your
time & talent!*

2025 Volunteers

Alix Krueger & Rob Spoon
Angela Marcoccia
Anne Richter Ashley
Arthur Smolinski
Bill Andrews
Bob & Carol Keller
Caroline Anna
Chris Cronk
Cindy Stewart
Daniel Tuthill
Danielle Salisbury
Dee Croll
George & Nancy Grisham
Heidi Smith
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Kate Woodle
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Martha N. Wilson
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Patricia Singer
Peter Cheresnoski
Ray Spahn
Robert McNamara
Kim Boker
Ruth Norton
Sarah Coughlin
Tristan Stewart
Zachary Wakeman

LOOKING AHEAD: OUR 2026–2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

Shaped by Our Community, Guided by Our Mission

Over the past year, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust has been looking ahead, asking an important question: How can we best serve the Tug Hill region over the next five years?

The answer wasn't developed by staff or the board alone. It was shaped by the people who care deeply about this place.

Hundreds of community members shared their thoughts through our strategic planning survey. We also sat down with donors, conservation partners, and community leaders to hear their perspectives, held a full board and staff retreat to discuss priorities, and formed working committees that spent months developing and refining the plan.

Every conversation, idea, and piece of feedback helped shape the direction of this roadmap.

To everyone who participated, thank you. Your time, thoughtful input, and commitment to the future of Tug Hill have helped create a plan that reflects the values and priorities of the communities we serve.

Our 2026–2030 Strategic Plan builds on more than 35 years of conservation while recognizing the opportunities and challenges ahead. It focuses on four key areas:

- **Conservation** — Protecting the forests, farms, waters, and natural areas that define the Tug Hill region.
- **Stewardship** — Caring for the lands and conservation easements entrusted to us for generations to come.
- **Engagement & Belonging** — Helping more people experience, appreciate, and care for the Tug Hill region.
- **Organizational Capacity & Resilience** — Strengthening the people, partnerships, and resources that make our conservation work possible.

More than a list of projects, this strategic plan is a guide for thoughtful decision-making. It will help us focus our time and resources where they can make the greatest impact while ensuring we continue to fulfill our long-term commitment to the lands and communities we serve.



We invite you to explore the full plan by scanning the QR code.

Thank you for being part of this journey and for helping shape the future of conservation in the Tug Hill region.



OUR IMPACT

Thanks to you As a community-supported conservation organization, you, our donors, partners, landowners, and volunteers are what makes it all possible.



31 Tug Hill Explorer Backpacks

Distributed to 16 local libraries, helping connect more children and families with the outdoors.

Community & Education Programs

83

Community and Education Programs



1,435

Adults



1,291

Children

Connecting people with the Tug Hill region through hikes, workshops, school programs, and outdoor experiences.

Volunteer

788

Hours donated



599

Trail Stewardship Hours



189

Program Support Hours

Helping maintain trails, lead programs, and create meaningful outdoor experiences for the community.

Public Conservation Areas

Expanded public access to nature by establishing two new Public Conservation Areas:

40

ACRES

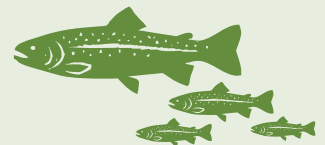
Dimon and Rhoda Benson Public Conservation Area

In Oswego County, the Land Trust's first public conservation area in the county.

103

ACRES

David E. Ramsey Independence River Public Conservation Area



Land Conservation

956.55

ACRES Conserved through six new conservation easements. Permanently protecting...



WORKING FORESTS



FARMS



WILDLIFE HABITAT



WATER RESOURCES

for future generations.



Trails

14

MILES (Approx.) of trails across our Public Conservation Areas

Providing safe and enjoyable opportunities for hiking, wildlife observation, and connecting people with nature.

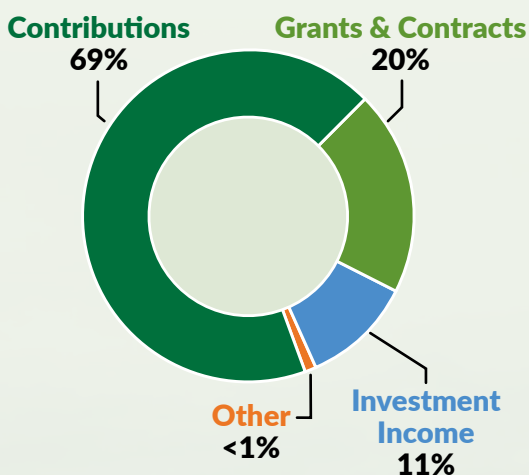
Your support makes conservation possible.

You give because you care about Tug Hill. About its forests and farms, clean waters, wildlife, and the special places that make this region unlike anywhere else. Your support helps protect these places and ensures they remain part of Tug Hill forever.

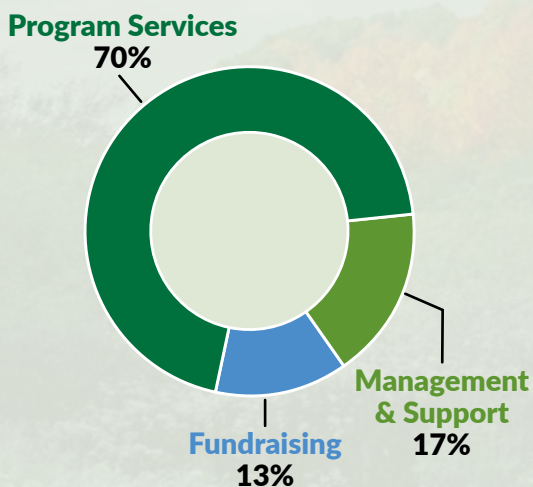
We take your trust seriously. As a nationally accredited land trust, we are committed to responsible stewardship of both the lands entrusted to our care and the financial resources you provide. Every gift helps us protect land, care for conserved places, and build a strong foundation for the future.

Your generosity sustains this work—today and forever.

Income 2025



Expenses 2025



Join others as a part of the...

Heart of Tug Hill Legacy Society

Have you considered how you might leave a lasting impact for generations to come? A gift through your will, of any size, is a terrific way to make a legacy gift. It's easy to do and will show how much you care.

Your generosity and compassion will ensure that kids and families can develop a love of Tug Hill like you do.

Because of you, cherished lands and waters will be conserved and cared for. Let us know if you've included us in your will so we can thank you.

Carol Beck
 Harold Boyce*
 Arthur Evans & Leslie Reed-Evans
 John & Marcia Gosier *
 Steve & Madeline Hunter *
 Bob Keller *
 Carol Keller *
 Chris Kelly
 Virginia Kelly
 John D. King*
 Dave Kohr
 Dave & Uli Larrabee
 Steve Litwhiler
 Russ & Rebecca Myer *

*Deceased

The Legacy Challenge

Now through the end of 2026, Bob and Carol Keller are inspiring future conservation through the Legacy Challenge.

For every new commitment to include Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust in your will or estate plans, the Kellers will make a **\$1,000** gift to the Land Trust—up to **\$10,000**.

If you have already included Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust in your estate plans, we would love to thank you, recognize your generosity, and learn more about the legacy you hope to leave.



Let's celebrate...

Thanks to you, more of Tug Hill's farms, woodlands, waters, and wildlife

Thank you to all who supported the land trust in 2025. Clean water doesn't happen by accident. Neither does preserving our local heritage. Your compassion, generosity, and enthusiasm are what make our community a better place to live, work, and play for today, tomorrow, and generations to come.

Together, we are conserving the extraordinary places of Tug Hill and providing places for people from all walks of life to enjoy, close to home.

We sincerely apologize for any errors or omissions. Please give us a call at 315-779-8240 if you have a correction to make.

(M) Monthly Donors

👉 Donors giving more than 10 years

🌟 Donors giving more than 20 years

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Continues on page 14

What better way to say you care?

A gift in honor or memory of someone special is a meaningful way to celebrate their life, values and connection to the places they loved. With each gift, we'll send a card to the person you've honored or, for a memorial gift, to their family—letting them know of your thoughtful contribution.

It's a beautiful way to recognize someone who matters to you while helping protect the lands, waters, wildlife, and communities we all cherish for generations to come.

In Memory of

Steve Brown
Patricia Carney & Eric Mumpton

James L. Davis
Alan & Lisa Davis

David E. Ramsey
Deborah Davis
Sherry Ramsey

Linda O'Leary
Lucy Reed Foltyniak

Walter & Jean Frykholm
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Jennifer Speers
Sam Sutphin & Kerry Dinneen
Sam Welch & Mark Landrey

Core Forest Society \$5,000-9,999

Anonymous (2)
Jan & Natalie Bogdanowicz ♡
Gilbert Butler ♡
Dave & Mel Geurtsen ♡
Heidi Jones & Jonas Kelly ♡
Christopher & Virginia Kelly ♡
Ruth Norton
Chuck & Carolyn Whitfield
Mary & David Young

Headwaters Society \$10,000+

Chris Clarendon
Dave Clarendon ✱
Dani Friedman-Baker ✱
Robert & Carol Keller ✱
Dave & Uli Larrabee ♡
Bob & Vicky Pender
The Nature Conservancy ✱
Martha N. Wilson
Chris & Melany Welch ♡

Foundations

The Community Foundation
of Herkimer & Oneida
Counties, Inc.
Northern New York
Community Foundation
Richard S. Shineman Foundation
Central New York Community
Foundation

Businesses invest locally and it shows

Part of what makes Tug Hill a special place to live, work, and play is the commitment local businesses have to help our area shine.

It's that community ethic we truly value. Through both in-kind and monetary support, local businesses help leverage the generosity of people from all walks of life. Whether sponsoring educational programs, special events, or a new public conservation area, they demonstrate what it means to invest in our community. We hope you will join us in thanking them for their commitment to conservation.

If you would like to explore becoming a business sponsor and joining our Corporate Eagle program, please contact us at 315-779-8240.

In-Kind Gifts

Riverside Equipment Rentals
WDesignGroup.com
Linda & Peter Gibbs
Coughlin Printing
GYMO Architecture, Engineering
& Land Surveying DPC
Jake Johnson Properties
Law Office of David Geurtsen



2025 Corporate Eagles



Dr. Melanie
Parker-Geurtsen



Bob & Carol
Keller





Tax-savvy ways to give

The places we cherish today become tomorrow's legacy because people choose to protect them.

With new federal tax incentives taking effect in 2026, now is an excellent time to explore the many ways charitable giving can support both your financial goals and the lasting conservation of the Tug Hill region.

Whether you make a gift today, give through your IRA, or include Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust in your estate plans, **your generosity helps protect the farms, forests, waters, and wildlife that define our region for generations to come.**

Become a monthly donor

Monthly giving is one of the easiest and most effective ways to support conservation year-round. Your recurring gift provides reliable funding that allows us to care for protected lands, offer educational programs, and respond when new conservation opportunities arise. Monthly gifts of any amount make a difference.

Give Appreciated Stock

Donating securities, such as stocks or bonds, can offer you potential savings on capital gains taxes while also providing a charitable income tax deduction.



Leave a Legacy

A gift in your will or estate plans is a powerful way to ensure the landscapes you love remain protected for generations to come.

The Legacy Challenge

See page 11 for details.

Give from Your IRA

If you are age 70½ or older, you can make a direct gift from your IRA to Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust — up to \$111,000 per year — without it being treated as taxable income. This gift can also count toward your required minimum distribution (RMD), making it one of the most tax efficient ways to support conservation.

Other Ways to Give

Some supporters choose to donate land or other property to help expand conservation efforts and strengthen our programs. To learn about additional giving opportunities, visit our website or contact us.

[Tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org/waystogive](https://tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org/waystogive)

New Tax Benefits for Charitable Giving in 2026

Recent federal tax law changes have created new opportunities to make charitable giving even more impactful.

- **New for everyone:** Even if you do not itemize deductions, you may now deduct up to \$1,000 in charitable gifts (\$2,000 for married couples filing jointly).
- **For itemizing taxpayers:** Charitable gifts remain deductible, although new rules may make it advantageous to combine multiple years of giving or explore strategies such as donor-advised funds.

IRA giving remains a smart option: Qualified Charitable Distributions continue to provide significant tax advantages for eligible donors.

Because every financial situation is unique, we encourage you to consult your financial or tax advisor to determine the giving strategy that is right for you.

As always, please consult your tax advisor/attorney for advice on your specific situation.

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

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Capture the Beauty of Tug Hill

Every season tells a story, and we'd love your help sharing it.

Whether it's a stunning landscape, wildlife encounter, favorite hiking trail, or a special moment spent outdoors, your photos help showcase what makes the Tug Hill region so special. Selected images may be featured in our annual calendar, *Greenings* newsletter, website, or social media, with full photo credit.

Thank you for helping us inspire others to discover and protect the places we all love.

2027 Calendars Are Here!

Enjoy a full year of Tug Hill's beauty with our 2027 calendar, featuring photographs submitted by supporters like you.

Visit tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org/shop to order your copy today.

