

TUG HILL
TOMORROW



Greenings

Celebrating Conservation & People

FALL/WINTER 2024



**“Action on behalf of life transforms...
As we work to heal the earth,
the earth heals us.”**

– Robin Wall Kimmerer
Potawatomi botanist, author, and
director of the Center for Native
Peoples and the Environment

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Defining Our Work on Tug Hill through the Lens of Conservation

We're pleased to bring you our Fall edition of *Greenings*. We invite you to read about sustainable farming on Tug Hill, a farm-to-market success story, a new conservation area in West Turin, a perspective about volunteers making a difference, a reminder about our Tug Hill Winter Challenge, and an introduction to our newest program, our Bequest Challenge.

In all of the work that we do together, we do in the name of environmental conservation. We're focusing on that. At a time in our country and in the world when we generally agree that there are few issues more important than the need to protect our land and our waters, these stories demonstrate our commitment to ensuring that we are leaders in conservation efforts.

That is because those who live and work here, those who we have worked with over the years to protect their lands, and those who enjoy the unique outdoor experiences that Tug Hill offers have made conservation a priority.

Together, our Tug Hill family, which has collectively helped protect tens of thousands of acres of forest and farm lands, has made a storied difference in New

York State. I couldn't be more proud of our landowners, financial supporters, volunteers, and staff as we do the important work in environmental conservation.

I see the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust as not only doing the work to protect lands in six counties, but being a leading voice for conservation efforts. We continue to expand our education programs for youth and at the same time, are providing local governments with solutions to save lands from overdevelopment.

We stand for the preservation of precious acres of core forest and for smart timber harvesting which promotes healthy forest growth. We stand for a critical balance of green energy production on our lands — an energy production planning that respects our agricultural lands and allows for those lands to continue being agriculturally productive at the same time.

As we move into 2025, I want the voice of the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust to continue to be strong for conservation and to play a significant part in the creation of sound environmental protection policies being crafted locally, and federally.

I invite you to join us in this endeavor — drop me an email at mpacilio@tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org with your thoughts.

Enjoy the changing seasons with a hike in Tug Hill!



Mark Pacilio
Executive Director



Hikers enjoyed the trails marked by volunteers at French Settlement Road Public Conservation Area this summer.

“I see the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust as not only doing the work to protect lands in six counties, but being a leading voice for conservation efforts.”



Terra Sullivan

Protecting & Keeping Farmland Productive

The Farm-to-Market Impact of Conserving Farmland

Conserving farmland brings significant benefits to our community by strengthening the farm-to-market pipeline with a steady supply of fresh local produce. This process supports local and regional food markets and suppliers, boosts the economy, and promotes sustainability, which benefits both farmers and consumers.

Bauer Agriculture is one example of how agricultural lands conserved by the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust have a positive impact on our food supply.

“Corn is our primary crop. When we grow it, we let the plant fully mature and dry down, harvesting it for its grain as opposed to chopping it for silage,” says owner Austin Bauer, who farms several hundred acres of land now owned by the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust.

Bauer leases the land, which is part of the David S. Smith Public Conservation Area in LeRay. In addition to corn, they also occasionally grow soybeans and wheat as a crop rotation to help promote soil health and sustainability.

A large majority of the grain that they harvest ends up in the local and regional livestock industries, ultimately supporting the strong dairy industry prevalent in upstate

New York. In addition, a smaller portion of our grain does make its way into ethanol plants where it is used as an energy ingredient and into export markets.

“While our grain does not immediately go from the field to human consumption, it is a necessary component in so many different consumer foods from dairy products to fresh meat to baked goods – without the grain, these foods would not be able to make it to market for consumers to enjoy,” adds Bauer.

Protected farmland contributes significantly to food security by maintaining a reliable supply of fresh produce, especially during supply chain disruptions. This local distribution network reduces transportation costs and environmental impact, creating a win-win situation for both businesses and the community.



THE STANKO FAMILY LEGACY

Preserving Farmland & Fostering Future Generations

Jim and Marnie Stanko's journey began in different parts of New York—Jim grew up on Long Island, while Marnie was raised in Waverly, NY. They met at SUNY Stony Brook in 1973, married in 1976, and initially lived in a restored 1740s farmhouse on Long Island.

However, a career opportunity led them to rural northwest New Jersey, where they discovered a shared passion for preserving historic homes and farmland. They purchased a 200-year-old farmhouse, the first in what had once been an agricultural area.

Yet, as they started their family, the farmland around them was rapidly developed into housing.

Their son, Tracy, developed a close bond with the last farmer on their road, which sparked his interest in farming.

He purchased his first tractor and dreamed of starting a custom fieldwork business. Inspired by friends who continued farming in New York, Tracy's passion grew, leading him to SUNY Cobleskill, where he studied Dairy Herd Management and Power Equipment Technology.

Expanding operations

In 2003, he found a 184-acre dairy farm in the Town of Deerfield, NY, and relocated to pursue custom fieldwork.

Tracy soon expanded his operation, purchasing the farm and establishing Redline Farms with his wife, Becki. Together, they turned Redline Farms into a thriving dairy operation, producing milk and feed.

As Jim and Marnie prepared for retirement, they found a 137-acre farm neighboring Redline Farms, offering an opportunity to support Tracy's growing business. Purchasing the farm allowed **Redline Farms** to expand its arable land and enhance its sustainability practices.

A critical component of the Stankos' success has been the **Farmland Protection Implementation Grant**, which helps safeguard their land from development and keep it dedicated to agriculture. The grant, secured by the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, supports Tracy and Becki's efforts to improve Redline Farms' productivity while protecting the land for future generations.

The Stankos' commitment to the environment is shared across the family. Their daughter, Gwen Sivirichi, is a Senior Technical Director at AKRF Environmental



By conserving their farm, the Stankos are able to invest in their milking operation and protect their farmland for future generations.

Consultants. With degrees in biology and environmental sciences, Gwen's work in environmental impact studies—including a recent project for the Micron Semiconductor facility in Clay, NY—reflects the family's dedication to conservation.

Creating a sustainable legacy

The Stanko family's story is a powerful reminder of the importance of farmland conservation, particularly as urbanization continues to encroach on agricultural lands. Their dedication to preserving farmland not only sustains their family's legacy but also supports the health and sustainability of the Tug Hill region. By expanding their operation and embracing sustainable farming practices, the Stankos contribute to the vitality of local food systems and the preservation of the agricultural landscape.

We are proud to highlight the Stanko family, celebrating their efforts to sustain and grow their farming legacy. Their story encourages all of us to recognize the critical role of farmland preservation in shaping a brighter, more sustainable future for our community.

Is conservation right for you, or someone you know?

Would you like to protect your land? Do you know someone who might be interested in protecting their farm, woodlands, or wetlands?

People protect their land for a variety of reasons. For many, it's a way to ensure their love of the land will remain intact after they leave.

For others, it's a way to honor their parents and grandparents. Sometimes it helps with estate planning or financial management plans.

If you would like to explore if conservation is right for you and your family, contact Mark Pacilio, Executive Director at 315-779-8240 or email mpacilio@tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org.

All conversations are confidential to provide your family the privacy it needs to make a decision that is right for you.

**“We are pleased to be able to help support
Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust's work to
protect the working lands, wild places,
and way of life on the Tug Hill.**

**It is not only our home,
but our favorite place to be.”**

- Carol Keller



KELLER MOHAWK HILL

A New Gem in Tug Hill's Conservation Efforts

In 2021, the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, in partnership with Ducks Unlimited, successfully acquired 77 acres of restored grassland in the Town of West Turin, near Constableville. This addition to our portfolio of Public Conservation Areas (PCA) stands out for its unique natural features.

Keller Mohawk Hill PCA is home to re-established grasslands, Olmstead Brook, and wetland areas that provide critical habitat for a variety of wildlife, including migratory waterfowl and songbirds.

The property's wetlands serve as essential breeding grounds for several species and contribute to the overall health of the local ecosystem.

Birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts will find Keller Mohawk Hill especially rewarding.

Recognizing the potential for public engagement and education, the Land Trust is currently seeking funding to construct a viewing platform that will allow visitors to observe the area's wildlife without disturbing their natural habitat.

In 2023, the Land Trust proudly named this conservation area after Bob and Carol Keller, in honor of their unwavering dedication and support. Longtime residents of Tug Hill will know the Kellers for their significant contributions to the region's conservation efforts.



Longtime donors and volunteers Carol and Bob Keller, for whom the Keller Mohawk Hill Public Conservation Area is named.

Bob Keller has been a steadfast member of the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust's Board of Directors, serving as both President and Treasurer in recent years.

Beyond their leadership roles, the Kellers continue to be actively involved in the stewardship of Keller Mohawk Hill. Bob will be leading a volunteer group that plays a crucial role in maintaining the PCA, ensuring that trails are accessible and the natural beauty of the area is preserved and we're looking for interested volunteers.

Ducks Unlimited also assists by mowing the trails several times each summer. After eight years, the Land Trust will assume full responsibility for all mowing and maintenance activities at Keller Mohawk Hill.

Collaborative Preservation

Keller Mohawk Hill is not just a conservation area; it is a testament to the power of community and collaboration in preserving Tug Hill's natural heritage for future generations.

Winter Offers Unique Outdoor Experiences

We know that grasslands and wetlands are busy places in the summertime, but what about winter?

While many birds migrate to warmer areas, owls, foxes, and weasels are hunting abundant mouse and vole populations taking cover under the grass and snow. White-tailed deer and cottontail rabbits like the thick grasses for bedding, hiding from predators and getting out of the harsh winter winds.

Tug Hill's many habitats provide great opportunities for people to see winter wildlife. We hope you'll take the time to explore this winter when you can, take our Winter Fun Challenge and get your patch or decal!





Celebrating Our Volunteers

Their dedication makes all things possible

Have you hiked a trail on one of the land trust's properties or picked up a brochure or map from one of our event tables? You have our amazing volunteers to thank!

Their dedication and hard work have kept our organization running smoothly, made trails safe and passable, raised crucial funds for vital land conservation, and so much more.

Our volunteers are the heart and soul of our efforts, and their contributions are invaluable.

From maintaining trails to organizing events, their commitment ensures that we can continue our mission to protect and preserve our natural spaces.

We are proud to foster a vibrant and enthusiastic community of volunteers who lend their time and talents to the land trust.

These individuals not only support our conservation efforts but also help create enjoyable and meaningful experiences for everyone involved.

Whether you're looking to get outdoors, meet new people, or support a cause you care about, there's a place for you in our volunteer community.

Join us and be a part of something special—together, we can make a difference!



“I am glad to be supporting a cause I believe in while spending time outdoors doing the activities I enjoy. The wide variety of volunteer opportunities available allows me to stay involved by participating in the ones that fit my schedule.”

– Sarah
Brownville, NY

Volunteers make amazing things happen

Would you like to make a difference? Depending on your interest and availability, you can spend a couple of hours or all day—whatever works for you. Often, there's a way to include friends and family.

Some folks like to help with trail maintenance or installation. Others prefer to send photographs, assist with mailings, or help with events. No matter your age or experience, there's a place for you. Call Lin Gibbs or email her at lgibbs@tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org to explore what feels right.

Make Great Memories Exploring Tug Hill This Winter

Connect and have fun with family and friends outdoors
Nov 1. - Apr. 15 by taking on the Tug Hill Winter Fun Challenge!

There are countless ways to embrace winter in the Tug Hill region — from tubing hills and skiing to snowmobiling and beyond. **Visit 8 or more different locations for winter fun, tell us about it and submit your list of outings on our website.** There, you can choose

to receive either a patch or decal to mark your achievement.

"We loved hearing how rocks sound rolling across a frozen lake," said Lily, who explored

Delta Lake State Park for the first time last year as part of the land trust's Tug Hill Winter Challenge. She is just one of many who've had memorable experiences discovering new places and enjoying the winter beauty of Tug Hill. Will you be next?

With so many options — check them out on our website: tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org/winter-fun-challenge — you're sure to discover multiple ways to enjoy the season. Enjoy your favorite winter activities and create lasting memories with loved ones in the Tug Hill region.



Carolyn Whitefield

Don Simpson

TUG HILL EXPLORER BACKPACKS

Nature Exploration is for Everyone

Our Tug Hill Explorer Backpacks have become a popular borrowing choice at area libraries by families wanting to get outside together with some helpful tools and resources. In addition, many libraries have requested in-person programs to further delve into the themes presented in the backpacks.

Participants have eagerly embraced the programs, enjoying hands-on learning experiences that deepen their understanding of our natural world. Whether exploring birds, animal tracks, insects or ponds and streams, these programs spark curiosity and foster a love for nature in kids and adults alike.

Thanks to generous support this year from the Stewart's Holiday Match Fund and Watertown Savings Bank, we boosted our

teaching supplies to enhance our programs. These essential supplies enable us to offer more in-person nature programs in the coming year, providing structured learning opportunities led by knowledgeable educators, and helping participants take a deeper dive into the topics covered in the backpacks.

We look forward to continuing to inspire a sense of wonder and appreciation for our natural environment through these engaging educational initiatives.

Interested in sponsoring a backpack for your library or in bringing a program to your library, classroom, club or meeting? Contact Linda Gibbs at lgibbs@tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org or 315-779-8240.



Tug Hill Explorer Backpacks give you information and resources to explore, and are available at many area libraries.

I really enjoyed the bird watching. I learned new types of birds, and it was very peaceful sitting out there in the evening watching and counting. My husband got involved as well! Thanks!

- Molly Hale, Watertown

BIRD QUEST • MAY 19-23

Birds Excite & Inspire

For over 20 years, the Tug Hill Bird Quest has allowed people of all ages throughout the region to experience the excitement and inspiration that birds bring to our lives by participating in the annual Tug Hill Bird Quest.

Open to school classrooms, home-schools, youth groups, families and individuals, the Bird Quest is region-wide bird feeder observation event.

Participants, as volunteer observation teams, learn about and how to identify birds, then record the birds they see during the third week in May (this year May 19-23).

Teams build observation skills, learn about the natural world, add to a

yearly bird count, and have a lot of fun watching birds.

Will you join them this year?

Early Bird teams who sign up by December 31, 2024 get weekly emails January through March with fun bird info, tips and activities.

Not interested in being an Early Bird but want to watch birds with us in May? **Sign up by March 31, 2025.** We'll send all teams daily *Bird of the Day* emails April through May with bird photos and ID tips.

Every team that submits a tally on or before June 6, 2025 will be entered in a drawing for a fabulous prize!



INTRODUCING THE LEGACY CHALLENGE 2025-2026

A Lasting Gift for Tug Hill's Future

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust is thrilled to introduce the Legacy Challenge 2025-2026, a unique opportunity for our supporters to make a meaningful and lasting impact on the future of our region's cherished landscapes.

This initiative, generously supported by Bob and Carol Keller, offers an exciting incentive: for every new commitment to include the Land Trust in your will, the Kellers will contribute a \$1,000 gift to the Land Trust, up to a total of \$10,000.

What Is the Legacy Challenge?

The Legacy Challenge encourages individuals to create a bequest in their will that includes Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust.

Whether large or small, these gifts help safeguard the land, wildlife, and natural resources of Tug Hill for future generations to enjoy. By participating in this program, you're not only leaving a personal legacy but also unlocking immediate support through the Kellers' generous challenge gift.

Honoring Past Supporters

If you have already included Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust in your will, we want to extend our heartfelt thanks.

To recognize this commitment, Bob and Carol Keller will make a one-time gift of \$2,500 to honor those who have previously pledged their support. If you're one of these legacy donors, expect to hear from us soon so we can express our gratitude and keep you updated on the important work your gift will support.

How to Participate

Participating in the Legacy Challenge is simple.

All it requires is completing a short form to notify the Land Trust of your legacy gift.

This form helps us track where your will is filed, and who your executor or attorney is, should we need to follow up in the future. We do encourage you to share the relevant portion of your will to ensure that all the details—such as our address and federal ID number—are correct. Your information will be held strictly confidential.

Additionally, we will stay in touch with all legacy donors, ensuring regular communication to express our gratitude and keep you updated on our work. These conversations are key, as we understand that estate plans can change, and we want to ensure that your gift aligns with the areas of our work that mean the most to you.

This two-year challenge program, running now through 2026, encourages donors to act now, rather than putting off these important decisions.

Making a bequest is a straightforward and meaningful way to contribute to a cause you care deeply about.

It's also a flexible form of giving—you can adjust the details over time, and it allows you to make a lasting contribution without affecting your current financial situation.

If you have any questions or would like more information about the Legacy Challenge, please call us at 315-779-8240 or email us at thlt@tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org. You can also visit our website: tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org.

Together, we can create a lasting legacy of conservation for Tug Hill Tomorrow!




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](https://www.facebook.com/TugHillTomorrowLandTrust)

 [@tughillnature](https://www.instagram.com/tughillnature)

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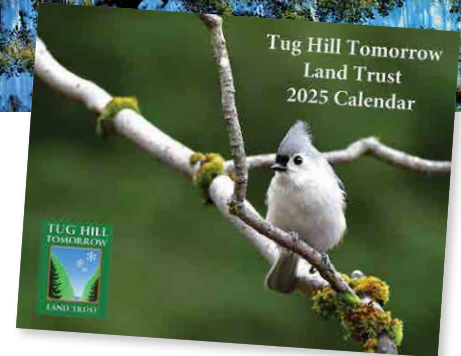
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Capture the Beauty of Tug Hill

We are accepting photographs highlighting the many landscapes, wildlife, activities and people of the Tug Hill region for our annual calendar, *Greenings* newsletter, website and social media. Credit will be given for any published photographs.



Contact Emily Males at emales@tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org for more information or to send photos. Thank you for helping us share the essence of the Tug Hill region!

2025 Calendars are Available! To purchase the 2025 calendar featuring submitted photographs, visit tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org/shop.



Serena Soldani

You're invited...

Candlelit Winter Solstice Celebration Walk

Friday, December 20th • 7:00 - 8:30 PM

Joseph A. Blake Wildlife Sanctuary • Watertown, NY

Celebrate the year's longest night, and the return of longer days, with a candlelit walk through the forest.

Hear and share winter season inspiration, decorate a tree with gifts for wildlife, and get inspired as we move forward into the new year. **Registration is required:**

tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org/events.