

TUG HILL  
TOMORROW



LAND TRUST

# Greenings

Celebrating Conservation & People

SPRING/SUMMER 2026

“Creating habitat for snowshoe hares took careful planning but seeing the forest come alive and knowing we’re giving wildlife a real chance to thrive makes it all worthwhile.”

– Maureen Clark



Daniel Dagenais

## BUILDING SHELTER, CREATING CONNECTION

# How Thoughtful Stewardship Helps Wildlife Thrive

Maureen Clark and Paul Madden have always known their land was more than just a place they owned, it was a place that worked. A place where wildlife moved quietly through the trees, where seasons shaped the forest, and where careful attention could make a lasting difference.

When they began learning more about snowshoe hares and the challenges they face in today's changing landscape, Maureen and Paul saw an opportunity to help.

Snowshoe hares depend on dense, young forest and thick understory cover to survive, habitat that has become increasingly scarce as forests mature and land uses change.

Snowshoe hares are uniquely adapted to northern climates. Their oversized hind feet act like natural snowshoes, allowing them to travel

efficiently across deep snow where many predators struggle to follow.

Each fall, their coats shift from brown to white, providing camouflage against winter snow. As spring arrives, that white coat gradually fades back to brown, blending into leaf litter and emerging vegetation.

Spring is also the start of their breeding season. Females can have multiple litters between spring and late summer, and young leverets are born fully furred and able to

move within hours, relying on thick ground cover for concealment while their mothers return briefly to nurse them.

Understanding how closely these hares are tied to young forest habitat made the need for action clear. Rather than waiting for nature to recover on its own, Maureen and Paul chose to take action.

With expert guidance from forester Kellen Murphy, they set out to create habitat tailored specifically for snowshoe hares.



*This land is a key part of the Wildlife Connectivity Project, linking habitats from Tug Hill to the Adirondacks.*

Using whole trees, they built carefully placed brush piles across their property, informed by research and best management practices. These structures mimic the dense, low cover found in young forests and provide vital escape routes, resting areas, and protection from harsh winter winds.

Snowshoe hares spend much of their time concealed beneath thick cover, emerging at dawn and dusk to feed on twigs, bark, buds, and woody vegetation such as willow, birch, and maple.

“We’ve always felt a responsibility to care for this land,” Maureen and Paul shared. “Creating habitat for snowshoe hares took careful planning but seeing the forest come alive and knowing we’re giving wildlife a real chance to thrive makes it all worthwhile.”

The results are about more than one species. Snowshoe hares are a cornerstone of northern forest ecosystems and a primary prey species for animals like bobcats, foxes, coyotes, and even great horned owls. When hare habitat improves, the benefits ripple outward, supporting a more balanced and resilient forest community.



*Thoughtful management in action: brush piles provide shelter, protection, and essential habitat for the snowshoe hare*

The brush piles on the property are more than cozy hideaways for snowshoe hares, they’re part of a much larger effort.

Protected by a conservation easement held by Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, their land lies at the heart of the Wildlife Connectivity Project, a partnership of local, state, and national conservation groups working to create a continuous corridor that stretches from the

southern Appalachians all the way into Canada.

This stretch of forest, fields, and wetlands helps animals move safely between these two iconic regions, especially as climate change shifts habitat ranges northward. Each brush pile and planned clearing serves as a stepping stone for hares, foxes, bobcats, and countless other creatures along their journey.

Thanks to the collective efforts of community members, landowners, and conservation partners over the past decade, more than 3,500 acres in this corridor have been conserved, largely through easements with private landowners.

Many of these lands remain in private hands, where owners continue to live, work, and care for the land, making sure it stays wild and welcoming for wildlife.

For Maureen and Paul, building habitat and protecting land go hand in hand. By creating safe spaces for snowshoe hares, they’re doing more than caring for one species, they’re strengthening a network of life that connects Tug Hill to the Adirondacks and beyond, showing how dedicated, deliberate work can ripple across an entire ecosystem.

## A LIFE SHAPED BY THE LAND

# Protecting Farmland for Generations to Come

For Jon Ostrowski, farming is not just a livelihood, it's a life rooted deeply in place. His farm in the Town of Champion is where he hopes to spend the rest of his days with his wife, LuAnn, and their dog, Shadow.

"I love the land," Jon says simply. "When you farm it, you know every inch of it. I tell everyone I want to live and die here on this property. That's my dream."

That dream of keeping the farm intact has been strengthened by conservation. In 2013, Jon placed a conservation easement held by Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust on his property to ensure the land would remain farmland. Recently, he decided to apply for another easement on an additional parcel facing development pressures. For Jon, the choice reflects both practical realities and deeply held values.

"Once you take the land away and put houses on it, you can't very easily put it back," he says. "We need land to farm. You can't subdivide everywhere. It's sad to see some of these lands get developed."

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– Jon Ostrowski



The easement has helped Jon to keep the farm together, even as agriculture evolves and financial pressures mount. “We’re farming it a bit differently, but we’re able to keep it all together and keep farming. The conservation easement has helped us do that.”

Importantly, Jon notes that the easement hasn’t changed the day-to-day work of the farm. “It doesn’t affect the way I farm,” he says. Instead, it provides stability, helping him stay in business while protecting the land from future development. The additional easement also brings financial and tax benefits that support the long-term viability of the operation.

Beyond the farm itself, Jon sees the broader impact. “I think it helps the whole community to keep farmland as farmland,” he says. “If farmers run out of land, then we’ve got a problem. By helping farmers, we’re helping the whole community.” Protected farmland supports local food systems, preserves green spaces, and contributes to environmental health.

### A Place That Means More Than Farming

Yet conservation is deeply personal, too. Down by the creek, a small waterfall provides a quiet spot where Jon and his family gather for evening campfires. It’s one of many corners of the farm that hold meaning beyond production.

Looking ahead, Jon hopes the farm will stay much as it is today. “Hopefully it stays just the way it is,” he says. Passing the land on to future generations is a big part of that hope. “I would love for my grandkids to farm this land someday. With the way things are, you never know, but it would be nice to pass it on.”

Through conservation, that possibility feels more secure. Jon’s commitment reflects the power of partnerships between landowners, the land trust, and supporters who make farmland protection possible. Together, they ensure that farms like his remain working landscapes, providing food, sustaining families, and benefiting the community for generations to come.



*Jon Ostrowski and Shadow at home on the farm he’s committed to protecting.*

## 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 John Souva, Conservation Director at 315-779-8240 or email [jsouva@tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org](mailto:jsouva@tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org).

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





# Birders On the Lookout for a Special Bird this Spring

## Confirming Tiny Warbler's Presence is the Focus

"What's that bird singing?" someone asked. During our first public nature hike at the French Settlement Road Public Conservation Areas last spring, the group had stopped in the meadow to listen.

Linda Gibbs, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust (THTLT) Community Programs Director, and lifelong birder Steve Litwhiler exchanged a hopeful look. She whipped out her phone and activated the Merlin bird identification app to see if it confirmed their first thoughts. Sure enough, the group had heard the call of a Golden-winged Warbler.

This small, boldly marked, silvery-gray migratory bird, with a golden yellow head cap and golden wing patches is a species of special concern in New York State.

It's experiences like this that remind us why protecting these spaces matters, for the birds, for the habitat, and for all of us who get to share in the wonder.

## A Species of Special Concern

**Golden-winged Warblers have shown decline for two major reasons.**

The first is habitat loss. These birds require specific areas of shrubby habitat with underlying herbaceous plants and grasses situated in a certain proximity to young and mature forests in order to thrive. Without disturbance, their ideal shrubby habitats naturally disappear and grow up into young trees and forest.

The second is interbreeding between Golden-winged Warblers and the more abundant Blue-winged Warbler. Hybridized young can potentially sing both birds' songs, so visual confirmation is the only way to accurately determine that true Golden-winged Warblers are present.

This spring, THTLT staff and an experienced group of volunteers will conduct focused surveys to confirm the presence of Golden-winged Warblers in this location, and THTLT will likely include improvement and maintenance of habitat for these birds moving forward.

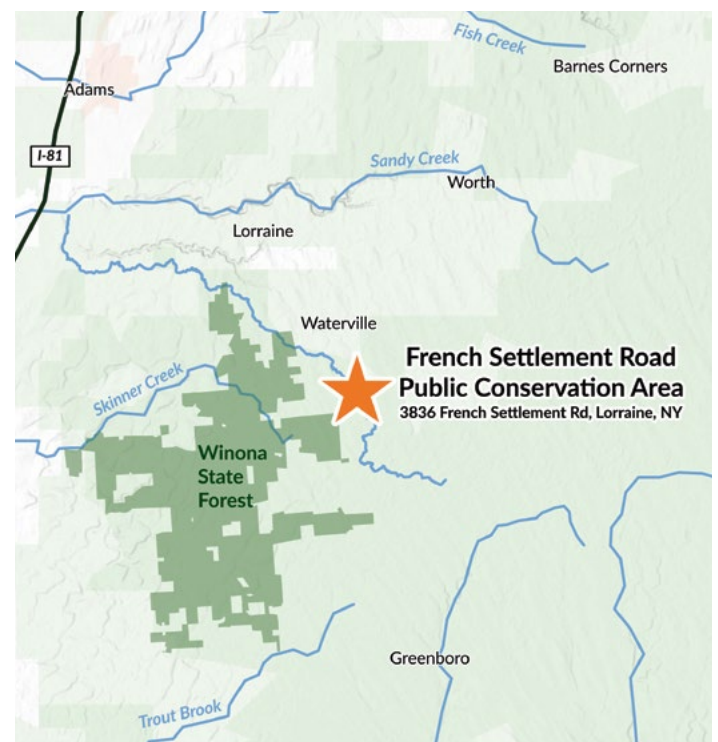


*Golden-winged Warblers have suffered one of the steepest population declines of any songbird species in the past 45 years.*

## This is the power of our public conservation areas

While they protect vital habitat, they also provide the unique opportunity for people to escape the day's pressures, relax, breathe fresh air and connect with wildlife in a natural setting surrounded by birdsong, the flutter of butterfly wings on flowers, a chorus of frog songs and more.

And that so, for the foreseeable future, visitors walking the meadow trail at French Settlement Road Public Conservation Area can stop, hold their breath, and say, "I hear a Golden-winged Warbler singing!"





“Strong partnerships are essential to the long-term care of the places we love. By working together with landowners and conservation organizations, we can help ensure these trails remain safe, respectful of the land, and open for people to enjoy now and into the future.”

– Peter Franz, Tramp and Trail



## A PARTNERSHIP THAT MOVES TRAILS

# The Tramp and Trail Club of Utica Care for Trenton Greenbelt

Some partnerships grow naturally, sparked by shared experiences on the trail and a common love for the land.

In the fall of 2025, members of Tramp and Trail spent an afternoon exploring the trails at Stone House Preserve in the Town of Vienna.

Founded in 1921, the hiking club has a long history of outdoor exploration and stewardship, and the visit quickly led to deeper conversations about conservation, access, and caring for the places we all enjoy. This club is the oldest hiking group in New York State with close to 270 members. They have a Facebook page and website: [www.trampntrail.org](http://www.trampntrail.org)

Those conversations continued when Tramp and Trail invited Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust staff to present at one of their “Interesting Evening” programs in New Hartford. What followed was a shared enthusiasm for an especially meaningful place: the Trenton Greenbelt.

## Shared Responsibility, Lasting Impact

The Trenton Greenbelt is one of the Land Trust’s earliest conservation projects and remains a powerful example of partnership in action.

The Greenbelt is a mosaic of adjacent public and private properties, woven together by a shared trail system. Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust holds conservation easements on the privately owned parcels, while the Town of Trenton owns the land where the parking area and trailhead are located, once an old sandpit, now designated parkland.

Today, Tramp and Trail has officially adopted the Trenton Greenbelt trails as the focus of their volunteer trail maintenance and stewardship efforts. They have taken on an important role in caring for a place that means so much to the community.

“Strong partnerships are essential to the long-term care of the places we love,” said Peter Franz of Tramp and Trail. “By working together with landowners and conservation organizations, we can help ensure these trails remain safe, respectful of the land, and open for people to enjoy now and into the future.”



*Trail talk and stewardship with John Souva and members of Tramp and Trail club.*

Their volunteer stewardship helps keep the trails safe, welcoming, and enjoyable, while reinforcing the shared responsibility that makes public access possible on conserved private and public lands alike.

Partnerships like this are at the heart of our work, strengthening connections between people and place, and ensuring that landscapes like the Trenton Greenbelt remain healthy, accessible, and protected for generations to come.

## 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 Linda Gibbs at 315-779-8240 or email her at [lgibbs@tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org](mailto:lgibbs@tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org) to explore what feels right.



Fresh air, forest trails, and friendly faces, our free programs make outdoor time restorative for all ages.

## READING INFORMS PRACTICE

# The Research Is In:

## Getting Outside Provides Important Health Benefits

*Take a moment and close your eyes.*

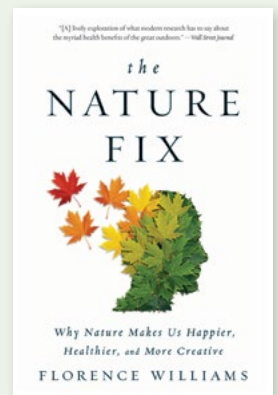
*Take in a deep breath and exhale.*

*Now breathe in again and imagine you are sitting in a lush Tug Hill forest next to a bubbling stream.*

*What do you hear, smell, taste, feel?*

Most of us realize that time in the outdoors, especially when we concentrate on being present to experience all of our senses, is beneficial. But beneficial how exactly?

In *The Nature Fix: Why nature makes Us Happier, Healthier and More Creative*, one of our first Tug Hill Book Club books this year, Florence Williams tells of her participation in various research initiatives exploring why and how we experience benefits and exactly what happens in our bodies to prove it. From experiments monitoring peoples' blood pressure to memory or actual brainwaves, the proof is documented — lower blood pressure, deeper rest, better memory recall, and stimulation in parts of the brain involving skills of brainstorming, creating, solving problems, and communicating in ways that strengthen our social relationships.



Also learned is that most children and adults don't experience natural environments often enough to realize how restored they make us feel. The more we get outside, the stronger the benefit and the more often we start to do it over time.

That's where providing experiential programming for all ages comes in. Outside time combined with interactive presentations incorporating sound recordings, games, readings, crafts and storytelling is the key. Have you joined us lately or enjoyed a trail walk on one of our properties? We invite you to take in a guided outing or make regular visits on your own and note the ways in which you feel better!

Check out our variety of programs in the coming months at [www.tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org/events](http://www.tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org/events), find us on Facebook and/or Instagram, or join our mailing list for the inside scoop.

## ADVENTURE EXPANDS

# Tug Hill Explorer Backpacks Hit More Libraries!

Thanks to you and the generosity of Northern Credit Union, more young explorers in Jefferson and Oswego counties now have the opportunity to borrow fully stocked Tug Hill Explorer Backpacks to discover the great outdoors.

Ellisburg Free Library in Jefferson County and Mexico Public Library in Oswego County are each receiving a **Birding Backpack** and a **Tracking Backpack**, complete with books, field guides, and hands-on tools that let patrons explore Tug Hill's wildlife on their own schedule.

With this expansion, even more families and young naturalists can enjoy nature right in their own backyard. These backpacks are more than just backpacks, they provide an engaging, hands-on way for children and adults to connect with the natural world, build observational skills, and gain a deeper understanding of the region.

Many libraries are also requesting Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust accompanying programs, where participants can explore topics in depth, engage in interactive activities, and spark curiosity about the environment.

By giving people the tools and guidance to explore at their own pace, these backpacks help foster a lifelong appreciation for Tug Hill's wildlife and habitats while encouraging stewardship, exploration, and outdoor learning for all ages.

**If you or your business would like to sponsor a backpack for a local library, or if your library would like to request a program,** please contact Linda Gibbs at 315-779-8240 or email [lgibbs@tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org](mailto:lgibbs@tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org).



A close-up of a wolf paw rubbing from the Tracking Backpack, letting young naturalists explore Tug Hill wildlife.



## Libraries participating include

**Jefferson County:** Adams, Adams Center, Black River, Carthage, Ellisburg, Rodman and Watertown

**Oswego County:** Central Square, Mexico, Orwell, Parish, Pulaski, Sandy Creek and Williamstown

**Lewis County:** Constableville, Lowville, Lyons Falls, Martinsburg, Osceola, Port Leyden, West Leyden

**Oneida & Herkimer Counties:** Barneveld, Boonville, Camden, Holland Patent, Poland, Prospect, Remsen, Rome, Turin, Westernville, Woodgate




## 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](http://TugHillTomorrowLandTrust.org)

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

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

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Front Cover: JH Williams

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# Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust Annual Community Picnic Is Coming Soon!

**SAVE THE DATE FOR A DAY ON TUG HILL!**

**Saturday, September 12<sup>th</sup>**

**Stone House Preserve**

**8327 Whiskey Island Rd, Camden, NY 13316**

Join us for a day of celebration, connection, and conservation as friends, families, and supporters gather to enjoy the accomplishments you have made possible.

The day will feature optional morning nature walks and outdoor activities, followed by lunch and inspiring updates highlighting the impact our community has made and the exciting work still ahead. This special gathering is a wonderful way to experience the heart of Tug Hill.

Individuals and businesses who would like to help make this special day possible are invited to join the Honorary Ally Committee. Committee members play an important role in strengthening the event and demonstrating their commitment to conservation and community in the Tug Hill region. Several giving levels are available.

**To learn more about joining the Honorary Ally Committee**, please reach out to Director of Communications & Marketing Emily Males at [emales@tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org](mailto:emales@tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org).

