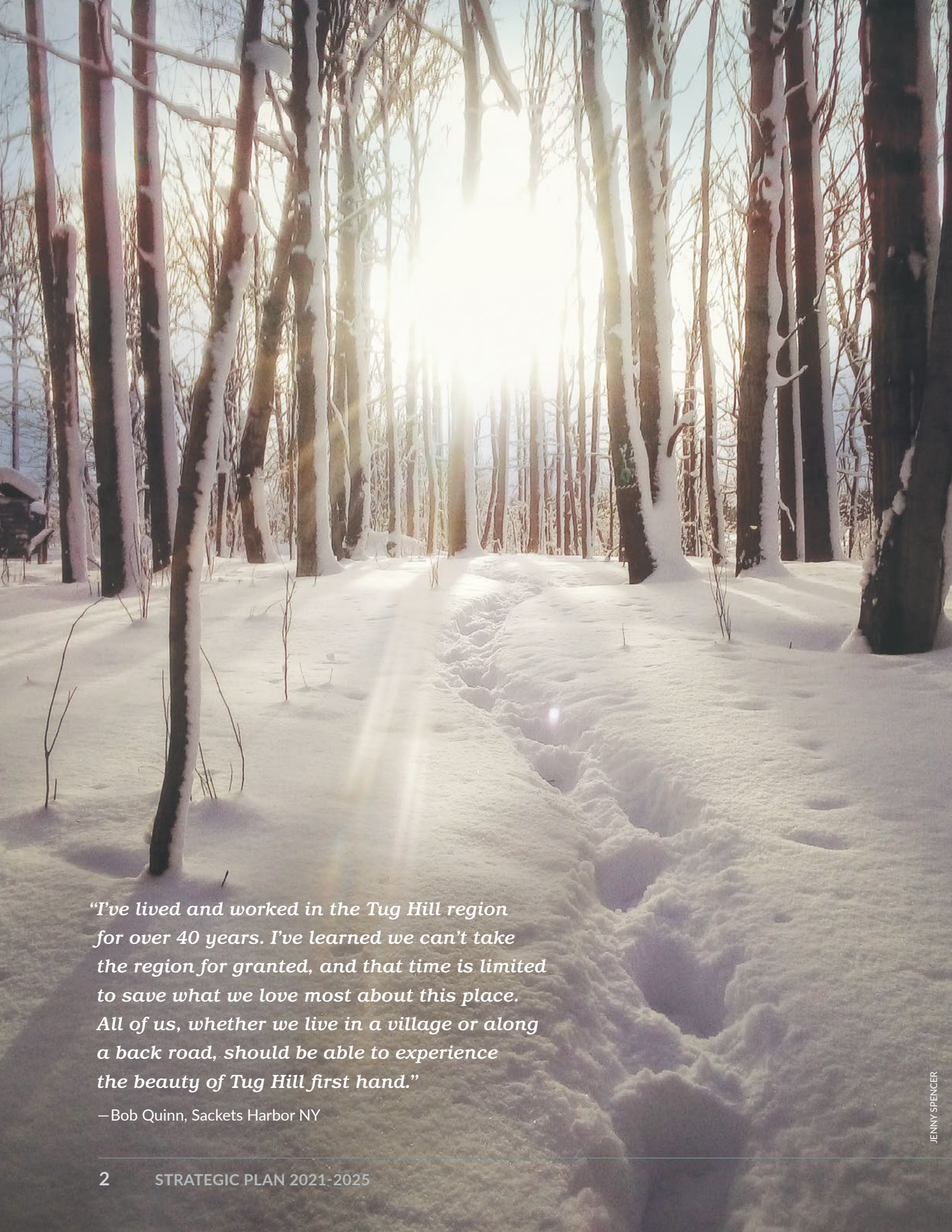


Conserving and Celebrating the Essence of Tug Hill

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2025

*“We have a once-in-a-generation
chance to expand the pace, and
the reach, of land conservation.”*

—Bob Keller, Boonville NY



“I’ve lived and worked in the Tug Hill region for over 40 years. I’ve learned we can’t take the region for granted, and that time is limited to save what we love most about this place. All of us, whether we live in a village or along a back road, should be able to experience the beauty of Tug Hill first hand.”

—Bob Quinn, Sackets Harbor NY

RESPONDING TO OPPORTUNITIES

Conserving and celebrating Tug Hill with you

You may have heard the saying, “It takes a village to raise a child,” yet have you considered how that same concept is true for conserving the lands we love? Each one of us, no matter where we live or what we do, can play a role in conserving and celebrating the very essence of Tug Hill.

It’s easy to understand, with everything going on in the world, how it can feel daunting to face the future. Yet, because of you, we continue to feel a tremendous sense of hope and purpose.

It’s times like these when we recognize that connecting to nature and local farms is no longer a luxury: it is a necessity. As each decade goes by, a bit of Tug Hill risks being chipped away.

That’s why we must do more — together.

Building off the extraordinary progress we’ve made over the past thirty years, we will work with you to grow our impact and capacity to save the special places while there’s still time. We are undertaking a multifaceted approach to protect locally and regionally important lands, foster a love of the land, and connect more people to each other and to what makes this place special.

That’s one of the reasons why we are investing in programs, and new public conservation areas, close to home. We know from research that everyday experiences in nature, and around farms, are critical for the long-term success of land conservation. If kids grow up caring about the lands and water like you do, they are more likely to make sure these areas are maintained and cherished in the future.



Wayne Lamica

The opportunities ahead

The next five years will be instrumental in these efforts. Given the urgency to conserve the lands so critical to our future, we are ramping up our land protection program. **Working in partnership with people like you, and local families, we will conserve an additional 6,000 acres of farmland, forest lands, wildlife habitat, and community lands.**

This strategic plan reflects conversations and input from hundreds of people and community organizations throughout our region who made it clear that now is the time to act. Our collective success is based upon the innovative and enduring partnerships throughout the region. Together, we will be responsive, innovative, and bold; together we will create the lasting change we wish to see.

MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust

Mission

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust's mission is to protect the wildlands, working forests, and farms of the Tug Hill region and surrounding areas, and to promote appreciation of the region's natural and cultural heritage, for present and future generations.



“In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we value, and we will value only that we have come to appreciate through experience.”

—Bill Scott, ecologist

Farms: Jacqueline Humphrey, Recreation: Onfokus, Water: Dorene Warner, Equity: Emmanuel Voucher, Wildlife: Paul Reeves Photography, Climate: Carley Parker, Connections: Noah & Julia Crabtree

Vision

We envision a Tug Hill region that includes a healthy mix of wild and working forestlands, farms, and places for people to connect with each other and nature, that support thriving people and communities.

We will know we are successful when:

- People in the Tug Hill Region have many accessible public places, close to home, to visit and enjoy the beauty of Tug Hill with their friends and families.
- Tug Hill's forests are healthy, and the water is clean; there are still viable and successful working farms; and compatible renewable energy is integrated into the landscape. Locally and regionally important lands are conserved at a scale that ensures their vitality over time.
- Our partnerships with schools, libraries, and other community organizations inspire love of the region's history and landscape. Together, we identify opportunities to experience lands and waters as ways to foster greater learning and personal growth.
- Our efforts to conserve, support, and celebrate land protection are widely recognized as critical to Tug Hill. We are seen as a leader in creating welcoming and inclusive conservation experiences to connect, and celebrate, the community and the land, while serving as a vital community partner.



Linda Garrett

Values

We undertake our mission and work guided by these values:

- Creating a culture of caring, for the land and our community, through programs, direct land stewardship, and shared experiences.
- Protecting wildlife habitat, farms and forest lands, and community spaces creatively and responsibly, including consideration of climate change.
- Setting land protection goals that respect the opinions of those who live in and care about the region, with attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Working in partnership with conservation and community organizations that care about the Tug Hill region, and with the communities that contain the lands we protect.
- Upholding ethical and business standards that apply to the work of land trusts and other not-for-profit organizations.

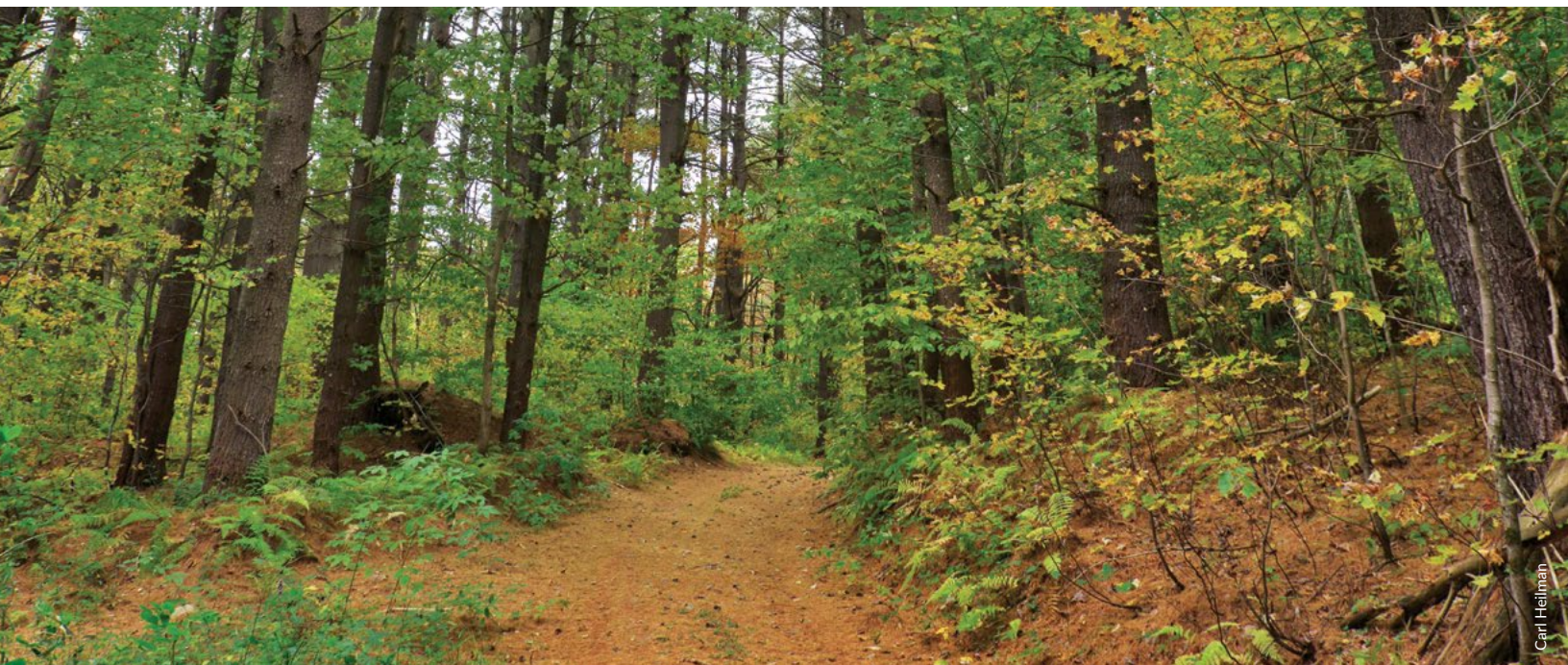


J. Anderson

GOAL 1:

Protect forestlands

in the Tug Hill Region for fish and wildlife, clean water, climate resilience, outdoor recreation, and sustainable forestry.



Carl Helman

“Wood Thrush, American Woodcock, and Golden-winged Warblers depend on healthy, diverse forest types to thrive, and their low numbers are ringing the alarm bell.

“New York is nearly 70% forested, but we’re losing quality habitat. Since our forests are also critical to improving water quality and mitigating the effects of climate change, this issue affects people too.”

—Audubon New York

Tug Hill’s forests are critical

Tug Hill’s forests are a mix of working and wild lands that provide a wide range of benefits, including abundant clean water, wildlife habitat, local forest products, and opportunities for a variety of recreation.

These woodlands also play an increasingly important role in reducing the severity of flooding due to extreme weather and slowing down climate change by storing carbon.

For many wildlife in our region, forests—in combination with area farmlands—provide critical lands to migrate and adapt to development and the changing climate.

It's not truly wilderness, though the term "Lesser Wilderness" is sometimes used to compare the Heart of Tug Hill to the vast wilderness of the nearby Adirondacks. The area consists of "Core Forest" with over 170,000 acres of unbroken forest land, wetlands, ponds, and headwater streams.

Not only is this landscape vital to a multi-state wildlife corridor, but it also supports our regional traditions of forestry, hunting and hunt camps, fishing, hiking, bird watching, and snowmobiling.

Action Highlights

- **Conserve at least 2,000 acres of working and wild forest land in the next five years** in partnership with local families and conservation organizations like New York State, Adirondack Land Trust, The Conservation Fund, Ducks Unlimited, and The Nature Conservancy.
- **Enhance and support the capacity of municipalities and individuals to voluntarily protect forests and woodlands** for greater ecological, recreational, and climate resilience in and around the Tug Hill Region.
- **Update our land protection plan to highlight forests** in the heart of the plateau, including strategies to connect the Adirondacks to the Tug Hill region at-large.
- **Explore new ideas and methods** (including funding sources as they become available) **with local families and landowners**, to protect their lands.
- **Facilitate collaborations**, advance creative financing, and accelerate local efforts to conserve additional lands including those that also benefit clean water.
- **Help shape state and federal policies and funding programs** to support creative and responsive efforts in forest conservation and other related goals at the local and regional levels.



Tom Pfister



Lee Ellsworth

GOAL 2:

Conserve farmland

to secure the foundation of a healthy and sustainable regional food economy, including opportunities for farm vitality and climate resilience, in the Tug Hill Region.



Lee Ellsworth

“Conserving farmland is an important tool when passing it on to the next generation. When land changes hands, it’s often at risk.”

—Casandra Buell, Lewis County Planner

A generational shift is underway

Tug Hill is a working landscape that supports an economy based on agriculture, forestry, and recreation. Our farming heritage runs deep, with many of our region’s farms owned and managed by the same families for generations.

As farm family leaders grow older, they realize the need to pass the land on to the next generations. For many families, farmland conservation can help, often making the land more affordable for new farmers and encouraging farm innovation.

American Farmland Trust documented that from 2001 to 2016, 11 million acres of agricultural land across the country were paved over, fragmented, or converted to uses that jeopardize agriculture, curtailing sustainable food production, economic opportunities, and the environmental benefits afforded by well-managed farm and ranchland.

New York's agricultural lands are no different. We recognize that farmland conservation necessitates both a local and regional approach. Over the next five years, we will assist farmers, county farmland protection boards, municipalities, and regional organizations to implement county farmland protection plans and accelerate farmland conservation efforts.

Action Highlights

- **Conserve an additional 4,000 acres or more of farmland** in partnership with local families using state and federal grant resources, charitable contributions, and other strategies.
- **Explore methods to increase local food security and healthy soils**, in partnership with municipalities, farmers and community organizations, while building climate resilience as part of a sustainable food economy in the Tug Hill Region.
- **Partner with families to conserve locally and regionally significant farmland**, including submitting state and federal grant requests on their behalf, as appropriate.
- **Create a Tug Hill Tomorrow Farmland Protection Plan** and identify priority areas with community input; provide educational and outreach materials to local counties.
- **Connect farmers and farm owners who are interested in best practices for water quality, climate smart farming**, etc. with technical advisors and funding opportunities.
- **Encourage compatible renewable energy infrastructure on marginal agricultural land** when possible, in a manner that enhances soil health and farm viability and/or wildlife conservation efforts.



Alix Krueger



Karen Millsbaugh

GOAL 3:

Create and enhance public conservation areas and trails

throughout the Tug Hill region to inspire, and facilitate more people of all ages and abilities to regularly experience the outdoors.



Linda Garrett

“Over the years I’ve realized how healing the lands of Tug Hill are, and how we can’t take them for granted.”

—Beth Steria, Lowville NY

Bringing joy to others

We believe that everyone deserves the opportunity to learn in, thrive in, and appreciate the outdoors — and when that happens, our community becomes healthier and stronger. Research tells us that nature, close to where people live, work, and play is critical to their overall wellbeing.

In addition, we know if people have regular and positive experiences with nature and farms they are more likely to want to conserve and care for them.

It may come as a surprise, but many communities in the Tug Hill region lack a variety of nature-based neighborhood places to explore and connect to the seasons of Tug Hill. The need for safe, convenient, and welcoming public open spaces is greater than ever. We look forward to working with you as opportunities arise.

Action Highlights

- **Create new public conservation areas** throughout the Tug Hill region and ensure they are welcoming to people of diverse ages, incomes, backgrounds, and physical abilities.
- **Create and encourage additional public access opportunities through trail improvements** on existing community and state lands, as requested, in addition to lands we own or manage as public conservation areas.
- **Develop all-access trails** that are interesting, welcoming, and provide a variety of experiences to connect with nature. Improve signage and parking areas to become suitable for wheelchairs and school trips.
- **Work with volunteers and partners to complete and maintain the 20-mile Traverse Trail** through the Heart of Tug Hill (the only non-motorized long-distance trail on Tug Hill).
- **Explore opportunities to enhance, and link existing trail systems**, ensuring there are trails for all ages and abilities.
- **Increase our capacity to manage conservation areas** in an efficient and effective manner for both outdoor recreation and other conservation goals.



Linda Garrett



24K-Production

GOAL 4:

Engage people with nature

through first-hand experiences and programs to create a lasting love for Tug Hill and build a sense of community.



Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust

“There has been a steady increase in anxiety disorders in our youth. Kids should always have access to the healing power of nature. Nurturing their connection to nature is critical to our future.”

—Kim Buker, teacher, Carthage High School

Perfect opportunity

From the very beginning, we have recognized that a core part of our mission is to increase awareness and appreciation of the Tug Hill region.

We have done this in a variety of ways including hosting community outings; working with schools, daycare facilities, and libraries; creating the *Tug Hill Natural History Guide*, the *Tug Hill Recreation Guide* and Tug Hill 10 Challenge; and curating cultural and historic art exhibits like the Tug Hill Family Farms, and Venerable Folks Project — to name a few.

This effort must be sustained for generations to come—just like land protection—to ensure people cherish the special places of Tug Hill and see the value of it in their lives.

Developing this connection requires nurturing ongoing partnerships, supporting local initiatives, and finding creative ways to connect to those who have been left out of nature-based trips and experiences. It also recognizes that as our community ages, there are many who long for the opportunity to connect to the land and water as they once did. We look forward to increasing opportunities for a greater diversity of people to experience our programs and conservation areas.

Action Highlights

- **Inspire a love of, and connection to, nature and farms** in young people and their families through stories and direct experiences so they cherish these memories throughout their lives.
- **Provide community programs for adults, including elders,** to facilitate a growing sense of community, and develop greater engagement and awareness of the importance of community, land, and water.
- **Partner with schools, libraries, and community organizations** to reach more youth throughout the region in a sustained manner.
- **Develop an understanding of the challenges facing youth in urban areas** who seek to explore nature and farms within our region; develop an engagement strategy that builds trust, partnerships, and greater comfort with the outdoors.
- **Explore how we might reduce barriers people face to experience the outdoors,** including in the rural, suburban, and urban areas of our region.



Kristy Sullivan

“The average American child is said to spend four to seven minutes a day in unstructured play outdoors, and over seven hours a day in front of a screen.”

“Technology is winning. The love of nature is losing. We are working to change that.”

—Lin Gibbs, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust

GOAL 5:

Ensure the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust

is able to respond in a thoughtful, strategic, and nimble manner to what are often once-in-a-generation opportunities.



Lynn Bystrom

“We were searching for a way to conserve our family’s property. Thankfully we found Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust who made the entire process easy. The land trust was able to move quickly and assist our family when we needed help.”

—Andrea & Lydia Kibiuk, Barneveld NY

Strong organizations create change

No matter how timely, proactive, and integrated a strategic plan is, it cannot happen without a strong and resilient organization.

Sustainable organizations are forward-looking; they share leadership and responsibility; they grow and diversify their organizational leadership and who they serve.

They are learners and adapters, and can address challenges in a manner that builds their relevance and becomes the foundation for long-lasting conservation initiatives.

That's why the next five years are so important. With you as a partner, we will address the urgency of land conservation in the Tug Hill region. To do so will necessitate growing our team, investing in our volunteers, and maintaining a strong and dynamic Board of Directors to ensure our projects are sustainable.

Because of you, the next five years will position our land trust to maximize our effectiveness, while scaling up our ability to serve the region.

Action Highlights

- **Increase our financial resilience and resources** to allow us to seize opportunities and weather unexpected economic downturns.
- **Expand our outreach and marketing efforts to inspire, connect with, and engage** new audiences, while strengthening relationships with the supporters, partners, landowners, and communities with whom we currently work.
- **Ensure Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust staff, board, and volunteers have the training and tools they need** to successfully implement their vision.
- **Celebrate volunteers** who are making a lasting difference through their work with events, programs, outreach, trails, and land restoration by growing and strengthening our volunteer program.
- **Expand donations of property** to establish new public conservation areas, or to conserve and then sell, using the proceeds to further our conservation and educational programs.
- **Develop partnerships with businesses and community organizations** to achieve mutual goals of increasing access to nature, strengthening the vitality of local farms, and diversifying programs around the power of land and water as part of a healthy community.
- **Increase opportunities for planned giving** to ensure that everyone can help make a difference in our conservation initiatives, now and in the future.



Bob McNamara



Janelle Castro

"You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."

—Dr. Jane Goodall



Larry Master

TUG HILL'S SPECIAL PLACES NEED YOU

How would you like to help conserve and celebrate the essence of Tug Hill?

One of the inspiring aspects of this plan is that everyone can play a role.

When you join us at programs and events, you inspire us—and others. As a locally-supported land conservation organization, we recognize that our success relies on the enthusiasm and commitment of our community. Whether that means assisting as a volunteer, or accelerating conservation projects through charitable donations, the long-term health and wellbeing of Tug Hill depends on you.

Year after year, you are the backbone of expanding our reach and impact. It truly is a team effort.

Monthly donations and planned gifts, including donations from an IRA, gifts of stock, or gifts of land could save you taxes and leverage the conservation work and educational programming you want to see happen. Your generosity will last for generations to come.



TugHillTomorrowLandTrust.org

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To get more involved

Visit our website tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org and sign-up for our eNews, Facebook, and Instagram page to receive updates on programs and events.

Feel free to call the office at (315) 779-8240. We look forward to hearing from you.

Strategic plan update supported in part with funding from the New York State Conservation Partnership Program (NYSCPP) and New York's Environmental Protection Fund. The NYSCPP is administered by the Land Trust Alliance, in coordination with the state Department of Environmental Conservation. Strategic planning facilitation by Strong Outcomes. Publication by Community Consultants and W Design.

On the cover: Pickering Brook Beaver Flow, Linda Garrett