



2017 Highlights & Annual Report

"The new Traverse Trail will offer a unique hiking experience within the Core Forest, revealing its hidden scenic gems."

*- Bob McNamara,
co-trail/volunteer leader*

You're protecting the lands and waters that make Tug Hill special



Key to community vitality and wildlife health

Core Forest one of the most special places in NYS

As you walk one of the old logging roads, deep in the woods, the smell of moss, decaying leaves, and balsam wafts around you. There's a peacefulness about the place not often found in our region, with sunlight sparkling on streams and wetlands and birds calling overhead.

Here in Tug Hill's "Core Forest", an area that spans over 150,000 acres and includes parts of the Towns of Worth, Redfield, Montague, Martinsburg and Osceola, we are immersed in an amazing place for wildlife and our community alike. The Core Forest also includes the headwaters of six major rivers: the Mad River, Deer River, Salmon River, Sandy Creek, East Branch Fish Creek and the Mohawk River.

The mix of northern hardwoods like beech, birch and maple with intermittent wetlands, form a giant sponge that reduces area flooding by absorbing rainfall and slowly releasing it into nearby streams and rivers.

During droughts and periods of increasing extreme heat, wildlife and plants rely on the Core Forest to survive. "We often think about the importance of the vast woodlands of Tug Hill's Core Forest from a forestry perspective," remarked Gregg Sargis Director of Ecological Management for The Nature Conservancy Central and Western New York Chapter, "but the waters of Tug Hill are critical for wildlife and plant communities as well as the towns of the region. That's why it's a priority in the NYS Open Space protection plan."

Drinking water, habitat, and need for protection

Fishing and kayaking are frequently associated with these waters, but let's not forget that the City of Rome and several other rural communities depend on the naturally filtered water from Tug Hill for their drinking water. It also provides critical habitat for wildlife who need uninterrupted places to raise their young, like the northern goshawk, bobcat and the shy fisher.

It took a decade of partnerships with timber companies, hunting clubs, recreationists, town officials and local landowners to conserve approximately one-third of the Tug Hill Core Forest. Now, recognizing the importance of the remaining areas, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust is working with a variety of landowners and partners to continue the protection efforts.

It's a landscape that's not easily forgotten. Together, we are creating the next conservation chapter of the Core Forest.



The 150,000-acre Core Forest is helping to combat climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide, one of the key heat-trapping gases accelerating climate change.





*"What a day, what a special place,
how wonderful being with like-minded folks &
making new friends! Could not ask for more."
- Meredith Leonard, field trip participant*

When conservation connects, close to home

Making conservation last the test of time

For land conservation to withstand the test of time, future generations have to care about it and the land trusts who conserve it. Yet new research from the Land Trust Alliance, the national service organization for land trusts, has again confirmed that most Americans don't see the benefits of land and water conservation—or land trusts—in a tangible way.

That's one of the reasons why, as part of our commitment to conserving land and water in perpetuity, we are ramping up our efforts to work with area partners like local libraries, schools, after-school and summer programs, and home-schooling groups to bring them to conservation—and conservation to them.

We also know we need to provide safe, interesting, and accessible places in nature (and farms) to develop lasting connections. Other research by Cornell University has shown that regular, positive, every-day experiences outdoors, *close to home, often in the company of others, is critical—even in rural areas.*

Local conservation areas, “close to home” (ideally within a 20-minute drive so it's easy to get to) with trails designed for a variety of people is one of the ways families and friends can spend time together, away from technology, creating memories.

Opportunities to connect with nature

One of the newest places to explore is off Partridge Hill Road, near West Canada Creek, in the Town of Russia in Herkimer County. The Black River Environmental Improvement Association (BREIA) is building on its commitment to helping people, especially families, experience nature. BREIA recently purchased land previously protected by a Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust (THTLT) conservation agreement and created the Swale Pond Bird & Wildlife Sanctuary with a network of public trails. “This is great news. It's imperative we get kids outside to build their self-esteem and sense of compassion for nature,” explains Linda Gibbs, THTLT's educator, “we look forward to partnering with BREIA in the future.”

The Joseph Blake Wildlife Sanctuary is another such example. Owned by THTLT, and managed in partnership with volunteers, it's located just 15 minutes outside of Watertown with a network of trails open all-year long. It's a beautiful place, one where THTLT regularly hosts free programs for families and school groups.

Just the beginning

This coming year, with the support of people like you, we'll be expanding our community programs with area kids and families, as well as partnering with other organizations like BREIA to inspire compassion for each other and for the land. We'll also be helping establish new conservation experiences like the 20-mile Tug Hill Traverse Trail that will run north-south from Osceola to Montague and when complete, will provide the first ever long-distance trail on Tug Hill.

That's part of our commitment to ensuring that the lands you love will be here well into the future. And we couldn't do it without you.

Did you know?

- Studies reveal that children are healthier, happier, and perhaps even smarter and more creative when they have a connection to nature.
- Nature has positive effects on children with attention deficit disorder, asthma, and obesity, and being in nature relieves stress and improves physical health.
- Adults who work in spaces incorporating nature into their design are more productive, healthy and creative.
- Hospital patients with a view of nature from their window heal faster.





*"You know what they say, you can
take the kid off the farm, but you can't get
the farm out of the kid...or something like that.
That's what it's like for us. It's who we are and
who we want to be. We feel blessed to live here,
on the farm we love." - Shelly*

Because it's part of who we are...

Looking out from the hilltop, over the barns and pastures as the sun rises and the warm glow creeps across the sky, you'd think you were lost in another time.

The heifers call, anticipating breakfast; the geese flying low overhead note their descent to the near-by river. It's almost quiet, at 5:30 in the morning, and up here on the hill is one of the special places that Dean and Shelly Gleisner, think about when they wondered if they should conserve their land.

"Sitting right next to Ft. Drum, our farm could become really valuable for commercial development as opposed to agricultural. But our family didn't want it to be lost to development, we've been farming for generations and its part of who we are" reflected Dean.

The 147-acre farm, located in the town of Philadelphia, is a mix of fields, pastures, and woodlands with a couple of streams meandering through. Pileated woodpeckers and great horned owls inhabit a portion of the woodlands, where their calls pierce the early spring mornings.

It sounds idyllic, but it's not been a life without challenges

"We lost about everything about 25 years ago in a barn fire," reflected Dean, "it was an awful time in our lives, but our community came together for us and we pulled through.

"We thought about leaving farming, but it's the farm that has defined our family. It's part of our bones, it's really who we are," explained Shelly. So Shelly and Dean, and their kids, pulled together and kept farming—this time focusing on beef cattle and dairy cow replacement heifers.

A great way to raise a family

"Farming's not easy, but it's a great way to raise a family, it's a great way of life, and that's why we still have it. My three kids all grew up farming. Ryan is my youngest and at 17 and he's in a BOCES program; he enjoys operating equipment and helping out on the farm. They have to know it from a young age to go into farming. Katelyn, my eldest, loves to come home for the holidays and Gregory works with me as part of the beef operation."

"Our whole family is, or has been, in farming, and now they've all decided to conserve their farms," Dean says, continuing, "first it was my brother Charles, and then Billy did it. We knew we were going to do it too but wanted it to be the right time. We wanted to make sure that this farm stays a farm, or at least open land, for generations from now."

And that's exactly what the Gleisner family has done. Working in partnership with the Army Compatible Use Buffer program, and the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, they've conserved their land and in so doing, they've also helped ensure that Fort Drum won't be surrounded by incompatible development that would hinder it's military training.

Quick facts about farmland protection and ACUB

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust works in partnership with Fort Drum, and Ducks Unlimited, through the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program to conserve lands that are important for national security around the army base.

Here are some quick facts:

1. The U.S. Army initiated the ACUB program to address the growing concern of development, which can lead to encroachment around the perimeter of military installations.
2. All projects are voluntary. Farmers contact our land trust and we work with them and Fort Drum to clarify if their land will qualify for ACUB funding.
3. The landowner continues to own and manage the land and pay taxes subject to the conservation agreement (called a conservation easement).
4. The landowner receives a one-time payment for their non-farm development rights, as determined by a qualified appraisal.



*"We are intertwined, the land,
our families, and our community."
—Pamela Underhill Karaz, photographer*



Next year looks amazing...

Thanks to you

As a community-supported conservation organization, your generosity is what protects—and instills a passion for—our lands and waters all year long. 2017 was a year we were able to jump start our work with more farm families to conserve their land due to increased funding from New York State.

Your support in 2018, and now and in the coming year, is critical in conserving 20 farms and forestland projects totaling nearly 15,000 acres. These families are relying on us to create conservation plans, write grants, obtain town and county approvals as needed, and work in partnership with their advisors and family members to ensure conservation meets their goals. It takes a team to conserve the special places on Tug Hill—and you're a big part of that. Thank you.

Community...

A very special thank you

Conservation projects often take years to complete. Developing a love of the land does too. It's because of you that we can support families across Tug Hill to conserve the lands and waters we all love and connect kids to the land. You've made it possible to expand our assistance to towns and diversify our partnerships to ensure that the locally, and regionally, important lands of Tug Hill are conserved and managed appropriately. Thank you.

Volunteers provide the magic

Can you imagine a remote forest walk without a leader? A mushroom hike without a mushroom expert? A kayak paddle without the knowledge of the river? No? We can't either—and that's thanks to the amazing volunteers who help lead the outings and community programs all year long. But it doesn't stop there. Volunteers of all ages help with mailings, events, and take photographs for our social media. Thank you to all our volunteers for their time, talent, compassion and dedication, who made 2017 a great year.

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Cornell Cooperative Extension of Oneida County
Development Authority of the North Country
Ducks Unlimited
Fort Drum
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NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
St. Lawrence Eastern Lake Ontario Partnership for
Regional Invasive Species Management
The Conservation Fund
The Nature Conservancy Adirondack Chapter
The Nature Conservancy Central & Western NY Chapter
The New York State Zoo at Thompson Park
Tug Hill Commission



© Pamela Underhill Karaz

2017 Financials

With the urgency of conserving farms, forests, wetlands and wildlife habitat increasing due to development pressure, economic stress on farms, and climate change, your charitable gifts are more important than ever. Thank you for all that you have done to make Tug Hill a better place to live, work and play.

¹ **Foundations and Grants:** In 2017 we received several grants to purchase development rights (conservation easements) including NYS Ag & Markets and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA).

² **Other Income:** includes stewardship fund contributions, income from conservation projects and contract work, and investment income.

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. These audited figures reflect the fiscal year January 1, 2017–December 31, 2017. A copy of the full audited financial statement is available upon request by calling Linda Garrett at 315-779-8240 or emailing lgarrett@tughilltomorrow.org.



2017 Revenue

Foundations & Grants ¹	\$630,583
Individual contributions	\$283,270
Special events	\$10,997
Other income ²	\$183,360
Total	\$1,108,210



2017 Expenses

Program Services	\$779,513
Administration	\$56,310
Fundraising	\$37,653
Total	\$873,476

Let's celebrate... *Thanks to you, Tug Hill's farms, trails, woodlands, and*

Thank you for conserving land, connecting people and our communities to the amazing places of Tug Hill and celebrating what we can do together. Your compassion, commitment, and enthusiasm is what makes conservation possible now, and in the future.

(M) Monthly Donors

✧ Donors giving more than 10 years

✧ Donors giving more than 20 years

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Give the gift of joy...

No matter how you give, it makes a difference

What is it about Tug Hill that you love?

This holiday season, and into the coming year, you can share your love of Tug Hill and contribute in a variety of ways that feel right to you: volunteer, a gift of real estate, a bequest, an IRA contribution, and a year-end holiday donation. Monthly donations are a great way to provide support for conservation all year round. It's easy to do and you'll have the satisfaction knowing that every month conservation gets a boost.

You can also make a donation in someone's honor and we'll send them a card letting them know you care.

No matter how you decide to give a gift for Tug Hill's conservation, it will bring joy to so many. No amount is too small and we appreciate your compassion and generosity. Thank you for caring, leading, and making sure that Tug Hill remains the place we all love. Have a lovely holiday.

For additional ideas on ways to give, check out our website at <https://tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org/ways-to-give>

