

Tug Hill's forests identified as critical

t's not truly wilderness, though the term "Lesser Wilderness" is sometimes used to compare the Heart of Tug Hill to the vaster 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.

Numerous rivers, whose headwaters are located in the Heart of Tug Hill rely on the forest's health and resilience to sustain their flows throughout the summer, as well as absorbing heavy rainfalls. Much of Tug Hill revolves around these amazing landscapes and include the Salmon, Mad, and Deer Rivers, as well as the Sandy Creeks and the East and West Branches of Fish Creek.

Recent research has once again documented the importance of forestlands and their associated wildlife habitat. In 2019, the Tug Hill Chapter of Trout Unlimited found unique strains of brook trout in portions of some Tug Hill headwaters streams. These brook trout are genetically distinct, showing little evidence of introduction of non-native or hatchery-raised stock.

During the same period, research by The Nature Conservancy concluded that the Heart of Tug Hill faces development pressure that could fragment and disrupt the ecological health of the region. In short, it's an area with an urgent need for thoughtful, accelerated and long-term conservation efforts.

There's reason for guarded optimism, however. Landowners are asking for our assistance and funding may become available thanks to ongoing discussions at the state and

"It's so peaceful out there. I love that we are working together to create a trail that is unique to Tug Hill."

Nancy Grisham

federal levels to voluntarily conserve 30% of the U.S. land base and waters by 2030 (termed 30×30).

The 30×30 initiative recognizes that land conservation is not keeping pace with growing threats to our lands, waters, wildlife, and ways of life across the country. The Land Trust Alliance (the national conservation organization that provides technical assistance to local land trusts) has stressed the critical nature of this voluntary effort.

National Audubon notes its importance, too. North America has lost three billion birds due to climate change and habitat loss—29% of its bird population—since 1970.

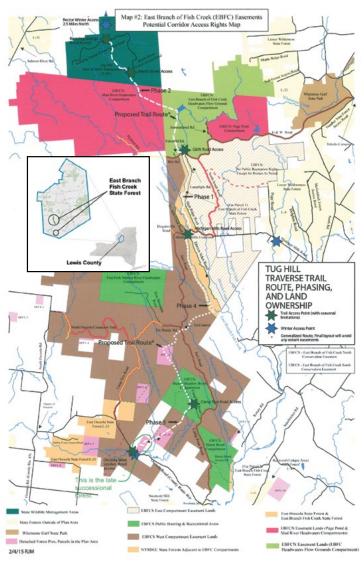
Perfect Timing

The majority of landowners in the Heart of Tug Hill are elderly and many face the choice of selling their land, ideally protected, or passing it on to the next generation. Because of this, when combined with development pressure, the next ten years will define what Tug Hill looks and feels like.

Our task, therefore, is to make sure we have the capacity to seize opportunities presented like the 30×30 initiative and assist these families when they ask for help.

That's one of the reasons we launched the *Tug Hill FOR Tomorrow Campaign*. A huge thanks to so many of you who have already contributed.

Together, we can support our region's desire to balance future development with the protection of the farms, forests, waters, and wildlife habitats that define us.



The proposed trail, including the portion that is roughed-in, runs through a mix of lands owned by NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (tan, light pink and dark green), Timber Investment Management organization (brown and light green), and The Nature Conservancy (dark pink and olive green). To find out more go to: www.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands_forests_pdf/mapebfccefull.pdf

WANT TO HELP MAKE HISTORY?

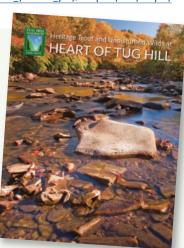
Come join us and create the Tug Hill Traverse Trail

This summer and fall, we have a number of community trail workdays planned to continue work on the 20-mile long Traverse Trail, in forested portions of the towns of Osceola, West Turin, and Montague (lands we call the Heart of Tug Hill).

They're a fun way to spend some time with family, friends, and co-workers; get outside; hear some birds; and get your hands dirty. Trail work consists of pruning branches and shrubs, building stream crossings, and putting up trail markers.

You'll want to wear sturdy shoes and appropriate clothing for working in the woods, and bring pruners if you have them. We will provide snacks and water and recommend you bring a sack lunch.

See a complete listing of trail workdays and register >>



Want to learn more about the Heart of Tug Hill? Download the booklet from our website: tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org/heart



LOCAL FAMILIES TAKING ACTION

"We want to leave a peaceful place for generations to come"

Julia Rubenstein's dad, Stan Wiater, loved wildlife. Growing up in the 1940's, he learned about hard work and respecting nature during the long days at camp in the town of Forestport, Oneida County.

As a young boy, Stan learned much from his mentor, Larry Frey, who had purchased their original 100 acres through the government veteran's program when he returned from WWII.

Larry took Stan under his wing, and on weekends they would drive up from Utica together to visit the camp in Forestport. Stan learned the arts of forestry, trapping, hunting, and taxidermy, which he then shared with his younger brother Ed.

When Stan returned from the Army, and became a skilled mason, Larry and Stan purchased abutting land. Over the next 20 years they planted thousands of trees and built a spillway on Gulf Creek to create a pond for fishing and wildlife.

Ed (Julie's uncle), still owns and enjoys the abutting parcel of land Larry and Stan gave him as a wedding gift in 1974. "I come up here as much as I can and find that time in the woods renews me," explains Ed, who, until Stan's passing in 2019, had seldom missed a weekend on the property since 1957.

A tribute to family and nature

Julie and her husband Jeff, are now conserving this land as a tribute to the men in her life who toiled to care for it, learned from it, and loved it. "My dad would be so pleased that we have protected this place that he loved so much, and was such a large part of the wonderful, generous, strong man he became."

The Rubenstein's will continue to own the property, pay property taxes, and manage it subject to the long-term conservation agreement. "I come up here as much as I can and find that time in the woods renews me."

- Ed Sajdzikowski

Both critical and timely

This region is a central part of the Wildlife Connectivity project area; a partnership between local, state and national conservation groups to create a conservation corridor extending from the southern Appalachians up into Canada.

At stake are numerous wildlife like moose and black bear who find the changing climate necessitates increased movement for food, cover, and raising their young.

For the Rubenstein's, conserving their land is important to protect significant habitat—and share the healing powers of nature. "We want to pass this love of nature on to others, too," said Julie. "We hope to partner with area nonprofits to provide a place for young people from disadvantaged situations to find themselves, like my dad and I did, to find inner peace, and hopefully find a lifelong love of nature."

PUBLIC CONSERVATION UPDATE

Community jump-starts French Settlement Road Public Conservation Area

he importance of accessible open space for recreation, physical and mental health, and connecting and learning about nature has become very apparent during the pandemic.

Providing a variety of places to explore and enjoy nature "close to home"—meaning within a 15 to 20-minute drive—is now recognized by social scientists as central to inspiring a lasting connection to wildlife, as well as improving public health. Because of this, one of our strategic initiatives is to establish at least one new conservation area per county over the next five years in Jefferson, Lewis, Oswego, and Oneida Counties.

Late last year, Dr. Marvin Reimer generously donated 121 acres to establish our newest public conservation area on French Settlement Road, in the town of Lorraine, in southernmost Jefferson County, NY.

The conservation area is comprised of a mix of northern hardwood forests with several large beaver ponds, wetland areas, and important habitat to resident and migrating birds. It also contains foundations from two historic farmstead sites.

Getting the place ready for the community took a giant step forward recently, thanks to a gift from Pure Water for Life (PWfL). This lead gift of \$30,000 will help create a parking area, trails, signage, and educational programming.



"We thought it would be years before we could improve the public access—and then came this amazing gift from PWfL," explained Linda Garrett, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust's Executive Director.

The vision includes creating a parking area large enough for a school bus and several cars; non-motorized trails that meander throughout the property; and benches and resting areas. Funding permitting, we hope to create wildlife viewing areas and an accessible trail.

Additional grants and community donations will supplement the grant from PWfL. Once the parking area and trail improvements are complete, we will host guided nature walks and other educational programs for the public, youth groups, and schools.

Linda notes that the timing couldn't be better. "It's our hope that the next \$15,000 needed for phase two of the trail and habitat improvements will be contributed by members of our community over the summer to keep progress going. This is such a special place. We can't wait for people to see it."

NEW HOPE

Restoring the American Chestnut

According to the American Chestnut Foundation, nearly four billion American chestnut trees once flourished in the eastern U.S. Sadly, in the early part of the 1900's, a fungus was unknowingly imported, wiping out the majority of these magnificent trees and destroying a central part of North America's ecology.

But there's good news. A team of researchers at the State University of New York's College of Environmental Science and Forestry and the American Chestnut Foundation have developed a disease-tolerant and genetically diverse American chestnut tree.

This summer, our land trust in partnership with the Zoo NY, based in Watertown, will be planting the new variety of chestnut trees as part of an educational program to demonstrate how devastated species, like the Chestnut, and their ecosystems, can be restored using genetic engineering.

It's our hope that someday you too may be able to plant them on your property.



DAIRY GRANTS

"It's a win for our community"

hen Harold and Anna Sullivan purchased their dairy farm in 1947 on Roberts Road in the Town of Denmark, in Lewis County, they carried with them a dream to raise their family as part of a vibrant farming community.

With fertile soils, ample water, a mix of woodlands abutting the Deer River, and extraordinary hard work, the "home farm" grew to more than 700 acres over two generations.

Their son, Charles, and his wife Shirley purchased the farm from his parents in the 1980s where they raised five sons: Mike, Jeffery, Kevin, Gary, and Scott.

Mike and Joyce Sullivan, as third generation dairy farmers on the family land, have decided to conserve their 494 acres of farmland. Known as Flat Rock Farms, and a "Dairy of Distinction" due to the family's commitment to excellence, the farm is currently home to 135 milking cows, young cattle, and a mix of fields growing alfalfa, corn, and grain.

Their recently awarded NYS farmland protection grant, written and submitted by Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust on behalf of the Sullivan's, will help them continue to diversify the farm to allow for greater economic resiliency. Mike's brothers, Gary and Kevin, have already protected their farms, and Jeffery hopes to conserve his farm, too.

Farmland conservation is a priority

According to the USDA 2017 census data, New York lost over 2,100 dairy farms between 2012 and 2017. Joyce notes "Dairy farmers are increasingly

looking to diversify their operations to withstand the dismal milk prices. We plan on diversifying more into grains."

New York State is responding by investing in farmland protection, with \$50 million in funding statewide committed to purchase development rights via farmland protection grants over the next year.

"It's no secret that the dairy industry is stressed by erratic milk prices as part of a national pricing structure," explained Mike Sullivan. "This grant is a win for our community. It would be tragic to see the farm get developed. We have so much of our family history in this farm. My grandparents would be proud of all we are doing to keep it as a farm. It's part of their legacy."

The farmland protection program allows farmers to diversify operations, including establishing home-based businesses and 'value-added' products like cheese and cider. Given the commitment to farm viability, the farmland conservation agreement also allows the installation of solar panels on barns and a portion of the land in a manner that is compatible with farming and healthy soils.



Mike and Joyce Sullivan and their family.

The demand for these farmland protection grants is high. Nearly 40 farm families in and around the Tug Hill region have asked for our help. After extensive evaluation based on the state's grant criteria, this year we will submit nine projects to NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets for funding consideration.

It takes over 50 hours to prepare one of these grant applications, including working with the relevant county, town(s), and farm families. If a farmland protection grant is awarded, a project can take two to four years to complete, necessitating well over 250 hours of staff time.

We couldn't undertake this effort without the support of people like you. Thank you

"This grant is a win for our community. It would be tragic to see the farm get developed. We have so much of our family history in this farm. My grandparents would be proud of all we are doing to keep it as a farm. It's part of their legacy."

- Mike Sullivan, Flat Rock Farms



Black River Elementary School 2nd graders enjoyed being part of the Tug Hill Bird Quest

Local school connects with nature to enhance learning

When was the last time you visited a school with an outdoor, nature-based, classroom?

Nationwide, educators and conservation organizations are partnering up to create natural areas and trails that are on or near school grounds.

Whether nature-based playgrounds, walking trails, or relaxation and inquiry spaces, these efforts have increasingly proven effective in improving students' learning, engagement, and social interaction.

Additional research notes that handson educational activities help foster greater understanding and learning retention.

A good example is Black River Elementary School, in Jefferson County. They are creating their own outdoor learning trail with a special grant from the Army's Federally Impacted Schools Education Foundation as part of their Learning Coming to Life initiative.

"Hands-on nature activities have kept my students engaged and learning, even with just two in-person classroom days a week," explained Tricia Pierce, a second-grade teacher helping to lead the effort.

"With current limits on time and expenses, creating a trail right on school property helps us incorporate outdoor learning more regularly at all grade levels, and community members have opportunities to join in and benefit from it as well."





Lewis County takes steps to become a Climate Smart Community

This past winter, the Lewis County Board of Legislators took the first step necessary to become certified as a Climate Smart Community, by adopting a 10-point pledge and appointing the newest county Planning Department member to lead the charge toward certification.

To date, 329 communities and counties across New York State have registered to become "climate smart"—working towards a variety of actions including climate-smart land use, decreased energy use, and innovations towards green economies.

We are standing by to assist local communities as they implement their land conservation goals related to climate-smart plans. Examples include supporting local farming and farmland protection, dual-use solar and farming, and regenerative agriculture.

To find out more, check out the *Climate Smart Communities* website at www.climatesmart.ny.gov.



When Sam* looks out the window, he's not thinking about math, biology, or history.

"Some days are bad days for him, but coming here to watch the birds for a while quickly calms him down so he can relax a little before going back to the classroom," explains Susan Jeffers, a second-grade teacher at the Mount Markam Elementary School, who participated in this year's Bird Quest. "It's been particularly relevant this year."

Many of the over 40 school, homeschool, family, and individual teams have reported the same impact while watching their feeders in 2021.

Birds are everywhere. Combine that with the fact that people were cooped up from Covid and it's not surprising that there has been a big increase in birdwatching.

Indeed, the online database eBird reported a 37% increase in users documenting their sightings, with more than two million people using the Merlin Bird ID app in 2020. That's good news for conservation too.

"As kids and adults start to appreciate birds, they also start to consider what birds need to thrive. For some, this is the first time they've considered the larger picture" explained Lin Gibbs, our Community Programs Director.

This program is possible because of our donors' generosity and community support.

If you shop at State Street Hardware, Lowes, Walmart, Home Depot, or Rudd's Town and Country, please tell them how much you appreciate their support of the Tug Hill Bird Quest.

We couldn't offer the free bird feeders and bird seed to our Bird Quest teams and schools without them.

*Name changed to ensure privacy

"As kids and adults start to appreciate birds, they also start to consider what birds need to thrive. For some, this is the first time they've considered the larger picture."

Lin Gibbs, Community Programs
 Director

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. Many times, it's a way to ensure that 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 whether conservation is right for you and your family, give JJ Schell, Associate Director, a call at 315-779-8240 or email him at jschell@tughilltomorrow.org.

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





Soggy Sneakers makes a splash

hat a day! Eighty-five hardy folks dusted off their sneakers and joined us for the Tug Hill Soggy Sneaker 5K trail race/walk this April. The event was held at our very own Joseph A. Blake Wildlife Sanctuary in Rutland, only 15 minutes from Watertown.

Some came to run, others to walk with friends. Many were there because they were itching to do something after a winter of being cooped up. Everyone wanted to experience the woodland trails.

The race was staged in waves of 10 minutes (with 10 runners per wave) to accommodate social distancing guidelines. Virtual participation was welcome, too, where people registered to run/walk the course at another time.

"It was so much fun. I love that kids were there, getting dirty, having fun outside. It's inspiring to see so many people who care about the land and want to do something as a community," remarked Kylie Schell, the event organizer who volunteered her time and talent to make this a success.

All registered runners received a Tug Hill Soggy Sneaker pint glass and a custom-made finishers medal created by Kylie.

Thank you to our lead Soggy Sneakers sponsors

GYMO, a local architectural, engineering, and land surveying company knows land. And they also know about livable communities and giving back. With more than 40 years of regional professional experience and service, GYMO brings cultural and local knowledge to every project across the North Country. That's been true for conservation work as well.

GYMO regularly sponsors their employees to attend events like Soggy Sneakers and come out for trail workdays. They've also donated the preliminary design for our grant application for an all-access trail at the Sanctuary. It's local businesses, like GYMO, who are demonstrating that being part of the community goes beyond the expected. *Thank you!*



A special thank you to...

Kylie Schell,whose passion and event skills made the Soggy Sneakers 5K a reality. Kylie has extensive experience with trail runs and planned the course, logistics, and outreach.

With trail running/walking becoming increasingly popular, Kylie notes, "There's a need for more trails close to where people live and work, so they can get out in nature, easily.

The land doesn't have to be hundreds of acres to have an important local impact. We need fun, healthy ways to get outside and connect with nature and our community. The Sanctuary is a good example of that."





"We came out to help support the conservation efforts of THTLT.

What better way than a beautiful walk in the woods at the Wildlife Sanctuary.

The trail did not disappoint."

Al & Barb Weiman







Cross Island Farms shows up for conservation

Cross Island Farms was founded as a sustainable farm in 2005 and since that time farmers Dani Baker and David Belding have never looked back.

In fact, they keep looking forward—finding innovative ways to support local conservation initiatives that connect people to the land, local food, and one another.

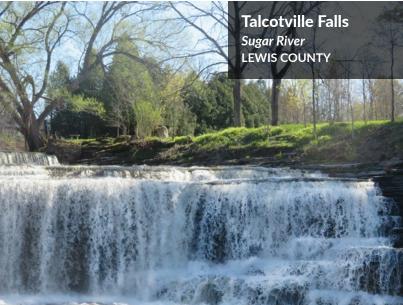
The 102-acre farm, located on Wellesley Island, NY, produces certified organic fruits, vegetables, beef, pork and goat meat. Their one-of-a-kind Enchanted Edible Forest consists of over 300 incredible fruits, nuts, berries, and edible flowers. Check them out at crossislandfarms.com.

As the lead donor of the Sanctuary's all-access trail, they walk the walk of connecting food, community, and healthy land. Local businesses like this make all the difference!









CONSERVATION EFFORTS ARE HELPING TO KEEP THEM CLEAN

What's your favorite waterfall?

s you venture out on the trails this summer to find a special place to relax and spend time with family and friends, Tug Hill's waterfalls could be just the ticket.



We are fortunate that the lands surrounding Tug Hill's spectacular waterfalls are remarkably intact, many with beautiful trails and overlooks and sparkling clean water.

"Water is one of the things that Tug Hill does best," notes Katie Malinowski, Tug Hill Commission's Executive Director. "But we can't take it for granted."

As noted by the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, the Northeastern U.S. has experienced a 38% increase in the amount of precipitation falling in very heavy events from 1901 to 2016 accompanied by longer periods of summer drought. That trend continues.

The change in weather patterns makes it even more important to conserve the lands surrounding streams, wetlands, rivers, and waterfalls.

Heavy downpours cause intensive runoff which, in turn, carries sediment and nutrients, increasing the likelihood of water contamination and rendering habitat unsuitable for fish and other wildlife.

Conserving Tug Hill's waterways is an ongoing priority for us. Our partnerships with municipalities, conservation organizations, and local landowners are growing.

This summer and fall, with support from people like you, we hope to conserve farms, woodlands, and wildlife habitat that will contribute to maintaining the clean waters of Tug Hill. In the meantime, check out what's already been conserved.

You can find out more about the waterfalls of Tug Hill, and other beautiful places to visit, on our website: tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org.

It's a great way to participate in the Tug Hill 10 Challenge, too.

Have a blast, take the Challenge

Summer is a terrifc time to explore the many diverse landscapes in Tug Hill. Whether you want to go for a casual walk or stroll, a more strenuous hike, or a paddle along the many Tug Hill rivers, it all counts!

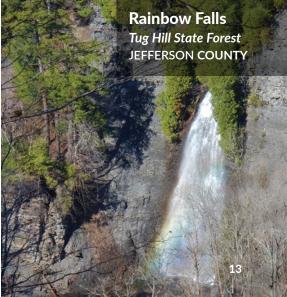
The Tug Hill 10 Challenge is easy and fun. Just visit ten trails from the Tug Hill Recreation Guide (available on our website, or we are happy to mail you one).

Then fill out the Challenge form on our website. We'll send you our special patch or decal (your choice) to recognize your accomplishment.

What if you've already completed the Tug Hill 10 Challenge? Complete ten more and we'll send you a Tug Hill Natural History Guide.

While you're out on the trail, or on the water, please take some photos to share. We love to see your nature shots of wildlife you've spotted and fun times with your family, friends, and pets.









Monthly Giving

With so many people wanting to make a difference to help increase the pace of conservation in Tug Hill, a monthly gift can be the perfect solution.

Your monthly donation will do double-duty: it will count towards the campaign and will put a smile on our faces, all year long.

Join David and Nancy Liddy who have found being a monthly donor works for them: "A monthly gift is easy for us to do—we don't have to remember as it happens automatically. We can stop it at any time and our donations add up over the year to make a bigger impact than we could with a one-time gift. It makes us feel good to know we're part of the change, all year long."

Gifts of Stock

Are you looking for a smart way to support the lands and waters you love this year? Recent gains in the stock market means that donating stock is one simple way you can give a powerful gift, while avoiding the capital gains tax.

Many donors are surprised that it can result in up to 70% tax-savings. When you give a gift of stock, you will also know that it's going to go right to work—ramping up trails, caring for the land, initiating educational programs, and working with the community to conserve land.

Give Linda Garrett a call, or go to the "Ways to Give" page on our website to learn more or donate a gift of stock.

Gifts of Property

Did you know that if you have a parcel of land, a house, or camp that you no longer use or need, you can donate it to our land trust and potentially receive a significant income tax benefit?

If the gift meets our conservation criteria, we conserve it and then sell it—and use the proceeds to protect additional land in the region. If you choose to go this route, we will help streamline the process and take care of the details. A number of people have found this to be a great option, and an outstanding way to increase the pace of conservation in Tug Hill.

"Our [monthly] donations add up over the year to make a bigger impact than we could with a one-time gift. It makes us feel good to know we're part of the change, all year long."

David & Nancy Liddy





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Sign up for our electronic updates:

TugHillTomorrowLandTrust.org

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Let's celebrate...the land, our community, and what we love to do outside, together.

We look forward to seeing you this summer now that we can safely get together in person.

FRIDAY, JUNE 11TH • 10AM-2PM

Traverse Trail workday. Come out and help create the first long-distance trail on Tug Hill. Must register on our website. Can't make this date? Check out our website for the entire list of workdays throughout summer and fall.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 14TH • 12PM-5PM

Sustain Music and Nature. Celebrate our 30[™] Anniversary headlining The Brother Brothers, an identical twin indie folk duo from Brooklyn. Opening will be local fiddlers Caleb Brazie and Sterling Brown. The concert will be at the North American Fiddlers' Hall of Fame in Osceola, followed by a hike at the southern end of the Tug Hill Traverse Trail. \$5/person, \$10/family.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23RD • 6PM

30™ Anniversary Farm-to-Table Annual Dinner. Join us in celebrating the local conservation work that you have made possible over the last thirty years. The Barn at Windy-Hollow in Carthage, NY. \$50/person or \$90/couple.



Front Cover: Pixley Falls by Karen Millspaugh