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The Western New York Land Conservancy Announces a \$200,000 Challenge Gift to Save the College Lodge Forest

The Western New York Land Conservancy and the Friends of the College Lodge Forest are announcing a \$200,000 challenge gift to save the College Lodge Forest, a spectacular 168-acre property located near Fredonia, NY. They need members of the community to donate to match the challenge gift by the end of this year. The community has already raised more than \$400,000 toward its goal of \$790,000 to save the forest. Once the challenge gift is matched, they will meet that goal, purchase the land, and keep it open as a publicly accessible nature preserve forever.

The College Lodge Forest is a cherished community gathering place and one of the most exquisite natural areas remaining in Western New York. It includes an incredible diversity of wildlife, a pristine wetland with carnivorous plants and freshwater coral, and old-growth forest with native orchids and 400-year-old trees. It also includes miles of hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country ski trails. The land rests on a continental divide: on one side rainwater drains towards Lake Erie and the Atlantic Ocean, while on the other side it drains towards the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. The land is also threatened. If not protected now, it could be logged.

The challenge gift includes \$100,000 from the Lenna Foundation. "Ever since the enterprising students at SUNY Fredonia purchased the property, the College Lodge Forest has been a place of enormous significance in Western New York," Joe Johnson, President of the Lenna Foundation, said. "As a research center and as a refuge for people to get outdoors and into nature, its value to our community is incalculable. We are thrilled to assist in the Land Conservancy's efforts to save this local treasure."

The Gallogly Family Foundation has offered \$50,000 towards the challenge gift. Kasey DeLuke of the foundation, also a Land Conservancy board member, said: "The College Lodge Forest has always been home to rare and incredible wildlife, like migratory songbirds that fly all the way from South America; a diverse array of amphibians and reptiles; and gorgeous wildflowers including seven distinct species of orchids. We encourage everyone to take a trip to Chautauqua County and see this ecological wonder for themselves."

Another Land Conservancy board member, Kathryn Lasher, and her partner, Scott Bieler, president of West Herr Automotive Group, also contributed \$50,000 to the challenge gift. "We are blessed with an abundance of natural beauty here in Western New York," Kathy said. "But some of that abundance, like the College Lodge Forest, is in critical danger of being lost forever. So it's crucial to our children and grandchildren and to future generations of Western New Yorkers that we protect spectacular places like this."

“Saving valuable lands for future generations is an ongoing process,” said Nancy Smith, Executive Director of the Land Conservancy. “There is no pause button to press during difficult times. This pandemic has shown us all just how important nature is for our mental, physical, and even spiritual health. And these gifts represent a strong show of support for the work we’re doing to permanently protect the College Lodge Forest. We are immensely grateful.”

The property was purchased in 1939 by SUNY Fredonia students, with their own funds, for the main objective of promoting health outdoors. Since then, the land has been a prized learning laboratory for thousands of teachers, researchers, students, and the entire community. The Faculty Student Association (FSA), a non-profit auxiliary of SUNY Fredonia, has owned the property and operated a historic lodge on the site since 1969. But the cost of maintaining the land and all of the buildings is high, and the FSA proposed a plan to raise funds by logging the forest, including the old-growth trees. Fortunately, the FSA decided to sell a large portion of the land to the Land Conservancy and enable protection of the forest. By purchasing 168 acres from the FSA, the Land Conservancy will protect the forest and the FSA will be able to invest funds from the sale into the stewardship of visitor facilities on the portion of the property it retains. The FSA will continue to own and operate the lodge and the 33 acres surrounding it.

The Land Conservancy needs donations of all sizes in order to save the College Lodge Forest. For larger donations, naming opportunities include:

- One donor of \$200,000 can name the preserve
- One donor of \$100,000 can have the old-growth grove named in their honor **(Reserved)**
- One donor of \$100,000 can have the beaver pond named in their honor
- One donor of \$50,000 can have the small island named in their honor **(Reserved)**
- One donor of \$50,000 can have the birdwatching blind named in their honor
- One donor of \$50,000 can have a wooden footbridge named in their honor
- One donor of \$50,000 can have a panoramic viewpoint of the beaver pond named in their honor
- Donors of \$20,000 can have a bench in the outdoor amphitheater named in their honor
- Donors of \$10,000 or more will have their name listed on a plaque placed at the preserve
- Donors of \$2,000 or more will be recognized in the Land Conservancy newsletter

If you would like to donate to save the College Lodge Forest, you can donate online at wnylc.org or send a check made payable to “Western New York Land Conservancy” to P.O. Box 471, East Aurora, NY 14052. Please call or email if you have questions: (716) 687-1225 or info@wnylc.org.

The **Western New York Land Conservancy** is a regional, not-for-profit land trust that permanently protects land with significant conservation value in Western New York for the benefit of future generations. The Land Conservancy envisions a future in which open spaces, working lands, wildlife habitat, and scenic beauty are cherished and protected as part of the landscape and character of Western New York. The Land Conservancy is accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission and is one of 1000+ land trusts nationwide, including 90 in New York State. Land trusts have protected 56 million acres of land.

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