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Community Reaches Fundraising Goal, Western New York Land Conservancy to Purchase the College Lodge Forest

The Western New York Land Conservancy and the Friends of the College Lodge Forest are pleased to announce that the community has matched a challenge gift and reached their fundraising goal to save the College Lodge Forest. Located near Fredonia, NY, this spectacular forest has long been a cherished community gathering place in Chautauqua County. Once purchased, it will be permanently protected.

During the past few years, the Land Conservancy and the Friends of the College Lodge Forest carried out an ambitious fundraising campaign to protect the property. Purchased in 1939 by SUNY Fredonia students, with their own funds, for the main objective of promoting health outdoors, the land has been a prized learning laboratory for thousands of teachers, researchers, students, and the entire community ever since. 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.

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation played a significant role in the campaign by awarding the Land Conservancy a large grant: "The College Lodge Forest is a jewel," said Parks Commissioner Erik Kulleseid. "For decades, its well-maintained trail system has provided Western New Yorkers as well as SUNY Fredonia students and faculty with a place to both appreciate and study nature. Protecting this forest is a win for New Yorkers of all ages and backgrounds who are eager to explore all that our great state has to offer."

In addition to being a sanctuary for people, the College Lodge Forest is home to an incredible diversity of wildlife, a pristine wetland with carnivorous plants, old-growth trees, and unique native orchids. It is also part of a significant migratory bird corridor—a fact that led the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to award the Land Conservancy with a grant as part of its Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI).

"The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is happy to support the conservation of the College Lodge property under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, through our Joint Venture habitat grant program," said Wendi Weber, Regional Director for the North Atlantic-Appalachian Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Just 4.5 miles from Lake Erie, the tract provides important stopover habitat for migratory birds during spring and fall migration, and a mosaic of interior forest and wetland habitats used for breeding and wintering by many different wildlife species. The area also provides valuable opportunities to connect people to nature, as it has long been used for birdwatching, hiking, and other outdoor recreation."

Joe Johnson of the Lenna Foundation, which provided a portion of the challenge grant funds, said: “Ever since the enterprising students at SUNY Fredonia purchased the property during the Great Depression, the College Lodge Forest has been a place of enormous significance in Western New York. 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 help to save this local treasure.”

“We are extraordinarily grateful to the entire community for accomplishing this goal,” said Nancy Smith, Executive Director of the Land Conservancy. “This has been a challenging year for everyone. What this demonstrates, once again, is just how much our community values nature. Even in a year like this, the community came together to protect one of Western New York’s most incredible forests.”

Additional support for the College Lodge Forest comes from Kathy Lasher and Scott Bieler, the Gallogly Family Foundation, hundreds of individual community donors, and the Garman Family Foundation administered by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo.

The Land Conservancy will now enter the final stages of purchasing the property, and will be the proud new owners of the College Lodge Forest in early 2021. Once the sale is official, the Land Conservancy will keep it open year-round as a publicly accessible nature preserve, and it will maintain miles of existing hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country ski trails. The FSA will continue to own and operate the lodge and the 33 acres surrounding it, using funds from the sale to operate the historic lodge on its share of the property.

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 current and 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 87 in New York State. Land trusts have protected over 56 million acres of land.

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