



WESTERN NEW YORK
LAND CONSERVANCY

The Resource

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTERN NEW YORK LAND CONSERVANCY

SPRING 2022

Back to Their Roots: Providence Farm Collective



Mahamud Mberwa and his daughter Fatuma
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Back to Their Roots: Providence Farm Collective

By Kyle Semmel, *Communications Manager*

Although Abdullah “Abdi” Sundi’s family had farmed in Somalia for years, Abdi never learned how. In 1991, when he was just a boy, a bloody civil war broke out in his homeland. As a member of the Somali Bantu people, an ethnic group descended from Bantu tribes in Mozambique, Malawi, and Tanzania who were enslaved and brought to Somalia, Abdi and his family were considered second-class citizens. During the war, Somali Bantus were systematically stripped of their land and forced to make a dangerous trek across the border to Kenya to live in crowded refugee camps.

In the camps, instead of practicing the traditional farming methods that had sustained them for generations, Abdi and his family had to rely on donations of food from the United Nations World Food Programme. The camps offered no opportunity to grow the types of delicious staple crops they were accustomed to, such as African maize, a nutrient-rich variety of corn that is hardier than its American cousin.

Abdi and his family lived at Dadaab Refugee Camp on the flat, windswept border of Somalia and Kenya. Their stay at Dadaab was supposed to be temporary, but it turned out to last more than a decade, when they were moved to another refugee camp. They had minimal medical aid, little water, no electricity, and no firewood to cook the all-too-meager supply of food supplied by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). To this day, the UN’s World Food Programme warns that more than 400,000 refugees still living in Kenya’s refugee camps face chronic food shortages.

When the United States named the Somali Bantus a priority group for resettlement in 1999, it paved the way for people like Abdi and his family to come to America to start a





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Plant the Future of Farming

Providence Farm Collective (PFC) is a not-for-profit organization that leases farmland in Orchard Park where nearly 300 refugee, immigrant, and Black farmers grow healthy food for their children, families, and communities.

You can help PFC farmers plant the future of farming and put down permanent roots at their farm by donating today. Already, our community has raised more than \$600,000 toward its goal.

Donate If you would like to donate, please send a check made out to “Western New York Land Conservancy” with “Providence Farm Collective” on the memo line to: Western New York Land Conservancy, P.O. Box 471, East Aurora, NY 14052.

You can also donate online at www.wnylc.org Select “Providence Farm Collective” in the dropdown menu under “This contribution is for” on our donation page.

new life. He arrived in Buffalo in August of 2004. Though he couldn’t speak English and had little formal education, he now possessed something that had been missing in his life—hope for a better future. He was soon joined in Buffalo by other members of the Somali Bantu community.

In 2017, more than a decade after many of Buffalo’s Somali Bantu community arrived, a number of individuals within the community led a grassroots effort to get back to their farming roots. Since then, that movement has grown to encompass refugees and immigrants from multiple nations as well as members of Buffalo’s Black community, and it has spawned Providence Farm Collective (PFC).

The venture has been so successful that, in 2021, PFC outgrew its original location in East Aurora and moved to an ideal 37-acre site in Orchard Park that they lease. It’s here

where they hope to put down permanent roots. This year, our community is teaming up to raise \$2.3 million so that PFC can buy the land and add needed infrastructure, such as a pavilion with working restrooms and a refurbished barn for office space. The deadline for the campaign is December 31st. Once we reach our goal, the Land Conservancy will permanently protect the farm with a conservation easement. PFC farmers will then have a permanent location to grow their crops and raise goats and chickens, and they will always have land to call home.



Ovenbirds: The Soundtrack of the Forest

By Kyle Semmel, Communications Manager

Soon after you receive this newsletter in late April, Ovenbirds will be returning to the forests of Western New York from their winter homes in the Caribbean or Central America. You'll know them by their dull brown, speckled chests and their distinctive calls, a series of rapid whistles that rise in pitch—tea-cher, Tea-Cher, TEA-CHER. As local naturalist Marcus Rosten put it, their characteristic song is part of “the soundtrack of the forest.”

Ovenbirds are common here, if you know where to look. Hike in any dense mature or mixed forest in our area, such as the College Lodge Forest or the Gallogly Nature Sanctuary, and you'll hear them. They often raise two broods during the summer breeding season. Unlike most warblers, which nest in trees, Ovenbirds nurture their young in dome-shaped nests constructed on the ground from leaf litter. These nests resemble old-fashioned ovens, and give the bird its name. Since Ovenbirds camouflage their nests so well, seeing a nest is a rare experience—even for trained birders. But we don't recommend that you wander around the forest in search of one. In trying to get a glimpse, you might accidentally trample these delicate structures and the eggs or chicks inside. In fact, this is one of the reasons we don't allow dogs on our preserves: to protect the vulnerable plants and animals, like

Ovenbirds, that reside on the forest floor.



Ovenbird

Although Ovenbird numbers remain stable, this species relies on large, unfragmented forests for their survival—and this presents a serious challenge to Ovenbird populations as more Western New York forests are logged and developed. “When it comes to forest fragmentation,” Rosten says, “they are one of the first birds to indicate there's a problem. The canary in the coal mine.”

Luckily for Ovenbirds, protecting large forests and preserving them—intact and unfragmented—for future generations is at the core of our community's work.

Restoration work: Niagara Gorge

By Andrew Lance, PhD, Restoration Ecologist

Restoration work in the Niagara River Gorge continued over the winter with treatment of invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle shrubs along the Gorge rim in Whirlpool State Park. We will be actively planting in the area this spring, adding red and white oaks, sugar maples, and bitternut hickories to areas formerly dominated by invasive plants. The arrival of spring also gives us much anticipated insight into how native plant communities are responding to our restoration work, with new and unique species emerging each year.

We're also excited to initiate ecological restoration projects at a number of our properties and preserves. This includes expanded treatment of invasive shrubs in the woodlands at Stella Niagara Preserve, retreatments of regenerating buckthorn at Margery Gallogly Nature Sanctuary, and treatment of invasive plants at Mossy Point. We're also planning on expanding our restoration work at several properties on Grand Island and at the Niagara Escarpment Preserve. Stay tuned!

Save Land by Donating Today!

Want to save our farms, forests, streams, and meadows for future generations? Become a member, renew your membership, or donate to protect Western New York's most valuable resources today. To donate, use the envelope in this newsletter or visit wnyle.org and make your payment online. Thank you!

News

College Lodge Forest

We have purchased the College Lodge Forest near Fredonia. A special thank you to the Faculty Student Association of SUNY Fredonia, the Friends of the College Lodge Forest, and the many donors who helped us secure the necessary funding.

Mossy Point

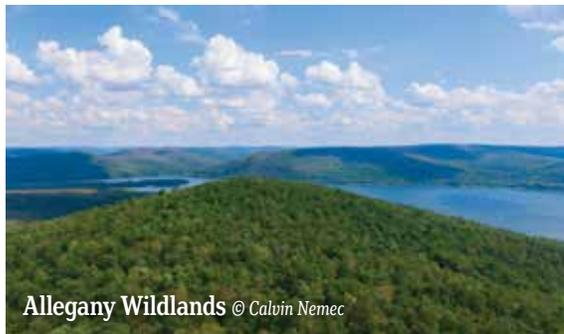
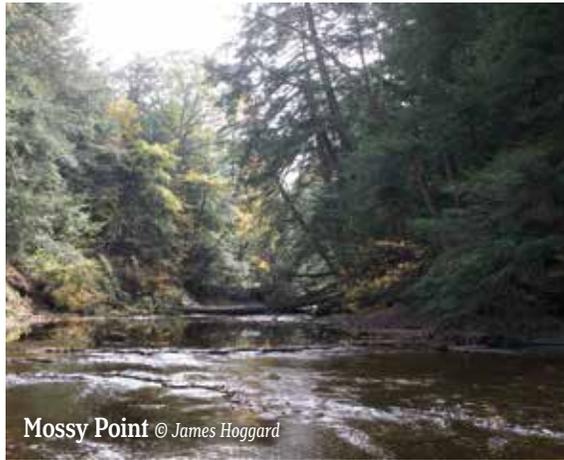
We will officially open the trails at Mossy Point later this spring. Check for updates in our e-newsletter in May.

Allegheny Wildlands

Late last year, our community reached its fundraising goal to save the Allegheny Wildlands. This spectacular 200-acre forest in Cattaraugus County is home to a rich diversity of plants and animals. Once purchased, it will be permanently protected and become part of the Land Conservancy's planned Western New York Wildway.

WNY Wildway

Speaking of the Wildway, we received a \$2,000,000 grant from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) as part of its Water Quality Improvement Program (WQIP), a grant that specifically targets the protection of source waters. We will identify and permanently protect land in the Black Creek-Angelica Creek watershed in Allegheny County, an area that falls within the Wildway.



North Tonawanda/Grand Island

We received a \$160,000 grant from the Tonawanda Community Environmental Benefit Program (TCEBP). We will undertake a host of projects at preserves in North Tonawanda and Grand Island. We will improve existing nature preserves, restore wildlife habitat, reduce the threat of hazard trees, improve walking trails, and engage people of all ages in environmental education.

The Riverline

The Riverline was awarded \$900,000 in federal funds in the recently approved federal budget, as announced at a press event featuring New York State Senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand; Congressman Brian Higgins; Mayor Byron Brown; Thomas George, Director of Public Transit at the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA); Jeff Lebsack, The Riverline Director; and Nancy Smith, our Executive Director. If you are interested in learning more about this project, or donating to create The Riverline, please visit the website for The Riverline: theriverline.com. You can also reach out to the Land Conservancy at (716) 687-1225 or info@wnylc.org.



2022 Spring/ Summer Events

Breeding and Migrating Birds of the College Lodge Forest

Saturday, May 28
9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.
Join us for a delightful walk through the College Lodge Forest in search of the rich diversity of bird species that raise their young on this property, or pause here to feed and rest on their marathon spring migrations.

GorgeFest

Saturday, June 18
11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
Join us and our partners for a special educational program to celebrate the Niagara Gorge and its river by showcasing its past, present, and future splendor. Partners include the Underground Railroad Museum, NYS Parks, the Niagara Aquarium, and many more. Learn more at our website: www.wnyc.org

To learn more about these and other upcoming events, or to register, visit www.wnyc.org

Native Plants at Ralph C. Wilson Centennial Park

By Kyra Umrigar, Development Assistant

Thanks to a \$690,000 grant from the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation, we will grow 50,000 plants from locally collected seeds, and add many trees, shrubs, and aquatic plants that will enrich the wildlife habitat at the new Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Centennial Park on the waterfront in Buffalo.

But how will we produce 50,000 plants? We will partner with many native plant specialists and local growers, such as Allison Dehonney of Buffalo Go Green. Allison's farm in Buffalo produces vegetables for food-desert neighborhoods. Her plots are lined with flowers, adding pops of color and green, and neighbors often walk and drive out of their way to enjoy them. Neighborhood beautification is an unexpected, but positive impact of her business. Now, she's excited to bring native plants to Ralph Wilson Park.

Allison cites sourcing seeds as the first challenge. Local native plants help preserve the genetic differences essential to long-term biodiversity, but seeds from local native plants aren't readily available, so they will be carefully collected by hand at our preserves and with permission from other landowners.

Once the seeds are collected, Allison and other local growers will create the perfect conditions for the seeds to sprout. Their greenhouses will provide the necessary amount of light, heat, and moisture for the seedlings to flourish. Creating the correct environment requires research, tips from specialists, and trial and error. All this effort will be worthwhile when the plants arrive at their final destination, making space in the greenhouses for vegetable seedlings once again.

It will take the growing seasons of 2023 and 2024 and many hands to accomplish this feat. But the Land Conservancy is up to the challenge. Come visit Ralph Wilson Park in a few years and enjoy the scenery. But please don't pick the flowers—those seeds are necessary for the next generation of native seedlings.

Allison Dehonney

Are you a farmer?

Would you like more information about protecting your farm? Contact our Farmland Protection Specialist, Rachel Chrostowski, at rachelc@wnylc.org or (716) 687-1225 ext.126.

“I love the idea that collecting seeds will be one of the first steps in bringing the shoreline of Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park into reality. The plants that are grown through this grant will help us establish a robust site ecology that can thrive in this dynamic environment. The community has been very influential in making sure that this design really represents Buffalo. I hope there will be a lot of pride in knowing that these plants are locally sourced and sustainably grown.”

—Award-winning landscape architect and lead park designer Michael Van Valkenburgh, the Charles Eliot Professor in Practice of Landscape Architecture at Harvard's Graduate School of Design and Founder and Partner of MVVA.



Thank you for honoring those you care for and supporting their love for nature.

In Honor of

MARY ANDERSON
*From Linda Anderson,
Evelyn May*

KATHY & SCOTT BIELER
*From Bill & Colleen Loecher,
Ernest & Connie Matthews,
Nancy & Tom Smith*

BARBARA LANDREE
From Eric Landree

JAMESON LINDSTROM
From Amalia Wagner

JACKI LONSKI
From Robert Lonski

MILLER, HAMER, &
MAYNARD CHILDREN
From Gregory Neumann

AUNT DONNA & UNCLE JIM
LINDA JONES
ROSEMARY & STEVE KELLY
HENRY & MATTHEW
MACIEJEWSKI
ROSEMARY MARCUS
JOANNE MIECZNIKOWSKI
USCHI & JOHN
WARCHOCKI
From Judith & Frank Krauz

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AND WALT WITMER
From Marcia & Jim Nixon

DOUGLAS WRIGHT
From Nancy J. Wright

College Lodge Forest

We are thankful to everyone who made the College Lodge Forest possible. The following supporters were able to give at least \$2,000.

\$100,000+
Environmental Protection Fund
administered by the NYS OPRHP
FSA of SUNY Fredonia
Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
administered by the USFWS
Lenna Foundation

\$50,000-\$99,999
Kathy and Scott Bieler
Gallogly Family Foundation
LTA/NYS DEC

\$10,000-\$49,999
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\$2,000-\$9,999
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& Karen Koepfel, Debra & James
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Bruce and Nancy Garlapow
Beverly Caffery, in honor of
Kathy and Scott Bieler
Julia D'Amico
Falcone Farms, Inc.
Margaret and Mitchell Fitzgibbon
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Irene Reynolds Guerriero
Carol and John Hardenburg
Bob and Norma Henderson
John and Betty Howell
Robert and Ellen Irwin, in honor of
Kathryn Bieler
Mark and Bonnie Morgante
Margie and Sandy Nobel
Oliver Kennedy and Christina Rockwell
Joanne and John Schlegel
Daniel and Mary Shonn
Amy Titus
Western New York Foundation
Shari Yudenfreund-Sujka

A resource to build compassion

The Land Conservancy has partnered with FreeWill, a free, online tool for writing your will.

We want to make it easier for you to find peace of mind and protect what you love.

One way to do that is to write a legal will—it's an essential task to plan for your future and protect the people and natural landscapes that you care about.

We are strong because we are together. Thank you for being part of our loving community. Scan the QR code to use this free will-writing tool to get started.

Or visit wnylc.org/planned-giving.



Thank you

to our Legacy Society members who have made us part of *their* legacy by including us in their planned giving, like their will.

Are you interested in joining our Legacy Society and ensuring your favorite places are protected for future generations? Email Kyle Semmel, Communications Manager, at ksemmel@wnylc.org.

James Battaglia
Lawrence M. and Carolyn K. Brooks
Amy Choboy and Pamela Rossotto
Larry and Sheila Drake
Edward G. and Joan Eschner
Deborah H. Fenn
Chuck and Ann Fourtner
Douglas Germony
Amy Holt
Ed and Gayle Hutton

David Kimball
Mark P. and Deborah E. Kisker
Art and Marilyn Klein
Paul and Jane Lehman
Nancy J. Leone
Sally Metzger
Franklin and Linda Meyer
Barbara Mierzwa
John Owen
Jajeane Rose-Burney

Carleen Blake Ryan
Kyle Semmel
Deborah Sabol
Judith Sabol
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Save the Date!

The Land Conservancy's 2022 Gala

Tuesday, September 20, 2022 | 6:00 p.m.
The Terrace at Delaware Park, Buffalo, New York

This year's Gala will be a celebration of the incredible accomplishments of the Land Conservancy and its members. The Gala will be a cocktail party with music, heavy hors d'oeuvres, and an open bar with beer, wine, and cocktails.



Our Mission *The Land Conservancy is a regional, non-profit land trust that has protected more than 7,000 acres of land with significant conservation value in Western New York for the benefit of future generations. We envision a future in which forests, farms, meadows, and waterways are connected, cherished, and protected in Western New York. Our clean air, clean water, and fertile soils will equitably support the health and wellbeing of future generations of every living thing. We are accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission.*



Follow us for more news & updates!