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Western New York Land Conservancy Dedicates College Lodge Forest, Old-Growth Forest Network Inducts Preserve into Nationwide Program

The Western New York Land Conservancy and the Friends of the College Lodge Forest held a ribbon cutting ceremony at the College Lodge Forest to announce the Land Conservancy's formal purchase of the property. Located near Fredonia, NY, this spectacular forest has long been a cherished community gathering place in Chautauqua County.

The College Lodge Forest becomes the newest Land Conservancy preserve. It will remain open year-round as a publicly accessible nature sanctuary with miles of existing hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country ski trails. The Faculty Student Association (FSA), a non-profit auxiliary of SUNY Fredonia from which the Land Conservancy purchased the forest, will continue to own the historic lodge and the 33 acres surrounding it.

"We are extraordinarily grateful to the entire community for accomplishing this goal," said Nancy Smith, Executive Director of the Land Conservancy. "Time and time again, we are reminded just how much our community values nature. It came together during a trying period to protect one of Western New York's most incredible forests. We owe a special thank you to Jon and Priscilla Titus and the incredible men and women of the Friends of the College Lodge, who first introduced us to this amazing place and who were instrumental in protecting it. Without them, we would not be here today. We are also grateful to the Faculty Student Association for ensuring this forest could be protected forever."

As part of the ceremony, the College Lodge Forest was formally inducted into the national Old-Growth Forest Network (OGFN). To celebrate the dedication of this protected forest, the Old-Growth Forest Network's Founder and Executive Director, Dr. Joan Maloof, presented a plaque to the Land Conservancy's Executive Director, Nancy Smith.

"We are thrilled to welcome this beautiful forest into the Network as the forest representative for Chautauqua County," says Dr. Maloof. "We honor and celebrate the Faculty Student Association of SUNY Fredonia and the Western New York Land Conservancy for their vision and work in preserving this special forest for generations to come. OGFN depends on volunteers in each U.S. county to help identify and induct forests into the Network. Christopher Merchant of Jamestown was instrumental in the dedication process."

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 FSA has owned the property and operated the lodge since 1969.

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.

Support for the College Lodge Forest came from many foundations, state agencies, and donors, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the Lenna Foundation, Kathy 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 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.

The mission of the **Old-Growth Forest Network** is to connect people with nature by creating a national network of protected, mature, publicly accessible, native forests. The organization's goal is to preserve at least one forest in every county in the United States that can sustain a forest, estimated to be 2,370 out of a total of 3,140 counties. The Old-Growth Forest Network's program works to identify forests for the Network, ensure their protection from logging, and connect people to these properties to experience old-growth forests. It also educates about the extraordinary ecological and human wellness benefits of old-growth forests, and speaks out regarding immediate threats to specific ancient forests. Founded in 2012 by Dr. Joan Maloof, OGFN has over 155 forests in 28 states. College Lodge Forest will be the sixteenth New York forest to join the Old-Growth Forest Network, becoming the second Western New York forest in the network, joining Zoar Valley Unique Area in Cattaraugus County. The full list of forests in the Network may be viewed at www.oldgrowthforest.net.

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