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Land Conservancy Awarded \$2 million Grant to Protect Lands that will Safeguard Drinking Water in Allegany County

The Land Conservancy is pleased to announce that it has 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. With this funding, the Land Conservancy will identify and permanently protect land in the Black Creek-Angelica Creek watershed in Allegany County, safeguarding public drinking water sources. The grant will allow the Land Conservancy to find priority source water protection lands, and as always, partner with local landowners who *voluntarily* wish to protect their land.

Properties protected through this WQIP grant, the largest single grant the Land Conservancy has been awarded in its 30-year history, will help protect public drinking water sources by permanently protecting forests in source water areas. In addition, the properties acquired for source water protection will have the added benefit of spurring the creation of the Western New York Wildway, a landscape-scale conservation initiative centered on protecting and connecting some of the largest forests in our region. Together with the 46,000+ acres of already protected state-owned land in Allegany County, properties protected through this project will form part of a connected corridor of protected lands that will stretch from the vast forests of northern Pennsylvania to the Great Lakes, through to the Finger Lakes, the Adirondacks, and beyond.

The Western New York Wildway will help New York State increase the number of acres protected for public drinking water sources, meet its own 30 by 30 goal, and answer President Biden's call to Americans to conserve 30% of land by 2030. By connecting with already protected state forests in the area, it will also create links totaling thousands of acres of contiguous forest, thus limiting the impacts of forest fragmentation—including the loss of wildlife and the increase in disease spreading ticks, invasive species, and flooding.

Creating the Western New York Wildway will take decades, however, and will require collaboration with many partners. The Land Conservancy is at the very beginning of this

initiative, and although a preliminary map of boundaries exists, and some key places have been protected already—such as Mossy Point, in Erie County—the vast majority of the work lies ahead.

“Although we are only in the early stages of our planned Western New York Wildway,” said **Nancy Smith, Executive Director of the Land Conservancy**, “we believe it will have an enormous impact on our conservation work going forward. The Wildway will be a decades-long project that will require a wide range of partners to achieve, but the urgency of this work becomes clearer every day. It’s absolutely vital that individuals and organizations make every effort to preserve what we have left—including our fresh water—before it’s too late. We couldn’t be more thrilled to be awarded this incredibly significant grant from the DEC.”

The Land Conservancy’s Conservation Director, Marisa Riggi, agreed. She added: “The main conservation need in this priority watershed is the permanent protection and long-term stewardship of ecologically significant forests. Through this grant, we will protect the forests vital to public drinking water sources, ensuring reliable fresh water for the people of Allegany County—and those downstream—for years to come.”

“Protecting water quality is a top priority for DEC and our land trust partners throughout New York State,” **DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos said**. “DEC is excited to partner with the Western New York Land Conservancy on this \$2 million Water Quality Improvement Project grant that will support forest connectivity, ensure permanent preservation of this priority Southern Tier watershed, and protect public drinking water supplies for future generations of Western New Yorkers.”

“The Land Conservancy is a leader in innovative conservation work,” said **Senator Gillibrand**. “This funding will safeguard Allegany County’s drinking water and help ensure that the Black Creek-Angelica Creek watershed is protected for generations to come. I look forward to continuing to work with the Land Conservancy to protect New York’s air, water, and land.”

Congressman Tom Reed said, “We care about protecting and preserving our environment and that is why we were proud to support the Western New York Land Conservancy in seeking these funds. This grant will go to further the excellent conservation work that the Western New York Land Conservancy has already accomplished.”

“Funding from New York State for this project ensures fresh drinking water for Allegany residents for years to come,” said **State Senator George Borrello**. “It also supports economic development in this community, because new preserves create more outdoor recreation opportunities, which in turn attract more visitors. Our hotels, restaurants, and small shops will benefit from this investment. The Land Conservancy has been a good partner to the communities in my region. They have worked with landowners and municipalities in the past on successful, voluntary conservation projects. They have brought outside resources to our community for these projects. I am glad that they continue their work in my district.”

Assemblyman Joseph Giglio said, “I am thrilled that this funding will allow the Land Conservancy to locate important forest tracts for conservation, while helping to pay landowners to protect their land once identified. As a former member of the Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Task Force, I know this funding will open the door for ancillary opportunities for more tourism in the region. This is a win-win for everyone.”

The Western New York 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. The Land Conservancy is accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. For more information on upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, or the mission of the Western New York Land Conservancy, please call (716) 687-1225 or visit www.wnylc.org.

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