

The RESOURCE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTERN NEW YORK LAND CONSERVANCY | FALL 2025

**Wetlands:
Nature's Sponges**



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Why Wetlands Matter

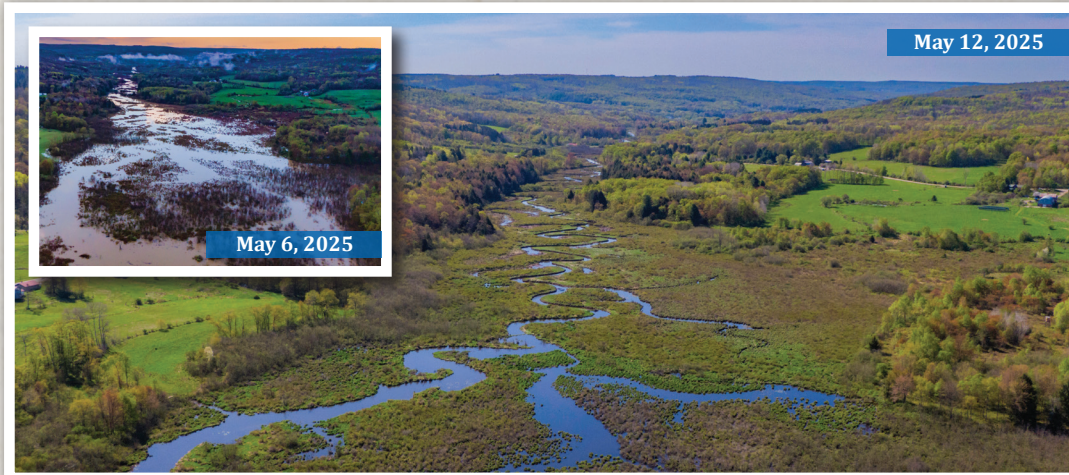
By Kyle Semmel, *Communications Manager*

Did you know that wetlands are some of the most biodiverse habitats on the planet? Spend even a few hours exploring any wetland in our region and you will see a stunning variety of wildlife. These include beavers, otters, frogs, turtles, and a host of unique insects and rare birds—to name but a few. Wetlands also sustain an incredible range of trees, shrubs, grasses, and ferns that deliver important benefits throughout the web of life. The nutrient-rich soil and water provide ample resources.

Wetlands teem with an abundance of wildlife, but they also provide significant benefits for humans, too: flood and erosion control, water filtration, groundwater recharge, and even improved air quality. In fact, wetlands are some of nature's best remedies for improving the lives of wildlife *and* people—and that's why we're focusing our efforts on them.

Imagine a powerful storm sweeping through Western New York, one that pummels the region with heavy rain that turns city streets into rivers and fills basements with water. In rural communities, the rains blow out roads and bridges, creating unsafe driving conditions and destroying crops.

With more and more natural land being logged or developed in WNY and paved over with asphalt and concrete, the severity of such floods has grown more acute. Hard, impenetrable surfaces block the water from seeping into the ground—creating the very conditions that produce destructive floods. In their natural state, wetlands serve as giant sponges that absorb and store excess rainwater, reducing the risk of flooding. Take a look at the photos on this page, for example. This year, between May 2 and May 6, the Black Creek watershed was drenched with over 3.5 inches of rain. Thanks to the amazing absorption qualities of the intact wetlands, water levels returned to normal in just six days.



In recent years, we have protected a number of important wetlands that are home to some of the most biodiverse plant and animal communities in our region, including the College Lodge Forest and the Floating Fen Preserve in Chautauqua County. With your help, we aim to protect an additional 539 acres of wetlands and forests in Allegany County. Announced earlier this year, these five properties are known collectively as the “Black Creek Protection Projects.”

The Black Creek watershed contains critical Class I Wetlands, among the most ecologically valuable and functionally important landscapes in Western New York. Their complex ecosystems sustain everything from amphibians and birds to native plants and pollinators, making them biodiversity hotspots. By conserving these lands, we're protecting wildlife, safeguarding clean drinking water for thousands of people, mitigating storm damage, and laying the groundwork for a future public nature preserve that will open new opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors.



Black Creek Preserve © Andrew Gaerte

The Black Creek Protection Projects

The spectacular 276-acre **Black Creek Preserve**, located southwest of the Keeney Swamp State Forest, adds important acreage to the core area of the WNY Wildway. Once this property is permanently protected we will create a public access trail.

The 180-acre **Worden Wetlands** offers a unique opportunity to protect both a wetland and a forest. The young forest provides habitat for bobcats, deer, bears, owls, and more. Turtles roam the wetland, otters and beavers swim through the water, and birds like Swamp Sparrows and Marsh Wrens call out from the grasses where they nest.

Hope Sings in the Forest

By Andrew Gaerte, *Director of Development & Communications*

By the time I bushwhacked my way to the summit of the forest, I was out of breath. I paused to take in the lush green of spring in the Allegheny Wildlands Expansion. That's when I heard it: a bird's buzzy trill. I suddenly had all my energy back. Could it be what I hoped it was? Slowly I headed in the direction of the distinct song descending from the towering oaks and hickories. There it was again. Yes! The unmistakable song of the male Cerulean Warbler.

It is a rare treat to hear the song of the Cerulean Warbler in WNY. This stunning warbler the color of the bright blue sky has seen its population decline nearly 70% since the 1980s. This significant decline is primarily due to the loss of the Cerulean's preferred habitat: large, contiguous mature forests, particularly in riparian corridors and on uplands and ridgetops dominated by oak-hickory forests. According to some estimates, there are fewer than 600,000 known Cerulean Warblers in the wild—and the majority of them breed in healthy Appalachian forests like the one found at the Allegheny Wildlands Expansion.

Located within a core area of the WNY Wildway, the Allegheny Wildlands Expansion property is the perfect habitat for this threatened bird. When we began studying topographical maps and exploring the site in the fall of 2024, we had a hunch this property might be perfect for this special bird come spring when the forest turned green. As we assessed the property

The Shaw Property is 30 acres of vital floodplain where Black Creek winds through the land, naturally filtering rainwater and helping protect our region's drinking water. It expands a key WNY Wildway Core Area.

The Patrick Conservation Easement is a mature, 53-acre forest that borders Jersey Hill State Forest. With its streams, seeps, and underground water flow, this forest plays an essential role in protecting the headwaters of Black Creek and the Genesee River.

What is a conservation easement?

A conservation easement is a legal agreement that a landowner makes with the Land Conservancy to protect their land forever. It limits activities like development or mining, so the land remains natural, scenic, or farmland. The land still belongs to the owner, but the conservation protections stay in place even if the property is sold or passed on.



in our flannels and wool caps, any Ceruleans who might call these woods home were already staying warm in the wintering grounds thousands of miles away in Central America.

I scheduled a trip to the property in late May to see if I could locate any of these birds, if they had returned. Our hunch proved correct, and I was able to document three of these bright Warblers, two males and one female. I heard the territorial songs of the males, and I observed the female carrying food—telltale signs that the Allegheny Wildlands Expansion is a likely breeding location for Ceruleans.

On my hike out, still giddy with excitement over this discovery, I spotted a Black Bear print in the trail. What a perfect example of why the WNY Wildway matters. The same large undisturbed forests that are home to the largest animal of the WNY Wildway are also key to protecting one of the smallest.



© Sue Barth

TOGETHER WE WILL PROTECT, CONNECT, AND RESTORE WESTERN NEW YORK.

To support the purchase of the Black Creek Land Protection Projects and the Allegany Wildlands Expansion, we've established the Land Acquisition Fund. If you would like to donate to this fund, scan the QR code below or visit wnylc.org. Or you can send a check to:

The Western New York Land Conservancy
P.O. Box 471
East Aurora NY 14052



Giving Invasive Species the Brush off at Kenneglenn

By Brittany Hernon, *Restoration Ecologist*

In July, we were awarded funding from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and New York Sea Grant for restoration efforts at our Kenneglenn and Mossy Point Preserves.

This project will focus on invasive plant species treatment, primarily invasive shrubs such as honeysuckle, multi-flora rose, common buckthorn, and Japanese barberry. Mugwort infestations in the riparian (or buffer) area along Hunters Creek are also slated for removal. These efforts include multiple rounds of treatment to ensure re-sprouts and new seedlings are removed for long-term success. Monitoring plots will be established to track restoration success and guide follow-up invasive species treatment and native seeding and planting efforts.

Invasive shrubs produce berries that are eaten by birds, but these berries provide lower quality nutrition compared to native varieties. When birds use invasive species for nesting habitat, they may nest earlier in the year or closer to the ground where there is increased predation risk. By removing invasive shrubs and replacing them with native trees and shrubs, we will provide beneficial food sources and habitat for birds, and other wildlife as well. The restoration efforts will also aid in erosion control and water filtration.

The Land Conservancy's office is located at Kenneglenn, which makes this project even more exciting. We know that visitors at Kenneglenn and Mossy Point will enjoy increased native plants and wildlife sightings in the coming years. As part of this project, we will host outreach events geared toward landowners to focus on invasive species identification and management. That means you too can get involved and implement similar restoration efforts at home.



Restoration Ecologist **Brittany Hernon** hit the ground running when she arrived at the Land Conservancy this summer. But Brittany, who holds a BS in Biochemistry and an MA in Applied Ecology, doesn't mind; she loves her work. After serving for the past few years as the Terrestrial Program Manager of WNY PRISM, she's leading our restoration efforts throughout the region.

Rooted in the Land: Protecting the Heart of Western New York Agriculture

By Rachel Chrostowski, *Acquisitions Director*

Western New York's rolling landscapes are dotted with picturesque family farms. They are so common in our region—and so embedded in our agricultural heritage—that one might be forgiven for overlooking them. And yet farms and farm support businesses are a powerful economic engine in our region, pumping millions of dollars into the local economy every year. According to the most recent Farm Credit East report, over 6.5 million acres of farmland serve as the foundation for an incredible \$85 billion in economic activity throughout New York State, employing 290,000 people. Those are big figures.

Unfortunately, many Western New York farmers face intense financial pressure. To stay afloat, many have no choice but to sell off parcels of land piece by piece. As a result, thousands of acres of farmland have been lost to residential development, renewable energy, or commercial development. Compounding matters, sometimes young people walk away from the farming way of life for other pursuits, even when a farm has been in their family for generations. This trend has accelerated in recent decades.

Without farms and farmers, who will grow our food?

Farming lies at the heart of our region's identity. Thanks to New York State's strong farmland protection program, farmers are encouraged to continue cultivating the soil, caring for their animals, and bringing fresh, local food to our communities. Since 1991, the Land Conservancy has protected more than 4,200 acres of farmland. But with development pressure increasing, the need to protect WNY farms is more urgent than ever.



Never before have so many farmers reached out to us, eager to secure their land for the future. We now have 16 farms in our protection pipeline—totaling an additional 5,400 acres—and we're on pace to more than double the amount of farmland we've protected in just a few years. With more farmers than ever ready to protect their land, we have both the opportunity and the responsibility to ensure that Western New York's farmland endures as a source of food, heritage, and community for the generations ahead.

Are you a
FARMER?

Would you like more information about protecting your land? Contact our Acquisitions Director, Rachel Chrostowski, at rachelc@wnylc.org or 716.687.1225 ext. 126



© Rachel Chrostowski





news

WORDEN WETLANDS

We were awarded an \$85,000 grant from the Chrysanta Foundation to protect the Worden Wetlands. This funding will help us match our New York State WQIP grant for our Black Creek Land Protection projects, bringing us closer to our goal.

FLOATING FEN PRESERVE

The new trails at our Floating Fen Preserve are now officially open! This spectacular 225-acre preserve in Chautauqua County is connected to our College Lodge Forest. It's also home to an incredible range of wildlife. Plan your visit by checking our website.



Floating Fen Preserve



North Tonawanda Audubon Preserve

WNY WILDWAY PARTNER NETWORK

The Network for Landscape Conservation has awarded the WNY Wildway Partner Network funding to create a Strategic Action Plan to catalyze the collaboration and action of partners to protect and connect climate resilient lands in Western New York. This is a highly competitive grant, and we are one of only 18 organizations nationwide to be awarded this year. The Wildway Partner Network was also one of only 3 of these organizations to be awarded Land and Climate grants from the Land Trust Alliance and the Open Space Institute.

NORTH TONAWANDA AUDUBON PRESERVE

With a special thanks to a team of volunteers from Moog Inc. and others, we installed over 400 feet of new bog bridging at our North Tonawanda Audubon Preserve in September, making this fantastic wetland preserve easier for the public to enjoy. Funding for this project was made possible by the Tonawanda Community Environmental Benefit Fund.



WNY Wildway

THANK YOU

for honoring those you
care for & supporting
their love for nature.

In Honor of

Father's Day & Tony Meli
from Lori Lovejoy

**Father's Day &
Douglas Borschel**
from Laura Borschel & Rita

Margaret & James Clukey
from Adam Clukey

Douglas Borschel
from William Borschel

Gerald Daly
from Kimberly LaMendola

Marta Fernandez
from Lorna Lippes,
Lucy Matteliano, Gloria Paul,
and Jody Valdes

Rachel Chrostowski
from Yvonne Frank

In Memory of

**Esther Becker
& Esther Winkky**
from Mary Bayer

Judith Bihl
from Marlene Sanza

Caitlin Carey
Patricia Kane

John Kociela
from John V. Daleo
and Carol Kociela

Ann Neumaier
from Donna Jackson

Emily Oprea
from Ogan Family Fund



Thank you to our Legacy Society members who have made us part of *their* legacy by including us in their planned giving and ensuring their favorite places are protected for future generations. If you are interested in learning more about how you can support the Land Conservancy in the future, please contact Andrew Gaerte, *Director of Development and Communications* at 716-687-1225 ext.120 or by email at agaerte@wnylc.org.

Legacy Society Members

James Battaglia
Kathryn and Scott Bieler
Lawrence and Carolyn Brooks
Amy Choboy
and Pamela Rossotto
Ellen Balnis Chapman
Larry and Sheila Drake
Joan Eschner
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Deborah Sabol
Judith Sabol
Kyle Semmel
Shirley Shannon
LeRoy and Carla Smith
Tom and Nancy Smith
Greg and Nancy Stevens
David Stout
Clarence Wigler

Donor Advised Funds

More and more people are choosing to give through donor advised funds (DAFs). These charitable accounts make it easy to support the causes you love—like the Land Conservancy—with just a few clicks. Recommending a grant through your DAF is quick, convenient, and helps ensure that Western New York's forests, meadows, and waterways are protected for future generations.

Chuck and Ann Fournier use their DAF to support the Land Conservancy: "Giving through our donor advised fund is so simple. We can recommend a grant online in just a minute or two, and we know it goes straight to supporting the Land Conservancy's work. It feels good to know we're helping protect the places we care about, without any extra hassle."

DAFs can also be a powerful way to create a legacy. By naming the Land Conservancy as a beneficiary of your DAF, you can join our Legacy Society and make a lasting impact on the landscapes you cherish. This simple step ensures your conservation values will live on, protecting nature for years to come.



Did you know?

If you are 70 ½ or older, you can protect forests, farms, and wildlife by making a qualified charitable distribution (QCD) from your IRA. By directing a gift to the Land Conservancy from your IRA, you are not only permanently protecting land but may also reduce your taxable income—up to \$100,000.

To explore this tax-saving giving option, please contact Andrew Gaerte, Director of Development & Communications, at agaerte@wnylc.org or 716-687-1225 ext.120.



WESTERN NEW YORK
LAND CONSERVANCY

P.O. Box 471 | East Aurora, NY 14052

Our Mission

The Land Conservancy is a regional, non-profit land trust that has protected more than 8,000 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.

The Land Conservancy recognizes that we serve on the traditional and ancestral lands of the Seneca, Tonawanda Seneca, and Tuscarora Nations and other indigenous communities. We are thankful to the Haudenosaunee who have been and continue to be the stewards of this land. We are committed to the Haudenosaunee Seventh Generation Principle which asks us to honor the lessons of the last seven generations as we work in partnership to shape and heal the world the next seven generations will inherit. This acknowledgment, while important, is just a start. We are listening, learning, and taking actions to address injustices that have impacted the Haudenosaunee and the land.

Save Land with a Monthly Donation!

Want to save our farms, forests, streams, and meadows for future generations? By becoming a monthly donor, you will help protect Western New York's most valuable resources today. To donate, use the envelope in this newsletter for visit wnylc.org and make your payment online.

Scan here!



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news and updates!



Second Annual Conservation Celebration

Thanks to our generous sponsors, 350 attendees, and a \$25,000 matching challenge, we raised over \$100,000 for permanent land protection in WNY at our 2nd Annual Conservation Celebration in September.

