



ENVIRONMENT

# The Western New York Wildway



by [queenseyes](#) May 10, 2021, 2:39 pm 2 Comments





Preserving wilderness in WNY has become increasingly important, as we are finally beginning to understand the critical nature of conservation.

If there's one organization that understands the value of protecting our wildlands, it is the Western New York Land Conservancy. In recent years, I have written on numerous instances where the Conservancy has successfully protected at-risk lands from potential development, including the [College Lodge Forest](#) and [Mossy Point](#).

While the act of saving and preserving these pristine lands is imperative, connecting them is also a top consideration. Nationally, we have seen large scale (albeit grassroots) efforts underway to create interlinked natural thruways, such as via the [Butterflyway Project](#). These types of initiatives ensure that animals, birds, insects, etc., have the ability to travel from place to place, while accessing food and shelter.

Now, a similar effort is underway in WNY that is being implemented thanks to funding from the 2021 Resilient and Connected Network Grant Program. The effort has been termed The Western New York Wildway. The goal of The Wildway is to establish an eco-corridor that will ultimately connect forests of Alleghenies to the Great Lakes, the Finger Lakes, Catskills, Tug Hill Plateau, Adirondacks, and beyond. The Wildlands Network's Eastern Wildway will join a planned network of wildlands and corridors from Eastern Canada to the Gulf of Mexico.

The initiative is inspired by E.O. Wilson's goal of protecting half of the planet.

In order to get the ball rolling, the Nature Conservancy in New York has bestowed a \$25,000 grant upon The Land Conservancy, to be used for planning the proposed Western New York Wildway. This is not going to be a quick, overnight endeavor, however. Rather, the journey will "take many decades and will require collaboration with many partners," according to The Land Conservancy. The good news is that work has begun on mapping the potential boundaries. Also, as I mentioned previously, there are conservation efforts underway that will contribute towards the end goal of establishing the Wildway.

"This is a hugely significant grant for our proposed Western New York Wildway," said Nancy Smith.

Executive Director of the Land Conservancy. “It will catalyze the Wildway initiative and allow us to spend the next year mapping the Wildway to determine where the best available land is while also building the partnerships required to make its long-term success achievable.”

“Creating connectivity for plants and wildlife is critical to our future,” said Marisa Riggi, the Land Conservancy’s Conservation Director, who is spearheading the organization’s development of the Wildway. “We have an opportunity to ensure the ecological integrity of our region by increasing core protected areas, and ensuring connectivity throughout the region. This grant allows us to plan with our partners to make the Western New York Wildway a reality we can all benefit from.”

In the next year, thanks to this funding, the Land Conservancy will:

- Meet with partners from other land trusts across the region, non-profits, regional governments, indigenous communities, and state and federal agencies
- Refine the Wildway boundary map
- Prioritize parcels for protection
- Write and design a shareable document – the plan itself

In order to expedite the process, the Nature Conservancy has developed a new mapping tool that will identify key conservation areas where plants and animals can thrive in a changing climate. The Land Conservancy will use the tool as part of its own mapping efforts. Altogether, 12 organizations across NY State received a combined \$300K in grants from the Nature Conservancy. These grants will be used to map key lands with a greater sense of urgency.

The clock is ticking... the time is now.

*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](http://www.wnylc.org).*

*Lead image of Mossy Point courtesy James Hoggard*

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Newell Nussbaumer is 'queenseyes' - Eyes of the Queen City and Founder of Buffalo Rising. Co-founder Elmwood Avenue Festival of the Arts. Co-founder Powder Keg Festival that built the world's largest ice maze (Guinness Book of World Records). Instigator behind Emerald Beach at the Erie Basin Marina. Co-created Flurrious! winter festival. Co-creator of Rusty Chain Beer. Instigator behind Saturday Artisan Market (SAM) at Canalside, Buffalo Porchfest, and Paint vs. Paint. Founder of The Peddler retro and vintage market on Elmwood. Instigator behind Liberty Hound @ Canalside. Throws The Witches Ball at Statler City, the Hertel Alley Street Art Festival, and The Flutterby Festival.

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