YOUTH LEADING THE WAY

Inspiring Action for a Brighter Future

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westchesterlandtrust.org
FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

In previous newsletters, I’ve touched upon the important role nature has played in my family for generations. We weren’t backpackers campers or alpine hikers but we’ve all possessed an unassuming, quiet appreciation for the land and the restorative power that the land can bring to one’s everyday life.

The recent and ongoing challenges we are all facing show me just how important that restorative power is. When nearly every aspect of life was turned upside down a year ago at the start of the pandemic, everyday stresses compounded with new overwhelming pressures—worrying about the health and safety of our loved ones, access to nature matters for our physical and mental health. And protected natural spaces are key to creating a sustainable, livable future for all. As an organization, we’re learning, growing, and evolving to help create that future.

These struggles are compelling us to take stock of what is most important and examine how we can build a more resilient, just, and safe community for all people. In previous newsletters, I’ve touched on the importance of EarthShare, a nationwide network of workplace giving campaigns and your employer can support WLT through conservation charities. To find out how you can be a part of America’s most respected environmental and conservation charities, please visit earthshare.org or contact Michelle Pleim Culbert, Vice President, at 914.234.6992 ext. 22.

Throughout this process, young people have emerged as champions of our work in ways we’ve never seen before. Younger generations have stepped up in inspiring, actionable ways to help WLT advance its mission over the past year. Young people helped us plant, grow, and harvest thousands of servings of fresh produce. High school and college students, who have only ever lived in a world shaped by climate change, are undertaking important and fascinating projects to safeguard threatened species on the lands that you have helped us protect, and make WLT’s 1,000 acres of preserves safer, more accessible, and more resilient. And a growing online cohort of younger supporters is spreading our message to new audiences.

Your donations, guidance, and encouragement enable these younger generations to gain valuable field experience and drive positive change in our community.

Through these pages, we invite you to learn how our community has turned to nature for its restorative power. We hope that you’ll be inspired by the incredible upshot in youth support, which is made possible by your generous contributions. And we’re confident that together, we can continue to shape a future that our younger generations deserve.

Thank you,

Len Ensigner

P.S. We are proud of what we’ve been able to accomplish together and we’re eager to continue protecting land for our community. We make a difference and your support makes our work and youth volunteer opportunities possible. Check out Page 7 for more information about our volunteer programs.

PROTECTING WHAT WE LOVE

New Arboretum Opens at Westchester Wilderness Walk / Zofnass Family Preserve

For Paul Zofnass and Renee Ring, getting to know the natural landscapes of Pound Ridge over the past few decades has led to a deep sense of caring about the trees, rocks, rivers, and wildlife of our region. That care inspired the Zofnass family to help create the 127-acre Westchester Wilderness Walk / Zofnass Family Preserve—and now, they’ve added to this incredible landscape with the opening of a new, three-acre arboretum at the preserve.

The arboretum was donated to our organization by Paul and Renee, who constructed the trails, plantings, and signage over the past 10 years. Created to inspire curiosity and encourage people to learn about the natural world, the arboretum is now open to the public. Visitors are welcome to explore its 1/3-mile of meandering paths and carefully laid out areas that allow for easy views of grasses, wildflowers, trees, and shrubs.

“Renee and I are so happy to share this arboretum, our labor of love with the community,” Paul said at a small, outdoor gathering to celebrate the arboretum’s opening. “We believe that people naturally care about what they know, and protect what they care about. We hope this land provides all of our community an opportunity to get to know new species of plants and trees and inspires more people to not only appreciate the land, but commit to protecting it in the future.”

Paul and Renee, who are Pound Ridge residents (and former and current members of WLT’s Board of Directors, respectively), first conceived the idea of creating a nature preserve decades ago and worked for more than 20 years donating land, encouraging their neighbors to do the same and creating the impressive trail system that exists today.

Both the preserve and the new arboretum represent the profound impact one person—or in this case, one family—can have on protecting land and encouraging our communities to connect with nature. It takes a village, and we hope you are inspired to help.

To read more about the land protected on Gloucester Place at Glenwood Lake Park, visit our website.

Conserving Land that Supports Our Community

As we saw in 2020, access to safe, outdoor spaces is critically important for the health of our communities, particularly in heavily developed urban areas. Westchester Land Trust completed six land deals last year for a total of 222 acres permanently protected, including two parcels on Glenwood Lake in New Rochelle.

The Glenwood Lake land was acquired by WLT thanks to a partnership between WLT, Friends of Glenwood Lake Park (FGLP), and the City of New Rochelle, and will be permanently protected as a public nature preserve. The properties are the last remaining undeveloped parcels around the lake.

“This latest acquisition was 20 years in the making. Generations yet unborn will benefit from the expansion, preservation, and restoration of Glenwood Lake Park,” said Michael Yellin, past President of the Glenwood Lakes Association, and WLT Advisory Board member. “This was a complex project, and a tangible example of how multiple partners can come together to accomplish great things for the community.”

Our ultimate goal is to transfer ownership of the land to the City of New Rochelle, with WLT holding a conservation easement on the property to ensure that the land remains a public nature preserve in perpetuity. The newly acquired property will be named for the Prieurau family, who were the prior landowners and longtime New Rochelians, residing until recently at the property next door.

Project partners are currently seeking grant funds to enable the next phase of the project, which will be the cleanup of the property, removal of invasive plants, planting of native trees, and the creation of a trail linkage to the rest of Glenwood Lake Park. Interested community members can contact Brendan Murphy at brendan@westchesterlandtrust.org for more information on how to get involved.

LAND UPDATES

Creating Spaces for Joy and Learning at the 127-Acre Westchester Wilderness Walk

For decades, the 127-acre Westchester Wilderness Walk / Zofnass Family Preserve provided a unique opportunity to learn about the world around us. The Zofnass family’s generous gift of an additional three acres of land will allow for the addition of several places that children can explore and enjoy, including a natural playground. Thanks to the generosity of the Zofnass family, the newly expanded arboretum will provide a space for easy viewing of grasses, wildflowers, trees, and shrubs.

For more information about the Westchester Wilderness Walk / Zofnass Family Preserve, visit westchesterlandtrust.org/new-arboretum.

P.S. This is the last page of this newsletter. If you would like more information about our conservation and volunteer programs, please visit our website: westchesterlandtrust.org.

Visit our website for more information about the arboretum and check out our YouTube channel for a video of the opening ceremony. See Page 7 for details about the May 1 Arboretum Tour.

Cover: Paul Zofnass and Renee Ring (center) stand in front of the newly expanded three-acre arboretum at Westchester Wilderness Walk / Zofnass Family Preserve.

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Volunteers Spencer and Halle pulled thousands of invasive vines threatening a wildflower meadow, gave fresh produce for our neighbors in need, cleared trails after tropical storms, built an informational kiosk, improved the sustainability of our trails, worked on restoring a floodplain forest, and surveyed locally rare plants.

Despite heat, sun, multitudes rose thorns, and the global pandemic, WLT’s youth volunteers were incredibly enthusiastic, dedicated, and thoughtful. These younger generations give us hope, and challenge us to act more boldly and be unwavering in our fight for a brighter, more resilient future for all.

THE FACES OF Our Future

A Spiritual Connection to the Land
Chad Petschek has had a deep appreciation for the natural world since long before he volunteered at our Frederick P. Rose Preserve (Lewisboro) last summer, working on trail improvements. His love of the outdoors was formed as a child playing in the woods with his brother where they searched for bugs and caught crayfish in streams.

“It is important to spend time outside in order to feel more connected with nature and to gain a deeper appreciation for life,” he said when reflecting on his volunteer work. “When I am outside, I feel more spiritual and present!” Chad and his brother have spent time surveying trails at WLT’s Danner Preserve (Yorktown and Putnam Valley) and exploring the treasures that nature provides.

“It is important to preserve local ecosystems for logistical and ethical reasons alike,” Chad said. “While we try to separate our species from the natural world, we are still reliant on local ecosystems for simple things like air purification, water collection, and resource recycling. Ethically, it is important to preserve and aid the natural communities from which humans have evolved!”

Finding Peace Outside
For McLain Booge, nature offers a much-needed refuge from the challenges of daily life.

“When I’m outdoors, I feel calm,” McLain explained. “The smell of trees and dirt override my senses and I don’t feel stressed about anything else in my life.”

As a kid, McLain spent afternoons splashing through creeks catching frogs. Now, she brings that same passion to WLT, when volunteering at our Sugar Hill Farm in 2020. “I enjoy volunteering because it gives me the chance to give back,” she described.

McLain’s passion for environmental causes is rooted in strengthening our communities. “It’s important to preserve and care for natural lands because of global warming, flavoring, pollution, and other things that hurt the land,” she said. “By having preserved land that the whole community can take care of together, it brings the community together.”

Giving Back to Nature
After spending countless afternoons as a child exploring Central Park—strolling through the Ramble and relaxing on the Great Lawn—Charlie Rudge turned to nature, running outdoors to cope with the challenges of the global pandemic.

“Running felt like my only escape, but by summer, I realized my relationship with the outdoors was fairly uneven,” Charlie said. “I was using it as solace from the soul-crushing virus, but not giving back to the ecosystems I enjoyed. That is why I volunteered—to try and help ensure other people could enjoy the escape that is nature as much as I had.”

Charlie’s volunteer work included helping our Preserve Manager John Zeiger pull what seemed like truckloads of the highly invasive mile-a-minute vine from our preserves. “For all of history, writers and dreamers and thinkers have found their paradise outside, and billions find the tranquility they can’t find anywhere else in their regimented lives by wandering in the woods,” Charlie said. “We don’t all have to go full Henry David Thoreau, but we should all have the luxury of an outdoor escape. It is a necessity to preserve our humanity.”

Hands-On Learning Outdoors
Samantha Rubin has loved nature and been concerned about sustainability since she was a kid playing hide-and-seek and building forts outside. For her, nature has always been a source of tranquility and happiness.

“I was interested in volunteering with WLT because I think the work WLT does is really important,” Samantha explained. “I really appreciated that John, WLT’s Preserve Manager, helped me find volunteer work that catered to my interests and was useful to WLT.”

In addition to caring about natural lands for their ecosystem services, like protecting clean air and water, Samantha also appreciates the benefits open space has for people.

“It’s really important that people have access to natural areas because this increases people’s well-being and appreciation of the environment,” she said.

Did You Know?
Volunteers helped us grow 1,687 POUNDS of fresh veggies at WLT’s Sugar Hill Farm in 2020.

We’ve donated 70,000 SERVINGS of PRODUCE to local food banks since 2012.

WLT has protected trails in 27 COMMUNITIES and is committed to conserving more land, particularly urban and suburban.

THE WESTCHESTER LAND TRUST INTERNSHIP PROGRAM
Offers opportunities for students and young adults to gain valuable land conservation skills while working with our staff to build a more sustainable future. Visit the volunteer page of our website to learn about our 2021 opportunities.
**Growing up at LEON LEVY**

Ever since they were small children, Robyn and Ty Graygor have grown up surrounded by the trees, birds, and trails of Leon Levy Preserve in South Salem. Their siblings, now in high school, credit the thriving tract of land with inspiring their love of nature and even shaping their plans for the future.

“The is a nice place to go so we can’t really go anywhere else,” Ty explained. “This is the one place you can go where you know you won’t catch [Covid] and it’s a nice place to get fresh air.”

Robyn credits her parents with fostering her love of nature and connection to the Leon Levy Preserve. She has fond memories of wandering along the snowy trails in snowshoes and climbing rocks as a kid. Thinking back on her childhood, she stressed the importance of teaching kids to observe the natural world and approach the outdoors with a sense of curiosity.

Ty’s love of nature inspired him to become a Boy Scout; he’s currently a Life Scout deciding on his Eagle Scout project. One idea he is pursuing is creating a public compost bin at a local park that gives back compost to gardeners. He knows that anyone, even those new to hiking, can get outside and discover connections to the natural world—be it recommending going out with friends and making sure to bring good shoes, a phone, map, water, and a mask.

Seeing her peers struggle with online school, college decisions, and the pandemic, Robyn and her friend Molly have spent countless hours exploring Leon Levy and finding peace in the outdoors. For Robyn, her connection with the Leon Levy Preserve has not only inspired her to be more involved in nature—she’s become a stewardship intern for the Westchester Land Trust—but has also helped her cope with the stress of the pandemic.

**“Just having a connection like that with someone out in nature where you can just be by yourself and be alone with the birds and hearing a creek trickle past, it’s an experience that you don’t get anywhere else,” Robyn noted. “It’s silence that you don’t get to experience at a house—you don’t have artificial light, you don’t have heaters or air conditioning going.”**

For Robyn, her connection with the Leon Levy Preserve has not only inspired her artwork and school projects, but has also served as the topic of her college admissions essays. She plans to major in journalism and environmental science to help people understand the responsibility we all have to protect and steward the natural world against development threats and the climate crisis.

**The Leon Levy Preserve is tranquil, scenic, and brimming with fascinating features, including the ruins of the Black Mansion. In 2005, a public-private partnership led by WLT negotiated the $83.2 million acquisition of the preserve. The land is named in memory of Leon Levy, founder of the Jerome Levy Foundation, which was the main source of funding for this project. The Town of Lewisboro owns and manages the preserve with the help of dozens of volunteers, and WLT holds a conservation easement on the land, ensuring that it will remain undeveloped forever. In 2018, WLT protected the 33-acre Mill River Preserve adjacent to the Leon Levy Preserve and is working to create a public trail linkage between the two.**

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**ANNUAL BENEFIT SATURDAY, JUNE 5, 2021 On Our Land**

We invite you to join us On Our Land for WLT’s Annual Benefit as we raise crucial funds to protect and celebrate the land you love!

This year’s summer wine will feature outdoor tours and tastings at exclusive properties protected by WLT.

**2021 HONOREES:**

Jamie and Michael Wolff

**PRESEvation ANGEL AWARD**

For their leadership support of land protection projects throughout Westchester

Stephen Backwith

**LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

For his inspiring leadership and dedication to WLT

Daniel Ricci

**youth conservation AWARD**

For his service to WLT as a Summer Intern

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**2021 HARVEST CELEBRATION Live Music in the Meadow at Maple Grove Farm in Bedford! SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 18**

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**POLLINATOR POP-UP EVENTS**

WLT’s events raise critical funds to protect the land we love and safeguard our community.

Please note these events will comply with New York State’s AOC/COVID guidelines on gatherings to ensure we are taking every precaution possible.

To be invited to the invitation list for these events, please email Michelle Culbert at 914-234-6992, ext. 22, michelle@westchesterlandtrust.org.

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**VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**

**STewardship Volunteer Days at various WLT locations**

Join WLT’s Stewardship team on the land to help with invasive plant removal, trail care, and much more! To learn about stewardship volunteer opportunities, contact John Zeiger at johzeiger@westchesterlandtrust.org.

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**Ellenwood Lake Park, New Rochelle, NY**

Pollinator Pop-Up: Celebrate Earth Day at Glenwood Lake Park Clean-Up

Celebrate Earth Day by taking part in the annual clean-up of the beautiful Glenwood Lake Park. Activities will include invasive plant control, guided tours around the lake, and trash pick-up. The Pollinator Pop-up will be on display all day. This event is in partnership with the Glenwood Lake Association and the City of New Rochelle.

**Glenwood Lake Park, New Rochelle, NY**

Earth Day Clean-Up

**Sunday, May 2, 2021**

9:30 AM – 12 PM and 1 – 3:30 PM

Help us protect this beautiful preserve by joining us to pull and cut invasive plants. You will learn how to identify common invasive species as well as tips for how you can get started on your own backyard project. Bring gloves, wear good boots, avoid off trail walking on rugged terrain for up to 2 miles.

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**Glenwood Lake Park, New Rochelle, NY**

Invasive Species Pull

**Sunday, May 2, 2021**

9:30 AM – 12 PM and 1 – 3:30 PM

At this event you will have the opportunity to identify different frog calls, discover what makes amphibians unique, and find the perfect vernal pool habitat on a hike after dark. Bring a flashlight and wear your flashiest and brightest springtime duds!

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**Glenwood Lake Park, New Rochelle, NY**

Pollinator Pop-Up: Farm Season Kick-Off

**Saturday, April 24, 2021 from 9 AM – 2 PM**

Help arrive at the Pollinator Pop-Up and learn more about the importance of pollinators for a healthy ecosystem. You will have the opportunity to purchase native wildflower seeds and other pollinator-friendly plants.

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**Glenwood Lake Park, New Rochelle, NY**

Pollinator Pop-Up: Celebrate Earth Day at Glenwood Lake Park Clean-Up

**Saturday, April 24, 2021 from 9 AM – 5 PM**

Thanks to Con Edison for partially funding this Westchester Land Trust program and for supporting local efforts to make our communities more pollinator friendly. For more information on pollinators, visit bit.ly/WLTBees.
WLT’s mission has never been more important! Make your annual gift to WLT today to preserve land forever, keep trails safe and open to the public, and provide organic produce for your neighbors in need today. No gift is too small!

**Protect our environment for the Faces of our Future**

Make a recurring monthly donation today! A small gift to you is a big deal for us—$10 a month will make a big difference funding internships and volunteer opportunities for the next generation of land stewards.

**Thinking long term?**

WLT’s commitment to protect and care for the land is forever. By making a planned gift, you can help create a legacy of conservation for your family and for future generations to enjoy.

For information about WLT’s planned giving program please contact Kara Whelan, Vice President at 914-234-6992 ext. 12 or by checking the legacy gift box below and we will reach out to you.

Rhys Healy, a local high school student, volunteered at our Pine Croft Meadow Preserve to improve Baltimore Checkerspot (a regionally rare butterfly) habitat by protecting white turtlehead, their host plant, from deer browse with fencing. Rhys is also collecting data on the health of the turtlehead inside and outside the fences to better understand the effect deer have on this plant.