

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2024



Westchester Land Trust



BRANCHING OUTWARD:
Nurturing Communities Through Nature

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Dear Friends,

Some of my most cherished WLT memories involve introducing **Paul Zofnass** to crowds of hikers at Westchester Wilderness Walk / Zofnass Family Preserve. Paul, along with his wife, **Renee Ring**, and their friends and neighbors, spent decades protecting and stewarding the preserve, which is now one of the most beloved hiking destinations in Westchester. I often say Paul is like a living Lorax—he speaks for the trees.

It has never been easy to keep up with Paul, who scrambles trails with the ease of a mountain goat. For those that have managed to hold his pace, you've probably heard him talk about roots and shoots. "The growth in the tree canopy," he'd shout over his shoulder, "is sustained by the roots that stretch below!" *Read about Paul and the updates we're making to care for the trails he blazed on page 3.*

Whether you're scaling rocky trails or simply strolling through the woods, spending time near trees causes your **energy level** to go up and your **blood pressure and stress to go down**. Want to bask in the benefits of trees? We invite you to join our biggest stewardship project ever—a yearlong forest health initiative launched in January. *Learn how to get involved on pages 4 and 5.* As part of our commitment to spreading the joy of trees, WLT is serving as an engagement partner for the City of Mount Vernon's USDA Urban and Community Forestry Grant. This significant award will fund tree education workshops, tree plantings, and tree awareness outreach.

As WLT branches out in new ways, we're pleased to welcome several stellar additions to our leadership team. **Tony Freund, Chantel McGee, and Bruce Ward** have joined our Board of Directors while **Ava Cohn, David Michael, Sesh Murthy, and Mike Rubbo** have joined our Advisory Board. *Read our press announcement highlighting their impressive talents by scanning the QR code on page 6.*

As a celebration of our roots and shoots, we're planning a party like no other for our annual benefit on June 8 at Old Salem Farm and we want YOU there! We'll honor the **Ryder Family** for preserving their historic farm—a project we proudly partnered on in 2023. We'll tip our hats to farming legend, **Annie Farrell**, for her contributions to local agriculture. And, we'll raise a glass to **Mike Surdej** for his many years of volunteerism. Get ready for a night of fun, festivity, and heartfelt recognition!

Thank you for your support and for branching out with us! Remember, "UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." —The Lorax

With deep gratitude and hope,

Kara Hartigan Whelan, *President, Westchester Land Trust*



Kara Whelan
and
Paul Zofnass
in 2016



ABOUT THE COVER

Volunteers plant trees at Glenwood Lake Park in New Rochelle. Photo by Brien Adams.

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Westchester Land Trust (WLT) is a member of **EarthShare**, a nationwide network of America's most respected environmental and conservation charities. To find out how you and your employer can support WLT through an EarthShare workplace giving campaign visit earthshareny.org or contact Susan Leighton at susan@westchesterlandtrust.org or 914-234-6992 ext. 23

Combined Federal Campaign
(CFC) Number: 77308



Wayfinding at Westchester Land Trust's Flagship Preserve

If you've visited our Westchester Wilderness Walk / Zofnass Family Preserve recently, you may have noticed things look a little different, thanks to the completion of the first phase of a trail improvement project. Our stewardship team re-blazed the trails, added new wayfinding signs, and installed updated maps throughout this stunning 127-acre sanctuary in Pound Ridge. The sprawling 7.5-mile trail system was created over decades by the preserve's founding family, **Paul Zofnass** and **Renee Ring**, who generously donated their land and inspiring encouraged their neighbors to donate land to the cause.

Paul was quoted in *The New York Times* in a 2004 article about the preserve: "To be perfect, Mr. Zofnass says, a hiking trail must fill two basic requirements: hikers never catch a glimpse of a house, road or car; and you can get close to whatever natural beauty there is." It's that feeling of remoteness—despite being a short distance from one of the most heavily developed urban centers in the world—that makes clear signage so important.

 **Read the full article from *The New York Times* here: <https://bit.ly/WLTNYT2004>**

During the formation of the preserve's trail system, Paul chose the most interesting routes that led visitors to unexpected attractions and ecological wonders. This approach, with its meandering paths and appreciation for the quiet beauty of the forest, reflects Paul's love and passion for this natural refuge from the fast pace of life beyond the preserve's boundaries.

ACTUAL ENTRIES FROM OUR TRAIL LOG!

"Thank you, Paul! As always, we are so thankful for your generosity and wisdom in creating this beautiful preserve." — Chris and Catherine

"We come almost daily; my three-year-old LOVES these trails. Thank you!" — Carissa

"We love this place!"
— Doug and Libby

"Never expected to learn so much about trees. Thank you for the amazing work you have done to create such an incredible experience." — Kate and Mike

"Our little piece of heaven, thank you!"
— The Dixon Family

We want to hear from you!

Share your experiences out on the land with Westchester Land Trust by tagging us in your social posts or sending us an email at info@westchesterlandtrust.org.

Looking Ahead

The second phase of this project will take place this year and includes upgrades to the parking lot, as well as additional signage installations. Preserve enhancement projects like this are part of the perpetual commitment Westchester Land Trust makes to land in our care—but we need your help.

GIVE A GIFT TODAY BY VISITING WESTCHESTER LANDTRUST.ORG





CLEARING THE PATH

Rescuing Forests From Invasive Vines and Planting Hope

Throughout Westchester County, amidst our homes, schools, offices, and retail spaces, lies a precious treasure that has long provided solace, inspiration, and vital ecological services to our community: our forests. These havens of green not only offer habitat to wildlife but also serve as sanctuaries for our own well-being—sustaining the clean air and water we rely on.

Sadly, our forests are facing unprecedented challenges, from invasive species and development pressure to climate change-induced disturbances. Yet, in the face of this stark adversity, there is hope, and it comes in the form of collective action and sound stewardship.

Our hope was recently bolstered by a transformative \$100,000 anonymous donation given to Westchester Land Trust, dedicated to the preservation and restoration of local forests.

This generous contribution marks a turning point in our efforts to safeguard the health and vitality of these natural places for generations to come and will support a robust, year-long forest restoration initiative.

How did we get here? Why are our forests in such jeopardy? The answer is a complex web of factors, including pests, the spread of invasive species, overgrazing by deer, and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events that take down healthy trees. As we've witnessed the devastating effects of pests and diseases on our native tree species, it's clear that urgent action is needed to reverse this alarming trend and protect the forests for our future.

The good news is that solutions exist, and they are within our reach. Through strategic stewardship practices like vine cutting, tree plantings, and deer exclosures, we can help mitigate the threats facing our forests and improve their resilience in the face of ongoing challenges. By engaging volunteers, collaborating with local organizations, and leveraging community support, we can make a tangible difference in the health and vitality of our natural landscapes.

Cutting the Vines that Bind

Vine cutting, or removing invasive wrapping plants from around trees, is a simple yet effective way to alleviate the burden on trees caused by invasive vines. Once the vines are removed, trees can thrive and flourish once again. WLT is mobilizing volunteers to participate in more than 400 hours of vine-cutting activities across our preserves to help restore balance to our forest ecosystems and create healthier habitats for wildlife. Check our website for upcoming volunteer opportunities.

Planting Trees Today for Tomorrow's Forests

When done in conjunction with vine removal, tree plantings offer a beacon of hope for the future, replenishing our forests with new growth and ecological resiliency. Through targeted planting initiatives, we're working to enhance biodiversity, improve soil health, and mitigate the impacts of climate change, one sapling at a time.



THE NEED FOR URBAN TREES

By 2050, it's estimated that 68% of the world's population will live in urban towns and cities, so planting and maintaining trees for the future is crucial. Trees help filter urban air pollutants, cool the air by between 2° and 8°C, and provide habitat, food, and protection for wildlife.

No Deer Zone

Deer exclosures represent another crucial tool in our conservation arsenal, protecting vulnerable tree species from overgrazing and enabling natural regeneration to occur. By establishing a 10-acre deer fence at our Frederick P. Rose Preserve (Lewisboro), we can create safe havens for young trees to thrive and mature, ensuring the long-term sustainability of our forest ecosystems.

We can't do this work alone. We need the support of our community to achieve our shared vision of a healthier, more resilient future for Westchester's forests. Whether you're a seasoned volunteer, a concerned landowner, or a passionate advocate for conservation, there are countless ways to get involved and make a difference.



Beech leaf damaged by disease

Emerald Ash Borer

GET INVOLVED

- 1 **Volunteer your time and expertise** to assist with vine cutting, tree plantings, and other restoration efforts. Contact us at jaelen@westchesterlandtrust.org to learn more about upcoming volunteer opportunities.
- 2 **Consider protecting the land you love through conservation easements**, ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy the beauty and benefits of our natural landscapes. Reach out to gentian@westchesterlandtrust.org to explore this option further.
- 3 **Stay informed and engaged** by visiting our website at westchesterlandtrust.org, where you can follow our progress, learn about upcoming events, and support our work through donations.

Together, we can make a lasting impact on the health and vitality of Westchester's forests, preserving these invaluable ecosystems for the benefit of all.

Your support plays a key role in our commitment to stewardship and conservation, ensuring that the forests we cherish today will thrive for generations to come.

TREES IN TROUBLE

Over the last decade, ash trees have become functionally extinct across much of our region due to an invasive pest, the emerald ash borer.

Beech trees may be next, with entire stands dying off because of beech leaf disease, a pathogen that damages the trees' bark and leaves. And they're not the first trees to succumb to insects and pathogens—throughout the last century our chestnut, elm, and hemlocks have mostly been erased from the landscape due to pests and disease.

Photo credits: Beech leaf by Mike Surdej. Emerald ash borer adult with elytra and wings spread, courtesy of USDA-APHIS, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.



Vine Volunteer Superhero

Doug Mancinelli—pictured left, in his superhero cape!—has always appreciated the peace and serenity he feels while walking in the woods, surrounded by the sounds of birds and gentle breezes. And a few years ago, after noticing the undeveloped land

throughout Westchester County shrinking, he decided to start getting his hands dirty volunteering with WLT to ensure the forests he loves are there for his children and grandchildren in the future.

“I like the work Westchester Land Trust does and I believe in it,” he said. “I think it’s necessary to protect the forests because they are dwindling fast and, in many cases, no one is taking care of them.”

Guided by WLT’s stewardship team and joined by a cadre of dedicated volunteers, Doug has stepped up to care for our forests, participating in nine forest health events (and counting). One of the most satisfying tasks out in the woods, he said, is cutting invasive vines to prevent them from killing trees. In the first few months of 2024 alone, Doug removed over 400 vines throughout WLT preserves, saving more than 90 trees. He plans to continue volunteering at upcoming vine cutting events and tree plantings as part of our year-long forest health initiative detailed on pages 4–5.

What’s Doug’s advice for anyone interested in saving our forests?

“Just take the first step,” he said. “You’re doing something that’s healthy for you and good for the environment. It’s important to help nature and give back to the community, and we need to make sure there are places for kids to play in the future.”

Become a Friend to the Forest

Doug has hosted a vine cutting volunteer event in partnership with our stewardship team and we want you to join us for future sessions! Our upcoming fun and family friendly tree planting events are perfect for beginners who want to learn more about WLT’s forest health initiative and the ways we can all make a difference for our forests.

Visit westchesterlandtrust.org to learn about volunteer opportunities this spring.



YES! WE’RE PROTECTING MORE LAND!

Westchester Land Trust is excited to announce we’ve received a \$1.3M Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) grant from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to protect 13 acres of land in partnership with the Town of Bedford.

Stay tuned to learn more about this significant conservation success!

MEET OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS



Ava Cohn

Bedford Corners,
Advisory Board



Anthony Barzilay Freund

Bedford,
Board of Directors



Chantel McGee

New York City,
Board of Directors



David Michael

Sleepy Hollow,
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Sesh Murthy

Yorktown Heights,
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Michael Rubbo

Verbank,
Advisory Board



Bruce Ward

Katonah,
Board of Directors

LEARN MORE

Visit the news section of our website to learn more about our new Board Directors and Advisory Board members.

westchesterlandtrust.org/news/westchester-land-trust-announces-new-additions-to-leadership





GROWING OUR FUTURE

Saturday, June 8, 2024

OLD SALEM FARM | NORTH SALEM, NY

You're invited to be part of the celebration of our shared commitment to protecting the land you love.

Gather with us at Old Salem Farm in North Salem, NY as we enjoy a night of unforgettable festivities, all in recognition of our shared commitment to protecting the land you love.

This spectacular evening will feature fabulous food, fun signature cocktails, a thrilling silent auction, and our ever-popular wine pull. There will be live music so be sure to bring your dancing shoes!

The event will take place at the stunning Old Salem Farm, one of Westchester County's premier equestrian facilities, which features 120 gorgeous acres of land.



TICKETS ON SALE NOW!

Tickets start at \$500, and new this year, we're offering *Junior Conservationist* tickets for \$200.

Visit bit.ly/WLT2024benefit to join the fun!



MEET OUR 2024 HONOREES

PRESERVATION AWARD

The Ryder Family

Owners and operators of Ryder Farm, the oldest working farm in Putnam County, permanently protected by WLT through a conservation easement in 2023

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Annie Farrell

Local farming icon who has revolutionized agriculture in the region for decades

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER AWARD

Mike Surdej

Longtime stewardship volunteer and community leader

SAVE THE DATE

**THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 19, 2024
AT MAPLE GROVE FARM IN BEDFORD**

Get ready to jam at our fun and oh-so-hip fall event, featuring a live reggae band, Rho & The Nomads. Dig into heavy hors d'oeuvres, craft cocktails, and a curated silent auction all in support of WLT's land protection mission.

Stay tuned—tickets go on sale in August!

To be added to the invitation list for these events, please contact Michelle Dellorusso at 914-234-6992, ext. 17 or michelle@westchesterlandtrust.org.

 **REGGAE** 
IN THE BARN



Westchester Land Trust

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914.234.6992

westchesterlandtrust.org

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Westchester Land Trust

LEND A HAND ON THE LAND

Spend a few hours caring for the land you love. We have volunteer opportunities on our preserves, at Sugar Hill Farm, and in the office.

BECOME A SUSTAINING STEWARD

Join our Sustaining Stewards Club by making a recurring monthly donation. Every little bit helps and no gift is too small.

CONNECT WITH US

Stay up to date on the latest WLT news, events, and volunteer opportunities. Find us on Instagram and Facebook @westchesterlandtrust and Twitter @WLT_NY.

SHARE THE LOVE

Nature brings us joy, helps us find peace, and opens up a world of exploration. Get outside and bring a friend to explore a WLT preserve near you. Visit our website to find a place to hike and connect with nature.

Donate to Make a Difference Today

Join our Sustaining Stewards Club Recurring: ___Monthly ___Bi-Monthly

I would love to contribute \$25 \$50 \$100 \$150 \$200 Other \$ _____

No donation amount is too small and every dollar counts toward preserving and stewarding the land that will sustain you and your family forever.

- My gift is in honor/memory of _____
- I would like my gift to remain anonymous.
- I would like to learn more about leaving a legacy gift in my will to WLT.
- I will submit matching gift from my employer: _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number _____ Email Address* _____



*The email provided above will be added to our enews list to keep you up to date on Westchester Land Trust's successes, news, and events. You can unsubscribe at any time. We never share your private information.

Checks made out to Westchester Land Trust can be mailed to 403 Harris Road, Bedford Hills, NY 10507. Donate online by visiting westchesterlandtrust.org and clicking the 'Donate' button.

WLT is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, your contribution is tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.