

GREAT NEWS!

WLT earns
reaccreditation!



FALL NEWSLETTER



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Westchester Land Trust

Learning and Healing Through Nature

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Reimagined

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Special thanks to Ellen Best, Newsletter Advisor

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 Michelle Pleim Culbert at Michelle@westchesterlandtrust.org or 914.234.6992 ext. 22.

Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) Number: 77308.



COVER

This rehabilitated barred owl was released at our Pine Croft Meadow Preserve as part of our Annual Benefit: Reimagined. The owl was treated and released by Dara Reid from Wildlife in Crisis. Check out our YouTube channel for the full release video.

Photo credit:
Rob Cummings

FROM THE PRESIDENT



It's when we allow ourselves to pause, learn, and shift to a better way of existing that we become truly resilient.

Being in the land conservation business, land trusts often speak about the concept of resilience. Usually, it's in the context of climate resilience, but this year it has taken on a much broader meaning.

Resilience does not mean rigidity in the face of adversity, but rather something quite different. It's being flexible and open to learning new ways of doing things. It's having the courage to grow, adapt, bounce back, survive, and even come out the other side better than before. Being the strongest, the most impenetrable, the most unyielding will not typically lead to survival in a changing world. It's when we allow ourselves to pause, learn, and shift to a better way of existing that we become truly resilient.

The COVID-19 pandemic and our society's racial justice reckoning have caused Westchester Land Trust to reassess many foundational aspects of our organization—how we communicate with our supporters and landowners, the programming we offer, how we can work safely with volunteers, the ways we steward our lands, and our role in bringing about justice and healing for our community. We have tested and embraced new technologies (for example, using aerial technology to assist with our conservation easement monitoring), used online videos

more than ever before to maintain continuity and increase accessibility to our programming, and each staff member has pitched in to manage with our physical offices closed and staff count down by 40% for most of the year, due to a hiring freeze. All of this is possible thanks to your support.

Our stewardship team has never been busier or stronger. They are not only handling their normal responsibilities of managing 1,000 acres of WLT preserves, but also meeting the needs of unprecedented visitation levels at our preserves, brought about by the COVID shutdowns of most other recreational facilities. And in early August, our preserves were hit hard by Tropical Storm Isaias, with winds that rivaled those seen during Superstorm Sandy and caused extensive damage to our trails. We have received gratifying and heartfelt notes from visitors—many of whom have never visited a preserve before—who were so thankful for the ability to experience nature at particularly stressful times like these. They have recounted how nature has restored them and brought them the peace and centeredness that they need to cope.

Building resilience requires flexibility. It's being open to varied perspectives and willing to embrace better action. Building resilience is not a "one and done" type of thing. It's a journey of learning that never ends. WLT is committed to this journey, and we invite you to continue to join us—we can't do it without you.

Thank you,



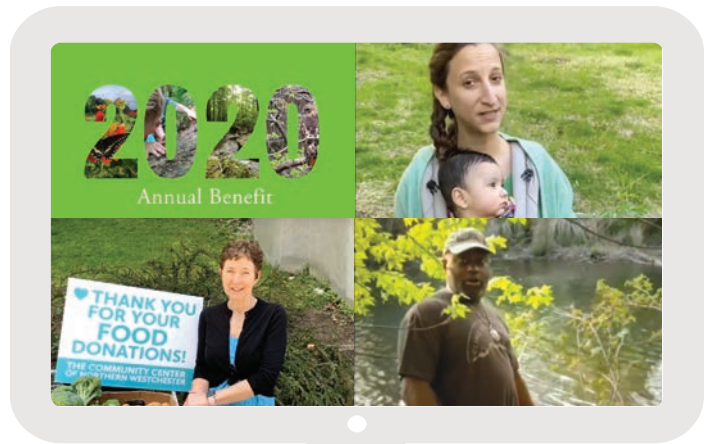
Lori Ensinger

P.S. We are proud to work together with you to drive change. Our impact is your impact, and we hope that you'll feel confident reading through these pages that YOU are making a difference.

Our Annual Benefit: Reimagined

WLT's first virtual annual benefit raises more than \$200,000 for land preservation! Thank you!

When it became clear that we wouldn't be able to gather at WLT's 2020 Annual Benefit we knew we'd need to reimagine this meaningful occasion. Members of WLT's Board of Directors and the 2020 Benefit Committee came together to imagine a two-week online auction and campaign aimed to show you, our community, why Westchester Land Trust's work is even more important, impactful, and relevant in light of the global pandemic. Although we couldn't gather in person, we still wanted to celebrate the land you love and let you know it's here for (and because of) you!



Funds raised during the June event will be used to preserve land and in turn, protect natural resources, wildlife habitat, farmland, nature trails, historic landscapes, and so much more!

Friends of WLT rallied to raise funds that help us grow nutritious vegetables to feed our neighbors, maintain trails, and keep land preservation projects in the pipeline. Thanks to an anonymous donor's matching gift, we surpassed our fund-a-need goal and raised the funds we need to continue to do this critical work—to meet the increased demands for fresh food when our community needs us most.

Many local businesses including Farmer & the Fish, Hickory & Tweed, Wild Birds Unlimited, and Kelloggs & Lawrence donated items, gift certificates, and their services to the online auction. These business owners generously supported WLT when they were struggling to make ends meet themselves. Please thank and support these businesses and all in our community. For a full list of benefit business supporters, visit our website.

The people shown in these images are featured in our Annual Benefit videos. You can visit our YouTube channel to view all seven of the event's videos which feature many familiar faces and landscapes that you love! youtube.com/westchesterlandtrust.



We asked "Why is nature important to you?" and received heartwarming responses such as "Because it makes my children happy," and "It's where I feel most myself."

WLT supporter Shaiza Zahid, and children, featured in the "What Does Nature Mean to You?" video

In Spite of it All, We're Still Protecting Land

Despite the many challenges we have all faced this year, we are pleased to report that land preservation continues unabated. So far this year, we have completed three land and easement acquisitions (in Kent, Patterson, and Pound Ridge), totaling 150 acres of environmentally sensitive land. We are currently working on another dozen land projects around the region that will protect hundreds more acres of land. These projects range in size from under one acre in a dense suburban community, to several hundred acres of unique wetlands in the northern reaches of our service territory. What do these properties have in common? They are all vital puzzle pieces in existing corridors of open space, whose preservation will yield vital benefits to the habitat, water quality, and climate resilience of the region. To learn more about each 2020 land protection project and the partners who helped make them possible, please visit the press section of our website.



92 acres of land in Patterson, NY were among the lands protected by WLT this year.



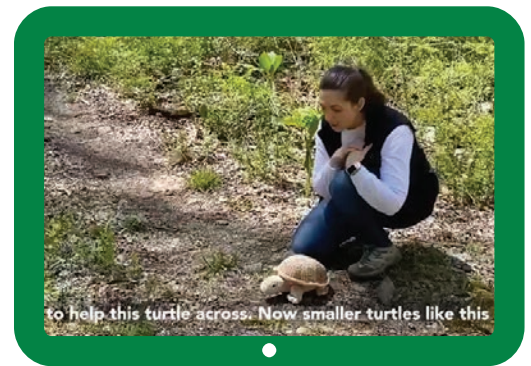
A (Virtual) Return to the Land

Faced with a global pandemic and the unexpected shutdown of nearly every aspect of life, everyone at Westchester Land Trust understood that our programming plans for 2020 would have to drastically change. As schools, offices, gyms, restaurants, and other public places closed down, we saw people turn to the land as we never had before. Seeing the profound impact natural spaces have during these challenging times, we realized that it was our duty to help people connect with nature in new ways while protecting the safety of our community.

Prior to the pandemic, our programming relied on in-person interactions—helping families learn how to tap a maple tree, guiding groups through the forest to identify trees and plants, or showing people the magic of early-spring amphibian migrations. Reimagining those types of events for a non-contact, digital format has taken a bit of creativity but also opens up the opportunity to reach a wider group of people and inspire action throughout our community.

Story Walking With Friends

Local organizations and businesses have embraced our shift to online programming, offering to partner with us and promote digital nature experiences. **Lewisboro Library** helped us host two Story Walks, one at WLT’s Frederick P. Rose Preserve where we read the book, “*The Foolish Tortoise*,” during turtle egg-laying season in May, and another at our Pine Croft Meadow Preserve featuring “*The Very Lonely Firefly*” on World Firefly Day in July. Leading up to the Firefly Story Walk, **Little Joe’s Books in Katonah** stocked up on copies of the book so families could read along at home. Both events were pre-recorded and posted to WLT’s social media.

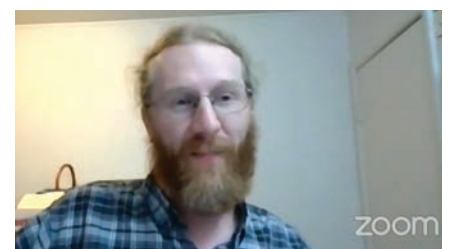


Hands-On At Home

Keeping kids busy when schools first closed was tough on parents, so we created a series of DIY nature-based activities to educate and entertain young minds. These simple crafts only required easy-to-find items from around the house or yard and a bit of imagination. We demonstrated how to use old cans and newspapers to make newspaper planting pots. Tape, flowers, leaves, and twigs became colorful nature bracelets. And sticks, string, yarn, and plants were transformed into magical nature wands. By getting kids outside to interact with natural items, we’re encouraging them to see the beauty of nature and all that it has to offer.

Sharing Other Voices

We’ve been thrilled to share, elevate, and celebrate the events and resources of other groups finding new ways to interact with nature. WLT staffers, like Director of Stewardship Brendan Murphy (right), have participated in virtual chats with **Bedford 2020** and **Federated Conservationists of Westchester County**. We’ve partnered with **Saw Mill River Audubon** to host bird Q&As. And we’ve learned from and celebrated the important voices of people who have been silenced in the conservation movement for too long with #BlackHikersWeek and #BlackBirdersWeek.





Have You Seen the Pollinator Pop-Up?

WLT's Pollinator Pop-Up is an interactive exhibit offering hands-on activities and a wealth of information for pollinator lovers of all ages. It made its debut in February of this year and our team is excited to be offering opportunities to engage with the program at several of our preserves this fall. Resources, activities, and programs about bees, butterflies, and other pollinators can be found on our website, as well as at kiosks at our Pine Croft Meadow (Waccabuc), Hunter Brook (Yorktown), and Otter Creek (Mamaroneck) preserves. Follow us on social media and be on the lookout for surprise Pollinator Pop-Up happenings this fall. To learn more about this program and the new resources available to you and your family, contact Kara Whelan at Kara@westchesterlandtrust.org or 914.234.6992 ext. 12.



Thanks to Con Edison for partially funding this program and for supporting local efforts to make our communities more pollinator-friendly.

Find Your Connection to Nature

Although our traditional, in-person programming cannot be resumed yet, we're planning several small-group and virtual events throughout the rest of the year. Please visit the calendar page of our website to learn more about each program listed below. **Registration is required for all in-person programs.**



Salt Marsh Stroll

Saturday, September 26, 2020, 2-3:30 pm
Otter Creek Preserve, Mamaroneck, NY

Did you know that New York's salt marshes are some of the most productive ecosystems in the world? During this muddy adventure, WLT's Preserve Manager, John Zeiger, will explain how our permanently protected Otter Creek Preserve salt marsh provides critical habitat for species ranging from oysters and clams to osprey and other migratory birds, and relief from more frequent flooding events. Footwear for exploring a muddy low tide zone is encouraged!



Guided Mindful Meditation

Tuesday, November 10 and
Thursday, November 12, 2020, 9:30-10:30 AM
Pine Croft Meadow Preserve
Waccabuc, NY

Take a break from your routine and practice slowing down during this unique meditation program. Master Reiki instructor and WLT staffer Betty Sue Hanson's skillful guidance will help participants activate their bodies, improving concentration and reducing stress. Especially great for newcomers or for those who can't sit still.



Winter Tree Identification

Sunday, December 6, 2020, 1-3 PM
Westchester Wilderness Walk / Zofnass Family Preserve
Pound Ridge, NY

No leaves, no problem—become a winter dendrology pro! Join our Director of Stewardship Brendan Murphy for an easy stroll through our Westchester Wilderness Walk / Zofnass Family Preserve. Enjoy the wintry landscape of our flagship preserve and learn techniques for identifying trees in winter. This program is great for families looking to get outside for a quiet winter walk while learning about the diverse tree population in this special preserve.



Grow and Share!

Farm Days @ Sugar Hill Farm
Every Tuesday and Thursday through October
Registration is required
Bedford Hills, NY

Volunteer at Westchester Land Trust's half-acre Sugar Hill Farm! We welcome all ages and abilities to connect with each other, the environment, and their food, through exploration on the farm.

Where Does that Food
Pantry Food Come From?

Your Garden! Our Garden!

FARMS FEED OUR COMMUNITY



*From June to early
August WLT's Sugar Hill
Farm produced...*



**850 POUNDS
OF FRESH PRODUCE**

*for the Community Center of
Northern Westchester
where they feed*

**2,000 FAMILIES
from
38 TOWNS**



YOU
make a difference

**Thank You to
Our Donors and Volunteers**

The work we do to protect land, feed our neighbors, and inspire connections to nature would not be possible without the generous contributions of our volunteers and donors.

*We thank you for your commitment to a
brighter, more sustainable future for us all.*



To see a complete list of individuals, businesses, and organizations that made gifts or pledges to WLT from January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019, please visit westchesterlandtrust.org.



COVID-19 has put a tremendous strain on our community and the demand for food from our neighbors in need is on the rise. We have fielded more calls from food pantries and distribution sites asking us to help source fresh produce than ever before.

To meet this growing demand, WLT has redoubled our efforts to grow as much nutritious food as possible, right at our headquarters in the Sugar Hill Farm Garden. The first step was hiring a farmer to oversee the production, which we were able to do again this year thanks to a generous grant from the **Rusticus Garden Club** and donations from supporters like you! The garden has been in production for nearly ten years and averages 7,000 servings of food a season. This year volunteers have generously stepped up to help us grow an array of vegetables—from tomatoes and potatoes to rhubarb, dried peas for soups, kale, and cabbage—the list is impressive! And all that food goes directly to local families, thanks to our partnership with the **Community Center for Northern Westchester**, which receives deliveries straight from our farm twice per week.

To respond to the increase in demand for fresh food, our staff adapted an existing program—our *Faermland Linking Program*—to identify two new privately-owned growing sites. WLT staff facilitated land matches between private landowners and **InterGenerate**, a nonprofit food justice organization. Introductions were made, gardens were prepped, food is being grown, and more families in need have fresh produce on their tables as a result of this effort. With your help, we'll be expanding this work in 2021, along with our faermland linking work which fosters new relationships between land-seeking farmers and landowners in our region to ensure that faermland stays in production and is considered for permanent protection.

Also on the rise is support from local volunteers. We have received offers of help and creative support from dozens of people whose assistance has been needed and gratefully received. The combination of doing something meaningful during a time of such uncertainty is one of the biggest draws for volunteers. With so many people bored from sitting inside, stuck behind a computer screen, our volunteer offerings provide a positive outlet for our minds and bodies.

IN MEMORIAM



Bill Mayo-Smith

The Board of Directors and Staff of Westchester Land Trust mourn the passing of our dear friend and leader Worthington (Bill) Mayo-Smith, a long-time Director of Westchester Land Trust, who died peacefully at home in Rye, NY on June 5, 2020, at the age of 95.

A 63-year resident of Bedford, NY, Bill served two separate terms on WLT's Board, first with founding Chair Louis McCagg, and then again with Chair Sam Pryor. Bill served in the formative years of the organization, helping to drive WLT's strategic direction, and later assumed a leadership role on WLT's Capital Campaign Committee, ultimately raising several million dollars to fund land conservation priority projects in Westchester and Putnam counties. Bill's leadership in the conservation world was both inspirational and impactful, and his legacy can be seen in the many beautiful and environmentally critical landscapes he helped protect in perpetuity.

The Best-Laid Plans... More than any meme can muster, these three words best describe our 2020 so far.



Last summer and fall, we laid out our plans for the year 2020. We had some big projects lined up, ranging from parking lot upgrades to an intensive restoration project and stream geomorphological study at our Hunter Brook Preserve in Yorktown. Backed by grants, field technicians, volunteers, and trusted contractors, we were energized and ready to roll.

As you might have already guessed, our plans changed. Key grants were delayed, perhaps indefinitely. Needed hires were paused and important volunteer events were canceled.

Then something interesting happened. It started with a few phone calls and Facebook posts pointing out how many cars were at our preserves. Crowds of hikers arrived, seeking an escape on the trails. Our Westchester Wilderness Walk / Zofnass Family Preserve was particularly active, with our trail cameras showing up to 300 daily visitors!

Our goals suddenly switched from restoration to public safety and engagement. Overflowing parking lots required a weekend presence with support from local police. Ensuring safe trail use

meant communicating social distancing rules through lots of conversations and signs. This was also true on our trail-less preserves, which meant our focus had to expand from our 12 public preserve trails to all 32 preserves.

And then in early August, we were hit hard by Tropical Storm Isaias with winds that caused extensive damage to our preserves and trails. **Cleanup from the storm required more than 150 hours of work to clear 101 trail blockages with chainsaws.**

Throughout it all, we were humbled by the positive silver linings that emerged from the situation. Our preserves have remained open when they were most needed, which gave us the opportunity to meet many new people—not just new to us personally, but new to our trails and to the Westchester Land Trust. Many families were thrilled to have discovered a new place to hike, explore, and just get away for a bit.

Another positive is that people are asking how to get involved and if we need help. We said yes, and their helping hands have been invaluable on many projects, from roofing a new kiosk, to pulling vines off native tree saplings and sending in trail reports.

Are you interested in helping too? Our best-laid plans haven't slowed us down, and it's an exciting time to connect with us. Check out the back page for ways to get involved.

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

Many hands make light work! Meticulous volunteers are working hard to save our favorite meadow from a troublesome vine called mile-a-minute. As the name suggests, the vine grows really fast, and can smother the native plants that pollinators depend on at our Pine Croft Meadow Preserve in Waccabuc. Volunteers have contributed more than 40 hours of their time in 2020 to help us eradicate this vine from the nine-acre meadow, which features a particularly rich diversity of wildflowers, birds, and butterflies.



SPOT THAT MILE-A-MINUTE!
It has triangular leaves, small barbs on the stem, and a distinctive circular ocrea (fun word, look it up!) around the joints. Its berries are small, bluish-purple when mature, and can be spotted July through September.

Support, Revenue & Expenses

Year ending December 31, 2019

SUPPORT & REVENUE

Individual Donations	\$2,227,206
Foundation Donations	\$257,568
Corporate & Government Donations	\$271,999
Special Events, net of expenses	\$349,215
Endowment Donations	\$152,067
Endowment Investment Income, net	\$832,733
Miscellaneous	\$22,482
Total Support & Revenue	\$4,113,270

EXPENSES

Program Services	\$948,222
Fundraising	\$147,306
Management & Administration	\$156,849
Total Expenses	\$1,252,377
Change in Net Assets*	\$2,860,893
Net Assets, beginning of year	\$20,444,306
Net Assets, end of year	\$23,305,199

*Net Assets include land held for conservation, Sugar Hill Farm assets, endowment funds, and other Board designated and restricted funds. Please visit our website or contact us for a copy of our audited financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2019.

Get Involved!
**Take Action
 to Help WLT**



Lend a Hand on the Land

Roll up your sleeves and spend a few hours of your time caring for the land you love. Lend a hand by pulling invasive plants, planting veggies at Sugar Hill Farm, or volunteering in the office.

Every Bit Helps

Recurring monthly gifts of \$10, \$15, \$20 have a significant impact and help to sustain our land protection and farm work year-round. Become a sustaining donor today by checking the "Monthly" donation box on the back remittance card.

Follow Us on Social Media

Stay up to date on the latest WLT news, programming, volunteer opportunities, and tips to help protect the land in your backyard. You can find us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

Got Land? Share it!

The demand for farmland is greater than ever and WLT is working with dozens of land-seeking farmers looking for tracts of land between 1-20 acres to farm in Westchester and eastern Putnam counties.

Share the Love

Nature can bring us comfort, peace, and healing in challenging times. Introduce a friend or community member to your favorite WLT preserve and encourage them to support our work.



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!

I would love to contribute

- \$10 \$30 \$50 \$75 \$100 \$250
- \$.....
- One Time Monthly Quarterly Bi-annually
- My gift is in honor/memory of

- I wish my gift to remain anonymous.
- I would like to learn more about including Westchester Land Trust in my will.
- I will submit matching gift from my employer.

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

Name

Address

City

State

Zip

Phone Number

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*The email provided above will be added to WLT's enews list to keep you up-to-date on Westchester Land Trust's successes, programs, 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.