

FALL NEWSLETTER



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

# Westchester Land Trust



## Listening and Learning Together

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(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 [earthsharenyc.org](http://earthsharenyc.org) or contact Michelle Culbert at [Michelle@westchesterlandtrust.org](mailto:Michelle@westchesterlandtrust.org) or 914.234.6992 ext. 22.

Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) Number: 77308



**COVER**

WLT Director of Stewardship, Brendan Murphy, in the field with summer interns Briana Marcano and Erick Rosa

Photo credit: WLT Staff

**FROM THE PRESIDENT**



Dear Friends,

The world has changed rapidly over the past few years. We've seen drastic shifts in the land, climate, society, resources, and economy. At Westchester Land Trust (WLT), we acknowledge that we have changed and must continue to evolve to support our communities where they need us most.

To keep up with these changes, we've been busy examining our organization to identify areas where we can make our work more equitable, inclusive, and rooted

in what our communities need. **We understand that this is a long journey, and we're committed to listening and learning together.**

We know that before we can march toward a brighter future, we must understand the changed world we're in and how we can better serve it. For us, that means an evolution of our definition of land protection, based on listening to people throughout our service area and learning what we can do to make our conservation efforts more inclusive. Whenever possible, WLT will now include an evaluation of land-use history, including by Indigenous people and people of color in our land assessment process. We're redoubling our commitment to urban land protection, including prioritizing the protection of parcels that provide much needed access to open and green spaces that can be used for reflection, recreation, and growing food.

As part of our effort to take the next right steps, we embarked on a year-long urban feasibility study. We listened to community leaders, conservation groups, and local growers to gain a greater understanding of how best to leverage our technical expertise and land protection resources. We understand that this work will require an investment in additional resources and will soon be ready to add a new position to our staff to increase our capacity to focus on urban conservation projects and programs.

We continue to broaden our reach and impact and recently launched a new conservation internship program designed to give youth conservationists hands-on field experience and serve as a launching point for their careers. Our summer interns, along with Groundwork Hudson Valley's Green Team, helped us tackle the effects of climate change at our preserves. Our team also fostered a new partnership with Blythedale Children's Hospital in Valhalla as part of our Pollinator Pop-Up program to install a wheelchair-accessible pollinator garden.

And yes, importantly, we are protecting land! So far this year, **we've protected 167 acres across five projects** and look forward to completing several more projects in the coming months. We continue to be inspired by you and your neighbors as you turn to the land as a source of tranquility, respite, and joy.

As you read this issue, we hope you'll gain a greater appreciation for why your annual support matters. Westchester Land Trust is an agile, adaptive and impactful organization because of the support of our donors, volunteers, and community partners. **We invite you to join us as we act boldly to do the next right thing. When we listen and learn together, we can create a brighter future.**

Thank you,



Lori Ensinger

P.S. We are inspired by what we've been able to accomplish with your support and we look forward to protecting more land, strengthening our food systems, and creating opportunities for youth conservationists. YOU make a difference, and your support makes our work possible!

**LAND PROTECTION**

**Expanding Habitat Corridors**

Protecting land has always been at the heart of what we do, but understanding just how crucial green space is to our community has made our mission more relevant and urgent than ever. Over the past year, WLT has protected 167 acres of land across five land deals, and we have several exciting projects in the works.

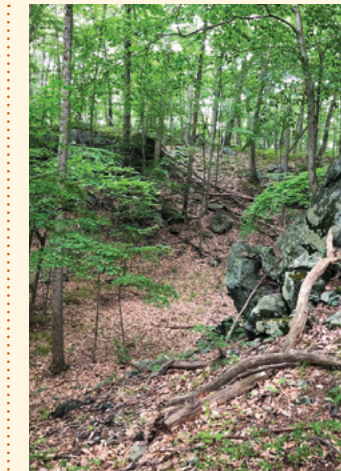


**Hudson Highlands Corridor with Rich History**

We protected 125 acres of land across three land preservation projects in the Town of Cortlandt, NY, marking a critical addition to an existing 2,700-acre conservation corridor within the Croton-to-Highlands Biodiversity Area. A large portion of the land was generously donated to WLT by the Estate of Amram Attias. To add to the assemblage, another landowner donated four adjacent acres of land, and WLT purchased a nearby 13-acre parcel that protects the water quality of the Peekskill Hollow Creek, which is the drinking water supply for residents of the City of Peekskill.

These acquisitions were supported by a generous bequest from the Estate of Worthington Mayo-Smith, who was a former Director of WLT, a grant from The Nature Conservancy of New York's *Resilient and Connected Network* grant program, and WLT's land acquisition fund.

Originally inhabited by the Indigenous peoples of the Lenape, or Delaware tribe, the proximity of these properties to the Hudson River and its tributaries made it a likely seasonal Lenape camp site or hunting ground. The land also played a role in the American Revolution and is documented as the site of a military parade ground and gallows. Recently, much of the property was used as a private camp. The land will be protected in perpetuity as a nature preserve and hiking trails will be opened to the public as soon as practical.



**Bedford Forestland with Uncommon Ecosystems**

An ecologically significant 15-acre parcel in Bedford was generously donated to WLT by Janice and Robert Diamond. The land is one of the few undeveloped and unprotected parcels left in Bedford that sits at a high elevation (625'), which made conserving it a top priority. Because of its elevation, the land is home to locally uncommon ecosystems and soil types, which allow unique plant communities, like chestnut oak and blueberry, to thrive. Due to its topographic diversity, the property is expected to be more climate resilient. The new "Diamond Family Preserve" will be managed by WLT as a nature sanctuary with a focus on ecological research.



**Land in Bedford's Caramoor Greenbelt with Drinking Water Protection**

WLT permanently protected 27 acres of land in Bedford through a conservation easement generously donated by Elizabeth Morgan and Jonathan Cary. The newly protected parcel is located within Bedford's designated Caramoor Greenbelt, an area that has particularly high conservation value and within which the Town encourages additional land protection. Conservation of this property allows for perpetual protection of wildlife habitat and local drinking water supplies, as well as the potential restoration of agriculture to the site, which had been part of a larger farm for generations. This property is located within the Croton River watershed, a designated priority watershed of the New York State Open Space Conservation Plan.

**WLT AWARDED \$23,000 FROM WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY FOUNDATION**

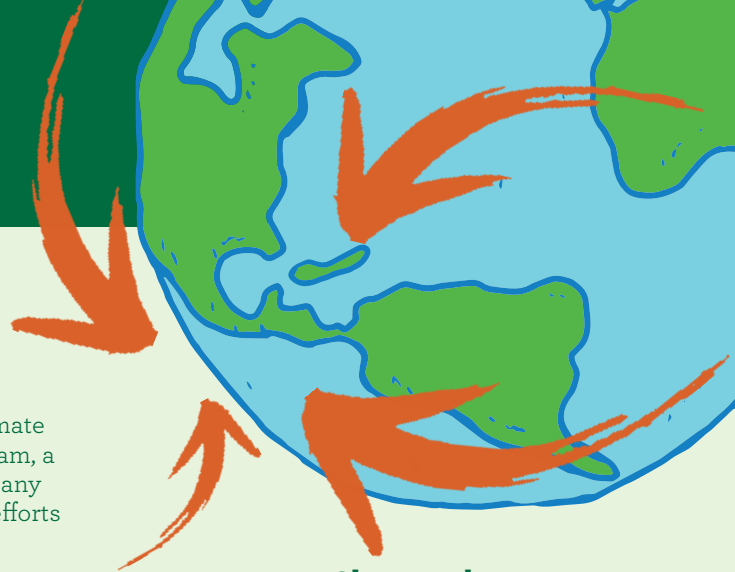
The grant will allow WLT to restore the recently acquired New Rochelle property's natural habitat, create a spur trail that will link to the adjacent Glenwood Lake Park trail system, and provide public access to the new property. WLT will work with the Glenwood Lake community and local volunteers on this project.

*Westchester Community Foundation's mission is to connect generous people to the causes they care about and invest in transformative ideas and organizations to improve lives and strengthen our community. WCF is a division of The New York Community Trust, one of the largest community foundations in the country, with assets of approximately \$2.6 billion.*

# Green Team and Summer Interns Protect WLT Preserves from Climate Change

The effects of climate change are no longer just predictions, scary headlines, or alarming soundbites on the news—we're seeing its impact first-hand at our preserves and in our communities. From rising temperatures and increasingly extreme weather events, there are constant reminders all around us that the time to act is now. And President Biden's '30x30' initiative, which calls for the protection of 30 percent of U.S. land and coastal seas by 2030, gives us an ambitious conservation goal.

This summer our stewardship team worked closely with two interns, Briana Marcano and Erick Rosa, to tackle climate change-related issues on WLT's preserves. Briana and Erick are alumni of Groundwork Hudson Valley's Green Team, a group that hires local teenagers enrolled in the Yonkers Public School system for environmental jobs, which for many teens, serve as their first professional job experiences. The interns, with help from the Green Team, focused their efforts on two of WLT's preserves that are experiencing climate change challenges: Otter Creek Preserve and Pine Croft Meadow Preserve.



## Rethinking Our Role in Farmland Protection

WLT is dedicated to protecting farmland in addition to forests, meadows, wetlands, and other natural habitats. Most of the 800 acres of farmland we've protected are in the rural parts of our service area. As we've expanded our food pantry garden at our headquarters, we recognize that prioritizing the protection of urban land is a critical component to doing our part to build a sustainable, healthy, and equitable local food system. Many people in our community struggle with food insecurity and we know that, while donating all produce grown at Sugar Hill Farm to food pantries is impactful, there's more we can do.

To better understand what role WLT can play in this effort, we took a holistic approach by funding a year-long urban conservation feasibility study. Through research, interviews, and organizational assessments, we explored how WLT's land protection work can be leveraged as one important piece of the puzzle in tackling food, economic, and environmental inequalities in our urban communities. This study taught us that there are important connections to be made with local groups that each uniquely focus on other pieces of the same puzzle.

**Listening to the community.** We understand that cultural context and strong community connections are essential to this work. That involves actively listening. We are working with local growers and food justice organizations to learn which parcels are suitable for farming and where these lands are located. And we're creating opportunities at Sugar Hill Farm for people to have hands-on experience with sustainable farming techniques. By learning alongside our farmer, Allison Turcan of **D.I.G. Farm**.

**Learning where we can do more.** While we continue to expand the size and yield of our farm garden, our goal is not just to provide food to communities in need. We're learning that the land we prioritize for protection can serve as a common ground foundation for fostering connections between local growers and organizations specializing in all aspects of community building and food security.

**Looking within.** More resources are needed. We are planning to create a new full-time staff position whose focus will be on identifying opportunities for land access, accelerating our urban conservation work, and establishing partnerships with community groups in our urban areas who are addressing important aspects of this work.

This is a long journey and we've only taken the first steps on the path to a more equitable future. We look forward to listening more, learning more, and taking action to have a more impactful role in our urban communities.



### SUGAR HILL FARM SUPPORT

WLT has partnered with local food banks since 2012 to grow and distribute an average of 8,000 servings of fresh produce annually to local families in need. We currently distribute our produce through our partner, the **Community Center of Northern Westchester**, which serves over 10,000 low-income, food-insecure individuals a year, including more than 3,000 children.

WLT was awarded a \$11,030 grant from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets as part of the Community Growers Grant Program. These funds are supporting the expansion of the food pantry farm garden at Sugar Hill Farm with the installation of perennial fruit shrubs, and our creation and distribution of bilingual recipes and nutrition cards to families in need.

Climate change is not going away and it will undoubtedly cause increased damage across our preserves as temperatures continue to rise and extreme storms become more common.

The challenges we face are big, but as we learned from working with our interns and the Green Team, youth conservationists will play a key role in guiding our response to climate change. They understand, perhaps better than any other generation, what we're up against and it's up to us to support them, listen to them, and learn how we can all create a brighter future together.

### Funding the Future

WLT's summer internship program is made possible thanks to your generous support and that of Groundwork Hudson Valley, Long Island Community Foundation, Lower Hudson PRISM, and Rusticus Garden Club.

*This project was contracted by the Lower Hudson PRISM (Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management) using funds from the Environmental Protection Fund as administered by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.*

To learn how you can support WLT's internship program, contact Kara Whelan, Vice President, at [kara@westchesterlandtrust.org](mailto:kara@westchesterlandtrust.org) or 914-234-6992 ext. 12.

### At Highest Risk from Rising Sea Level:

#### OTTER CREEK PRESERVE, MAMARONECK



THE TEAM

Photo Credit: Mike Surdej



BEFORE



AFTER

### CLIMATE CHANGE EFFECT

- Rising sea levels, along with stronger, more frequent storms, routinely flood Otter Creek's trail system.
- Stronger storms damage woodlands, which provide critical habitat for birds and act as a buffer to the salt marsh.
- Increased deer browsing eliminates native plant understory.
- Extreme weather stresses plants.

### WHAT WE'VE DONE TO MITIGATE

- Restored and lengthened the existing bog bridge system by 100 feet.
- New trail routing improves accessibility and prevents unauthorized "rogue trails," which damage native plants, spread invasive species, and infringe upon wildlife.
- Rebuilt 1,000 feet of deer enclosure fencing to help ensure woodlands can be restored from the effects of climate change and deer.
- Continued native plant restoration efforts by planting additional wildflowers to support pollinators and locally threatened turtle species.

### Increased Invasive Threat:

#### PINE CROFT MEADOW PRESERVE, WACCABUC



THE TEAM



BEFORE



AFTER

### CLIMATE CHANGE EFFECT

- Climate change gives invasive mile-a-minute vine an advantage over native plants.
- Stronger storms are continually damaging the small woodland at the meadow, leading to downed trees that act as ladders and allow mile-a-minute to spread rapidly.

### WHAT WE'VE DONE TO MITIGATE

- Pulled 32,000 mile-a-minute vines.
- Planted native plants and protected some to prevent deer browsing.
- Relocated and improved the public parking to make it higher and drier, and more accessible.
- Monitored and mapped new emerging invasive plants.



## Pollinator Pop-Up Blossoms

We've been busy spreading the word throughout Westchester that we can all do our part to help pollinators! Following its successful launch in 2020, WLT's Pollinator Pop-Up program has expanded over the past year to bring pollinator knowledge, fun facts, and activities to groups throughout our service area.

As part of our expanded efforts, we created Spanish-language versions of all Pollinator Pop-Up handouts, which are available on our website and at Pop-Up events. We received a great response to the Spanish materials and we're now exploring other areas throughout our organization where we can offer programming and resources in Spanish.

We also partnered with **Blythedale Children's Hospital** in Valhalla, NY to bring the Pollinator Pop-Up to their campus and create a pollinator garden for students and patients to enjoy. WLT's Pop-Up team spent a wonderful day of service planting a variety of colorful native flowers in the garden.

To reach even more people, we're working on a series of short, family friendly videos that highlight the importance of pollinators to our gardens, ecosystems, and food supplies. Stay tuned for more from WLT's Pollinator Pop-Up and visit [bit.ly/WLTbees](http://bit.ly/WLTbees) to learn how you can make a difference to help bees, butterflies, birds, and other pollinators!

*We are grateful to Con Edison for partially funding this program and for supporting local efforts to make our communities more pollinator friendly.*

**Blythedale Children's Hospital is New York State's only independent, specialty children's hospital.** Their caring and highly specialized staff of board certified physicians, experienced nurses, and the largest cadre of pediatric-trained therapists in the state, is dedicated to improving the health and quality of life of children with complex medical illnesses and conditions.



## Bioblitz at Tom Burke Preserve

This summer WLT held a **bioblitz** at Tom Burke Preserve in Bedford Hills, NY to find and identify as many species of plants and wildlife as possible and record them on the **iNaturalist app**. Held in partnership with Healthy Yards, the bioblitz invited community members to join us for a series of workshops, including a nighttime moth hunt, wetlands walk, and a Spanish-language nature stroll.

### What's a Bioblitz?

A bioblitz is an event that focuses on finding and identifying as many species as possible in a specific area over a short period of time.

### What is iNaturalist?

iNaturalist is a citizen-science app developed by National Geographic and the California Academy of Sciences that helps users identify plants and wildlife. The app allows users to share observations of plants and wildlife, which experts can identify or use for scientific research. Documentation of even the most common species provides valuable data that can help us better understand the local impacts of climate change.

**Become a citizen scientist! Download the app and learn more at [www.inaturalist.org](http://www.inaturalist.org).**

**42 participants joined eight workshops totaling 12 hours at Tom Burke Preserve over three days, and made 143 observations of 96 different species**

## ANNUAL REPORT

### You Make a Difference

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 read a list of individuals, businesses, and organizations that made gifts or pledges to WLT from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020, visit [westchesterlandtrust.org](http://westchesterlandtrust.org).*

### Support, Revenue & Expenses Year ending December 31, 2020

#### SUPPORT & REVENUE

Individual Donations	\$599,068
Foundation Donations	\$192,300
Corporate & Government Donations	\$27,222
Special Events, net of expenses	\$210,590
Endowment Donations	\$25,000
Endowment Investment Income, net	\$593,155
Miscellaneous	\$14,818
<b>Total Support &amp; Revenue</b>	<b>\$1,662,153</b>

#### EXPENSES

Expenses	
Program Services	\$807,778
Fundraising	\$172,850
Management & Administration	\$169,813
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,150,441</b>
Change in Net Assets	\$511,712
Net Assets, beginning of year	\$23,305,199
<b>Net Assets, end of year*</b>	<b>\$23,816,911</b>

\*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, 2020.

# Westchester Land Trust Programs

*Our programs will be held in person when possible and all events will follow local, state, and federal COVID-19 regulations. Group sizes are limited. Online pre-registration is required for all programs—visit the **Calendar** section of our website to sign up. Please notify us of any cancellations so we can alert those on waiting lists.*

**Sunday  
October 31, 2021  
9-10 AM  
(Rain or shine!)**



**Halloween Family Story Walk**  
Taylors Lane entrance at Otter Creek Preserve, Mamaroneck, NY

**Dress up in your favorite Halloween costume and take a self-guided stroll through our spooky salt marsh** at WLT's Otter Creek Preserve. On the trail get ready to follow the adventures of a Halloween-themed story in both English and Spanish.

**Saturday  
November 6, 2021  
9:30 AM-12 PM and 1-3:30 PM**



**Glenwood Lake Clean-Up / Pollinator Pop-Up**  
Glenwood Lake Park entrance on Gloucester Place, New Rochelle, NY

**Help us clean up the recently protected Prileau property, adjacent to Glenwood Lake Park**, to prepare for a tree planting in the spring! We will be cleaning up trash and piling brush and branches. Feel free to sign up for one or both of the sessions. Please bring sturdy work gloves and plenty of water. We recommend wearing pants and close-toed shoes. Stop by WLT's Pollinator Pop-Up to learn about pollinators!  
**Rain date: Sunday, November 7 at 9:30 AM-12 PM and 1-3:30 PM**

**Saturday  
November 20, 2021  
7:30-9 AM**



**Sunrise Hike at Turkey Mountain**  
Turkey Mountain Nature Preserve, Locke Lane, Yorktown Heights, NY

**Join us for an early morning hike at Turkey Mountain Preserve!** We'll hope for clear skies and a view of the Manhattan skyline. The summit is measured at 831 feet, which is pretty mild for a mountain, but be prepared for a moderately challenging uphill climb, with rocks and roots underfoot. The loop will be approximately 2 miles.  
**Rain date: Sunday, November 21, at 7:30-9 AM**

**Saturday  
December 4, 2021  
9:30-11:30 AM**



**Winter Tree Identification**  
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 a 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.  
**Rain date: Sunday, December 5, at 9:30-11:30 AM**

## Volunteer Opportunities

**Grow and Share! Farm Days**  
Every Tuesday and Thursday through October  
Sugar Hill Farm, Bedford Hills, NY

Help us grow food for our neighbors in need at our Sugar Hill Farm. All produce is donated to the Community Center of Northern Westchester. We welcome all ages and abilities to connect with each other, nature, and their food, through exploration on the farm.

For more information, contact Michelle Culbert at [michelle@westchesterlandtrust.org](mailto:michelle@westchesterlandtrust.org).

**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 volunteer days, contact John Zeiger at [johnz@westchesterlandtrust.org](mailto:johnz@westchesterlandtrust.org).

Westchester Land Trust  
403 Harris Road  
Bedford Hills, New York 10507  
  
914.234.6992  
westchesterlandtrust.org

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Otter Creek Preserve in Mamaroneck

# Westchester Land Trust


YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS  
NOW & ALWAYS

Help us continue to Listen and Learn Together as we protect, restore, and steward the land you love.

The challenges we face are big, but when we work together and do the right thing, we can make a difference. Please consider doing the next right thing—just \$10 a month funds internships, volunteer opportunities, and the protection of vital forests and farmlands.

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 check the legacy gift box below and we will reach out to you.

 WLT's mission has never been more urgent! 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  \$25  \$35  \$50  \$75  \$100  \$.....

Recurring  Monthly  Bi-Monthly

*For the price of one lunch a month, you can contribute \$100+ in 2022 and preserve the land that will sustain future generations.*

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

.....

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

Name

.....

Address

.....

City

State

Zip

.....

Phone Number

.....

Email Address\*

.....

*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.*

*\*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.*