

FALL NEWSLETTER | 2022 ANNUAL REPORT



Westchester Land Trust

GROWING *Where Our Community Needs Us*

Return to
Urban Conservation

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westchesterlandtrust.org

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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. Find out how you and your employer can support WLT through an EarthShare workplace giving campaign visit earthsharenyc.org or contact Susan Leighton at susan@westchesterlandtrust.org or 914.234.6992 ext. 23.

Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) Number: 77308



ON THE COVER

The Louis-Dreyfus Conservation Easement in Bedford, NY, protected by Westchester Land Trust since 2001.

FROM THE PRESIDENT(S)



Earlier this year, we announced that our president, Lori Ensinger, is stepping down from the role she has held for the past nine years. The entire Westchester Land Trust (WLT) community thanks Lori for her dedicated service, sharp strategic guidance, and endless support for protecting the land we all love. Lori will remain on staff as a senior advisor.

Well friends, this is my last letter to you as Lori Ensinger, president of Westchester Land Trust. My decision to transition to a more tightly focused role has been bittersweet, but I leave this position with confidence, knowing that the organization has the positive momentum it needs to carry it into this next exciting phase of growth.

As I reflect back on my years as president, I'm reminded of the many land acquisition projects that have filled me with purpose and still bring a tear to my eye today. From the preservation of Stuart's Farm in Somers to the selfless generosity of the Dominican Sisters of Hope in Ossining, to the inspiring neighborhood perseverance that catalyzed several land acquisitions at Glenwood Lake in New Rochelle, I'm moved by these amazingly diverse conservation successes. The common thread underlying them all is the landowners' and communities' deeply authentic love of the land and desire to protect it for future generations.

As much as I love the land, it's the people that I have been privileged to

URBAN CONSERVATION: Every Acre Counts

By the year 2050, two out of every three people worldwide will reside in cities—and Westchester is home to three of the 10 most populous cities in the State of New York. In early 2020, WLT privately funded and executed an 18-month urban conservation feasibility study that is now being used as the foundation to guide our advancements in urban conservation. At a leadership retreat for our Board, Advisory Board, and staff held in early May, we committed to increasing resources dedicated to proactive land conservation and stewardship of lands in urban areas.



This urban focus is a re-commitment to WLT's founding, dating back to 1988. During our early years, WLT's leadership, led by founding Chairman Louis McCagg, identified three mission areas for the organization: open space preservation, supporting affordable housing in cities, and education about the importance of land preservation in suburban, rural, and urban communities.

WLT has implemented plans to add a full-time director of urban engagement position to our professional staff and we are committing significant resources to this role. The primary responsibility of this leadership position will be to cultivate enduring partnerships with community nonprofits, residents, grassroots advocates, and elected officials in our urban centers to prioritize local land protection, stewardship, and environmental education needs.

Look for the director of urban engagement job posting on our website!

work with that have made my time as president truly special. From our staff, Board and Advisory Board, to our amazing summer apprentices, volunteers, community partners and supporters—we wouldn't have made a fraction of the impact we did without you.

Now, just as I'm handing over the role of president, I'll tag Kara Whelan, who will serve as WLT's new president, to share her vision for the organization.

Kara Whelan has been with WLT for 10 years, most recently as our vice president. She stepped into the president's role in September.

As my first letter to you as president of Westchester Land Trust, it feels impossible to simultaneously capture my deep gratitude to Lori, my genuine enthusiasm for the future of this organization, and my immense respect for the responsibility that comes with this position.

Lori's legacy of land protection and financial planning is commendable. She has led some of the most complicated land deals WLT has ever completed and steered this organization to its strongest financial position since our founding in 1988.

As a lifelong Westchester resident, I have a passion for local conservation that has an impact in our communities. Our current lineup of active land protection projects is growing both in number and in geographic diversity and I see an incredibly bright future for WLT. That future includes

re-focusing on urban land protection—one of our original mission areas—as well as continued careful stewardship of our preserves and easements, and a redoubled dedication to engaging with communities throughout our service area to learn how WLT can grow into the spaces where we're needed the most.

We hope that you enjoy the stories within these pages, which demonstrate WLT's agility and resilience in the face of climate change and how our organization is being shaped by the next generation of conservationists who are hopeful and eager to dig into this important work with us. This is the future of WLT—not daunted by the challenges of climate change but emboldened by the love of and for our community to take action here and now.

We welcome you to join us in embracing this time of transition and growth for Westchester Land Trust. This organization exists thanks to your involvement and support.

With our deep appreciation to you,



Kara Whelan and Lori Ensinger

P.S. Want to get involved? We've made it easy—see the back cover for some ideas!



Transformational Gift from the Estate of David Swope Supports Urban Conservation

David Swope was an influential Board member who dedicated his time and talents to WLT's strategic planning process from 2008-2010. Known as a prominent and highly respected environmentalist, community leader, and philanthropist, David encouraged our staff and his colleagues on the Board to be thought leaders in land management practices and to pursue innovative, collaborative partnerships with groups beyond the environmental sector. Thanks to a transformational bequest from David Swope's estate, WLT is well positioned to play a critical role in the advancement of conservation projects in urban communities.

"David was a committed conservationist for his entire life and he also dedicated a large portion of his philanthropic efforts to addressing the needs of underserved communities. As his trustees, we therefore felt certain that he would have been an enthusiastic supporter of WLT's new urban conservation initiative. We are delighted to have been able to make this gift in his memory, which we hope will help to get this unique and exciting new effort off to a strong start."

—Dorry Swope,
Trustee and sister of David Swope

Create your legacy through a planned gift. Contact Kara Whelan at 914-234-6992 ext. 12 to learn more.



A Bridge to Urban Communities

Westchester Land Trust's Pollinator Pop-Up is a newly designed mobile education exhibit that was conceptualized and launched with the goal of connecting WLT's work to urban communities and areas where we don't currently protect land. **Educators take note—all Pop-Up resources are available in Spanish and English and are downloadable for free on our website!**

We salute Con Edison, the State of New York, and American Farmland Trust for partially sponsoring this program.



A BAD DAY AT THE BEECH

The new disease that is decimating Westchester's trees

by Brianna Rodriguez and Christian Fierek, WLT's Summer Conservation Apprentices



Westchester Land Trust staff, conservation apprentices, and volunteers partnered with Groundwork Hudson Valley's Green Team to study the impacts of beech leaf disease at our preserves



Have you ever hiked along a nature trail and noticed dark stripes forming between the veins of the leaves of beech trees?

American beech is an abundant tree in our area with smooth, silvery bark. These trees produce beech nuts in the fall, a vital source of food for animals. Unfortunately, that darkening indicates the presence of beech leaf disease (BLD). In the short time since BLD has been discovered in Westchester, it has already begun to damage our native beech trees and the forest ecosystems that rely on this important species.

According to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), BLD may be caused by a nematode, a type of microscopic worm. Some common symptoms of BLD are rounding, curling, and change in leaf texture from soft and smooth to leathery and coarse. Another common identifier of the disease is the formation of dark stripes on sections of the leaves, while the surrounding surface area maintains its normal light green color. The leaves eventually wither away and die, draining the tree of its energy until the entire tree eventually dies, too.

The disease was first documented and discovered in the state of Ohio in 2012 and after a few years, many neighboring states also began to find the infection. The beech populations of New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey all have noted sites plagued by BLD. The disease has even been detected as far north as Rhode Island and Ontario, Canada. And we're not only losing a valuable species of tree in our native ecosystem—creatures that depend on beech such as birds, squirrels, and even black bears, will also be negatively affected.

All hope is not lost, yet. Local conservation organizations are making major strides to protect American beech and our local forests. Westchester Land Trust (WLT) and Lower Hudson Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (LH PRISM) are working together to learn more about BLD and

Groundwork Hudson Valley's Green Team (right) is made up of local teenagers enrolled in the Yonkers Public School system who are hired for environmental jobs. For many of the students, the Green Team serves as a launching pad for a career in conservation



ensure that new forests will grow in areas where beech trees die off. In 2021, WLT staff and interns mapped 15 acres of beech woodlands within the Westchester Wilderness Walk / Zofnass Family Preserve in Pound Ridge. In 2022, we worked within these mapped woodlands to remove invasive plant species and install deer exclosure fences, tree cages, and tree tubes to prevent deer from eating young native saplings that will take the place of beech trees. Much of this work was carried out by Groundwork Hudson Valley's Green Team, a paid crew of high school students and young adults from Yonkers schools that work on environmental projects.

Unfortunately, the goal of this work is ultimately not to save beech trees themselves, as there is very little information

known about the causes of BLD and how to stop its spread. Instead, we want to make certain that the young trees in the new forest openings, where beech once stood, will thrive, eventually growing into a healthy new forest. The NYS DEC will conduct further monitoring of the effects of BLD throughout the forest and WLT staff will collect data on the growth of new saplings in beech woodlands.

With such limited information on BLD, protecting our forests may seem like a daunting task. But given that the health of our forests is at stake, participating in efforts to preserve what is left of our vital greenspace during this time is all the more important.

Tips for LANDOWNERS

The future of our forests is dependent on us and the work we must do now.

- If you notice beech leaf disease in your area, take photos and report it on **iNaturalist**
- In addition to vigilantly looking out for the spread of BLD, you can contribute to conservation efforts by volunteering in your area to help with the work being done to aid the regeneration of healthy forests.



Department of Environmental Conservation

WLT's work to combat BLD at the Westchester Wilderness Walk/ Zofnass Family Preserve is partially funded by the Lower Hudson PRISM using funds from the NYS Environmental Protection fund administered by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.

Building Climate Resilience at Hunter Brook Preserve

Protected as open space in 2000, WLT's 46-acre Hunter Brook Preserve features a trail, tall trees, and of course, a major stream called the Hunter Brook which flows into the New Croton Reservoir, part of New York City's drinking water supply.

Looking upstream from the trail bridge is a row of towering spruce trees planted nearly 100 years ago. The spruces—and all streamside trees for that matter—are the key to clean healthy streams. Their shade keeps the water cool, they absorb and capture pollutants, and their strong roots prevent floods from washing the streambank away.

Running into Trouble

Problems began when the forest on the windward side of the spruces died—nearly all the trees were ash, and they all succumbed to the invasive emerald borer within the last few years. Being unaccustomed to direct wind and now standing unprotected, the spruces began toppling over, tearing the streambank apart as they splashed down into Hunter Brook. Flooding was also becoming worse and happening more often due to climate change and continued upstream development.

This is when we realized that our bridge could be in danger. The bridge originally cost \$250,000 to build and was engineered to last for generations—assuming that the

conditions remained fairly consistent. But would the bridge last without the trees keeping the streambank in place?

To answer this question, we hired experts from Woodard & Curran, a consulting firm that specializes in water and environmental projects. Their job was to tell us whether the bridge was at risk from the eroding streambank and, if it was, to give us recommendations on what to do next. It's worth noting that their August 2021 field work took place amid three major storms: Fred, Henri, and the catastrophic Ida.

The engineers crunched the data and gave us the results: the good news was that the bridge was not in immediate danger, but the continued tree loss near the bridge was a major concern. They recommended that we act quickly to preserve the bridge and access to the preserve.

A Stable Future

Following the implementation of Woodard & Curran's recommendations, the bridge and streambank at our Hunter Brook Preserve are once again safe and sturdy. While climate change is likely to cause continued disturbances, such as flooding and new invasive threats, the bridge and surrounding land are now shored up and ready to withstand future challenges. This ensures that visitors will be able to enjoy this special place for generations to come.

What Did We Do?



1
First, we had to stop the spruces from falling over by selectively topping the ones most at-risk. By removing those in a controlled manner, we mitigated the risk of the trees unpredictably ripping up the streambank or toppling healthy trees in their fall, which were both likely to keep happening if we didn't intervene.



2
Second, we partnered with an arborist to cut and remove the spruces that had already fallen. This prevented the trees from forcing floodwaters into the fragile streambank and causing further erosion.



3
And third, we planted trees to replace the ash and spruce trees that had died, providing wind protection to the spruces still standing. The new trees will also continue to stabilize the streamside land as their roots grow over time.

Funding a Resilient Future

Many funders made this project possible! The stream study and tree removal were supported by the **New York State Conservation Partnership Program (NYSCPP)** and **New York's Environmental Protection Fund**. These groups, along with **Croton Trees for Tributaries** program, funded the tree planting to stabilize the streambanks. The NYSCPP is administered by the **Land Trust Alliance** in coordination with the **New York State Department of Environmental Conservation**.



NEW YORKERS!
The Environmental Bond Act is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to protect clean drinking water, modernize infrastructure, and improve quality of life across the state.



Vote YES for the Bond Act on November 8 to support clean air, clean water, and green jobs! Visit voteyescleanwaterandjobs.com to learn more.

SUSTAINING SUPPORT



SPOTLIGHT ON A RECURRING DONOR:
Anne Niemann

Anne Niemann has been part of the **Sustaining Stewards Club** as a monthly recurring donor since 2020. Anne shared the inspiration behind her continued support of WLT:

“My parents came to Bedford in 1958 when I was just two and I have recently returned with my husband to live in my childhood home. I was so grateful to find Bedford much the same as I left it 45 years ago.

While it was a much less crowded place during my childhood, it remains largely the same in terms of beautiful open spaces and woodlands with an astonishing number of sanctuaries and preserves for its residents to enjoy.

We **MUST** think ahead and plan for the future, and this is exactly what WLT does. I give to WLT on a monthly basis not for my own benefit, but for my grandchildren. I want to ensure that 45 years from now they will be saying the same thing I am about the beautiful open spaces of Bedford.”

Sign up to join our Sustaining Stewards Club!
Visit our website at westchesterlandtrust.org to learn more.



WLT is constantly improving and expanding our trail system. In the next few years, we will build 2-3 miles of new trails and we need your help to buy more trail markers!

Help us raise \$1,500 for new trail blazes at our preserves—you can make it easier for hikers of all levels of experience to safely explore WLT’s trails and enjoy the land you love.

Meet the New Faces on WLT’s Board of Directors



Carine Verschueren
 Verschueren, a resident of Larchmont, is an adjunct professor in the international and comparative education program at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her work focuses on the ways policy initiatives in public schools can foster a sense of environmentalism and sustainability with regards to responsible and equitable use of natural resources.



Dr. Diana Williams
 Dr. Williams, a resident of Mount Vernon, brings a wealth of experience from more than three decades of serving as a community advocate, community engagement expert, and champion of public access to adequate healthcare and dental care.



Matt Young
 Young, a resident of Bedford Hills, is chief revenue officer at Recurrent Ventures, Inc, a digital media company that includes Field & Stream, Futurism, Outdoor Life, and Popular Science. He has more than 20 years of experience working in the advertising, sports, and technology sectors.



Longtime WLT volunteer, Marie Calo, at Sugar Hill Farm

Photograph by Kevin Warren

VOLUNTEER WITH WLT

YOU can help—volunteer with WLT to steward wildlife habitat, grow food for our neighbors in need, and improve natural lands in our community. Visit westchesterlandtrust.org to learn about volunteer opportunities throughout the year.

All ages and abilities are welcome!

You Make a Difference

The work we do to protect land, feed our neighbors, and inspire connections to nature is made possible by our generous donors and dedicated volunteers.

Thank you for your commitment to building 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, 2021 to December 31, 2021, visit westchesterlandtrust.org.

Support, Revenue & Expenses

Year ending December 31, 2021

SUPPORT & REVENUE

Individual Donations	\$2,153,737
Foundation Donations	\$291,500
Corporate & Government Donations	\$1,557,743
Special Events, net of expenses	\$264,665
Endowment Donations	\$117,540
Endowment Investment Income, net	\$866,872
Miscellaneous	\$36,152
Total Support & Revenue	\$5,288,209

EXPENSES

Program Services	\$2,234,670
Fundraising	\$178,703
Management & Administration	\$176,063
Total Expenses	\$2,589,436

Change in Net Assets	\$941,414
Net Assets, beginning of year	\$23,816,911
Net Assets, end of year*	\$24,758,325

*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, 2021.



CLEAN AIR + WATER for NY

In partnership with local + regional groups, WLT joined a campaign to support the \$4.2B Environmental Bond Act. (It passed! New York voted to protect clean air and water.)



The accreditation seal is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.

A Look Back at YOUR Impact in 2022

PROTECTING LAND, FOREVER

Protecting the land you love is at the core of our mission

In 2022, we conserved **179** acres of land in Patterson, Peekskill, and Yorktown.



We also secured **\$2M** in funding to protect

128-acre Ryder Farm, the oldest working farm in Putnam County.



Yorktown
The last unprotected lot around Shadow La

Peekskill
Stunning views of t

Did You Know? The land that WLT protects provides for around **1,300+** species of plants, animals, and ins

STEWARDING THE LAND YOU LOVE

Caring for the land we protect is a commitment to stewardship, fore

250 trees planted at WLT Preserves, including 30 trees at WLT's first urban forest restoration plot in New Rochelle

Beech leaf disease (BLD) is an emerging threat to our forests and WLT is working with regional partners to address BLD. What we've done:

- 2,000 ft. of deer fences installed
- 1,800 invasive species removed
- 10 acres surveyed for invasives

VOLUNTEER and DONOR SUPPORT

Your generous support makes our work possib

Hours volunteered:
549 at Sugar Hill Farm
554 at WLT preserves


Thanks to your generous support this year, the WLT team has focused on growing into the spaces where you need us most. We've redoubled our dedication to building stronger connections with communities throughout the County. We're steadfast in our commitment to careful stewardship of the preserves and easements you helped us protect.

And we've grown thousands of servings of food to feed families in need. **Together, we are making a difference.**



How Big is an Acre?
One acre is roughly the size of an American football field.

Patterson
Home to a rare floating bog



EXPANDING the POLLINATOR POP-UP

Making new friends while learning about what we can all do to help pollinators

15 Pollinator Pop-Up events in Yonkers, Rye, New Rochelle, Bedford, and more

400+ seed packets given out (plus resources in English and Spanish)

1,500+ people engaged with our programs, including the Pollinator Pop-Up

To learn more buzz over to bit.ly/WLTbees

Improvements at Westchester Wilderness Walk / Zofnass Family Preserve

4,000 ft. of trails improved

7 waterbars installed to prevent trail erosion

5 wood duck boxes hung to provide habitat



Did You Know? WLT is actively managing invasive species to protect native plants. We pulled **10,420** mile-a-minute vines and removed **1,084** cutleaf blackberry plants. And volunteers cut bittersweet vines from **10** acres of woodland.

GROWING FOOD for OUR COMMUNITY

Building a stronger, more resilient local food system together



4,905 servings of produce were grown at Sugar Hill Farm by volunteers, and donated to local families via our food pantry partnership (that's 981 pounds of veggies).

Did You Know? Since 2012, we've grown and donated **82,069** servings of produce, all on our small-acre farm in Bedford Hills.

INVESTING in YOUTH CONSERVATIONISTS



WLT hired 30 members of Groundwork Hudson Valley's Green Team, a group of students from Yonkers Public High Schools, to tackle beech leaf disease.

Did You Know? We welcomed two paid college conservation apprentices, including one alumna of the Green Team!

124 in the office

Plus, 490 supporters engaged in WLT events



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**GET INVOLVED!
 TAKE ACTION
 TO HELP WLT!**

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.

EVERY BIT HELPS

Recurring monthly gifts of \$10, \$15, \$20 have a significant impact. 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, events, and volunteer opportunities. You can find us on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

GOT LAND? SHARE IT!

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

SHARE THE LOVE

Nature can bring us joy, help us find peace, and open up a world of exploration. Introduce a friend or community member to your favorite WLT preserve!

 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. No gift is too small!

I would love to contribute

\$10 \$25 \$35 \$50 \$75 \$100 \$.....

Recurring Monthly Bi-Monthly

Join the Sustaining Stewards Club! See the impact of our recurring donors by reading about Anne Niemann on page 7.

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*

.....

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.