



Westchester Land Trust



SPRING 2025 NEWSLETTER

# THE FUTURE WE PROTECT

*Conservation in Action*





Kara in the Great Swamp watershed.  
Photo by David Emerson

*Would you like  
to visit one of our  
preserves with  
Kara? Reach out  
at 914-234-6992  
ext. 12.*

## *President's Letter* **A Season of Hope and Renewal**

I stepped outside barefoot, needing a moment of quiet after a whirlwind of meetings. The air was crisp, and the pond behind my house was still half-iced over. But at its edges, water had begun to open.

And then, I saw them. The mallards.

Back again, as they are every spring. Swimming, quacking, carrying on as if no time had passed, as if everything in the world was just as they had left it. In that simple moment, I welcomed their beauty and felt the quiet reassurance that nature moves forward, that renewal is constant, and that hope remains. Much of the hope we feel comes from you and your fearless dedication to protecting land.

At Westchester Land Trust, we don't just stand in awe of nature's beauty—we protect it, restore it, and ensure it thrives for you and for generations to come. From safeguarding forests and wetlands to removing old structures so the land can heal, our work is rooted in the belief that conservation is an ongoing act of care and kindness. You've chosen to uphold that care with us, and for that, I am truly thankful.

Like the mallards returning to the ponds or buds blossoming on trees in our neighborhoods, nature reminds us that even in uncertain times, we move forward. And together, we are a critical part of the renewal that will create a brighter future.

Thank you for joining with us to protect these places and spaces that, in turn, protect us.

I hope to see you out enjoying the land in the weeks ahead,

Kara Whelan  
President





## *A New Place to Wander*

MILL RIVER PRESERVE IS OFFICIALLY  
OPEN AND READY TO BE EXPLORED

Ribbon cutting at Mill River Preserve. Photo by Rob Cummings

**Our new Mill River Preserve invites you and your family to enjoy protected land that safeguards your drinking water.**

The future of conservation got a bit brighter last fall with the opening of Mill River Preserve, our newest public preserve in Lewisboro! This 32.4-acre landscape—featuring forests, wetlands, meadows, and a scenic river—does more than provide a beautiful place to explore. It actively serves as wildlife habitat, strengthens climate resilience, and helps protect drinking water for thousands of people.

To introduce our latest land open to the public, we held an inspiring ribbon-cutting ceremony that brought together community members, volunteers, and WLT staff. As we explored the land on a guided hike, staff shared information about the many plants and animals living within the preserve.

Mill River Preserve's serene loop trail offers a peaceful escape, connecting directly to the 370-acre Leon Levy Preserve, owned by the Town of Lewisboro and protected forever

with a WLT conservation easement. Donated to WLT in 2018, Mill River Preserve has been carefully restored with help from dedicated volunteers who worked tirelessly to prepare it for opening to the public.

**"As someone who has spent countless hours creating trails, I know the power of a well-loved outdoor space," says George Scott, a volunteer with the Town of Lewisboro Trail Volunteers. "Mill River Preserve is a place where people can connect with nature, find inspiration, and experience the beauty of our region's landscapes."**

By protecting this land with your help, we're securing a healthier, more resilient future for both people and nature. We invite you to explore Mill River Preserve and be part of this lasting legacy.

**LEARN MORE AND GET DIRECTIONS AT**  
**[westchesterlandtrust.org](https://westchesterlandtrust.org)**

[westchesterlandtrust.org](https://westchesterlandtrust.org) 3



# Clearing the Way for Conservation

A NEW CHAPTER FOR THE LAND AT LITTLE POND PRESERVE

*“People often think of conservation as simply protecting what’s already wild. But sometimes, the most important work happens after it is saved—when we take steps to restore and renew the land.”*

—Janelle Robbins,  
WLT VP of Conservation



Little Pond de-development in progress. Photo by Ben Kleist

**Conserving land isn’t always as simple as placing a boundary around it. Sometimes, the path to preservation requires undoing decades of human impact—a process that takes time, patience, and dedication. That’s exactly what we undertook at Little Pond Preserve, a stunning 174-acre landscape in Patterson, NY, where protecting nature meant first removing what no longer served the land.**

Little Pond Preserve was once home to the Yonkers YMCA Boys Camp, a hunting lodge, and most recently, a private residence with rental cabins. Before it could truly return to nature, the property needed extensive de-development—a meticulous process of planning, permitting, and demolishing buildings, removing debris, and restoring the land’s natural integrity.

## **The Path to Restoration**

Over the past year, WLT removed a large main house, 12 cabins, and other outbuildings, along with the utilities that served the former mountaintop community. This work was not just about tearing down structures—it was about returning the land to nature. The cleanup required asbestos testing and abatement, demolition, and the proper disposal of materials, ensuring that nothing would compromise the preserve’s ecological value.



The land now looks like there were never buildings on it. Little Pond Preserve sits within the Great Swamp watershed, an ecologically significant area that helps filter drinking water and provide habitat for rare plant and animal species. By removing human-built structures and allowing native ecosystems to recover, WLT is ensuring that this land will forever serve as a refuge for wildlife, water, and the future of conservation.

### Sharing a Legacy of Stewardship

For Paula Matta, who, along with her late husband Makram, sold the property to WLT, seeing the land restored and protected forever is deeply meaningful. As owners of the property since the 1970s, the Matta family worked to safeguard its natural features—including its rare floating bog, beaver populations, and unique plant species. While the journey to conservation isn't always easy, Paula knew it was worth it.

Paula describes working with Westchester Land Trust as “a blessing,” and reflects, “The land has given so much to people over the years. Now, it’s time to let it heal, to let nature take the lead.”

The transformation of Little Pond Preserve is a powerful reminder that protecting land is not just about holding the line against development—it’s about reclaiming, restoring, and renewing nature. Thanks to your support, this land will no longer be shaped by human use, but by the rhythms of nature, as a sanctuary and retreat for generations to come.

 **LEARN MORE ABOUT THE DE-DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN OUR LITTLE POND STORY MAP AT [bit.ly/WLTlittlepond](https://bit.ly/WLTlittlepond).**



Little Pond's pristine floating bog.  
Photo by Ben Kleist

## *Yes, You Will Be Able to Visit!*

Upon completion of the entire de-development and restoration process, this land will be sold to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to become part of the adjacent Cranberry Mountain Wildlife Management Area.

Sign up to get updates on this project at [bit.ly/WLTnewssignup](https://bit.ly/WLTnewssignup).



Before and after de-development work. Photo by Ben Kleist



# Protecting Beautiful Bedford

THE LATEST CONSERVATION SUCCESS IN THE  
TOWN WESTCHESTER LAND TRUST CALLS HOME

Conserved land in Bedford. Photo by Jody Hughes

**We're celebrating a major conservation win in Bedford, a 44.75-acre property is now under an expanded conservation easement with WLT. That means even more land is safeguarded for the community.**

*Did You Know: Together, we have protected more than 1,650 acres in Bedford.*

This beautiful landscape, home to rare plants and animals, is part of a 933-acre core forest that helps preserve Bedford's connected natural spaces. It also plays a vital role in the health of the Croton Reservoir System, which provides clean drinking water for nine million people. Thanks to forward-thinking landowners and a shared commitment to conservation, this land will remain a haven for nature forever. By taking action today, we can work together to secure a healthier, more resilient future for all.

 **WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT LAND PROTECTION? CONTACT [gentian@westchesterlandtrust.org](mailto:gentian@westchesterlandtrust.org).**

Photo by Cheyne Little

## *Saving Land, One Document at a Time*

Throughout winter, Cheyne Little could often be found at Westchester Land Trust's office, methodically bopping between rows of packed filing cabinets and a quietly whirring scanner.

Her meticulous work is part of an ongoing effort to digitize decades of conservation easement records. "I typically volunteer outside on preserves and farms, but this project has opened my eyes to WLT's long-term impact," she explains.

"Some easements have a 60-plus-year documentation history," she notes. "Working

with those documents really brings the 'in perpetuity' part of the mission to life."

Cheyne first connected with us while volunteering at the Peekskill Regeneration Farm, where she met WLT staff leading students in planting a native pollinator garden. For Cheyne, volunteering isn't just about giving back—it's also deeply fulfilling.

"Finding places to connect with my local community and gift my time and skills," she shares, "has given back to my mental health and happiness exponentially."



# CONSERVATION EASEMENT CORNER

A conservation easement is a legal agreement that restricts development to protect a property's conservation values. Whether you have one on your land already or are interested in learning more about this type of protection, this page is for you.



Photo by Jody Hughes

## Forever Protected, Forever Evolving

Your land is protected forever, but that doesn't mean it never changes. Whether you're seeing invasive species move in or you'd like to make permissible improvements, there may be options to help you access, enjoy, and enhance your easement.

## Discoveries on the Land

When we're out monitoring the land, we often come across strange and fascinating objects. What's the coolest thing found in the woods so far in 2025? A medicine bottle 'Syrup of Hypophosphites' dated from around 1900. Or a decades-old can (pictured above) that reminds us that littering is a careless act that can have long-term impacts.

## Spot Critters on Your Easement

We love to hear stories, or even better, see pictures and videos of wildlife on our conservation easements. Send us your content and we may feature it here in the future.

## Selling Your Property?

Conservation easements stay with the land forever, but the landowner may change. If you are a current easement owner and are planning a move, please contact us. We can ensure all interested parties understand the conservation easement and make ourselves available to answer questions.

The conservation easement also needs to be referenced in the new deed, a fact that often gets overlooked. Open conversations and clear communication can reduce the risk of potential violations due to misunderstandings.

## MEET YOUR *Easement Team* AT VIRTUAL OFFICE HOURS



Join (from left) Jody Hughes and Gentian Falstrom for Virtual Office Hours on April 30 from 4-6 PM to ask all your easement questions.

**Register at [bit.ly/WLThours](https://bit.ly/WLThours).**

Questions? If you already own land under an easement, contact [jody@westchesterlandtrust.org](mailto:jody@westchesterlandtrust.org) and for new easements, contact [gentian@westchesterlandtrust.org](mailto:gentian@westchesterlandtrust.org)

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## Westchester Land Trust

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# FIELDS OF GOLD

Celebrating Champions of New Horizons

**SATURDAY, JUNE 7, 2025 AT 6 PM**  
Ivanna Farm | Mount Kisco

**Give today, make a difference forever.** Including Westchester Land Trust in your estate planning leaves a lasting legacy of conservation for you and your family. To learn more about the impact you can make, contact Kara Whelan at [kara@westchesterlandtrust.org](mailto:kara@westchesterlandtrust.org).



**ON THE COVER:** Otter resting on a log in Tarrytown. Photo by David Michael, WLT Advisory Board



*New partnership!*

