



Westchester Land Trust



SUMMER 2026 NEWSLETTER



WHERE HOPE COMES TO LIFE

*Connection, Abundance, and
Community in Action*

A group of children and adults are gathered outdoors at Sugar Hill Farm, participating in a growing season kickoff. They are focused on planting seeds in the soil. The scene is bright and sunny, with trees and a white car visible in the background. The children are wearing casual clothing, and some are wearing hats. The adults are also dressed casually, and one man is holding a smartphone. The overall atmosphere is one of community and environmental stewardship.

A Letter from Our Program Manager

Dear Friends,

At our Sugar Hill Farm growing season kickoff this April, more than 60 people gathered to welcome spring. Volunteers worked side by side, local partners shared their knowledge, children made art and explored the Pollinator Pop-Up, and a young boy named Jameson planted a carrot seed.

Two weeks later, he returned with his dad, expecting to find an orange carrot peeking out of the soil. Instead, he discovered that growing something takes a little more time. He was fascinated and couldn't wait to come back again.

That small moment captures what I love about programs at Westchester Land Trust. Protecting land forever is at the heart of our work. But when people experience that land, planting a seed, discovering a pollinator, growing food for a neighbor, or learning on a trail, protected places become part of our lives. We understand not only that the land matters, but why.

I felt that same sense of possibility at the kickoff when children planted seeds using garden tools forged from reclaimed firearms through a Guns to Gardens program. Together, we reflected on the transformation of something that once caused harm into something that could nurture new life. Then, as the group sang "This Little Light of Mine," the words shifted: This little seed of mine, I'm going to let it grow.

That spirit runs throughout this issue, in stories of food traveling from farm to table, meadows coming alive with native plants and pollinators, and communities learning from the land and one another.

I hope you'll also find an invitation to come explore, learn something new, lend a hand, and bring someone you love to share a connection with nature. There are so many ways to experience the land you help protect and there is always a place for you here.

I hope to see you out on the land this summer.

Warmly,
Kim Fendrich
Program Manager

Children plant seeds at the growing season kickoff celebration at Sugar Hill Farm in April. Photo by Mike Surdej



A Place Where Hope Grows

Along the Hudson River in Ossining, Westchester Land Trust and the Dominican Sisters of Hope built a partnership grounded in a simple belief: caring for land also means caring for the people and wildlife connected to it.

In 2018, the Sisters donated a conservation easement protecting 34 acres of Mariandale's 61-acre property, ensuring its meadows, forest, and a small stream will remain protected forever.

Development is permanently limited, but people are free to enjoy the land through passive recreation and certain agricultural uses. Because water from this land flows to the Hudson River, protecting it also supports water quality, wildlife corridors, open space, and treasured views.

This June, Mariandale provided a beautiful and fitting setting for WLT's annual benefit, Hope on the Hudson. Together, we celebrated the people and partnerships that make conservation possible and honored the Dominican Sisters of Hope for their enduring commitment to protecting this remarkable landscape, echoing the work made possible by our supporters every day.

A Meadow in Transformation

Permanent protection is the promise; caring for the land is how that promise comes to life. Based on extensive experience at our own preserves, WLT helped the Sisters evaluate ways to manage invasive plants including mugwort, tree-of-heaven, and knotweed. That work is supported by a \$100,000 pollinator habitat restoration grant from the New York Community Trust, which also funds similar work at WLT. As part of these efforts, the Sisters are restoring 5.5 acres of meadow to make way for native pollinator habitat through solarization, native plantings, and the same conservation goats from Fat and Sassy Goats that visited our Tom Burke Preserve in Bedford.

WLT documented the meadow through drone imagery during solarization (a process that uses the sun's heat to remove unwanted plants) and will return before native planting begins to capture the next stage of its transformation. The partnership has also spurred programs on the land, including eagle spotting, the Pollinator Pop-Up, and other shared learning experiences.

The work at Mariandale reminds us that every meadow restored, stream protected, and native plant grown strengthens a larger living landscape, one that we all depend on far beyond property lines.



Conservation goats snack on mugwort to make space for native plant growth. These goats also helped with a habitat restoration at WLT's Tom Burke Preserve in Bedford earlier this year. Photo by the Dominican Sisters of Hope

WHY GOATS?

Goats happily eat many plants we'd rather see less of, including invasive mugwort. By grazing vegetation down repeatedly, they can help weaken unwanted plants while avoiding erosion and soil compaction common in other methods. At Mariandale, WLT preserves, and beyond, their appetite is helping make room for healthier native meadows.

Hungry goats, happy meadows.

Seven Generations, One Shared Hope

At Mariandale, a landscape protected forever through a WLT conservation easement, there is space for restoration, reflection, and a deeper understanding of our shared history.

That fuller story will take center stage on Wednesday, August 19, with a screening of the documentary, *Seven Generations of Hope*, at the Bedford Playhouse.

"Our relationship with the Stockbridge-Munsee community has deepened our understanding of what it means to care for this land," said Sister Lorelle Elcock. "Seven Generations of Hope is an invitation to listen, learn, and consider how acknowledging the past can help us build more honest and hopeful relationships for the future."

The film follows Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican youth as they return to their ancestral homelands and encounter an unexpected partnership with the Dominican Sisters of Hope that transforms both groups. Together, their experiences reveal what can become possible when communities face a complicated history with honesty.

The screening invites us to consider another dimension of our relationship with land: understanding its history, listening to the people connected to it, and making thoughtful choices about what we carry forward.

Following the screening, guests are invited to stay for a panel conversation and reception exploring history, healing, and stewardship,

featuring representatives from Tribal Members of the Stockbridge Munsee Band of Mohicans, Westchester Land Trust, the New York Community Trust, the Dominican Sisters of Hope, and filmmaker Joe Plante.

TURN HOPE INTO ACTION

Join us this summer to learn, explore, lend a hand, or simply spend time outside together. Visit our website to get involved:

AUGUST 19—Seven Generations of Hope Screening | Bedford

SEPTEMBER 12—Invasive Removal at Tom Burke Preserve | Bedford

SEPTEMBER 13—Pollinator Pop-Up at Stuart's Farm | Granite Springs

SEPTEMBER 26—A Journey Through Time: Geology Hike | Pound Ridge

Visit our website to learn more and buy tickets.

Growing Good in Mini Gardens

Now in its fourth season, WLT's grow bag program has become a beloved spring tradition—one that brings neighbors together to grow fresh food, share knowledge, and experience the joy of planting something of their own.

This year, 250 portable gardens are taking root across our region. Each one offers an accessible way to grow veggies and herbs at home, connect with the natural world, and discover how food, pollinators, healthy soil, and community are all connected.

This spring, WLT joined the Zeta Nu Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., D.I.G. Farm, and First Presbyterian Church of Mount Vernon for the church's community garden kickoff. We returned for another milestone: the opening day of Mount Vernon's newest farmers market. At each gathering, grow bags offered a welcoming way for people to begin gardening.

The learning was just as important as the planting. WLT's conservation apprentices joined the celebration, while Westchester County CompostED demonstrated how food scraps can become rich soil instead of waste. Girl Scout troops filled their grow bags, asked questions, and discovered the fun of growing food.



Planting a grow bag. Photo by Brien Adams

By the end of the season, these 250 grow bags will have produced far more than vegetables and herbs. For hundreds of neighbors, they offer the experience of planting something, tending it, watching it grow, and discovering firsthand that even a small patch of soil can connect us to our food, our environment, and one another.

"I love how engaged the girls were in their ability to have hands-on experiences, as well as being able to ask and answer questions. They loved being able to get their hands dirty and plant."

—Tisha Brizz, Girl Scout troop leader



Girl Scouts assembling their grow bags this spring.
Photo by Jake Sacket

A Season of Abundance

At Sugar Hill Farm, nestled within WLT's headquarters, each harvest has a destination, and every destination is rooted in care.

The gardens at Sugar Hill Farm are full of color in midsummer. But the real measure of abundance is not only what's growing—it's where the food goes and what happens when it arrives.

On a Thursday in July, WLT staffers brought produce harvested at Sugar Hill Farm to First Presbyterian Church of Mount Vernon. There, Marcia Morgan and a dedicated team of volunteers transformed fresh ingredients into ready-to-eat meals for 100 neighbors, distributed through the Community Service Associates food pantry.

The kitchen came alive with chicken baked in a tomato-onion sauce. Rice and beans were simmered with coconut milk and finished with onions and scallions from Sugar Hill Farm. Zucchini was seasoned and roasted; kale and Swiss chard were sautéed with onions and peppers. And Marcia already baked cornbread and brownies that morning, adding a sweet treat to the meal.

As people chopped, cooked, and chatted, Marcia shared her secret ingredient to making food so tasty, "You have to shake, shake, shake all the spices until it tastes good," she laughed.

This is what local food systems can look like: land cared for with intention, volunteers sharing their time, partners bringing their strengths, and fresh produce becoming a welcoming meal. A harvest begins in the soil, but its impact travels—from farm, to kitchen, to table, to community.

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GET YOUR HANDS DIRTY

Spend a summer morning at Sugar Hill Farm! Learn about sustainable growing, meet fellow volunteers, and help grow food for neighbors in our community. Join us Tuesday and Thursday mornings through October. Sign up on our website!

No experience necessary. All are welcome.





START WHERE YOU ARE

Replacing invasive plants with native favorites like rough blazing star, milkweed, mountain mint, common oxeye, or bee balm can provide food and habitat for pollinators and other wildlife.

Small actions drive big change.



Small Spaces, Big Impact

A meadow doesn't have to be enormous to be alive with activity.

On a summer day, the small meadow at WLT's Sugar Hill Farm headquarters hums with bees, butterflies, beetles, and birds moving among native flowers. If you look closely, there's always something happening.

These small habitats matter. As development and other pressures reduce and fragment the places wildlife depend on, patches of native habitat can provide food, shelter, and places to reproduce, and help connect larger natural areas across our communities.

Healthy meadows and prairies can support extraordinary biodiversity, with different plants offering nectar, pollen, seeds, and shelter throughout the seasons. Native flowers also bring changing colors, textures, and activity to the land.

Creating habitat doesn't require a large property or a big budget. Replacing even one invasive plant, such as burning bush, multiflora rose, or barberry, with a native flower or shrub is a meaningful place to start. One wildlife-friendly yard may be small, but together, yards, gardens, meadows, preserves, and other green spaces can create a network of habitat across a neighborhood.

Conservation can begin almost anywhere. By paying attention to what we plant and making a little more room for nature, each of us can help the plants and animals that share our communities thrive.



Aerial view of the front meadow at
Westchester Land Trust's Sugar Hill Farm headquarters.
Photo by Ben Kleist

PLANTING POCKET MEADOWS

This spring, we hosted a meadow management workshop to share tips and tricks for growing healthy habitat, no matter the size of the meadow. WLT staff taught attendees how to choose plants, sow seeds, and remove unwanted vegetation. Now, the meadow at Sugar Hill Farm is bursting with life and color, supporting vibrant populations of pollinators.

Every bit of habitat counts.

You're invited to...

The Autumn Party

AT MAPLE GROVE FARM

THURSDAY • SEPTEMBER 24 • 5:30-8PM • BEDFORD, NY

*Celebrate the season with a beautiful evening at Maple Grove Farm,
bringing our community together in support of the forests, farms, meadows,
and clean water we all depend on.*



FAMILY FRIENDLY • LAWN GAMES • LOCAL PROVISIONS

OPEN BAR • LIVE MUSIC BY RHO & THE NOMADS



Get your tickets today!

SCAN THE QR CODE
OR VISIT

WESTCHESTERLANDTRUST.ORG

TICKETS START AT

\$150



(Children's tickets available)

HOST COMMITTEE

George Bianco, Host

Matt and Taylor Boddy, Smity Conjeevaram, Kyle Ellis, Kylan Johnson,
Stephanie Spiegel, Amanda Victoria, Jessica Watts, Jenn Wege, Matt Young

For questions or to inquire about sponsorship opportunities

CONTACT CAROLINA COONEY

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LET HOPE GROW BEYOND A LIFETIME

A child planting a seed. A meadow buzzing with pollinators. Fresh food shared around a table. A forest trail waiting to be explored.

These moments are possible because someone chose to care for the land and for the people who will experience it long after us.

By including Westchester Land Trust in your estate plans, you can help ensure that the forests, farms, waterways, trails, and open spaces woven through our communities remain protected, cared for, and full of life for generations to come.

To explore the many ways a planned gift can support WLT's mission, contact Kara Whelan at 914-234-6692 ext. 12 or kara@westchesterlandtrust.org.

ON THE COVER: Sunflower blooming at Sugar Hill Farm. Photo by Jack Sacket

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- Sound Finances
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