everwild
land trust

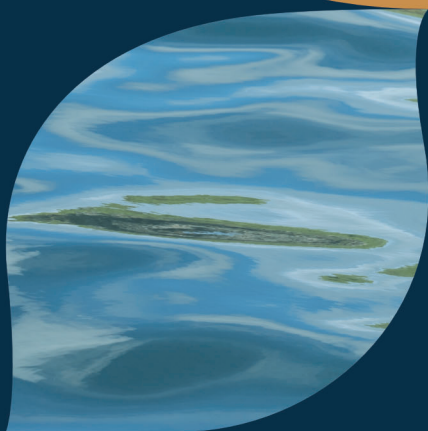
The future of the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy





Field Notes

Quarterly newsletter



August 2026

everwild
land trust

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Cover (top to bottom):
AIS Survey. Sandra Emke.
Great Blue Heron. Sunny Lo.
Water Ripples. Rob F.
Back: *Fall foliage hike.* Whitney Gleason.

Mission

To lead, inspire, and nurture collective stewardship of the life, lands, and waters of the Chautauqua region, uniting action, science, education, and community in perpetuity.

Staff

Whitney Gleason, Executive Director
Twan Leenders, Director of Conservation
Justina Dore, Director of Development
Claire Johnson Baker, Operations Assistant
Carol Markham, Conservationist
Bethany O'Hagan, Stewardship & Rewilding
Daniel Conklin, Land Acquisition Coordinator
Kim Turner, Communications Designer
Sydney Maggio, Summer Intern
Finn Casswell, Preserve Management Assistant

Board of Directors

Officers:

Janis Bowman, Chair
William Ward, Vice Chair
Kaitlyn Bentley, Treasurer

Directors:

Kathleen Ebersole, Heather Kinal, Michael Jabot, Rebecca Nystrom, Pete Pedersen, Kristofor Sellstrom, Mackenzie Shults, Mary Beth Southwick, Robyn Steele, William Thomas, Deborah Trefts, Ruth Wahl

Emeritus:

William Locke, Michael Lyons, Thomas Small, Arthur Webster

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Belted Kingfishers. Sunny Lo.

From the Canopy

A note from our leaders

Dear friends,

Summer is in full swing and our region is alive. Alive with plants, wildlife, the gorgeous lakes and waterways we have throughout our county; and alive with people from near and far who choose to spend their summers here because of that abundance of life and water. There is something remarkable about the way this place comes into itself this time of year. It's a privilege, and a responsibility that we recognize and don't take lightly at Everwild.

This is our busiest season in the field, as our team is out on the land and water doing maintenance, restoration projects, and invasive species detection and removal. This work often happens quietly, but its reach is long. We both feel so fortunate to have such a dedicated crew that works hard through every season to protect the ecosystems that sustain our communities, wildlife, and waters.

We are also excited and proud to be announcing our 2026 lands campaign – Twice the Land, Forever Protected. An initiative to provide permanent protection for over 1,000 acres of land throughout our region. This is meaningful, tangible work, and we're making real progress. But we are going to need your partnership to be able to see it through.

Summer is a time when we all feel naturally more connected to this place we call home. It is easy to look around and appreciate what we have and to think about what we want to pass forward. We are both thankful that you're here, and that Everwild Land Trust's work is meaningful to you. Together our ability to care for the region's lands and waters is strengthened, and there is so much hope for the future generations who will enjoy summers yet to come here in this beautiful place.

With warmth and gratitude,

Whitney Gleason
Executive Director

Janis L. Bowman
Board Chair



Judy Maskrey monitoring Whitney Bay Lakeshore Forest. Bethany O'Hagan.

Support Through Stewardship

An interview with Judy Maskrey

Judy and Fred Maskrey have been either visiting or living on the shores of Chautauqua Lake for 45 Years. Admiring Whitney Bay area every day out their window sparked a desire in Judy's heart to help protect it from being developed. When she first heard that Everwild, then Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy, was raising funds to protect it in perpetuity, she made her first of many contributions to help secure the land. She witnessed the direct impact of that work as plants and wildlife flourished on the newly secured nature preserve.

When Judy retired, she became more involved and joined our Board of Directors. With an accounting background, she thought her talents may be put to use as the board treasurer. She never took on the role as treasurer, but she did become the board secretary, as well as the development committee chair. While serving on the board, and with the encouragement of Jonathan Townsend, former Lands Specialist, Judy became a volunteer steward for the same nature preserve that started it all, Whitney Bay Lakeshore Forest, which was secured in 2014. As if volunteering on the board, serving as a committee chair, and stewarding a preserve wasn't enough, in 2016 she took on the steward responsibilities for Prendergast Creek Wetland Preserve as well.

Eventually Judy rotated off the board, but she continues to actively support our mission and dedicates her time as a steward for both preserves. When asked why she chooses to give her time and energy to our work, Judy shared her excitement around being part of an organization that does so much throughout the community. As she put it, "where would we be without John Jablonski? He had a vision that couldn't have been executed without the wonderful team that he put together. With Whitney now at the helm, she can take that dream into the future with her excited, youthful staff who are able to adapt to the many changing environmental aspects that this region faces". Judy enjoys watching over the preserves because she sees the impact their protection has on our region and the lake she cares so much about. She loves that she can monitor these preserves in the way she loves best – kayaking! As Judy says, "what could be better than that?"

Interested in becoming a preserve steward? Please email Bethany@everwildlt.org

New Threats Require New Solutions

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) update

Everwild Land Trust continues to lead efforts in aquatic invasive species (AIS) prevention, early detection, and rapid response on Chautauqua Lake. With a strong focus on emerging threats, our early detection surveys and on-water educational programs are once again taking place this summer.

In addition, Everwild staff lead removal efforts for invasive water chestnut and closely monitor populations of other recent arrivals in the lake, most notably starry stonewort. This invasive macroalga was first identified in Chautauqua Lake in 2009. For over a decade, it persisted in small, inconspicuous patches in the north basin. However, in 2022, it began appearing near marinas in both basins and expanded rapidly.

Starry stonewort spreads easily through fragmentation and via small, star-shaped reproductive structures called bulbils, which function similarly to seeds in vascular plants. These bulbils form on root-like rhizoids beneath the lakebed. Although the plant dies back completely in early winter, it regrows in early summer from these bulbils. Growth accelerates later in the season, often resulting in dense mats that crowd out native vegetation and disrupt ecosystem balance.

Current infestations are found in Ashville Bay, near Prendergast Point, and near Elmhurst. In 2025, a combination of Diver-Assisted Suction Harvesting (DASH) and Mobitrac equipment was used to combat the spread, in an effort led by Everwild with critical support by partners including CLA, CLWMA, and the towns of North Harmony and Chautauqua. This targeted strategy enabled large-scale removal in areas dominated by starry stonewort, while also allowing for precise extraction in mixed vegetation zones to preserve native biodiversity. Monitoring of these methods continue in 2026 to evaluate long-term effectiveness.

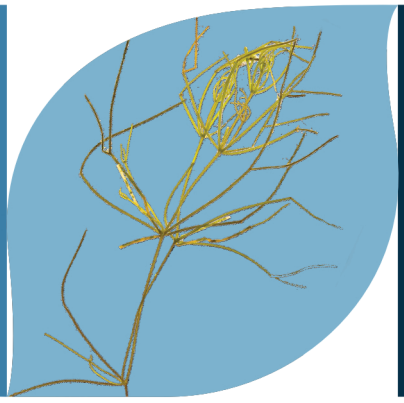
In parallel with in-lake management efforts, Everwild staff are leading a mesocosm experiment to test new remediation approaches under controlled conditions. A mesocosm is a simulated natural environment that allows for small-scale experimentation before applying methods in the field. Several mesocosms are currently in place to cultivate starry stonewort from bulbils using lake water and sediment, closely replicating the natural conditions of Chautauqua Lake.

Throughout the summer, we will test various combinations of algaecides, mechanical removal techniques, and a potential biodegradable barrier designed to prevent bulbils from germinating. Because relatively little is known about the biology of starry stonewort in this region, these experiments are critical for improving our understanding and informing management strategies.

Each lake presents unique challenges, and because starry stonewort is still relatively new to North America, there is no universal solution for its control. These efforts are aimed at identifying the most effective, lake-specific management approaches for Chautauqua Lake. We are confident that this research will help guide the development of a long-term strategy to protect and restore these waters.

Left: *Daniel and Sydney collecting lake sediment for mesocosm studies.* Twan Leenders. **Right:** *Starry stonewort. Twan Leenders.*





Birdies and Eagles

Golfing for a good cause

Thank you to everyone who supported our Charity Pro-Am Golf Tournament on June 29, 2026 at Chatuauqua Golf Club. Thanks to your participation and generosity, we exceeded the $40,000 goal to support our mission to protect the lands and waters that make the Chautauqua region such a special place to live, work, and play. We were fortunate to enjoy a beautiful day on the course while bringing together a community of supporters committed to conservation.

We extend our sincere appreciation to our host, Chautauqua Golf Club, for their outstanding partnership and hospitality, and to our presenting sponsor, Snug Harbor Marine and Service Center, for their leadership and support of this event. We are deeply grateful to Gary and Colleen Reeve along with the many other sponsors whose contributions helped make the tournament a success.



Save the Date

Wine on the Trail
Aug. 21, 6:30 p.m. at CHQ Lake Outlet Greenway
Sep. 18, 6:30 p.m. at Mary & Tom Huhn Nature Park
Oct. 16, 6:30 p.m. at Cassadaga Lakes Nature Park
Nov. 20, 6:30 p.m. at Browns Creek Tributary Forest Preserve

Hidden Harvest: Native Plant Discovery Hike
Aug. 22, 10:00 a.m. at Cassadaga Lakes Nature Park

Plant Bingo
Aug. 25, 7:00 p.m. at Brazil Lounge

Curiosity Club at Prendergast Library
- **Taking a Walk on Jamestown's Wild Side**
  Sep. 1, 5:30 p.m.
- **What's a Nature Preserve Anyway?**
  Sep. 8, 5:30 p.m.
- **Gather & Grow: Native Plant Seed Collection**
  Sep. 15, 5:30 p.m.
- **More Than Meets the Eye: Prize-winning Plumage & Bird Behaviors**
  Sep. 22, 5:30 p.m.
- **Unwanted Guests: The Truth About Invasive Plants**
  Sep. 29, 5:30 p.m.

Gather & Grow: Native Seed Workshop
Sep. 22, 6:00 p.m. at Dunkirk Community Native Garden

Forest Bathing: A Mindful Journey into Nature
Sep. 26, 10:00 a.m. at CHQ Creek Oxbow Forest Preserve

Coffee on the Trail
Sep. 27, time & location TBD

Learn more and register at everwildlandtrust.org/events

On-water Classrooms

Be part of the solution



There are still several On-water Classroom sessions left this season. Join Everwild staff to help survey and learn how to identify, monitor, and remove aquatic invasive species (AIS), such as water chestnut, found in and around Chautauqua Lake.

- August 7, 9:00 a.m., Celoron Park Launch
- August 12, 8:30 a.m., Lakeside Park, Mayville
- August 24, 2:00 p.m., Lakeside Park, Mayville
- September 2, 10:00 a.m., McCrea Point Park
- September 16, 2:00 p.m., Celoron Park Launch

Register at everwildlandtrust.org/events

Twice the Land, Forever Protected

A campaign to double the acreage of our preserves

Across the Chautauqua region, extraordinary natural places quietly sustain our communities every day. Wetlands filter the water flowing into our lakes and streams. Forests provide habitat for wildlife and help store carbon. Meadows support pollinators that are essential to healthy ecosystems. These lands are not only beautiful, they are working landscapes that protect our water, support biodiversity, and strengthen the quality of life that makes this region such a special place to call home.

Today, many of these places stand at a crossroads.

For more than 36 years, Everwild Land Trust has worked to protect the lands and waters that define the Chautauqua region. Through partnerships with landowners, local communities, conservation organizations, and supporters like you, we have preserved acres of forests, wetlands, shorelines, and wildlife habitat.

Now, we are facing a once-in-a-generation opportunity. Several of the most ecologically important properties in our region have become available for permanent protection at the same time. These landscapes include rare wetlands, mature forests, floodplains, wildlife corridors, and critical waterways that help sustain the health of Chautauqua Lake, Bear Lake, Cassadaga Lake, and their surrounding watersheds.

That is why Everwild has launched the Twice the Land, Forever Protected Campaign—an ambitious effort to double the acreage of our preserve network and secure some of the region's most important natural lands forever.

Threats and pressures



Fragmentation that breaks apart wildlife corridors, reducing biodiversity and contributing to dangerous migration paths.



Pollution and runoff into lakes and waterways, leading to declining water quality, increased algal blooms, and damage to ecosystems.



Development and land clearing that eliminate habitat and degrade water quality.



Loss of wetlands, which are essential for flood mitigation and nutrient filtering.

The importance of land protection



Safeguard clean water by filtering runoff and stabilizing banks.



Provide crucial habitat for native plants and animals, some rare or endangered.



Store carbon and support climate resilience through intact forests and wetlands.



Protect our way of life and economy by securing outdoor recreational opportunities, scenic beauty, and community.

A Rare Conservation Opportunity

Through years of relationship-building, scientific assessment, and collaboration with landowners, Everwild is positioned to protect 13 exceptional properties throughout the region.

These landscapes include the Bear Lake Conservation Area in Stockton, home to one of the region's most significant wetland ecosystems; the Conewango Forest Conservation Easement, featuring nearly 70 acres of mature forest and stream habitat; and a floodplain treasure along Cassadaga Creek that supports freshwater mussels, bald eagles, and wood turtles.

Other priority projects include shoreline and wetland protection along Chautauqua Lake, forest restoration sites, emerging wetland complexes, and critical wildlife corridors that connect existing protected lands.



Together, these properties represent hundreds of acres of wetlands, forests, streams, floodplains, and wildlife habitat. Conserving them would dramatically expand Everwild's impact and create larger, more resilient landscapes capable of supporting healthy ecosystems for generations to come.

Opportunities of this scale are extraordinarily rare. The chance to protect so many high-priority conservation properties at once may not come again.

Protecting Land Forever

Land conservation is about more than acquiring property. It is about ensuring that these places remain protected and cared for in perpetuity.

Everwild uses nationally accredited conservation practices and tools to achieve permanent protection. Depending on the property, this may include direct land acquisition or conservation easements that allow landowners to retain ownership while safeguarding the conservation values of their land. Long-term stewardship plans, ecological monitoring, habitat restoration, and dedicated stewardship funding ensure these lands remain healthy and protected well into the future.

Every acre conserved today becomes part of a lasting legacy for future generations.

How You Can Help

The Twice the Land, Forever Protected Campaign represents an investment in clean water, healthy wildlife habitat, climate resilience, and the future of the Chautauqua region. The success of this campaign depends on the support of people who care deeply about the places that make our region unique. Whether you are a longtime conservation advocate, a lake lover, a hiker, a hunter, a birdwatcher, or simply someone who values the beauty and character of our community, you have a role to play.

Your gift will help secure these extraordinary landscapes and ensure they remain protected forever. Together, we can safeguard critical wetlands, preserve mature forests, strengthen wildlife corridors, protect water quality, and create a lasting conservation legacy for future generations.

This is a rare moment. A rare opportunity. And a rare chance to shape the future of our region. Join us in protecting the lands and waters that sustain us all.

Together, we can protect twice the land — forever.

Please contact Justina Dore at Justina@everwildlt.org for more information.



Softening Shorelines

A Yard Smarts success story

What happens when passionate neighbors, a shared love of Chautauqua Lake, and a commitment to native plants come together? A beautiful and beneficial shoreline transformation!

Robyn and Tom Steele, residents of Crosswinds Marina Community and longtime advocates for lake-friendly landscaping and the health of Chautauqua Lake, spearheaded this shoreline restoration project. Robyn serves on Everwild's board of directors, and over the past several years has had multiple Yard Smarts consultations with Conservationist Carol Markham. Each time, Robyn has reinforced how deeply she and Tom care about protecting and improving the lake.

Located on the north end of Chautauqua Lake in Dewittville, Crosswinds Marina Community was developed in the 1980s and remains the only marina community on the lake's north basin.





Top: *Robyn Steele and Carol Markham.*
Center: *Crosswinds buffer during the "lasagna gardening" phase.*
Bottom: *Crosswinds buffer after selected plants were installed.*
Photos by Carol Markham.

From the beginning, the developers intentionally preserved green space along the shoreline and included a protective lakeshore buffer near the marina to help safeguard the lake. Over time, however, this area became overgrown with aggressive and invasive vegetation, diminishing both its ecological function and overall health.

Last fall, inspired by Yard Smarts principles, Robyn, Tom, and a group of dedicated community members came together to restore a section of the Crosswinds shoreline. Volunteers cleared the overgrowth and rebuilt the area using the "lasagna gardening" method: layering cardboard, newspaper, straw, soil, and mulch to naturally suppress weeds and prepare healthy planting beds.

This spring, the transformation continued with a native planting design by Carol. More than 40 native species from Royal Fern Nursery were installed, including New York Ironweed, Joe-Pye Weed, Mountain Mint, and other plants chosen for their beauty and ecological value.

The result is a vibrant lakeside buffer that reflects strong yard smarts principles in action: replacing aggressive invasives with thoughtfully selected native plants that support pollinators, improve shoreline habitat, and help protect water quality. It stands as a lasting example of what can be achieved when community leadership and environmental stewardship come together.

Hidden Gems Beneath the Surface

Freshwater Mussels

Beneath the quiet waters of streams and lakes across Chautauqua County lives an often-overlooked group of animals that plays an outsized role in ecosystem health: freshwater mussels. Despite being unobtrusive, well-camouflaged, and rarely seen, these are among the most imperiled groups of wildlife in North America. Many species found in our area are listed as threatened or endangered, reflecting widespread declines driven by habitat loss, pollution, invasive species, altered waterways, and historic (over)harvesting (even in our region, many of the larger species were collected in large numbers to produce buttons for garments in the 19th and early 20th centuries).

Freshwater mussels serve as natural water filters. A single mussel can process gallons of water each day, removing algae, bacteria, and suspended particles. In doing so, they improve water clarity and quality for fish, wildlife, and people alike. Their presence is often a sign of a healthy aquatic system, while their absence can indicate ecological imbalance. Several species are limited to only a single watershed, and our backyard may be the only place where they occur!





Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of freshwater mussels is their remarkable reproductive strategy. Most native mussel species rely on fish to complete their life cycle. Female mussels release tiny larvae, called glochidia, into the water and some display extraordinary strategies to attach their larvae to the gills or fins of a fish host. Modified sections of their soft tissue, usually hidden within their shells, have evolved to contain the glochidia and mimic a small fish or insect. Acting as a lure, these modified sections of the mantle attract curious fish and the mussel will release its larvae when a suitable host species is close. Once attached, the larvae hitch a ride for some time, developing safely before dropping off as juvenile mussels in new locations throughout the watershed. Several of our local mussel species are picky and only use a few select host fish species or, in one rare case, an aquatic salamander: the mudpuppy.

Despite their resilience and ingenuity, freshwater mussels face mounting challenges. The loss of host fish can directly limit their reproduction. Sedimentation from erosion can smother them, contaminants degrade their habitat, and invasive species such as zebra mussels can outcompete or suffocate native mussel populations.

Protecting freshwater mussels in Chautauqua County means protecting clean water, stable streambanks, and healthy fish communities. By monitoring and safeguarding these quiet custodians of our waterways, we also preserve the broader ecosystems that depend on them—and ultimately, the quality of life in our own communities.

Top: *Giant Floater Mussel displaying its fish-like lure to attract host fish.* Twan Leenders.
Bottom: *Two Giant Floater Mussels in shallow fresh water.* Twan Leenders.

Welcome, New Faces of Everwild

Sydney Maggio
Conservation Intern



Sydney Maggio is a third-year biochemistry major attending Rochester Institute of Technology from Jamestown, NY. Her main focus through the summer is working to remediate the invasive algae, Starry Stonewort, and assisting with other field work projects throughout the season.

With a background in Biology and Chemistry, Sydney is hoping to bring new mitigation ideas to Chautauqua.

She enjoys being both in the lab and in the field doing experiments, hiking, and kayaking. After graduating, Sydney plans to pursue a PhD in chemistry and is eager to gain hands-on environmental science knowledge through her internship with Everwild.

Finn Casswell
Nature Preserve Management Assistant



Finn Caswell is a recent Jamestown High School graduate who has joined the Everwild team for the summer and fall to help make our preserves as welcoming and enjoyable as possible.

He is assisting with preserve maintenance, signing our newest land acquisitions, updating perserve signs, and lending a hand to advance our ecological restoration efforts along the waterways and on Chautauqua Lake.

Finn loves the outdoors and enjoys running, backpacking, camping, biking, climbing, skateboarding, and photography. He is excited to work outdoors in conservation and is especially looking forward to experiencing the special, rarely seen parts of the county that we protect.

Claire Johnson Baker
Operations Assistant



You may recognize Claire's name from her time spent serving on Everwild Land Trust's Board of Directors. She joined the board in January 2025 and served as Board Secretary before transitioning this spring to join the staff team!

Claire has been working as an independent corporate sustainability consultant since returning to Western New York in 2023.

As her career has evolved, Claire has acquired a diverse skillset from experiences in the private and non-profit sectors, and she is excited to put her talents to work behind the scenes at Everwild.

Claire is helping to build capacity by taking on some of our general operations tasks, including assisting with administrative and fundraising responsibilities.

Kim Turner
Communications Designer



Kim Turner joined the Everwild staff team in November 2025. Serving as the Communications Designer, she strives to authentically share the organization's mission with the public. Her goal is to engage and inspire, making the principles of conservation accessible to all.

With an MFA from Indiana University Bloomington and over a decade of experience volunteering and working in the non-profit sector, Kim is grateful to join Everwild where she can seamlessly combine her passions for nature and creativity.

Kim has hit the ground running as we implement the new Everwild Land Trust brand across the organization. Her history with transitioning Audubon Community Nature Center's brand makes her a valued asset to the team, especially during this pivitol time.

Grit and Gratitude

Trail maintenance on our preserves



Since the start of May, every Wednesday at 10 a.m. volunteers gather at different nature preserves for a weekly trail cleanup. These mid-week meetups bring together people who share a simple goal: keeping Everwild Land Trust's trails safe and beautiful, while highlighting the importance of maintaining natural spaces.

The cleanups rotate between different properties, giving participants the chance to explore new trails and nature preserves while making a meaningful impact. One week might involve clearing branches or fallen trees along a shaded forest path; the next could include removing litter near a roadside preserve or trimming overgrowth of invasives along a popular hiking loop. The shifting schedule also spreads care evenly across our most frequented preserves, preventing any single space from becoming neglected.



Beyond the environmental benefits, these gatherings foster a sense of connection to like-minded people, and to our natural environment. Newcomers are always welcomed with enthusiasm as the cleanups are beginner-friendly. Everwild Land Trust staff provide tools, guidance, and safety tips, making the experience approachable for people of all ages and skill levels. Many volunteers appreciate the chance to learn more about local plant species, invasive threats, and conservation practices.

Anyone interested in joining can simply show up at the designated preserve each week. It's a small time commitment with a big impact, and a powerful reminder that caring for nature is a shared responsibility. Please wear comfortable shoes and clothing, and bring a bottle of water and a willingness to pitch in. We hope to see you out there!

Dates and locations can be found at everwildlandtrust.org/events
For questions or to get involved, contact Bethany@everwildlt.org

Top Right: *Bethany, James, Bill at Dobbins Woods Preserve.*

Central Right: *Nancy and Kate at Cassadaga Lakes Nature Park.*

Bottom Middle: *Rich, Jodi, and Michelle at Chautauqua Creek Oxbow Forest Preserve.*

Photos by Bethany O'Hagan.



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