THE 'SHED SHEET

Fall / Winter 2025

NEWSLETTER OF THE CHAUTAUQUA WATERSHED CONSERVANCY

A First Look at a "Wow-Worthy" New Preserve

(by Twan Leenders)

One of the most exciting properties we're on the verge of protecting is a still-unnamed 80-acre parcel along the outflow of Bear Lake. At first glance, much of it might look like "useless land" – a floodplain that spends much of the year underwater when the creek swells with snowmelt and rain. But we see it very differently.



The main channel of the Bear Lake outflow cuts right through the property, with a maze of tributaries, side channels, and bends branching across the floodplain. This complex network acts like a giant sponge – absorbing, storing, and slowly releasing floodwaters. Beavers have joined in, building dams that expand the site's water-holding capacity even further. Beyond flood protection, this slow movement of water through lush, plant-filled channels naturally filters and cleans the flow, benefiting water quality downstream. And given the location of this property, near the very top of the watershed that ultimately ends in the Gulf of Mexico, there is a whole lot of "downstream" that benefits.

When Land Acquisition Coordinator Daniel Conklin and I first visited the site in August, we weren't sure what we'd find. On paper, the site ranked high in our Comprehensive Regional Conservation Implementation Strategy (CRCIS) model which highlights the most ecologically and hydrologically valuable areas in the county. The parcel's location alone made it promising – it drains Bear Lake and feeds into Cassadaga Creek, where we've already documented several sensitive and rare species. Still, nothing compares to boots on the ground. (*continued page 5)*

Early Detection, Rapid Response: Protecting Chautauqua Lake from Aquatic Invasives

(by Daniel Conklin)

CWC continued its leadership this summer in protecting Chautauqua Lake from aquatic invasive species (AIS) through its AIS Early Detection Program. The program trains and mobilizes CWC staff, volunteers, and local partners to monitor the lake, identify invasive plants, and take quick action to keep them from spreading. Using survey data and the iMapInvasives.org reporting system, CWC has been able to track changes over time and coordinate rapid responses when new threats appear.



This year, 13 on-water surveys were conducted across 10 sites, which confirmed the extent of two historic starry stonewort sites, led to the discovery of brittle naiad at two new locations, and identified the current extent of water chestnut in the Lake's outlet. During a public paddle on the Chadakoin River, 400 water chestnut plants were removed, helping move us toward the possibility of full eradication of water chestnut in the outlet. In addition, a number of potential hotspot sites were monitored to ensure no new threats were developing. (*continued page 7)*

CHAUTAUQUA WATERSHED CONSERVANCY

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Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and nationally accredited land trust working to preserve and enhance the quality, scenic beauty, and ecological health of the lands and waters of the Chautauqua region for our community.

From Executive Director Whitney Gleason



Dear Friends,

Fall has arrived in Chautauqua County, and with it a beautiful transformation of our landscape. Those iconic bold oranges, reds, and yellows have painted the forests and fields the CWC community has worked so hard to protect. Their colors and the joy they bring are the perfect reminder of why we do what we do.

This season invites us to slow down and take it all in: the shimmer of a creek through golden leaves, the calls of migrating birds overhead, and the quiet satisfaction of knowing that these places are here, and thriving, because our community cares enough to protect them.

At the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy, we believe conservation is about more than saving land. Our work is about nurturing a shared sense of place and responsibility. The wetlands, forests, and shorelines that we protect are not only beautiful – they are also vital for clean water, healthy habitats, and our region's resilience in the face of a changing climate.

But the truth is that we cannot do this work alone. Every acre we preserve, every mile of stream we restore, and every partnership we build to care for our watersheds is only possible because of your generosity. As we enter the seasons of gratitude and giving, I want to say my own heartfelt thank you to each of you. Your support uplifts our mission and brings lasting change to the landscapes and waters we all cherish. Together we are making our region more beautiful and more resilient.

Looking ahead, I'm happy to share that we're laying the groundwork for an exciting new lands campaign launching in 2026 – one that will nearly double our organization's protected lands and further secure the clean water and natural beauty that define this special place.

Thank you for being such an important part of this growing community of conservation. Together, we are protecting something truly extraordinary.

With so much gratitude,

Whitney

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Let's Give THANKS to our Yards

(by Carol Markham)



Fall yard clean-up doesn't have to mean bagging up every leaf or cutting down every plant. In fact, leaving a little "wildness" behind is one of the best gifts that we can give back to nature – and it ties in perfectly with the spirit of Thanksgiving.

The fallen leaves that cover your lawn? They're not just clutter. They're nature's mulch, keeping the soil cozy through winter while breaking down into nutrients for next spring. They also make a safe blanket for pollinators, fireflies, and all sorts of tiny creatures that need a place to rest until the warmer days return. And those dried flower stalks that look a little scraggly? To birds, they're a Thanksgiving feast! Seed heads from sunflowers, coneflowers, and grasses help keep goldfinches, chickadees, and sparrows fed long after the gardens stop blooming.

By leaving some leaves and stalks, we're really saying "thank you" to the natural world for all it gives us . . . clean air and water, healthy soil, and the food on our own holiday tables. Thanksgiving is about gathering in gratitude, and that gratitude can extend right outside our back doors. When we sit down to a meal of cranberries, squash, and turkey, it's worth remembering that every bite depends on the same cycles of pollination, soil health, and seasonal rest happening in our yards. So, this fall, instead of chasing every leaf into a bag, take a moment to pause, give thanks, and let nature do its quiet work beneath its blanket of autumn.

Clearing the Way

(by Twan Leenders)



2025 marks the third year CWC has overseen the removal of navigational hazards (log jams, fallen trees, and other obstructions) from Chautauqua County's major waterways. As in past years, the work was led by arborist Vince Liuzzo and his skilled crew.

Where possible, hazard trees are felled away from creeks, and submerged logs are lifted out with excavators. In remote sections where equipment can't reach, the crew works from boats, cutting logs into smaller pieces, and winching them from the stream bed.

This year's work was shaped by extreme weather. A snowy winter followed by a very wet spring caused flooding well into June, toppling trees on saturated banks and sweeping dead ash into creeks. Many areas cleared in the past two years quickly filled with new obstacles. Fortunately, the drought that followed lowered water levels, allowing equipment access to areas that are normally unreachable.

Starting in July, crews returned to upper Cassadaga Creek to re-clear hazards identified in 2024, then worked downstream toward the confluence with Conewango Creek, where they are now finishing removal of several large log jams. Once complete, the west branch of the Marden Cobb Waterway Trail (from Kabob on Cassadaga Creek to the Pennsylvania line on Conewango Creek) will be free of obstructions. These sections of waterway have been virtually impassable for decades, but with regular spring maintenance going forward, we expect to stay ahead of the flooding cycle. By next year, this 40.5-mile stretch should be ready for safe, continuous recreational use.

So far in 2025, crews have cleared 23 miles of Cassadaga Creek, removing 71 log jams (each containing 3–20 trees), 30+ hazard trees (dead ash or unstable live trees), and more than 300 additional logs and snags. These efforts don't just open up recreational opportunities – they also strengthen the health of our waterways. Clearing log jams improves water flow, helping floodwaters drain more efficiently and reducing risks to the surrounding communities. It also lessens erosion and improves water quality where obstacles would otherwise cause scouring and bank undercutting. And, of course, it reclaims our creeks and rivers as vibrant recreational assets for residents and visitors alike.

A Legacy of Love for Chautauqua: Art & Carol Webster's Commitment to Conservation

(by Justina Dore)

For Art and Carol Webster, conserving the health and beauty of the Chautauqua region isn't just a cause – it's a lifelong commitment. That's why they've chosen to become members of the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy's Kingfisher Legacy Society, including the CWC in their estate plans to ensure that generations to come can enjoy the area's natural beauty they've cherished for decades.



"My grandparents had their honeymoon here in 1911," Art recalls. "I learned to walk on Forest Lawn Avenue in Maple Springs during World War II when my mom brought us to stay with my grandparents. The cottage is still there. We've been coming back ever since."

The Websters' deep roots in the region are matched by their dedication to its long-term well-being. After decades of summer visits, they made the decision to retire in Chautauqua County full-time in 2003. "We love this place – or we wouldn't have come back here to retire," Art says.

The Websters' have been supporters of the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy for over 25 years. They were initial supporters of our organization, and when they made Chautauqua their permanent home, Art served as both a member and president of our board of directors. He currently holds an emeritus role, continuing to provide guidance to CWC's leadership.



Art on the Lake with mother Jennie and sister Mary Jane

Their decision to make a lasting impact through the Kingfisher Legacy Society was driven by a desire to invest in an organization that aligns with their values and, as Art puts it, provides "the most comprehensive approach" to caring for our region's land and waters.

Their planned gift reflects both their love for the land and their hope to make a lasting difference. "You reach a point in life where you ask, 'What are you going to do with your legacy?'" says Art. For the Websters, that legacy is rooted in Chautauqua's land, waters, and habitats – and in their belief that responsible conservation is the best way to give back to a place that has given them so much.



We are deeply honored to be part of the Websters' legacy and grateful for their confidence in the lasting impact of our work. Their generosity, along with the extraordinary commitment of all our Kingfisher Legacy Society members, ensures that the lands and waters we all cherish will be protected for generations to come. To learn more about the Kingfisher Legacy Society, please contact Director of Development Justina Dore at 716-664-2166 x1011 or justina@chautauquawatershed.org.

"We have the choice to use the gift of our life to make the world a better place - or not to bother."

~ Jane Goodall (1934—2025)

New Preserve continued

Our hot, dry summer gave us a rare chance to explore areas usually too wet to reach. What we discovered left us amazed. After fording the main channel and climbing above the floodplain, we stumbled into one of the finest upland habitats we've ever encountered in Chautauqua County. The site holds a dazzling series of vernal pools – seasonal wetlands that fill with water in spring and then dry up by summer. These ephemeral pools are critical nurseries for fairy shrimp, frogs, salamanders, and turtles. Because they dry out, fish can't survive there, giving pool-breeding species a predator-free sanctuary. Thick mats of emerald-green Sphagnum moss cover logs and pool edges, promising a magical spectacle when these wetlands come alive again next spring.



The surrounding upland forest added even more "wow." Its pit-and-mound topography – hummocks and hollows created by centuries of fallen trees – revealed land that has never been plowed or farmed. Towering black cherry trees, free of cut stumps, made it clear we were standing in a section of old-growth forest, shaped only by natural cycles and floodwaters. And the biodiversity? Even in just one visit, we encountered unusual plants such as pink lady's slipper orchids, closed bottle gentian, white turtlehead, marsh St. John's wort and, in the creek, the largest population of eastern pond mussels I've ever seen. This imperiled freshwater mussel, already rare across its limited range, finds refuge here. Visiting this site next spring when spring ephemeral wildflowers abound and the vernal pools reveal their inhabitants is likely going to be epic – but entirely contingent on whether we will be able to cross the floodplain then.



This property is a living mosaic of wetlands, old forest, and rare species – a place where water, wildlife, and wild beauty converge. It's also a landscape of delicate balance and hidden secrets, accessible only with effort and great care. By protecting it, we safeguard natural flood resilience, preserve high water quality across its watershed, and ensure this irreplaceable habitat remains a sanctuary for rare species for generations to come.

I have to be a little vague about its exact location for now. At the time of this writing, the closing is still in progress, and we don't want to jeopardize those final steps. The good news? By the time you're reading this, the property should officially be a CWC preserve! Even better, we have several more equally unique and "wow-worthy" sites in the pipeline for protection over the coming year. Stay tuned – there's a lot of exciting news ahead!







If you're inspired to help us protect these hidden gems, or if you'd like to honor a loved one by naming one of our new preserves, please reach out to Director of Development Justina Dore at justina@chautauquawatershed.org or 716-664-2166 x1011 .



Putts For A Purpose

Our annual Charity Pro-Am Golf Tournament at Chautauqua Golf Club was held on June 23rd this year, with more than 100 professional and amateur golfers hitting the links. Congratulations to this year's winning team: WNY PGA Pro Kirk Stauffer (Chautauqua Golf Club) and amateur golfers Jim Roach, Steven Roach, and Ken Brown.

Thank you to everyone who sponsored, played in, and volunteered for the event to help us raise just over $29,000 (net) to further our work to preserve and enhance the health and sustainability of our area's lands and waters. Special thanks go out to Chautauqua Golf Club pros Kirk Stauffer and Troy Moss for hosting and organizing this great event and to Snug Harbor Marine, who was this year's presenting event sponsor, and to Gary and Colleen Reeve, who were this year's hosting member sponsor.

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A Heartfelt Farewell & Thank You

(by Whitney Gleason)



This season brings change not just to the leaves around us but also to our team. After five impactful years with the Conservancy, our wonderful business manager, Cait Weilacher, will be moving on as she relocates with her family to a new community.

While we are excited for this next chapter in her life, we will deeply miss Cait and the knowledge, dedication, and growth that she brought to the CWC family during her time on our team. From completely revamping our financial operations, while simultaneously keeping them running smoothly, to providing behind-the-scenes support for nearly every major initiative and team member, Cait has been an essential part of our success. She has helped guide our organization through growth and transition with grace, attention to detail, and a deep commitment to our mission. Her fingerprints are on so many of the systems and successes that keep our work moving forward, and her absence will certainly be felt.

Please join us in thanking Cait for all she has done for our organization and wishing her the best on her journey ahead. We are so grateful for her time with us and look forward to staying in touch as she continues to make a difference wherever she goes.

AIS continued



One of this year's biggest challenges was managing starry stonewort, a fast spreading macroalgae that forms dense mats and reproduces through small white bulbils (star-shaped reproductive structures) hidden in lake sediment. It spreads rapidly through fragmentation, often caused by boats and other watercraft passing through infested areas.

This summer, CWC staff and volunteers identified an extensive patch of starry stonewort in the Elmhurst area. Floating fragments had been found there in the past, but this was the first time that patches of starry stonewort were observed growing there. CWC was able to obtain a permit from the NYS Department of Conservation to deploy a Diver Assisted Suction Harvesting (DASH) team to address the new infestation. Also this summer, CWC, NYSDEC, the Chautauqua Lake & Watershed Management Alliance, the Chautauqua Lake Association, and the Towns of North Harmony and Chautauqua collaborated on a large-scale starry stonewort removal effort in Ashville Bay and Prendergast Bay using a combination of Mobitrac harvesting and DASH. A heavy emphasis was also placed on clearing navigation channels, both to maintain safe boating and to reduce fragmentation.

These efforts marked the most comprehensive starry stonewort management project attempted on Chautauqua Lake to date, and the combination of using Mobitracs along with DASH is unprecedented. The method allowed for precision removal of starry stonewort with minimal negative impact on native submerged aquatic vegetation.

While removal is an important step, we recognize that more needs to be done to keep the macroalgae from returning. As a result, CWC launched a pilot revegetation project this year to restore native plants to areas cleared of starry stonewort. Nearly 2,000 eelgrass plants were installed using biodegradable burlap bags and bare-root methods. Eelgrass is a hardy native species with strong roots that stabilize sediments, provide fish habitat, and make it harder for starry stonewort to return.

Aquatic invasives act as a potential threat to Chautauqua Lake's ecology, recreation, and economy. However, thanks to the combined efforts of CWC, its partner organizations, and dedicated volunteers, our AIS Program is continuing to make real progress toward a healthier, more resilient Chautauqua Lake.

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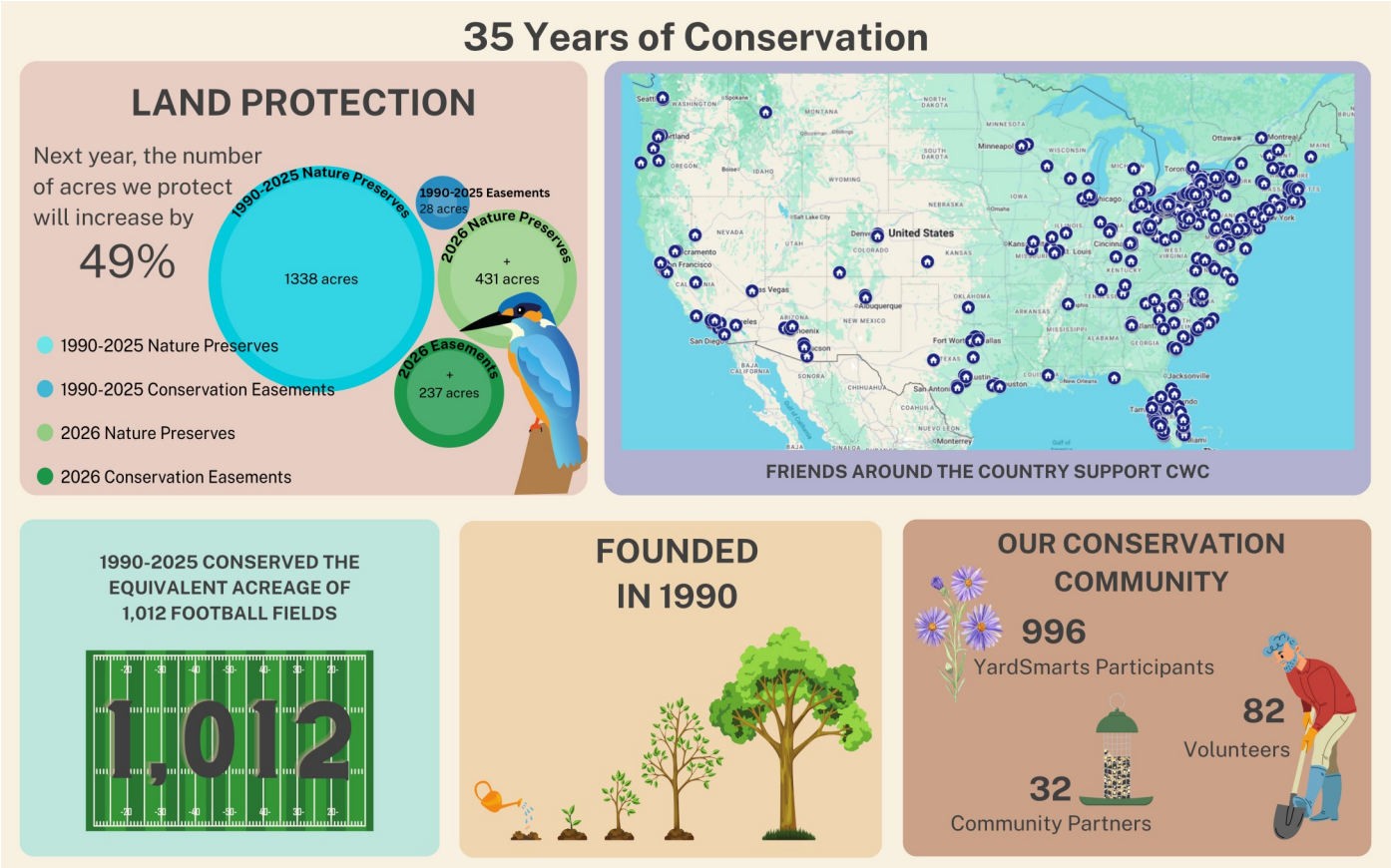

The 'Shed Sheet newsletter is compiled and edited by Jill Eklund, Senior Executive Coordinator.