everwild
land trust

The future of the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy







Field Notes

Quarterly newsletter

May 2026

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Cover (top to bottom):
Leaf detail. Curran Kelleher
Outside time & Green Frog. Twan Leenders
Back: *Hiking WNY.* Kim Turner

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
Jill Eklund, Senior Executive Coordinator
Carol Markham, Conservationist
Bethany O'Hagan, Wilds, Engagement & Stewardship Coordinator
Daniel Conklin, Land Acquisition Coordinator
Kim Turner, Communications Designer

Board of Directors

Officers:

Janis Bowman, Chair
William Ward, Vice Chair
Kaitlyn Bentley, Treasurer
Claire Johnson Baker, Secretary

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

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From the Canopy

A note from our leaders

Dear Friends,

We find ourselves in a season of renewal, both in nature and within our organization. This year marks an exciting new chapter for the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy.

After thoughtful reflection, community conversations, and a deep look at who we are and where we're going, we are proud to introduce the future of our organization: Everwild Land Trust.

This change is more than a new name or logo. A rebrand is an opportunity and sign of success and progress. As we move forward, we hope that our new brand will serve as a better expression of our work and belief that land, water, and wildlife should be protected, cared for, and connected. It reflects our long-term vision: a thriving Chautauqua region where nature and people flourish together in community, sustained by shared responsibility, resilient ecosystems, and a lasting sense of belonging for generations to come.

Our mission remains steadfast. Across Chautauqua County, the need for conservation has never been more urgent. Development pressures, water quality challenges, and habitat loss continue to impact the landscapes we all love. At the same time, we are seeing incredible momentum, with landowners stepping forward, partners collaborating, and a community that cares deeply about the future of this place.

This spring and summer, that momentum comes to life. We will be advancing several priority land protection projects, restoring critical waterways and wetlands, and expanding access to nature through thoughtful, community-centered stewardship. Our work is rooted in science and a deep sense of responsibility to this region.

As we step into this new season, we are filled with gratitude. None of this work happens without you. Our supporters, volunteers, partners, and community members are the backbone that supports all our work. You are the reason we can dream bigger, act boldly, and care for the land in ways that truly make a difference.

We invite you to be part of this next chapter. Visit a preserve, attend an event, and share our story. Together, we are building something lasting.

With appreciation and excitement for the season ahead,



Whitney Gleason
Executive Director



Janis L. Bowman
Board Chair



In Memory of Jill Eklund

Celebrating a life of dedication



Top: *New England Aster.* Carol Markham
Above: *Beloved staff member, Jill Eklund.*

For some moments there really aren't the right or enough words, and this is one of those moments. Last month we lost a beloved member of our small team, Jill Eklund.

For a number of her 20 years at this organization, it was just Jill and our former Executive Director, John Jablonski III. She carried countless responsibilities with grace and quiet determination, doing whatever was needed to keep our work moving forward. She was exceptionally organized, deeply dedicated, and known for her careful eye as an incredible proofreader, helping ensure that everything we shared with the world reflected our very best. While our staff team has grown over the years, Jill continued to wear many hats and was always willing to take on new challenges.

As this newsletter is going to print, we're especially feeling her absence in announcing this next chapter for our organization. Jill was our longest serving team member and carried with her an incredible amount of institutional knowledge. She invested a great deal of time and energy into bringing Everwild Land Trust to life and was excited to see it realized. While we wish she were here to celebrate this moment, we are deeply grateful for the role she played in creating it.

In our team that often feels more like a family, Jill was a lot like the office mom. She was a trusted friend, a steady presence, and a safe person when you needed a good cry. Her work here was instrumental to our growth and her impact on our organization is immeasurable. Jill's absence will be deeply felt by all who had the privilege of working alongside her.

We are so grateful for her years of service and her friendship. While her loss leaves a profound hole in our hearts, we will hold close the many memories she gave us, and honor her by carrying forward the dedication she showed each day.

Welcome, New Board Members

We are excited to welcome a new group of dedicated leaders to our Board of Directors. Each brings a unique perspective, a deep connection to this region, and a shared commitment to protecting the lands and waters that define our community. As Everwild Land Trust continues to grow and evolve, their insight and passion will help guide our work and strengthen our impact in the years ahead.

Kate Ebersole

Kate brings more than 25 years of experience helping organizations and communities grow stronger, healthier, and more connected. Through her consulting work, she has partnered with nonprofits, health departments, and regional initiatives across Western New York to lead strategic planning, support leadership development, and guide collaborative community improvement efforts. Her work is grounded in both professional expertise and a genuine passion for people where she draws on her background in quality improvement and systems thinking, as well as years of coaching and mentoring leaders. Kate has worked with dozens of local organizations, including ours, and is widely respected for her ability to bring people together, build shared vision, and turn ideas into meaningful action.

Heather Neckers Kinal

Heather brings energy, creativity, and a deep commitment to community into her work with Everwild. As the founder of Rooted MTB and the Chautauqua Connection Collective, she has built a reputation for bringing people together through meaningful, well-crafted events. From intimate gatherings to large-scale festivals and community initiatives, her work centers on connection. She has made strides empowering women through outdoor experiences and creating spaces that strengthen local relationships. In addition to her nonprofit leadership and fundraising experience, she serves on the Board of Maplevale Farms, where she contributes to strategic planning and governance. A dedicated Preserve Steward and active member of Everwild's Education and Events Committee, she is passionate about nature, community, and turning ideas into action.

Pete Pedersen

Pete brings decades of experience in environmental redevelopment, sustainable energy, and finance to Everwild's work. As a co-founder and principal of Renova Partners, he has led the redevelopment of contaminated properties across the country, transforming underutilized sites into productive assets. He also co-founded Brightfields Development, advancing innovative solar projects on landfills and brownfields. Earlier in his career, he held leadership roles in corporate development, investment banking, and law, building a strong foundation in strategy and complex transactions. In addition to his professional work, he has been deeply engaged in environmental and community leadership, including serving as a director of the Environmental League of Massachusetts and a trustee of the Chautauqua Institution. His experience reflects a long-standing commitment to sustainability, thoughtful development, and community impact.

Left: *Ruby-throated Hummingbird*. Jeanne Wiebenga **Right:** *Sundrops*. Carol Markham





Mackenzie Shults

Mackenzie is a thoughtful and strategic leader with a passion for building purpose-driven organizations and fostering collaborative, people-centered systems. With a background in psychology and positive organizational development, she has worked across startups and emerging industries, leading operations, culture, and strategy. Mackenzie brings a systems-thinking approach to her work, combining creativity with strong operational insight to help teams thrive. Based in Lakewood, she is deeply interested in community, learning, and the natural world, and is excited to support Everwild's mission of protecting the lands and waters that connect us.

Bill Thomas

Bill has a strong background in operations, sustainability, and community programming that he brings into all his work. Previously serving as the Waste & Recycling Manager and Sustainability Specialist for Tops Friendly Markets, he oversaw recycling and waste programs across more than 150 locations, helping implement efficient, compliant, and environmentally responsible systems. With past leadership roles in maintenance management, agriculture services, and youth programming, Bill combines hands-on technical expertise with team leadership and budget management experience. His career reflects a practical, solutions-oriented approach and a long-standing commitment to sustainability, operational excellence, and community engagement that he now brings to his volunteer work with Everwild Land Trust.

Save the Date

Programs & Events

Mother's Day Wildflower Walks
May 10, walks at 10:00 a.m. & 1:00 p.m.

Wine on the Trail
May 15, 6:00 p.m. & June 19, 6:00 p.m.

Allegany Nature Pilgrimage
Visit alleganynaturepilgrimage.com for more info
May 29 – 31

Tree Identification Hike
June 6, 10:00 a.m.

Forest Findings Hike
June 7, 10:00 a.m.

Plants and Pints
June 14, noon – 4:00 p.m.

Stewardship Appreciation Potluck
June 27, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Charity Pro-Am Golf Tournament
June 29, 10:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Learn more and register at EverwildLandTrust.org/Events

Get Involved

Join our wild, wonderful squad



Are you a tree-hugger, puddle-jumper, or bird-whisperer? Everwild Land Trust invites you to join our volunteer team. From helping maintain the trails, to planting native flowers, and keeping the office running at top-gear, protecting land and water is a shared effort with lasting impact.

No experience required, just curiosity and a willingness to help. Fresh air included, friendly people guaranteed, dirt optional.

Sign up today to join a community working together to protect our lands and waters, one volunteer at a time. The birds, trees, and your neighbors will thank you.

Learn more at EverwildLandTrust.org/Volunteer

The Evolution to Everwild

The Journey to Who We Are Today

Where We Began: May 1990

After months of meeting in restaurants, living rooms, and kitchens, our founders made it official when they incorporated as a 501(c)(3) and held our first public meeting as the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy.

Initial logo "the kingfisher looking out over the waters, ready to protect them."
Designed by Albert Cala

Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy

Planting the Seed: 1991

We began with a simple but powerful mission: to encourage and assist efforts to conserve, maintain, and enhance the physical and aesthetic environment and natural resources principally within the Chautauqua region. The first "'Shed Sheet" was printed and distributed.


THE 'SHED SHEET
NEWS OF THE CHAUTAUQUA WATERSHED CONSERVANCY INC

FROM THE PRESIDENT...

C.W.C. Activities in 1991...

Wetlands Workshop A Big Success...

Growing Our Impact: 1995

We started permanently protecting land with the first land donation of Dobbins Woods Nature Preserve. From then, we never looked back. We began hosting workshops for the community on watershed care and thinking about how we could steward the critical habitats that sustain our region.

Right: Bill Mealy, Grace Crist, Becky Nystrom, and John Jablonski.



Gaining Traction Through Transformation: 2016

Over the years, our logo became more colorful. We continued to grow and expand our protection of the region's natural resources in service of their ecology and our community, gradually reaching 1,000 acres permanently protected in 2016.

CHAUTAUQUA WATERSHED CONSERVANCY

Building Momentum: 2024

As we grew and became more established as an organization, we worked to hold ourselves accountable to the highest standards of financial stability, ethical conduct, responsible governance, and lasting stewardship. After years of hard work toward those standards, we achieved national accreditation with the Land Trust Accreditation Commission.

ACCREDITED™ LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

Starting the Next Chapter: 2023

Under new leadership, our work continued to expand. Our name wasn't always telling the full story. We learned that people often confused us with other organizations, and our identity no longer reflected the full scope of what we do and where we're going. So we took a step back to listen to our community, our partners, and our supporters.

Right: Whitney Gleason giving a presentation.



More Than a New Name: 2025

Through a thoughtful and inclusive process, we explored how to better communicate who we are. We asked big questions and wrestled to better understand how we are seen and how we want to be seen. That work led us here, and we are so excited to take flight in this new chapter for our organization as Everwild Land Trust. This new identity reflects the heart of our work protecting the lands and waters that sustain our region, now and for generations to come.

Right: Justina Dore, Whitney Gleason, Twan Leenders, Bethany O'Hagan, Jill Eklund, Carol Markham, Daniel Conklin, and Kim Turner.



Spreading Our Wings and Taking Flight: 2026

In our new logo, every element tells a story. Land and water come together to reflect the landscapes we protect and the connections that sustain them. The infinity symbol represents perpetuity and the care we work to provide for generations to come. Finally, our beloved kingfisher, rising into flight, represents the life these landscapes support and the forward momentum of our work – still there, after all these years, looking out over the waters.

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Infinity, Connection



Belted Kingfisher



Trees, Land



Waves, Water



From Lawn to Habitat

A Yard Smarts success story

Our Yard Smarts program helps people in Chautauqua County care for their yards in ways that support clean water and local wildlife. Small changes like planting native species, reducing chemical use, and capturing rainwater can have a big impact on the environment and the community. Anyone can participate, and it's free! With Yard Smarts, your yard isn't just something to mow, it's a chance to help nature thrive.

Katie Finch and Jeff Brockelbank took that idea to heart. When they bought their home, most of their 1-acre yard was just mowed grass. Seeing a blank canvas, they envisioned a space that could support wildlife and themselves. They started small and transformed a section of their front yard. Our Conservationist, Carol Markham, visited, offered further guidance, and helped plan the next section. Since then, they've added over 150 native and edible trees, shrubs, and perennials in small, manageable projects. Watching bees, butterflies, beetles, and birds explore the garden has been proof that their efforts are making a difference.

Katie and Jeff, an experienced educator at Audubon Community Nature Center and a senior forester with DEC, respectively, truly understand the meaningful impact these seemingly small projects can have. "Plants are the foundation of the food chain and are critical to the health of our ecosystems," Katie explains. "Even one acre can have an impact, and inspiring others to plant a few natives magnifies that impact." Their yard isn't meticulously landscaped, but maintained paths, edges, and thoughtful design make it inviting. "We hope people passing by get curious about what we are doing," she adds.

With Yard Smarts, and community members like Katie and Jeff, every yard can be more than a lawn, it can be a thriving habitat, a classroom, and a community resource, benefitting Chautauqua County for years to come.

Learn more about Yard Smarts at EverwildLandTrust.org/YardSmarts





Top left: *Katie Finch and Jeff Brockelbank*
Central left: *Front garden with freshly planted native plant species.* Katie Finch
Central right: *Front garden with now established native plants.* Katie Finch
Bottom left: *Front yard meadow.* Carol Markham
Bottom right: *Bumble bee collecting nectar from Butterfly Weed.* Katie Finch







Daniel Conklin and Richard Stineman at Jamestown Public School Forest. Twan Leenders

Protecting a Living Classroom

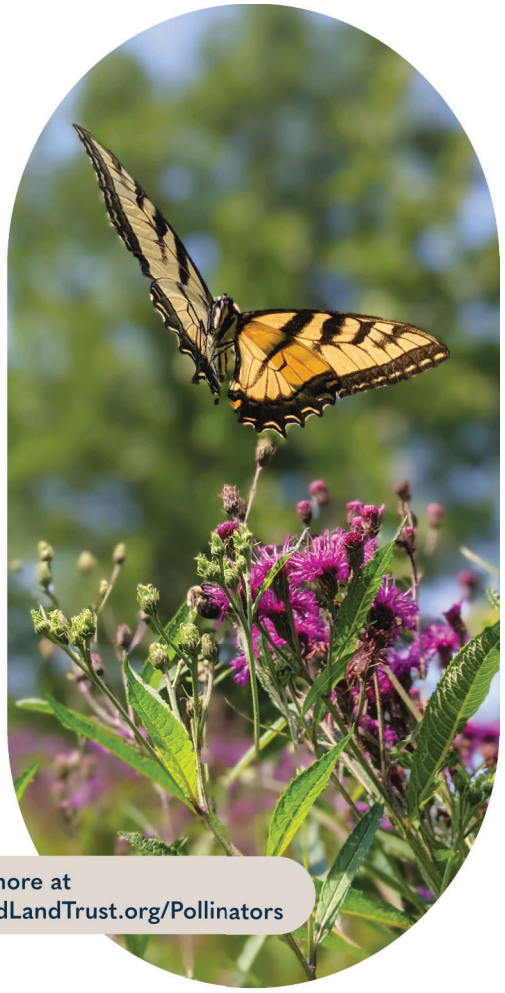
The Jamestown Public School Forest

2026 is shaping up to be an exciting year for the protection of land and water across the region. While some of the properties we're working to acquire are fee acquisitions, we're also advancing land protection through conservation easements. One of these properties that we're particularly excited about is the Jamestown Public School Forest. Spanning more than 350 acres, the property includes a diverse mix of forest, wetland, and open field habitats. The property has been owned and operated by Jamestown Public School Forest, Inc. since 1927. Since then, the land has been actively managed with a focus on conservation, wildlife habitat, and education. Over time, the property has been transformed through succession and replanting into a large, contiguous forest that now supports mature hardwood stands, conifer plantations, and acts as an important haven for interior bird species. The property also includes a recently established pollinator meadow that further enhances its habitat diversity and ecological value.

In the past, the property was frequently used as an experiential learning site where students could engage directly in forestry and environmental topics. While these opportunities have been more limited in recent years, the organization continues to support education through grants and scholarships funded by sustainable timber harvesting and other resource-based revenue. By working with Jamestown Public School Forest, Inc. to place a conservation easement on the property, we can help ensure that its conservation values are protected in perpetuity, while allowing for continued sustainable management. This partnership will protect not only an important ecological resource, but also a long-standing legacy of stewardship, education, and community benefit.

A Community in Bloom

Funding growth, month by month



Across fields, forests, wetlands, and backyards, pollinators are quietly at work. Bees, butterflies, moths, beetles, and birds move from bloom to bloom, steadily sustaining the plants that sustain us.

That spirit of consistent, committed care inspires our monthly donor community: The Pollinators.

At Everwild Land Trust we know conservation doesn't happen in a single moment, it's a long-term commitment. Protecting land, restoring habitat, and caring for nature requires dependable resources month after month, season after season. The Pollinators are the dedicated supporters who make that steady progress possible.

Monthly giving is powerful because it's accessible. A gift of $10, $20, or $50 a month grows over time, just as countless pollinator visits lead to abundant harvests. Predictable support reduces administrative costs, ensuring more funds go directly into conservation and stewardship.

When you join The Pollinators, you become part of something larger than any single preserve or project. You become part of a movement rooted in resilience, generosity, and hope.

Learn more at EverwildLandTrust.org/Pollinators

Right: *Eastern Tiger Swallowtail and New York Ironweed.* Carol Markham



Protecting Hemlock Trees

A promising season of surveys

This past winter was another successful year for our early detection Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) survey program. We conducted eight surveys across various Everwild preserves, as well as a survey at JCC's College Park and the Roger Tory Peterson Institute. HWA remained undetected in all surveys, aside from the two areas where HWA was found in previous years. During the surveys, staff and volunteers follow NYSDEC protocols. With the help of nearly 50 total participants, we were able to examine over 1,700 trees. While HWA remains a concerning threat to our crucial hemlock populations, we are excited about the progress being made in combating these invasives.

According to Allegany State Park biologists working in partnership with NYS Hemlock Initiative, biological controls are being used as close as Long Point State Park and Allegany State Park through releases of Laricobius beetles and silver flies. The beetles serve as predators of the developing adelgids and adults, whereas the larva of the silver fly acts as a specialist predator that feeds on eggs of both HWA generations. Researchers are observing great success with using the species in tandem. Everwild Land Trust will continue exploring opportunities for collaboration on the use of biocontrols to help protect our region.

Left: *Murl Kinal surveying hemlock trees.* Daniel Conklin

Vernal Pools

Small wetlands with big ecological value

Each spring, as snowmelt and seasonal rains collect in shallow forest depressions, temporary wetlands known as vernal pools come to life. Unlike ponds and lakes, vernal pools typically dry out during the summer. This seasonal cycle prevents fish from establishing permanent populations, creating a safe nursery for a remarkable diversity of wildlife.

In New York State, vernal pools are critical breeding habitat for several amphibians, including wood frogs, spotted salamanders, Jefferson's and blue-spotted salamanders, as well as the tiny four-toed salamander. These species migrate to the pools in early spring, often on the first warm, rainy nights of spring, to breed and lay eggs. The pools also support other "obligate vernal pool breeding species" - animals that uniquely rely on these fleeting aquatic habitats for their survival, such as fairy shrimp, fingernail clams, and a variety of aquatic insects. These small invertebrates quickly colonize a vernal pool once it is filled with water and its ice cover melts. Soon after, they become a vital food source for those larger frogs and salamanders.

Active vernal pools are fascinating to watch as thousands of tadpoles and salamander larvae develop rapidly, racing to complete the water phase of their life before their temporary home dries up. Throughout spring, the pool's water level fluctuates, occasionally fed by rain and snow, but inevitably slowly drying as the sun becomes more powerful and the weather warms. Generally, vernal pools dry out completely sometime in July – hopefully after the last of its seasonal inhabitants move out.

Although they may appear small and unassuming, vernal pools play an outsized role in maintaining healthy forest ecosystems. Amphibians that breed in these pools spend most of the rest of the year living in surrounding upland forests, where they help regulate insect populations and serve as prey for birds, mammals, and other forest animals. Because of this connection, protecting vernal pools alone is not enough; conserving their surrounding forest habitat is equally important.

Across New York, many vernal pools remain unmapped and unprotected, making them vulnerable to development, road construction, and changes in forest management. For example, careless tree removal may result in a reduced canopy cover and increased sun exposure, which may cause a vernal pool to dry too soon! Recognizing and conserving these important seasonal wetlands and the forested landscapes around them is an important step toward safeguarding the biodiversity that we are focused on at Everwild Land Trust.



From top to bottom: *Blue-spotted Salamander, Vernal Fairy Shrimp, mating Wood Frogs.* Twan Leenders

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