

Protecting Nature, Preserving Our Future

2024 Annual Report

CHAUTAUQUA WATERSHED CONSERVANCY

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**joined Jan. 2025*



Executive Director's Note

by Whitney Gleason



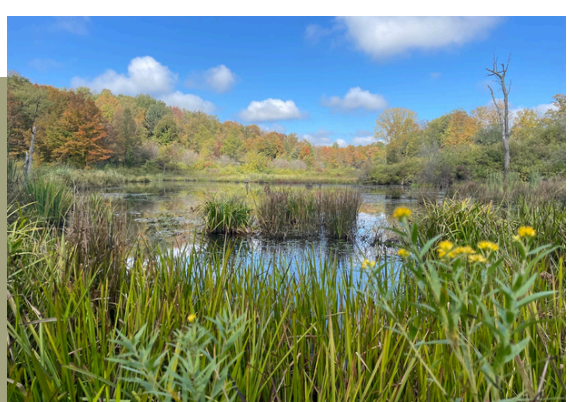
What a remarkable year it's been for our land trust! As I reflect on our accomplishments, I'm reminded that our success is thanks to the shared commitment and generosity of community members, donors, partners, and volunteers who believe in protecting our region's lands and waters.

We began 2024 with a major milestone – achieving first time land trust accreditation through the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. I'll never forget the phone call from the Commission telling us we'd achieved full accreditation, which came in while I was at home with my newborn son, Oliver. Just as Oliver has grown a lot this past year, so has the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy.



Through our free Yard Smarts (formerly LakeScapes) program, we reached hundreds of new property owners, offering them guidance on eco-friendly landscaping, native planting, and storm water management. Our ongoing restoration work along the Chadakoin River continues to improve water quality, riparian habitats, and the environment for wildlife and local communities. We also continue to work with landowners to protect the highest ecologically valuable properties while also maintaining our 35 nature preserves and keeping our trails accessible for the community to use and enjoy.

In addition to my incredible staff, we are fortunate to have dedicated preserve stewards, volunteers, and supporters who have made this work possible. In a time when threats to our natural spaces are rising, your partnership affirms that conservation is not just about preserving beautiful places but also ensuring that our communities remain strong and our local economies vibrant. Whether through volunteering, donating, advocating, or spreading the word, you are vital to our success.



As we look to the future, I hope you'll continue standing with us to protect the land and water we all depend on, inspire future conservationists, and leave a lasting legacy of environmental responsibility.

With your support, I am confident we can create a brighter future for our region's natural resources.

Expanding Water Protection:
Chautauqua County's first farm easement

by Twan Leenders

The Conservancy acquired a new conservation easement in 2024 – and the very first farm easement in Chautauqua County!

This farm easement (outlined in yellow on the map at right) is located on the lands of Mud Creek Dairy, an active dairy farm on Bloomer Road in the Town of Chautauqua whose pastures are bisected by a small tributary that drains directly into Mud Creek and then into the north basin of Chautauqua Lake.

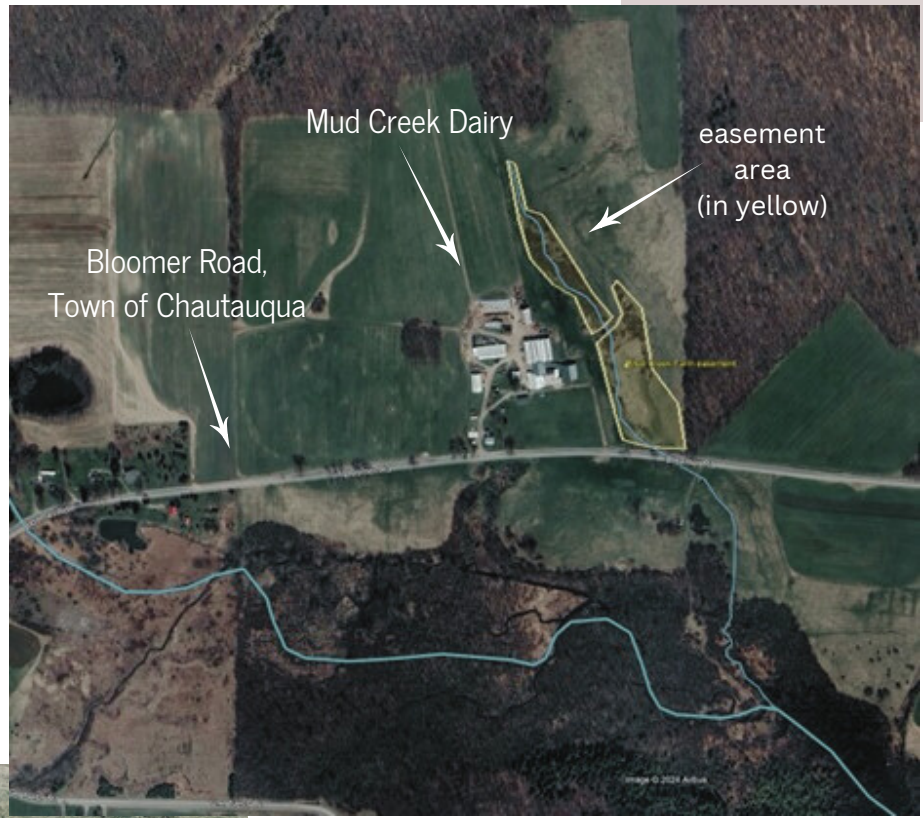




Photo by Chautauqua County Soil & Water Conservation District

Even though the farm and its lands benefit from having a steady supply of water from the stream to irrigate crops and water livestock, the erosion caused by cattle crossing the stream and its surrounding floodplain is negatively impacting water quality on the farm and anywhere downstream from there.

Additionally, during times of heavy rainfall or snowmelt, the mud near the creek can be so deep that cows have gotten stuck to the point that they needed to be rescued.



Photo by Chautauqua County Soil & Water Conservation District

To address these issues, six acres of the farm located near the creek were fenced off to exclude cattle and stabilize the land. The area was then removed from farm production and placed under a conservation easement. A raised cattle crossing and special water trough were installed to ensure safe passage across the creek and clean drinking water access for the cows.

These changes will prevent the cattle from feeding, watering, and excreting waste in the area of the tributary and allow a vegetative buffer to grow along the creek, all of which will result in cleaner water entering Chautauqua Lake through Mud Creek. And farm operators will also no longer have to worry about cows getting stuck and hurt as they try to navigate the muddy area that bisects their farm.



This project was managed and designed by the Chautauqua County Soil and Water Conservation District.

The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy now holds the easement and will monitor it in perpetuity to ensure continued compliance.

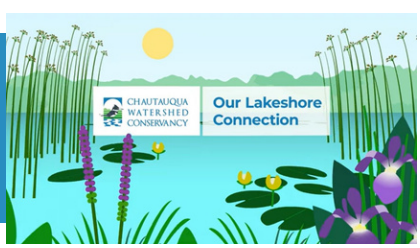
Eco-Education For A Sustainable Future

By Carol Markham & Bethany O'Hagan



2024 was another busy year for Conservancy educational outreach and activities. Our LakeScapes program (now called Yard Smarts) was again in full swing. The program promotes watershed-friendly landscaping and lawn care to not only help create essential wildlife habitats and beautiful gardens but also teach homeowners how their yards can better absorb and filter runoff and improve water quality. Roughly 3,500 miles were traveled and 200 consultations completed in 2024 alone, bringing the total number of homeowner consultations to nearly 800 since the program began in 2020.

We partnered with Royal Fern Nursery to present a mini-meadow workshop where participants learned about the benefits of shrinking lawn size and incorporating native plants. We also teamed up with Chautauqua Marina for our 4th annual native plant buffer bonanza and plant sale, which highlighted the importance of native plants and their role in enhancing water quality and lake health.



Another significant achievement was the creation of an educational video, *Our Lakeshore Connection*, which illustrates the importance of lake shore buffers and the connection between land and water. (You can watch the video on our YouTube channel and website.)



Our Education and Engagement Committee was also especially active this year. The committee's focus is to engage the public, raise awareness of our mission, and promote a sense of place and respect for ecosystems while empowering individuals to create sustainable environments within their communities. To support these efforts, the committee engaged with the community through a variety of outreach activities, including educational displays at local events such as the Wild America Nature Festival and Fall Foliage Festival at Panama Rocks, Prendergast Library Community Block Party, SUNY JCC Earthfest, Lakewood Library Earth Fest, Cummins Health Fair, and several farmers' markets.



Committee members were also active participants in several events such as the Chautauqua Lake Dragon Boat Races, a Halloween Trunk or Treat, and Jamestown Christmas Parade. What an amazing year of connecting with our community!

A Year of Conservation & Connection

By Bethany O'Hagan & Carol Markham



2024 was packed with many exciting projects and fun activities at the Conservancy!

In June, we launched *Wine on the Trail* – a new and engaging event created and led by Land Specialist Bethany O'Hagan and Conservationist Carol Markham. Each month, they explore one of our nature preserves, inviting the public to join them for a relaxing outdoor walk with a beverage of their choice. It's been a great success and a great way to connect with nature!



As a nationally accredited land trust, we're responsible for having clear, readable signage on all our properties. So with some help from our conservation committee and handyman John McCarthy, Land Specialist Bethany O'Hagan was able to begin the on-going process of updating and installing signs, as well as new kiosks and trail maps, at all of our preserves.

Other notable highlights include:

- Closing on a new conservation easement
- Continuing riverbank restoration work along the Chadakoin River
- Cleaning up 30+ miles of the Martin E. Cobb Waterway Trail
- Removing and treating invasive species at some of our preserves with assistance from WNY PRISM, local Boy Scouts, and other volunteers
- Conducting aquatic invasive species surveys in Chautauqua Lake and Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) surveys on local hemlock trees
- Installing memorial benches at preserves
- Recruiting new stewards for our preserves
- Volunteering and tabling at a variety of local events to better connect with our community









We have many more conservation activities lined up for 2025 and beyond, so stay tuned!

Restoring & Revitalizing Water, Habitats, & Communities

Our ecological restoration and improvement efforts made great strides in 2024!



Invasive Species

We partnered with WNY PRISM to combat invasive species at our Cassadaga Lakes Nature Park, working to safeguard the sensitive native plant communities that exist there. At the McCray Peckinpaugh Preserve, we removed invasives such as Japanese Knotweed and Multiflora rose and will plant native shrubs and wildflowers in their place in spring 2025.



We continued our role as the region's aquatic invasive species task force, conducting on-water surveys to keep an eye out for new threats, while actively addressing existing ones such as water chestnut and Starry Stonewort. In 2024 alone, we removed 200+ invasive plants from the lake's outlet and even more from ponds at Maplehurst Golf Club.

Wetlands

At the Southern Tier Brewery Wetland Preserve, we started evaluating the feasibility of building a series of engineered wetlands to help manage excess flow from Goose Creek during storms. Since the preserve is located close to the mouth of the creek (just upstream of Chautauqua Lake), this project has the potential to reduce erosion and downstream flooding while also filtering sediment and nutrients from the creek water before it enters the lake. When the creek is not flooding, the wetlands would retain water, creating valuable habitat for frogs, salamanders, ducks, and other wildlife.









Chadakoin Riverbank

We made major progress in 2024 restoring the collapsing banks of the Chadakoin River in downtown Jamestown. With funding from the City of Jamestown, the failing river banks were stabilized, regraded, and rebuilt with stacked rock to mimic a more natural river corridor. Just before the first snow fell, we completed the first round of native vegetation planting, with more to come in 2025.

This project will not only create a sustainable, erosion-resistant riverbank but will also be a beautiful new attraction along the city's Riverwalk as well as a healthy and thriving habitat for fish, turtles, and other wildlife.

Waterways Cleanup

For decades, unprecedented massive logjams and debris have been clogging up Cassadaga Creek and Conewango Creek, disrupting flow, causing flooding and property damage, and creating hazards for boaters. With assistance from certified arborist Vince Liuzzo, we identified the worst obstructions in these waterways and removed many of them. Funded by Chautauqua County, the City of Jamestown, and the Conewango Creek Watershed Association, crews mapped and cleared hazards and obstructions along the Chadakoin River in Jamestown and Falconer, and as far south as Russell, PA, on Conewango Creek.

The biggest achievement was the herculean task of removing hundreds of fallen trees and dozens of massive logjams from Cassadaga Creek to allow safe passage of both water and kayakers. A continuous stretch of 20.4 miles of Cassadaga Creek, from Kabob downstream to its confluence with the Chadakoin River, is now safely navigable again.

To prevent similar situations coming about in the future, we also developed a draft management plan for the county's major waterways.

Assets

CURRENT ASSETS	
Cash and cash equivalents	$ 303,049
Grants and contracts for services receivable	52,788
Prepaid expenses	2,786
Total current assets	358,623
PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT, net of accumulated depreciation	3,103,554
OTHER ASSETS	
Beneficial interest in assets held by others	177,187
Investments, at fair value	292,981
Total other assets	470,168
TOTAL ASSETS	$ 3,932,345

Liabilities and Net Assets

CURRENT LIABILITIES	
Accounts payable	$ 4,784
Accrued expenses	14,879
Deferred revenue	500
Current portion - loan payable	2,735
Total current liabilities	22,898
LONG-TERM DEBT, net of current portion	88,150
Total liabilities	111,048
NET ASSETS	
Without donor restrictions	
Operating	3,175,810
Board restricted	523,225
Total net assets without donor restrictions	3,699,035
With donor restrictions - purpose restricted	122,262
Total net assets	3,821,297
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	$ 3,932,345

Statement of Activities

	2024		
	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total
REVENUES AND OTHER SUPPORT:			
Grants and contracts for services	$ 408,152	$ 50,000	$ 458,152
Contributions - cash and securities	297,270	-	297,270
In-kind contributions	11,596	-	11,596
Special events	54,306	-	54,306
Annual dinner	3,510	-	3,510
Investment return	39,188	-	39,188
Interest income - bank	189	-	189
Other income	3	-	3
Net assets released from restrictions	261,980	(261,980)	-
Total revenues and other support	1,076,194	(211,980)	864,214
EXPENSES			
Program services	693,762	-	693,762
Administrative	200,188	-	200,188
Fundraising	107,750	-	107,750
Total expenses	1,001,700	-	1,001,700
Change in net assets from operations	74,494	(211,980)	(137,486)
OTHER CHANGES IN NET ASSETS:			
Change in beneficial interest in assets held by others	3,243	-	3,243
Change in net assets	77,737	(211,980)	(134,243)
NET ASSETS AT BEGINNING OF YEAR	3,621,298	334,242	3,955,540
NET ASSETS AT END OF YEAR	$ 3,699,035	$ 122,262	$ 3,821,297

Thank You Preserve Stewards!

Our sincerest gratitude goes out to the following individuals who serve as volunteer stewards of our nature preserves. Thanks to their dedication and hard work to help protect the health and biodiversity of these precious lands, our preserves continue to thrive and provide a sanctuary for both wildlife and visitors alike. Thank you for being the guardians of our green spaces!

Preserve Stewards

Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy





Preserve	Acrage	Steward	Co-Steward
Dobbins Woods	100	Brad & Carol Samuelson	
Elm Flats Wetland Preserve	113	Tom Slabe	
Cassadaga Creek Wetland Preserve	151.14	Johnny Mac	Twan Leenders
Prendergast Creek Wetland Preserve	8	Judy Maskrey	
Chq. Lake Outlet Wetland Greenway	82.9	Brad Peterson	
Lake Erie Migratory Bird Preserve	89.1	NEED STEWARD	
Ball Creek Nature Park	5	Terry & Kathy Horner	
RoseMary Straight Bird Sanctuary	5.8	Peter & Kathy George	
Houston Hollow Preserve	1.3	Jackie Damore	
Chq. Creek East Branch Preserve	21.6	Jay Stratton	
Randy Allan Hendrickson Preserve	17.5	Kyle Cashmore	
Little-Big Inlet Wetland Preserve	4.3	Michael Koscher	
Sunnyside Marsh Preserve	4.5	Cheryl Eckwahl	Jim Berry
Fern Island Wetland Preserve	12.4	Peter & Kathy George	
Loomis Goose Creek Wetland Preserve	25.1	Jackie Damore	
Wells Bay Lakeshore Forest	3.5	Julie Stronz	
Whitney Bay Lakeshore Forest	0.9	Judy Maskrey	

Preserve	Acrage	Steward	Co-Steward
Joyce Johnson Bird Sanctuary @ Cass Creek	54.6	NEED STEWARD	
Chq. Creek Oxbow Forest Preserve	23	Deb Piotrowski	
Goose Creek Valley Greenway Preserve	23.3	Jan Bowman	
Naetzker Forest Preserve	74.9	Heather and Murl Kinal	
Salomon Family Nature Preserve	58.6	Mady and Karie Hayes	
Bentley Preserve	38	Terry Roberts	Nathan Elliot
Brown's Creek Tributary Forest Preserve	31	Greg Eckwahl	Dan Anderson
Fletcher Family Preserve	12.84	Jennifer Harper	
Galucki Wetlands at Chq. Lake's Big Inlet	20	Michael Koscher	
Cassadaga Lakes Nature Park	77.7	Nancy Wickmark	
Jerry & Joan Myers Family Wetland	11.9	Bethany O'Hagan	
Pry Wetlands	24.3	Jim Fox	
Bear Lake	14.5	NEED STEWARD	
Southern Tier Brewing Company Preserve	30.5	Jackie Damore	
Kyle's Landing at Cassadaga Creek Preserve	22	Mary Donna	
Abram Preserve	33.93	Nicole and Eric Hohenstien	
McCray Peckinpaugh Nature Preserve	14.7	MaryBeth Southwick	
Mary and Tom Huhn Nature Park	50.2	Bob Pray	Dick Redington







WITH THANKS TO OUR 2024 DONORS!

We are deeply grateful to the generous individuals, businesses, and organizations who supported us in 2024. Their contributions were instrumental in helping us achieve our goals and make a meaningful and lasting impact in our community. Below, we proudly recognize those who donated to us between 1/1/2024 – 12/31/24.

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Stephen & Ann Abdella
Tom & Abby Abelson
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Dennis Anderson
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Nancy Stadnicar
Charles Stafford
Marty & Roz Stark
Peter Stark
Robyn & Thomas Steele
Lee & Jennifer Stein
Justin and Mamie Stewart
Jane Stirniman
Jay Stratton
John & Cindy Strickland
Marianne Strother
Henry & Beverly Suhr
Jay Summerville
Gale Svenson-Campbell
Greg & Cindy Swan
Tyler & Carolyn Swanson
Todd & Lois Swanson
Robert & Elizabeth Tannahill
Judith Taucher-Lewis
Sue & Gary Tabor
Steve & Patricia Telkins
Craig Thompson & Rose Woodard
Steven & Gwen Tigner
David & Rosanna Todd
Dorothy & Dan Trefts
Dolores Trethewey
Kim Turner
Richard Turney
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Jamestown
UPMC Chautauqua
Russell Vacanti
William & Carole Van Duzer
Tara VanDerveer & Amy Tucker
Bob VanEvery & Judith Claire
Joseph & Margaret Varatta
Stephen & Carol Viehe
Barbara Vitkowsky
George & Joann Vosburgh
Lamont Wager & Martha Paulson
Ruth Wahl
William Ward
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Peter & Linda Weaver
Peter & Susan Weaver
William & Janet Weaver
Weaver Materiel Service, Inc.
Diane Weber
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Wegmans
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Mary & Mitch Weisman
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Janelle Welch
Westfield Nursery, Inc.
Thomas & Mary Ann Whitmeyer
Jeanne Wiebenga
Rod & Dona Williams
Scott Williams & John Lauro
David Williams
Karen & Mike Williams
Scott & John Williams
Mike Wilson
Lou Wineman
Subagh & Linda Winkelstern
Melinda Wolcott
Women's Club of Lakewood
Albina Wood
Wooglin, Inc.
Daniel & Jean Wurzbacher
Tom & Maureen Yanko
Maggie & Emily Yeager
Barrie & Julie Yochim
Thomas & Joann Zaragoza
Anne Zaragoza
Steve Zenczak & Patricia Feighan
Burton & Sandra Zucker



Foundations & Grants

Allen R. & Margaret H. Findlay Fund
Blanchard Family Foundation
Chautauqua County
Chautauqua County Soil & Water Conservation District
Chautauqua Region Community Foundation
City of Jamestown
Conewango Creek Watershed Association
Gebbie Foundation
Joseph R. Takats Foundation Trust- Lee A. Takats Disclaimer Fund
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RipYuki Giving Fund
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Village of Lakewood

In Memory Of

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Cindy & Chris Hall
Elizabeth & Richard Abram
Caitlin & Jenica Abram
Susan Abram & Alan Kowlowitz
Frank & Joan Ciccarelli
Louis & Deborah Clementi
David & Jean Cooper
David & Zhanna Cooper
Dorothy Goodwill
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Shorelands on Chautauqua Lake
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Anne Zaragoza
Thomas Small
Yvonne & Jack McCredie
Caroline Young
Connie Swanson
Brian Rexroad
Carol Van Blois Paterson
Lewis & Vicki Van Blois
Jason M. Williams
Joan Marcello

Staff Appreciation & Welcome

by Whitney Gleason

2024 was a strong year for the Conservancy, thanks in large part to the strength of our incredible staff. Throughout the year, they tackled challenges head-on, brought in fresh ideas, and worked together to make a real impact for our organization and the communities we serve. Whether in the field or at the office, each team member played a vital role in helping us achieve our goals. As we look back on what we've accomplished, I want to recognize and thank our remarkable staff for bringing energy, creativity, and heart to everything they do. For each of us, this work is about caring deeply for our mission and putting that passion into the everyday efforts that result in cleaner waters and protected lands for our community.

As we move into 2025, we are also incredibly fortunate to welcome two new members to our dedicated team – Daniel Conklin as Land Acquisition Coordinator and Justina Dore as Director of Development. I have no doubt that this year will bring our organization to new heights while continuing our legacy of protecting clean water and preserving natural spaces for now and generations to come.









CHAUTAUQUA WATERSHED CONSERVANCY

Contact us at: info@chautauquawatershed.org or 716-664-2166

Learn more at: www.chautauquawatershed.org

Preserving and enhancing the quality, scenic beauty, and ecological health of the lands and waters of the Chautauqua region for our community since 1990

All photos are courtesy Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy unless otherwise noted.