Genesee Land Trust

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Members turn vacant lot into beloved park pg. 9

SPRING/SUMMER 2023 NEWSLETTER

"Even leaving a small vernal pool in the back of your yard can make a big difference."

— Martha Zettel

Conserving and restoring wetlands for climate change

Walking around her backyard one rainy night in March, Martha Zettel stumbled across her very first Spotted Salamander. Then she saw hundreds more marching down a steep limestone slope into a vernal pool. The memory still inspires her 35 years later.

"This set off an obsession in me to learn as much about the salamanders in my little patch of wetlands as possible," the Rush resident said.

Roy "RJ" Jacobson understands. "Going out looking for salamanders is fun and connects people to the environment," said the Head of the Habitat Protection Section for the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. He oversees the DEC's wetlands management work across the state, and recommended protecting vernal pools to support biodiversity — especially salamander populations.

More than just a big puddle

You'll find most vernal pools in wooded areas like the one at **Cornwall Preserve** in the cover photo.

Teeming with life and easy to find in April, by August a vernal pool looks like a small treeless depression in the dry ground. Covered with leaves packed down from the weight of water, these seasonal wetlands are the only place where salamanders reproduce.

Often overlooked and misunderstood, vernal pools easily get destroyed.

"When you look at a map of the state, more vernal pools have been lost in your region than others," RJ said. More than half of all wetlands — of all types and sizes — have been destroyed across the state and nation, he added.

On cold wet nights in early spring, Spotted Salamanders like this one come out of the dirt to lay their eggs in a vernal pool, then go back home to bury themselves under rocks and eat more bugs. Salamanders play a critical role in the health of woodlands and need vernal pool wetlands to survive.

Photos by Kevin Farrell at Macyville Woods.

> **"The efforts of land trusts like Genesee Land Trust to restore wetlands is wonderful; it really does help."**
>
> *— Roy "RJ" Jacobson, Head of the Habitat Protection Section for the NYDEC*

Above: Marsh at Macyville Woods, photo by Elliotte Bowerman. Right: Christine Sevilla Wetlands Preserve, photo by staff.

Wetland protection gaining importance

Wetlands play a critical role in mitigating the impacts of climate change. Wetlands store more carbon dioxide than any other type of habitat. And the unique plants that live in year-round wetlands improve water quality by naturally filtering pollutants out of our creeks, streams, and rivers.

During extreme storms wetlands reduce flood risks by absorbing water and slowly releasing it — especially when wildlife need it most.

"In terms of climate change, we're experiencing more frequent large storms which makes these wetlands holding flooding more important," RJ said. "It's so important that [in 2022] the legislature and governor made sweeping changes to protect 1.2 million more acres of wetlands."

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Members make the difference

Together, donor members like you have protected more than 800 acres of wetlands so far, including the purchase of **Deer Creek Woods in Ontario** last year and the opening of **Salmon Creek Nature Preserve in Hilton**. Almost every property the Land Trust protects includes wetlands.

For the salamanders and frogs that need wetlands, Genesee Land Trust Legacy Society member Martha Zettel decided "to do everything I can to ensure they have a home long after I am gone." She and her husband Bill O'Neill donated land to Genesee Land Trust in their will. "Priority is always given to larger wetlands. I want people to know small wetlands are important too."

Top Left: Leopard frog at Brookdale Preserve, photo by Kevin Farrell.
Top Right: Christine Sevilla Wetlands Preserve, photo by Cole Vandenberg.
Bottom: Deer Creek Woods includes a floodplain wetland heavily populated with invasive reed canary grass. During a May staff walk with environmental consultants to monitor and analyze the property, the water reached mid-calf and deeper. Opening Deer Creek Woods to the public will be a multi-phase process and accessibility projects will depend on funding. Photo by Kevin Farrell.

4 Other Types of Freshwater Wetlands

Marshes: Frequently or continually covered with water, marshes line streams and the shallow waters along lakes, ponds, and rivers. Common plants include reeds, cattails, and lily pads.

Bogs aka Moors: Formed by precipitation, these cold-climate wetlands have spongy peat deposits, acidic waters, and a floor covered by a thick carpet of sphagnum moss.

Swamps: Any wetland permanently saturated with water and dominated by trees, swamps have thick, black, nutrient-rich soils.

Fens: These peat-forming wetlands are often covered by grasses, sedges, rushes, and wildflowers. They can take up to 10,000 years to form naturally.

3 Ways You Can Help:

- **Visit local protected wetlands**. You can find a list and more info at **www.geneseelandtrust.org/explore**.
- **Clean boots between visits.** Invasive species can hitch a ride on your shoes. Use a boot brush before and after hikes to stop their spread.
- **Wait before you landscape.** That dry depression in your yard during the summer might just be a life-sustaining vernal pool in springtime.

Mindfulness Walks: A Guide

Research shows being in nature, walking, and mindfulness practices all improve people's health. Mindfulness walks combine these elements. Warm weather is a great time to try one alone or with others.

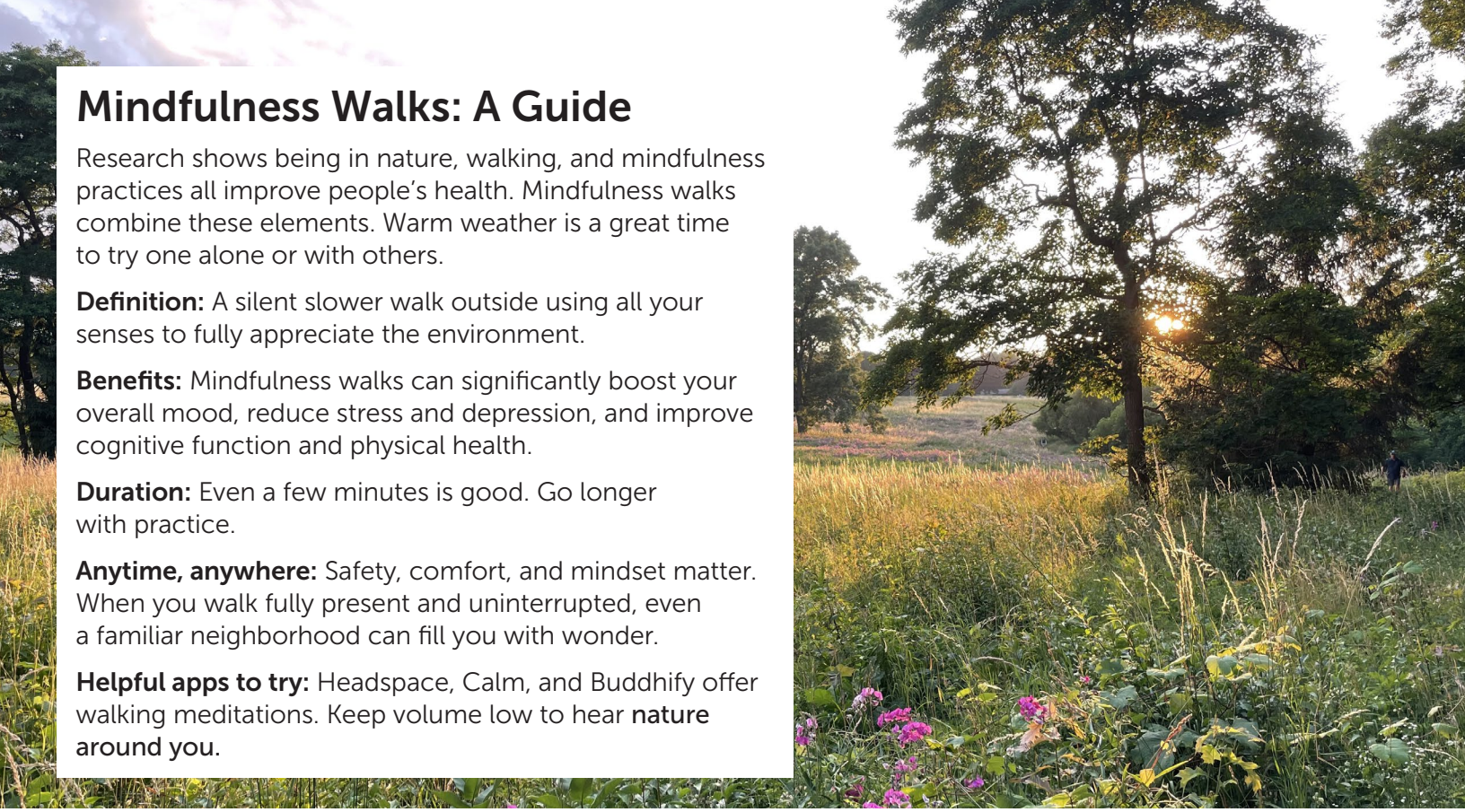
Definition: A silent slower walk outside using all your senses to fully appreciate the environment.

Benefits: Mindfulness walks can significantly boost your overall mood, reduce stress and depression, and improve cognitive function and physical health.

Duration: Even a few minutes is good. Go longer with practice.

Anytime, anywhere: Safety, comfort, and mindset matter. When you walk fully present and uninterrupted, even a familiar neighborhood can fill you with wonder.

Helpful apps to try: Headspace, Calm, and Buddhify offer walking meditations. Keep volume low to hear **nature around you.**



How to take a mindfulness walk:

Stand still, close your eyes, and become aware of your body. Starting with your toes, notice how each part of you feels.

Take a few deep breaths. Open your eyes and begin walking slower than usual. Savor all your sensations.

Feel each footstep as it rolls from heel to toe. Pause to touch something beautiful.

Listen to the wind, life around you, your breath.

Look deeper. See the shadows shifting as you move.

What does the air taste like? That sip of water?

If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the present.

When you're done, stop and stand still. Take a few deep breaths. Say "Thank You" out loud.

Top: A quiet sunset walk around the wildflower meadow at Gosnell Big Woods in Webster. Photo by Elliotte Bowerman. Bottom: The shore of Lake Ontario provides magical moments anytime, like this sunrise at Durand Eastman Beach in Rochester. Photo by Nigel P. Kent.

Sweet success for Steimer family farm

Photo by Elliotte Bowerman

Bill, Emmy, and Audrey Steimer

> **The land is the highest priority natural resource we have. If it wasn't for the topsoil and the quality of the land, we would have no water retention.**
> *– Bill Steimer*

If you've had a Dunkin Donut lately or enjoy the cookie dough in Perry's Ice Cream — you might be eating winter wheat grown by Bill and Audrey Steimer on their Reed Farm in Chili. The wheat is turned into pastry flour at Star of the West — a mill in Churchville that provides high-quality flour to many local and national companies.

Bill Steimer started doing chores on neighboring farms at the age of 8, and by the time he was 14 it was clear he wanted to be a farmer. "I just love respecting and working with the land," he says.

To support his dream, and provide another income source for the family, Bill's parents purchased the farm in 1960. Bill eventually went to Alfred State College for an agronomy degree and then bought the 122-acre farm with his wife, Audrey, in the 1970s.

40 years protecting farmland

In 1982, Bill first heard about conservation easements and got excited about how they could help preserve local farmland. "The development of it — or you could say the destruction of it — is so rampant that we need to protect whatever we can," he says. Bill served one term on the Genesee Land Trust Board of Directors, and has been a long-time member of the Farmland Protection Committee.

Bill and Audrey applied for a state grant twice. The first project fell through, so they applied again in 2018 and in June the project will close. The Steimer's Reed Farm will soon be the 21st farm protected by Genesee Land Trust. Thanks to your support of the farmland protection program, a total of 7,451 acres across Monroe, Wayne and adjacent counties will always grow food, not houses.

Located near the airport, a portion of the farm is part of the Black Creek wetlands complex. It is also adjacent to Reed Road Bird Refuge, a wooded wetland protected by Genesee Land Trust. To prevent erosion and protect the soil, the Steimers plant their fields in strips of different crops –winter wheat, soy beans, and hay for local horses.

Looking to the future

Like most farmers, Bill and Audrey hope the land stays in their family. If not, Bill says the farm could get annexed to a larger operation, or perhaps a startup farmer will take over. American Farmland Trust — in partnership with Genesee Land Trust and other organizations — runs Farmland for a New Generation New York. This program aims to match farmers looking for land with retiring farmers.

Want to discuss protecting your land?

Farmland: Amanda Grisa – **agrisa@geneseelandtrust.org**,
Wildlife habitat: Kevin Farrell – **kfarrell@geneseelandtrust.org**.

5 Fast Facts About Conservation Easements

Conserving your land — for farmland or wildlife habitat — is always a big decision. That is why landowners who do so have some things in common – they love their land, they think of it as part of their legacy, and they have a commitment to the future of their community.

Are you interested in exploring land conservation for you or someone you know? Here are some important points to consider:

1. Ownership Retained
You retain your private property rights and can sell, lease, or pass your land on to your family.

2. Tax Benefits
If you donate at least part of your conservation easement, there can be both federal and state tax benefits.

3. Tailored to You
All conservation easements are unique to the land it conserves and to your vision for your property.

4. Voluntary
Farming or wildlife conservation easements are voluntary and do not require public access.

5. Estate Planning Benefits
Conserving your land can help with your estate planning, reduce your estate taxes, and can help with a transition to the next generation.

Reconnecting riverside communities

New event series for Rochester's BIPOC residents

The Genesee River Alliance aims to increase and diversify city engagement with a new series of riverside events this summer.

In addition to the ongoing mile-a-month walks anyone can join, Genesee River Alliance — a project of Genesee Land Trust — will offer free programs specifically for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). These include kayaking classes, picnics, educational walks, and group discussions about justice, climate change, and community building.

Based on feedback, the new programs specifically invite residents of the El Camino and Edgerton neighborhoods to reconnect with the river that borders their communities.

The events began in May with a monthly riverside yoga series led by 19th Ward native and city school teacher, Kaysha Bennett, who is "thrilled to be creating a positive impact on Rochester."

An equity grant from ESL made the special series possible. Continuing the program will depend on support from members like you who value the benefits of time in nature and want to make sure accessing it doesn't depend on your zip code.

"People will not only have the opportunity to learn and have fun individually, but also to build stronger, more inclusive communities that promote environmental equity and justice for all," says Helen Dumas, the Land Trust's Director of the Genesee River Alliance and Urban Programs.

Your gift to Genesee Land Trust will increase access to nature for everyone.

Kaysha (above) leading a yoga class during the opening of Salmon Creek Nature Preserve.

El Camino residents playing at Conkey Corner Park's 10th anniversary celebration last summer. Photos page 8 & 9 by Elliotte Bowerman.

Transforming urban blight into beauty

Sonya Christensen hated seeing the piles of garbage and railroad rubble when she walked past the abandoned lot on her street, but didn't know what could be done. Then, in 2003, she heard about Tom Frey and Genesee Land Trust working on a project to turn the abandoned railroad track into an urban walking trail.

At the time, Sonya had recently retired and decided to join the effort. An avid gardener, she wanted to turn her neighborhood's eyesore into a community garden.

With no money, plan, or official permission, she just asked neighbors for drought-tolerant perennials and dug in to create one flower bed.

Sonya also started advocating for what would become the Thomas R. Frey Trail at El Camino. For years she went to conferences and meetings, met with officials, and worked with other Land Trust members to create the trail.

Over at her park, bit by bit, Sonya planted and mulched, watered and weeded. Her husband Carl, she says, "will do all the things except shovel."

For 20 years the Christensens — with the help of neighbors and city employees — have lovingly created and cared for the St. Paul Pocket Park. New neighbors tell Sonya the park is a selling point for buying a house in the area. She encourages other people to adopt city lots in their community.

"If you want to do it now, the city has a permit system but it's not a big thing," Sonya explains. "It's just a matter of connecting all the resources."

"Why be irritated when I can just do something about it?"

— Sonya Christensen

Field notes from the special places you help protect

Look for more wildflowers and butterflies

Last year you transformed a cornfield into a beautiful wildflower meadow at **Salmon Creek Nature Preserve in Hilton.** Visit often to find endangered monarch butterflies, 120+ types of birds, and more wildflowers like little bluestem, milkweed, butterfly weed, Allegheny monkeyflower, and others. As funding becomes available, Genesee Land Trust will continue improving trail accessibility and hopefully add birding and fishing platforms. add birding and fishing platforms.

Photo by Will Macaluso

Wetlands restoration project enters next phase

The multi-year effort to restore 3 acres of wetlands at **Cornwall Preserve in Pultneyville** finished in May. Volunteers planted 3,500+ tree seedlings and shrubs including White Pine, Red Oak, Black Chokeberry, and Winged Sumac to replace dead Ash and increase biodiversity. This summer, the next phase of wetland restoration work begins at **Macyville Woods in Sodus Point.** When you visit, say "Hi!" to the 250+-year-old Macy tree and check out the marsh views from a large benched deck built by Eagle Scout Ambrose Widemann.

New parking lot improves accessibility

Visiting **Eva and Harlan Braman Preserve in Webster** got safer and easier thanks to your support. This past spring Genesee Land Trust installed a $30,000 parking lot of 6-8 spaces and a split-rail fence on busy Ridge Road. When you visit, take a walk on the 80-foot boardwalk constructed by Eagle Scouts from Penfield's Troop 9 and relax on the meadow bench built and installed by another Eagle Scout as you look and listen for Bobolinks (pictured) and other grassland birds.

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Front and back cover photos by Elliotte Bowerman

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YOU'RE INVITED TO THESE UPCOMING EVENTS!

MUSHROOM WALKS

Explore the fungus among us and learn how mushrooms help the ecosystems in this series of walks lead by experts from the Rochester Mycological Association. Fun for all ages, please register in advance.

Sunday, July 23 @ 10 - 11:30 AM – Gosnell Big Woods in Webster
Sunday, August 20 @ 10 – 11:30 AM – Macyville Woods in Sodus Point

ORCHARD JAMBOREE

Celebrate the permanent protection of this popular orchard with a live Contra dance for all ages, u-pick blueberries (as available), lawn games, and refreshments. Your RSVP is appreciated.

Saturday, August 12 @ 5 – 7:30 PM – G and S Orchards in Walworth

LEARN TO FISH

If you're angling to learn how to cast and reel, join fishing experts from partners Lake Plains Waterfowl Association and Monroe County Conservation Council for a lesson during these free fishing days. Bring a pole or borrow one. Advance registration helps us plan.

Saturday, June 24 @ 9 - 11 AM – Salmon Creek Nature Preserve in Hilton
Saturday, Sept. 23 @ 9 - 11 AM – Salmon Creek Nature Preserve in Hilton

Please register at www.geneseelandtrust.org/all-events

To learn more and register for upcoming events, please visit www.geneseelandtrust.org/all-events. We also invite you to sign up for our eNews for early event registration as well as conservation news and stories.

Don't forget to follow us on social media for more news!