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The Western New York Land Conservancy Receives Two Major Grants to Protect the College Lodge Forest near Fredonia

The Western New York Land Conservancy has received two major grants toward the protection of the College Lodge Forest, located in Chautauqua County near Fredonia. The grants include \$150,000 from New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and \$203,000 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Combined with \$40,000 already donated by community members, the Land Conservancy has now raised nearly \$400,000 to protect the forest. The Land Conservancy has until December 31, 2020 to raise at least \$790,000 to buy the property, keep it open as a publicly accessible nature preserve, and maintain the land forever. They now need donations from people all over the region to succeed.

The College Lodge Forest sits atop a ridge overlooking the Lake Erie plain in Chautauqua County. It is a cherished community gathering place and one of the most exquisite natural areas remaining in Western New York. The property was purchased in 1939 by SUNY Fredonia students, with their own funds, for the main objective of promoting health outdoors. Since then, the land has been a prized learning laboratory for thousands of teachers, researchers, and students. It boasts a network of hiking trails, an incredible diversity of plants and animals, a pristine wetland, and old growth forest. Old growth forests are rare in Western New York, and this is one of the best preserved patches in the region. Interestingly, the land sits on a continental divide: on one side rainwater drains towards Lake Erie and the Atlantic Ocean, while on the other side it drains towards the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico.

The Faculty Student Association (FSA), a non-profit auxiliary of SUNY Fredonia, has owned the property and operated a historic lodge on the site since 1969. But the cost of maintaining the land and all of the buildings is high, and the FSA proposed a plan to raise funds by logging the forest, including the old growth trees. Fortunately, the FSA decided to sell a large portion of the land to the Land Conservancy and enable protection of the forest. By purchasing 168 acres from the FSA, the Land Conservancy will protect the forest and the FSA will be able to invest funds from the sale into the stewardship of visitor facilities on the portion of the property it retains. The FSA will continue to own and operate the lodge and the 33 acres surrounding it.

The 168-acres of forest that the Land Conservancy will purchase includes miles of hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country ski trails. Once purchased, the Land Conservancy will maintain it as a publicly accessible nature preserve.

The College Lodge Forest's unique position on an escarpment above the Lake Erie plain places it in an important bird migratory corridor. "The overlapping summer ranges of both northern and

southern bird species there results in unusually high bird diversity for such a relatively small area,” said Colleen Sculley, Northeast Chief of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “We are thrilled to support the Land Conservancy’s efforts to save this property and protect this incredible migratory bird corridor through our Great Lakes Restoration Initiative-Joint Venture Habitat Protection and Restoration Program.”

Mark Mistretta, Director of the Western Division of New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, noted the property’s significance to the health of the Western New York community. “It is so important for people to have access to nature, to go on a hike, and to explore natural wonders in their own backyards. We are excited that the trails at the College Lodge Forest will always be open to the public, and that the land’s rich heritage will be conserved.”

Nancy Smith, the Land Conservancy’s Executive Director, described why this land needs protection. “The first time I visited the College Lodge Forest I was amazed by its magnificent beauty. The more I learned about the land, its old-growth forest, its biodiversity, and its significance to the region’s water supply, the more I knew that we simply *had* to step up and protect it. If a pristine forest like this is lost, we cannot get it back.”

If you would like to save the College Lodge Forest, you can donate online at wnylc.org or send a check made payable to “Western New York Land Conservancy” to P.O. Box 471, East Aurora, NY 14052. Please call or email if you have questions: (716) 687-1225 or info@wnylc.org.

The **Western New York Land Conservancy** is a regional, not-for-profit land trust that permanently protects land with significant conservation value in Western New York for current and future generations. The Land Conservancy envisions a future in which open spaces, working lands, wildlife habitat, and scenic beauty are cherished and protected as part of the landscape and character of Western New York. The Land Conservancy is accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission and is one of 1000+ land trusts nationwide, including 90 in New York State. Land trusts have protected over 56 million acres of land.

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