

Nature

central & western new york

The Nature
Conservancy 
Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

FALL/WINTER 2011



Message from Tom & Jim



Jim Howe, Executive Director



Tom Lunt, Chair

The Nature Conservancy's mission is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. Our science solves complicated conservation challenges. Our collaborative approach helps us find common ground with communities, governments, landowners, and other partners. And our tenacity and focus get things done.

Since 1957, The Nature Conservancy has been working strategically and collaboratively to protect the lands and waters of Central and Western New York. In addition to the projects featured on the following pages, here are some of our results from the last few months:

- In Northern New York, we've hired a new staff person to oversee a coalition that is battling invasive species like swallow-wort and water chestnut. It takes well-coordinated and sustained efforts to prevent and control invasive species, and we're confident that our partnership has the tools and capacity to get the job done.
- In the Great Lakes, we're working cooperatively with NYS DEC and a wide range of scientific partners to develop a science-based water withdrawal framework that will help New York State meet the terms of the Great Lakes Compact. Our abundant supplies of freshwater may be New York's most important competitive advantage – both economically and environmentally. Let's keep them here.

Thank you for your support of our results-oriented work here in Central and Western New York. If you like our results, please know that everywhere we work, financial capacity is the limiting factor. With your support, we can continue to deliver the tangible, lasting conservation results profiled in this newsletter.

Thanks!

Jim Howe, Chapter Director

Tom Lunt, Board Chair

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

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The Nature Conservancy protects 500 acres of vital land and water on Sodus Bay



Shaker Heights is a rich mosaic of habitat, including forests, wetlands and streams. © TNC/Adams.

The broad sweep of Sodus Bay protects one of the largest sheltered bays in the Great Lakes. Long popular as a haven for sailors, the Bay provides a safe place for migrating birds to pause and rest, spawning fish to reproduce, and lots of other wildlife. It's also a popular recreation area for boating, swimming, and fishing. So last year, when over a thousand acres along the Bay became faced with sale and possible development, the local conservation community took notice, including The Nature Conservancy.

“The Lake Ontario shoreline has been a priority for protection for

a long time,” says Zack Odell, the Chapter’s Director of Land Protection. “Sodus Bay was a place that made sense for the Conservancy to get involved.”

Protection of these 1,100 acres was a joint effort. The Genesee Land Trust and a farm animal rescue operation called the Cracker Box Palace acquired 600 acres currently in use by the rescue operation, in cooperation with Wayne County’s agricultural preservation board. The remaining 500 acres, which features undeveloped frontage on Sodus Bay, will soon be owned by The Nature Conservancy.

Few privately owned properties along Lake Ontario remain undeveloped today. The tract the Central & Western New York Chapter is purchasing from the Shaker Heights Land Company is one of the largest such properties on Lake Ontario’s southern shore. Eventually, we will transfer it to NYS DEC for addition to their Lakeshore Marshes Wildlife Management Area, where it will fill a gap in a string of public lands protecting coastal wetlands and bays along the southern shore of Lake Ontario.

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The Nature Conservancy was able to move quickly to protect Shaker Heights, thanks largely to a \$1.0 million grant from the North American Wetland Conservation Act, or NAWCA. The NAWCA program received a boost in grant-making from the federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. “Protecting the Shaker Tract at Sodus Bay was one of the top-ranked applications in the whole country,” says David Klein, the Chapter’s Senior Field Representative.

The rare alignment of large parcel size, lakeshore location and lack of development make Shaker Heights an exceptional opportunity. In addition to location, the site is a superior conservation holding owing to its mosaic of different habitats: forests, wetlands, grasslands, and stream systems. This habitat diversity allows Shaker Heights to support richer and more abundant wildlife than the surrounding areas.

Tens of thousands of waterfowl have been observed descending on the open waters and wetlands of Sodus Bay during migration. Here, they rest and refuel before continuing to their Canadian breeding grounds. Ducks are especially abundant on Sodus, including black ducks, common goldeneye, redheads, ruddy ducks, and ring-necked ducks. Waterfowl take advantage of the ice-free patches of water in the bay and overwinter here, including priority conservation species like lesser scaup.

The wetlands also provide food and respite for shorebirds, which breed in the tall, dense marshes and bordering grasslands. One of the most notable breeding birds at Shaker Heights is the least bittern, a small, secretive heron that builds



Above: Sodus Bay is a popular spot for outdoor recreation. © TNC. Below: David Klein examines a culvert at Shaker Heights. Restoring more natural hydrology at Third Creek may be a future project. © TNC/Crabtree.

intricate nesting platforms among tall reeds. The least bittern is an uncommon breeder in freshwater and tidal marshes in this region, and is threatened in New York State.

The forest that shelters the wetland and river corridors is also valuable. “During spring and fall, these woodland trees are dripping with warblers and other songbirds,” says Kristin France, Senior Conservation Scientist for the Chapter. “The trees provide protective cover for migrating songbirds, which seek protection from predators.”

Development of this parcel would have affected water quality in Sodus



Bay. The mouth and much of the main channel of Third Creek, one of the least altered tributaries emptying into Sodus Bay, flows through Shaker Heights. Keeping it in natural cover will go a long way

toward enhancing water quality in the Bay, which is an important spawning and nursery area for many species, including yellow perch, white sucker and smallmouth bass.

The mouth of Third Creek may provide a desperately needed spawning area for a very threatened native fish: the lake sturgeon. Decades ago, New York boasted the largest annual catch of this primitive and threatened species. But now lake sturgeon are exceedingly rare, found in only five sites in the state. Spawning areas like Shaker Heights are absolutely critical to this species' continuing survival.

Yet one more species stands to benefit from the protection of Shaker Heights: people. The now private lands will become publically accessible, a factor very important to the current landowner who wants to see people enjoy the property. "Shaker Heights will be a great place to go for a hike, see birds, or catch some fish," says Jim Howe, Chapter Director. "It's great for both people and nature."



Federal funding from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act enabled the Conservancy to move quickly to protect the Shaker Heights tract. The area will join Chimney Bluffs State Park and other state lands as protected lands. © TNC.

More Than A Perfect Match!

Thanks to a \$1 million dollar grant from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act program, **individual contributions for the preservation of Shaker Heights will receive a 5:1 match!**
Gifts received prior to April 1st, 2012 will be QUINTUPLED!

Just write "Shaker Heights" on your check memo line.

Thank you!

Chapter Adopts Sister Project in Africa: Helping forests, fisheries and families in Western Tanzania

The Nature Conservancy works to make a positive impact around the world, from here in New York State to the most biodiverse regions of the globe. The Central & Western New York Chapter is proud to now be partners with an international project poised for great impact: protection of the Greater Mahale Ecosystem, a magnificent, intact forest system on the shores of Lake Tanganyika in Tanzania.

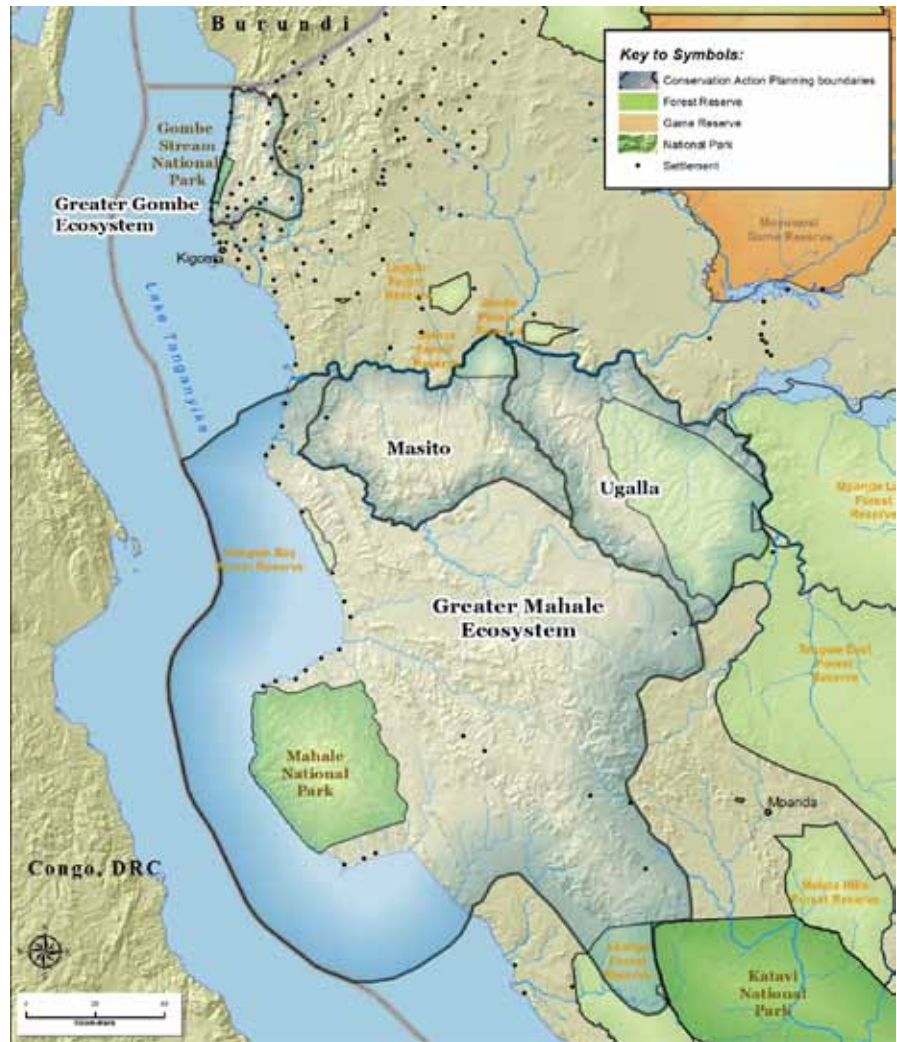
The Greater Mahale is a place where man meets nature every day, and where a balance must be struck between resource use and resource protection in order to save both nature and the communities that depend on it. It is the traditional homeland of the Watongwe and Waholoholo tribes, most of whom are small-scale farmers and fishermen. These communities live close to the land; their lives and livelihoods are dependent upon forest for food and firewood; upon healthy soils for agriculture; and upon the lake for fish and water.

Greater Mahale supports 93 percent of Tanzania's endangered chimpanzees — one reason the Chapter chose to adopt this global project. But despite thousands of miles of separation, there are also close connections between Central & Western New York and Greater

Mahale. Both places lie on the shores of a great lake, and both have rich freshwater and forest resources that people depend on.

Mahale's great lake is Lake Tanganyika. The deep and ancient lake is home to more than 250 species of fish found nowhere else in the world. But productivity in

the lake's deepwater fishery—the source of 40 percent of the protein consumed by local families—has decreased 30 percent over the last few decades. Climate change and population pressure have contributed to an imbalanced ecosystem, from which both people and wildlife now suffer.



The Greater Mahale Ecosystem lies on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, just south of the famous Gombe National Park. ©TNC



At 420 miles long, Lake Tanganyika is the world's longest freshwater lake. It holds 17% of the world's freshwater, nearly as much as the Great Lakes combined. The Central & Western NY Chapter has adopted the lake as a sister site for conservation, and is providing resources and know-how to our colleagues in Africa. ©TNC/Brown

The Conservancy recognizes that successful conservation efforts at Mahale must include both the lake and the forest while respecting the needs of people. To reverse the trend of forest loss and coastal zone degradation, conservation efforts must provide food security and sustainable economic growth for local communities.

The Nature Conservancy is working with several partners, including the Jane Goodall Institute, Frankfurt Zoological Society, the Tanzanian government,

and Pathfinder International to implement sustainable solutions. The coordinated initiatives of the partnership are meant to address sustainability issues from all sides.

For example, the Frankfurt Zoological Society will develop land-use planning tools and microfinancing programs in order to jumpstart sustainable economic development. Pathfinder International will improve access to health care for residents, and The Nature Conservancy will help protect food and water

quality by developing guidelines for sustainable fisheries and forest management. Such guidelines may identify certain areas as underwater sanctuaries, or identify forest and terrestrial habitats that perform a vital ecosystem function. Support from the Chapter will enable hiring of a project director for the Greater Mahale Ecosystem project, who will provide management and accountability for the conservation strategies that will protect this rich and remote place.

Growing Harriet Hollister Spencer State Park



Cross country skiers race at Harriet Hollister Spencer State Recreation Area. ©Tim Mangan

What began as a small 18-acre purchase that stitched together two sides of the Harriet Hollister Spencer State Recreation Area has blossomed into multiple acquisitions that nearly double the size of the park and assure conservation of an important Finger Lakes landscape.

Harriet Hollister Spencer was a Rochester civic leader and expert rose gardener. Upon her death, she gave over 700 acres of property in Ontario County to the state, creating a recreation area named in her

honor. Thanks to its elevation, the Harriet Hollister Spencer State Recreation Area gets significant snowfall and is a popular spot for cross-country ski enthusiasts.

Back in 2006, The Nature Conservancy began purchasing property adjoining the park. “This is a conservation hot spot for many reasons,” says Jim Howe, Executive Director of the Chapter. “It’s a large forested area, anchored by three Finger Lakes. Wildlife abound, as do opportunities for outdoor recreation. The area also includes portions of the Hemlock

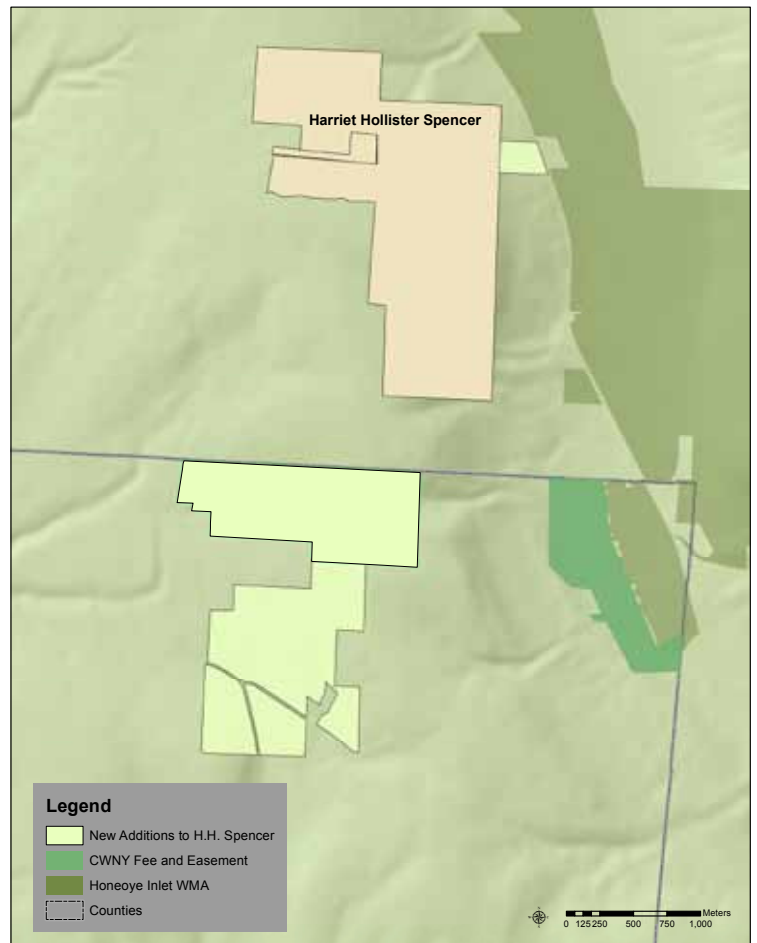
and Canadice Lake watershed, which generates drinking water for the City of Rochester.”

The Conservancy targeted lands around the park as a way to secure a large, unfragmented habitat. Many local species, including black bear, mink, river otter, and woodland warblers, need large intact forests to thrive. Nearly 500 acres were eventually acquired and added to the 766-acre park, dramatically increasing its size. When the adjacent Honeoye Inlet Water Management Area is added to the total, nearly

4,000 acres in the area are protected, a remarkable section of the Finger Lakes.

A significant bonus of increasing the size of Harriet Hollister Spencer State Recreation Area is improved public access and recreation. As trails are constructed and access is improved, a much larger area for recreational opportunities (hiking, biking, birding, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, deer hunting in season) will be available to people who are looking for a scenic but nearby getaway to enjoy nature.

The Chapter has helped the NYS Office of Parks & Recreation add nearly 500 acres of forestland to the Harriet Hollister Spencer State Recreation Area that provide hiking, mountain biking, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling opportunities for people, as well as habitat for black bear, songbirds, and woodland salamanders. ©TNC/Odell



Leave a Legacy for Future Generations

What better legacy is there to leave than your commitment to protecting the Earth for generations to come? Whether you are taking those first important steps toward planning your estate or are in the process of updating your estate plan, The Nature Conservancy is here to help. Don't let another day pass by.

Contact The Nature Conservancy today.

CONTACT: Susan Gutchess **PHONE:** (877) 812-3698 (toll-free)

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Please consult a qualified financial advisor before making a gift. PHOPM201201001

Take a Hike! Enjoy New York's Remarkable Natural Heritage

We invite you to experience New York's remarkable natural heritage. Hiking any one of the Central & Western New York Chapter's publicly accessible preserves guarantees an exceptional experience, as these properties protect some of our state's most striking, unique and fragile biological and geological resources.

Below we present four from across the state, each of which is open every day from dawn to dusk.

Find more preserve details and driving directions on our website — <http://nature.org/newyork/placesweprotect>.

Rome Sand Plains (*Oneida County*): As one of only a handful of inland pine barrens left in the United States, Rome Sand Plains contains a fantastic diversity of habitats. Visitors can find an interesting and varied trail experience as they wind through high sand dunes and low peat bogs or walk through pine barrens, meadows and hardwood forests. Choose from three trails with hikes that range from a half-hour to two hours long. Keep your eyes open for wild blue lupine, pitcher plants, and sundews.

Frenchman's Bluff (*Chemung County*). Frenchman's Bluff Preserve features over nine miles of trails, some of which offer exceptional views of the Chemung River 700 feet below. The trails wind through open meadows, wild ponds and south-facing shale cliffs and talus slopes, as well as eastern red cedar and heath oak forests. In winter, the trail system provides great cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Visit the Tanglewood Nature Center (Tuesdays through Saturdays from 9 am to 4 pm, closed holidays). Watch for timber rattlesnakes, eagles, ospreys, ravens, and more than 30 species of migrating warblers.

Rob's Trail (*Ontario County*): Located within the watershed of Hemlock and Canadice Lake, Rob's Trail showcases the ecological communities, scenic vistas and geological features typical of the Finger Lakes. A 1.75-mile loop trail passes through a variety of early successional plant communities (this trail also supports cross-country skiing and snowshoeing in winter). A more strenuous 0.75-mile spur trail rewards hikers with

access to Canadice Lake. "This is the only trail in the whole Finger Lakes region where you can start on a steep ridge and hike down to the shoreline of an undeveloped Finger Lake," says Stewardship Ecologist Gregg Sargis, who helped develop the trail. You may spot bald eagles, which nest on the south end of Hemlock Lake.

Deer Lick Conservation Area (*Cattaraugus County*): Located within the scenic and rugged Zoar Valley on the South Branch of Cattaraugus Creek, this preserve is a National Natural Landmark. Deer Lick features five hiking trails, from short, easy ventures (0.9 miles) to longer, more challenging treks (up to 3.3 miles). Trails wind through several hundred acres of exemplary old growth forest and feature striking glimpses of waterfalls and shale rock canyon walls.

The Zoar Valley is the northern edge of the range of the American chestnut tree; here you can see young chestnut samplings that won't be affected by the chestnut blight until they reach maturity. Keep an eye out for black bear and hooded warblers, rare tiger beetles, sand darters and steelhead in the creek.



Top: A close up of a sundew at Rome Sand Plains.

©Elinor Osborne.

Middle: A group of happy hikers at Deer Lick. ©TNC.

Bottom: Enjoying the foliage at Rob's Trail. ©TNC

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Meet the Cerulean Warbler

The cerulean warbler (*Dendroica cerulea*) is a small neotropical song-bird known as much for its beauty as its declining population status. This striking blue-and-white migrant breeds in eastern North America and winters in middle elevations of the Andes Mountains in northern South America.

The cerulean has specific habitat preferences for mature forests with structurally diverse canopies and multiple vegetation layers, which demonstrates how influential forest age, complexity, and structure can be to a bird's reproductive success. Due to habitat loss and fragmentation throughout its range, ceruleans are declining at a rate

of 3.2% per year on their breeding grounds. This is the steepest decline of any warbler species in North America, and qualifies the cerulean as a species of special concern and for the Audubon Watch List.

The female cerulean performs a peculiar "bungee jumping" exit flight from its nest. She plunges from the side of the nest, wings pressed to her sides; only when she's sufficiently below the nest does she spread her wings and fly.

The cerulean is a 'notable find' among bird watchers, especially when evidence of breeding is found. Happily, a small breeding



Cerulean warbler © Mike Danzenbaker.

population of cerulean warblers exists on the property of Shaker Heights (see cover story). The forest habitat there is now protected to ensure that population is supported.