

# field, forest & fen

Small  
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Velsko

production. Scenic vistas of open meadows and forests are visible from 2,040 feet of road frontage.

Although not extensive in themselves, these two properties play a crucial role in safeguarding the natural and cultural landscape of the Otsego region by maintaining open space and protecting water resources in two watersheds of the Upper Susquehanna River Basin. By doing so, they also protect our quality of life and contribute to the health of the Susquehanna River and the Chesapeake Bay.

A piece of the sky and a chunk of the earth lie lodged in the heart of every human being.  
-Thomas Moore

Blueprint  
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came up for sale, Peterson acquired and protected them with conservation easements, eventually forming Greenwoods Conservancy, over 1,000 acres of woodlands, fields, and wetlands, to be used for educational and recreational purposes in perpetuity.

In the late 90s, the Cooper family partnered with the Land Trust to protect several properties near the intersection of County Route 33 and Estli Avenue, defining the "eastern gateway" to Cooperstown. Beginning with Holiday Farm on Murphy Hill Road in 1999, the family then added Red Creek Farm on Route 33 to the roster in 2003. In summer of 2004, Holiday Farm II across the road was added, and the Heller family's easements on both sides of County Route 52 soon followed. With the conclusion of an easement on Red Creek Ravine, between County Route 33 and Bowerstown, these two corridors are now connected for over 900 acre of easement-protected properties, thus ensuring the viability of those farming operations as well as protecting

Red Creek Ravine and its valuable aquatic and terrestrial resources.

The Conservation Blueprint defines 10 "landscapes" particularly rich in natural, economic and historic resources: Butternut Valley, Canadarago Lake Headwaters, Charlotte Valley, Cherry Valley, Elk Creek, Panther Mountain, Otsego Lake, Upper Otsego Creek and Unadilla River Headwaters.

Currently, the Land Trust stewards protected property in each area, and actively seeks to protect lands in the vicinity of, or contiguous with, other already protected properties. Those properties could be owned by private individuals, the state or municipality (like a state park or forest), or a corporate entity, whether for-profit or non-profit (such as Thayer Farm, owned by The Oneonta Foundation of State University of New York (SUNY)-Oneonta.) In the months ahead, the Plan will be further refined and adjusted as new threats or resources are identified, and will help the Land Trust continue to protect open space for future generations in the most cost-efficient and effective way.

## Small is Beautiful

### Building Lake Protection

If a journey of 1,000 miles begins with a single step, then it's appropriate to say that a vision for protecting 10,000 acres starts with securing one acre. Or in this case, with 2.0 acres. That's the size of the first parcel of land protected by Otsego Land Trust under its visionary new plan, the Conservation Blueprint for the Otsego Region.

This parcel, located on the eastern shore of Otsego Lake, contributes to the extensive natural buffer encircling the lake that protects its water quality, which is so crucial as a source of drinking water. The open nature of the property maintains the rural and historic character of the region, and contributes to the integrity of the Glimmerglass Historic District, in which it is located. It is also in the vicinity of "an inventoried rare animal."

But when Jerry Raymond decided to protect this land from encroaching development, the Conservation Blueprint hadn't been developed yet. Adjoining their cabin property to the north, he and his wife Marisabel bought it with the express purpose of maintaining its natural values in a sensitive area of the Otsego Lake watershed.



Raymond

With no new dwellings allowed, this conservation easement protects water quality in the lake by precluding a septic system, fertilizer use and installation of impervious surfaces that normally accompany homebuilding. By serving as a buffer to neighboring properties with lake frontage, the Raymonds' property safeguards the waters of the lake by securing the health of an unnamed stream running across it that drains into Otsego Lake.

By protecting their small parcel from development, the Raymonds' easement complements a broad mosaic of other protected properties in the Otsego Lake Conservation Area, both under private ownership or state-owned, such as Glimmerglass State Park.

But water quality's not on Jerry's mind when he says "Up here we feel like we're passing into another time and place, so different from any other...it's a wonderful refuge." Their love for the lake and its environs has found expression in their conservation easement, their contribution to preserving the continuity their family so prizes.

## Charlotte Valley

Pete and Elaine Velsko didn't intend to be trailblazers when they recently donated a conservation easement on the Land Trust's first property in the Charlotte Valley Conservation Area. On the other hand, it seems to come naturally to the couple, who live and work 10 months of the year in the Alaska bush.

Pete first came to the Otsego region as a teenager from Long Island, on a hunting trip with some school buddies. The friends loved it so much they clubbed together and bought a 200-acre parcel for hunting, fishing, and camping trips. Over the years Pete and Elaine have expanded their holdings in the Charlotte Valley, always on the lookout for a way to keep them wild.

The Charlotte Valley boasts what is possibly the earliest European settlement in the Otsego region. The Servos family, said to have moved into the valley around 1740, eventually cleared the land and established several farms and mills, as well as a prosperous trading post. As the Land Trust's first easement in the Charlotte Valley (and the first in Delaware County), the Velsko property reflects that agricultural heritage in its 8 acres of prime agricultural soil, 11 acres of managed forest and highly-rated forest soils, and a Greek Revival farmhouse. Charlotte Creek once powered a sawmill on the property to process local timber, and nearby Strain Mountain was named for the mill's builders. Its location adjacent to the South Worcester Historic District effectively buffers the boundaries of that district, and protects the remnants of the Strain sawmill dam (circa 1840) on the property. The Velskos' farmland is located within a Delaware County Agricultural District, and they currently lease a portion of their acreage to a local farmer for hay

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Otsego Land Trust protects the distinctive rural character of the Otsego County area by securing lands and waters of significant scenic, historic, and ecological value, including forests and farmlands.

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## Field Notes

As the cold, damp weather settles in and the days grow short, late fall is a natural time for gathering with friends and family, sharing the season's bounty and reflecting upon the year as it draws to a close. One recent evening in November we shared dinner with members of the Route 20 Association and reflected upon our rich agricultural heritage and what the economic downturn might mean for communities located along this scenic byway.

As Route 20 traces the northern edge of the Otsego region, this historic and well-traveled road crosses four of the broad landscapes which the Otsego Land Trust has identified as conservation priorities. From here the headwaters of the Susquehanna River and several of its tributaries flow 400 miles to reach the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. In this intact agricultural area that spans several counties is home to hundreds of working farms that service markets in New York City, Boston and other urban centers throughout the Northeast.

While the significant agricultural heritage of Route 20 is well-known, several people with whom I shared dinner were surprised to discover the significance of this corridor for wildlife. The miles of hedgerows, the expansive uncultivated wetlands and other natural areas that crisscross this working landscape provide important habitat for rare birds, such as Upland Sandpiper and Northern Harriers. In fact,

the Route 20 corridor is the largest land base in our area inhabited by rare plants and animals and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has designated this corridor as an important area for protecting grassland birds.

With the recent downturn in the economy, many people are staying closer to home and finding a renewed passion for life's simple pleasures. My dinner partners expressed the hope that local and regional travel will add momentum to the local food movement and the agricultural and heritage tourism of our region. Rediscovery of the significance of nearby communities may even prompt their economic revitalization. We share that hope and it is one of the many reasons that we included several landscapes along Route 20 in our Conservation Blueprint—our geography of hope.

Otsego Land Trust has worked tirelessly over the past two decades—in good times and bad—to protect the places that you cherish in the Otsego region. Your contributions are now more important than ever. We intend to continue working with partner organizations, such as the Route 20 Association, to protect the landscapes so vital to our well-being. With your continued financial support, we will be able to do so.

  
Peter Hujik  
Executive Director

  
Harry Levine  
Chairman

## A Land Protection Strategy Matures: the Conservation Blueprint

As our "new" land protection strategy, the Conservation Blueprint expands on the past 20 years' work preserving open space, and extends its reach based on the footprint of natural areas rather than on man-made municipal boundaries. This plan, defined by important watersheds with the Otsego region, "identifies, prioritizes...and protects those specific tracts of land that will most effectively and efficiently achieve the land trust's mission."

The key words here are "effectively" and "efficiently." Our region faces unprecedented development pressure, and this *single* threat can negatively affect every valuable resource in our region, including prime agricultural soils, working farms, standing forests, wetlands, historic resources and cultural landscapes, and wildlife habitat. With a wealth of such assets vying for protection, how does Otsego Land Trust decide where to focus its limited staff time?

That's where the Conservation Blueprint comes in.

### Water, Water Everywhere

It should come as no surprise that the Land Trust's Conservation

Blueprint is primarily delineated by watersheds. After all, the one element necessary to life in all its forms is water. And the Otsego region boasts an impressive array of liquid resources in the form of rivers, creeks, wetlands, vernal pools, trout streams and, of course, Otsego and Canadarago Lakes. Thus, the Conservation Blueprint's parameters extend to cover a crucial portion of the Upper Susquehanna River Basin, including one of its prime tributaries, the Unadilla River. This area, encompassing 1,040,000 acres, effectively delineates our focus area.

The importance of protecting wetlands and water resources cannot be overestimated: in addition to protecting the quality of our drinking water, wetlands and riparian areas provide habitats for a rich variety of birds, mammals, reptiles, and aquatic and semi-aquatic creatures. New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) estimates that since European settlement in the 18th century, the State has lost half its wetlands statewide.

Other attributes contributing to the "conservation value" of a property include: geological and archeological resources, prime agricultural soils, rare native plants or animals, and wildlife habitat. Through overlaying maps of these natural and historic resources in our region, we can "zero in" on the richest and most diverse

concentrations of those assets and utilize our limited resources where the impact will be greatest.

### Compound Interest

But the value of protected land is compounded when it is nearby, or adjacent to, other protected land. By showing us where other protected lands are located, the Blueprint will help the Land Trust "fit the puzzle pieces together," thus protecting a greater proportion of a given resource: more river or stream frontage, more habitat for wildlife (who don't recognize parcel boundaries), more productive land, intact historic and cultural landscapes, and the working farms and forests so crucial to the health of our local economies.

The value of this connectivity, or "ecological integrity", to use the technical term, has long been known by ecologists and conservation biologists. Otsego Land Trust was introduced to this concept early in its history. In 1993, Earle Peterson closed the Land Trust's 2nd conservation easement on 701 acres in Burlington that includes high-quality wetlands, working forest, old meadows and farm buildings for adaptive reuse. Having grown up on a farm in Unadilla, Peterson understands the web of interrelationships that sustain life. Over the next 6 years, as neighboring properties

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1988–2008: Twenty Years of History													
1988	1990	1993	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Otsego Land Trust founded "for the conservation, preservation and enhancement of the agricultural, forest and open space resources of the Otsego Region..." <sup>1</sup>	Dorothy Campbell donates Leatherstocking Farm easement on Otsego Lake	Earle Peterson donates first conservation easement on Greenwoods, 706 acre on a ridge line between Butternut Valley and Upper Otsego Creek	Martha Frey, first paid staff person, works 1 day a week as Executive Director Kent and June Barwick donate first easement in Cherry Valley Land Trust awarded first grant from Land Trust Alliance (LTA), for \$1,000	Henry Cooper protects 62.5 acres on Murphy Hill	Oneonta Foundation partners with Land Trust to protect Thayer Farm and other properties as research facilities, 558 acres on Otsego Lake	2,165 acres under protection by year's end	Otsego Land Trust moves to 101 Pioneer Alley Bill Brosseau hired as first full-time Executive Director	John and Josephine McKelvey protect 167 acres in the headwaters of the Unadilla River	Second staff person is hired, thanks to another LTA grant	Hannah-Lee Stokes Land Protection Fund established	Erika Hall secures 275 acres in the Butternut Valley Carl Roemer protects 10.5 acres of wetlands at the base of Panther Mountain First Farmland Protection grant awarded	Landowners partner with Land Trust to protect 1,043 acres, including additional acreage in the Butternut Valley, Panther Mountain and Upper Susquehanna River Basin	A first in Charlotte Valley: Peter & Elaine Velsko protect 11 acres  Our first acquisition: 3 acres along the Susquehanna River  5,213 acres under protection as of October 31

<sup>1</sup>Otsego Land Trust, Inc. Articles of Incorporation.