

field, forest & fen



Connecting People with the Healthy Lands and Clean Waters that Sustain Us



TAKING THE LEAD

Otsego Land Trust Announces New Executive Director

Otsego Land Trust is pleased to introduce Gregory Farmer as its new Executive Director. Working with OLT's Search Committee, Eos Transition Partners provided a thorough process for this national search.

"Being a native upstate New Yorker with an innate love for our region, Greg's deep expertise and connections in the land trust and preservation communities across the northeast will be a great asset to all OLT's benefactors, conservation easement donors, stakeholders and partners. OLT staff and board are excited to welcome Greg as our new leader," says Carla Hall, OLT Board Director and Search Committee Chairperson.

Gregory Farmer was born and raised along the Erie Canal corridor. An early interest in the landscape and history of the region led him to the completion of a degree in American Studies (Interdisciplinary) from SUNY Brockport and a master's degree in History Museum Studies from the Cooperstown Graduate Program at SUNY Oneonta. His initial focus on American material culture evolved into an emphasis on community development, affordable housing, and historic preservation in Western Massachusetts, eventually expanding into Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Maine.

He previously worked for the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation in addition to managing community-based projects as an independent consultant.

Careful listening

"Partnerships are the basis of every successful project," says Greg. "Research and field documentation can tell us what we have," he observed, "but only conversation in the community, paired with careful listening, can tell us what is possible." Farmer has been laudably successful in securing project funding from a variety of private and public sources and has worked hand in hand with regulatory agencies to ensure funding transparency for the greatest public benefit.

Connecting communities with land and water


Greg's favorite projects have been those that link communities directly to the natural landscape, especially farmland, forests, and waterways. "Farming in the Northeast has never been easy, but the landscape of the region is so often defined by the relationship between farmland and villages. Sustainable agriculture that maintains the quality of the soil and provides a reasonable economic return is key to the preservation of the area's rural character." In Greg's view, "healthy forests and clean waterways are shared amenities that improve the quality of life for everyone."

"I am delighted to be returning to Central New York and to have the opportunity to work with the



"Healthy forests and clean waterways are shared amenities that improve the quality of life for everyone."

talented staff, board, and partners of the Otsego Land Trust," Farmer enthused. The organization's strong history of land protection through its successful collaboration with landowners and with other nonprofits attracted him to the position. "The generational challenge for everyone who appreciates the exceptional beauty of the Upper Susquehanna region is to address the effects of climate change on our natural ecosystems. The legacy of farmland, forests and waterways is at risk unless we act together."



Crisp detailed drone images show shifts in creek corridors and outflows into Otsego Lake. This view can provide insights related to flooding impacts that may not be visible from the ground.

2021 STEWARDSHIP SEASON

Monitoring from the Air

As part of OLT's stewardship obligation, we must annually monitor all 11,000 acres of conservation easement land, and 800 acres of fee land.

For the last thirty years, OLT staff and volunteers have met this obligation by strapping on our hiking boots and walking each property.

We have covered a lot of ground by foot (and sometimes by canoe), but as more and more land became protected, OLT began exploring alternative methods for monitoring properties.

In the Spring of 2021, OLT was one of 18 land Trusts from across the country to receive a grant from **The Land Trust Alliance** and **The Nature Conservancy California** to pilot remote monitoring technologies, including satellite imagery and drone photography.

While these technologies have existed for many years, they had previously been cost-prohibitive for our small land trust. However, during the pandemic we began to

explore remote monitoring more seriously, as staff members could not come into the office or meet face to face with landowners.

With funding from this grant, OLT partnered with a company to obtain high resolution imagery of all of our conservation easement and fee properties. We also consulted with a local drone operator to collect aerial imagery on select properties.

Our hope is that these technologies will not only save us time and transportation costs, but allow us to better measure and understand changes on conservation properties over time, or in response to certain pressures (i.e., increases or decreases in population, changes in farming or timber practices, climate change, etc.)

Remote monitoring gives us the power to measure accurately the

The LENS satellite image viewer allows OLT staff to compare property images to previous years; see new structures or measure changes to fields, wetlands and forests.

Here you see an example from Brookwood Point. The 2011 image shows the area with old house that was once on the property, the 2019 image shows it gone.

impact of private land conservation, here and across the country. And most importantly, our staff can work more efficiently, saving time and money to conserve more of our precious landscape before it is too late.

BY MAY LEINHART

MUSSEL FLATS

Protecting Wetlands, Stream Corridors and At-Risk Wildlife Species

Honoring their parents by protecting the land

Otsego Land Trust (OLT) recently completed an important land protection project within Otsego County's beautiful Butternut Valley. Located along the gorgeous and biologically diverse Butternut Creek, the property, known at OLT as Mussel Flats, was purchased from the Wheeler Family.

Many years ago, Robert and Blevyn Wheeler spoke with OLT Board member Carla Hall and then-Board Chair, Earle Peterson, about conserving their property. Years later, Robert and Blevyn's children (Kate, Diana, John, and Bob) decided to move forward to protect the land they had loved so deeply. "Protecting this land feels like a love letter to our parents and honoring them in a way that will last forever," Diana Wheeler said.

Much more than just acreage

The 82-acre Mussel Flats boasts over 7000-feet of frontage on Butternut Creek and contains extensive wetlands, critical for wildlife and flood attenuation. The property also has high quality farmland in active cultivation. But this story is so much richer than a few stats can communicate!

"Protecting this land feels like a love letter to our parents and honoring them in a way that will last forever." — **Diana Wheeler**

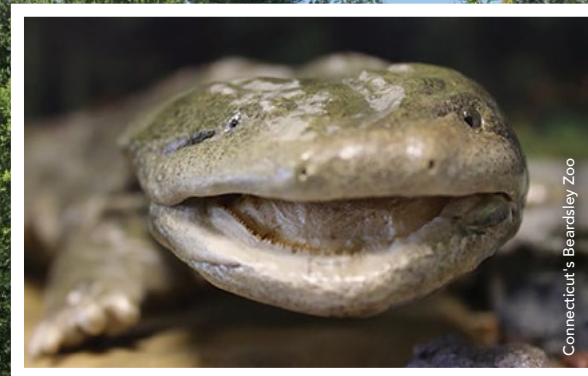
Mussel Flats was purchased by OLT as a "Trade Land" (see sidebar) and then transferred to The Wetland Trust (TWT), a non-profit organization which focuses on wetland protection and improvement.

TWT also acts a wetland mitigation bank, keeping wetlands in reserve

for wetland establishment and improvement projects required by state or federal regulators. Jim Curatolo, the Executive Director of TWT, jumped on board the "project train" very early in the process. The project would not have been successful without Jim's determination and experience.

The property also supports, or may support in the future, some amazing wildlife species including American eel, yellowlamp mussel, eastern elliptio mussel, river otter, and giant eastern hellbender.

The Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC), a non-profit that works in a multi-county region in NYS and Pennsylvania to enable wetland, floodplain, streambank and stream protection and improvements, contributed significant time, expertise, and funding to enable OLT to pursue and complete this



Giant eastern hellbender is generally nocturnal and crawls along silt-free stream floors. They emerge at night to hunt.





Rainer Lucas

Lydia Brinkley (Upper Susquehanna Coalition), Michelle Herman (The Wetland Trust), and David Diaz (Otsego Land Trust) stand amongst thousands of trees and shrubs recently planted at Mussel Flats.

project. USC staffer, Lydia Brinkley, shared "USC is thrilled to have been a part of this project. It is a model for multi-organizational and individual partnerships resulting in uniquely important land, water and species conservation."

The Otsego County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has also played a vital role. SWCD, in cooperation with USC, planted nearly 20 acres of riparian area plants within the property, utilizing NYS's "Trees for Tribes" program. Mark Kugler, a SWCD staffer, says "The plantings will eventually grow into a forested wetland, providing habitat and water quality benefits for generations to come."

This project, totaling nearly \$200,000, was made possible by the financial support of The Wetland Trust, Upper Susquehanna Coalition, Tianaderrah Foundation, Dr. Earle N. Peterson, Edward Lentz, and additional individual donors. It is also indebted to the many generous donors throughout our region who provide general support for OLT's operational costs. OLT's Hannah Lee Stokes Land Conservation Fund also

played an important role in covering some costs prior to reimbursement from grants.

Ed Lentz, Chair of the Butternut Valley Alliance, an organization that seeks to connect communities, protect the environment, and promote the arts within the Butternut Creek Watershed said, "The BVA is really excited to see this land, especially its wetlands and creek frontage, protected by OLT and owned and managed by The Wetland Trust. We thank OLT for making this happen and we are glad to have played a small part in this effort."

OLT cannot protect land without the support of our communities.

We invite you to visit our website and click the "donate" button in order to help advance work critical to our region's quality of life, food production, water quality and critters.

Look for the rest of the Mussel Flats story in our Spring 2022 edition.

BY DAVID DIAZ

Important land protection tool

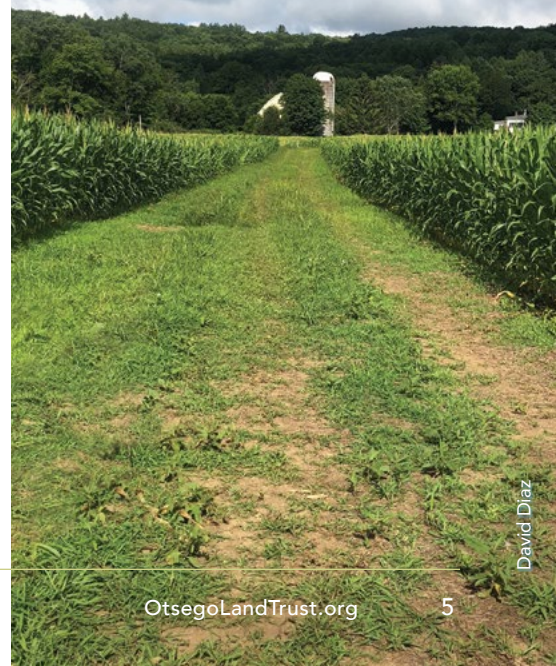
Trade lands

Trade land properties are acquired by land trusts with the specific intention of transferring or selling them to another entity.

If the trade land has significant conservation value, a permanent conservation easement is placed on the land before it is transferred from the land trust to its new owner.

Why use trade land agreements?

- They allow the original owner, who wants to relinquish the property, to protect their land and put it to good use.
- They enable land trusts to assure important land resources and qualities are permanently protected without taking on the onerous and ongoing expenses of owning lots of land themselves.
- Can provide land trusts with significant revenue depending on the transaction.



David Diaz



BEFORE

NORTHSIDE STREAM RESTORATION

Experiencing the *Brookwood Project*

Imagine walking through an old forest of towering trees and listening to the sound of a babbling brook next to you. You discover a charming wooden bridge, cross the brook and begin to see the forest opening up into a lovely meadow.

As you continue a little further down the trail, Otsego Lake comes into view. A few minutes later you arrive at what was once the former home site of the Brookwood Point mansion. You now have an uninterrupted view of shimmering Otsego Lake and are treated to an unexpected view of Kingfisher Tower.

Turning south you cross a second bridge over the creek that connects you to the historic gardens and garden house on the other side of Brookwood Point. This side of the creek has been the primary destination of visitors since the property became a public access land.

In the last twenty years, few have experienced the pure bliss of the “brook” and “woods” that gave the property its name: Brookwood. It is Otsego Land Trust’s vision to create an easily accessible trail through the woods and along the

brook for visitors to reconnect and enjoy this part of the property again.

This is the intent of the Brookwood Northside Project, a multiphase project that will create a walking trail loop on the north side of the property.

Realizing this vision requires us to restore eroded portions of the streambanks, bring back native flora, enhance wildlife habitat, establish a trail and construct two new bridges.

You will be pleased to know that we have acquired some of the resources to begin the work but we still have a long way to go. Here’s the scoop...

Exciting news: the Northside Project is underway

Otsego Land Trust is pleased to report that Phase One of the

Brookwood Northside Project is now complete thanks to funding from the Scriven Foundation, Black Foundation, and the Upper Susquehanna Coalition.

This summer two badly eroded sections of streambank along Brookwood Creek were stabilized to reduce erosion and sedimentation in Otsego Lake and to accommodate a future public access trail through the woods.

OLT will also coordinate an effort to re-plant areas with native species this fall and next spring in order to further stabilize the slopes and to enhance the property’s stream, lake shore buffer and animal habitat.

Working in collaboration with the Upper Susquehanna Coalition and Otsego County Soil and Water Conservation District, and with funding from Delaware Otsego



AFTER

Audubon Society, OLT will remove invasive species such as barberry, multiflora rose, honey suckle, and buckthorn from areas of the property.

The cleared areas will then be replanted with native species such as black willow, shagbark hickory, smooth alder, and button bush.

Enhancing the stream buffer with plant species native to New York will improve wildlife habitat and improve water quality before it enters Otsego Lake. It also sets the stage for Phase Two of the Brookwood Northside Project. During this stage we will reconstruct the bridges, establish the walking trail and transform our vision for access to the north side of the property into a useable reality.

Still a ways to go: getting over the river and through the woods

The construction of new bridges is critical for allowing visitors to connect with the proposed north side trail. Materials and design details for the proposed bridges will replicate features of the original structures, providing a visual and architectural connection to the property's rich history.

Earlier this year OLT submitted a grant application and we hope to receive good news in December. The grant would partially fund the replacement of the two deteriorated bridges that would connect visitors to the north side

of the property. If the grant comes through it will make raising the funding needed to complete the project much more manageable.

Proposed bridges

The future trail will follow the historic drive alignment to the extent possible. Additional trail routing will comprise a complete loop and connect with an enhanced parking area at the visitor kiosk. Interpretive signage highlighting historical, cultural and natural features is also proposed to further enhance the experience.

**STORY & PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MARCIE FOSTER**

Interested in seeing access to the north side become a reality?

Why not volunteer or donate? The Brookwood Northside Project vision is one that will open up a free public hiking trail through a property with unparalleled scenic, cultural and natural significance. OLT will need your support to make this vision a reality through donations and volunteer efforts. Please consider making a donation to Otsego Land Trust now to help realize this vision, by visiting www.otsegolandtrust.org





Otsego Land Trust conserves our natural heritage of woodlands, farmlands, and waters that sustain rural communities, promote public health, support wildlife diversity and inspire the human spirit.



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Front cover: North American river otter by
Mike Reynolds.

Otsego Land Trust is partially funded by the New York Conservation Partnership Program administered by the Land Trust Alliance Northeast Program with support from the State of New York. A copy of Otsego Land Trust's annual financial report may be obtained upon request from our office or from the New York State Attorney General's Charities Bureau. ATTN: FOIL Officer, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.



P.O. Box 173
Cooperstown, NY 13326

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Donations in honor of a friend or family member make great birthday and holiday gifts, too!

Use the envelope inside this newsletter to send your gift of support, or visit otsegoandtrust.org.

