

“ROCKY RIDGE” EASEMENT IN HENDERSON PROTECTS VAST

Largest forestland ever conserved by all-volunteer land trust

The natural beauty of a scenic ridge and forestland overlooking Henderson Bay will be protected as part of a conservation agreement finalized recently with OBI Land Trust.

The conservation easement filed in August in Jefferson County is a partnership with landowner Stephen W. Yaussi to ensure that roughly 243 acres off Gilman Road in the northeast portion of Henderson will remain forever wild by preventing development on most of the land. It includes a vast hardwood forest and several hundred feet of what is known as the “rocky ridge” – a high bluff with shear limestone cliffs that are geologic feature as well as a local landmark for those driving along Route 3 in Henderson or boating in Henderson or White’s Bay. It is one of three distinctive bluffs of the ridge known by some as “the three sisters.”

“It has open space value for the area and is visible from Henderson Harbor and it’s well-known,” said OBI Land Steward Lee Ellsworth.

“Having undeveloped forest on a significant ridge like this is really a great thing.”

The property includes two separate, adjacent parcels and is home to a mature forest with an impressive number of hardwood species, including cedar, maple, shag hickory, hickory, and oak. The nearby limestone cliffs are visible from the Great Lakes Seaway Trail (Route 3) and serve as a flyway and nesting area for migratory songbirds as they make their way up the lakeshore. The property represents the largest forestland ever protected by OBI.

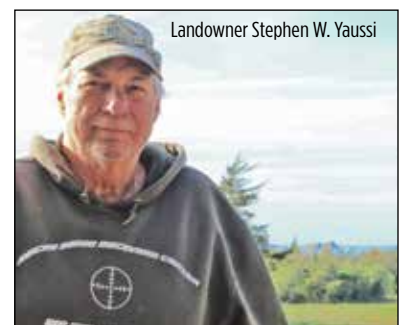
Mr. Yaussi knew the Henderson property was special in 1978, when he became a co-owner with the late Dr. Kenyon J. Plumpton. They raised beef cattle and horses on what was then Rocky Ridge Ranch. Productive hay fields, barn and a sugarbush converted into a hunting camp were part of the ranch, which is no longer operating.

An architect and co-founder of GYMO, Mr. Yaussi built his home there in an area tucked away to

maintain the natural beauty of the ridge. Years later, the land was divided up and since then he has had an interest in protecting his 200-plus acres, especially with a trend toward the construction of large residential homes on scenic shoreline and ridge areas.

“We had a productive, educational and enjoyable time on the property over the years and it just seemed like this property was too nice to have it disturbed,” said Mr. Yaussi. “This is land that needs to remain open and natural.”

The easement keeps the land on the tax rolls and in private hands. The Town of Henderson is part of an 8-town service area for OBI that follows along the shoreline communities of Jefferson County.



Landowner Stephen W. Yaussi



A LAND TRUST

PO Box 117
Chaumont, NY 13622-0117
315-649-6045
www.obilandtrust.org

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Downybrook Nature Reserve included in New York State Birding Trail



The New York State Birding Trail highlights world-class birding opportunities across the state and provides information on places anyone can go to find birds amid beautiful settings. It is a network featuring some of the state's prime birding locations and this is an exciting opportunity to boost birdwatching at Downybrook, located on Perch Lake Road in Brownville.

"The many habitats and pond areas in 180-acre property are home to dozens of bird species such and songbirds and migrant

waterfowl and we welcome bird enthusiasts to bring their binoculars and camera and walk the trails at Downybrook," said OBI Chairperson Jim LaPlante.

Local bird clubs are regular visitors to Downybrook and OBI has a bird checklist available for more serious birders. A new nature viewing deck on the reserve's west side was recently completed and will only enhance the birdwatching experience.



OBI in the News...

Local Media Take Notice of OBI's Accomplishments in 2022

On April 24, OBI Land Trust was featured on the front of the Northern New York section of the *Watertown Daily Times*. The article titled "Land Trust Secures \$50K boost for Downybrook Wildlife Refuge" by Chris Brock explained the improvements being made at the reserve on Perch Lake Road as a result of grant money and private donations.

"Preserving Open Space: Grants from state will help 3 land trusts enhance the region," was the title of an article published in the May 20 edition of the *Watertown Daily Times*. It told of grants awarded to three area land trusts, including more than \$35,000 awarded to OBI through the New York State Partnership Program to fund a new parking area and driveway and the nature viewing deck at Downybrook Nature Reserve.

In July, OBI was featured by the local public television station, WPBS-TV in Watertown.

The seven-minute segment for "WPBS Weekly: Inside the Stories" included interviews with Carrie Fleming and Tracy Valentine, both members of OBI's Board of Directors. Filmed at Downybrook Nature Reserve, the program highlighted recent improvements at the reserve as well as the ongoing mission and conservation goals of OBI.

Then on September 12, 2022, the *Watertown Daily Times* featured OBI once again with the article, "Land Trust Secures 'Rocky Ridge' Section in Henderson as Conservation Easement." It told about OBI's latest easement property, which is also featured on the cover of this newsletter.



OBI's work at Downybrook was feature story in Northern New York section of *Watertown Daily Times* this spring.

Join Us! The non-for-profit OBI Land Trust relies on contributions from the public and grants from foundations to fund our projects in land conservation.

Please send your contributions to: P.O. Box 117, Chaumont, NY 13622.

Become a "Friend of OBI."

Levels of membership range from \$100 Protector of the Land to \$1500 Friend of the Land.

We need and appreciate support of OBI!



OBI SERVICE AREA

Looking into the Future 30TH ANNIVERSARY APPEAL

First of all, I want to say THANKS to each of you for your support this past year. It has been a remarkable year for us and YOU are what makes OBI Land Trust happen!

“Looking into the future!” was the theme of OBI’s very successful annual “friendraiser” this last August, and is also being carried through for the end of year appeal for donations. After all, that is what it is all about- conserving and protecting land for today—and future generations! As I have mentioned many times, land conservation is an expensive and ongoing proposition.

In this newsletter, you will learn about our exciting year, including the completion of the **Rocky Ridge Conservation Easement** and some significant improvements at **Downybrook Nature Reserve**.

Those of you who attended our annual gathering heard from several young people from the community who told about their contributions through hands-on



CHAIR’S MESSAGE

work projects and grant support to benefit OBI.

- Youth Philanthropy Council participation in trail cleanup at the Alex Velto Bat Conservation area.
- Two Eagle Scout Projects completed at Downybrook and an Honor Student Volunteer Project.

Young people are demonstrating their belief in Conservation through their actions, they truly are the future.

Please make a contribution today to show your support of your all volunteer land trust!

OBI Land Trust 30th anniversary is happening in 2023! Help us kick it off with a great end of year appeal! THANKS for your support and have a great Holiday Season!

Best,
JLaP

YOUTH COUNCIL PARTNERS WITH OBI FOR CLEAN-UP AT BAT CONSERVATION AREA

Members of the Northern New York Community Foundation’s Youth Philanthropy Council joined OBI Land Trust for a spring clean-up day at an OBI nature trail that is also a habitat for an endangered species.

A pickup truck full of trash was collected in and around the woodland trail during the sunny Saturday morning on April 29 at the Alex C. Velto Bat Conservation Area at Eagle Ridge Village housing development in Evans Mills. The trail is open to the public and also traverses the 15-acre property that is also home to the Indiana bat.

OBI Land Steward Lee Ellsworth explained the unique nature of the property and how the overhead tree canopy provides a home for the bat, which is about the size of a small mouse and is an endangered species

“This is critical habitat for the bat, yet people can still come here and enjoy the trail,” he told the group. The Council is made up of area high school students.

The clean-up day included a lesson about the unique property where recreation and conservation coexist.

“Volunteerism is a pillar of philanthropy and the Council chose to work with OBI with a keen interest in environmental conservation. The group enjoyed the opportunity to make a tangible impact in the community we care deeply for” said Kraig Everard, Director of Stewardship and Programs at the Northern New York Community Foundation.

It seemed especially appropriate for the Council to be involved since the trail is named for the late Alex C. Velto, who served as executive director of the Northern New York Community Foundation for 17 years. During that time, Velto’s conservation interests helped OBI Land Trust – the area’s only all-volunteer land trust – to survive and grow by helping OBI secure vital grant funding.

The trail was named for Mr. Velto in 2014, nearly five

years after his passing.

High school student Jack Mangan joined the Youth Philanthropy Council in fall 2021 and helped to organize the clean-up event with OBI.

“It was a chance to learn about this trail and it was also a team-building event because we’re working together and being together and we’re also having a positive impact,” said Mangan, now an 11th grade student at South Jefferson Central School and chairperson of the Council program this school year.

The trail runs the length of the conservation area and can be accessed from the end of Kestrel Drive, at Eagle Ridge Housing Development, or from the end of Northern Lane.

OBI Land Trust was among five non-profit organizations in the north country to receive \$1000 grant awards from the Council this year.

Members of the Northern New York Community Foundation’s Youth Philanthropy Council assist with cleaning up the Alex C. Velto Bat Conservation Area in Spring 2022.



Discover Downybrook Phase Two

2021 Grant Funded Improvements to Downybrook Nature Reserve Now Complete

Your donations to OBI really do make a difference! Private donations to OBI were combined with grant funding to OBI from The New York State Partnership Program (a collaboration of funds from the New York State Land Trust Alliance and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation) to complete a gravel entrance, driveway and parking area at Downybrook Nature Reserve's east entrance. Completed this summer, the project has greatly improved access to the east side trails and is more welcoming to visitors at the 180-plus acre reserve, located on Perch Lake Road in Brownville.

A portion of the grant was combined with a generous donation from Dani Baker, co-owner of Cross Island Farms on Wellesley Island, and a grant from the Youth Philanthropy Council at

the Northern New York Community Foundation to fund the construction of a wonderful nature viewing and gathering deck on Downybrook's west side. The multi-use deck overlooks the grassland prairie and is a perfect sitting spot for birdwatchers as well as a gathering spot for educational programs and events.

The "Discover Downybrook" campaign was launched in 2019 to highlight this premier public-use property and its 3.5 miles of nature trails. Since then, two separate grants from the New York State Partnership Program have helped make it possible for two phases of improvements. The first phase included new wood walkovers, and bridges, an observation deck on the west side pond, informational kiosks and expanded parking on west side trails.



Eagle Scout Project completed at Downybrook

Boy Scout George Weir, a member of Troop 586 in Adams, completed various trail improvements at Downybrook West this fall that will greatly improve access to areas prone to flooding. Work included trail clearing at a spot susceptible to standing water, construction of a replacement bridge, and the refurbishment of a long bridge and trail area that was impassable due to seasonal flooding.

"I chose this project because I wish to preserve the beautiful Downybrook nature walk and support the mission to protect birds and wildlife," said George, age 16. The improvements took many hours and were completed in October as he works toward earning the highest rank of Eagle Scout.

OBI is grateful to the scouts who have done trail work at Downybrook as part of their Eagle Scout projects. The improvements made by scouts, their family and troops are having a lasting impact that will be enjoyed by visitors for many years to come. George is a junior at Watertown High School and son of Sarah and Marshall Weir.





Another Great Time at Wise Guys!

ANNUAL DINNER RECOGNIZES CONTRIBUTIONS OF AREA YOUTH TO OBI LAND TRUST

This year's OBI fundraiser theme "Looking into the Future: Conserving Land for the Next Generations" was a chance to recognize and celebrate the various young people who have made a difference by donating their time and talents to OBI Land Trust. This includes clean-up at conservation properties and projects, such as new bridges and walkovers at Downybrook. OBI is grateful to have the support from the Youth Philanthropy Council of the Northern New York Community Foundation, Eagle Scout Jeremy Shimel of Troop 2 of the Seaway Trails District as well as Ben Clement,

honors student at General Brown Central School. They offered inspiring words that were a highlight of the August event at Wise Guys Ristorante in Chaumont. More than 100 guests joined OBI's Board of Directors at the sit-down dinner, which is the primary fundraiser for our all-volunteer organization. OBI Land Steward Lee Ellsworth received special honors this year for his many contributions to OBI, including leadership with maintenance of conservation properties and expertise as a leader of many birding trips and nature walks.



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Running at the Reserve

The General Brown Central School Cross Country team has enjoyed training on the 3.5 miles of trails at Downybrook Nature Reserve for the 2022 fall season. The reserve is open from dawn to dusk daily.





PO Box 117
Chaumont, NY 13622-0117

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**CELEBRATING 30 YEARS
OF LAND CONSERVATION**

**OBI LAND TRUST
INVITES YOU
TO JOIN US**

**AUGUST 7, 2023
WISE GUYS RISTORANTE**

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**WINTER BIRDING ON
POINT PENINSULA
SATURDAY JANUARY 7, 2023**



Lee Elsworth

Join us for our annual winter birding trip along the shores and in the fields of Point Peninsula, in the Town of Lyme. Point Peninsula is a prime birding

destination. We will watch for raptors such as the ever popular Snowy Owl and others including Bald Eagle, Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Harrier, Northern Shrike, and American Kestrel. Snow Buntings, and several species of waterfowl will be about! We are hopeful this year the raptors will have plenty of food in our area!

We will meet at 10:00AM and ride along the route in your own cars. A field guide will be on hand to answer questions and direct the route. Several stops will allow for photographs and discussion! We will be monitoring for weather conditions.

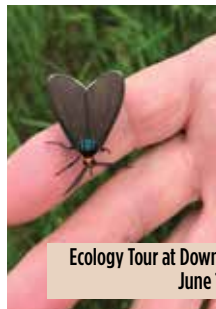
Priority for reservations will be given to Friends of OBI Land Trust, email to reserve your space on this ever popular trip!
info@obilandtrust.org

**EVENTS &
WALK ABOUTS
IN 2022...**

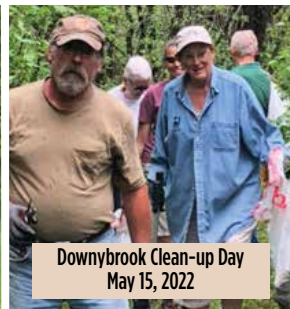
Here's a sampling of a few enjoyable OBI events that happened this year.



All About Bluebirds: Bluebird House Building Workshop
July 9, 2022



Ecology Tour at Downybrook Nature Reserve
June 12, 2022



Downybrook Clean-up Day
May 15, 2022



Enchanted Edible Garden Book Signing with author Dani Baker
August 14, 2022

