

## OBI Builds on Recent Successes by Launching 2019 End of Year Appeal

Lee Elsworth

It is that time of the year again when we and many others appeal for your support!

As you may know, OBI Land Trust has had many accomplishments over the last couple of years, and we could not have done it all without **you!** Our successes were achieved by our all-volunteer board as well as other dedicated volunteers. **All** of your donations go directly to the process of conserving land and maintaining that preservation, as well as educational community involvement.

Rather than try to list all the accomplishments in an individual letter, we thought we would devote this end of the year newsletter to a few of them. Hopefully, you will enjoy reading about our various activities.

One project that I'd like to highlight is the improvements we have made at Downybrook Nature Reserve. If you have not been to Downybrook yet, you should visit and **take a hike** (around the property). The first thing you will notice is our improved parking area. An informational kiosk, currently under construction, will be visible at the trailhead, and also at the trails across the street. You will see improved trail signs, bridges and boardwalks on both sides, as well as picnic tables and a great new wildlife blind (photo below) at the westside beaver pond. All of this was done not only to preserve land, but also to improve the public experience. We hope you will visit Downybrook as a four season destination. It is the perfect spot for cross-country skiing in winter.

Our grant for the Downybrook improvements was funded by the New York State Conservation Partnership Program, with matches from the Northern New York Community foundation, and supporters like you!

You might have seen information regarding a study commissioned by Thousand Islands Land Trust, which verifies something we already knew: **preserved lands bring economic value to the community.** Read more about the study on the OBI website.

We have a couple of new projects in the hopper, as well as ideas about our other properties.

If you were at our *Summer Gathering* you might have heard that the status of OBI is excellent. We need your help to keep this excellence going. We are going to continue our event programs, which have been fun, educational, and best of all... **outside!**

As you may have heard me say: "Conserving land is an expensive proposition", and we appreciate your support that got us where we are today. We are asking that you keep the success going. **Please either renew or become a friend!** This is our annual appeal issue and we would appreciate your continued support.

Come to our events and keep in touch through our website [www.obilandtrust.org](http://www.obilandtrust.org) for information on events and other OBI news. Thanks!

Jim LaPlante  
OBI Board Chairman





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**Board of Directors**

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- Urban Hirschey, **Emeritus Board Member**
- Amanda McIlroy
- Rosanne Weir
- Tracy Valentine, **Editor and Historian**

# INSIDE OBI: Amanda McIlroy

Amanda McIlroy became an OBI Board Member in May of this year, and with that she brings her enthusiasm for writing, social media, and her love of the outdoors!

Amanda holds a B.A. in Communication and Social Interaction from SUNY Oswego and received her M.S. degree in Recreation and Leisure Services Management from SUNY Brockport.

She has years of experience in the recreation field from being a Parks and Recreation Playground Director for four summers, followed by two summers as a Camp Counselor in the Adirondacks, a year as a School Age Child Care counselor for the YMCA, and an internship for the Ontario Community Center in Ontario, NY while receiving her M.S. degree.



Amanda currently works at Immaculate Heart Central School as their Director of Marketing and Communications for the entire K-12 school system. She brings to OBI her enthusiasm for non-profit initiatives, event planning, marketing experience, and creativity!

“I’m excited to be on the OBI Land Trust to apply my education, experience, and love of experiencing the outdoors, while learning more about the logistics of land conservation. I’m eager to learn as much as I can from this hard working and well-read group that are passionate about making an impact in our community!”

Amanda enjoys hiking, kayaking, reading, live music, and exploring Upstate NY trails with friends and family in her free time.

**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.

Look for our end of year message in early December.

**We need and appreciate support of OBI!**

## OBI Highlighted in New Video

Acres of forests, open fields and marshland, preserved by OBI Land Trust, takes the spotlight in a new short video, “Where Land Meets Lake: A History of OBI Land Trust.” Developed in collaboration with OBI’s Board of Directors and produced at WPBS Public Television, it is narrated by new OBI board member and WPBS staffer, Colin Burns. Colin, who also co-produced the video and took the lead in gathering footage said it “tells the story about our all-volunteer land trust and features the beautiful places that we have protected. We hope it will inspire people to think about supporting our mission and conservation options to help keep land forever wild.”

Stunning drone footage showcases the trust’s most significant properties, including the Alex C. Velto Bat Conservation Area in the town of LeRay - a recreational trail and home to the endangered Indiana bat, as well as the 400-acre conservation easement in the town of Lyme that includes a unique alvar habitat. Also highlighted is the pristine Stoney Cove property that is one of the last stretches of undeveloped shoreline in Henderson Harbor.

The video, available for viewing on our website [obilandtrust.org](http://obilandtrust.org), also features an interview with Mary Eldrett, former owner of Downybrook Nature Reserve. In 2015, Mary and her late sister, Helen, entrusted ownership and care of Downybrook - a stunning 184-acre property in Brownville - to OBI. “We were happy that we had somebody that would be able to maintain it beyond us,” she said.



## Thank You Nugent Carpentry & Remodeling!



Our Dreams for Downybrook Nature Reserve are becoming a reality. A big thank you to **Nugent Carpentry and Remodeling, LLC** and owner **Nathan Nugent** for all of their amazing work (much of it requiring hauling wood into the woods!) that included building new walkovers and footbridges, installing interpretive panels and putting up signs and kiosks. These improvements will be enjoyed by visitors for many years to come.





Mabel and Tom Walker, this year's honorees

OBI Chairman Jim LaPlante greets guests

OBI Treasurer Joan Woods talks with Mabel Walker

OBI Volunteer Steve McIlroy with daughter Amanda, OBI Board Member

## AN EVENING WITH OBI LAND TRUST

One day a year OBI Land Trust supporters to come together to honor our mission, celebrate our accomplishments and pay tribute to the people who help make it all possible.

"An Evening with OBI Land Trust", held on August 6, 2019 at the stunning and scenic Lucky Star Ranch in Chaumont, was OBI's most successful fundraising event - surpassing all previous OBI fundraising successes. Record-setting attendance and sponsorship resulted in an event with the highest ever amount of financial support. We thank all of you who were a part of it and appreciate that Meme Hanley, New York Program Manager for the Land Trust Alliance, could join us.

The summer gathering is an annual event that helps fund operations for our Chaumont-based land trust. It is a tradition that brings together OBI supporters and those looking to learn more about our land trust.

The night was especially memorable as we honored two very special guests: longtime OBI supporters T. Urling "Tom" and Mabel Walker. Their loyal support has had a vital role in OBI's successes. It was wonderful to pay tribute to them in the presence of other OBI "friends" - our loyal supporters and

volunteers who came together for a night of celebration.

The Walkers, longtime residents of Watertown, were also summer residents of Cape Vincent and Henderson for many years. They have a strong personal connection to the shoreline communities that OBI serves. In 2015, they generously sponsored the Walker Challenge; a \$10,000 matching donation program that, at the time, was the single-largest fundraiser in our trust's history. For every dollar donated to OBI, the Walkers matched it to help fund our operating budget. The matching program exceeded \$20,000 and was a key factor in the continued growth and success of our organization.

"Their support of our conservation goals is something that we are grateful to have had over the years," OBI Board Chairman Jim LaPlante told the crowd at the event. "The Walkers truly believe in what we do and that OBI Land Trust matters."

Supporting our mission and our activities is also a key to work on preserving land that is special to us all along the shoreline communities of Jefferson County. Our success depends on all of you!



Charles Stone, OBI easement co-owner, receives gift from OBI



OBI Land Steward Lee Ellsworth and LTA's Meme Hanley (both standing)



OBI Kids help us celebrate

### Thank you to our wonderful Sponsors!

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#### Partners

Lucky Star Ranch · North Country Bird Club · Northern New York Community Foundation · White Caps Winery



## Strategic Planning Meeting

What do we want for the future of OBI Land Trust? That was the big question that brought board members together on November 5, 2019 with Connie Manes, Circuit Rider with the Land Trust Alliance. We spent several hours discussing OBI's strengths and accomplishments, the needs of the communities we serve and steps our all-volunteer group can take to become stronger. The meeting was held at the Northern New York Community Foundation and was an important first step toward updating the OBI Land Trust Strategic Plan for 2020-2025.



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### OBI WISH LIST:

- ★ Riding mower for trail maintenance
- ★ 4-wheel drive vehicle for trail monitoring and maintenance
- ★ Chain saws
- ★ Loppers
- ★ Volunteers!



Invite your friends to connect online: [obilandtrust.org](http://obilandtrust.org)

[facebook.com/OntarioBaysInitiative](https://facebook.com/OntarioBaysInitiative)



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## Donor Highlight

### Become a Steward of the Land Today

The stunning print of an original drawing by talented sketch artist **Anna Stunkel** will be our gift to donors to OBI Land Trust at a minimum \$1000 Level, Steward of the Land. The professionally matted print of a Red-Tailed Hawk will be available now through 2020 to those who contribute at the \$1000 level, or higher, to our non-profit land trust.



Anna has had a lifelong interest in birds and the natural world. She graduated from the College of the Atlantic in 2013 with a BA in Human Ecology and a concentration in Wildlife Biology. She has since worked as a seasonal field biologist in various areas of the country. This includes work as a raptor counter in California, Idaho, Maine, Virginia and New York. For two springs, she has worked as a spring migration raptor counter at Derby Hill Bird Observatory in nearby Oswego County. She has also worked with seabirds, woodpeckers, and songbirds in various areas of the country. Anna is a wildlife and pet portrait artist who works mainly in colored pencil and pen.

OBI Land Trust is very pleased to be able to offer this highly-detailed and lifelike print to our highest level supporters!

## EVENTS & WALK ABOUTS...

### Winter Birding on Point Peninsula, January 11, 2020

Come ride with us and enjoy a birding trip along the shores and in the field around Point Peninsula and surrounds. Winter on the peninsula has been a prime birding destination. We will watch for raptors such as the ever-popular Snowy Owl, and other raptors including Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Shrike, American Kestrel, Bald Eagle, Snow Buntings, Longspurs, Swans and several species of waterfowl may also be seen.

Transportation will be provided and field guide will be on hand as we spend a Saturday exploring the bird life on the peninsula, located in the town of Lyme. Priority for reservations will be given to Friends of OBI. For more information, visit [obilandtrust.org](http://obilandtrust.org)



Lee Ellsworth

### OBI LAND TRUST IS BUSY PLANNING EVENTS FOR 2020!

**Annual Spring birding trips at Downybrook** – in cooperation with North Country Bird Club.

Don't forget your binoculars!

**Nature Walk at Chaumont Barrens** – (The 2019 event was so popular!)

**Annual ecology tour at Downybrook** – In mid-June. Lots to learn about the plants, animals and different environments at Downybrook.

**Nature Photography Workshop** – Hosted by OBI Land Steward Lee Ellsworth.

**Downybrook Kids!** – A fun day for the young and older kids! Run around, explore and experience nature!

Dates and times for events will be posted on our website [obilandtrust.org](http://obilandtrust.org).

Do you have an idea for an event? Please let us know via our website or by calling 315-649-6045.

## ANOTHER WAY TO GIVE TO OBI



Did you know that you can support OBI when you shop on Amazon.com? How? Use AmazonSmile - a simple and automatic way for you to support our land trust every time you shop at Amazon, at no cost to you. When you shop at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com), you'll find the exact same selection and convenience, with the added bonus that Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price to OBI.

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**Our organization is listed as Ontario Bays Initiative. Sign up and a portion of your purchases is donated directly to us! Thank you!**