



Indian Fort Nature Preserve



Genesee Valley Conservancy Spring Newsletter

2015

From the Executive Director



One of my favorite things about living in western New York are the four distinct seasons. If you enjoy outdoor winter recreation, you certainly were able to have fun this year! As evidenced by the ski and snowshoe tracks I encountered while on weekend treks, it was obvious that folks were taking full advantage of winter.

One advantage the snow provides is the ability to see evidence of all the critters that roam the forests and fields. In other seasons, evidence of their movements are harder to see. In winter, super-highways appear giving away the vast activity that takes place. On one snowshoe, I snapped the cover photo at Indian Fort Nature Preserve of a lone set of tracks scurrying down one of the trails.

In addition to revealing unseen activity, winter also brings animals that cannot be seen in other seasons. Snowy owls were in our region, having flown in from Canada. One snowy owl “Geneseo” spent much of the winter living off of conservation lands and was tagged as part of an important research project (page 6).

This winter was also a good one for new conservation. The Conservancy completed another project along Jaycox Creek and expanded conservation in the Nations Road grassland region. In addition, two farms were accepted into the State farmland protection program. The Conservancy will begin working with the Moore (page 3) and VanDeWeert (page 5) families to protect their family farms this year. Each farm will be a great addition for conservation.

We also reached a major milestone this winter. Genesee Valley Conservancy is celebrating its 25th anniversary! Thanks to everyone who has served on our board, volunteered, contributed financial support, helped establish nature preserves, and worked to conserve land!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben".

Benjamin Gajewski, Executive Director

Jaycox Creek Protection Expands

By Benjamin Gajewski

This winter, Genesee Valley Conservancy protected 82 acres of farm and pasture land in Geneseo with the help of brothers Jeremy and Eric Grace. A conservation easement was placed on the property located in the Genesee River watershed in Geneseo, Livingston County.

This project contributes to an ever expanding area of conservation in the Nations Road Grassland, identified by National Audubon Society as an important bird area and by the New York State Open Space Plan as a priority area. This region is where Genesee Valley Conservancy completed its first conservation project 25 years ago, and because of its importance, continues working today.

Jeremy and Eric are longtime supporters of conservation. They have supported Genesee Valley Conservancy as members and have contributed to previous conservation projects locally.



David Bojanowski

With this new project, now over 4.5 miles of the Jaycox Creek are protected. The creek passes through the “Research Reserve” which is the site of many SUNY Geneseo studies and projects.

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Protection to Expand Along Beards Creek

By David Bojanowski

Livingston County will soon have an additional protected farm due to selection of an application submitted by the Conservancy to New York State for farmland protection.

The Moore Farm on Dunkley Road in Leicester is scheduled for protection. The conservation easement on the Moore Farm will permanently protect 475 acres of productive farmland in perpetuity, including natural resource protection areas along Little Beards Creek and its tributaries.

Applicants to the NYS farmland protection program are first chosen by Livingston County in a pre-application selection which ranks farm applications on characteristics such as soil productivity, development pressure, farm sustainability and proximity to protected lands.

The Moore Farm is a cash crop enterprise owned by brothers Gary and Dennis Moore. Dennis's son Patrick works on the farm, lives in the farm homestead, and plans to take over the farming operation when his father retires.

The family farm started in 1953 when Lester Moore purchased 330 acres of prime farmland and began milking 30 cows. The dairy herd increased over the years to 75 milk cows in 1965 when Gary and Dennis formed a



The Moore Farm started in 1953, seen here, when Lester Moore purchased 330 acres and began milking 30 cows on this property.

Provided

partnership with their father Lester. Land was also added to the operation with an additional 150 acres purchased in 1963. In 1979 the farm ownership and management was transferred to Gary and Dennis and continued to grow to 120 milk cows by the late 1990's. The cows were sold in 2006 when Gary and Dennis shifted to a cash crop operation.

The decision to convert to a cash crop operation was based primarily on the high production capability of the soils which results in profitable crop yields. The farm does not rent or lease other land. The farm currently grows corn, soybeans, wheat, and hay crops for local dairy operations and dry hay for baling.

The farm has consistently incorporated

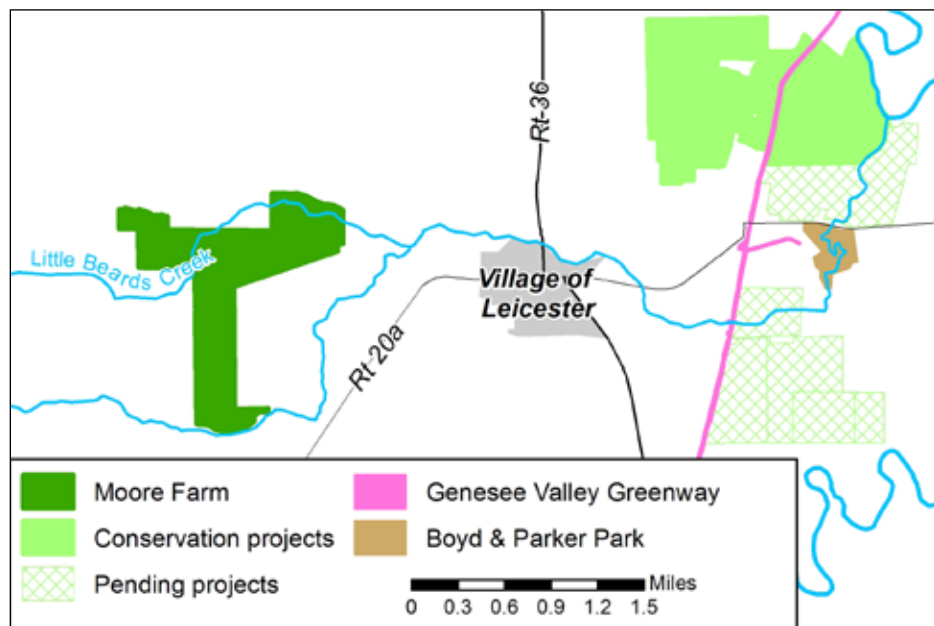
conservation practices including extensive crop rotations, drain tiling, runoff diversions, and conservation tillage practices. In 1984 the Moore Farm was chosen as the Livingston County Conservation Farm of the Year by the Soil & Water Conservation District.



The farm is now a cash crop operation and produces strong yields from the high quality soils. BG

Gary has served as a director on the Soil & Water Conservation Board and as supervisor for the Town of Leicester for over 20 years.

In addition to seeking to permanently protect their farmland with a conservation easement Gary and Dennis have developed estate plans to ensure the farmland is passed to their children, so the family's farm legacy and operation can continue. GVC



Jaycox Creek Protection Expands

...continued from cover

Eric is familiar to many at the Conservancy, having served for 13 years as the organization's Executive Director (1999-2011).

Eric said "It is far too easy to treat land as a commodity - as an asset that can be converted to cash. However, by donating a conservation easement, we are making a statement that this land has value as open space and we feel that is more important."

"We are making a statement that this land has value as open space."

The primary threat to the Nations Road Grasslands is loss of habitat through the sale and development of land for housing. As the towns of Avon and Geneseo continue to grow, the land has increased in value, making it increasingly tempting for landowners to subdivide and sell. As Eric stated, this land has more than just financial value.

The habitat here is critical to a wide variety of birds for breeding and wintering. The mix

of forestland, grassland, and oak-savanna habitat attract Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Short-eared Owl, Grasshopper Sparrow, Henslow's Sparrow, and Bobolink species just to name a few.

The conservation easement on this property allows the land to remain privately owned while restricting future residential, commercial, and industrial development in favor of conserving the open space, scenic views, and natural resources on the property. The property is a major part of the viewshed seen while traveling north and south on Route 39 north of Geneseo and is also readily visible from the top of Nations Road. The land is currently used as horse pasture as well as productive agricultural fields. By protecting this property, Eric and Jeremy have helped preserve the rural character along this northern entrance to Geneseo.

In addition to helping maintain the rural character and scenic views, this project protects 2,700 feet of the southern branch of Jaycox Creek, an important tributary of the Genesee River. The land is also adjacent to the northern branch of Creek, providing an important buffer to a 200 foot bend in the creek.



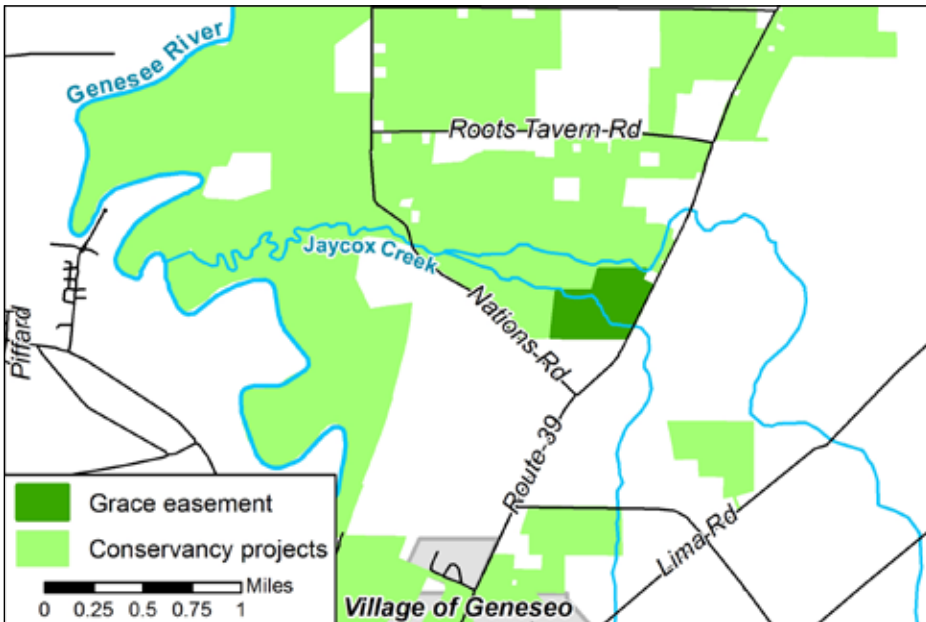
The rural landscape, working pastureland, and forest, are all enjoyed while driving by the property on Route 39. Seen here, a scene from the fall. **BG**

Jaycox Creek is one significant aspect of the SUNY Geneseo Research Reserve which is adjacent to this new conservation project. The Reserve is a three way partnership between Genesee Valley Conservancy, the landowners, and SUNY Geneseo that allows access to the land for research purposes to SUNY faculty and students.

"I am delighted that we will be helping preserve the natural beauty of the Genesee Valley for future generations."

Jeremy added to his brother's sentiment, "I am delighted that we will be helping preserve the natural beauty of the Genesee Valley for future generations. I am also thrilled that we will be able to continue working with SUNY Geneseo at the Research Reserve as they continue to conduct research and educate students on natural ecosystems."

Thanks to this project, Genesee Valley Conservancy now holds conservation easements on over 4.5 miles of contiguous land along Jaycox Creek starting at its connection with the Genesee River. **GVC**



Family Farm to be Protected in Geneseo

By David Bojanowski



DB

The Genesee Valley Conservancy is pleased to announce that Pleasant Hill Farm in Geneseo was chosen as the recipient of a New York State farmland protection grant to permanently protect 221 acres of the VanDeWeert family farm with a conservation easement.

Appropriately named, the Pleasant Hill Farm sits nestled on a soft rolling hill on Lima Road boasting scenic views, prime soils and a successful family dairy operation.

Gary and Eleanor VanDeWeert and sons, Gary Jr, David, and James, moved to Livingston County and purchased Pleasant Hill Farm in November 1988. Prior to the move, the family ran a dairy operation on a rented farm in Orange County, NY.

The owners of that land, Orange County, converted the farm to a large scale golf course and the VanDeWeert family immediately sought to purchase their own land.

Through an ad in a statewide agricultural circular, the VanDeWeerts located and purchased the Pleasant Hill Farm as a turn-key operation and moved their herd to Geneseo.

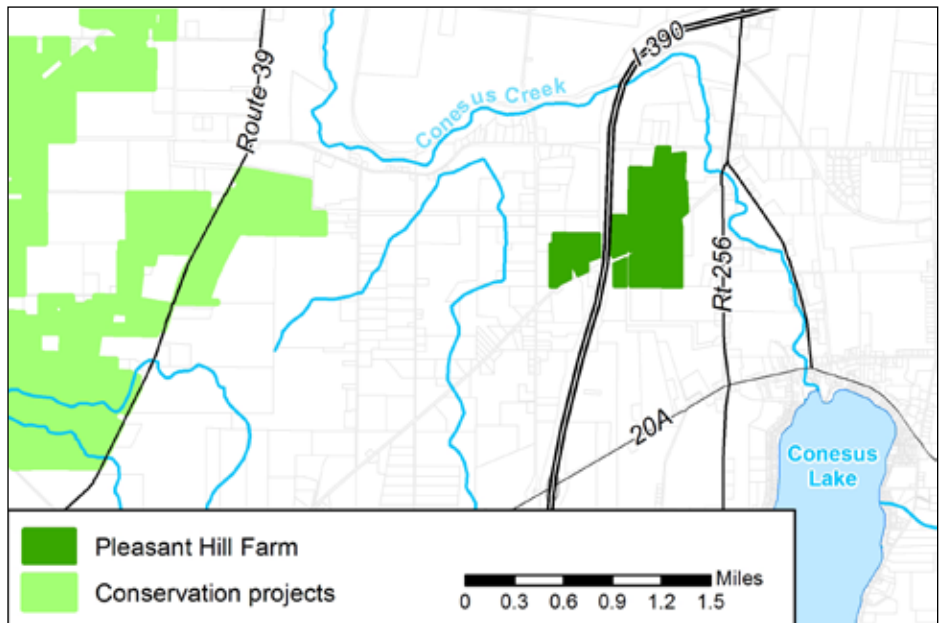
Today, Pleasant Hill Farm milks 100 Holstein cows and raises their own replacement heifers. The farm produces an average of 21,000 pounds of milk per cow per year milking twice per day.

Including rented land, the farm has approximately 200 acres in corn and alfalfa rotation, 100 acres in hay, and 40 acres of pasture.

Pleasant Hill Farm is truly a family farm operation. While Gary and Eleanor are “retired,” they still live on the farmstead and help as needed. In 2012, Gary and Eleanor transferred ownership of 221.4 acres of farmland and management of the farm to their son James. James, his wife Rosemary and their

agriculture, the VanDeWeert’s are planning to increase the herd size by 20% with updates to the milking parlor and calf raising facilities

Pleasant Hill Farm has been a Dairy of Distinction since 1996. The VanDeWeert family, particularly matriarch Eleanor, have kept the appearance of the property a priority



two sons, James Jr. and Kenny, are responsible for all of the daily farm chores as well as much of the field work.

James Jr. recently completed an Agricultural and Diesel Mechanics degree in 2014 at the University of North Western Ohio and has returned home to work with his parents and younger brother on the farm.

To accommodate both sons interest in

in an effort to create a positive image for agriculture in the region.

Visible from I-390 and on both sides of Lima Road, the Conservancy is excited to protect this farm as it contributes to the significant farmland of the Genesee Valley region. **GVC**

In the photo above are family members and farm operators Gary, Ken, and James.

Project SNOWstorm Lands in Geneseo

www.projectsnowstorm.org

By Scott Weidensaul

Researchers behind Project SNOWstorm are hopeful that this project will not only produce useful information about the behavior of snowy owls, but will ultimately better inform conservation efforts.

“Geneseo” a snowy owl that took up residence on protected lands in the Nations Road Grassland this winter, is now part of this important research project.

Tom McDonald of Rochester has been studying snowy owls in New York for two and half decades, and because of that long experience, his insights into snowy owl behavior are all but unmatched. We thought you'd like to hear more about what goes into catching these spectacular raptors.

“If I have learned anything about snowy owls in the last 25 years,” Tom said, “it's the fact that they are the Marcel Marceaus of the bird world.”

“No other raptor on the planet is more expressive and talkative than a snowy. In their own unique way, they will tell you if they are agitated by something, as well as what is bothering them.

They will let you know if your trap presentation is enticing or whether it represents nothing more than entertainment value — something to pass the boredom.”

Tom had watched the owl extensively before trying to trap him, and his individual personality played a big role in how and when he decided to try to catch him.

“Geneseo” as the owl was named, has been wintering in Livingston County, New York, about 25 miles southwest of Rochester.



This winter, a Snowy Owl took up residence on the protected lands along Nations Road. The grasslands provide an ideal hunting ground during these cold months which bring these owls south from Canada in what is called an irruption.

Laurie Dirks

“Geneseo is an extremely aggressive adult male (they typically defend nesting and wintering territories vigorously) and I watched him chase another adult male literally out of the County in the early hours of darkness the day before I trapped him,” Tom said.

Most snowy owls look for a high perch in the final hours before sunrise, watching for a last meal before crows, hawks and other annoyances start their day.

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Legacy Giving

Make the Genesee Valley part of your legacy.

Whether made during your lifetime or as part of your estate, a legacy gift is a one-time extraordinary contribution that propels conservation forward and will leave a lasting impact.

No matter the size, a legacy gift can help initiate new projects, fund larger undertakings and increase the pace of conservation locally, **protecting the places you love.**

Contact Ben Gajewski to discuss legacy giving
585-243-2190
ben@geneseevalleyconservancy.org

Types of Gifts

- Cash
- Stock
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- Retirement accounts
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Potential Gift Uses

- Stewardship Endowment
to ensure permanence
- Acquisition Fund
to protect new places
- Preserve Maintenance
for GVC's nature preserves

If you have included Genesee Valley Conservancy in your estate planning, please let us know so we may understand your gift and wishes.



2015 Nature Walks and Events

April 25 - Earth Week - Indian Fort Preserve Workday, 10am-1pm

May 16 - Spectacular Bluebell Walk, 10am & 2pm

Roadside at 3432 Nations Road, Geneseo - \$5 Photo Raffle for 36" Print!

May 30 - Rare Species Bird Walk with Dr. James Kimball, 7:30am

Roadside at 3432 Nations Road, Geneseo - Bring binoculars & scopes!

June 7 - Genesee River Float with Genesee River Wilds

Free, bring your own craft, Transit Bridge to Caneadea, 9am meet, 10am launch

June 14 - Annual Membership Picnic, 5:30pm

June 21 - Fathers Day Bird Walk, 7:30am

Hosted by Hans Kunze in Wyoming Co., Location TBD

July 11 - Genesee River Paddle (Free! Bring your own craft!)

Free, bring your own craft, Mt. Morris to Indian Fort, 9am meet, 10am launch

August 7 - Art Auction & Geneseo Wine Stroll

Save the date for this exciting new event featuring Genesee Valley art!

August 15 - Geology of Indian Fort Nature Preserve, 9am

Hosted by Dr. Jeff Over at Indian Fort Nature Preserve, Geneseo

September 6 - Oak Tree Half Marathon & 5K Run/Walk, 8am

Registration opens June 1 at www.geneseevalleyconservancy.org/race Run, watch or volunteer!

October 10 - Genesee Valley Hunt Races with Genesee Valley Hunt, 10am-4pm

Details at geneseevalleyhunt.org/races These races take place on protected lands!

October 23 - Bald Eagles: Rising from the Brink of Extinction, 7pm

Save the date for this featured talk by biologist Peter Nye. Learn about the successful effort to keep eagles in NY.

Join our e-mail list for more events like our Foliage Walk and Cross Country Ski!

For details visit:

www.geneseevalleyconservancy.org



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Many of these events are held with permission on private property, please respect landowners private property so we can continue these great events.

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"Geneseo was different," Tom said. "He was roosting on the ground early on the morning that I captured him, but was still in charge of his surroundings, standing at attention in his favorite spot 400 yards out in an open field."

"My experience with aggressive individuals

has shown that even if the owl has had a successful night hunting, he will pursue enticing prey just to keep other predators from having it," Tom said.

That was the case with Geneseo, which Tom caught less than 15 minutes after setting up his

rig. "If I had not had the opportunity to study him the night before, I would not have set up on an owl so far out in the field," he said.

You can follow Geneseo's movements at www.projectsnowstorm.org on an interactive map and learn about this research project. **GVC**



Laurie Dirckx

Tom McDonald, left, and David Mathiason carefully remove "Geneseo" from the trap in order to attach a tracking device for researchers to monitor the owl's movements.



Laurie Dirckx

Indoors, Tom and David work meticulously to attach the transmitter without causing harm to the owl.



Genesee Valley Conservancy

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www.geneseevalleyconservancy.org

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Nancie Battaglia

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www.geneseevalleyconservancy.org

