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**Contact:** Lori Severino | (518) 402-2016  
Press Office | [PressOffice@dec.ny.gov](mailto:PressOffice@dec.ny.gov)

## **DEC ANNOUNCES \$1.8 MILLION IN CONSERVATION GRANTS TO LAND TRUSTS TO BOOST TOURISM, FARMLAND PROTECTION AND PUBLIC ACCESS FOR RECREATION**

*Grants Leverage an Additional \$2.25 Million in Community Contributions and Private Support*

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) today announced \$1.8 million in Conservation Partnership Program grants for 55 nonprofit land trusts across the State. Representatives of the DEC and the Land Trust Alliance unveiled the grantees at an event today in Skaneateles, in Onondaga County, in recognition of Earth Week, a weeklong celebration of New York's commitment and accomplishments to protecting our environment, conserving open space and increasing access to the state's vast and magnificent natural resources.

"Land trusts continue to make a difference in local communities, maximizing public and private dollars to protect and preserve our state's natural resources for generations to come," said Acting Commissioner Basil Seggos. "Through partnerships like these, the Environmental Protection Fund provides critical support for many environmental and open space programs, generating revenue, creating jobs, and ensuring a cleaner and healthier New York."

The grants, funded through the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), will leverage an additional \$2.25 million in private and local funding to support projects that will protect farmland, wildlife habitat and water quality, enhance public access for outdoor recreational opportunities, and conserve priority open space areas important for community health, tourism and regional economic development. The Land Trust Alliance administers the Conservation Partnership Program in coordination with DEC.

"DEC's work with land trusts is essential in our efforts to conserve and protect New York's valuable natural resources and this program is a clear example of the partnerships that have made a difference in preserving open space," Seggos said. "Governor Cuomo's historic \$300 million budget for the Environmental Protection Fund, will help support the work of the state's Land Trusts to be effective stewards of important habitats in the state for generations to come."

The 13<sup>th</sup> round of Conservation Partnership Program grants, administered by DEC, will help local land trusts sustain and expand community and landowner outreach initiatives and develop an array of land conservation, stewardship and education programs.

The grants will further regional economic development goals by strengthening partnerships with local and state governments and advancing locally supported efforts to protect working farms, enhance public access and recreation opportunities, and conserve private lands prioritized in New York State's Open Space Conservation Plan and state wildlife action plan. Land trusts will also apply grant funds to prepare for national accreditation, supporting New York land trust commitments to rigorous national standards for nonprofit governance and organizational excellence.

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“This pioneering initiative enables land trusts, local communities and private landowners to better protect New York’s most important water resources, farmland, wildlife habitat and urban green space such as community gardens,” said Andrew Bowman, president of the Land Trust Alliance. “We also applaud New York’s tremendous progress in strengthening the Environmental Protection Fund in this year’s state budget. Individually and together, these are smart investments promoting healthy communities, strategic land conservation and environmental stewardship. On behalf of the Land Trust Alliance and its supporters, I thank Governor Cuomo, Acting Commissioner Seggos and the New York State Legislature.”

“The Conservation Partnership Program has demonstrated impressive statewide success by supporting land trusts in our local communities,” said Andy Zepp, chair of the Land Trust Alliance’s New York Advisory Board and executive director for Finger Lakes Land Trust. “Together with state funding for land conservation and farmland protection, this program helps to protect and care for New York’s natural heritage and working lands, and create trails, preserves and community gardens. It also benefits our economy, from tourism and outdoor recreation to farming and forestry. The program leverages state funding, focusing resources toward New York’s Open Space Conservation Plan, enhancing services and support for local municipalities, and enabling private landowners and land trusts to achieve their goals,” he added.

Senator John A. DeFrancisco said, “Land trusts play a significant role in helping private landowners and local communities preserve the many open and scenic spaces and farms that exist in Central New York and throughout the state. In addition, they help to protect our environment, while creating new recreational activities for both residents and tourists alike.”

Senator Tom O’Mara, Chair of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee, said, “This year’s fully funded Environmental Protection Fund makes great environmental and economic sense. It’s going to help us achieve critical conservation goals, including supporting the critical work of grassroots environmental stewards like the Finger Lakes Land Trust in my legislative district. These Conservation Partnership Program grants are smart investments that will benefit agriculture, tourism, outdoor recreation, farmland protection, parks and trails, local land use and so much more.”

Assemblyman Steven Englebright said, "Land Trusts are indispensable partners in our efforts to preserve our State's natural heritage lands, working landscapes, urban green spaces, wildlife habitats, recreational spaces and lands that provide priceless ecological services to our state. Our state's land trusts also have their fingers on the pulse of regional priorities and are stewards to many of our valuable conservation investments. The announcement of these land trust grants is a great way to both celebrate Earth Week and to start on a new round of preservation in our state!"

Grant awards ranged from \$80,000 to \$2,750. Among the 55 different land trusts awarded grants were several local organizations based in central and western New York. In all, 16 grants totaling \$398,700 were awarded to organizations in central and western New York including Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy, Central New York Land Trust, Finger Lakes Land Trust, Great Swamp Conservancy and Western New York Land Conservancy.

The EPF-funded grants will also support green infrastructure, urban trails and community garden programs administered by Grassroots Gardens of Buffalo, Green Guerrillas and Brooklyn-Queens Land Trust in New York City, Kingston Land Trust, and Capital Roots (formerly Capital District Community Gardens) in Albany/Troy.

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The grants will also assist several organizations that are committing to the accreditation process over the next three years, contributing to the Alliance's "40 by 20" goal of having 40 nationally accredited New York land trusts by 2020. This year's grantees include 25 accredited land trusts: Agricultural Stewardship Association, Champlain Area Trails, Columbia Land Conservancy, Delaware Highlands Conservancy, Dutchess Land Conservancy, Finger Lakes Land Trust, Genesee Land Trust, Hudson Highlands Land Trust, Lake George Land Conservancy, Mianus River Gorge, Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy, Mohonk Preserve, North Shore Land Alliance, Open Space Institute, Orange County Land Trust, Otsego Land Trust, Rensselaer Land Trust, Saratoga P.L.A.N., Scenic Hudson, Thousand Islands Land Trust, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, Wallkill Valley Land Trust, Westchester Land Trust, Western New York Land Conservancy, and Winnakee Land Trust.

**For a summary of this round of grant awards and awardee directory, please click [here](#).**

The \$1.8 million was awarded by region as follows:

- Western New York /Finger Lakes/Southern Tier: 10 awards totaling \$310,500
- Central New York/Mohawk Valley: 6 awards totaling \$88,200
- North Country: 9 awards totaling \$194,350
- Capital District: 20 awards totaling \$553,400
- Mid-Hudson: 21 awards totaling \$480,550
- New York City: 3 awards totaling \$98,000
- Long Island: 3 awards totaling \$75,000

Since the program's inception in 2002, the Conservation Partnership Program has awarded over 700 grants totaling \$13.1 million in EPF funds to 86 different land trust organizations across the state. The state's investment has leveraged over \$15 million in additional funding from local communities and private donors.

The 2016-17 State Budget includes appropriations of \$300 million for the EPF, the highest level of funding in the program's history and an increase of \$123 million from FY 2015-16. The increase will provide record funding for stewardship, agriculture programs, invasive species prevention and eradication, water quality improvement, municipal recycling and an aggressive environmental justice agenda. Further, this funding level will establish new programs to help communities adapt to climate change through resiliency planning and capital projects, and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions outside of the power sector.

Recent research underscores how New York's investment in land conservation and open space boosts property values, supports local businesses, saves taxpayer dollars and protects public health. A 2011 study by the Trust for Public Land found that every dollar of investment from New York's Environmental Protection Fund generates \$7 in total economic benefits from tourism, reduced government costs and public health.

The EPF grants announced today will support local efforts that contribute substantially to the Finger Lakes region's billion dollar agricultural sector and \$4.3 billion tourism economy by helping to preserve the state's most productive agricultural lands and expanding public access to trails and other popular recreation areas. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, outdoor recreation in New York directly supports 305,000 jobs across the state, generating \$15 billion in wages and tax revenue.

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