



**Friends of the
Washington County Grasslands
IBA
- 2014 Annual Report -**

Friends of the IBA closes on Loftus parcel!

*Thanks to Gerald & Joanne Loftus
for their generous donation!*



Ribbon Cutting - November 18, 2014



photo courtesy Fred Wehner

Friends of the Washington County Grasslands IBA, Inc.

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ANNUAL REPORT - 2014

Friends of the IBA celebrated an important milestone this past year with our first land acquisition! Thanks to the generosity of Gerald and Joanne Loftus, 14 acres of critical grassland bird habitat in the heart of the Washington County Grasslands Important Bird Area are now under Friends of the IBA's protection. We were then awarded a \$20,000 grant in late December for the creation of the Alfred Z. Solomon Grassland Bird Viewing Area on the Loftus parcel!

Other highlights for the year: Friends of the IBA educated over five thousand children and adults about our state endangered Short-eared Owls and other threatened and at risk grassland birds and nearly doubled membership and revenues. Friends of the IBA is a proud member of the Land Trust Alliance. Our decision to become an accredited land trust will better enable us to acquire, conserve and manage more critical lands in the IBA.

LOFTUS Land Acquisition: Fort Edward

Friends of the IBA's year long journey to acquire the Loftus parcel ended on October 30th when we closed on and took ownership of the property. A special "Land for Owls" campaign raised over \$6,000 in six weeks to cover costs associated with accepting and closing on the parcel! We owe a special thanks to the Loftus' and more than fifty private individuals who contributed. Gerald and Joanne Loftus were honored at a ribbon cutting and Award ceremony on November 18 with the assistance of the Adirondack Chamber of Commerce. Many members and supporters turned out to share our joy in this historic accomplishment.

Mr. Loftus spoke of the couple's shared commitment to conserve the land for at risk birds and for future generations to enjoy. He said a "spark" was lit when he and his wife met Friends of the IBA President and founder Laurie LaFond at the Washington County Fair last year. This spark fueled the couple's decision to donate their land to Friends of the IBA. Friends of the IBA will honor the couple's wishes and preserve the "*Land for Owls, and people, too.*"

FRIENDS OF THE IBA honored, featured in National Calendar!

Friends of the IBA was one of two organizations selected to host an I Love New York Wildlife Viewing Planning Workshop in 2014. Friends of the IBA partnered with Washington County Tourism and Lakes to Locks to host a workshop at the Rogers Island Visitors Center in Fort Edward. More than 30 participants from around the region attended. We learned about the economic potential for wildlife viewing from Watchable Wildlife President James Mallman, who has conducted Nature/Wildlife Tourism workshops and programs around the world.

We learned that **wildlife viewing is now the number one outdoor activity in the U.S., contributing \$54.9 billion to the U.S. economy and bringing millions of dollars in sales, tax revenues and jobs to local communities.** This, in turn, creates strong community support for conserving wildlife habitat. Friends of the IBA worked with New York State DEC to implement recommendations from the workshop; we also held follow up meetings in Fort Edward and Whitehall to identify premier sites to be included in a regional Wildlife Viewing/ Birding Trail.

Watchable Wildlife selected the Washington County Grasslands as one of North America's premier wildlife viewing sites for inclusion in their 2015 calendar! The month of March features a photo of a pair of Short-eared Owls taken by Friends of the IBA President Laurie LaFond, with an inset photo of the State Area on Blackhouse Road. December featured a photo of a male cardinal by Dr. Gordon Ellmers of Fort Edward. The recognition honored Friends of the IBA and New York State DEC for our work to protect and conserve wildlife while promoting nature tourism to the region. *All proceeds from calendars sold by Friends of the IBA benefit our work!*

Raptor Rapture 2014 - held on November 15th

Families flocked to our 4th annual Raptor Rapture at the New York State Museum in Albany! Visitors followed our birding trail throughout the museum's first floor to see and learn about some of New York State's most endangered birds and their habitats! Kids and adults participated in hands on activities, learned about winter raptors from New York State DEC biologists, played "Falcons in Jeopardy" and other activities with DEC Five Rivers, asked questions about study skin preparation during demonstrations by the museum's Curator of Birds, dissected an owl pellet (*to see what these mysterious raptors eat!*), learned to draw birds from a professional artist, tested their "birding" skills, created "make and take" bird crafts and more. **Attendance of over 2,000 was the best yet!** Friends of the IBA and the New York State Museum co-founded Raptor Rapture in 2011. We invited Audubon Society of the Capital Region to co-sponsor the event the following year. Plans for November 21, 2015 are under way.

Winter Raptor Fest 2014 - March 29 & 30

Friends of the IBA's 4th annual Winter Raptor Fest drew record crowds on Saturday as residents and visitors of all ages turned out to see and learn about our native raptors. We spotted four Snowy Owls during the Saturday evening Owl Watch, including one gorgeous female preening atop a power pole by the road! Membership grew by more than 50 new members thanks to efforts by Membership Chair Marilyn Stephenson and her enthusiastic volunteers! The event netted \$8,000 in 2014. Estimated Attendance: 1500

Youth Education/ Outreach

Friends of the IBA reached an estimated 1200 children in 2014 through Winter Raptor Fest, Raptor Rapture and other educational programs. Our volunteer educators helped over 180 elementary school children create their own "fact cards" about endangered and at risk grassland birds at Moreau State Park's annual Conservation Field Day. The kids then shared what they learned with their classmates. The kids loved our activity and learned a lot! We are seeking grant funds to develop our "Grassland Bird Fact Cards" for youth education programs next year.

Girl Scouts, their leaders and parents once again participated in Winter Raptor Fest 2014. The girls talked to people attending the event about the importance of saving habitat and helped kids create posters displayed at the event.

Friends of the IBA Field Trips: January - October 2014 Attendance: 91

- IBA Field Trips: 2 Winter Raptor/Owl Watch, 2 Spring/ Breeding Birds
- IBA Field Trip with Adirondack Mountain Club (Feb.)
- Members Trip to Plum Island, MA (May)
- Members Trip to Saranac/ Malone/ St. Lawrence Seaway for Boreal Birds, Saw-whet Owls and Migrating hawks and waterfowl (Oct.)

TOTAL Direct Attendance at Friends of the IBA Events/Outreach: **+5,000** (*est.*)

FINANCIAL STATEMENT - FY 2014

Revenues

Grants	\$25,500
Programs	\$23,468
Memberships & Donations	\$15,583
Gross Revenues	\$64, 551

Expenses

Programs	\$13,678
Land acquisition	\$5,744
Administration	\$6,414
Board Training (<i>\$5,000 NYSCPP Grant</i>)	\$5,823
Fundraising	\$4,156
Insurance	\$1,600
Total Expenses	\$37,415

Balance* **\$27,136**

[*\$20,000 temporarily restricted;
received at end of year for A.Z.S. Grassland Bird Viewing Area]

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Laurie LaFond, President
 Clifford Oliver, Vice President
 Ron Renoni, Secretary
 Margaret Baldwin, Treasurer
 Scott Pulver
 Sandra Scroggins
 Sandra Smith
 Ken Beckley
 Wendy Hall

SUPPORT:

Marilyn Stephenson - Grants Coordinator, Membership Chair
 Webmaster - Scott Pulver
 Membership - Sandra Smith, Robin Lyle

Friends of the IBA project highlights for 2015:

Winter Raptor Fest 2015 - March 28 & 29, 2015

Our fourteen person committee is already hard at work planning and organizing Winter Raptor Fest 2015. Live Bird of Prey programs and free-flight demos by Master Falconers will feature old favorites and some new programs, including a live wolf program by our friends at Adirondack Wildlife Refuge. With almost double the committee members we've had in previous years we expect 2015 to be the best Winter Raptor Fest yet!

NEW for 2015: I Love New York "Winter Raptor Fest Fam Tour"

Thanks to Friends of the IBA's ongoing partnership with New York State Tourism and the progress we've made, we've been offered the opportunity to co-host a familiarization tour sponsored by I Love New York Marketing. ILNY will bring tour operators and travel writers from outside the U.S to Washington County to experience bird watching in the Washington County Grasslands and surrounding area. The tour, co-hosted by Washington County, is part of an initiative to promote wildlife viewing in the region.

Alfred Z. Solomon Grassland Bird Viewing Area

Friends of the IBA received a \$20,000 grant from the Alfred Z. Solomon Charitable Trust in late December! The grant will enable the creation of the Alfred Z. Solomon Grassland Bird Viewing Area on the Loftus parcel. CT Male, a top Engineering Firm, generously donated their time on the preliminary site design. We expect to break ground in 2015.

Looking Forward...

Friends of the IBA's dedicated Board of Directors will continue working to build our capacity to expand critical education and conservation initiatives in the coming years. We are developing a site management plan with help from New York State DEC biologists for the Loftus parcel; we expect to begin habitat restoration work after the 2015 breeding season. Friends of the IBA will continue to seek partnerships to promote grassland bird conservation in the Washington County Grasslands IBA. **With your help we will begin building a \$1,000,000 endowment for future land acquisitions, conservation and stewardship of critical habitat.**

Please join us in increasing the pace of land conservation in the Washington County Grasslands Important Bird Area (IBA), so that endangered Short-eared Owls and other imperiled grassland birds can continue to breed and winter on this historic grasslands!

Everyone who watches a flock of Short-eared Owl rise from an uncut field and start hunting in front of them feels a sense of awe at this ancient spectacle! Please help Friends of the IBA keep these owls from disappearing from New York State and the northeast U.S. so that you, your children and future generations can share the wonder!

- Laurie LaFond, President & Founder, Friends of the IBA