



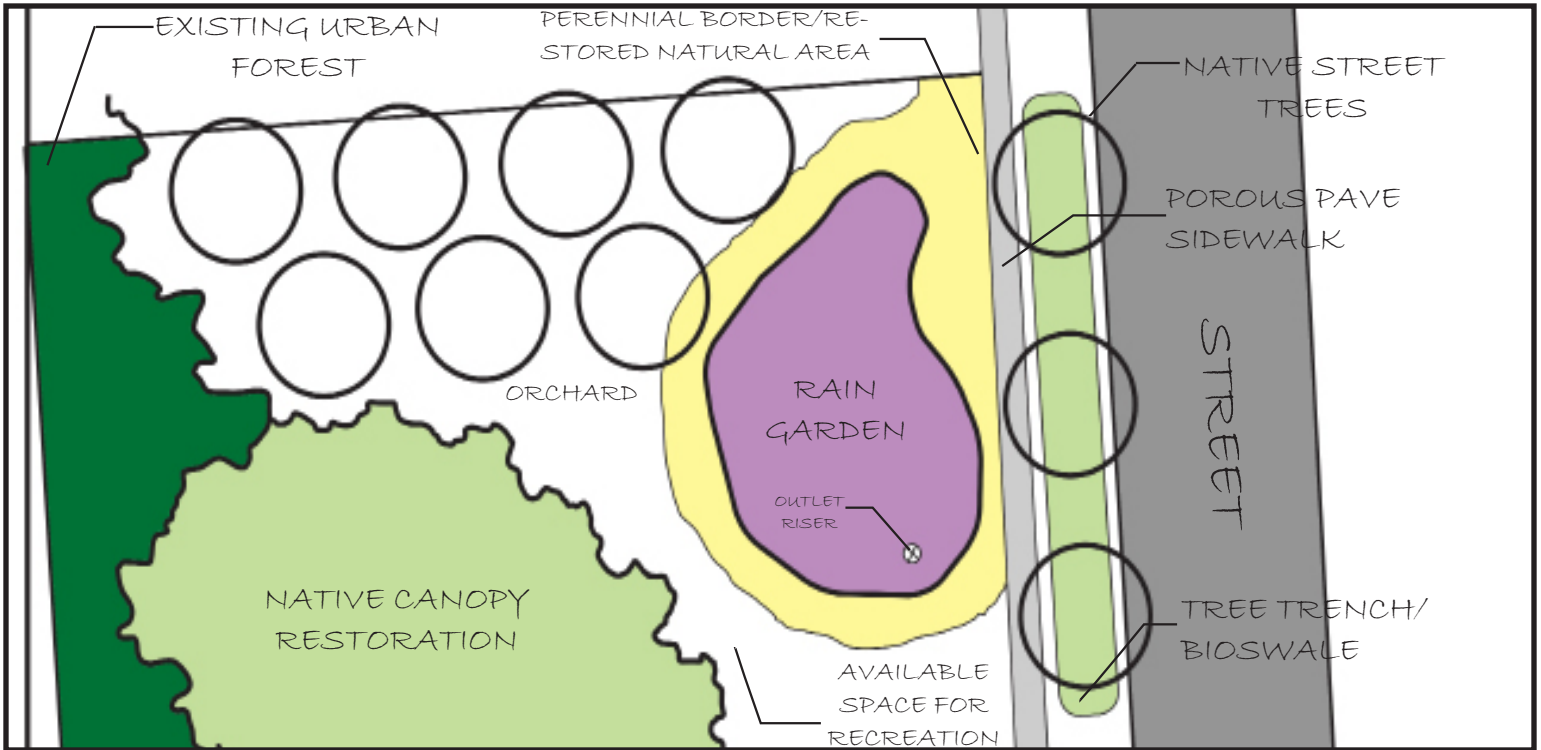
Atlantic States
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ASLF Awarded \$1.1 Million Green Innovation Grant



Conceptual design for a vacant lot.

ASLF's Revitalizing Urban Vacant Properties for Green Stormwater Infrastructure project has been selected to receive up to \$1,100,000 in funding for the implementation of green infrastructure (GI) practices on vacant lots, through NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation's Green Innovation Grant Program (GIGP). The GIGP is funded through the USEPA as part of the New York Clean Water State Revolving Fund.

ASLF has been the lead agency in identifying and designing vacant lots for GI and developed the manual for Onondaga County vacant lot operations. Even with the extraordinary success of Save the Rain, the County has found itself behind in prioritizing stormwater capture from vacant lots, primarily due to lack of resources and hurdles related to long term ownership and maintenance. With this award, ASLF will reinvigorate this important program and has established an urban land trust—the Sage Land

Trust—to hold and maintain repurposed lots in perpetuity.

Vacant lots in Syracuse, New York will be acquired by the Greater Syracuse Land Bank and transferred to the Sage Land Trust to be held in fee simple. Upon acquisition,

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ASLF & GIGP (Continued)

these lots will be repurposed into stormwater infiltration features—green infrastructure—with a primary function of improving water quality. The general GI design will include a rain garden, native trees, and permeable sidewalk with curb inlet. Each parcel will be evaluated individually for the most appropriate mix of GI features and designed to capture adjacent street runoff to the maximum extent practicable.

ASLF has begun the process of narrowing down potential sites for repurposing through an evaluation of soil type, CSO area, location in floodplain, and proximity to waterbodies; and many sites have been assessed by a site visit. This process has narrowed the list of potential sites to 186 parcels, which are all adjacent to at least one other vacant parcel, resulting in 98 potential sites. All are currently vacant and either owned by the City of Syracuse or are seizable.

We are excited to work with community groups, local contractors, the City of Syracuse, the Greater Syracuse Land Bank, and Onondaga County as we move forward with this project. For additional information, contact the Project Lead Olivia Green at ogreen@aslf.org.

Change and Succession at ASLF

ASLF has reached the point in its story when there needs to be a succession of leadership. Our President and co-founder, Samuel H. Sage, will be retiring soon, and the Board of Directors has developed a process for selecting a new Executive Director (ED). The role of President will be abrogated. Khris Dodson, a Board member, is leading this effort that will first develop a Board-approved job description for the position. A search committee has been created, consisting of Board members, former staff, and close colleagues of ASLF. The committee's task will be to devise a proper protocol for searching for the ED and implementing such a search after approval of the Board. The committee will do initial screening, recommending finalists to the Board who will have the final say on the decision. Although a detailed time line has yet to be determined, we hope to have a new ED in place at our Syracuse headquarters by July 2016. Candidates for the ED position should be persons of stature and experience who can show from their previous employment histories the ability to handle this critical position. Applicants will be judged by their technical competencies, ability to work with the existing Board and staff, and their fortitude. This is a stressful position as

the ED must often make decisions that promote social change, which may sometimes ruffle feathers. The position is open to all applicants without exception and without any discrimination based on any characteristic. We particularly welcome applications from those who have traditionally not been in leadership positions in the environmental social change arena, and look forward to letting Samuel Sage reduce the burden he has carried for over 33 years while making ASLF one of the most respected environmental organizations in the world. That being said, Samuel will not be leaving us completely, likely staying connected to ASLF as a Board member.

ASLF presents at Society for Ecological Restoration 6th World Conference on Ecological Restoration in Manchester, UK

In August, ASLF President Samuel H. Sage and Program Director Paul Harris attended the annual world conference hosted by the Society for Ecological Restoration (SER), which took place in Manchester, UK. The conference featured speakers from around the world presenting on a variety of topics related to restoration, conservation, pollution, urban ecology, and much more. A presentation was given by Harris with the title: Building Urban Habitat through Restoration of the Native Tree Canopy. In the presentation, Harris reviewed ASLF urban forestry projects and how they have helped to restore the tree canopy in Syracuse. He also described the myriad benefits associated with tree canopy restoration, which not only includes the creation of urban habitat, but also brings social and economic improvements to neighborhoods. Harris explained that urban forestry is one of several viable solutions for dealing with vacant land in U.S. rustbelt cities.

SER is based in Washington D.C. and its mission is “to promote ecological restoration as a means of sustaining the diversity of life on Earth and re-establishing an ecologically healthy relationship between nature and culture.”

Progress Continues on Environmental Benefit Fund Project

ASLF will use the EBF (a grant from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation) to develop and implement green infrastructure (GI) for stormwater



A green roof at ASLF headquarters.

management demonstration projects in the “036 Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) basin” of the Near Westside neighborhood in Syracuse, NY. This is the largest and most trafficked CSO drainage basin in the Near Westside, and green infrastructure within it will contribute to the largest CSO reductions in the neighborhood while also providing the most visible examples of GI to the community. The suggestion was to make this area an education and demonstration zone for green infrastructure technologies.

Multiple green infrastructure practices have been proposed and/or already installed in this area, such as bio-retention, urban forestry, green roofs, permeable paving, and rainwater collection systems. Furthermore, West Onondaga Street, which forms the backbone of this area, is a heavily traveled thoroughfare thus these projects will be highly visible to the public. A significant component of the urban forestry portion of this project is an urban tree nursery constructed at 663 West Onondaga Street, which was a vacant property before ASLF took possession of it. The urban nursery will stock and grow trees for planting in the sewershed and at other locations in the City.

A demonstration paving project at 658 West Onondaga Street is planned, where five permeable paving options will be demonstrated and tested with monitoring equipment in place. This will allow rainwater to percolate through the driveway and enter the underground aquifer. We hope to convince the City of Syracuse to allow permeable materials to become an option for sidewalks, also, and plan to install an example if permitted.

ASLF is proposing a redesign of the Leavenworth Circle Park located at the intersection of West Onondaga Street, Delaware Street, Onondaga Avenue, and Tallman Street. Possible scenarios include a solar-powered

water fountain using stormwater, smoothing of the traffic pattern by re-establishing the roundabout that was removed in decades past, making motorist and pedestrian/bicycle interactions safer and more efficient, and creating gardens in the adjacent vacant lots.

Another proposed method of stormwater management along the corridor is planting street trees. Missing street trees along W. Onondaga St. could be planted in infiltration trenches, to better intercept and infiltrate more surface runoff.

The construction of the two green roof demonstration projects at 658 West Onondaga Street has been completed. The roofs’ construction was reinforced, surfaces were prepared, media and plants were installed, and it appears to be a successful method of capturing rainwater.

Recreating a Historic Garden Using Native Plants

Located on West Onondaga Street, ASLF’s office is in a historic Victorian-style mansion built in the 1880s. In celebration of the building’s rich history, we have been working on the design of a garden with Victorian elements to replace the current front lawn in the hope that the integrity of this house and its gardens will be restored. Although we did not find any direct information about the landscape of this home in its time, we did, through research using photographs, sketches, plans and literature, learn much about the design philosophy behind many gardens in upstate New York from that era. American gardens in the late nineteenth century were going through a transition from the formal style that celebrates exoticness to the informal naturalistic style that promotes the use of native plants. Our vision is to combine both ideologies and create a garden which, in its formality, speaks to the architecture of the house and at the same time, in its functionality, provides ecological and environmental services. ASLF puts great emphasis on the environmental benefits that can be obtained from the addition of this new garden. Currently the garden is being planned as part of our Environmental Benefit Project. Our philosophy is twofold: to strengthen the resiliency of our local urban ecosystem by reintroducing native species and to help manage stormwater and create a healthier urban environment by implementing green infrastructure. Countless studies have compared native species and exotic species and pointed out the importance of native

species in the local ecosystem. Native species evolved over a long period of time and have adapted to the local natural conditions. They provide the most natural habitat for native insects, some of which are endangered and threatened species while others serve as the most preferable food source for native birds and other animals. They help establish a healthier local ecosystem, which in turn delivers cleaner air and cleaner water for people. Culturally speaking, native species are part of the natural heritage of a region and deserve to be preserved. Even from an economic point of view, native species have their advantages: they require less long-term maintenance, less water and no additional fertilizer or pesticides; thus are more cost-efficient. The incorporation of green infrastructure will make our garden even more environmentally beneficial. Many green infrastructure elements, namely downspout disconnection, rainwater harvesting, a rain garden, and permeable pavements, are integrated into the system that is designed to capture and utilize stormwater and allow infiltration back into the water table. In our design, the downspout from the roof of the building is disconnected, diverting water into a cistern which is used to provide water for our Victorian-style fountain. Excess water overflows into the slightly depressed rain garden area. Additionally, the existing sidewalk is replaced with permeable pavers, maximizing the capacity of the system. At the current stage, we have finished the design of the hardscape and are continuing to work on the planting plan, grading plan and details. The integration of native species, green infrastructure, and historic elements made the design of this garden a very challenging yet exciting project. We hope to finish the renovation by Summer 2016.

Recent ASLF Publications

This has been a busy year for ASLF peer-reviewed publications. Olivia Green, our Water Resources Specialist, published three first-author and one second-author articles related to our work on bridging the gap between ecology and law, especially in the context of urban stormwater management. The fundamental argument in these works is that our environmental laws do not reflect our current understandings of ecosystem dynamics. To bridge the gap, the articles recommend a more adaptive form of environmental governance.

The highest profile article was published in *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* and co-authored with Buzz Holling, the father of ecological resilience and adaptive management, among other environmental law and ecol-

ogy scholars. The article describes the gap: that environmental law assumes that environmental harms can be predicted and mitigated, but ecological discoveries of the past four decades have revealed that ecosystems are capable of surprises and can cross thresholds and never return to a prior state (i.e., are not able to be restored). The authors propose adopting adaptive governance in order to reduce uncertainty in environmental management. This article was selected for inclusion in the *Yale Environmental Review*.

Urban Ecosystems published another article co-authored by scholars and practitioners collaborating on a vacant land repurposing project in Cleveland, Ohio (Vacant to Vibrant by the Cleveland Botanical Garden, EPA, USGS, and the Ohio State University). The article details the ecosystem service potential of vacant lots in post-industrial cities like Syracuse with emphasis on stormwater management and urban forestry. One barrier to implementing vacant lot repurposing strategies is bureaucratic red-tape, and the article calls for governance innovations, such as land banks, to facilitate urban renewal through vacant lot revitalization.

Olivia also co-authored a book chapter in *Adaptive Management of Social-Ecological Systems* which was published this year. The article details how “bridging organizations”, such as ASLF, can serve as facilitators between the public and environmental management agencies and achieve better environmental and social outcomes.

Olivia second-authored an article in the *Idaho Law Review* inaugural natural resources issue describing the social-ecological resilience model of the Anacostia River Basin with particular emphasis on urban stormwater management in the DC Metro and urban and suburban Maryland portions of the watershed.

If you would like an author’s copy of any of these articles, contact Olivia Green at ogreen@aslf.org

Saving the Sterling Creek from Proposed Martville Mining Operation

In the town of Sterling, NY in northern Cayuga County about six miles south of Fairhaven State Park, Sterling Creek flows through a quiet, small and rural residential and agricultural community on its way to the State Park and Lake Ontario.

A large parcel in this area was purchased for the sole purpose of starting a large scale mine. The property is sur-



A rendering of the planned ASLF historic native plant garden.

rounded by many family homes and Sterling Creek. The mine threatens the way of life in the quiet community along with residents' safety, well water supplies, and the environment in and around Sterling Creek. The owner proposes to process material from the mine on site and fill up to 10 trailer trucks per hour. He plans to remove, process, and haul away up to 60 feet of material over about a 35 acre area next to Sterling Creek, potentially more than 50,000 cubic yards over the life of the mine.

There is no public water supply to the area; the mine and its neighbors use wells fed from underground water sources. No borings have been drilled by the mine owner or NYSDEC, and no one has a clear picture of the area's hydrology. There are realistic concerns that the heavy use of the mine's well for the operating processes involved in mining will affect neighbors' wells. An independent geologist/hydrologist's study of this area, obtained by surrounding residents, concludes that it is indeed a real possibility that wells may be affected; further test borings and water table studies are needed to know more about the possible dangers of contamination and/or level deterioration of residential wells and Sterling Creek.

With the mine overlooking Sterling Creek, there are obvious concerns about erosion, sediment and long-term detrimental effects on the Creek. Many people are concerned about possible contamination of the creek downstream of the mine and along its route to the Lake Ontario inlet and Fair Haven State Park. Dissent from local residents at town meetings has been not only ignored but actually omitted from official records, and the town

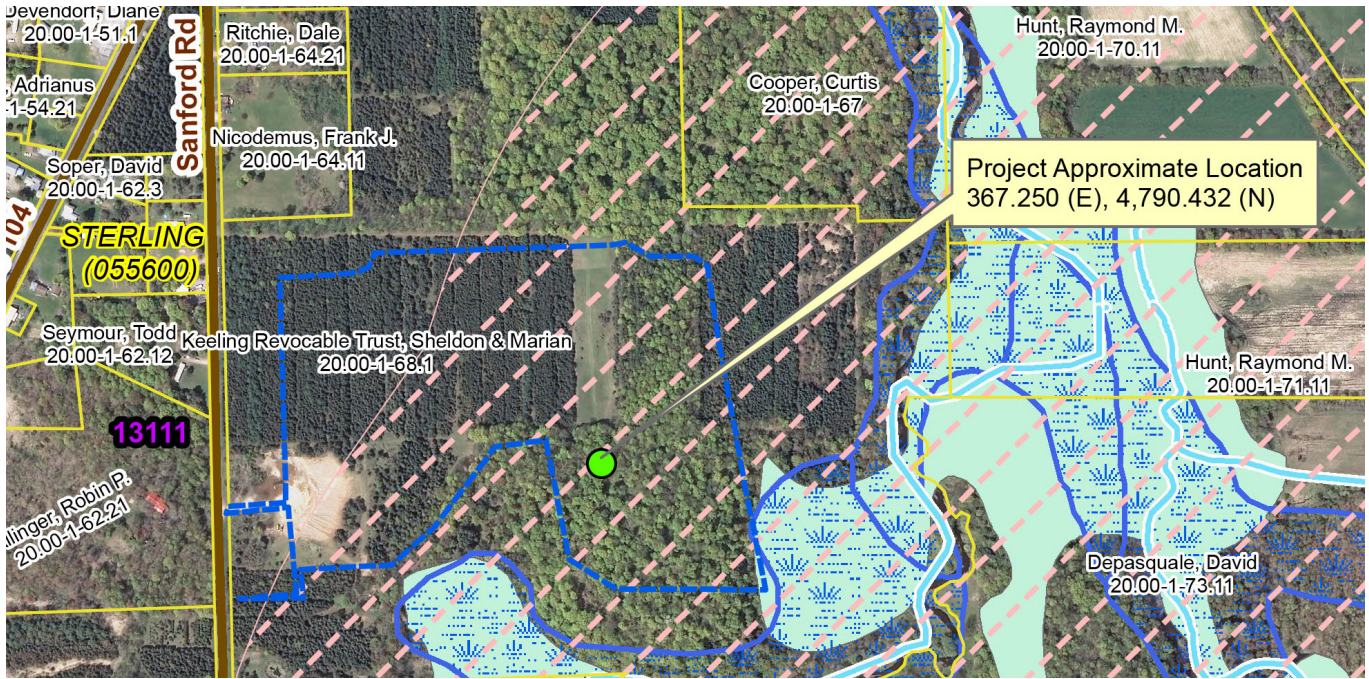
has disregarded its own land use regulations so as to both allow a zoning variance and issue a special use permit.

ASLF supports the citizens of the Town of Sterling as they work to protect the Creek and the local environment. We are opposed to the granting of a NYS DEC mining permit, and/or a Town of Sterling Special Use Permit and/or area variances for those and related purposes. The close of 2015 saw the wrap-up of our Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) 2013 urban forestry project. We planted over 600 hundred trees on various private, non-profit properties in the City of Syracuse. These included apartment complexes as well as Oakwood Cemetery.

Update on Urban Forestry Program

The GLRI is a program created in 2010 by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in partnership with other federal agencies. The USDA Forest Service has administered much of this grant money, and ASLF has either directly or indirectly executed various Forest Service-awarded grants. Up until this point, all of these projects have been in Syracuse, NY. We just initiated however our first project outside Onondaga County, this time located in Oswego County. The project involves planting trees on brownfield sites.

In the Spring of 2016, the ASLF Urban Tree Nursery, located at 663 West Onondaga Street, will be receiving approximately 1000 trees for future green projects. All trees are native species, and the nursery - the first of its kind in Syracuse - will be used as a main staging area for the GIGP and future forestry projects.



Location of the proposed mining operation in Cayuga County.



Planting trees in Oakwood Cemetery.



Planting trees at Pompeii North Apartments.



Groundbreaking ceremony for the ASLF urban tree nursery, April 2015.



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About Atlantic States Legal Foundation

Atlantic States Legal Foundation (ASLF) was established in 1982 to provide affordable legal, technical and organizational assistance to individuals, community groups, and other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and as a way to effectively remediate threats to the natural environment. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, ASLF was the principal NGO utilizing the citizen suit provision of the Clean Water Act as a means of forcing polluters to cease the desecration of America's waterways. During that time, and continuing today, we work cooperatively with local environmental groups and attorneys throughout the United States to deter polluters and enforce environmental justice.

In the early 1990s, ASLF became the lead NGO in the national campaign forcing industries to disclose the extent and volume of toxic materials stored at individual facilities. Our previous efforts resulted in a vast number of industries becoming accountable to their residential neighbors in relation to potential risks to otherwise uninformed communities.

As ASLF grew, and as the nation's environmental problems and solutions have become more complex, we have been focusing a greater portion of our time participating extensively in stakeholder negotiations, scientific and technical review and consulting, and community education programs. Our staff scientists work in conjunction with leading experts in the fields of wastewater and mechanical engineering, GIS mapping, chemistry, biology, geology, hydrology, toxicology, and risk assessment, in order to provide affordable, accessible technical expertise to communities in need.

YES! I want to contribute to ASLF's important work!

I am already a member. Please update my records with the following information:

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

E-Mail _____

Sign me up at the following level:

"Supporter" (\$50)

"Sponsor" (\$100)

"Protector" (\$250)

"Benefactor" (\$500+)

"Patron" (\$1000+)

Other: _____

YES! I am interested in volunteering with ASLF by:

Doing research in my area

Helping out in the ASLF office

Providing a place to stay for ASLF associates working in my area

Send me _____ newsletters to distribute

Other: _____



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