

## New GLRI Grant Awarded to Support ASLF’s Tree Planting Initiative for Water Quality and Community Resilience



Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) Planted by ASLF’s Previous GLRI Grant near Shoreline of Lake Ontario in Oswego

The USDA Forest Service has awarded Atlantic States Legal Foundation (ASLF) a \$185,537 Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) grant. This funding will support ASLF’s effort to enhance water quality and foster climate resilience in communities within the Lake Ontario watershed.

ASLF will collaborate with two prominent community partners, the State University of New York at Oswego (SUNY Oswego) and St. Luke Family of Caring, to plant at least 400 native trees and shrubs on their nearshore

campuses. These institutions were chosen for their leadership in sustainability, community well-being, and public education, as well as the significant impervious surfaces on their properties, which contribute to untreated runoff flowing into Lake Ontario.

The added tree canopy from this project will significantly mitigate the environmental impacts of stormwater by reducing over 47,000 gallons of untreated runoff entering Lake Ontario each year. The plantings will provide multiple ecosystem benefits, including improved water

quality, enhanced biodiversity, and a reduction in the urban heat island effect.

A notable feature of this project is its incorporation of agroforestry practices in green infrastructure within urban environments. All the trees and shrubs to be planted will produce edible or medicinal components, supporting ASLF's commitment to building resilient, multifunctional urban landscapes that integrate alternative food sources with ecological restoration, fostering healthier ecosystems that serve all beings. Associated educational programs will be developed in partnership with SUNY Oswego and St. Luke Family of Caring to engage the public and raise awareness about the benefits of edible green infrastructure in creating long-term community resilience.

As part of this project, over 60 new edible species and varieties will be deliberately selected and added to SUNY Oswego's Centennial Arboretum. Already accredited as a Level I arboretum by ArbNet, the Centennial Arboretum currently hosts over 40 different species. The new plantings will not only enable it to qualify for Level II accreditation but will also establish it as one of the region's most diverse collections of native edible species.

The enhanced arboretum, coupled with accompanying educational initiatives, will serve as a regional model for the use of native edible species in urban landscapes. It will provide a unique opportunity for research, study, and public education on integrating edible plants into urban green infrastructure to improve water quality, promote long-term resilience, and advance environmental sustainability.

This project underscores ASLF's dedication to creating sustainable and resilient communities through innovative green infrastructure solutions. By blending green stormwater infrastructure with agroforestry, ASLF is setting a standard for leveraging urban forestry to address pressing environmental and societal challenges, fostering a greener, healthier future for the Lake Ontario watershed.

## Letter from the Chair

As we enter December, everyone at ASLF would like to extend a sincere thank you for your interest and support of the organization this past year. Under the leadership of Executive Director Dylan Seaver, ASLF continues to pursue and execute projects that benefit the environment and people of Central New York. The team successfully wrapped up the NYS Department of Health Small Wellness Mini grant in Fulton, NY and is working on expanding our footprint with future projects in that region. Also, work continues on the OMG green stormwater infrastructure program, to intercept stormwater from Syracuse's combined sewer system.

Currently, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant is underway in Oswego, NY to carry out tree planting at SUNY Oswego and The St. Luke Family of Caring facility. The main goal of this project is reducing stormwater runoff into Lake Ontario and building resilient urban landscapes using native species.

As we look ahead to a new year, we remain inspired by the progress we've made together and the possibilities that lie before us. ASLF is committed to driving meaningful change — creating healthier ecosystems, fostering resilient communities, and ensuring a sustainable future for Central New York and beyond. Guided by our mission and the dedication of our supporters, we envision a landscape where dedication and collaboration thrive, where every project not only addresses today's environmental and social challenges but also lays the foundation for generations to come. Thank you for being part of this journey—we can't wait to see what we'll accomplish together in the year ahead.

We wish you a safe and happy holiday season.



John Pobedinsky  
Board Chair

# Greenspace, Agroforestry, and Wellness Workshop Series in Oswego County



Agroforestry and Wellness Workshop in Fulton, NY

This year, our organization undertook an impactful project in partnership with the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), with grant funding administered through the Health Research Institute (HRI). The initiative aimed to tackle social determinants of health through wellness outreach and enhance COVID-19 health literacy in Oswego County.

In collaboration with key local partners including the City of Fulton, Fulton Garden Club, Fulton Block Builders, Fulton Public Library, SUNY-Oswego, Rice Creek Field Station, Village of Pulaski, Pulaski Public Library, Springbrook Apartments, Pulaski United Methodist Church, and Oswego County, we launched a series of eight community-driven workshops from April to September 2024. These workshops culminated in a planting event and foraging walk, where we added edible and medicinal trees and shrubs to an existing food forest in Van Buren Park in Fulton, New York. Each plant's benefits were discussed during our sessions, providing practical knowledge and hands-on experience. We also introduced basic agroforestry concepts and encouraged participants to get involved in community forestry efforts. Volunteers from our workshops and partners helped bring this project to fruition, demonstrating the power of community collaboration.

A central theme of our workshop series was wellness, emphasizing how the environment can support various aspects of well-being. The workshops highlighted the role of nature in stress relief, promoting a healthy diet and exercise, enhancing mental health, and preventing both chronic and communicable diseases. We also explored how environmental activities can bolster family and social life,



Mayor Rice of City of Fulton Attending a Planting Event

creating opportunities for meaningful interactions and community bonding. According to the Attention Restoration Theory (ART), exposure to nature has restoring and

replenishing effects on concentration, focus, cognition, and can cure mental fatigue!



ASLF teaching students silviculture basics and tree ID at wellness workshop in Fulton, NY

Our efforts focused on providing wellness education as it relates to having access to nearby nature, distributing essential COVID-19 health information, and promoting sustainable, health-conscious living practices such as foraging for local food. By leveraging the strengths and resources of our diverse partners, we were able to reach a wide audience and make a tangible difference in the lives of Oswego County residents. We look forward to building on these great partnerships for future projects.

## OMG! Construction Continues



**A**SLF's One Million Gallons Community Partnership Program (OMG!) is nearing the completion of its second project, located on the 400 block of Lodi Street, just outside the Hawley-Green neighborhood in Syracuse. Developed in partnership with Syracuse Cultural Workers, this project retrofits



Construction of Porous Paving System at 414 Lodi St

two small parking lots with innovative green infrastructure (GI) practices.

The OMG! program aims to promote the use of GI practices to manage urban stormwater runoff and improve water quality in the Syracuse area. Much of Syracuse is served by a combined sewer system, which can discharge untreated sewage into Onondaga Creek or Harbor Brook during heavy rains as the system becomes overwhelmed by stormwater. GI practices mitigate this issue by retaining stormwater on-site, reducing runoff and the risk of sewer overflows.



Construction of Rain Garden at 408 Lodi St

At 414 Lodi Street, a porous asphalt paving system spanning over 2,000 square feet has been installed to capture stormwater runoff from the entire parking lot and a neighboring roof. At 408 Lodi Street, a rain garden has been constructed to intercept runoff from the parking lot and adjacent roof areas. Together, these GI systems will prevent over 200,000 gallons of stormwater runoff annually from entering the sewer system.

In the spring, the project will conclude with the planting of hundreds of native plants in the rain garden and surrounding landscaped areas. These plantings will enhance stormwater management, create urban habitat, and provide fresh edible plants for the community. The Onondaga Earth Corps will lead the planting effort as part of a training program, equipping young community members with hands-on skills in GI construction and maintenance.

This project was designed by ASLF in collaboration with Natural Systems Engineering (NSE), a Syracuse-based consulting firm specializing in green stormwater infrastructure, watershed restoration, as well as geothermal systems. NSE also partnered with ASLF on the first completed OMG! project: a stormwater tree trench at 235 Cortland Avenue that captures nearly 500,000 gallons of stormwater runoff annually.

The third OMG! project, now ready for construction, is a partnership with Bellegrove Missionary Baptist Church on Martin Luther King West in the Southside neighborhood. Scheduled for completion in spring 2025, this project will retrofit the church parking lot with a porous asphalt system, reducing over 578,000 gallons of stormwater runoff annually.

## ASLF Agroforestry Program Continues to Grow

If you have been keeping up with ASLF news, updates, and social media lately you probably have encountered various announcements related to our agroforestry program. Maybe you found yourself wondering about the nature of this program, or even about what agroforestry is. Let's recap and review some of the basics.

At its simplest agroforestry is the integration of trees and shrubs into an agricultural or food system. In more recent years the practice has been implemented in urban areas in the form of tree plantings as a means of increasing food security and enhancing existing greenspace. These plantings are often referred to as "food forests", and can exist in public parks, vacant lots, or pretty much any open space with enough room for trees. Optimally a publicly accessible food forest has the most impact and social benefit, and this is what ASLF has been promoting for several years with various partners.

In Syracuse we have created six individual food forests so far, all accessible to the public. Two of

these sites are on rain garden properties owned by ASLF in the Skunk City neighborhood. We have also planted a large agroforestry system on private land owned by the Onondaga Nation to assist in growing their food sovereignty program. In addition to implementation, we have been developing the outreach and education component for this program. For example, this past year we conducted a series of wellness workshops in Oswego County focusing on the positive health benefits of urban agroforestry and nearby greenspace. The project culminated in a foraging walk and small planting in Fulton, NY where attendees were able to bear witness to the prolific pawpaw crop on trees we planted in Van Buren Park back in 2016. Our program continues to grow as we begin a new GLRI grant to plant 450 food producing trees and shrubs in Oswego.



Pawpaws Growing in the Van Buren Park Food Forest, Fulton, NY

Future plans include continuing to build the urban agroforest in Syracuse, expanding our program in Oswego County and other nearby counties, building and strengthening partnerships, and producing content and written material for outreach and education. Follow us on social media to stay up to date on our exciting agroforestry projects!

## Building Community Agroforestry in Ecuador

While most of our work is focused on Central New York, ASLF is occasionally open to involvement in select national or international projects that align with our mission. Earlier this year in

Tangalí, Ecuador, staff member Paul Harris had the opportunity to represent ASLF and participate in a great program organized by The Tandana Foundation. Working with parents and administrators in this rural, Indigenous community, we planted dozens of fruit-producing trees and shrubs thus integrating agroforestry into the local school's active gardening program.



Program Participants and Local Residents with Newly-planted Fruit Trees

Additionally, ASLF Board member Samuel Sage has been active building partnerships and organizing collaborations in the Quichinche community where he resides. ASLF hopes to continue promoting agroforestry and reforestation projects in the area with the involvement of local schools, municipalities, and community organizations.

We look forward to building on this experience in Ecuador as well as our work here at home in New York, by fostering “minga” (to use the Quechua term), which means community solidarity and collaboration.

## ASLF Hosts a Panel at Forrest Keeling Fall Field Day in Missouri



**O**n September 19, 2024 ASLF presented at the biennial Forrest Keeling Fall Field Day. This is an event hosted by Forrest Keeling nursery to bring together regional

professionals and innovators in the agroforestry, silviculture, and natural resources world for a meeting of the minds. The theme of this year's event was “One Health”.



ASLF Hosting the Panel

Hongbin Gao and Paul Harris of ASLF made the journey to Elsberry, MO to present on the topic of “Greenspace, Agroforestry, and Wellness in Urban Environments”. The panel drew nearly 100 people and outlined the more recent ASLF program of integrating urban agroforestry into an overall plan for public health and wellbeing. We explained the genesis of our agroforestry program as an evolution from innovating green infrastructure and tree planting in vacant lots, which itself originated from the consent order for Onondaga County to reduce combined sewer overflow pollution in Onondaga Lake.

Forrest Keeling nursery has supplied us with thousands of native trees and shrubs over the years and we are happy to continue building this professional relationship based on shared environmental vision.

## ASLF Moves to New Office, Former Location Sold

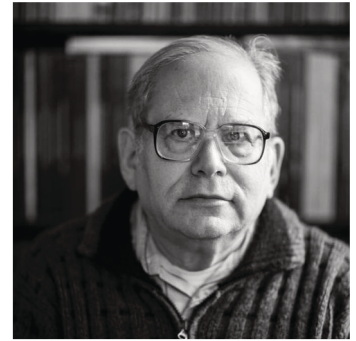
**A**fter nearly 40 years at 658 West Onondaga Street, ASLF has relocated to a new office at 1654 West Onondaga Street in Syracuse. The building's former owner, Fund for the Environment, Inc., recently sold the property. We are pleased to share that the new owner is committed to preserving the green infrastructure we installed, including porous paving systems and green roofs, ensuring these features continue to benefit the community.

# Happy Birthday, Samuel!

This past summer our cofounder, Board member, and acting President Samuel H. Sage turned 80! Samuel has been the heart and soul of ASLF for many years, spearheading citizen initiatives to stop pollution and bring an end to many violations of the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. A Cornell graduate with a background in chemistry, Samuel cofounded Atlantic States Legal Foundation in 1982 and shall we say the rest is history!

A cornerstone of his life's work and ASLF's most notable accomplishment to date is the citizen suit that resulted in the dramatic reduction of raw sewage being discharged into Onondaga Lake. This litigation evolved into a mandate with a technical assistance program integrating green infrastructure, thus putting Syracuse, NY

on the map as a community pioneering this "new" form of ecologically integrated stormwater management.



Another little-known fact about Samuel: he was involved in the drafting of the Clean Water Act and the Coastal Zone Management Act. To this day we continue to defer to his extraordinary breadth of knowledge on environmental history and policy.

While enjoying his retirement in Ecuador, Samuel is still active on the ASLF Board. These days he spends his time gardening and assisting with local environmental projects in Ecuador. He is also currently helping build and promote agroforestry programming for ASLF.

## Board of Directors

ASLF welcomed Karen Noyes to its Board of Directors during the May 2024 board meeting. With over 25 years of experience as an associate planner at the Oswego County Department of Community Development, Tourism, and Planning, Karen played a pivotal role in securing ASLF's first Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) funding for Oswego County and collaborated closely on its successful implementation. Since then, Karen has been an unwavering advocate for ASLF's programs in Oswego County, strengthening

our connections with local communities, assisting with multiple grant applications, and laying the foundation for our continued success in the region.

- John Pobedinsky ..... Chair
- Martha H. Loew ..... Vice Chair
- Kevin Bliss ..... Secretary
- Buffy Quinn..... Treasurer
- Samuel H. Sage ..... President
- Christine Body ..... Member
- James Darlington ..... Member
- Naseer Idrisi ..... Member
- Karen Noyes ..... Member

- 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 outreach in my area
- Helping out in the ASLF office OR maintaining a rain garden
- Collecting native plant seeds
- Helping with web design
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

# About Us

## WHO WE ARE

**Atlantic States Legal Foundation (ASLF)** is a New York chartered not-for-profit corporation founded in 1982 with its mission being to provide affordable technical, legal, and organizing services to a variety of citizens, citizen groups, local governments, and others on a wide variety of environmental issues.

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. Through environmental litigation against Onondaga County, NY decades ago, we started the process of resuscitating Onondaga Lake, and this remains a cornerstone of our legacy. Since that time we have protected hundreds of watersheds in New York State and beyond through our practical approach to conservation.

## WHAT WE DO

Our current program combines technical expertise, planning, design, and citizen advocacy to empower communities towards a better level of environmental decision-making and involvement, as a way to effectively remediate threats to the natural environment. A major portion of our work portfolio is related to the protection, restoration, and conservation of our urban water resources. We develop,

promote and implement innovative and practical ways to preserve the environment, green the urban core, and protect water resources. We build bridges between communities, technical experts, and government to advocate for systemic improvements in environmental management, policy making, and public engagement.

## WHAT WE OFFER

**Advocacy & Organizing Services** for building resilient communities, protecting water and other environmental resources, and beneficial repurposing of urban space.

**Technical Assistance** for natural resource planning, green infrastructure, urban forestry, landscape design, stormwater management, environmental health, and environmental awareness.

**Outreach & Education Services** for underserved communities, agencies, and municipalities.

Donating to ASLF online is easy with "mightycause" or by mail. Visitors to our websites now have the ability to donate simply by clicking the Donate Now logo. Of course, we still enjoy opening mail to find a donation by check, too! Please support your favorite environmentalists! All contributions to ASLF are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. Copies of ASLF's financial report may be obtained from the New York Department of State in Albany.



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