

WNY Land Conservancy to Enhance Stella Niagara Preserve



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LEWISTON, N.Y. -- Even in the middle of winter, the serenity of the Niagara River and sound of birds make walking through the Stella Niagara Reserve an enjoyable peaceful experience. That's ironic, for a plot of land known for its role in the War of 1812.

"It has extraordinary cultural and historic importance," said Western New York Land Conservancy Executive Director Nancy Smith. "Not only was it the very place where the British landed in the War of 1812 to capture Fort Niagara in Lewiston, but it also was important before that time for native communities."

Since 1907, the Sisters of St. Francis owned and took care of the land. Now, it's changed hands to the Western New York Land Conservancy. The not-for-profit has plans to make it easier to connect people with nature.

"We're changing the trail system completely so initially it was just kind of a straight shot down the edge of the property. This is going to be an unfolding experience of kind of mystery and beauty," said Smith.

The Land Conservancy purchased the 29-acre preserve along the Niagara River last summer after a \$3.6 million fundraising campaign. The Land Conservancy has opened the nature preserve to the public with walking trails and kayak access, with plans to enhance and restore wildlife habitat.

"We want to make it even a richer experience with more plant diversity and as a result more birds, more butterflies, more life," said Darrel Morrison, Stella Niagara Preserve landscape designer.

Over the next year, the Land Conservancy plans to lay out the entire trail system, and complete the major planting of various grassland areas by 2017. It will be a work in progress for decades.

"It will be changing all of the time because the vegetation will be changing from spring to summer to fall and from year to year," said Morrison.

When winter rolls around, the same calm that has been a part of the Stella Niagara for decades will still be present.