

# Webster Pond and Rand Tract Update

to

**Chad Norton, Bill Norton, Julie LaFave, Stephen Harris, and**

**John Marsellus**

from

**Dr. Michael L. Schummer, Senior Research Associate, SUNY ESF**

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**Background:** Webster Pond and the adjacent Rand Tract are unique properties in Syracuse owned by the City. Rand Tract is a mixed deciduous forest with significant biological diversity. Webster Pond has a storied history of pollution, reclamation, and uses, but nowadays it is a place that Syracuse city residents actively feed and interact directly with wild and domestic waterfowl. The proximity of these properties to urban residents makes them a favored destination for many people in the City of Syracuse. The location is also ideal for training students that attend SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. In summer 2020, John Marsellus introduced me to Chad Norton and the Friends of Wildlife at Webster Pond. Working with Webster Pond was a natural fit for my teaching and research program at ESF because our lab focuses on waterfowl and wetlands science, conservation, and management. In Fall 2020, I also taught the Conservation Biology major Senior Synthesis Capstone Course. After my introduction to Webster Pond and the Rand Tract by John, it also was noticeably a natural fit to use these properties as a real-world scenario for students to develop a Conservation Plan for these unique properties. With logistical and financial Marsellus support we were able to train and provide abundant real-life experiences to over 30 ESF students including the Conservation Biology course, graduate students conducting research, and the ESF Collegiate Chapter of Ducks Unlimited. In addition, Don Leopold, James Gibbs, Melissa Fierke, and Sam Quinn of ESF provided support for our work at the Rand Tract and Webster Pond. This work and relationship building have been mutually beneficial to the Friends of Wildlife, ESF students, City of Syracuse Department of Parks, Recreation, and Youth Programs, and the Syracuse community. Despite the challenges brought to our community by the pandemic, we succeeded in contributing to the betterment of the City of Syracuse. It has been our pleasure to work with everyone towards the accomplishments listed below.

### Accomplishments:

- 1) Development of relationships with Chad and Bill Norton of Webster Pond and inclusion of mallards at the pond in an ESF graduate student research project,
- 2) Development of a relationship between our lab at ESF and Stephen Harris, City Forester,
- 3) ESF students conducted a Bioblitz which is an effort to catalog as many species as possible in a geographic area over a limited period of time. The Bioblitz, recorded on [iNaturalist](https://www.inaturalist.org) included 1,278 species observations, 433 species cataloged, and 169 identifiers. These results were included in the final Conservation Plan developed by the students in the Conservation Biology Senior Synthesis course,



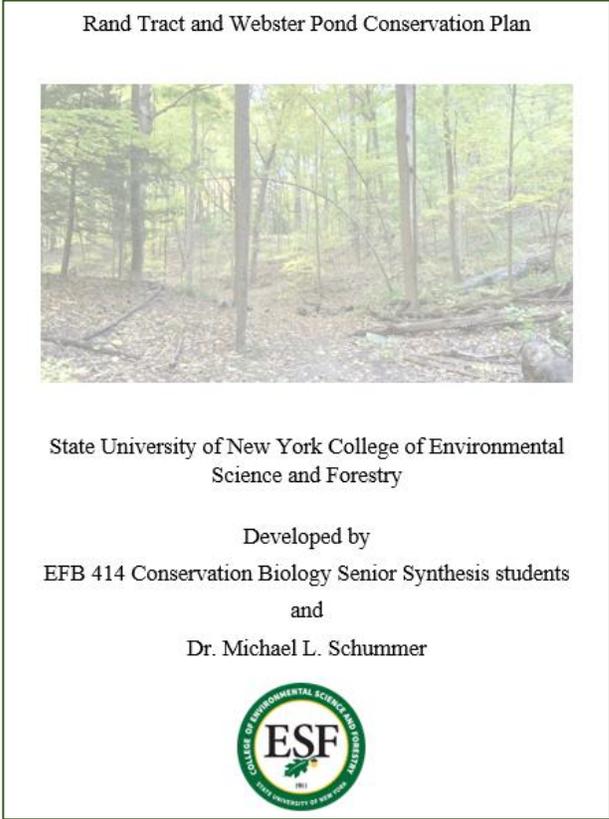
Mallards captured at Webster Pond were included in an ESF graduate student research project



Students during the Bioblitz identifying plants and fungi at the Rand Tract

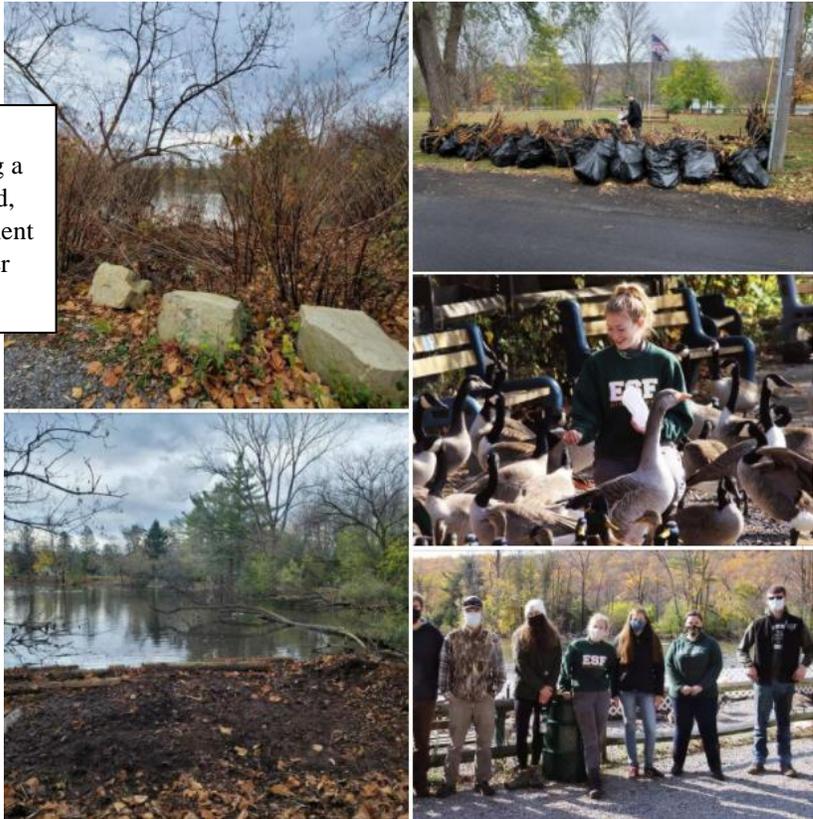
- 4) Development of a 104-page Conservation Plan for Rand Tract and Webster Pond by the students of the Conservation Biology Senior Synthesis course. The plan identified challenges and opportunities as well as recreation plans to sustain biodiversity while ensuring that the people of the City of Syracuse were engaged with the environment at these unique properties, and

A finalized, student-developed, Conservation Plan will be available in Spring 2021



- 5) Volunteer days by the ESF Collegiate Chapter of Ducks Unlimited to help clear invasive plants around the pond.

Students with the Ducks Unlimited Chapter at ESF helped to clear and bag a substantial area of Japanese Knotweed, helping with invasive species management and providing a clear view of Webster Pond for visitors





**THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT**

