The Adirondacks depend on us.

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With mud season nearly behind us and our boot scrapers tucked away, we look forward to green days ahead. It’s a refreshing change, but also melancholy. Winter in the Adirondacks is becoming less predictable. Over time, changing temperatures will affect winter recreation and local economies.

In the face of inevitable change, we will adjust to our new reality. But what can we do to ensure the Adirondacks remain a resilient and connected landscape in a warming world?

We began by identifying places best positioned to help wildlife and people adapt to climate change. The Adirondacks rank as one of these climate-resilient strongholds. Intact Adirondack forests allow wildlife to adapt and move as temperatures change. Equally as important, wildlife from outside the area will be able to access new habitat here. Our resilient forests will continue to improve our air and water quality, store carbon, provide food and water, and sustain the livelihoods of many.

But for nature to continue to provide what we depend on, we have to do more. We must see to it that such areas remain as healthy, thriving and connected as possible.

We’re ramping up partnerships beyond our region’s borders, using cutting-edge science and innovative technology to identify lands and waters that need urgent protection. We’re establishing wildlife corridors to connect the Adirondacks to the Tug Hill Plateau, the Green Mountains of Vermont and Southeastern Canada so that black bear, bobcat and moose can move freely across the landscape.

We’re working with local and state partners on removing barriers at road-stream crossings to restore aquatic habitat for native fish and keep communities safe from flooding. This work serves as a model for other Conservancy chapters in New York State to follow.

And we’re expanding public awareness—and engaging more people—in our campaign to prevent the spread of invasive species that can devastate our forests and choke our waterways.

None of this critical work would be possible without your support. Years from now, the wildlife in the Adirondacks will be different. But you’ll have played an important part in keeping it as resilient as ever. As for the mud, we’ll keep our boots nearby.

Peg Olsen
Director
Preserving Natural Strongholds

Climate change is altering habitats and shifting home ranges across the globe. For example, here in the Northeast, species are shifting their ranges 11 miles north and 30 feet in elevation each decade. For wildlife that need room to roam, that poses an existential challenge. But the Adirondacks are distinctly more resilient to the impacts of climate change than other landscapes and are better able to sustain native wildlife and ecological processes.

The Conservancy uses ground-breaking science to identify high-priority, resilient lands and waters—ones that are best able to support plants and animals in a changing climate. These places, which include the Adirondacks, are of critical importance as rising temperatures, changing precipitation patterns and other climate impacts destabilize natural areas around the world.

By protecting these strongholds, we can ensure that a broad number of species have suitable habitat. This strategy—“conserving nature’s stage”—focuses conservation efforts on giving species and natural communities their best chance for survival as the climate changes.

“Our science fuels and informs decisions about current and future conservation projects,” says Michelle Brown, the Adirondack Chapter’s senior conservation scientist. “We can also better identify natural corridor connections so wildlife can move fluidly as their traditional habitats are made unlivable by climate change.”

Here in the Adirondacks, for instance, we partner with local highway departments and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service to restore the movement of fish and other aquatic species in our streams by upgrading critical road stream crossing infrastructure. These projects have multiple benefits, including flood mitigation and reduction of maintenance costs in a region that depends on recreation and tourism.

We’re pursuing land protection agreements and partnerships with the state transportation department at the edges of the park to ensure wide-ranging mammals have suitable habitats to move in and out of the Adirondacks. And our invasive species program has an 87 percent success rate—with over 1,000 regional eradications to date.

More than 160 years ago, a hall-of-fame group of philosophers launched the Transcendentalist Movement from the shores of Follensby Pond. Today, this same place embodies global climate resilience. The property, ranked “highly resilient,” boasts a thriving bald eagle population; a closer look shows that Follensby Pond is deep and well-oxygenated, buffered from impacts like sedimentation and nutrient run-off by an intact forested watershed. As a result, Follensby ranks among the five most climate-resilient waters in a preliminary assessment of 285 remaining interior lake trout lakes in the Northeast.
We recently caught up with supporter Annette Merle-Smith who has been involved with The Nature Conservancy since 1979. She’s passionate about protecting the Adirondacks’ natural beauty. It’s a place that nurtures her soul and replenishes her spirit.

**What’s your connection to the Adirondacks?**

My husband and I built our house in Keene Valley in 1964. It is on the mountain above the valley with a view of the surrounding high peaks, including Giant Mountain and the Great Range. I have climbed each of those mountains except Mount Marcy. I consider Keene Valley my spiritual home.

My family’s history in the Adirondacks can be traced back to mid-19th century when my husband, Fowler (“Mike”) Merle-Smith’s grandfather, the Reverend Wilton Merle-Smith, a minister in New York City, bought land and built a summer house here. Reverend Wilton and his wife Zaidie, had three children and started what would become a family gathering place for future generations to come and enjoy.

There are now several family houses in the Valley, four of which are occupied year-round.

**Why do you choose to support conservation?**

I support four environmental organizations in the Adirondacks, including The Nature Conservancy. These organizations are partnering, supporting and preserving land and people here.

I hope for non-partisan recognition of climate change. Specifically, for the Adirondacks, this means curbing emissions from mid-western factories and putting a halt on acid rain that damages our lakes and the wildlife that need them.

**What do you hope for the future of the Adirondacks?**

My hope is to be able to protect this special place, the freshwater, forest, recreation and livelihood it provides to local communities—especially in the face of climate change. The allure of the mountains and an escape from the city is what brought my husband’s ancestors here.

Today this place continues to bring my family together. These moments reinforce our responsibility to preserve this land today so that their children may have the same joy and maybe even climb Mount Marcy.
Connecting Landscapes for People and Nature

Flying over Lake Placid to the Black River Valley, Nature Conservancy supporter Annette Merle-Smith marveled at the mosaic below. A patchwork of color was knitted together by verdant forests and blue-speckled streams, creating a natural pathway between the two regions.

“Seeing this landscape from the air was exhilarating and put in perspective the topography of the Adirondacks and the importance of wildlife connectivity for animals to move freely throughout this region over time,” said Merle-Smith.

The area’s forests, dominated by pine (the tannins of which give the Black River its name), serve as an important wildlife corridor that links the Adirondacks with the Tug Hill Plateau. Notably, the river and its tributaries provide clean drinking water for local communities and opportunities for rafting, kayaking and fishing.

But in the face of a changing climate, expanding roads, forest loss, and development pressures, we must ramp up our efforts to safeguard natural pathways for wildlife to move and adapt in order to thrive. The Black River Valley is the ideal place to work with partners to ensure this landscape continues to support people and wildlife.

Recently, the Adirondack Chapter was awarded a state water-quality improvement grant of more than $537,000 to conserve priority tracts that contribute to both wildlife connectivity and public drinking water protection. The funding will acquire land and conservation easements with the goal of preventing streambank erosion and reducing sedimentation that can affect drinking water.

“This planning effort in the Moose River Region furthers my admiration for the Adirondack Chapter and its thoughtful approach to all aspects of conservation,” says Merle-Smith.

In this case, what protects our water also protects our wildlife. By focusing on the key pieces of land that have the biggest potential to benefit both, we can really leverage our results.

Protecting lands that benefit wildlife and people will maximize the results of our conservation work. Since receiving the grant to do just that, we’re now in the process of identifying the best places to protect to maximize water quality and wildlife habitat. We will then begin landowner outreach and cultivation with the hopes of securing several permanent conservation easements.

While the initial grant is a large amount of money, given it requires a 25% match, we need your support to see through our protection goals. The money we raise will directly support these projects as they become ready over the next several years.

Long-term benefits of clean water span social, economic and environmental sectors.
The Nature Conservancy in New York was born with the preservation of Mianus River Gorge Preserve in 1955. Since then, we’ve conserved more than 815,000 acres across the state from Long Island to the Adirondacks to Lake Erie. Protected lands help to clean our water, provide wildlife habitat, capture carbon and sustain New York’s recreational economy. And our work in New York goes beyond counting acres.

Thanks to your generous support, we are taking on the region’s biggest conservation challenges. Here’s a sample of what The Nature Conservancy is doing in New York.

$300 million

in funding secured for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). This record-level investment will improve water quality, create local parks and keep communities resilient to climate change.

$362 million

approved by Long Island voters for water quality—the single largest such allocation since the 1970s—this investment will reduce harmful nitrogen pollution in Great South Bay.

two million

oysters planted at seven sites around the Big Apple to help restore water quality in New York Harbor.

500 million

pounds of Atlantic Menhaden were harvested on the East Coast before The Nature Conservancy advocated to make the catch more sustainable. Menhaden feed marine life including bass, dolphins and whales.

74,000 tons of carbon are being captured by 612 forested acres recently conserved in the Zoar Valley, an hour outside of Buffalo.

110,000 miles of roadside and shoreline surveyed for invasive plants in the Adirondacks in order to keep native habitats healthy.

35,000 climate-adapted trees planted in a forest resilience project in Tug Hill. This approach has potential to be applied to other forests across the state.

6,400 acres conserved in Albany through our Working Woodlands program.

80% of New Yorkers believe climate change is happening, our polling discovered. The majority wants government action to stop it from harming them and their families.

74,000 native trees planted in Jamaica Bay, Queens to make New York greener.

900,000 volunteer hours contributed to conservation and community engagement.

500 million pounds of Atlantic Menhaden were harvested on the East Coast before The Nature Conservancy advocated to make the catch more sustainable. Menhaden feed marine life including bass, dolphins and whales.

240 volunteers participated alongside Conservancy staff in urban-greening opportunities, such as caring for local trees, in the South Bronx, Harlem and Gowanus neighborhoods.

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160 preserves managed across New York, spanning forests, grasslands, lakes, rivers, bays and the ocean.
It’s an iconic sight in rural Africa—to see a woman balancing a heavy water bucket on her head without spilling a drop. She may walk for miles with that load. But even when she arrives home, the weight remains on her shoulders.

In most African households, women are acutely affected by the quality and quantity of the water available to them. In rural areas, women spend hours each day walking to and from a reservoir.

In Kenya, the Tana River supplies 95 percent of the water for the city of Nairobi’s four million residents, and for another five million people living in its surrounding communities. The river feeds the country’s agricultural areas and provides half of its hydropower output. But development, poor farming practices and lack of planning threaten this resource. Land scarcity and declines in soil productivity drive farmers to expand cultivation into steeper slopes.

Deforestation of such hillsides causes massive sediment runoff that pollutes the downstream river.

To help secure clean water here, The Nature Conservancy recently launched the Upper Tana-Nairobi Water Fund. The fund improves water quality and supply by addressing issues at the source. Working with upstream farmers—starting with those in the steepest and most critical areas—is imperative to reduce the many impacts of development.

Together with our Water Fund partners, our colleagues in Africa are providing nearly 15,000 farmers with the training, resources and equipment they need to help keep the river healthy, conserve water and reap the benefits of higher crop yields and more stable farms. The fund will serve as a model for leaders across the continent as they look for innovative ways to solve ever-increasing water challenges especially in the face of climate change.

Ensuring access to clean, fresh water as well as water-saving measures is therefore not only socially responsible, it’s also smart conservation.

A century ago, New York City ensured the future of its clean water by protecting the forests, mountains, and streams in the Catskill Mountains.

Inspired by this nature-based solution, the Conservancy has developed water source protection funds around the globe. Replicated first in Quito, Ecuador, we aim to launch similar programs in 100 cities worldwide so that millions will have clean water, now and for generations to come.
The world we depend on depends on us.

EXPLORE THE PLACES YOU HELPED US CONSERVE!

Hike trails, spot wildlife and birds, or paddle quiet waters at our preserves. These destinations are yours to explore—because the places we conserved are protected for you. You don’t need to be a back-country adventurer to see them. Our Spring Pond Bog Preserve is a short drive from Tupper Lake and our Boquet River Nature Preserve in Willsboro is wheelchair-accessible.

Start your trip at nature.org/adkpreserves.