

The Nature  
Conservancy



FALL/WINTER NEWS 2019

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# Central and Western New York update

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## CONNECT WITH NATURE

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# Connecting Communities Through Conservation



Dear Friend,

Thank you for supporting The Nature Conservancy and caring about our lands and waters in Central and Western New York.

With its rich tapestry of forests, lakes, streams and farms, our region is among the most picturesque in New York State. But it's already experiencing the impacts of climate change from creeping temperatures, rising waters, and droughts and flooding. These

stresses put unprecedented pressure on our communities. Climate change threatens our quality of life, tourism and the success of our farms and agricultural businesses.

As you'll read in this issue, climate change affects everything—from the water we swim in, to the wine we drink. But in the face of these challenges, the Conservancy is implementing strategies to make sure that people and the natural world thrive for generations to come—globally, regionally and locally.

With your help, we are greening our cities, such as Rochester, through our Community Blooms project. This work adds to the beauty of the city, creates jobs and real-world learning experiences for young people, while also providing food for native bees, butterflies and birds.

Similarly, we are prompting residents and local leaders to prepare for climate change along the Lake Ontario shoreline. Communities can't reduce their vulnerability without working together and investing in nature is vital.

Across the county and here in New York, we continue to protect vast tracts of forested land so that birds and other wildlife have room to roam. And we're working tirelessly to restore our wetlands and shorelines, which can serve as the first line of defense against the threat of more frequent and intense storms.

We are excited to share some recent successes that you helped make possible. As always, we appreciate your unwavering support in protecting nature and preserving life.

The world we depend on depends on us. And we depend on you.

Thank you.

Jim Howe  
Executive Director

Brian Baird  
Board Chair

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# Building Healthy Communities

## CREATING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN LAKE ONTARIO

A pair of fledgling piping plovers runs across the sand, foraging along the shoreline. The chicks dart back and forth, picking up tiny morsels as the waves ebb and flow. For the first time in 30 years, these endangered birds are raising young here on the shores of Lake Ontario's Sandy Pond. Its return is a sign of recovery and a testament to the success of collaborative restoration work underway here that could serve as a model for other parts of the state.

Sandy Pond has experienced problems that many shoreline communities confront in the face of climate change—vulnerable properties, coastal erosion, and poor water quality.

Outdated and failing septic systems leach nitrogen pollution from sewage into the water, contributing to issues such as harmful algal blooms. At the same time, shoreline hardening restricts the natural movement of sand, robbing the beach of sediment it needs. Climate change, with more frequent and intense storms, exacerbates both problems.

To chart the path for the future, the Conservancy has been working with the Town of Sandy Creek and local stakeholders

to restore sandy beaches that shelter shoreline dwellings and businesses on North Sandy Pond from the full force of storms on Lake Ontario.

The approach in Sandy Pond is to capture sand trapped in a shoal in the Pond to restore an eroded barrier beach that protects the Pond from the lake.

“With help from a New York State grant to improve water quality, we’re working with the Town of Sandy Creek to rebuild and replenish the eroded beach and dunes through placement of sand and vegetation, rather than hardening the shoreline,” says David Klein, senior field representative. “By preserving the channel that maintains water exchange between the pond and the lake, this project supports efforts to improve water quality and reduce harmful algal blooms in the Pond. Hopefully, funds from Governor Cuomo’s Resilience and Economic Development Initiative (REDI) will enable the Town to address the inadequate septic systems that now contribute to harmful algal blooms. A healthy and thriving coastal system is the most effective way to buffer communities from the impacts of climate change.”



The area's beautiful beaches attract many visitors and tourists—an important part of the economy of the region.



Rich Olsen-Harbich of Bedell Vineyards, Long Island. © Kara Jackson/The Nature Conservancy

# Raising a Glass to Nature

For New York’s farmers, climate change isn’t looming in the distant future—it’s happening now. And when it comes to growing grapes, more frequent storms cause the fruit to mildew and rot. Heavy rainfalls erode soil and damage vines. And rising temperatures coincide with increased humidity, which leads to more pests.

Even the slightest of changes can affect the timing of harvest, the quantity of grapes produced, and the quality and complexity of the wine.

## Finger Lakes

“The wine industry should be highly concerned about and taking the lead in mitigating and adapting to climate change,” explained Suzanne Hunt, who is a partner in her family’s seventh generation farm and winery, Hunt Country Vineyards.

Recently, Hunt has seen direct impacts of climate change—flash floods, followed by drought and damage to the vines from wildly variable temperatures in winter.

## Long Island

Richard Olsen-Harbich of Bedell Cellars, a pioneer in Long Island winemaking, notes, “Most vines are ripening their crops earlier than they used to and that’s something that grape growers across the world are seeing as well.”

Benjamin Cook, a climate scientist at the NASA Goddard Institute, concurs that earlier harvests are happening—but that doesn’t necessarily make grape growing easier. With higher moisture levels, damper vines may need fungicide or pesticide treatment.

## Hudson Valley

In the Hudson Valley, home of some of the country’s oldest vineyards, new weather patterns bring challenges. The river moderates the climate, but the area’s high humidity, precipitation and cooler temperatures dictate which vines will thrive.

Matthew Spaccarelli, a winemaker at Benmarl Winery acknowledges the recent hurdles created by climate change. He plans to adapt his practices to deal with the changing climate, improve sustainability of his vineyard, and keep the wine flowing.

Whether in the Hudson Valley, Finger Lakes, or Long Island, the increasingly extreme and unpredictable weather is attributable to climate change, and that’s hard on winegrowers and all farmers.

“We can do everything perfectly in our vineyards and perfectly in the wine cellar but it will all be for nothing if we don’t solve the climate crisis,”

– Suzanne Hunt,  
Hunt Country Vineyards.

We depend on nature, not only to grow grapes for wine, but also for the food we eat every day. The Nature Conservancy works to share new practices with farmers and equip them with resources and tools they need to adapt to and mitigate climate change, while safeguarding their livelihoods and protecting lands and waters. Visit [nature.org/climate](https://www.nature.org/climate) for more information.

# Making History Through Conservation and Policy

## NEW CONSERVATION FINANCE TOOLS PROTECT MORE LAND THAN EVER

At 253,000 acres, the Cumberland Forest Project, one of the Conservancy's largest-ever conservation efforts in the eastern United States, protects sweeping forest landscapes in the Central Appalachians, across parts of Southwest Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee. Safeguarding this vast stretch of forest tackles climate change on two fronts: by storing millions of tons of carbon dioxide and by connecting a migratory corridor that scientists believe to be one of North America's most important "escape routes" as animal species, from warblers to bobcats, shift their ranges to cooler climates.

And there's another boon.

Much of the Cumberland Forest Project was structured as an investment fund by the Conservancy's NatureVest division—a team that leverages private investment capital to conserve at a greater scale and a faster pace. By carefully managing these forests under Forest Stewardship Council certification and selling the carbon offsets produced, the forests' health will improve while generating revenue for our conservation-minded investors, local foresters and mills.

This model also has implications for conservation in the years to come. Our science has shown that people and nature can thrive into the future but only if we act now. By managing forests in a way that is both ecologically beneficial and economically sound, the Cumberland project demonstrates an important tool in achieving that future.

### NEW YORK PASSES LANDMARK CLIMATE LEGISLATION

New York State recently passed the most powerful climate legislation in the United States. Our policy team spent long days at the Capitol, working closely with conservation partners and elected officials to craft the new law: the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. It will drastically cut carbon pollution, safeguard New York's clean energy programs, and invest in under-resourced communities. This new bill mandates that New York reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, 70 percent renewable energy by 2030, and an equitable transition to a low-carbon future—showing the nation how to effectively fight climate change.

# Growing Change in Our Cities

## NATURE CONSERVANCY AND PARTNERS GREENING CITIES IN NEW YORK AND BEYOND

### **A Vacant Lot Turned Flower Farm Brings Jobs and Nature to Rochester Residents**

On the corner of Joseph Avenue and Langham Street in Rochester, a vacant lot stood as a reminder that the area was once a bustling business district. This summer, an innovative project—part of a Conservancy-wide plan to bring more nature into cities—helped change that, transforming the parcel into a flower farm through a program called *Community Blooms*.

In partnership with Greentopia, the Joseph Avenue Business Association, and the City of Rochester, The Nature Conservancy helped local youth gain on-the-job training while offering residents a place to enjoy nature's many benefits. On the ¾ acre site, three young adults from the Joseph Avenue community were hired to grow and harvest flowers for custom-made bouquets sold at Wegmans stores and the Rochester Public Market.

And while the seeds of success were sown this summer, it's a project that has been germinating for years as part of the Conservancy's focus on building healthy cities.

"The Nature Conservancy works to protect the lands and waters we all depend on, and that includes nurturing green spaces within our cities," says Darran Crabtree, Senior Conservation Strategy Advisor. "We need approaches to urban conservation that make our cities more resilient and healthier places to live. *Community Blooms* is an exciting step in this direction. Work like this could help inform how Rochester invests in thousands of city-owned lots in the upcoming decade."



"The Nature Conservancy works to protect the lands and waters we all depend on, and that includes nurturing the green spaces within our cities."

– Darran Crabtree

How our cities expand, use resources, and withstand climate impacts is shaping the future of the planet. In New York, we are catalyzing investments in urban green infrastructure, like trees and open spaces, to reduce flooding and extreme heat, while ensuring equitable access for all communities to green spaces. Innovations minted in New York will guide how cities around the world incorporate nature into the urban fabric.

# By the Numbers

The Nature Conservancy was born with the purchase of Mianus River Gorge Preserve in 1955 right here in New York. Since then, we have conserved more than 815,000 acres across the state. We continue to be a conservation leader and are proud to have been the first state program to establish programs to make our water cleaner, our oceans healthier and our cities thriving.



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carbon emissions in New York by 2050 thanks the passage of the most ambitious climate legislation in the United States.

**1st**

of-its-kind boat wash station along a major highway opened at the I-87 Adirondacks Welcome Center to help protect waters from impacts of invasive plants.

**1,000**

trees planted for habitat restoration and water quality protection at the newly expanded Eagle Crest Preserve in the Finger Lakes.

**400**

volunteers planted 7,000 trees and cleaned up debris as part of a climate-resilience project at Brooklyn's Marine Park.

**16**

Hudson Valley communities engaged in climate-resilient future workshops.

**1,030**

infestations of invasive plants completely removed in the Adirondacks.

**132**

distinct whales observed feeding on menhaden around NYC by our partners at Gotham Whale.

**566**

Suffolk County grants provided to homeowners for the installation of new nitrogen reducing septic systems.

**\$500 million**

more statewide for drinking water protection and infrastructure upgrades.



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Beautiful weather and abundant sunshine brought out swallowtails, monarchs and dragonflies at Thousand Acre Swamp Preserve this summer. People of all ages gathered to take part in a guided trail walk and to observe and learn about the area's variety of butterfly species.

## VISIT OUR PRESERVES

Experience autumn's crisp cool air and changing colors at one of our many preserves throughout Central and Western New York. Visit [nature.org/newyork](http://nature.org/newyork) for more information.