

SPRING/SUMMER NEWS 2022

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# Central & Western New York Update

The Nature  
Conservancy



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# Together, We Find a Way



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Dear Member,

With your support, we have made a remarkable and lasting difference by working with communities to conserve and restore many special and iconic places across Central and Western New York. From the Great Lakes and Finger Lakes to the Southern Tier and Tug Hill, we've had a tangible impact on this region's incredible lands and waters.

We base our approach on sound science, leverage public and private partnerships to fund our work, and, most importantly, rely on our robust community of supporters like you as we chart a course for a sustainable future.

Together, we are turning the tide on water pollution to bring back thriving rivers, part of what is so special about this region. We are using new technologies to reinvigorate the Great Lakes and advocating for changes in fisheries management to restore keystone species. Clean water depends on good agricultural practices, so we're developing innovative solutions for better soil health to improve water quality in the Finger Lakes—and we're exporting these practices to other places.

Conservation success in Central and Western New York is fundamentally important to The Nature Conservancy's mission. And in the months to come, we will continue to actively promote the role of nature in making people's lives better and wildlife safer from the impacts of a changing climate.

We will continue to work closely with diverse communities to push for clean, drinkable water and healthy water quality in our lakes, rivers, and streams. And we will create healthier, more resilient forests that capture carbon and support abundant wildlife.

We would also like to take a moment to acknowledge the wonderful contributions of Jim Howe to The Nature Conservancy in New York. After leading the Central & Western division for 18 years, Jim has taken a new and exciting position as the Conservancy's senior policy advisor for freshwater, focusing nationally on river conservation and management. Jim has been an invaluable leader and leaves a legacy of success across Central & Western New York and beyond. We are excited that he will now be able to share his knowledge, experience, and leadership on the national stage.

As always, we thank you for your support as we work together to protect the lands and waters that sustain us all.

Sincerely,

Bill Ulfelder  
 Executive Director  
 The Nature Conservancy in New York



We are transforming degraded trails at our 550-acre West Hill Preserve in the Finger Lakes by building 10–12 miles of new, modern, and ecologically sustainable trails.

# Connecting More People to Nature

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Located in a popular hub of outdoor recreation for the Rochester and Elmira metro areas, The Nature Conservancy's West Hill Preserve has always been a place for "hardcore" hikers. A short trail system was originally designed for experienced outdoor enthusiasts only. But times have changed. In the last decade, trail-running and mountain biking have become two of the most popular activities across the country. And their popularity continues to grow. The Conservancy is making changes so our preserves will be accessible to everyone, not just the most rugged outdoor recreationalists.

In order to better serve the outdoor community and bring the experience of nature to a more diverse audience, we are updating our trails at West Hill Preserve with a professionally designed trail system. The new system will not only offer a more memorable experience for existing visitors, it will also better serve today's varied outdoor explorers. As an added bonus: This project will deliver one of the first trail systems optimized for mountain bikes in the Finger Lakes.

The region contains an active and growing mountain biking community—but is underserved with respect to the number of trails open to mountain bikes.

The West Hill master trail plan is an intentionally designed shared-use trail system that offers beginner, intermediate, and advanced hiking, running, and biking experiences for all visitors to connect with nature.

"The transformation of West Hill Preserve will provide new trails for residents and visitors alike," says Mat Levine, director of land assets for the Conservancy in New York. "What's more, the visioning process we're investing in with stakeholders will create stronger enabling conditions for trails and the natural environment. This is the Conservancy's first such trail system in New York—and a model for sustainably built trails that provide health, wellness, and economic benefits to the surrounding communities."

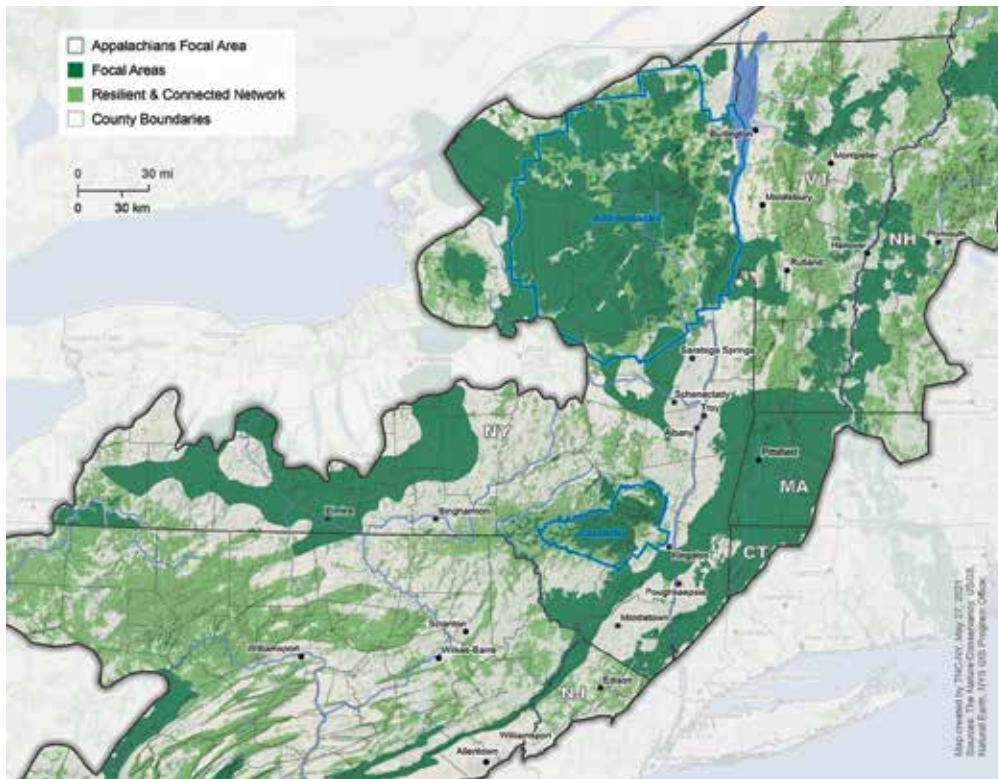
Importantly, this project will serve urban, suburban, and rural communities as well as many students. The Finger Lakes region is home to three community colleges and at least eight public and private four-year universities, whose students and staff rely on publicly accessible lands like this for outdoor recreation opportunities.



The Nature Conservancy's West Hill Preserve is located within one hour of Rochester, Corning, Geneva, and dozens of rural communities. The preserve also features a section of the Finger Lakes Trail that crosses Central and Western New York. For more information, visit [nature.org/newyork](https://www.nature.org/newyork).



# Creating a Continental Vision



Currently only a quarter of the Appalachian corridor is protected. Our vision for continental conservation involves stitching together large swaths of lands across the Appalachian expanse to mitigate climate change, bolster biodiversity and support communities.

State playing a critical role in advancing this vision. Conservancy scientists have identified the Adirondacks, Catskills, Tug Hill Plateau, and Hudson Valley as some of the landscapes with the greatest ability to sequester carbon and support biodiversity. We are working to connect and conserve these critical areas, as well as using nature to help communities and ecosystems adapt and become even more resilient to climate change.

In New York, it is essential to conserve key areas along with the landscapes that connect them, to give species opportunities to shift to northern ranges and higher elevations in response to climate change. Here are some ways we're working to conserve and connect these priority areas:

**Using innovative ways to manage lands for climate resilience.** Follensby, the 14,700-acre landscape in the heart of the Adirondacks and one of the last intact temperate deciduous forests in the world, serves as a platform for climate change research, education, and innovative partnerships.

**Accelerating the pace and scale of land protection through partnerships.** We provide land trusts with funding for land protection and capacity building in the areas that are most critical for conservation connectivity.

**Supporting private landowners in conservation.** With over 80 percent of New York's forested land in private ownership, we are developing resources and programs, like the Family Forest Carbon Program, to help private landowners manage and protect their forests for carbon sequestration and the best conservation outcomes.

**Improving infrastructure for species migration.** Major highways, like I-90, as well as improperly placed and undersized culverts, create insurmountable barriers to species migration. We are partnering with New York State and targeted municipalities to assess and improve problematic infrastructure and create better pathways so that nature can move in a changing climate.

Spanning 2,000 miles from the Blue Ridge mountains of Alabama to the boreal forests of Canada, the Appalachians are home to 22 million people who rely on the range's natural resources for health, livelihoods, and recreation. The landscape provides clean air and fresh water to communities, is one of the world's most biodiverse and resilient in the face of climate change, and is a superhighway for migrating species. But it is facing some serious challenges. Warming temperatures, extreme weather events, development, unsustainable forestry, and habitat fragmentation put the region's public, economic and ecological health at risk.

In this vast landscape, The Nature Conservancy sees an unmatched opportunity to address the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, with the lands and waters of New York

# By the Numbers

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**\$4 billion**

for a clean water, clean air, and green jobs bond act will appear on the November 2022 General Election Ballot, thanks in part to our policy team

**480,000**

acres of ocean area in the New York Bight will be leased for offshore wind development; we are advising agency contractors on how to manage this development in an environmentally friendly way

**\$234 million**

was allocated to a sewer expansion project in the tidal Forge River area on the south shore of Long Island to improve water quality, the largest sewer expansion since the 1980s

**10,500**

miles is the length of the New York State Snowmobile Trail System; with partners, we rerouted a section of the trail that runs through our Boquet River Nature Preserve to ensure trail access for snowmobilers

**60%**

of sites in the Adirondacks that TNC and partners cleared of invasive plants continue to be healthy and free of invasives

**85%**

of Long Island voters said yes to a plan that will upgrade septic systems for 1,889 homes and reduce nitrogen pollution into the Forge River by 71,000 pounds per year

**4**

interns from Polytechnic University, The New School, Harvard Business School and Duke University are assisting us with business solutions to make us more efficient, agile and innovative

**The 30th**

National Estuarine Research Reserve in the nation has been designated in Connecticut, after years of dedicated advocacy by Conservancy staff in New York and Connecticut

**65**

people from eight City agencies and nearly 20 organizations participated with us to envision how a successful buyout program will acquire, manage, and steward floodprone properties in New York City





# For the Love of the Land (and the Water)

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Farmers across the Owasco Lake region are protecting the lake by implementing farming practices that prevent water pollution and reduce soil loss and runoff.

Steve Cuddeback and his son, Jason, farm 700 acres between Owasco and Skaneateles Lakes, where they grow corn, soybeans, hay, and red beans. As 10th and 11th generation farmers, they can trace their farming lineage back to 1794.

In order to keep the business sustainable for the next generation, Steve is an avid adopter of new technologies and practices. One of his priorities is to ensure that his farms have minimal impact on the surrounding environment, and he works hard to implement a range of practices to protect the nearby lake.

“From one of my properties you can see an inlet for Owasco Lake; the lake is sensitive to runoff, pollution, and leaching,” he says. “Like many farmers I know, I do what I can to minimize runoff from my property.”

Over the years, he has seen the farming community embrace new technologies and practices to improve productivity and protect the environment.

“Farmers used to be engaged in very different practices, including heavy tillage, which we now know leads to soil loss

into the waterways,” he says. “It can take thousands of years to make a quarter inch of topsoil. Farmers look after the land because we know that what we are working with now is all we are going to have to work with in the future.”

That is why Steve saw such value in using cover crops (planting crops to cover the soil during the non-growing season) and reduced tillage on the farm. Both practices improve soil health and provide ground coverage to help reduce soil loss through erosion. Cover crops and no-till or reduced till farming are just two of the management practices for improving soil health that are growing in popularity across the Owasco watershed.

“My son, Jason, works at Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District. He uses my farm for research, and we spend a lot of time testing new practices,” Steve says. “About three or four years ago, we started trialing cover crops on my property.”

“Since then, we have seen some impressive results. Implementing cover crops along with reduced tillage management has significantly improved my overall soil health and organic matter, and healthy soil leads to better yields and quality.”



Farmers who invest in their soil health can pass fertile lands down to the next generation of farmers. © Dusan Petkovic

# Climate Change and You

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The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the scientific group assembled by the United Nations to monitor and assess all global science related to climate change, recently released its 2022 report. And the results are sobering. It underscores what we already know: Climate change is causing more frequent and more severe storms, floods, droughts, wildfires, and other extreme weather events. The increased frequency and severity of these events threaten the health and safety of millions of people around the world, both through direct impacts and by making it harder to produce food and access clean water.

But what's new and particularly troubling is that warming temperatures are leading to more "compound extremes." This is when multiple climate hazards (such as extreme temperature and precipitation) occur simultaneously in the same place, affect multiple regions at the same time, or occur in a sequence. For example, sustained higher temperatures can decrease soil moisture, which suppresses plant growth, which in turn reduces local rainfall, which leads to more drought in an escalating feedback loop.

## **But there is hope.**

Climate change is here today, reshaping our world in ways big and small. But that doesn't mean our future is predetermined. Every fraction of a degree of warming makes a difference when it comes to mitigating the impacts of climate change. We still can limit further warming and help communities around the world adapt to the changes that have already occurred.

And in New York, we are doing just that. Our state has the nation's most robust climate policy. We are helping New York lead the way with scalable solutions to fight climate change and ensure a thriving and resilient future for all.

We are providing key research, information, and collaboration to help New York State achieve its ambitious emissions reduction and renewable energy targets—New York's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act—the most forward-looking legislation in the United States. We've had a successful year helping to implement this legislation, which commits to a nation-leading target of 100 percent clean energy by 2040 and net zero emissions by 2050.

And we recently published our Long Island Solar Roadmap, a first-of-its-kind tool outlining how Long Island could produce more electricity than it uses (19.5 gigawatts to power 4.8 million homes), while protecting natural areas, reducing energy costs, and creating jobs.

We also launched the 'Yes in My Back Yard' or 'YIMBY' Toolkit, a public opinion project to understand the perceptions, preferences, and concerns about non-residential renewable energy projects in communities.

## **What can we do to stop climate change?**

When every fraction of a degree counts, we must use every tool available to us. That means accelerating the global transition to clean energy and doing more to leverage nature's ability to fight climate change. It also means finding more climate-friendly ways to produce food and creating climate-resilient water sources. To learn more, visit [www.ipcc.ch/reports](http://www.ipcc.ch/reports).



Wind turbines off the coast of New York. © Blue Planet Studio



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## Leave a legacy for generations to come.

What better legacy is there to leave than your commitment to protecting the Earth for generations to come? Whether you are taking those first steps toward planning your estate or are in the process of updating your estate plan, The Nature Conservancy is here to help.

**Don't let another day pass by.**

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