



SPRING/SUMMER NEWS 2020

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# Central and Western New York update

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**FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND DIRECTOR**

# Nature Brings Us All Together



Dear Supporter,

With all that is happening in Central and Western New York and around the world, we hope this letter finds you well. We are reminded of the importance of—and our intrinsic connection to—open spaces, fresh air and clean water.

This year, we're thrilled to celebrate the 10th anniversary of protecting the 7,000-acre forest surrounding Hemlock and Canadice Lakes.

A visionary and complex transaction involving the city of Rochester, NYS DEC, and The Nature Conservancy, this conservation project has forever changed the Finger Lakes region, contributing to the larger community in vast and meaningful ways—most notably by ensuring the continued protection of clean drinking water for the city of Rochester's residents.

Donors like you helped make this historic deal happen. And generous individuals like you keep supporting The Nature Conservancy's mission to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends.

As you know, our water is tied to our land—what we put on it or in it has a big impact. And now, in a climate-changing world, our work has never been more urgent. As a global organization, we're enacting ways to be a part of large-scale change. And as a local organization, we're implementing change right here on the ground.

We recently improved our Pulaski office with water-efficient environmentally sound solutions. Thanks to the John Ben Snow Memorial Trust, we upgraded our septic system, installed low-flush water efficient toilets, and added a tankless water heater. These measures help protect local water quality and ensure the efficient use of water in the building.

On a larger scale, we're coordinating with new partners to help change the behaviors and practices that have led to the degradation of our lands and waters.

We're working with the Finger Lakes agricultural community to understand the challenges—and to help develop innovative solutions—for better soil health across New York. We're learning about the current practices in dairy and row-crop farmers throughout the Owasco and Skaneateles watersheds to collectively protect water quality and soil health.

All this work is possible thanks to the support of members like you.

Thank you,

Jim Howe  
 Director

Brian Baird  
 Board Chair



# Protecting and Restoring Water Quality in the Finger Lakes

The Nature Conservancy is celebrating an exciting gift for the Finger Lakes region—87 acres of former farmland generously donated by the Dale C. Parmley Trust to help improve the quality of Owasco Lake. The land, which was actively farmed until this year, is located along the Owasco Inlet, the primary tributary to Owasco Lake, which accounts for over 60 percent of the surface water flow in the watershed.

Protecting important lands—and restoring critical natural functions on them—is a priority of The Nature Conservancy in New York. Harmful algal blooms are getting worse, especially in a climate-changing world. Warmer waters lead to longer and more frequent and intense occurrences of toxic blooms, and cause bathing beaches to be closed and sicken people, pets and wildlife. They also pose a threat to the city of Auburn’s drinking water, which Owasco Lake provides for some 43,000 individuals.

In 2018, The Nature Conservancy was awarded a \$1.1 million grant through the New York State Environmental Protection Fund’s Water Quality Improvement Program. With this grant, the Conservancy has been working to identify, protect and restore parcels of land in the watershed that could make a difference for the lake’s water quality.

“Nature can help solve water quality issues and keep our environment and economy healthy. Science and experience tell us that coupling land protection with other strategies, like bringing back wetlands and grasslands that absorb pollutants and expanding innovative soil health and water quality practices on farmlands, can help reduce the occurrence of harmful algal blooms,” said Olivia Green, Finger Lakes water quality specialist.

Conservancy staff are seeding the property with a cover crop to help curtail erosion and run-off while assessing restoration strategies with partners in the watershed.

“Protecting and restoring lands is an investment in nature’s ability to absorb stormwater and pollutants before they reach our waters,” added Green. “This work would not have been possible without the generous donation of the Parmley Family, and years of dedicated conservation work by Owasco Watershed Lake Association, Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council, Finger Lakes Land Trust, and Cayuga County.”

## NEW WATER QUALITY SPECIALIST JOINS TEAM

We welcome Olivia Green, our new Finger Lakes water quality specialist. Olivia has a diverse background in water resources, most recently serving as director of water programs for the Atlantic States Legal Foundation, focused on the restoration of Onondaga Lake.

“The Nature Conservancy can be nimble and innovative while also doing science-based work at scale. We’re taking the long view in the Finger Lakes by first working very closely with the community and partners to get a clear understanding of what’s at play in the Owasco and Skaneateles areas. We’ll make informed decisions about our work there and apply that knowledge to other places.”

# A Familial Love of Moss Lake Preserve

“No matter what the season, there’s something special at Moss Lake Preserve,” opines Paul Ronan. “In winter, the ice interplays with the moss and with the water. In spring the peeper frogs are *really* loud. In summer, blue iridescent damselflies hover over the water.”

“But in early fall,” adds Mary Ronan, Paul’s younger sister, “the colors are beautiful, and usually there’s a light fog. The bog is covered in spiderwebs and just about everywhere you look, it’s shimmering. You come to the realization that you think you really know a place and yet, there’s a whole secret layer that’s been revealed. Once the sun burns off the fog, it’s gone.”

Paul, Mary and siblings Kate and Jay Ronan, grew up  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile away from Moss Lake. Their parents, Lynn and Mike, were captivated by the beauty of the area and decided to raise the family there. As youngsters, they rode bikes down the dirt road to this spot as often as possible.

“It was the first place that we were allowed to have our freedom,” explains Mary. “We would go and spend our whole afternoon there—in this wilderness. It was a wonderful experience for us to have that autonomy, to be able to go out on our own.”

“Of course, as teenagers and in college, whatever you’re dealing with at the time seems like it’s the end of the world. All of us at some point or another have gone on a walk with Mom or Dad to Moss Lake to pour out our souls and talk about whatever was challenging us. Being able to do that while walking around such a peaceful place is something we all really appreciate,” Paul adds.

Moss Lake Preserve has had a very influential role in their lives. Three of the four siblings went on to pursue careers in environmental education and believe that Moss Lake was a contributing factor in their choices.

As adults, it remains an important place. “Today, it continues to be very accessible for us because we all live in Western New York. It’s now a place that we go to, stop in and say hi to Mom and Dad, and then we’re right back on our bikes or go by foot to Moss Lake,” adds Mary.



## HELP US REBUILD MOSS LAKE’S BOARDWALK AND TRAILS

Moss Lake Preserve is The Nature Conservancy’s most popular property in Western New York. Visitors are transported into an untouched landscape with fascinating features left behind by glaciers: a 15-acre kettle hole partially covered by sphagnum moss.

We are investing in new visitor infrastructure at Moss Lake that encourages access while protecting the preserve’s sensitive flora and fauna. We need your help! Please consider a contribution to our efforts to rebuild Moss Lake’s boardwalk, trails, and interpretive signs.



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Improving and protecting water quality means safe, accessible, and clean water for both people and nature. The Nature Conservancy is working to reduce the amount of pollutants that enter New York's waters to prevent harmful algal blooms, protect drinking water sources, and ensure healthy habitats for wildlife.

## Protecting New York's Water

From the Great South Bay to the Finger Lakes, New York's waters are our most precious resource. But with unsustainable food production and insufficient wastewater treatment, 80 percent of our fresh and coastal waters are contaminated, and one-fifth of our river basins cannot support the combined needs of people and nature.

"What was for a long time considered an abundant and inexpensive resource becomes a priceless commodity when water is polluted and scarce," explains George Schuler, co-director of The Nature Conservancy's New York Water Priority. "Growing and changing demands for water are putting stress on a system that is already challenged by climate change and degradation of natural areas that protect water supplies. Today, nine out of 10 natural disasters linked to climate change are water related—whether too much water, too little water or water that is too polluted."

Throughout the state of New York, The Nature Conservancy is engaging communities and working toward solutions.

"We are coordinating closely with government, residents and businesses to reduce nitrogen and phosphorous pollution, as well as how waste and stormwater are being managed. We are ensuring that these systems work together to protect and provide adequate water for generations to come," says Stuart Lowrie, co-director of The Nature Conservancy's New York Water Priority.

Improving and protecting water quality is a key component of our work to provide safe, accessible, and clean water for both people and nature. Reducing the amount of pollutants that enter New York's waters is critical to prevent harmful algal blooms, protect drinking water sources, and ensure healthy habitats for marine and freshwater species. Developing and implementing strategies to reduce nitrogen and phosphorous pollution is key and includes a diverse array of projects, including installing upgraded septic systems on Long Island, protecting source water in the Adirondacks, and working with farmers in the Finger Lakes to implement better agricultural practices.

### ONE WATER, NEW YORK

The Nature Conservancy is working to build the capacity of water professionals to improve and integrate management structures for better water quality and resources throughout the state of New York. Called our "One Water" initiative, we are working with local water managers to take into account all water—drinking water, wastewater, stormwater—as resources that must be managed holistically and sustainably.

# By the Numbers

The Nature Conservancy was born with the purchase of Mianus River Gorge Preserve in 1955 in New York. From the Great Lakes to Long Island, we advance science, conservation know-how, and diverse partnerships to build a resilient future. We are united in the need to protect land, water, and all the life it sustains, including ourselves.

2019 was a remarkable year for The Nature Conservancy in New York. We are grateful for your support in helping us tackle the greatest environmental threats of our time. Here's a look at the recent accomplishments of our team:

**70**

members representing 50 organizations launched the NYC Urban Forest Task Force to protect, maintain, use, and expand the city's urban forest.

**20**

farmers engaged in exploring innovative practices to benefit soil health and water quality on agricultural lands in the Finger Lakes.

**40,000**

acres of rooftops in New York City targeted for solar panel sites as part of two newly enacted laws to make the city more sustainable.

**87**

acres of critical land in the Finger Lakes donated to The Nature Conservancy for future restoration.

**40**

year-old Mashomack Preserve on Shelter Island celebrated this milestone anniversary.

**\$126 million**

per year needed to improve water quality conditions on Long Island through septic system upgrades.

**23,000**

cubic yards of sand has rebuilt an eroded beach and protected communities in Sandy Creek, Lake Ontario.

**21,000**

mega-watts of solar capacity could be installed on Long Island's rooftops, parking lots, and developed land.

**55,750**

acres of Adirondack forest could be enrolled in our *Working Woodlands* program, an effort to save trees, combat climate change and generate revenue for landowners.

**\$3 billion**

environmental bond act proposed by Governor Cuomo to support water quality, land protection and climate resilience.

**75 %**

of New York's road-stream crossings are undersized, creating barriers for fish and reducing flood resiliency.

**773**

infestations of invasive species are being managed by staff and partners in the Adirondacks.



Bluebird, New York State's bird. © Derek Rogers



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# Global Focus: Update on Australia's Bushfire Crisis

2019 was Australia's hottest and driest year on record which was a major contributor to the worst wildfires ever recorded along the forested east coast over the 2019/20 southern summer.

With 18.5 million acres of forests burned in south-east mainland Australia alone, the effects of the fires have been horrendous from loss of human life to the loss of native Australian plants and animals to the devastation on communities and habitat.

More than one billion land mammals, birds, and reptiles are estimated to have been killed, along with countless bats, fish, frogs, and insects. Many endangered species have lost the majority of their habitat—up to 95 percent—jeopardizing their futures.

“To respond to this unprecedented crisis, we’re bringing together experts from agriculture, conservation, indigenous land management, forestry, business, science and philanthropy, to agree on a plan to protect the future of Australian nature,” said Rich Gilmore, director of The Nature Conservancy Australia. “Together, we’re developing a market-based approach to deliver funding from private investors and government to restore private and public lands.”

## Protecting Water for Australia's Future

Recently, generous New Yorkers supported the first water markets fund in Australia. Through NatureVest, this project realizes a financial return for investors, while providing water to important wetlands supporting water dependent wildlife within the southern Murray-Darling Basin. As a result some wetlands have seen water for the first time in years, with emus, swans, and kangaroos returning to areas that hadn't seen such wildlife in a decade.

## Curbing the Loss of Nature and Wildlife through Climate Policy

To tackle climate change locally and around the world, and to protect nature from collapse, The Nature Conservancy is redoubling our efforts, including advocating for stronger policies to accelerate the pace and scale of climate action.

The decisions we make today will determine whether we achieve the world's sustainability goals for 2030—a longstanding milestone that is just 10 years away. We'll work to chart a brighter future for people and nature by urging global policymakers, the private sector, and interested individuals to drive change during this crucial year for environmental policy.





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## CELEBRATING A MILESTONE: 10 YEARS OF PERMANENT PROTECTION AT HEMLOCK—CANADICE LAKES

Ten years ago, The Nature Conservancy partnered with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to protect the 7,000-acre forest surrounding Hemlock and Canadice Lakes. With the only undeveloped shorelines in the Finger Lakes, these two lakes have provided high-quality drinking water for the city of Rochester and neighboring communities for almost 150 years.

Two lakes, gorges, and a waterfall can be found along Rob’s Trail. Bald eagles soar among the high ridges and rolling hills of this magnificent region.

Visit [nature.org/newyork](http://nature.org/newyork) for details.