

SPRING/SUMMER NEWS 2021

Central & Western New York Update

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FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND DIRECTOR

Nature Unites Us



Dear Supporter,

As the natural world awakens this spring, we'd like to take a moment to thank you for your ongoing support. The Nature Conservancy is committed to a future in which all of nature, including humanity, thrives.

And as we celebrate nature, we also applaud the people like you who take meaningful actions for the planet. We can't solve the world's biggest challenges alone, but together we are harnessing the power of nature to protect the thing that matters most: our home.

In Central & Western New York, we are leveraging our science and expertise to increase the scale of our outcomes. Thanks to your support, we are advancing important initiatives, including:

- Working to limit pollution and aquatic invasive species in our fresh waters, such as the Great Lakes and Finger Lakes.
- Conserving, restoring and connecting forestlands to capture more carbon and to provide safe refuge for wildlife and birds in a climate-changing world.
- Refocusing our land protection efforts to provide resilience to climate change and establish connective corridors that link ecologically important areas.
- Providing opportunities for people to connect with nature at our 35 publicly accessible preserves.

Yet, despite the myriad successes we've had, the conservation challenges ahead of us are great. Runoff plagues our fresh waters, climate change degrades our forests and unsustainable practices threaten our fish, birds and wildlife. These threats harm the environment and human health and put economically important industries such as farming, forestry and tourism at risk.

The Nature Conservancy's dedication to securing a sustainable world has never been stronger. Our science solves problems; our collaborative approach brings people together; and our passion and focus generate tangible results.

Most importantly, we are tapping into the innovative, diverse spirit of our neighbors like you.

Thank you for your support.

Jim Howe
Director

Laurie Dann
Board Chair



Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River provide drinking water for millions of people, sustain migrating birds and spawning fish, support recreational economies and underpin a unique way of life for millions of New Yorkers.

What's Happening with Water Levels in Lake Ontario?

New York's abundant freshwater—embodied by the Great Lakes and Finger Lakes—is one of our most important natural assets. But we must steward that freshwater and its surrounding habitats wisely. Recognizing this need, The Nature Conservancy was a leader in advocating for the U.S. and Canada's adoption of Plan 2014—a science-based management plan for Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence. The plan is taking steps to restore the degraded health of this incredible and important ecosystem, while respecting all the interests that depend upon the lake and river.

The timing of the plan's adoption, however, could have been better. After it was enacted in 2017, record rainfall saturated New York and Ontario. Lake Ontario hit record high levels, and shoreline communities suffered flooding. That happened again in 2019. In the aftermath, the International Joint Commission (IJC) created a new Public Advisory Group to review Plan 2014's performance. The Nature Conservancy is a member, and it's been heartening to see stakeholders listen to each other, learn about the complexity of the Lake Ontario–St. Lawrence system, and look for solutions.

Some of the group's findings include:

- The recent high water in Lake Ontario is part of a natural cycle—likely exacerbated by climate change—that all the Great Lakes are experiencing.
- High and low water cycles will continue to occur, regardless of the management plan in place.

- The IJC cannot control the water, it can only influence its flow and distribution.

The Public Advisory Group is looking at whether the Plan could be adjusted in a way that is fair to all interests yet doesn't compromise the health of the lake and the river.

The group also noted that we need to focus more on coastal resilience. The Nature Conservancy will continue to press for solutions such as:

- Assisting shoreline communities and property owners with best practices for land-use planning, shoreline protection, and dredging.
- Creating alternatives for the most vulnerable areas, so we're not building and rebuilding in places that will flood again and again.
- Building greater understanding of the complexity and constraints of managing this system among stakeholders and decision-makers.

“No matter how well the IJC manages the water, we will continue to grapple with flooding if we don't start learning to live with the natural rhythms of a Great Lake and great river,” says Jim Howe, Central & Western New York Chapter's director, who represents The Nature Conservancy on the IJC's Public Advisory Group.



Welcome New Board Chair Laurie Dann

We recently caught up with newly appointed Central and Western New York Chapter Board Chairperson, Laurie Dann, who has been a Trustee of The Nature Conservancy since 2014. A resident of Buffalo, Laurie spends her free time exploring natural areas and birding in New York, Canada and around the world.

What makes you care for nature and want to conserve it?

It goes back to my family and my youth. My father and my grandmother were both very nature aware. We had a cottage down a dirt road on the Canadian shore of Lake Erie, which gave me a real connection to nature. As kids, we learned about where the water meets the land. Out the back door was the lake, out the front door, the woods. And we took full advantage of all of that—birding, fishing, swimming and sailing. My husband Tom and I bought my great-grandparents' house that we enjoy to this day.

How does your connection to water shape your views on conservation today?

Water knows no boundaries as it flows, so all efforts to protect it need to be coordinated across borders. And that goes for conservation in general—it's all tied together. You can't compartmentalize it.

When it comes to restoration of the Great Lakes, in particular, we tend to focus on them from the U.S. side, but

efforts must be coordinated with the Canadian side, too, because it truly is a Great Lakes system. The lakes store 20% of the world's surface fresh water and have a vast shoreline that supports all kinds of nature, including millions of people. All conservation challenges touch down here, from agricultural to renewable energy to water level management to fisheries and invasive species.

What are you most excited about when it comes to the work of The Nature Conservancy?

The Nature Conservancy tackles the big issues—not just locally but globally. The Central and Western New York Chapter has a committee that annually backs a different international project because there is so much need and the impact is so great. And it's important to note that we are keeping top-of-mind the issues of diversity, inclusion and equity that are crucial to conservation. We have so much to learn from the Indigenous people—six different tribes—that have long lived in Central & Western New York.

What are some of the projects you look forward to taking on?

Water, renewables, climate change and biodiversity are all so important. And it starts with building awareness and relationships. It takes a lot of work to form trust—and to do it not only locally but also internationally. We all have a role to play and everybody needs to pitch in.



© Kent Mason

Across New York, we are using cutting-edge science to protect and restore woodlands that will withstand climate change—anchoring a broad Nature Conservancy effort to safeguard swaths of resilient, connected forests from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia to the boreal forests of Canada. This 179-million-acre region stores millions of tons of carbon, sustains communities and provides a habitat bridge for wildlife, such as birds, bobcat and moose, to move through.

Songs to Fill the Air

Nothing heralds the arrival of spring like birdsong. But the calls you hear echoing through the woods today may be different from the ones you heard when you were growing up.

Nature is on the move as warmer temperatures, increased flooding and other climate impacts alter and destroy habitat, forcing species to search for new homes. And birds aren't the only example—in North America, animals are moving an average of 11 miles north and 36 feet higher in elevation each decade. Climate change is altering the home ranges and migration routes of animals worldwide.

To help address this threat, The Nature Conservancy is focused on accelerating forest protection and restoration and securing key wildlife corridors—places that wildlife need to move safely to new habitat.

The forests and valleys stretching from Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains to the Canadian Maritimes and beyond function as a climate life raft for North American species—but currently only 21% of the area's protected. New York's forest stand out as a stronghold, anchoring the larger area. We are focused on accelerating forest protection and restoration here and in neighboring states because this landscape is paramount to a thriving future for all of nature, humanity and wildlife included.

“Now is our last chance to conserve and restore a vast, connected ecosystem on the East Coast. Our work in New York is central to that goal,” explains Dirk Bryant, the Conservancy's New York director of lands. “We use science and work with partners to put that knowledge into action. We have innovated new ways to help towns and landowners revitalize their forests. And we are ramping up programs that transform privately owned forests into powerhouses of capturing carbon, a major contributor to climate change.”

One of these programs, Working Woodlands, helps landowners conserve and sustainably manage their forests and generate third-party-verified carbon credits for sale. Working Woodlands now has more than 200,000 acres under management in six states (including New York), and our goal is to expand this program to sequester more than seven million tons of CO₂ by 2030.

While our forests may harbor different species of birds in the future, with this effort underway, we can rest assured that come spring, birdsong will continue to fill the air.

Visit nature.org/workingwoodlands to find out more.

By the Numbers

The Nature Conservancy works to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. Our 70 years of experience, our network of partners and our practical know-how are achieving long-lasting and meaningful results across New York and around the world as we tackle climate change and secure healthy lands, waters and oceans. With nature, we can build a healthier, more equitable and resilient world for future generations.

Thanks to your support, we are achieving conservation successes throughout New York, from the tip of Montauk to the High Peaks of the Adirondacks and the Great Lakes and beyond. The world we depend on depends on us. Here are some of our recent successes.

500,000

oysters recently replanted in local shellfish restoration areas across New York's bays and harbors

5,000

pounds of nitrogen prevented from leaching into local waters daily due to upgrades at Nassau County's Bay Park Wastewater Treatment Plant

\$250,000

in direct economic relief to New York oyster farmers struggling due to the impacts of COVID-19

106

coastal parcels in Mastic Beach recently protected, allowing nature to act as the first line of defense against community flooding

90%

decrease in nitrogen pollution thanks to a new Suffolk County law requiring new or major reconstruction projects to install clean-water septic systems

5,000

forested acres conserved across the Black River Valley and Tug Hill landscapes to secure climate-resilient habitat for wildlife

12

miles of trails at The Nature Conservancy-owned Deer Lick Conservation Area in the Zoar Valley

60

partners spanning the Northern Appalachians participate in our Staying Connected Initiative to enhance important wildlife corridors

100

miles of river reconnected in New York, protecting important wildlife habitat and reducing the risk of flooding to communities

12

years of dedicated effort helped set the stage for future protection of Plum Island—an 820-acre oasis for rare and endangered species

75

Nature Conservancy-owned preserves with public access being assessed for expanded opportunities trail

1954

the year of The Nature Conservancy's first land preservation purchase, the Mianus River Gorge

50th

anniversary celebrated this year by our Adirondack chapter

128

feet is the tallest basswood tree in the Northeast, found in protected lands in the Zoar Valley



Prairie warbler. © John Leon

Saving the Forest for the Trees

Deep in the ancient Mayan Forest of Belize, a jaguar is hunting. Perched near the edge of the water, where a tapir drinks, she freezes—then lunges forward with immense force and speed. Water splashes as the tapir thrashes about. This time, the jaguar loses her hold and the tapir trots away.

For the jaguar and big cats like her throughout the world, human encroachment and deforestation are causing her habitat, and that of her prey, to shrink—threatening their survival.

But forests are not only critical for wildlife, they also hold the key to mitigating climate change. Just one mature tree can sequester as much as 48 pounds of carbon per year, keeping it out of the atmosphere. When trees are cut down, the carbon they store is released.

The land here is also home to vibrant Mayan communities. Many continue to practice traditional farming techniques and steward the forest as they have for generations.

However, development pressures are greater than ever before. Traditional small-scale production is giving way to extensive agriculture and ranching, posing a threat for this vast and unique resource.

The Nature Conservancy's efforts seek to transform the region into a green economy that allows people and nature to thrive. With an unprecedented coalition of public and private partners, we are working with the government of Belize to ensure that the land is permanently conserved through the acquisition of the available properties—260,000 acres of lush habitat that will not be seen again, the crucial missing link within a network of reserves, national parks and protected areas.

Protecting the Maya Forest secures habitat for iconic wildlife and maintains an ecosystem that contains huge stores of carbon—which means the world can breathe easier. And the jaguar can thrive as an inextricable part of a precious and protected ecosystem.

We have a rare opportunity to protect two available properties in the Maya Forest, the largest remaining forest in Belize and a global biodiversity hotspot. The mahogany and pine savanna tropical forest that comprise these properties are home to over 400 species of birds and 70 species of mammals, including the largest populations of jaguars and other native cats in Central America.



© Lara T. Tonidandel



With private and public sectors and local communities, The Nature Conservancy is reducing deforestation and forest degradation to conserve or restore millions of acres of forests worldwide.

After the Amazon, Mesoamerica's 35 million-acre Maya Forest is the largest remaining tropical rainforest in the Americas. Stretching across Belize, northern Guatemala and Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, the Maya Forest provides refuge for countless rare and endangered species like white-lipped peccary, tapir, scarlet macaw, harpy eagle and howler monkey.



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BEAUTIFUL AND BOUNTIFUL MEADOWS

SPRING TO LIFE

Meadows and grasslands are some of the world's most threatened—and overlooked—natural areas.

Across New York, The Nature Conservancy is restoring these areas, which provide needed habitat for a community of climate-threatened birds and other wildlife species, such as the bobolink, meadowlark, woodcock, monarch butterfly and several important pollinators like bats and bumble bees.

Consider a walk at one of our spectacular meadow restoration sites in New York: Thousand Acre Swamp, Chaumont Barrens and Rob's Trail. For detailed information about these preserves and other places to visit, check out nature.org/newyork