

SPRING/SUMMER NEWS 2019

# Central and Western New York update

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# Connecting Communities Through Conservation



Dear Member,

The Nature Conservancy's vision is a world where people and nature thrive. And what that means to us in Central and Western New York is working *with* communities *for* communities—together.

We're building on our strong foundation of conserving land and water for future generations, most recently by protecting 612 acres of forest in the Zoar Valley. If you've ever hiked here, you know what a natural wonder it is. Turquoise waters rush through a shale canyon, banked by old-growth forests and towering cliffs that reach 400 feet from the gorge floor. It's no surprise that it's referred to as the Grand Canyon of the East.

This success was years in the making, and it took the help of many partners and supporters like you. We are especially grateful to the Darling family, who recognized the importance of continued conservation in the Zoar and wanted to see these forests saved.

But to take on the planet's biggest challenges, we must connect with more than just conservation-minded individuals. We must inspire people of all ages and walks of life, in cities and in the country alike.

To that end, we're helping the public contribute to healthier lands and waters in the Finger Lakes, where harmful algal blooms now occur in all 11 lakes—from the shallowest to the deepest and most pristine. We're collaborating with municipalities, agencies, volunteer groups, academic researchers and farmers to reduce phosphorous and other pollutants in our waters and invest in nature's ability to help keep our waters safe.

We're also working on water quality in our cities. In Buffalo, we're helping the Buffalo Sewer Authority accelerate efforts to address chronic sewage overflows. For a city undergoing an economic renaissance based on its waterfront, water pollution represents a major challenge.

Our efforts don't stop there. To create an experience that better serves deaf and hard-of-hearing people, we're developing a new interpretive nature trail at our popular Thousand Acre Swamp preserve in Rochester. An advisory panel with individuals from the Rochester Technical Institute for the Deaf and Rochester Museum and Science Center are partners with us in this venture.

We are so grateful for your support in helping us tackle the biggest conservation issues facing Central and Western New York—and people around the world.

Thank you.

Jim Howe  
 Executive Director

Brian Baird  
 Board Chair

# Conserving New York's Zoar Valley

## FAMILY TREES HELP FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE

When an American chestnut was discovered on his family's land 25 years ago, Herb F. Darling, Jr. began a life-long journey to save the species, which has been all but obliterated by chestnut blight since the 1900s. In the years that followed, he fought for that tree. He proudly named it Zoar 1, after the forest in which it stood, and even erected an 80-foot-high scaffold to pollinate it and gather its seeds while researchers searched for ways to save the mighty giant.

Although Zoar 1 eventually perished, Darling remained committed to conserving the majestic Zoar Valley forests—for their beauty, value to people and habitat for wildlife. When it came time to sell his 612-acre property, he turned to The Nature Conservancy.

"It was my father's wish from years back that this land should be preserved and kept as naturally as it could be," said Darling. "I just kept that enthusiasm. My children saw the benefits of protecting the land, and I'm hoping others will see the same benefits."

Beyond its scenic vistas, and abundant plants and animals, Zoar Valley maintains clean water and clean air while fighting against climate change. In these newly conserved acres, nearly 75,000 tons of carbon are stored—the equivalent of taking almost 16,000 cars off the road for one year.

"All that remains of Zoar 1 are three rocking horses that I had carved for my grandchildren, but the Zoar Valley is magnificent, and it needs to stay that way for generations to come," adds Darling.

The newly acquired land is adjacent to one of the largest remaining intact forests in New York's Great Lakes region. Future collaborations will focus on adding the property to New York State's 4,500 acres of protected lands in the Zoar Valley.



The Darling family's three generations at their family home in the Zoar Valley.

"From the high hills, you can see for miles and miles. And it is quiet. You stand up on one of those hills in the morning, and you can see the fog slowly rise up and disappear."

– Herb Darling, Jr.

Since The Nature Conservancy began its work in the Zoar Valley in the early 1960s, we have conserved about 1,800 acres of forestland here, including nearly four miles of land alongside the gorge, and established three nature sanctuaries, including Deer Lick Preserve, a designated National Natural Landmark on the south branch of Cattaraugus Creek.

# Seeing the Forest and the Trees

Walking in a dense grove of maple trees, Senior Conservation Manager Troy Weldy stops, takes a deep breath and surveys his surroundings. The air feels fresh and cool as the newly-emerged leaves dapple delicate shadows on the woodland floor. Inspecting the forest canopy, Weldy smiles, knowing he's standing not just in a beautiful forest but also in a carbon-sequestering powerhouse.

Every year, an acre of mature northern forest can bottle up the carbon equivalent of driving 2,445 miles. Putting the power of trees to work, The Nature Conservancy has developed an innovative way to encourage landowners to protect the forests they may otherwise cut.

Through its *Working Woodlands* program, the Conservancy works with property owners to adopt and maintain long-term forest management plans, and then pays the property owners based upon how much carbon their forests can store. In turn, the Conservancy sells carbon credits to corporations that want to offset their environmental footprint. This program has a multitude of benefits: it sustains local economies, protects drinking water, provides connected wildlife habitat and safeguards scenic vistas.

"We're collaborating with nearly two dozen landowners in New York. This program is a great solution for those who want to pass down a healthy and productive forest for future generations," Weldy says.

In the Empire State, some 6,400 acres are currently enrolled in *Working Woodlands*; there are about 67,000 acres in the program nationally.

*"Working Woodlands is a great solution for those who want to pass down a healthy and productive forest for future generations."*

– Troy Weldy



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## GOOD DIRT CAPTURES CARBON

Any gardener will tell you: good dirt means bigger, juicier and more abundant vegetables. But did you know that the high amount of organic matter in healthy soil also traps carbon? It also better responds to extreme weather events by holding and capturing water during heavy rains and drought, making it more resilient to climate change. The Nature Conservancy will work in the Finger Lakes region with the local agricultural community to understand the challenges—and to someday help develop innovative solutions—for better soil health across New York.





Women gather water on the shores of Lake Tanganyika in the village of Mgambo, Tanzania. Lake Tanganyika holds nearly one-fifth of the world's freshwater, is the world's second largest lake by volume, and is home to 250 native species of fish. It provides 40 percent of all protein for lakeshore villages.

# Saving Water Beyond Our Region

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.

## SUSTAINING WATER ACROSS CONTINENTS

The Central and Western New York Chapter has adopted Lake Tanganyika as a “sister site” due to the affinities between the African Rift Lakes and our own Great Lakes. We're providing financial resources and technical assistance to the Conservancy's Africa team as they help Tanzanian communities improve fishing methods, protect forests, and secure better health care.



# Central and Western NY Chapter Trustee Evan Dreyfuss

We caught up recently with Central and Western NY Chapter Trustee Evan Dreyfuss, who has been involved with The Nature Conservancy since 2017. His Finger Lakes home sits on Skaneateles Lake, a digit of pure cold water 16 miles long and over 300 feet deep.

## How did you learn about The Nature Conservancy?

Several years ago, I was invited to a Finger Lakes water quality awareness event held by The Nature Conservancy. I live on Skaneateles Lake, which supplies fresh drinking water not only for my community but also for the entire city of Syracuse. It's critically important to maintain the health of this resource here in upstate New York because a clean environment helps sustain the economy in this region.

## Why did you want to get more involved?

Serving on the board of trustees offered a chance to do something meaningful and impactful. Don't get me wrong: I'm a finance guy; I crunch numbers. But nature is one of our best assets, and we need to do what we can to protect it.

## What in your life made you care for nature, and want to conserve it?

I've always been around nature. I grew up on the East Coast, went to college on the West Coast and got to see a lot of the big parks: the Rockies, Yosemite, Glacier National Park, Grand Canyon and so on. I have always been aware of how pretty a country we have. When I first visited the Finger Lakes, I was awed—there's a reason people come up here. As you start to get older you become aware of your environment, how important nature is and what it really means. You want to leave it in the best shape possible for the next generation.

## What does The Nature Conservancy need to do more of in the future?

The most eye-opening thing to me is how global warming will affect all aspects of our lives—from how we live, to where we recreate, to our economy. It's something we all need to be very concerned about because it's happening now.

The Nature Conservancy is starting to engage the public on the issue of climate but we have much more to do. Since a good majority of people care about nature—starting with where they live—we need to better connect with people to effect change.



# The world we depend on depends on us.



VISIT us at  
[nature.org/newyork](https://nature.org/newyork)



# By the Numbers

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.

**74,000**

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

**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.

**28,000**

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

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**two million**

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

**110,000**

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

**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.

**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.

**160**

preserves managed across New York, spanning forests, grasslands, lakes, rivers, bays and the ocean.



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READY, SET, SWALLOWTAILS!

**THOUSAND ACRE SWAMP  
PRESERVE, JACKSON RD.,  
PENFIELD, NY**

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 3, 10-12PM**

Come see giant swallowtails and other  
butterflies at Thousand Acre Swamp.

RSVP: Contact Lucie at (585) 340-3227 or  
[lucie.parfitt@tnc.org](mailto:lucie.parfitt@tnc.org)

**COME CELEBRATE EL DORADO'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY  
EL DORADO PRESERVE, ELLISBURG, NEW YORK  
SATURDAY, JUNE 15, 10-12PM**

Celebrate the history of the El Dorado Preserve's beautiful shoreline and duneland habitat—and those who helped conserve it. Bird walks, trail hikes, cake and more. RSVP: Contact Lucie at (585) 340-3227 or [lucie.parfitt@tnc.org](mailto:lucie.parfitt@tnc.org).