

HUDSON VALLEY UPDATE | FALL/WINTER | 2019

# Hudson Valley depends on us.

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# Celebrating Conservation Victories



Dear Friend of The Nature Conservancy,

Thank you for supporting our work to conserve the lands and waters of the Hudson Valley. This region, with its tapestry of landscapes, cascading waterfalls, and rich history, is my home. As you are undoubtedly aware, Hudson Valley farms, communities, and waterways are impacted by a changing climate, threatening local economies and our quality of life.

The Conservancy works here and around the world to forge solutions so that people and nature can thrive, now and for generations to come. In this newsletter, I am pleased to share a few recent accomplishments from this region, made possible by your support.

Just this past year, the Conservancy:

- **Secured New York's nation-leading commitment to tackle climate change**—a mandate for 100% carbon-free electricity by 2040 and net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.
- **Produced the first-ever Restoration Plan for the Hudson River**, coordinating dozens of environmental, community, and agency partners to chart a blueprint for a healthier river and flood-resilient communities.
- **Added 11 acres to Westchester's Mianus River Gorge Preserve**, expanding trails and important wildlife habitat to 1,200 acres, including one of the last stands of old-growth forest in the Northeast.

With your help, we are creating a more sustainable world, starting in New York. I hope the following pages will inspire you to learn more at [nature.org/newyork](https://nature.org/newyork).

Thank you

Jim Attwood

Board Chair, The Nature Conservancy in New York

## BREWERIES HOP ONBOARD EFFORT TO CONSERVE FORESTS

The Nature Conservancy and nearly 200 breweries around America teamed up this fall to celebrate OktoberForest, a campaign to protect forests and the water they provide. Forests filter more than half of America's water, which is beer's main ingredient. But our forests face serious threats—and many need restoration. The OktoberForest campaign featured forest-themed events, hikes, presentations and social networking to raise awareness of woodland health. Go to [oktoberforest.org](https://oktoberforest.org) to learn more.



The Nature Conservancy is a private, non-profit 501(c)(3) international membership organization. Its mission is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

The Nature Conservancy meets all of the Standards for Charity Accountability established by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance. The BBB Wise Giving Alliance is a national charity watchdog affiliated with the Better Business Bureau.

# Communities Preparing for Climate Change

Climate change is affecting the Hudson Valley in tangible ways. Heavy precipitation causes widespread floods, rising seas erode our shores, and record-breaking temperatures strain our cities.

And in communities up and down the Hudson, sea level rise, and more frequent and intense storms are pushing infrastructure beyond its limits.

“Wastewater systems in many low-lying areas are going past their design capacities, which has a direct effect on both people and wildlife,” says Andrew Peck, ecologist and resilience specialist for The Nature Conservancy in New York. “During heavy rains, water rushes down into our valleys, and as many as twelve regional sewage treatment systems become inundated with water, releasing raw effluent into the Hudson.”

This affects recreation, water quality and the economy.

Wetlands and floodplains can help—they serve as nature’s first line of defense against storms, flooding and sea-level rise; they also offer habitat for fish, birds and other wildlife, and filter water. But in many shoreline communities, they are degrading at an alarming pace, leaving people and nature at risk.

As a result, the Conservancy and partners are working to implement holistic plans to improve community resilience including protecting and restoring shorelines, salt marshes and other critical coastal habitats.

To determine the best courses of action forward, with input from residents, the Conservancy and its partners are conducting Community Resilience Building workshops. This publicly-driven approach is starting to build capacity and educational opportunities in the region.

“So far, we’ve hosted six workshops throughout the Hudson Valley, encompassing 16 communities—in places like Croton-on-Hudson, Buchanan, Cortlandt, Beacon and Fishkill—to name a few. We have an additional 15 communities engaged in workshop preparations through 2020.”

In the sessions, participants identify current climate-related and natural resource challenges. Residents can begin to generate actions that reduce the vulnerability of their homes, businesses, and parks, to name a few. Together, they agree on priority actions to reduce climate-related challenges today, and in the future.

“The bottom line is, we are building capacity to empower communities in the Hudson Valley to become more resilient in the face of climate change.”



© Charles Gleberman

As towns throughout the region experience the worsening impacts of climate change, nature is needed now more than ever—to absorb carbon pollution and to help buffer communities from flooding, drought, and sea level rise.



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.

# Championing Conservation in New York and Beyond

We recently caught up with Bedford Falls residents Gregg Gelman and Joseph Hershberger—who serve on The Nature Conservancy’s New York Leadership Council—to ask them about their personal connections to nature.

## **What attracts you to conservation? How did you get involved?**

*Gregg:* I am attracted to conservation because it is the most selfless and selfish of causes. Watching friends create a better world for themselves and future generations is inspirational. It is hard not to feel the need to participate.

*Joe:* I have been sensitive to the degradation of the natural environment and plight of wildlife for as long as I can remember. Hearing Joni Mitchell sing about the birds, bees and trees in “Big Yellow Taxi” raised my consciousness to environmentalism when I was very young.

## **In terms of environmental solutions, what needs to happen in the next few years?**

*Joe:* We have to rethink how we travel and interact as a society to reduce our reliance on the automobile. Whether massive investment in mass transit or in technological advancements for increased fuel efficiency and alternative fuel sources. The traffic congestion in our cities and related environmental impact is heartbreaking.

*Gregg:* There needs to be a change in the current political situation. If we have leaders who see it in their best interest to roll back environmental and wildlife protections and not even acknowledge the crisis of climate change, it is hard to imagine a future without grave implications for our planet. There have been amazing advancements at the state level that demonstrate that we can make a difference.

“I am attracted to conservation because it is the most selfless and selfish of causes.” – Gregg Gelman

## **What about the Conservancy’s work and mission is most meaningful to you?**

*Joe:* They tackle the root causes of the big issues of our time. It’s a fact based scientific approach that delivers results.

*Gregg:* The Conservancy’s relentless pursuit to create a better world through meaningful acts of education, legislation and concrete programs that effect change is amazing.

*Joe & Gregg:* We feel privileged to be able to contribute to their work.

## **What are your hopes for the future when it comes to nature?**

*Gregg:* I hold out hope that younger generations, with the most at stake, will make it their mission to help save our planet, making the preservation of nature their top priority.

*Joe:* The Conservancy’s relentless pursuit to create a better world through meaningful acts of education, legislation and concrete programs that effect change is amazing.



A breathtaking view of the mountains of Patagonia.

# 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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**0**  
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.



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**566**  
Suffolk County grants provided to homeowners for the installation of new nitrogen reducing septic systems.

**16**  
Hudson Valley communities engaged in climate-resilient future workshops.

**\$500 million**  
more statewide for drinking water protection and infrastructure upgrades.

**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.





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## VISIT OUR PRESERVES

Experience this season's cool temperatures and changing colors at one of our many preserves throughout the Hudson Valley region. To plan your visit, check out [nature.org/newyork](http://nature.org/newyork)