



NEW YORK UPDATE | FALL/WINTER | 2023

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# Together, We Find a Way.

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### NEW YORK

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# Convening Partners for Conservation Success



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Dear Friend,

The challenges we face in New York, nationwide and globally – flooding, heat, fires and more – in 2023, are ever-present reminders of the urgency of our conservation and climate work. At the same time, we have many indicators of positive change and momentum. While The Nature Conservancy has an extensive legacy of using science, policy and innovation to create lasting, tangible results—diverse partnerships within the communities with whom we work are paramount to our success.

Looking back on this year, I'm proud of how we've used these signature approaches—particularly our partnerships—to ensure that our lands and waters are healthy, thriving and safe places to live, work and play.

As we continue to improve water quality and promote a more climate resilient Long Island, supporting Indigenous-led conservation efforts will lead to powerful results. Our partnership with the Shinnecock Kelp Farmers, a multi-generational, Indigenous and women-led nonprofit, is restoring bay waters through traditional methods that turn seaweed into natural fertilizer—reducing pollution, improving water quality and promoting the health and resilience of nature, humanity included.

By convening with local conservation organizations, Indigenous nations, community groups and residents in the Appalachians, we can tap into a wellspring of knowledge to help sequester carbon and support biodiversity so that communities and natural systems can adapt to a changing world. Through our Climate Resilience Grant program, we support partners in conserving critical landscapes that people, along with hundreds of species, need to adapt and thrive. This program allows us to significantly leverage public dollars and results in meaningful on-the-ground conservation.

And through a diverse coalition working to expand NYC's urban forest, and guidance from community partners, we are promoting healthy and equitable green spaces for those that need nature the most. This has culminated with new legislation that, for the first time, considers the role of trees in the City's long-term sustainability planning that improves the health, well-being and quality of life in New York City.

With your support, as we address some of the greatest challenges facing New York and the world, we continue to lead on climate, help people and all of nature thrive, and advance global wins through science, policy and innovation—and the incredible power of partners.

Thank you.

Bill Ulfelder

Executive Director

The Nature Conservancy in New York

# Cracking the Nut of Reforestation to Sequester Carbon

Dr. Michelle Brown, senior conservation scientist for The Nature Conservancy in New York, crunches through the woodland underbrush on a crisp morning in the Adirondacks. Hairlike frost lines the outer edges of fallen maple leaves, and they sparkle like a carpet of jewels in the glimmering autumn sunlight. A black-capped chickadee sends a warning call, notifying other birds that an intruder is walking in their forest.

But this scientist, armed with a notepad and measuring tape, is here to help, not harm. Her goal is to make the forest better, stronger and more resilient to climate change.

Leading a team of experts from around the state, Brown is working with a consortium of state agencies to help implement New York's historic Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. This law aims to reduce state-wide greenhouse gas emissions 40 percent by 2030—and no less than 85 percent by 2050. Brown believes that planting trees, as part of that effort, presents the greatest chance to increase carbon sequestration.

“Natural systems, like forests, have the unique ability to sequester—or pull—carbon out of the atmosphere and store it,” states Brown. “Reforestation represents the single largest opportunity to sequester more carbon. And importantly,

New York cannot meet its mandated net zero climate goals without sequestration strategies like reforestation. Reducing emissions from fossil fuel use or increasing renewable energy are critically important strategies, but climate goals will not be met without finding additional ways to sequester carbon.

To achieve our climate goals, we need to increase the number of acres planted each year by a staggering 40-fold—from 1,000 acres a year to tens of thousands of acres a year. And we need to ramp up every aspect of the work, from seed collection to workforce development, planting activities, land monitoring, landowner participation and more.

The Conservancy is using social science to understand private landowners' willingness to plant trees and participate in reforestation programs. We are applying natural science pertaining to climate adaptation, natural regeneration, reforestation and suitability of various species across New York. And we're exploring market-based solutions to overcome supply chain barriers. Our demonstration project in central New York is the testing ground for new ideas.

“Even though we have a lot to figure out, if we capitalize on all our tools, the scale of the solutions can meet the scale of the challenge,” says Brown. “And that's the biggest nut to crack.”



Nature has the potential to sequester 20% of net annual carbon emissions in the United States—and this number is even greater globally. Our New York team is focused on the important role that nature plays in climate mitigation. © Jeff Wendorff

# Gathering at Niagara with Indigenous Partners

The sun broke through the clouds and lit up a silvery mist as 160 Nature Conservancy team members and guests from around the world experienced the energy of Niagara Falls thundering around them.

The group chose to meet in Buffalo and Niagara, New York, for the Conservancy's second Voice, Choice & Action (VCA) Gathering because the area lies at the heart of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The six nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy—the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca and Tuscarora—form the oldest continuous participatory democracy in the world.

Holding the gathering in New York, where The Nature Conservancy got its start 70 years ago, was also an acknowledgment that in our organization's history, we have failed to adequately understand, engage and incorporate the rights, needs and views of Indigenous communities. We have played a role in perpetuating harms against Indigenous Peoples, and have benefited from colonial practices and systems.

In her opening remarks, Brie Fraley, North America Indigenous landscapes and communities director, described the gathering as an opportunity for healing. "It's about the responsibility we all have: to come into balance, to recognize our privilege and to use it to repair our relationships. We focus on three global solutions\* at the Conservancy, but there is a fourth solution as well—one of right relations."

The idea of 'right relations' comes from Indigenous thinking and activism and was one of several themes that flowed through four days of listening sessions, guided discussions and ceremony in Buffalo.

In keeping with Haudenosaunee tradition, the gathering began with a reading of the Ganö:nyök or Thanksgiving Address, by Clayton Logan, Wolf Clan of the Seneca Nation, on whose territory the group gathered. The "words that come before all else," spoken in the Seneca language, reverberated through the dark auditorium and grounded everyone in a practice of gratitude—just as they have for thousands of years.

\* The three global solutions are tackling climate change, protecting ocean, land and fresh water, and providing food and water sustainably.



Attendees of the second Voice, Choice & Action gathering at Niagara Falls, New York. © Nancy J. Parisi



Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper of the Turtle Clan of the Onondaga Nation speaks at the gathering. © Nancy J. Parisi

In his keynote address, Oren Lyons—a highly recognized global advocate of Indigenous rights, key architect of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and long-time professor at the University at Buffalo—called global warming a “soft” term. “This is an existential crisis we’re in,” he said. “We have to be the family that we are—the human family. We’re in the last round of the fight but it’s not over.”

In introducing Lyons, Bill Ulfelder, executive director of The Nature Conservancy in New York, recounted how, in 2018, Lyons challenged the Conservancy to do more on climate and for Indigenous sovereignty. Ulfelder described steps the organization has taken in New York since to collaborate via The State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry’s Center for Native Peoples and the Environment and identify opportunities to rematriate ancestral lands. “Holding the gathering here in Haudenosaunee territory allows us to polish the silver covenant chain of friendship,” Ulfelder said.

The New York team also developed the Indigenous Partnerships Program to build our competency and capacity to partner with Indigenous Peoples. Our work is based on establishing trust, building relationships and honoring self-determination and sovereignty. This conceptually dates back to the Haudenosaunee Two Row Wampum Treaty. The wampum belt contains two rows of purple lines that represent a canoe and a ship traveling down the river of life in parallel, bound together in their journey but also completely autonomous.

Ultimately, the Voice, Choice & Action gathering emphasized that the world is at a crossroads and that love is essential in giving people the courage necessary to bring forth the future we want.

“We have to tap into not only the power of the brain but the power of the heart,” said Ruchatneet Printup, a member of the Turtle Clan of the Tuscarora Nation. “That’s where those innovative ideas are going to come from.”

Andrea Burgess, director of The Nature Conservancy’s Global Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Program, added: “We are coming together in this moment to center what Indigenous and Traditional worldviews and vision have to offer us—what is still within reach that can offer a different reality than the one we are in now. This moment is a ripple effect of the thousands of ancestors who envisioned a more profound global orientation—an orientation that puts us back into balance.”

Please visit [nature.org/newyork](https://nature.org/newyork) for the full story and video.



Brie Fraley (left), director of the Conservancy’s North America Indigenous Landscapes and Communities Program, Robin W. Kimmerer, Potawatomi Nation, SUNY-ESF, Dawn Martin-Hill, Mohawk Nation, McMaster University, Beverley Jacobs, Mohawk Nation, University of Windsor, and Mariana Velez Laris, IPLC network manager. © Nancy J. Parisi

# Tree-mendous Step Forward for the NYC Urban Forest

On a crisp September morning, more than 100 people gathered to call for a vote on urgently needed legislation to monitor, protect and grow the New York City urban forest. Holding signs that read “Tree Equity for NYC” and “Trees Improve Our Health,” rally-goers included members of Forest for All NYC, a cross-sector coalition of 110+ organizations that The Nature Conservancy convenes, as well as elected officials and New Yorkers.

The urban forest is made up of all the trees in the city, including street trees and those in parks and gardens. It delivers important benefits that enhance quality of life for all New Yorkers, but the forest has been under-resourced for years and needs support.

Rally-goers celebrated the passage of legislation that ensures that trees and tree canopy are embedded in the City Charter as part of its long-term planning. They also called for the quick passage of a second bill that mandates the city’s first citywide urban forest plan and ongoing canopy cover monitoring.

This legislation directly advances the *NYC Urban Forest Agenda*, the coalition’s vision for meaningful and equitable investment in the urban forest, including 30% tree canopy coverage by 2035. The coalition successfully advocated for Mayor Adams’ PlaNYC to include a 30% citywide canopy goal.

“Our urban forest is essential living infrastructure,” says Emily Nobel Maxwell, director of the New York Cities

Program for the Conservancy. “Trees offer numerous benefits, from cooling and shading the streets and providing cleaner air, to absorbing and filtering stormwater and improving mental and physical health. Investing in the urban forest equitably will pay dividends, both today and into the future.”

As New Yorkers face intensifying heat waves, extreme rain events and flooding, there is a growing recognition that a healthy, equitably distributed urban forest is vital to mitigating the impacts of climate change, while improving life for all New Yorkers.

Both elected officials and citizens care about the urban forest, as evidenced by the enthusiastic participation in the second annual City of Forest Day. The event was hosted by Forest for All NYC, in partnership with the Parks and Open Space Partners NYC and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. The day featured more than 60 events across all five boroughs for New Yorkers to learn about, care for and celebrate the NYC urban forest and the role it plays as the “lungs” of our city.

The coalition will continue working to ensure that the New York City urban forest stays healthy and delivers its benefits equitably.

Interested in learning more? Visit [nature.org/futureforestnyc](https://nature.org/futureforestnyc)



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# By the Numbers

From the tip of Montauk to the shores of Lake Ontario, we are protecting our natural world for generations to come. Here's a snapshot of recent accomplishments that we achieved thanks to you!

## 70%

of New York's floodplains are in private ownership. The Nature Conservancy is exploring solutions to incentivize private property owners to allow flood- and erosion-prone portions of their land to remain natural to serve as buffers for water.

## 20

years since we conserved Bluepoints Bottomlands Preserve, ending over a century of mechanical shellfish harvesting in central Great South Bay on Long Island.

## \$550k

in grants for 14 projects in Western New York, the Mid-Hudson Valley, and the U.S. side of the Adirondack to Adirondacks linkage to conserve the greater Appalachian landscape.

## 95

acres were recently put under conservation easement to help protect Owasco Lake's water quality. This Finger Lakes property includes streams, wetlands, waterfalls and native plants and is the food source for an organic honeybee farm on the property.

## \$1 million

from New York State funds will cover groundwater monitoring to assess how phosphorus flows from septic systems into lakes and will later lead to installation and monitoring for pollution-treating septic systems in Cayuga County (Finger Lakes).

## 12

research projects are underway at our preserves, which are important field laboratories for academic, state and federal agency researchers. Projects include monitoring river otters, bog turtles, spruce grouse, garter snakes and more!



Monarch butterflies and other endangered species benefit from protected swaths of high-quality habitat. Safeguarding biodiversity is one of our top priorities. © Jodi Jacobson

## 30%

canopy cover by 2035, that reaches all neighborhoods equitably, is the goal of the NYC Urban Forest Agenda. This would enable trees to help clean and cool the air and reduce levels of asthma and heat-related illness.

### We want to hear from you.

What do these numbers mean to you?

We welcome your thoughts and hope that you'll be in touch with us.

Email us at [natureny@tnc.org](mailto:natureny@tnc.org)

Join us today





## Kelp Farmers Benefit People and Our Waters



Shinnecock Kelp Farmers Harvest 2023 © Anthony Graziano

Donna Collins-Smith pulls a thick strand of kelp from the cool water. At the surface, it looks like stained glass as the sun shimmers through its multi-colored leaves.

She is one of six Shinnecock Kelp Farmers, a multi-generational, women-led nonprofit that creates green jobs, helps restore marine habitat and improves water quality.

Kelp absorbs nitrogen pollution, which seeps into Long Island's waters from cesspools, septic systems and fertilizers. Kelp also provides habitat for wildlife and shields coastlines from the full force of storms.

Support for the Shinnecock Kelp Farmers was provided through The Nature Conservancy's Common Ground Fund, a New York program designed to catalyze and enable new and existing conservation work that advances equity, justice and land sovereignty.

The members of the group tend and harvest the kelp sustainably, selling it as fertilizer. Their work keeps kelp growing in Long Island Sound, generating a slew of environmental benefits, and provides members with a livelihood.