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Bill Ulfelder © Jonathan Grassi

From Our Executive Director

As the year draws to a close, I have been reflecting on the power of collaboration. Addressing the planet-sized climate crisis requires that we work together toward solutions, sharing information and partnering across industries, interests and borders. With your support, The Nature Conservancy is pursuing a future in which the impacts of climate change are reduced for everyone, in every neighborhood in NYC by collaborating to equitably expand and protect tree canopy across the city. We're working to restore the climate mitigating power of our underwater habitats as well, by leveraging the knowledge and experience of a diverse group of scientists and experts. Tackling climate impacts together allows us to improve livelihoods and strengthen the resilience of our communities. None of this is possible without you!

Bill Ulfelder, Executive Director

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New Yorkers enjoy shade from the sun, courtesy of the urban forest. © Diane Cook and Len Jenshel

Forest for All NYC

Building Momentum for 30% Tree Canopy by 2035

One year after the successful launch of the Forest for All NYC coalition, the future of the NYC urban forest is looking leafier by the day. Thanks to successful advocacy by the coalition, the Chair of NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation and all five borough presidents have endorsed the NYC Urban Forest Agenda's goal of achieving at least 30 percent canopy citywide, in an equitable manner, by 2035. A partnership with Green City Force is expanding pathways to urban forestry careers and increasing public support and stewardship of the tree canopy. And scientists from The Nature Conservancy have analyzed data to help guide where trees should be planted based on where shade is needed most and what changes in existing infrastructure might be necessary to ensure equitable canopy coverage across the city.

Since June 2021, the cross-sector coalition, of which The Nature Conservancy is the convener and leading member, has doubled in size with more than 60 member organizations, all committed to justly expanding, protecting and maintaining the resilience of the New York City urban forest.

As temperatures rise in the city due to climate change, the importance of this work for NYC—and as a model for cities across the country—cannot be overstated. From capturing carbon emissions to helping people adapt to climate change by cooling the city and mitigating stormwater impacts, the urban forest is some of our most valuable natural infrastructure. It also improves air quality, public health and overall quality of life.

"By increasing community support and involvement, building partnerships and influencing policy, Forest for All NYC is working to ensure that every person, in every neighborhood, enjoys the climate, health and wellness benefits that trees provide," says Emily Nobel Maxwell, New York Cities Program Director for The Nature Conservancy.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Coastal Ecologist Adam Starke works to restore the carbon-capture capacity of eelgrass. © Jamie Romeiser; Healthy beds of eelgrass store carbon, improve water quality and reduce coastal erosion. © Jerry Monkman; Eelgrass collected from South Bay, VA, as pictured here, might be better suited to survive warming temperatures in the bays of Long Island. © Alex Novak/TNC

Adapting Eelgrass, an Underwater Climate Hero

Q&A with Coastal Scientist Adam Starke

What is eelgrass and why does it matter?
A species of seagrass, eelgrass offers many benefits to marine life and people, not the least of which is its power to mitigate climate change. A bed of eelgrass has tremendous carbon-storing abilities—up to five times more than a terrestrial forest—making it extremely valuable as a natural climate solution. Much like a forest, eelgrass beds also improve water quality, stabilize sediment and erosion, and are home to an extremely diverse community of creatures large and small.

What is happening to eelgrass?
Eelgrass has been declining dramatically for the past 100 years. Nitrogen pollution from failing wastewater systems has driven eelgrass into shallower water, and the temperature of those shallow-water havens is now rising quickly due to climate change, severely limiting the "sweet spots" in which eelgrass can thrive. Once spread across the bays of Long Island, eelgrass now only grows near ocean inlets where the water is both shallow and cool.

What is The Nature Conservancy in New York doing to help?
In addition to work on improving water quality, we're collaborating with land-based conservation practitioners and international experts to explore ways of speeding the rate at which eelgrass adapts to climate change to strengthen its resilience and carbon-capture abilities. "Common gardens," an innovative adaptation method used in agriculture and forestry for decades, for example, might help identify the genotypes of eelgrass best suited for survival. Our findings will inform a strategic restoration plan to prevent eelgrass—and all of its incredible benefits—from disappearing.

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Indigenous communities call the Amazon home

The Amazon Rainforest is critical for water, wildlife and climate mitigation. © Gabriel Gabino Moreira/TNC Photo Contest 2019

Forests for Climate Change

The Amazon Rainforest produces one quarter of the world's freshwater, harbors abundant species, and can store enough carbon to shift climate change. But this vital forest is being cleared for cattle and soy farms at an alarming rate. The Nature Conservancy works to find alternatives by helping farmers diversify crops so there is less need to clear land; helping global companies remove forest destruction from agricultural supply chains; and strengthening Indigenous land rights. Our multi-partner initiative, Enduring Earth, recently secured the lasting protection of a substantial portion of Amazon and Colombian rainforest. Through this partnership and other efforts, we aim to conserve 58,000 square miles of the Amazon by 2030 to offset 1.2 million metric tons of carbon per year while safeguarding water and wildlife.

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