



Bill Ulfelder © Jonathan Grassi

From Our Executive Director

Last summer, I camped out in New York City. I spent the night on Governors Island, off the southern tip of Manhattan. The next morning, I strolled through the fields and admired the man-made hills and emerging forests, all built after Hurricane Sandy to protect the island from storm surges. As I gazed out at the water and skyline, I appreciated the remarkable change that is underway to improve the health of New York Harbor. The Nature Conservancy in New York is an important part of that change—creating resilient shorelines, leading the science to restore oysters and promoting building policies that account for sea-level rise. We can't wait and clean our water later, save endangered species later or reduce fossil fuel pollution later. Later is over. When we devote ourselves to making a city healthier, we can succeed.

Bill Ulfelder, Executive Director

DONATIONS

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Diamondback terrapin © Mac Stone

A Comeback for the Diamondbacks

In the late 1990s, Carl LoBue made a disturbing discovery near his Long Island, New York home: five dead diamondback terrapin turtles in a blue crab trap. LoBue, oceans program director for The Nature Conservancy in New York, soon learned this was not a rare occurrence. There were no laws prohibiting this silent turtle massacre; in fact, there was actually a New York State wildlife permit that legalized their harvest.

Determined to save the turtles, who help protect shorelines by eating the critters that prey on marsh grasses, LoBue did his research. He found that many states require a device to be attached to the crab traps that does not harm the turtles or interfere with the catch of blue crabs. He put forward a proposal to use these devices, but local fishermen loudly opposed it. They protested that the devices were costly and that they might not work in New York.

Years later, LoBue finally found success with a collaborative approach between people and nature. The Conservancy encouraged dialogue among crabbers, scientists and government officials, and more than 60 scientists signed a letter asking that the harvesting of diamondback terrapins stop.

The tide changed when a professional crabber shared his positive experiences with the device. “One fisherman speaking about excluders was more effective at changing minds than a whole stack of peer-reviewed papers,” says LoBue.

This year, due to hard work and healthy conversations, for the first time there will be no direct harvest of diamondback terrapins anywhere in New York, and terrapin excluder devices will be required on crab traps in prime turtle habitats. By harnessing the brainpower of residents and scientists alike, we found a unique solution to a unique problem.



Clockwise: Hard at work at our Mashomack Preserve © Charles Gleberman; Alison Branco © Julie Nace; Alison Branco and members of the New York team on Long Island © Noemi Fernandez/TNC

NATURE NEW YORK

A Positive Report on NYC Oysters

Before New York City became “The Big Apple,” it was known as “The Big Oyster.” While today’s oyster populations are less than .01 percent of what they once were, our new oyster monitoring report shows that oyster growth in New York Harbor is promising. Since 2016, we helped plant more than two million oysters at seven sites around New York City and systematically measured



Collaborating with Billion Oyster Project © Victoria O’Neill/The Nature Conservancy

Protecting Our Coasts

Meet Alison Branco, Coastal Director

Where and when did your interest in nature begin?

Growing up in upstate New York, I was lucky to spend a lot of time in the mountains east of the Capital District. That’s where my father shared his love of nature with me and my sister. We learned to hike, fish and paddle and spent countless hours looking for frogs and newts. Now, I enjoy that same area with my family, visiting as often as possible, and have two budding scientists of my own.

What is a healthy coastal system and why is important to you?

A healthy coastal system consists of 1) clean water 2) a dynamic, thriving shoreline acting as the first line of defense to rising seas and coastal storms and 3) elements to keep people safe from flooding. I live with my husband and our two daughters on the south shore of Long Island. Although our home seems safe for now, we are part of a community that is very susceptible to sea-level rise. So this issue is important to my work professionally, but it’s also personal.

What do you enjoy most about your work?

By working at The Nature Conservancy, I can help to protect nature while envisioning a world where people and nature thrive together. In some communities on Long Island, people can’t flush their toilets at high tide or need to wade through knee-deep water just to bring in their groceries. Such problems are becoming more frequent and widespread as sea levels rise. To address this crisis, we are working with communities to imagine a more resilient community that they can be proud of.

results. These plantings have been largely successful, with the majority of oysters showing rapid growth. This is positive news for the health of New York Harbor, as oysters are one of the most powerful natural water filters. A healthy one-acre oyster reef filters as much as 24 million gallons of water daily. Although it will take several years to evaluate long-term success, this is a positive step toward a thriving Harbor.

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