

# Adirondacks

2025 Spring/Summer Update

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of the Adirondacks,

Conservation has always been about perseverance and playing the long game.

For over 70 years, The Nature Conservancy has worked to protect the lands and water on which all life depends. At this critical moment, we are more energized than ever to drive bold solutions locally, nationally and globally. We are steadfast in our mission and continue to follow the science, work successfully across party lines, collaborate with partners to get the work done and create solutions that can have transformative impact.

Around the globe, Nature Conservancy colleagues, partners and supporters like you are finding common ground across great divides and working tirelessly to create the future we envision: a livable climate, thriving nature and healthy communities.

Together, we can do this.

Sincerely,

Peg R. Olsen, Director



## BRIAN GREENE HAS BEEN NAMED THE NEW PROGRAM DIRECTOR FOR THE ADIRONDACK PARK INVASIVE PLANT PROGRAM

We are thrilled to announce Brian's appointment. He has a strong research background, having studied water resources, invasive plants and amphibians across the United States. While serving as the program's aquatic invasive species coordinator for the past three years, he led several studies related to invasive species in Adirondack waters and established and maintained connections with dozens of partner organizations and volunteers. Before that, he created the statewide Utah Water Watch volunteer water quality monitoring program.

"I feel fortunate to be able to do work I'm passionate about in a region that I love," Greene says. "Here in the Adirondacks, we're this grand experiment where nature got to have a seat at the table. And thanks in part to incredible efforts from my predecessors, we can proudly say that the Adirondacks are the region least impacted by invasive species in New York state."

The Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program is a partnership program, housed under The Nature Conservancy in the Adirondacks, that was founded in 1998 by The Nature Conservancy, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, New York State Department of Transportation, and New York State Adirondack Park Agency. Funding is provided from the New York State Environmental Protection Fund.

COVER Black bears need wildlife corridors to roam. © Megan Lorenz

A juvenile and adult red fox in spring © Megan Lorenz



# Sharing a Love of the Outdoors

Do you remember your first time camping, or your first time in a canoe? Maybe you were amazed at how many stars you could see at night or loved it when you finally got into the rhythm of paddling. Taking a leap into the outdoors can be a life-changing experience.

The Nature Conservancy in New York has been working with partners to identify barriers that keep people from having that first, positive adventure in nature. Through that work, the team connected with Latino Outdoors, a community-led organization that inspires, connects and engages the Latino community in nature.

Latino Outdoors has hosted many day hikes at Nature Conservancy preserves in the lower Hudson Valley and on Long Island. The group recently reached out to us for help organizing a multi-day introduction to Adirondack camping and canoeing. There is nothing that Nature Conservancy Stewardship Manager Kate Berdan loves more than introducing people to the Adirondacks, so she offered her assistance and brought in a third partner, the Adirondack Mountain Club, which generously hosted the event at their Heart Lake Program Center.

"I've been so lucky to have people in my life who taught me basic wilderness skills," says Berdan. "Those

experiences sparked a different kind of appreciation for nature that turned into a career in conservation. It's a real joy to pass that knowledge on to others and to see what it sparks in them."

Over the course of four days, participants practiced paddle strokes, learned how to un-flip a canoe, studied plants and learned other outdoor survival skills. By sharing adventures, campfires, good food and games, they developed a sense of community. At the end of the trip, the group stopped for vegetables and treats at the Keene Valley farmers' market and helped weed the community garden before returning to New York City.

"This trip was about more than just learning how to set up a tent or paddle in a canoe. It was about creating a sense of belonging in the outdoors," says Melodie Mendez, Latino Outdoors New York and Northeast regional coordinator. "We broke bread together, passed time in the water together and chatted for hours under the stars—building community while deepening our connection to nature."

The three partners have two Adirondack camping events planned for 2025, including a winter camping expedition with snowshoeing and cross-country skiing lessons.

"My hope is that this experience is just the beginning of a lifelong relationship with the outdoors for many of the participants, and we couldn't have done that without the collaborative efforts of our partnership with The Nature Conservancy in New York and the Adirondack Mountain Club," adds Mendez.

Participants carry canoes to Heart Lake for a paddling lesson. © Mary Glynn







# New 768-acre Conservation Easement in the Black River Valley Protects Wildlife and Drinking Water

The Black River Valley's forests are dominated by pine, the dark tannins of which give the Black River its name. This valley serves as an important wildlife corridor that links the Adirondacks with the Tug Hill Plateau. Many wildlife species depend on this corridor to find the resources they need. Some animals need a lot of room to roam, like black bears, who can move up to 10 miles in a single day and may cover over 40 miles in a season. Smaller mammals like river otters can have a range of 10-30 square miles of waterways. Experts believe that the future viability of many animals and plants will depend on their ability to move and adapt in response to a variety of threats, including a changing climate.

Alissa Fadden, The Nature Conservancy in New York's wildlife connectivity manager, has been working in the Black River Valley for over a decade. While analyzing

data and identifying areas where wildlife roam, she came across the 768-acre Ton-Ka-Wa property. In addition to being an important wildlife corridor, the land also protects drinking water for the surrounding community. Fadden helped facilitate a partnership between the property owners, The Nature Conservancy, and the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust to place a conservation easement on the property.

## Ensuring a Thriving Future

Ton-Ka-Wa is a recreation club whose members are dedicated to the preservation of the landscape. It is adjacent to West Canada Creek, which drains into Hinckley Reservoir, and contains Conklin Brook. The areas along these streams and throughout the property act as natural filters for potential pollutants that would otherwise enter drinking water through flooding and stormwater runoff. These important shorelines and land will now be protected in perpetuity, thanks to the new conservation easement.

## What is a conservation easement?

A conservation easement is a legal agreement that limits development and extractive uses of the land to protect the property's natural features. Landowners retain many of their rights, including the right to own and use the land, sell it or pass it on to their heirs. All conservation easements must provide public benefits such as water quality, farmland preservation, scenic views, wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation, education, and historic preservation.

The Nature Conservancy and Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust visit with Ton-Ka-Wa landowner Chris Welch in the Black River Valley. © Erika Bailey



Chris Welch, a partial owner of the Ton-Ka-Wa property, already knew about conservation easements, which are legal arrangements to protect the natural features of a property while allowing the owners to retain ownership.

“The property I personally own had a conservation easement on it when I purchased it, so I was familiar with the concept,” says Welch. “When I became president of Ton-Ka-Wa, it became my mission in life to place an easement on that property.”

The Nature Conservancy and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation recently acquired the conservation easement through the state’s Water Quality Improvement Project. The easement will be held by the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust. It is the largest easement purchased to date through this program.

“I love the land, and I wanted to preserve it,” says Welch. “But Ton-Ka-Wa has several shareholders, and without the Water Quality Improvement grant, it probably wouldn’t have happened. Now when I look out, I know that everything I can see will never change.”

### Trail Cams Inspire Conservation

To build support for the idea of protecting nature in this landscape, Fadden initially enlisted landowners to help monitor wildlife on their lands. The landowners volunteered to place trail cameras on their properties

Alissa Fadden, wildlife connectivity manager, sits on the critter shelf. © Kurt Gardner

and then watched as black bear, bobcat, fox and porcupine moved across their fields and forests. This gave Fadden important data and inspired some landowners to preserve their land through conservation easements.

### Safer Wildlife Crossings

Supporting wildlife corridors includes both protecting land and creating safe road crossings. Fadden has studied major roadways in the region to identify significant barriers to wildlife movement. Based on her findings, The Nature Conservancy partnered with the New York State Department of Transportation to install New York State’s first critter shelf, a 138-foot-long walkway bolted to the inside of a culvert beneath a busy, multi-lane road near Boonville. The critter shelf not only offers safe, dry passage for animals, it keeps them off the road—making conditions safer for drivers, too. Fadden has since applied what she’s learned to a much larger project focused on deepening engagement with Department of Transportation and Fish and Wildlife agencies across eight states to incorporate wildlife connectivity into transportation planning.

“Working with landowners to preserve their land while improving road crossings can help ensure safe passage for wildlife,” says Fadden. “But these projects can also protect clean drinking water and the spaces for recreation that people depend on. We all rely on healthy and connected natural systems.”







# Forest Owners Tackle Climate Change in Their Own Backyards

Landowners with small forests have access to a range of new resources to help them tackle climate change by applying natural climate solutions.

Natural climate solutions use nature to help fight climate change. They include protecting, managing and restoring forests, grasslands and wetlands to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and store carbon. Combined with cutting fossil fuels and accelerating renewable energy, natural climate solutions offer immediate and cost-effective ways to tackle the climate crisis—while also supporting human health and wildlife habitat.

The Nature Conservancy has developed resources to help landowners learn how to apply natural climate solutions through actively managing the health of their forests, enrolling their property in the Family Forest Carbon program or planting more trees. Together, these nature-based solutions can have a sizable impact.

## Healthy Forest Management

Forests naturally remove carbon from the air. The amount they store and the length of time they store it largely depends on the way they are managed. Individual decisions by landowners add up, and

collective forest management decisions are one of the biggest opportunities to remove carbon pollution in the Northeast. The most effective thing that landowners can do to store more carbon on their land is to keep their forest as forest. This includes planning ahead for what will happen when they no longer own the property.

To assist with these decisions, The Nature Conservancy partnered with the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science to publish *Healthy Forests for Our Future: A Management Guide to Increase Carbon Storage in Northeast Forests*. This management guide outlines 10 practices that can maintain or increase the carbon that a forest stores within the next two decades. These same practices also help a forest to withstand changes in our climate and other threats, such as invasive species.

## Family Forest Carbon Program

Seventy-five percent of New York's 19 million acres of forestland is privately owned. More than 500,000 family forest landowners hold title to most of New York State's forests, with an average property size of less than 50 acres. These landowners typically treasure their forests no matter how large or small they are, and want to keep them intact, but many are also concerned about property taxes and other expenses.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
Family Forest Carbon Program  
[bit.ly/FamilyForestTNC](https://bit.ly/FamilyForestTNC)

LEFT TO RIGHT Landowners Janine and Tim Van Norman meet with Jack Lampman, a forester at The Nature Conservancy. © Jonathan Grassi

These tree saplings are protected from deer as part of a reforestation effort. © Anthony F. Graziano



The Family Forest Carbon Program, a partnership between the American Forest Foundation and The Nature Conservancy, is uniquely designed to expand access to carbon markets for forest owners who have 30 acres or more.

The program provides annual payments to implement forest management practices that are scientifically proven to enhance carbon capture and storage and to improve forest health. It also provides landowners with access to professional foresters who can help them write forest management plans tailored to their specific properties.

The carbon stored by landowners enrolled in the program is measured and verified by a new forest carbon accounting methodology that improves accuracy and transparency for the marketplace. By measuring the difference between similar forests, the methodology pinpoints the Family Forest Carbon Program as the sole variable that created additional carbon benefit on enrolled landowners' properties.

The Family Forest Carbon Program gives landowners a partner in forest stewardship, helping them implement their unique forest management plan and offering support along the way. It connects them to the growing community of family landowners who have committed to improving their forests' health and leaving their woods better than they found them.

## Planting with Purpose

Roughly 97% of the land that could be available for reforestation in New York is privately owned. Landowners who plant trees on their land are not only addressing climate change by sequestering more carbon, they're increasing wildlife habitat and improving air and water quality.

But the cost of reforesting land can be prohibitive. So The Nature Conservancy worked with two county Soil and Water Conservation Districts to pilot a new program this spring that provided landowners with technical assistance to create a tree planting plan and access to free trees and materials. The program is called Planting with Purpose. Eligible landowners in Jefferson County, Franklin County and adjoining counties participated through their county's Soil and Water Conservation District tree sales in April. And there will be another opportunity to participate next spring.

Planting trees is an investment that will benefit future generations. Planting with Purpose provides landowners with the materials and support necessary to restore forests and capture more carbon.

Landowners have a unique opportunity to care for their land in ways that help address climate change and protect nature and wildlife. The Nature Conservancy is proud to partner with them to implement these natural climate solutions for a better future.

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## Agents for Change

Janine and Tim Van Norman purchased over 600 acres in Stony Creek that adjoin state-owned forestland. As retired wildlife biologists, they understood the importance of maintaining habitat for black bears, bobcats and other animals that move across the landscape.

But 600 acres of mostly hardwood forest is a lot to manage, so they were considering harvesting timber on the property. Then they found the Family Forest Carbon Program. It offered them a way to avoid cutting their trees and provided a carbon benefit, while also helping them earn more income from the property.




"The Family Forest Carbon Program fits with our view of how we want this land to look. We're doing right by our land, and we're getting a guaranteed annual income to do it," says Tim.

Now the Van Normans are addressing climate change in their backyard and supporting wildlife by planting native wildflowers for pollinators. And they're considering adding a conservation easement to protect the land in perpetuity. "We view this land as a canvas that other painters have painted on, and now we are proudly adding our paint to it," says Janine.

The Van Normans joined the Family Forest Carbon Program to help preserve their property. © Jonathan Grassi





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# A New Tool for Tracking Aquatic Invasive Species

An invasive species is a plant, animal or organism that causes ecological or economic harm in a new environment where it is not native. The Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program (APIPP) was founded by The Nature Conservancy, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, New York State Department of Transportation and New York State Adirondack Park Agency to minimize the impact of invasive species on the region's communities, lands and waters.

For over 20 years, APIPP has tracked the presence of aquatic invasive species in lakes throughout the Adirondacks. Aquatic invasive species can easily spread when boats move between waterbodies, so our team recently gathered new data and created an interactive database to allow for visitors to look at equally important waters like streams, rivers and wetlands.

The Adirondacks boasts some of the country's healthiest waters, and this new approach to reporting aquatic data will help us better understand and prevent the spread of invasive species. You can help by remembering to **clean, drain and dry** boats and equipment between trips.

Learn more here: [bit.ly/APIPPMap](http://bit.ly/APIPPMap)

Zebra mussels are small, freshwater mussels that are an invasive species in the U.S. © Jim Schumaker

