



eastern new york
Nature
FALL/WINTER 2014

Dear Friends,

This year, The Nature Conservancy celebrates 60 years of protecting lands and waters in Eastern New York. That spirit of innovation and bold vision that propelled our first land protection deal at Mianus River Gorge continues to guide us today.

While a milestone like this is always a good time to reflect upon our success, we know there is still much more to do. As we evolve to meet today's global challenges, we will sustain those things - our science-based approach, our collaborative culture, and our on-the-ground experience - that have been crucial to six decades of conservation achievements.



In this newsletter, you can read about our dynamic three-year strategic plan for Eastern New York. This vision for the future of conservation will create a healthier natural world by focusing on freshwater, forests, critical lands, fish, and climate initiatives. In "Building Resilience," you can learn how we are encouraging the use of natural infrastructure to help communities adapt to a changing climate. You can also read how Conservancy scientists and partners are using science to develop tools to inform energy siting decisions. You will be able to read more about our work in the weeks and months ahead.

It is inspiring to look forward knowing that the actions we take today will determine our future. Together, with your generous support, we can help ensure that the natural world we know and love will endure for future generations.

Please accept my sincere gratitude for your ongoing support and commitment to conservation.

Sincerely,

Anthony M. Wilkinson
Acting Executive Director

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28.1 lbs. waterborne waste not created



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899 lbs. net greenhouse gases prevented

Front Cover: Conservation Ecologist Chris Zimmerman works with LEAF interns, Owen Smith and Jeremy Portorreal, to measure the success of a tree planting project to restore floodplain forest at the Neversink Preserve. © TNC; **This Page:** Anthony W. Wilkinson © TNC; **Opposite Page:** Village of Piermont after Hurricane Sandy © NYSDEC/LARRY WILSON.

Conservation Wishes

As we celebrate our 60th anniversary in Eastern New York, staff share their wishes for the next 60 years:

CELEBRATING



OF CONSERVATION SUCCESS

— Eastern New York —

- The lands and water of Eastern New York are teaming with fish and fowl, to the benefit and delight of all. – Tony
- My grandchildren have the opportunity to live healthy, active lives, experience the outdoors and be inspired by the beauty and abundance of the natural world. – Gabe

- We can protect the wild areas and open spaces vital to a healthy planet while providing opportunities to future generations for adventure and discovery. – Matt
- The U.S. takes the lead in reducing carbon emissions and we are able to reach global accord on policies and strategies to forestall more severe climate change in the future. – Cara
- For people to understand that even the smallest gesture can be a big difference for nature and to start acting on those gestures! – Michele

What's your wish? Share it with us at eny@tnc.org or post to our wall at [facebook.com/tncny](https://www.facebook.com/tncny)

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Building Resilience



The damages from recent storms like Sandy— and Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee— served as a wake-up call for many to the urgent need to better protect our families, our homes and economy. Throughout our region, these storms revealed how vulnerable we are to a changing climate.

Science tells us that these impacts from natural hazards like storms and flooding will continue to increase, putting ever more people and property at risk. At The Nature Conservancy, we are working to integrate the role of nature-based solutions to ease the impacts and help secure human communities, even as our climate changes.

On the Hudson River: Restoring habitats to help communities adapt to a changing climate is a key focus of the Conservancy's Hudson River Program. The Hudson River has been altered by human activities in ways that impact its function, jeopardizing the health of its productive natural habitats. Rising sea levels and increasingly frequent and severe storms could amplify

these challenges for communities working to manage and protect their waterfront and natural infrastructure.

To address these challenges, the Conservancy has convened a partnership of federal, state, local and not-for-profit organizations, *Partners Restoring the Hudson*, to develop a comprehensive and federally-recognized restoration plan. The Hudson River Comprehensive Restoration Plan will serve as a path forward for comprehensive restoration for the Hudson River Estuary from the Tappan Zee Bridge to the Troy Dam over the next several decades.

“Restoring and revitalizing habitats will preserve the many critical functions that habitats in the estuary provide including fish spawning, nursery and foraging habitat, and improved water quality,” says freshwater project manager Andy Peck. “Habitats like floodplains, tidal wetlands and shallow water areas can also serve as a frontline defense against flooding helping to improve the resiliency of the Hudson’s shoreline communities.”

Along the Delaware: With a grant from the William Penn Foundation, The Nature Conservancy in Eastern New York is building on our history of floodplain restoration along the Neversink River in order to enhance community resilience.

“By incorporating natural infrastructure into flood management at sites along the Delaware River Basin, we can restore habitat and help reduce the risk of flood damage to communities,” says project lead Mari-Beth DeLucia. “The grant will also fund hydrologic modeling along the Neversink River, one of the Delaware’s major tributaries.”

The modeling involves an analysis of the benefits of the removal of an existing berm. The berm, which can function similar to a levee, prevents water from spilling over into the floodplains. When a river is able to overflow its banks onto floodplains, natural processes temper water flows to prevent downstream flooding and thereby lower risk to nearby towns.

“The project will provide an opportunity to measure the water storage, water quality and habitat benefits of floodplain reconnection and enable us to increase the effectiveness of future floodplain restoration projects,” adds DeLucia.

An additional component of the grant is to work with partners to expand the scope of floodplain restoration projects beyond the actions of the Conservancy. “We are working with floodplain landowners, communities and other partners to identify and match funding sources with conservation-ready projects,” adds DeLucia. “An investment in nature combined with more traditional approaches will enable communities to maximize their defenses against the impacts of future storms.”

Strengthening Community Preparedness

New York State has taken a significant step toward climate change resilience with the passage of the Community Risk and Resiliency Act. This important legislation, signed into law by Governor Cuomo this fall, and supported by a coalition led by The Nature Conservancy, requires decision

makers to use the best available science in order to proactively consider sea level rise, storm surge, and flooding when issuing certain state funding and permits. This forward-looking approach will better prepare communities and protect people as our climate continues to change.



REDUCE
Climate
Change Risk



RESTORE
Fish

Our Work in Eastern New York

We live in an age of unprecedented threats to our natural world. As the planet's population grows, heading toward 9 billion people by 2050, corresponding demands for food, water and energy are straining Earth's natural systems. At the same time that this pressure is growing, there is increased need to protect and restore natural systems to provide resilience in the face of climate change.

As the world's largest conservation organization, The Nature Conservancy is uniquely qualified to tackle the biggest environmental challenges of our day. Our strategic framework, Global Challenges/Global Solutions lays out several of these challenges and identifies a plan for tackling them.

In New York, we have an exciting and ambitious vision of how we will meet these challenges. Our conservation vision defines what we will do over the next five years to protect nature, transform policies and practices, and inspire active participation in conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Our conservation actions are setting a course to creating a richer, more resilient natural world.

With the Conservancy's global priorities in mind, the Eastern New York chapter recently undertook a strategic assessment of our programs to determine how to better

deploy our resources as we look to deliver the best conservation outcomes over the next three years.

As a result, we are focusing on five strategic priorities in the Hudson River Valley, Catskill Mountains and the Delaware River Basin:

SUSTAIN FOREST RESOURCES: From the water we drink and the air we breathe, to the jobs and products we depend on, forests play a crucial role in our lives. We are using innovative science, collaborating with diverse partners, and advancing new policies and practices to protect our forests. For example, we are testing new financing mechanisms for land protection by using newly established "carbon markets" that pay landowners to protect and sustainably manage forests as a means of sequestering carbon to protect the atmosphere.

RESTORE FISH: Along the Atlantic Coast, important fish stocks are declining and the great estuarine nurseries for fish

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A photograph of a person wearing a hat and waders, standing in a shallow, fast-moving river. The person appears to be engaged in a conservation activity, possibly monitoring water quality or habitat. The background shows a forested bank.

CONSERVE Critical Lands

A photograph of a dense, lush green forest covering a hillside. The trees are vibrant and the scene is bright, suggesting a healthy ecosystem.

SUSTAIN Forest Resources

A photograph of two people sitting on a long wooden dock extending into a calm lake. They are fishing. The water is still, reflecting the sky and the surrounding greenery. A small boat is tied to the end of the dock.

SECURE Freshwater Resources

such as the Hudson, the Delaware and the Chesapeake are greatly diminished. We will provide sound science to support fishery management decisions at the basin and regional level and are working with the state and federal government to protect and restore habitats that are important nursery areas and spawning grounds critical for recovering fish populations. We will identify and restore critical habitats throughout the Hudson River Estuary and Delaware River Basin to restore robust populations of migratory fish.

CONSERVE CRITICAL LANDS: Land protection and the stewardship of the lands we manage will continue to be a strategic priority. As we focus our land protection efforts on larger natural areas and systems, we do so with an increasing understanding of the importance of these lands for wildlife, water protection and climate adaptation.

REDUCE CLIMATE CHANGE RISK: Climate change is here and we are taking our science and on-the-ground knowledge to identify specific priority systems, such as the Hudson River Estuary, where natural solutions can help

humans and natural communities adapt to a changing world. We are developing tools, decision-making protocols, and resources that support climate adaptation and are sharing these resources with government, businesses, communities and conservation partners.

SECURE FRESHWATER RESOURCES: A key part to securing the freshwater we all need to live is making smart decisions about how we manage this precious resource. We are bringing together state-of-the-art technology, science and public policy to transform how our freshwater resources are managed. We are developing new web-based tools to provide widely available and accessible water resource information and empower citizens, water users and resource managers to evaluate cumulative impacts of water withdrawals to New York State's rivers and streams. To increase the capacity for and collaboration in sustainable water resource decision-making, we will train civic leaders from around the state, building local networks to collaboratively solve problems and conflicts as they arise.

Clean Energy and Biodiversity

The development of clean, renewable energy sources is vital to providing for our future energy needs. Greenhouse gases from fossil fuels have contributed to climate change and its effect on biodiversity. The nationwide growth of wind energy projects offers great potential to enable transition away from fossil fuel dependence.

Renewable energy resources, including wind power, are an important part of meeting **NEW YORK'S GOAL TO REDUCE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS BY 80% BY 2050.**

Virtually all forms of energy production have impacts to the natural resources that sustain people and wildlife. Energy and infrastructure development can result in significant alteration to habitats and put at risk wildlife, natural communities, and water supplies for people.

A new and first-of-its kind GIS tool can help decision-makers balance environmental concerns with energy infrastructure siting. Cara Lee, energy team lead for The Nature Conservancy in New York explains how the new *Biodiversity and Wind Siting Mapping Tool* can inform energy siting decisions.

Q: What is the tool?

A: The tool is designed to help protect New York State's biodiversity while still advancing statewide energy development and carbon emissions reduction goals. Using geographic information system (GIS) technology, the tool maps important ecological resources and on-land wind resources.

Q: Why now?

A: New York State's clean energy goal is to obtain 30% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2015. Much of this new energy could come from wind power. New wind energy generation projects have the potential to affect New York's wildlife and biodiversity in a variety of ways, yet this can be avoided with a proactive approach that includes considering biodiversity values in siting decisions.

Q: Who can use the tool?

A: The likely users are state and municipal decision makers and wind developers, but the tool can be used by anyone. Use of the tool can help wind developers understand which areas pose the highest and lowest levels of development concern. The tool can also be used to evaluate other kinds of large scale development.

Q: What type of information is in the tool?

A: This innovative web-based tool facilitates access to a range of data layers including habitats for at-risk species, animal, bird and bat migration routes, stopovers and breeding locations, unfragmented forest and wildlife travel corridors, land-use patterns, estimated wind speed, and distance to roads and electric transmission line. All of this information is extremely valuable for conservation planning.

Q: Why are you excited about this project?

A: This tool is a great example of how The Nature Conservancy brings a science-based approach to help make energy development more responsible. Its critical information can enable decision makers to plan wisely for the development of highly productive wind generation sources.



Conservation Snapshots

A commemorative stone is dedicated at Sam's Point Preserve. This past year, the Conservancy moved forward the transfer of Sam's Point Preserve to New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. As part of the transfer agreement, the Open Space Institute and the Conservancy have created an endowment that will be used for the future management of Sam's Point Preserve and Minnewaska State Park, ensuring that Sam's Point's ecology and beauty are protected and secured, now and for future generations.

Karner blue butterflies continue to do well on the habitat restored at Wilton Wildlife Park and Preserve. Scientists counted over a thousand butterflies on a portion of the habitat restored by Conservancy ecologists. When habitat restoration began, the population only numbered in the tens of butterflies. Today, population numbers are recovering and total in the tens of thousands.



The Conservancy works to maintain fires role where it benefits people and nature. This year, we led the first prescribed burn on New York State Park property. The Conservancy continues to play a lead role in the Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership Fire Management program, assisting colleagues at the Mohonk, Minnewaska and Sam's Point preserves in conducting controlled burns to improve forest health, protect rare natural habitats and reduce the risk of severe wildfire.

Four teens worked alongside Eastern New York conservation staff this summer as part of the Conservancy's LEAF in Environmental Action for the Future (LEAF) paid internship program. The program has had a tremendous impact on urban youth—opening their eyes to career possibilities and building their self-confidence, work skills and conservation literacy.

This spring, The Nature Conservancy in Eastern New York transferred Balsam Mountain to the "Forever Wild" portion of the Catskill Park, one of three privately owned high peaks over 3500 feet in the Catskills and a key property in the protection of the New York City watershed.

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