

NATURE LONG ISLAND

CONSERVATION NEWS FROM THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

FALL 2011

The Nature
Conservancy



Protecting nature. Preserving life.™



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Director's Message

Once Hurricane Irene blew over us on Long Island at the strength of a tropical storm, we let out a sigh of relief. Although she did wreak havoc on our infrastructure, disrupted our lives and tested our patience, we were lucky. Sadly, the storm's grip was tragic in other parts of the state and region.

Will we be spared the next time a hurricane hits Long Island? What does it mean to be "storm ready"?

Our best preparation means letting nature do what it does best and keeping our natural environment as free as possible from harmful stressors. Preparation starts with saving our intact natural systems such as beaches, dunes and marshes.

Take, for example, our salt marshes. They protect us from storms, filter pollutants, and provide critical habitat. More than 50 percent of Long Island's historic salt marshes have been lost since the early 1900's. These early losses were largely due to the fill

and build activities before the 1974 Tidal Wetlands Act. But today, marshes face additional – and sometimes less direct – threats such as over-enrichment by nutrients that change the growth of marsh grasses, coastal development that obstructs their natural movement landward, restrictions to natural hydrology from undersized culverts, and loss of characteristic species from mercury pollution.

Flooding events, like the "100 Year Flood", will be more frequent because water levels are higher. As sea levels increase more rapidly and flooding happens more often and with greater intensity, how can we protect our coast and coastal communities?

Coastal habitats like salt marshes must be free from obstructions so that the processes that created these protective landscapes are allowed to continue. Said another way, salt marshes will drown if not given room to move landward.

Taking actions to limit the hardening of shorelines and maintain healthy coastal habitats not only benefits nature, but also people through increased protection from wave damage, natural filtration of water, and habitat for countless recreationally and commercially significant fish and shellfish.

Natural coastal habitats maintain the very nature of our community: people are not drawn to Long Island to watch water lapping against bulkheads. They come to walk on our beaches, feel the sand beneath their feet, and fish and clam in our coastal waters.

The best way to protect our coastal landscapes – and also to protect ourselves – is to ensure that our coastal habitats remain healthy. I hope you enjoy reading about the progress we are making toward that goal – we're studying the effects of sea level rise on our marshes, using science to determine which parcels of land are most important to preserve, and working on policies to ensure that the quality of our drinking water, and in bays and harbors, doesn't further degrade.

Our natural coastal habitats define who we are, protect our communities and provide for us here on Long Island – let's do our best to keep it that way.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy N. Kelley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nancy N. Kelley
Executive Director

The Nature Conservancy on Long Island



LEAF interns: Leaders in Environmental Action for the Future

It's not unusual for students who summer on eastern Long Island to be from New York City. But, most are from families that own second homes here, or they are visiting friends or relatives. Manny Rivera, Aaron Curry and Jeffrey Santos had a different summer experience at the Conservancy's Mashomack Preserve this year.

Manny hails from the Academy of Urban Planning in Brooklyn; Aaron and Jeffrey attend the High School for Environmental Studies in Manhattan. These students and their mentor Manny Ramirez were part of The Nature Conservancy's Leaders in Environmental Action for the Future (LEAF) intern program. When they took the ferry to Shelter Island and arrived at the 2,039-acre preserve, they knew they were in for something completely different from their urban surroundings.

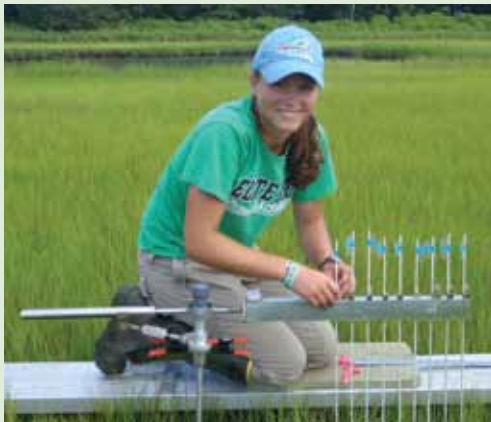
Dan Ritzler, Mashomack's land steward, worked with the boys during their stay. Under Dan's tutelage and mentor Manny's guidance, the students had many experiences: invasive plant species removal, maintaining trails and roads, and assisting with scientific research.

"They were great kids to work with. They were outgoing, and definitely appreciated the experience," said Ritzler.

Hauling in a shore seine to examine marine creatures, working with Dr. Nicole Maher's wetlands monitoring project on sea level rise, and assisting in shellfish restoration rounded out their experience.

Mashomack has participated in the LEAF program since its inception in the mid-1990s. "The LEAF program is mutually beneficial," said Mike Laspia, Mashomack Preserve director. "We get much needed extra hands to help us during the peak of the summer, and these young people are exposed to important conservation experiences. With a new focus on the importance of conservation both in undeveloped and urban areas, this is a key component to our success in the future."

The LEAF program hosted 72 interns in 19 states in 2011, and is funded with lead support from the Toyota USA Foundation and a grant from National Grid.



© Nicole Maher/TNC

High School Senior Amanda Sommi spent the summer with TNC participating in field research as part of a 3-year "Authentic Science Research" school curriculum. Here she is shown at Mashomack Point taking data from a surface elevation table to study marsh response to rising sea levels. Says Amanda: "What meant the most to me throughout the experience was seeing how passionate everyone was about what they were doing. Everyone I met at The Nature Conservancy seemed happy to be at work. They made me feel like we were really making a difference and that was a major part of why I enjoyed getting to help out this summer. At the East Hampton office, some people asked what I had done to be punished like this, being sent out to the marsh in such hot sticky weather. It was a joke, of course, but I never once thought of it that way. It was an incredible experience!"

Mercury Found in Salt Marshes



© Marian Lindberg/TNC

The sun was just rising on a steamy July day as seven people ran across the marsh at Merrill Lake Sanctuary in East Hampton. Spaced like the offensive line of a soccer team, they were not chasing a ball. This was science, not sport.

The runners were employees and interns of The Nature Conservancy and biologists from Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI) in Maine. Their goal: corralling a dozen saltmarsh sparrows into mistnets. Once the birds were carefully removed from the nets, Oksana Lane from BRI, under the shade of a beach umbrella, extracted small blood samples and feathers, banded legs, recorded morphological data, and released each bird quickly and unharmed.

Nearby, leaning over a ditch with a tube in his mouth, Lane's co-worker David Buck sucked spiders, amphipods and fly larvae (likely food for sparrows) into a plastic syringe. The samples are all being tested for levels of mercury.

Saltmarsh sparrows breed and feed in salt marshes, a disappearing habitat, and the species has been declared "of conservation concern" by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Mercury has

been known to have harmful effects on fish, birds, and mammals. These effects include impaired growth and development, abnormal behavior, difficulties in reproduction, and even death.

What no one wants is for methylmercury, a highly toxic form of mercury found in low-oxygen aquatic environments such as marshes, to work its way up the food chain from spiders and fish to birds and humans.



© Marian Lindberg/TNC

In 2010, Lane and Buck found high mercury concentrations (levels likely to affect reproduction) in sparrows from Hempstead/North Cinder Island and East Quogue, and low levels at Scallop Pond in Southampton. Results from summer 2011 indicate that blood mercury readings from Wading River are low, similar to those taken last year at Scallop Pond; Accabonac Harbor/East Hampton is in the intermediate range comparable

to East Quogue; and Hempstead remains the site of the highest concentrations found in New York and New England.

The BRI research, funded primarily by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, helps explain the "where" of mercury contamination in salt marshes. To help answer "why" and "what can be done," new funding will be necessary to investigate and reduce local sources of mercury pollution, such as incinerators and illegal dumps.

"Distant sources of mercury, such as coal-fired power plants, require national or international change. Power plant emissions pose other threats, including acid rain," explains senior conservation scientist Dr. Marilyn Jordan. "As acidic rainwater moves downward through forested soils, elements essential for plant growth are leached out, and harmful aluminum may be released. This combination is bad news for plants, and could cause similar damage to pond organisms." For that reason the Long Island Chapter is contracting with the U.S. Geological Survey to evaluate the impacts of acid deposition on several rare coastal plain ponds and adjacent forests.

Oyster Restoration Gets a Boost by the Conservancy's Adam Starke



© Kara Jackson/TNC

For Adam Starke, Long Island is an oval of water with some land inside. Adam grew up near Great South Bay, the son of marina owners in Brookhaven hamlet. He enjoys boating, surfing and scuba diving, but he doesn't just care about what humans do in the water. He spends a great deal of time thinking about the aquatic needs of oysters.

As conservation coordinator for The Nature Conservancy's marine and coastal programs, Adam is identifying the best places for oysters to grow in Peconic Bay around Mashomack Preserve on Shelter Island.

What oysters need may be fairly clear, but how to meet those needs isn't obvious at all. There are disease dynamics to worry about, in addition to sediment accretion associated with sea level rise that could choke out oyster reefs if they aren't growing quickly enough.

"We're going to try a few different approaches," explains Adam. "We're starting in a small creek with good physical characteristics, so as oysters start settling, any overflow of oysters could move into adjacent parts of the bay. Oysters have the potential to spread around fairly quickly if conditions are good."

Adam should know. His master's thesis research at Stony Brook University focused on oyster restoration in the Hudson River, following a seasonal job with the

Conservancy in 2007. Adam did well academically – chapters of his thesis will be published in the *Journal of Shellfish Research* this fall. There was no guarantee Adam could return to the Conservancy after getting his master's degree, but, fortunately, that is how it worked out.

"Adam did a great job when he was a shellfish steward," says Wayne Grothe, a former bayman who heads the Long Island Chapter's marine program. "Now Adam has the academic training to add to his strong work ethic and love of the water. We were really glad we could hire him back."

Like his affection for Long Island's beaches and bays, Adam's relationship with the Conservancy dates to his childhood. He grew up with the son of Mike Scheibel, a Conservancy scientist who has worked at Mashomack Preserve for 17 years.

"I've been volunteering at the Mashomack dinner dance since I was 12 years old," Adam says. "I washed dishes there for years."

Washing dishes is one kind of water work Adam says he isn't sorry to have left behind.



For more information on shellfish restoration visit www.nature.org/longisland

Preserving and Restoring Long Island's Environment: Update on Long Island's Last Stand Initiative

The results are in: more than 1,200 acres of open space and natural areas, and 630 acres of working farms on Long Island were protected in 2009-2010, but what does that mean to you and me?

"In addition to providing recreational opportunities and a boost to our economy from tourism, protecting open space allows for ongoing natural benefits free of charge, like providing clean drinking water. Protecting land overlying our aquifer ensures clean drinking water and reduces water cost up to 10 times," said Kevin McDonald, conservation finance and policy director.

Five years ago, we launched the Long Island's Last Stand initiative, an effort to save our most significant remaining 25,000 acres of open

space and 10,000 acres of farmland and to restore and protect our harbors, bays and water quality. In that time, nearly 7,900 acres have been protected but there are many more acres to go and much to do in the way of restoring our natural systems.

Long Island's wetlands, which provide a natural buffer against storms, also keep the water in our bays and harbors clean. And, naturally-occurring seagrass meadows provide nursery habitat for commercially important seafood like striped bass, flounder and shellfish. But more needs to be done in both land preservation and water quality

protection if Long Island's environment is to remain healthy and thriving.

"One of the biggest pollutants to Long Island's environment comes right from our land," explains Wayne Grothe, marine conservation project director. "Here on Long Island, everything we put on the ground winds up in our groundwater and in turn in our bays and estuaries. The dominant source of pollutants – from wastewater – must be addressed and wastewater treatment options that reduce

nitrogen must be explored if we are to continue to have healthy water to drink, swim in and fish in."

Going forward, there is a clear vision for success for a healthy environment on Long Island, as explained in the Long Island Last Stand Update.

"With a changed

economic landscape, now is the time to get really creative. It's time to implement as many sensible new strategies as we can if we are to reach 2020 with our natural and farmland heritage as a vital and functioning part of Long Island," continued McDonald.



To download the latest LI Last Stand Report, visit www.nature.org/longisland



© Carl LoBue/TNC

Dwarf Surf Clams Have Big Impact on Water Quality in Great South Bay

Protecting the health of Long Island's bays and estuaries is one of The Nature Conservancy's priorities. To help restore water quality (shellfish filter plankton and other particles from the water), the Long Island Chapter is actively involved in shellfish restoration projects in Suffolk County, and in Great South Bay and has transplanted over 5 million clams in over 60 spawner sanctuaries. Recent surveys reveal the clams are spawning and more juvenile clams are being found in the bay.

"This year has been very unusual in Great South Bay," said Dr. Marci Bortman, director of conservation science. "We had incredibly clear water in Great South Bay despite some of the worst brown tide showing up in Shinnecock Bay."

A massive set of dwarf surf clams clarified the water in Great South Bay over the summer. Locally called duck clams (*Mulinia lateralis*), they are about the size of a fingernail. These tiny clams were seen in tremendous densities as high as 10,000 to 20,000 clams per square meter over several square miles in central Great South Bay. They usually live for only one to two years and they tend to have large sets every 10 years or so.

"This large set of dwarf surf clams has provided real-life field observations of the positive implications of having large densities of filter-feeding shellfish in the Bay.

While we are learning what can be possible with high abundances of filtering shellfish, we are also learning that shellfish restoration by itself will not solve all our estuarine-related problems, largely because of elevated nitrogen loads which promote harmful algal blooms, and negatively impact seagrasses and saltmarshes." Bortman continued.

The majority of nitrogen added to Great South Bay is derived from land-based sources delivered through groundwater. In addition to supplying our rivers and bays with fresh water, ground water is Long Island's sole source of drinking water. Thus the protection of our ground water is of paramount importance to human health and economic prosperity as well as to nature. Waste water is the largest single source of nitrogen delivered to Great South Bay with atmospheric deposition (from burning fuels) a close second, and fertilizer a distant third.

"We have to enact large-scale changes on Long Island to ensure that we can continue to drink our groundwater and continue to swim and fish in our bays and harbors," said Kevin McDonald, conservation finance and policy director. "Water quality protection is important to maintaining a healthy environment and healthy people on Long Island. We need to do everything we can to protect it."

Larry and Eva Paul Recognized for 30 Years of Volunteer Service



© Nicole Maher/TNC

Before the days of Google maps and GPS, there was Larry Paul. When he first started as a volunteer cartographer for The Nature Conservancy in 1972, Larry used a compass and a good old-fashioned walk in the woods to help depict the trails and landscapes of TNC's preserves. He'd then sit down at a drafting table and sketch out the preserve's distinguishing features, natural landmarks, trails and boundaries. He mapped some 40 preserves owned or managed by The Nature Conservancy – many of those maps are still used today.

Larry's love of conservation began when on a family vacation in Maine. He recalls climbing a fire tower, looking out upon the vast miles of spruce and pine in wonder. This aerial view of a natural landscape inspired him to want to see and explore more, even in his own backyard. Larry took it upon himself to learn as much as possible about our local landscapes, especially in the unique and ecologically important Pine Barrens.

As time went on, Larry's volunteer work for The Nature Conservancy extended far beyond the task of mapmaking. He took on every type of outdoor job that came up – clearing trails, leading preserve walks, surveying and marking preserve boundaries. He's been a

true asset to the Conservancy's stewardship team whose members maintain and manage the very lands that Larry has mapped.

"Larry Paul knows Long Island's natural landscapes more intimately than anyone I've ever met," said Derek Rogers, Preserves Manager. "Larry is a walking encyclopedia of knowledge. It's been a real pleasure working with someone like Larry who is truly dedicated to conservation."



Equally passionate for nature and The Nature Conservancy is Larry's wife Eva. Alongside him, she diligently volunteered as office assistant at Uplands Farm Preserve, helping answer phones, handling filing and a myriad of administrative tasks critical to effectively managing an office. The two met on a hiking trip and their common interest in nature has been a strong bond in their 45-year marriage.

While both Larry and Eva have seen a lot of changes to Long Island's landscapes over the years, they both believe that local conservation of our natural habitats is still critically important and that nature is key to enriching our lives. Larry and Eva Paul have certainly enriched ours.

Connecting With The Nature Conservancy on Long Island

To be entered in a drawing for a free Conservancy gift, please add your email so we may reach you! *

Email Address (confidential): _____



What Would You Like to Learn More About?

Help us tailor our newsletter and other outreach efforts to best serve your interests!

1. What types of stories would you like to read more about?

(choose as many as you would like)

International Projects Staff/Intern/Volunteer Profiles Other (please specify) _____
 Member Profiles Preserve Information _____

2. What topics would you be interested in learning more about?

(choose as many as you would like)

<input type="checkbox"/> Coastal habitats (Tidal Marshes & Natural Shorelines)	<input type="checkbox"/> Freshwater Rivers & Wetlands
<input type="checkbox"/> Land Protection	<input type="checkbox"/> Birding
<input type="checkbox"/> Energy Issues	<input type="checkbox"/> Preserve Enhancements
<input type="checkbox"/> Surfing	<input type="checkbox"/> Seagrass Habitat
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustainable Fisheries	<input type="checkbox"/> Ecotourism Opportunities
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<input type="checkbox"/> Invasive Species	<input type="checkbox"/> Water Quality
<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Involvement	<input type="checkbox"/> Forest Health
<input type="checkbox"/> Photography	Other (please specify) _____

3. How would you like to get involved?

(Three Choices: Not Interested, Interested, Very Interested)

Volunteer Days _____
(Shellfish Restoration, Beach/Preserve Cleanups)

Film Festival (Conservation Focus) _____

Preserve Tours _____

International Trips _____

Educational Speakers _____

Other (please specify) _____

4. How often do you read our newsletter?

Every time I receive it On occasion
 Not frequently

5. Help us by letting us know where you are located

Zip Code: _____

6. How often do you visit our website at www.nature.org/longisland?

Once a week Once a month
 Once every 2-3 months Never

7. Please share with us anything you'd like about your experience with The Nature Conservancy.

Thanks for your feedback!

* Five Nature Conservancy-branded hats, valued at \$20 each will be given to winners chosen at random chosen on or about Jan. 1, 2012. Winners will be notified by email.

\$100,000 +

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THE NATURE CONSERVANCY ON LONG ISLAND

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Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Henry	Mr. Roger E. Podesta	Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Zeckendorf
Herrick Hardware, Inc.	Mr. Steven Pollack	
William Talbott Hillman Foundation, Inc.	Mr. Joseph A. Popper	
Mr. Rick Hoffman*	The Anne Porter Charitable Trust	
Mr. David Y. Howe		
Mr. and Mrs. Brent Humphries		
Ms. Clarice Hunter		

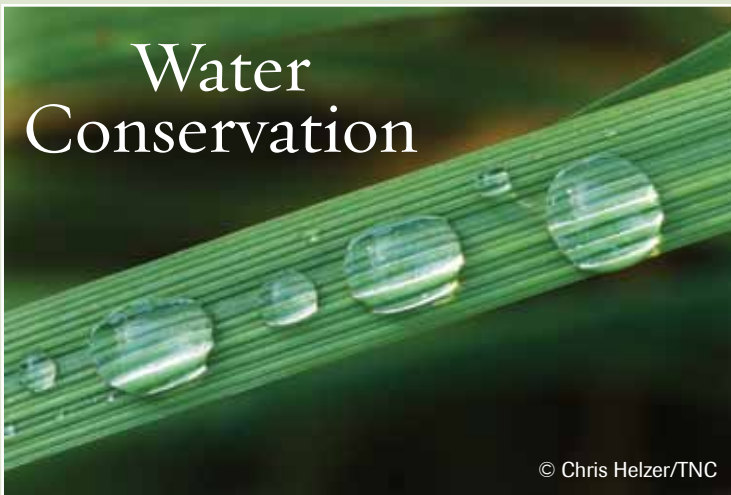
* includes pledges

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Water Conservation



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Here's what you can do to help conserve our water supply and protect water quality:

- Keep a container of drinking water in your refrigerator instead of letting the water run until it's cold
- Fill a re-useable bottle with tap water instead of buying bottled water
- Make sure the dish and clothes washers are full before running them
- Use environmentally-friendly detergents and cleaning supplies (baking soda and vinegar)
- Don't keep the faucet running when brushing your teeth or washing dishes
- Fix leaking faucets and pipes
- Take shorter showers
- Water your lawn or garden in the early morning; turn off sprinklers when it rains
- Use less fertilizer – compost plant waste and use it on your lawn and garden
- Support efforts to upgrade our wastewater treatment systems