

New York

2026 Spring/Summer Update

The Nature Conservancy 



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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friend,



Almost 75 years ago, scientist Gloria Hollister Anable learned that a beloved 60-acre stretch of hemlocks and winding waters in Westchester County was about to be lost to development. Refusing to let this forest slip away, Gloria and her neighbors rallied—holding raffles, organizing bake sales and even pledging life insurance policies—to save it. That 1955 effort became The Nature Conservancy’s first land protection project and helped launch a global conservation movement.

Our drive today is the same—tenacious, collaborative and powered by people like Gloria—even as the challenges have grown. The Nature Conservancy’s vision is a livable climate, healthy communities and thriving nature. The health of our communities and our economy is inextricably tied to the health of the natural world.

This year, that legacy of care came full circle as The Nature Conservancy supported one of the largest private land return efforts in New York—600 acres returning to Haudenosaunee stewardship. This partnership, rooted in respect and shared purpose, reflects a truth that has guided our work from Gloria’s time to today: when communities lead, nature thrives.

Nature is clean air and water. It’s also parks and beaches that strengthen local economies, pollinators that support a multi-trillion-dollar farming and food economy, and working forests that supply raw materials while storing carbon. That’s why an investment in nature is among the smartest investments we can make.

Here in New York, for example, we’re scaling transportation solutions that help wildlife move safely while reducing flood risk and lowering the cost of disaster recovery for communities. Drawing from successful projects across the northern Appalachians, we’ve created new ways to help engineers and planners design infrastructure that works with nature—not against it.

When we share clear, actionable research on how conservation benefits human and economic health, we can influence policies and budgets that strengthen nature. Our new report, *Nature’s Dividends*, synthesizes findings from more than 1,000 studies and shows what Americans have long believed: funding to protect land, air and water should not be cut, even when budgets are tight (learn more on page 6).

As we mark our 75th year, we honor Gloria and our early founders, but also the Indigenous communities whose stewardship predates us by centuries. Through collaborative action and shared commitment, we can achieve a livable climate, healthy communities and thriving nature—here in New York and around the world.

Thank you for making a real and lasting difference.

With gratitude,

Bill Ulfelder
Executive Director
The Nature Conservancy in New York

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Executive Director Bill Ulfelder © Jonathan Grassi

600 acres return to Haudenosaunee care

Land return in the Adirondacks creates new pathways for cultural and ecological renewal.

This winter, The Nature Conservancy in New York's Indigenous Partnerships Program announced one of the largest private land return initiatives in what is now New York State.

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the "People of the Longhouse," is a historic, powerful and democratic alliance of six Indigenous nations—Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca and Tuscarora. With assistance and funding from The Nature Conservancy, the Six Nations Iroquois Cultural Center (6NICC) purchased a 600-acre property from Paul Smith's College for \$1.1 million. The 6NICC, an Indigenous nonprofit focused on Haudenosaunee culture, will manage this land, along with 330 adjacent acres already under their care, according to Indigenous traditions and ecological principles.

"The land ethic of care and preservation has been a central part of the Cultural Center's mission since its founding by Ray and Christine Fadden in 1954," says David Fadden, Cultural Center director. "This acquisition of over 600 acres will serve as a classroom to share and learn Indigenous ecological knowledge for Native and non-Native students alike for generations."

Located in Onchiota and adjacent to the 6NICC, the property has been used as a seasonal camp and retreat center and as a site for teaching forest management practices. The 600 acres are 94% forested and the land is bookended by Big Haystack Mountain and Buck Pond Hill. John Thomas Brook, which supports native brook trout, flows through the wetlands.

The Cultural Center is now collaborating with the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry's Center for Native Peoples and the Environment, the Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force and the Akwesasne Seed Hub to provide a gathering

place for Haudenosaunee community members and a home for the Native Earth Program, which brings Indigenous high school students from across Turtle Island to the Adirondack region for community building, reconnecting with the Earth and deepening skills for environmental leadership.

Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer, author and founding director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment, says: "Land and people will benefit by the revitalization of Indigenous-led land care. Reuniting Haudenosaunee youth with traditional homelands sows seeds for restoring intergenerational relationships to place. I'm so eager to witness the reunion of Indigenous people, knowledge and land."

For Indigenous Nations, relationships with ancestral lands and waters are central to maintaining distinct cultural identity. This return of 600 acres of land in Kanien'keháka (Mohawk) territory, the eastern door of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, recognizes and supports the centuries-long efforts of the Haudenosaunee to reconnect with their traditional territories.

"We are thrilled to be part of this collaborative effort to reconnect Indigenous Peoples to their ancestral lands and to bring Traditional Ecological Knowledge together with western science in support of the land's biocultural restoration," says Peg Olsen, director of the Adirondacks and Indigenous Partnerships Program for The Nature Conservancy in New York.

The 600 acres is located southeast of Buck Pond, seen here at a distance. © Becca Halter/Adirondack Land Trust

Cultural Center Director David Fadden
© Six Nations Iroquois Cultural Center



Reimagining reefs

Off New York's coasts, we're exploring how underwater infrastructure can boost marine habitat, support fisheries and strengthen coastal economies.

From bridge foundations to offshore wind turbines, underwater infrastructure is a part of the marine landscape. So what if we could design underwater structures that mimic natural reef environments and better support ocean life? At the Atlantic Beach Artificial Reef off Long Island, The Nature Conservancy and partner organizations are collaborating to do just that.

At the reef, the ocean floor tells a story of transformation. An underwater landscape that was once a flat stretch of sand and mud now features strategically placed concrete slabs, steel decking, retired vessels and rock piles—some from NYC subway tunneling. These materials are a magnet for black sea bass, lobsters, flounder, porgies, tautog—and the anglers who chase them. As one of New York State's designated 16 artificial reefs, it is part of a network where underwater structures, both natural and human-made, have become bustling neighborhoods of ocean life.

"Every time we build underwater infrastructure, we have the chance to do more than just meet engineering goals," says Stephen Heck, a postdoctoral researcher at Stony Brook, one of The Nature Conservancy's project partners. "We can design these structures to support an incredible array of life."

"But not all structures are created equal," he adds. "Our research will help us learn whether an approach is working—and if it is worth the investment."

American lobsters play a key role in New York's marine food web and support a multimillion-dollar fishery vital to coastal communities and local economies. © Alex Shure/iNaturalist

Researchers guide monitoring equipment into the water at the Atlantic Beach Artificial Reef. © Carl LoBue/TNC

Led by The Nature Conservancy and Stony Brook University, with support from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, researchers are comparing monitoring methods, hoping to home in on the ones that can most effectively detect small differences in how marine animals use various materials and construction designs to make their homes.

"There's a lot we don't know about underwater habitat in the ocean," says Carl LoBue, ocean program director for The Nature Conservancy in New York. "The more we learn, the better positioned we are to protect it—and in some cases, to create it."

This approach—applying ecological design principles to underwater infrastructure—could be a game changer not just for habitat, but for supporting the global food supply and local economies.

In the North Sea, Nature Conservancy Scientist Boze Hancock is testing innovative ways to incorporate the nearly-wiped-out European flat oyster into the design of offshore wind infrastructure. Reviving these once-abundant oysters could restore a critical species and ecosystem function. And in small island nations throughout the Caribbean and Indo-Pacific, strategically placed underwater habitats are showing promise for easing diving pressure on natural coral reefs, creating new opportunities for sustainable tourism.

"Healthy oceans and all the things people want and need from the ocean can coexist," says LoBue. "It just takes a little bit of work. And science can show how to do it."



Scan to learn more about reef research.





Designing roads that work for wildlife and people

New approaches across the Appalachians aim to reduce wildlife crashes and rebuild the pathways nature needs.

In 2017, The Nature Conservancy and the New York Department of Transportation installed a simple, inexpensive “critter shelf” in a culvert under a busy road between Tug Hill and the Adirondack Park. Almost immediately, mink, groundhogs, raccoons, weasels and other small animals began scurrying across the steel mesh corridor, safely avoiding traffic.

Developed in Montana and adapted for New York, the shelf demonstrates how good ideas can travel. Recognizing that potential, The Nature Conservancy and partners developed the *Northeast Habitats and Highways* program to amplify local projects that make it easier for wildlife to move and to reduce traffic accidents.

Modeled after a nationally recognized training developed by the Vermont Agency of Transportation and Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, *Northeast Habitats and Highways* launched in 2025 with a series of videos that spotlight standout examples—from low-cost retrofits like New York’s critter shelf, to road designs that support larger wildlife movement, to policy changes that shape how entire agencies operate—led by partners in eight Appalachian states.

Alissa Fadden, who manages wildlife connectivity projects for The Nature Conservancy, says, “Our goal is to foster cultural change to help transportation and conservation professionals collaborate early, build infrastructure with nature in mind and reduce wildlife-vehicle conflicts.”

Thoughtful design allows roads to support safe movement of wildlife and people across the landscape.
Illustration by Liz Burdick Arts

Each year on America’s roads, an average of 200 people die and 26,000 are injured in wildlife-vehicle collisions, and an estimated 1–2 million large mammals are killed.

Climate change is driving animals to move north an average of 11 miles and approximately 36 feet higher in elevation each decade, reinforcing the necessity of resources like this series to inform projects that allow species to access expanded habitat. Furthermore, roads and stream crossings designed and adjusted to meet the needs of wildlife can also help communities reduce flooding caused by sea-level rise and extreme rainfall.

The training series has already been approved for continuing education credits for transportation planners and engineers in New York—an early signal that the resource resonates. “We plan to share this proven approach with colleagues and partners throughout the Appalachian region and beyond, speeding up the pace and scale of conservation that supports wildlife migration and thriving communities,” says Fadden.



Scan to explore the full story and videos.

Northeast Habitats and Highways promotes practical, wildlife-friendly designs that keep communities safer and habitats connected.

Nature's dividends add up

New report shows how protected lands drive economic growth, bolster public health and strengthen community well-being.

The Nature Conservancy's preserves across New York form a living atlas of habitats—beaches, salt marshes, pine barrens, old-growth forests, shaded ravines and mountain ridges. The protection of these wild places provides myriad and compounding benefits: preserving habitat for rare species, safeguarding clean water and storing carbon. Now, we can add improving human and economic health to the list.

According to a new report commissioned by The Nature Conservancy, *Nature's Dividends*, time spent outside results in lower rates of asthma, heart disease and diabetes; lower incidences of preterm birth and low birth weight (which are linked to numerous health issues both early and later in life); reduced symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; improved immune function; and reduced levels of stress hormones.

"We know that when we step outside, we feel better: our breath slows, our blood pressure drops, our body relaxes, but haven't always been able to measure that impact," says New York Stewardship Director Mat Levine. "This report provides tangible evidence that when we protect nature, we're taking a step toward protecting human health at no additional charge."

There are economic impacts as well: the report shows that the outdoor recreation industry is a major and

growing contributor to the U.S. economy. In 2023, the outdoor recreation economy accounted for \$640 billion—2.3% of national gross domestic product. Outdoor recreation supports nearly 5 million jobs—3% of national employment. And wildlife-based recreation is big business: in 2022, 39.9 million Americans fished, 14.4 million hunted and 148.3 million participated in wildlife-watching, generating \$395 billion in economic activity.

"Through the generosity of our supporters and partners, we've been able to create a statewide network of conservation lands that provide a range of ecosystem services, from safeguarding freshwater resources to mitigating the impacts of climate change," says Levine. "Now, we can see how that initial investment reaches even further, providing additional economic and health benefits to people."

With summer approaching, we invite you to visit the special places that you protect. Whether you choose to wander through the cool shade of an Adirondack forest, stand atop a glacial overlook in western New York, bike along the Hudson River, or birdwatch on a Long Island tidal creek, you're experiencing a landscape that is at the nexus of natural, economic and human well-being.

Preserve steward Alison Agresta leads a National Trails Day walk at Moss Lake Preserve. © Phil Cuppernell

Archery event at Mashomack Preserve with Kinfolk © Andrew Pelletier



Scan to plan your next preserve visit.





Global vision and a personal journey

Why Sabra Turnbull invests in a healthier planet

For Sabra Turnbull, a member of the New York Board of Trustees, protecting nature has always been paramount. But it was a Nature Conservancy trip to Mongolia that helped her understand that every crisis she cared about ultimately traced back to the health of the planet. “The environment felt fundamental,” she says. “Without it, life itself falters.”

That clarity set her on a philanthropic path that now stretches across continents and aligns powerfully with The Nature Conservancy’s ambitious 2030 goals: halting catastrophic climate change and biodiversity loss by protecting land, water, oceans and the communities who depend on them.

Sabra’s early love of nature was sparked in Girl Scouts and deepened through a master’s degree in plant science. Even as a Manhattan resident, she keeps nature close—tending a terrace garden and planning vacations around wild landscapes. Over time, she even converted her once-reluctant spouse into a fellow admirer of the natural world.

The moment that transformed her from donor to global conservation advocate came on that trip to Mongolia, where she witnessed vast intact grasslands, a small population deeply committed to preservation and nomadic herders whose lives depend on caring for the land.

Supporting Mongolia became her family’s first major conservation investment. Today, the country is on the verge of protecting 30% of its territory—an achievement that echoes The Nature Conservancy’s worldwide goal to conserve 650 million hectares of biodiverse land and 4 billion hectares of marine habitat by 2030.

Since Mongolia, Sabra’s philanthropy has expanded to match the scale of the challenges ahead. She has supported forest preserves in Belize, rainforests in Gabon and the Amazon, and marine conservation efforts in the Seychelles that strengthen sustainable fisheries. In Indonesia’s Forgotten Islands, she snorkeled above breathtaking coral reefs—only to see firsthand the pressures of overfishing. That, and her other firsthand experiences, underscored the urgency of our work to conserve 1 million kilometers of rivers, protect 30 million hectares of wetlands and help 100 million people facing climate-related risks.

What inspires Sabra most is The Nature Conservancy’s approach: conservation rooted in partnership.

“Lasting conservation depends on shared stewardship,” she says. “It endures when people feel connected to the land and take part in shaping its future.” That belief aligns with another core 2030 goal: supporting 45 million Indigenous and local community leaders in stewarding their environments.

For Sabra, global conservation isn’t abstract. It’s essential. And it’s personal. Her journey reflects what the organization’s 2030 goals are ultimately about: people coming together—across cultures, continents and ecosystems—to protect the planet we all depend on.

Aerial view of Mongolian landscape © Chris Pague/TNC
Sabra Turnbull in Mongolia © TNC



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For 75 years, you've helped conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. Today, our mission continues, building on that early conservation legacy and evolving to meet today's challenges.

Give today to shape the next 75 years.



Barn owl dream
 © Luke Evslin

