

The Nature
Conservancy



Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

**Eastern New York Chapter
Fall/Winter 2011**



Dear Friends,

The Nature Conservancy's 60th anniversary celebration this year makes me think about how much our conservation approach has evolved during the past decades. While much has changed, some things remain certain. The Conservancy will continue playing a vital role to ensure the health and survival of the natural world that sustains us all.

We have achieved tangible results throughout our history here in Eastern New York – from early land deals to the first dam removal in New York State for ecological reasons to Karner blue butterfly recovery and other groundbreaking conservation. Each of these successes is a testament to the Conservancy's commitment to use the best available science and to form innovative partnerships to create lasting results for nature and people.

Our work has evolved in scale and we now think about whole systems like the Hudson River estuary and watershed. Today we work to ensure that the natural systems within our chapter's boundaries, from the Hudson to the Catskills and Shawangunks, to the Delaware River and Saratoga Sandplains, have the ecological integrity to be resilient in the face of climate change and provide connectivity for the movement of plant and animal species along the eastern seaboard.

As you read here about our recent successes as well as the significant challenges that we face, I hope you will be inspired to support conservation in the Hudson Valley and around the world. Our ability to achieve results depends upon your help.

As you plan your annual gifts this season, please use the enclosed envelope to donate to the Conservancy. If you have already mailed your gift, and our letters have crossed, please accept my heartfelt thanks. But if you have yet to respond, I hope you will give as generously as you can.

Sincerely,

Rick Werwaiss
Executive Director



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Cover: Lake Maratanza, Sam's Point Preserve ©Pat Peters. Above: ©Ellen Weiss/TNC
Below: Conservancy staff help with Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee recovery efforts in the Catskills. ©Marie Jones/TNC



**The Nature Conservancy
Eastern New York Chapter**

265 Chestnut Ridge Road
Mount Kisco, New York 10549
914-244-3271

195 New Karner Road, Suite 201
Albany, New York 12205
518-690-7852

Safeguarding Fresh Water

A New Law Protects New York's Freshwater Resources

The mid-August signing of the Water Resource Management Act by Governor Cuomo is a significant achievement towards the protection of New York's freshwater resources. How we use our water now will affect our lives and communities for decades to come.

The new law is designed to foster responsible conservation practices and economic growth while protecting water bodies and wildlife habitats through the creation of science-based standards for water management and a new permitting system for withdrawals from streams, lakes and ponds. This protection is critical throughout New York, especially in places like the Delaware River and Catskills that supply water to nine million people and the Great Lakes which holds one-fifth of the world's fresh water.

"With threats such as natural gas development and climate change, the pressure on New York's water resources will continue to grow," said George Schuler, Director of Conservation Science. "This law will enable the Department of Environmental Conservation to protect the valuable resources of the Great Lakes while also enhancing the state's ability to manage water resources in response to current and future demands."

A major challenge in protecting freshwater at the state level has been that management has taken place through a patchwork of state and federal laws, regulations and programs that developed piecemeal over time. To create a unified management framework and the accompanying tools that will be necessary to implement it, The Nature Conservancy is leading the *Water for Tomorrow* project.

The project will replicate the successful collaborative approach the Conservancy pioneered in the Delaware River Basin and build on New York State's commitment to the Great Lakes Compact signed a few years ago.

Water for Tomorrow will employ a framework across New York State to provide scientifically based, spatially explicit information to evaluate ecological impacts and human tradeoffs of new water withdrawals for the 21,000 miles of streams and lakes in the state.

Specifically, working with partners, the Conservancy will:

- Undertake an assessment of current conditions of water flow in New York's streams
- Define measureable thresholds of impact for the state's aquatic animals, plants and ecological processes with scientific experts
- Develop a robust regulatory framework and standards for water management

"*Water for Tomorrow* represents the first time that modern freshwater science, statistical and modeling tools and innovative freshwater policy and regulation are being brought together in a collaborative manner," adds Schuler, "using the best science to reimagine the way in which New York State manages its water resources for people and nature for the coming century."

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Understanding Hydrofracking

Marcellus Shale Gas

Hydrofracking for natural gas is a “hot button” issue in New York and decisions about where and how it will be allowed are about to be made. The Marcellus Shale formation is currently the largest shale play in the U.S., stretching from West Virginia to New York’s southern tier, including the Catskills in Ulster and Sullivan Counties.

In recent years, the Marcellus Shale formation has come to the attention of oil and gas mining companies, because it represents one of the largest shale gas areas in the country and being viewed as a source for natural gas. Estimates of the volume of gas in the Marcellus formation vary widely, with claims that it could meet the U.S. demand for natural gas for anywhere from three to 25 years.

The existence of the Marcellus deposits has long been known. New technologies have only recently allowed companies to drill as far as 10,000 feet down, turn the well horizontally to follow the shale layer for a mile or more, using millions of gallons of water, carrying sand and chemicals to fracture the shale and release the natural gas — a process known as hydrofracking.



Scarlet Tanager ©Mark Diedrich



Clearing for well pads and pipes ©Cara Lee/TNC

In New York, hydrofracking that uses high volumes of water has not yet been permitted. New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) recently released its Generic Environmental Impact Statement study that outlines the state’s proposal for allowing high volume hydrofracking in the Marcellus Shale in New York’s southern tier. DEC also released its proposed rules for hydrofracking even before it has completed the legally required environmental review process on which future rules will be based. The public comment period for both documents concludes December 12, 2011.

“The decision on whether to permit high volume hydrofracking in the Marcellus Shale will define New York’s environment for generations to come,” said Cara Lee, Shawangunk Ridge Program Director. “The promise of shale extraction is that it will generate local jobs, provide needed income to upstate communities, and be

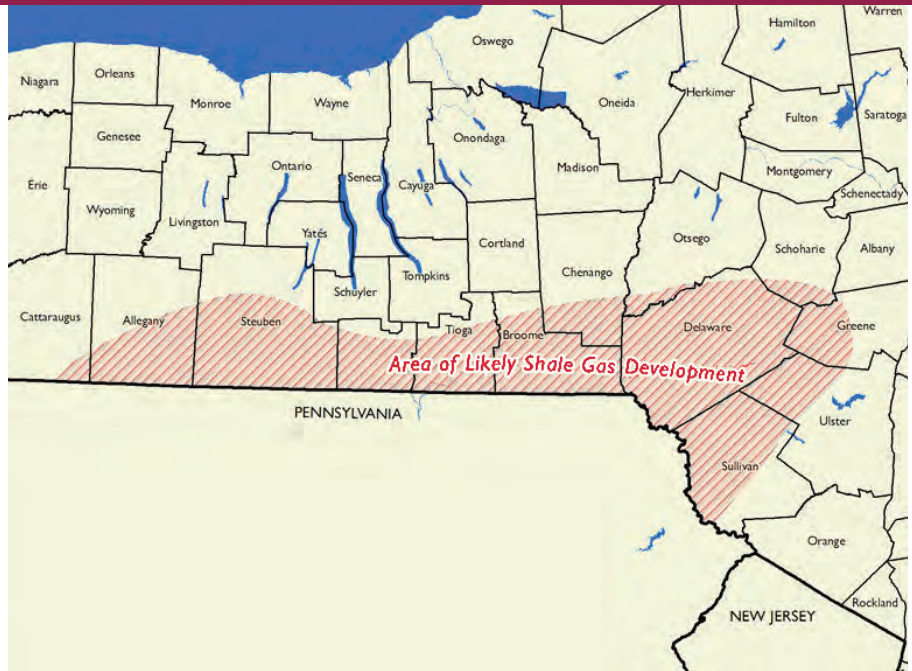
a domestic energy source. We question how these claims will play out and are concerned about the risks that hydrofracking presents for people and nature.”

Hydrofracking has the potential to affect the drinking water supply. Marcellus Shale lies under the New York City watershed and the Delaware River Basin, which together provide drinking water for more than 16 million people. Water used in the hydrofracking process comes back out of the ground contaminated, requiring high-level treatment that is currently unavailable in New York.

Fish and other wildlife are threatened by the large volumes of water that will be withdrawn from streams, lakes, rivers and other sources for hydrofracking. The Conservancy spearheaded the recent passage of legislation for the development of a statewide water management plan that looks to balance environmental and ecological needs with economic and use

needs. (See page 3 to learn more.)

Marcellus Shale runs through some of the most forested regions of our state. These forested areas provide clean water, clean air and provide habitat for diverse wildlife and there is growing recognition that the condition of our forests will be more important than ever as we confront the challenges of climate change. Extensive clearing for well pads, roads and pipelines associated with hydrofracking is a significant threat to the forests of New York's southern tier quality and has the potential to degrade interior forest habitat, impacting wildlife diversity.



Marcellus Shale boundaries in New York State.

“As the decision whether to permit hydrofracking of the Marcellus shale moves forward, it is critical that New York State do a thorough review and develop a proper regulatory process to adequately protect New York’s natural

resources,” adds Lee. The Conservancy will continue to provide its science expertise to inform sound policies and practices that avoid and minimize impacts to New York’s forests and fresh water.

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Leave a Legacy for Future Generations

What better legacy is there to leave than your commitment to protecting the Earth for generations to come? Whether you are taking those first important steps toward planning your estate or are in the process of updating your estate plan, The Nature Conservancy is here to help. Don't let another day pass by. *Contact The Nature Conservancy today.*

CONTACT: Kate Adams

PHONE: (518) 690-7846

EMAIL: kate_adams@tnc.org

WEB: nature.org/legacy

Invasives Species Watch

Emerald Ash Borer

They are purple, hollow, triangular, suspended by rope, and can be seen along roadsides. Some trees have them; some don't. What are they? Insect traps tethered to ash trees. Though each trap is scented to lure the emerald ash borer (EAB) onto its sticky walls, the hope is that every one of them will come up empty. A native to parts of Russia, China, Japan, and Korea, the emerald ash borer arrived in North America about a decade ago and has already wiped out some 70 million ash trees in the United States.

Smaller than a penny, the ash borer exclusively attack ash trees. The tiny



beetle does the most damage while in its larval stage as it feeds under ash tree bark and cuts off the tree's flow of water and nutrients.

First spotted in western parts of New York in 2009, emerald ash was detected in the Hudson Valley in 2010 and on the campus of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point this past summer. The Nature Conservancy, along with several state agencies, other non-profits and partners, is working in upstate counties to control its spread.

Though it has wings, this half-inch long, metallic green forest pest with a flat back is not a strong flier. Outbreaks are more likely to be the result of people transporting infested firewood than the insect flying from one place to another.

"It's unlikely that the trees will become

extinct," said Troy Weldy, Director of Ecological Management. Ash trees can reproduce while young — and ash borers tend to attack more mature trees.

"A dwindling ash tree population could have a major impact to forest health as well as the forest products industry," adds Weldy. Popular products made from ash wood include baseball bats, hockey sticks, tool handles, and furniture.



How You Can Help

Don't Move Firewood:

Use firewood only where it is gathered or purchased. New York State regulations prohibit transporting firewood more than 50 miles from its source. For more information, visit <http://www.dontmovefirewood.org>.

Watch for Signs of EAB

Damage: EAB leaves distinctive D-shaped holes when adults emerge from inside the tree. Report suspected EAB damage to Department of Environmental Conservation at 866-640-0652.

Voice Your Support for Federal and State Funding:

Early detection and a rapid response are critical to invasive species prevention. We need smart policies and tight monitoring and enforcement along our borders. Let your elected representatives know that you value the trees that beautify our surroundings, purify our air and water, and provide habitat for birds and animals.

Improving Habitat

through Prescribed Fire

It was a banner year for prescribed burns in the Shawangunk Ridge. Receptivity to prescribed fire as an effective conservation tool grew following the Overlooks Fire in 2008, which affected 3,000 acres of Minnewaska State Park, according to Cara Lee, Shawangunk Ridge Program Director. Land managers on the Shawangunk Ridge adopted a fire management plan earlier this year.

Working with the Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership, the Conservancy's prescribed fire team participated in three burns on a total of 112 acres around the region. These burns helped restore forest health and reduced fuel loads within and directly adjacent to the Sparkling Ridge and Cragsmoor communities.

In addition to nearly quadrupling the total acreage burned during prior seasons,

the team achieved several important milestones. "Two burns in excess of 50 acres at Mohonk Preserve represent a significant increase in both size and burn unit complexity over previous years," said Gabe Chapin, Forest and Fire Ecologist. "These burns also help us prepare for similar burns in more volatile fuel types over the next several years. Our first burn at Sam's Point Preserve was also a significant step towards expanding prescribed burning onto other properties on the Shawangunk Ridge."

The use of fires as a land-management tool dates back centuries. On the ridge, people used it to foster the growth of food sources, such as chestnuts, acorns and blueberries, and to improve habitat for important game species. Today, prescribed fire provides innumerable benefits to people and wildlife, from

reducing the risks of dangerous wildfires to controlling the spread of invasive species and to increasing water quality in our rivers and improving wildlife habitat.

With a dual emphasis on science and safety, the team continues to foster cooperative relationships with fire management partners both locally and regionally. "These opportunities provide invaluable training, experience building and learning," said Chapin.

In the past year, members of the fire team provided support to fire management programs on Long Island and the Green Mountain National Forest as well as received key assistance from the Conservancy's fire program in Massachusetts.

To learn more about prescribed fire in the Shawangunk Ridge, visit nature.org/eastern.





The Nature Conservancy
Eastern New York Chapter
195 New Kameer Road, Suite 201
Albany, NY 12205
nature.org/eastern

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