

# 2023 Impact Report New York

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**Together, We Find a Way**

# A Message of Thanks from Our Director



**Bill Ulfelder**  
Executive Director  
The Nature Conservancy in New York

Dear Friend,

The challenges we face in New York, nationwide and globally—flooding, heat, fires and more—are ever-present reminders of the urgency of our conservation and climate work. At the same time, we have been gaining momentum, and making great progress toward developing and implementing solutions.

Looking back on 2023, I'm so proud of how we've used science, policy, innovation and partnerships to create lasting, tangible results to ensure that our lands and waters are healthy, thriving and safe places to live, work and play.

We are conserving connected networks of land and water and promoting the well-being of local communities across New York State. Our thoughtful and balanced approach meets the needs of residents and businesses, provides abundant recreational opportunities for millions of people and ensures diverse and thriving populations of wildlife.

## **We rely on you to be the bedrock of our success.**

With your incredible support, we continue to advance the bold solutions so urgently needed in New York and beyond. We greatly appreciate your generosity as we work to protect the healthy and resilient natural world on which all life depends.

In gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill" followed by a stylized, sweeping flourish that extends to the right.

Bill Ulfelder  
Executive Director, The Nature Conservancy in New York

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# Advancing Natural Climate Solutions

Trees are vital in combating climate change—and we’re only just beginning to unlock their potential. We must massively augment reforestation to meet New York’s 2030 climate goals.

To help New York prepare to scale up reforestation, we’ve launched a pilot project in the Finger Lakes region, planting 2,700 trees with more to come in 2024—some on our land and some on that of our partners.

Our team is also establishing key regional partnerships, including with Cornell University, to identify other lands across New York suitable for reforestation, and address workforce and nursery supply issues.



***“Natural systems like forests pull carbon out of the atmosphere and store it. Reforestation represents the single largest opportunity to sequester more carbon.”***

Michelle Brown, Ph.D.  
Senior Conservation Scientist

## **MEET MICHELLE BROWN, PH.D.**

Michelle Brown manages our state-wide natural climate solutions team. She focuses on the role lands play in mitigating carbon emissions.

With your support, we are:

- **Helping private landowners manage their forests.** Working with the American Forest Foundation, we have designed the [Family Forest Carbon Program](#) to assist owners of woodlands as small as 30 acres get paid for implementing carbon-smart forest practices, empowering them to address climate change while earning income from their land. We use this win-win approach to maximize the carbon storage of their forests and benefit communities from the Catskills to the Great Lakes. We have identified over 85,000 qualified forest acres and enrolled 745 acres in New York’s Appalachian range into the program. We these early successes, we aim to scale and expand the Family Forest Carbon Program across most of the state.
- **Advancing other carbon-sequestration efforts.** We are working with several large landowners (at least 2,000 forested acres) interested in our [Working Woodlands](#) program to evaluate their lands and the potential for improved forest management using the highest carbon project standards.



# Connecting Lands & Waters in the Appalachians

Plants and animals are moving northward and higher in elevation in response to climate change. We have the chance to help our wildlife and impact change on a continental scale by conserving the Appalachian range. Stretching across 2,000 miles in 18 states, the Appalachians provide an intact, connected forest that allows species to move and adapt. The Appalachians' rich woodland habitats also store nine billion tons of carbon, provide clean drinking water for 22 million people and generate \$25 billion from recreation and tourism that supports local residents and the many cities that sit at the edge of this globally important landscape.



*“It has never been more urgent to conserve and restore a vast, connected system of lands and waters on the East Coast.*

*New York is central to that goal.”*

Heather Furman  
Appalachians Director

## **MEET HEATHER FURMAN**

Heather Furman provides strategic leadership for at-scale strategies in the Appalachians, one of the Conservancy's four global focal places—key geographies for realizing our 2030 goals. She integrates conservation programs, promotes equity, drives fundraising success and ensures coordinated communications across two countries, four Conservancy divisions and the 18 states that together comprise the Appalachians global priority focal area.

With your support, we are:

- **Creating a resilient, connected network of land and water in the Appalachians.** More than 22 million people rely on the Appalachians, a 2,000 mile landscape that spans from Alabama to Canada. In this vast geography, we are conserving critical lands and waterways—and New York plays an important role in advancing this continental vision. By collaborating on land connectivity, climate and community solutions, we can simultaneously conserve clean water and vital wildlife habitat, generate new job and recreational opportunities and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Scaling up for accelerated impact.** We recently launched a grant program to encompass the entire Northern Appalachian region. Inspired by New York's thriving Climate Resilience Grant Program, this initiative aims to help protect 20,000 additional acres in priority landscapes in 2024. Our new Resilient and Connected Appalachians Grant Program will grant up to \$2 million in private funding to assist non-profit organizations, town and county governments and Tribal Nations with land acquisitions where nature needs it most across key landscapes in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine. Planning is also underway to further expand the program to the Southern Appalachians next year.



Photos © David A. Seaver | © Kent Mason

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# Restoring Lands & Waters

New York's lands and waters are a valuable resource. They support job-creating industries and recreation, generate food, timber and other commodities, protect and provide clean water, mitigate climate change and create habitat for plants and wildlife. But our lands and waters are increasingly threatened by development, invasive species and pollution.

We're working with communities, landowners and all levels of government including federal, state and local agencies, to strategically protect and conserve valuable lands, utilize best management practices and employ innovative finance strategies to improve the carbon storage, soil health, wildlife habitat and water storage capacity of our forests and agricultural lands to benefit all of nature.



***“No matter how much land is protected, wildlife won't persist over time if their habitat becomes too fragmented due to roads and other development, especially in the face of climate-driven migrations.”***

Alissa Fadden  
Wildlife Connectivity Project Manager

## **MEET ALISSA FADDEN**

Alissa leads New York's wildlife connectivity efforts, using strategies like targeted land protection, landowner outreach and improving transportation networks to steer development away from sensitive wildlife areas.

With your support, we are:

- **Accelerating the pace and scale of conservation.** To leverage conservation dollars for maximum impact, we established the Climate Resilience Grant Program. Now in its third year of supporting partner organizations, the program awards grants to land trusts protecting land in the most critical areas for conservation and connectivity. In 2023, the team received applications from over 100 organizations and awarded \$550,000 in grants for 14 projects distributed across key landscapes in New York including Tug Hill Plateau, the Adirondacks and the Hudson Valley. Based on New York's success, we are launching a regional grant program for the Northern Appalachians.
- **Reconnecting priority rivers and habitat.** Barriers to fish migration like obsolete dams and culverts cut off fish from sizable portions of their habitat. Working with partners, the Conservancy recently completed the three-year Boquet River Watershed Protection and Restoration Project to enhance the resilience of this key Adirondack watershed. We also conserved 294 acres along the Boquet River, protecting both water quality and critical habitat.



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# Helping People Adapt to Flooding

Climate change makes devastating storms more frequent and intense. We are acting now to keep people out of harm's way by working with New York communities to craft new, innovative solutions and partnerships to restore low-lying coastal habitats and help people seek safer ground.

**With your support, we are:**

- **Preventing new development in floodplains.** In New York, 60-80% of undeveloped lands prone to flooding are privately owned. As storms become more frequent and intense, keeping floodplains undeveloped, or natural, will help keep people safe, prevent loss of life and minimize damage to important infrastructure. We're researching incentive models and working to understand private landowners' needs to help them keep floodplain properties undeveloped, natural and well-functioning.
- **Helping residents voluntarily seek safer ground.** We are helping New York State and New York City develop permanent, voluntary and proactive buyout programs that help families in low-lying and vulnerable areas move to safer places while restoring habitats, such as wetlands, that help protect communities from floods.
  - In the towns of Sidney, Edgemere, Olive and Brookhaven, we provided grants to local communities to create visions for repurposing vacant land after property buyouts occur.
  - In Ulster County, we completed a proof-of-concept rental agreement that allowed an at-risk resident to have money for their next move while the lengthy buyout process closed.
  - In Piermont and Southold, we offered grant writing assistance to help communities access state and federal funding to adapt to a changing climate. Piermont was awarded a grant to incorporate voluntary "un-development" of the flood zone into their municipal land use plan.

**What's next:**

We will kick off two social science projects to better understand the perspectives of community groups. In the Hudson Valley, we will gather information about incentives for private owners of undeveloped floodplain properties; and in Montauk, we'll interview the business community to gather perspectives about the future of this seaside town in the face of increasing climate risks.



# Saving the Saltmarsh Sparrow

Brimming with bright green grass and cerulean skies, The Nature Conservancy's Merrill Lake Sanctuary is one of the most striking coastal marshes on eastern Long Island. Nestled in the heart of East Hampton, the preserve offers panoramic vistas of Accabonac Harbor, with a primordial quiet broken only by the calls of ospreys and terns hunting their prey.

Here, where land meets the sea, is an abundance of aquatic life—making the sanctuary an ideal resting, feeding and breeding ground for shorebirds, waterfowl and other wildlife—including the saltmarsh sparrow. This special bird is unique to tidal marshes of the Atlantic Coast, where it lives a surreptitious life, blending perfectly with its surroundings.

But this small songbird's existence is under serious threat due to a trifecta of issues: sea level rise, habitat loss and pollution. The population decline of saltmarsh sparrows is indicative of their shrinking habitat, as marshes drown and have little room to shift against developed shorelines.

And there's also the legacy of marsh alterations: first to optimize conditions for farming in the 1600 - 1800s and then to control mosquitoes in the early 1900s. These alterations in salt marshes across the East Coast, including Merrill Lake altered wetland hydrology and their ability to keep pace with accelerating sea level rise. Similarly, chronic nitrogen pollution from septic systems and sewers has changed the way marsh plants grow (above and below ground), which has compromised their ability to resist erosion.

The Nature Conservancy is working to protect our vital marshes by restoring degraded habitats and protecting coastal lands—places to which marshes can migrate as sea levels rise. Saving our marshes means saving ourselves. They filter pollution, reduce erosion and protect shorelines and coastal communities from storms, provide nursery grounds for important fish, and fuel our coastal food web.

As for the saltmarsh sparrow, they are not yet listed as an endangered species, but without our help, this population of perfectly camouflaged birds may soon disappear.

***Salt marshes play an important role in filtering water, supporting the coastal food web and absorbing wave energy, but many of these ecosystems on the coast of Long Island are sick.***



# Mitigating the Effects of Climate Change

To ease the effects of climate change, we are helping achieve New York State's clean energy goals through careful energy siting. The Nature Conservancy's [Power of Place National report](#) outlines pathways for reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. With careful and coordinated planning and robust community engagement, the U.S. can build the clean energy infrastructure needed while avoiding most impacts to sensitive natural and working lands. We are working with New York State Energy Research & Development Authority (NYSERDA) and the energy modeling firm E3 to develop a similar report for our state's clean energy future.

As we increase our renewable energy production in New York, we must minimize impacts on critical wildlife habitat and working lands. As part of NYSEDA's [Agricultural Technical Working Group](#), we helped inform NYSEDA's report on the co-location of solar installation with agricultural operations (agrivoltaics). The report supplements ongoing research on opportunities and constraints associated with implementing agrivoltaics projects in New York State and additional state efforts to understand land use implications of large-scale solar development.

With your support, we are:

- **Building partnerships to protect marine life.** We're working with other ocean experts to ensure that clean energy and habitat for marine life go hand in hand.
- **Mitigating impacts of offshore wind development.** We're galvanizing and aligning Conservancy chapters up and down the East Coast and calling on the expertise of our internal and external partners to ensure that offshore wind development is built in ways that avoid, minimize and mitigate impacts to vulnerable marine life and fisheries. Our team is exploring wind turbine structures that, if constructed the right way, will *add* valuable marine habitat at the base of the turbines.
- **Studying seabirds for baseline data.** We're laying the groundwork to study seabirds through tagging efforts so that we can understand the impacts of offshore wind development on birds. Filling this critical information gap will provide sought-after baseline data ahead of the anticipated rapid development of offshore wind energy generation off the coast of New York (and the Mid Atlantic – Southern New England). We anticipate leading pilot tagging efforts this winter on northern gannets, a seabird often found in New York's coastal waters.

***“As we build out offshore wind energy, there is great potential to create new fish habitat. With intentional design, these new structures could support entire communities of marine life.”***

**Carl Lobue**  
New York Oceans  
Program Director





# Building a Greener, Climate-Ready New York City

Trees and green infrastructure are essential to our cities, cleaning our air and cooling our communities. Yet their benefits do not reach all New Yorkers equitably. Our New York City program has made tremendous progress toward a healthier, more resilient and expansive urban forest where the public health benefits of trees reach all New Yorkers.

To build a greener New York City, we first analyzed data to paint a picture of the current state of the urban forest—where it is and where it isn't—to highlight where tree canopy could be expanded. While considering social dimensions such as equity, justice, policy and funding, it became clear that not only should more trees be planted, but infrastructure, streetscape design and zoning may need to be redesigned to ensure equitable canopy coverage across the city.

With your support, we are:

- **Advocating for key policy wins.** With our leadership of the [Forest for All NYC](#) coalition and key role in the [NYC Urban Forest Agenda](#), trees are now considered critical infrastructure and must be included in the city's long-term sustainability and climate planning. NYC has set a goal of 30% canopy cover, with a special focus on getting more trees in our most vulnerable neighborhoods.
- **Hosting city-wide events.** The second annual City of Forest Day was held in October. With over 70 events, including 30 geared toward children and programs in Mandarin, Bengali and Spanish, this city-wide celebration of our urban forest was bigger and more inclusive than ever.
- **Making voices heard.** We're building key public and private sector partnerships to create a greener, more resilient New York City while helping vulnerable communities adapt to climate change and access the benefits of nature. The New York Cities team recently celebrated the two-year anniversary of the *NYC Urban Forest Agenda* and the *Forest for All NYC* coalition. The coalition has grown to over 120 organizational members and has received public endorsement from all five borough presidents.



# Keeping Freshwaters Healthy and Thriving

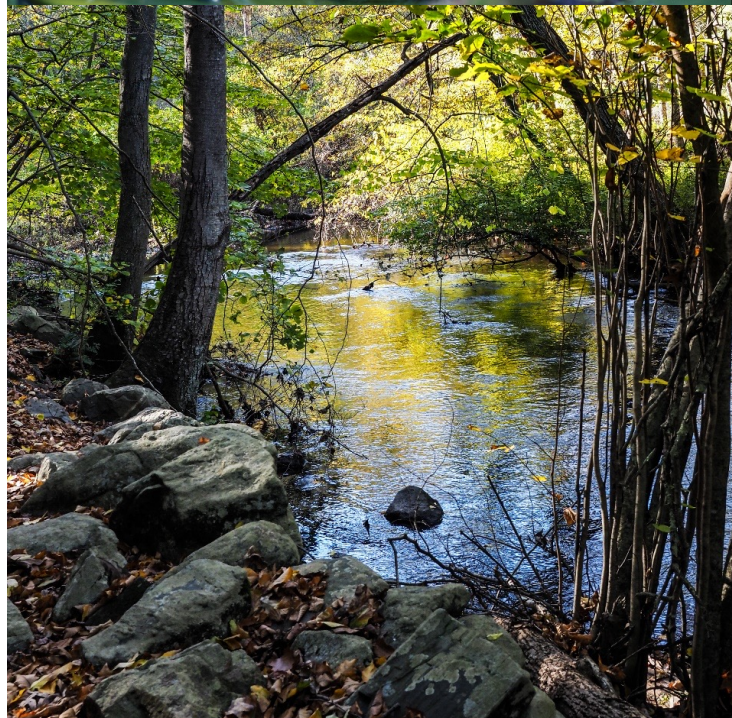
Our freshwaters are rich in biodiversity and crucial to life—but they are increasingly threatened in a climate-changing world. From Long Island’s aquifers to Lake Erie’s shores, we protect New York’s precious waters for all who rely on them.

With your support, we are:

- **Holistically promoting water quality in the Finger Lakes.** Knowing the importance of conserving headwaters and wetlands for improved water quality, we mapped and ranked lands in the Owasco Lake watershed that, if conserved, would have the greatest benefits to water quality. We’ve since protected four highly ranked properties and expect to close on two additional land deals in the coming months. In total, these six parcels protect nearly 725 acres of wetland and forested habitat.

- **Building local organizations’ capacity for change.** We recently transferred 161 acres to the Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council, making it a land-holding entity for the first time. The property, now called the Fillmore Nature Preserve, is one of the most important areas in the entire watershed for keeping Owasco Lake clean. As a land-holding entity, the Council has now increased its capacity to protect and steward land, providing a valuable conservation service to the local community.
- **Connecting homeowners to septic upgrade incentives on Long Island.** We launched a strategic communications effort on the North Shore of Long Island to help homeowners access public funds available to upgrade their septic systems and stop polluting nitrogen from entering our waters. We also worked with a canvassing partner on Long Island’s South Shore to reach thousands of homes and connect residents with Suffolk County’s Septic Improvement Program. We held over 3,000 conversations, and these learnings will inform our targeted communications efforts moving forward.

*Freshwater species have declined by an average of 83% since 1970. We have lost 64% of the world’s wetlands since 1900.*



# Using Policy to Ensure a Thriving Future

The Nature Conservancy accelerates conservation across New York by securing hundreds of millions of dollars in new public funding for conservation and climate action, making our policy work one of the most effective conservation tools available to us.



We influence public policy and shape public funding to protect and restore our precious lands and waters, fight climate change, increase biodiversity and improve community resilience. Your support helps us leverage conservation dollars to make change to ensure a thriving future for all.

## With your support, we are:

**Helping communities get much-needed funding.** On December 12, Governor Hochul awarded the first \$200 million from the \$4.2 billion Clean Water, Clean Air and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act to clean water projects across New York State. Along with funding from a second clean water program The Nature Conservancy supported creating in 2016, the \$480 million in awarded projects will safeguard clean drinking water and aquatic wildlife while creating 24,000 jobs.

## Streamlining disbursement of funds.

Unprecedented federal and state funding is now available for environmental and infrastructure projects in New York. To seize this critical moment, we are working with state and local officials to identify and overcome key pinch points that slow the distribution of public funding to communities.

## Leading on-the-ground policy work and coalitions.

We are building on our successful record of leading and supporting coalitions and campaigns, including a statewide goal to conserve 30 percent of New York's land and water by 2030, new state protections for freshwater wetlands, the preservation of important landscapes in New York such as Plum Island, and \$11 billion for environmental programs and clean water projects.

*When it comes to advancing policy, our on-the-ground expertise, nested in all 50 states and backed by 70 years of conservation history, means that we align the highest and best conservation outcomes by smartly influencing how and where funding is spent.*

**What's Next:** We're gearing up for a busy 2024. Congress is deliberating policies including the forthcoming American Wildlife Habitat Conservation Act and appropriations for federal funding programs. In New York, a looming fiscal gap in the state budget will put strain on budget negotiations. It may require the broad coalition we lead to advocate to maintain progress, and a local measure in Suffolk County, so that voters have the opportunity to authorize billions for clean water.

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# Conservation Policy: An Interview with Jessica Ottney Mahar

Jessica Ottney Mahar is the New York director of policy and strategy for The Nature Conservancy. She shapes environmental policy, which is a critical pillar of our conservation work in the Empire State. As our natural resources, communities and wildlife face escalating threats—such as climate change, development and invasive pests and pathogens—our policy wins increase the pace and scale of protection, restoration and conservation throughout New York. Ottney Mahar played a key role in advocating for the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act in 2019 and leading the coalition and campaign to pass the historic \$4.2 billion Clean Water, Clean Air, Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act last fall. We sat down with her to talk about policy across New York State.

**Q: What's it like doing policy work “behind the scenes”?**

**A:** A great deal of our work happens behind the scenes. Our team of experts support and shape New York's renewable energy policies through the advisory boards on which we sit. We meet with lawmakers, regulators, and other non-governmental stakeholders to share scientific expertise, foster long-standing partnerships that span party lines, and convene partners to advance our goals. Recently, our Natural Climate Solutions Director, Michelle Brown, served on the New York State Climate Action Council's Agriculture and Forestry Advisory Panel that recommended strategies for reducing emissions and storing carbon in New York's farms and forests. Thanks to our influence and the hard work of Climate Action Councilmembers, advisory groups and thousands of stakeholders, our state is on a path to power our homes, cars and businesses with clean energy. This will clean the air we breathe, improve public health and safety, and create thousands of good, local jobs.

**Q: How does it feel to shape environmental policy in New York?**

**A:** I have the best job in the world! I work with incredibly smart people inside the New York State Capitol and at The Nature Conservancy. I'm also a mom with a young child. When I look at my daughter and her friends, I know I need to do everything I can to make the world a safe and healthy place for her to live and raise her own family someday. We're seeing our climate change, and we're the last generation that can do something about it. I want to leave her a world where she can thrive. The work we do is hard, but meaningful and inspiring. I'm forever grateful to be part of this work for The Nature Conservancy.



Photo © TNC

***New York's environmental action has been a model for national progress. At this pivotal moment on climate change, our leadership will extend beyond our borders and help build a safer, cleaner and more prosperous future.***

**Jessica Ottney Mahar**  
New York Director of  
Policy and Strategy

# Fostering Healthy Communities

As part of our commitment to equity, we are helping to create a more accessible outdoors. Through outreach, new partnerships and thoughtful changes to our preserves, we are welcoming more people to enjoy the great outdoors.

*Nature provides lifelong benefits across physical health, mental health and academic competency. A healthy exposure to Vitamin D promotes bone health and helps minimize issues related to diabetes and heart disease.*

*Even playing with dirt can reduce anxiety and stress levels in kids.*



With your support, we are:

- **Providing equitable access to our nature preserves.** We've installed new trails, infrastructure and signage at our New York preserves to help more people connect with nature. Our updates to Wolf Swamp in Southampton—including a new boardwalk trail and more parking—opened to the public in the summer of 2023. We're making universal trails at Moss Lake in Houghton and Uplands Farm Sanctuary in Cold Spring Harbor.
- **Joining with volunteers to deepen our impact.** On [National Public Lands Day](#), Conservancy team members joined volunteers at our [West Hill Preserve](#) for a trail building and community event organized by the [Genesee Regional Off-Road Cyclists](#). Thirty-three participants from the mountain biking, hiking and trail running communities near Rochester and the Finger Lakes spent a half-day volunteering and touring the progress of the nearly complete 3.5 miles of our shared-use trail system.
- **Expanding educational programs and community outreach.** We're deepening our commitment to diverse communities with programs such as Black Dimensions in Art, with whom we are collaborating to offer an art and environment workshop teaching students how to paint *en plein air* for the second year. We also welcomed Hunters of Color to the Adirondacks, Hannacroix and Shelter Island, where we provided safe, equitable venues for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to learn hunting skills. Hunters of Color's mentorship weekend at Mashomack was featured in [The Nature Conservancy's Summer 2023 magazine](#). Our collaborative model of mentored hunts held on conservation lands is now being replicated across the Conservancy.



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# Shinnecock Kelp Farmers Helping to Restore Water Quality

As gentle waves lap the shoreline under a cloudless sky, Donna Collins-Smith gently pulls a thick strand of kelp from the chilly water. At the surface, it looks like stained glass as the sun shimmers through its multi-colored leaves. Collins-Smith is a member of the Shinnecock Indian Nation on eastern Long Island—a federally recognized tribe of historically Algonquian-speaking Native Americans who have relied on the rich, marine waters here for millennia.

She is helping protect these waters that are part of her traditions—as one of six Shinnecock Kelp Farmers—a multi-generational, women-led nonprofit that began to work on a kelp farm in 2020. By developing a business model that is Indigenous-led from “seed to sale,” the Shinnecock Kelp Farmers are growing kelp and hope to create and sustain green jobs that empower the Tribal community, restore marine habitat and improve water quality in Shinnecock Bay and beyond.

The benefits of farmed and wild kelp are multifold. Kelp helps filter the water and improves local water quality over time by absorbing nitrogen pollution, which seeps into the bays and harbors of Long Island from cesspools, septic systems and fertilizers. Kelp also provides habitat for wildlife, shields coastlines from the full force of storms, helps reduce erosion and can buffer the effects of ocean acidification at a local level.

The Shinnecock Kelp Farmers intend to expand the farm so that this valuable resource can be grown for its many ecological benefits, including restoring water quality, improving habitat and minimizing the impacts of climate change. Eventually, the group plans to sustainably harvest the kelp at scale and sell it as an eco-friendly alternative to conventional fertilizer.

Support for the Shinnecock Kelp Farmers is provided through The Nature Conservancy in New York’s Common Ground Fund.



# Protecting Our Oceans and Fisheries

The ocean is essential to our lives. Crucial to our climate, it covers more than 70% of the planet and contains over half the life on Earth. Habitats on New York's coastline are critical for people and nature, providing services including seafood production, carbon sequestration and protecting coastal communities.

But the world is changing fast. Demand is growing for food, energy and water—and that means more pressure on the ocean and its resources. And climate change means hotter seas, more intense storms and more frequent flooding. We're taking action to restore and protect the ocean's health while accommodating increasing demands for seafood, shipping, energy and more.

**With your support, we are:**

**Reviving underwater meadows.** Seagrasses support thousands of species and absorb and store carbon, which can help reduce the impacts of climate change. We are identifying which seagrass populations are most resilient to heat stress and sharing our findings widely. We're striving to reshape the way seagrass restoration is approached not only on Long Island, but regionally and potentially globally.

**Celebrating landmark change for marine life.** In the coming year, on Long Island, we'll be honoring the 20th anniversary of conserving our 13,500-acre Bluepoints Preserve—ending a century of mechanical shellfish harvesting in Great South Bay and starting us on a path to restoring water quality. Since then, we've leveraged billions of federal, state and local dollars to replace septic systems and sewers with clean water technology in Nassau and Suffolk counties.

**Helping coastal economies thrive.** Clams, oysters and bay scallops are not only economic pillars of Long Island's coastal communities—these keystone species filter water and provide habitat for fish and invertebrates. In addition to restoration efforts at our Bluepoints Preserve in Great South Bay, we're working with the New York State Shellfish Restoration Taskforce to develop a statewide shellfish restoration plan to help projects across New York succeed.

**Restoring salt marshes.** Salt marshes protect our shorelines and provide habitat for marine life like diamondback terrapins, horseshoe crabs and a long list of fish, invertebrates and coastal birds. We're working to restore natural water movement with strategic light touches that often require nothing more than a shovel—innovative projects with scalable potential well beyond New York's borders.



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# Gathering With Indigenous Partners

This summer, 160 Nature Conservancy team members and guests from around the world met in Buffalo and Niagara, New York, for our second Voice, Choice & Action Gathering.

The location of the gathering—in the heart of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy—has significance for several reasons. The six nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy: the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca and Tuscarora, form the oldest continuous participatory democracy in the world. Holding the gathering in New York, where The Nature Conservancy got its start 70 years ago, was also an acknowledgment that in our organization’s history, we have failed to adequately understand, engage and incorporate the rights, needs and views of Indigenous communities. We have played a role in perpetuating harms against Indigenous Peoples and have benefited from colonial practices and systems.

In her opening remarks, Brie Fraley, North America Indigenous landscapes and communities director, described the gathering as an opportunity for healing. “It’s about the responsibility we all have: to come into balance, to recognize our privilege and to use it to repair our relationships. We focus on three global solutions\* at the Conservancy, but there is a fourth solution as well—one of right relations.”

The idea of ‘right relations’ comes from Indigenous thinking and activism and was one of several themes that flowed through four days of listening sessions, guided discussions and ceremony in Buffalo.

In keeping with Haudenosaunee tradition, the gathering began with a reading of the Ganö:nyök or Thanksgiving Address, by Clayton Logan, Wolf Clan of the Seneca Nation, on whose territory the group gathered. The “words that come before all else,” spoken in the Seneca language, reverberated through the auditorium and grounded everyone in a practice of gratitude—just as they have for thousands of years.

\* The three global solutions are tackling climate change, protecting ocean, land and fresh water and providing food and water sustainably.



Photo © Nancy J. Parisi



# 2023: Year in Photos

2023 was a landmark year of gathering, tree plantings, hiking, birding and more. We want to share some of our favorite memories with you.

## Ode to Joy

A prothonotary warbler announces the arrival of spring © Matt Williams



## Leading the Way

New York's Innovation Team received the 2023 InnoLead Impact Award for our one-on-one coaching program. Pictured below is Jennifer Chin, NY director of innovation, accepting the award © TNC



## Beleaf It

In the Finger Lakes, we planted 1,800 trees with partners as part of our pilot to scale reforestation efforts © Anthony Graziano



## Let's Meet Outside

Participants from this summer's historic Voice, Choice & Action gathering in Buffalo pose by Niagra Falls © Nancy J. Parisi



**Buzz Off!**

Setting up bio-controls to target emerald ash borer, an invasive insect that threatens North America's native ash trees. © Shaun Kittle/TNC



**New Green City**

New Yorkers enjoying Brooklyn Bridge Park. Our efforts to promote green infrastructure are helping more people connect to nature. © Kevin Arnold



**Making Connections**

The Algonquin to Adirondacks Collaborative is a young organization, but thanks to the Climate Resilience Grant Program, they've forged partnerships in Canada and the U.S. to champion connectivity projects and climate resilience goals. © Algonquin to Adirondacks



**A Whale of a Time**

A humpback whale in a school of menhaden off Long Island. Since they're eaten by so many other fish and wildlife, menhaden, also known as bunker are "the most important fish in the sea." We're leading efforts to restore their populations. © S. Lynch



### On the Fly

A juvenile osprey on the look-out from its perch. These raptors are expert fish-hunters who rely on coastal habitats, including nest poles which are found at many of our preserves.

© Trisha Seelman/TNC

### It's the Climb

A climber scaling a cliff face in the Adirondacks. We love seeing the variety of ways people get outside and enjoy nature.

© Blake Gordon



### Hang in There!

A bobcat keeping watch from a tree. Our work to protect and connect key land corridors in New York and the vast Appalachian range is helping local species find safe habitats to thrive in a changing climate. © Jeff Wendorff

# By the Numbers

*Across the globe and in New York, The Nature Conservancy is achieving meaningful conservation results with your help. Here's a snapshot of our work in 2023, by the numbers:*

**12**

research projects are underway in our preserves, which are important field laboratories for academic, state and federal researchers. There are projects on river otters, bog turtles, spruce grouse, garter snakes and more

**70**

events held as part of City of Forest Day, where 30 organizations and hundreds of participants celebrated urban trees through our Forest for All NYC coalition

**3,400**

Brooklyn street trees will be planted as part of our Forest for All NYC initiative, a plan to equitably expand the city's urban forest

**5,000**

acres conserved in the Adirondacks, Tug Hill Plateau, Catskills and the Green Mountains, through our Climate Resilience Grant Program

**\$500k**

in grants for 14 projects will support partners' land conservation in Western New York, the Mid-Hudson Valley, and the U.S. side of the Algonquin-to-Adirondacks linkage to conserve the greater Appalachian landscape

**6,670**

native species of plants were installed with our partners in as part of an effort to restore a 30-acre floodplain in South Sandy Creek in the Lake Ontario region

**1.7 million**

acres of private land in New York State identified by our team as ripe for reforestation

**645,000**

people viewed a Conservancy New York preserve profile online

**\$1 million**

from New York State funds for groundwater monitoring to assess how phosphorus flows from septic systems into lakes will later lead to installation and monitoring for pollution-treating septic systems in Cayuga County (Finger Lakes)

**70%**

of New York's floodplains are privately owned. We're exploring solutions to incentivize private property owners to allow flood- and erosion-prone portions of their land to remain natural to serve as buffers for water

**10,000**

predatory bugs released near Lake Ontario to prey on invasive beetles and protect native ash trees

**13**

miles of multi-use trails under construction in Western New York's West Hill Preserve as part of our state-wide efforts to create a more accessible outdoors



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## Leave a legacy for generations to come.

What we were able to accomplish in 2023 is only possible thanks to the generous support of donors like you.

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

Contact Anne Salmon in New York at:

(631) 367-3384, ext. 137 | [asalmon@tnc.org](mailto:asalmon@tnc.org) | [nature.org/legacy](https://nature.org/legacy)



THE NATURE CONSERVANCY CANNOT RENDER TAX OR LEGAL ADVICE. PLEASE CONSULT YOUR FINANCIAL ADVISOR BEFORE MAKING A GIFT.  
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**Your dedication makes a lasting difference. We are so grateful for your support of our conservation work across New York and look forward to keeping you up to date throughout the year.**

For the latest stories from our work, please visit [our New York website](#).

Or join us at:



# Together, We Find a Way



Our New York Team on a fall 2023 hike at Mianus River Gorge Preserve in Westchester County—the birthplace of The Nature Conservancy in New York.

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