

FALL/WINTER NEWS 2020

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# Central and Western New York update

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## FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND DIRECTOR

# Nature Brings Us All Together



Dear Friends,

No doubt, it's been a year like no other. Many of us have found ourselves turning to nature for respite. Our members like you have long recognized the power and importance of nature—and in times like these, I'm sure you understand how it serves an even greater role.

While The Nature Conservancy in New York has deftly adapted to a new world, this year's events have put inequities into sharp focus.

The Nature Conservancy's new CEO, Jennifer Morris, is committed to creating lasting strategies that keep equity top of mind in our workplace and our work. Organization-wide, we are pushing to promote equal access to nature, to build communities where both nature and people thrive, and to ensure the safety and respect of our colleagues and partners.

In our region, we are improving flagship preserves for all to enjoy. As you'll read about in this issue, many of our preserves saw a two- to three-fold increase in visitation during the pandemic. We're increasing accessibility of such places across the state. In the coming year, we'll be making major investments in our Moss Lake Preserve in the Southern Tier, one of our most popular sites.

To build communities where people and nature thrive, we will continue our efforts to ensure that nature's values and benefits are enjoyed by all:

- In the Finger Lakes, we're working with the agricultural community to prevent water pollution and increase resilience of farmlands.
- As our climate changes, we're conserving lands along the Seneca River near Syracuse to protect nature and roads, homes and local businesses from flooding.
- On Tug Hill, we're restoring a forest that soaks up carbon, generates drinking water for the city of Rome, and provides habitat for three-toed woodpeckers, pine marten, and other wildlife.
- And in the Southern Tier, we're working with municipalities and other nonprofits to restore land and harness the value of floodplains to absorb stormwater and expand habitat for fish.

When we look back at what The Nature Conservancy in Central and Western New York has accomplished with your support this year, we are proud. The woodlands and waters we've conserved are an incredible force for resiliency. But only if we continue to take care of them—through the help of supporters like you—can they continue to take care of us.

With your support, we are creating a strong, healthy and thriving natural world for future generations.

Thank you.

Jim Howe  
Director

Brian Baird  
Board Chair



Grenadier Island is considered the epicenter of North America's deadly invasive plant, swallow-wort. Swallow-wort all but blankets this beautiful island location in the Eastern Lake Ontario region. The Nature Conservancy and partners are working with landowners on the island to pilot a biocontrol—in this case, an insect that eats swallow-wort and nothing else—that helps stamp out this invasive species. © Mathew Levine/The Nature Conservancy.

# Deadly Duo: Climate Change and Invasive Species with Dual Strategies to Combat Them

Two silent killers, climate change and invasive species, are making their way through New York—but The Nature Conservancy is working to thwart them in their tracks.

Invasive species are non-native plants, animals, insects, and other pests that cause harm to nature and people, often with significant economic effects. They can come from air, land and water, and each of these threats is exacerbated by an even greater deadly threat—climate change. Warmer temperatures drive species northward, bringing new invasives along. Detecting them before they have a chance to spread is one of the best ways to suppress these deadly marauders.

“Looking to the future, as the climate changes so does the range, distribution and impact of invasive species. Recognizing this and managing for resilience means creating habitats that are less susceptible to climate stress and more resistant to threats,” says Rob Williams, Invasive Species Program Manager for The Nature Conservancy in New York.

As such, The Nature Conservancy is working on a set of dual strategies: preventing invasives and building climate resilience on natural lands.

Backed by a team of 19 partners spanning five counties, The Nature Conservancy is focusing on prevention and attacking

the illness, not just the symptoms. This year, we've worked closely with a range of partners, including Cornell University, to find biological control agents for swallow-wort, hemlock wooly adelgid, and Japanese knotweed—three of New York's most challenging invasives.

At the same time, The Nature Conservancy is helping prepare our lands for future temperature shifts.

“Ensuring the health of our natural lands, like forests, is critical to clean air, fresh drinking water, a vibrant economy and local jobs,” adds Williams.

Some of our most at-risk regions include the Tug Hill Plateau, which is expected to warm by as much as four to six degrees Fahrenheit by the 2050s. The Nature Conservancy has protected more than 50,000 acres of forests, streams and wetlands here. Our team this Spring replanted parts of this area with 8,500 seedlings of tree species present today as well as species expected to thrive in a future climate. We'll be working with academic partners to assess the differences in survival rates and then sharing this information with other forest owners. Healthy forests that can adapt and overcome changes in our climate will help protect and provide for all of us.

To learn more, visit [nature.org/newyork](https://nature.org/newyork).





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The Muller family, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, NYS DEC, and Finger Lakes Community College, enabled the protection of the scenic valley at the south end of Honeoye Lake.

# A Legacy of Conservation

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The Muller family has been a vital partner in helping The Nature Conservancy protect lands and waters in the Finger Lakes region. Through their foundations, the Muller family has continued their legacy of giving to support causes near and dear, including conservation. We sat down with Patricia Leo, Executive Director of the Florence M. Muller Foundation and the Emil Muller Foundation, to learn more about the couple's impact and the foundations' goals for the future.

## **Please tell us a bit about Emil and Florence Muller and their support of conservation.**

Emil and Florence Muller amassed thousands of acres of land both for building and for making their home. Their beloved 3,000 acre "Wild Rose Ranch," located at the south end of Honeoye Lake, was where they shared their passion for the outdoors, enjoying the breadth of activities that their land afforded them—hiking, canoeing, farming, horseback riding, hunting and snowmobiling.

After her husband passed, Florence gifted and sold acreage to The Nature Conservancy and NYS DEC, permanently preserving in her words, "the rare piece of natural beauty for the study and enjoyment of future generations."

## **How do the visions of the Muller Foundations dovetail with the work of The Nature Conservancy?**

To ensure the Mullers' personal commitment lives on, each of the Foundations has conservation among their priorities. The Florence M. Muller Foundation works to create a clean, safe, and healthy environment for us all by reducing the harmful

impact of environmental toxins, promoting greater care for the environment, and protecting nature. That's strongly aligned with The Nature Conservancy's work to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

## **What would Emil and Florence be most proud of helping to contribute to today?**

Their gifts of land and investments to create a legacy that will impact generations to come. They would be particularly proud of the growth of field-based education programs, community outreach, and research being done by the next generation of conservationists and their teachers. And finally, the ongoing good works of the Foundations that honor the Mullers' legacy by continuing their conservation efforts.

## **Why do you, Patricia, think it's important to support organizations like The Nature Conservancy?**

We all have a duty and a responsibility to take care of each other and the world we live in, leaving things a little better than we found them. We can't be healthy, happy, and thriving unless the environment upon which we depend for the water we drink, food we eat, and air we breathe is also healthy and thriving. We can each individually care for our piece of the world with the composting, gardening, energy use, and purchasing decisions we make, but it is only together, working with The Nature Conservancy, that we can care for the whole of our earth and everyone and everything living on it.

Visit [fmmullerfdn.org](http://fmmullerfdn.org) to find out more.



© Ben Herndon

# Conservancy Preserves are Crucial to Science and Solace

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The Nature Conservancy has created the largest network of private preserves in the world—providing opportunities for people to connect with nature while protecting wildlife and the natural resources that bring us clean air and water. And this powerful network is more than just a host of pretty places.

Many of our New York preserves are living laboratories where scientists are studying the most pressing conservation challenges of our time. Conservancy lands and waters are increasingly being used as model sites for developing new tools and solutions for dealing with a changing climate.

“It’s an exciting time at The Nature Conservancy as we are using our preserves for research and to advance a future where nature and people thrive,” says Mathew Levine, Director of Stewardship for The Nature Conservancy in New York.

Our preserves are also inspiring the next generation of outdoor lovers and conservationists. The Nature Conservancy’s publicly accessible sites in New York collectively draw hundreds of thousands of people annually. This year, they’re playing a critical role to help people cope with the Covid-19 pandemic.

“The experience of the outdoors has never been more important,” explains Marcela Maldonado, The Nature Conservancy’s Preserve Coordinator in New York. “Most

of our flagship preserves are seeing three to four times the visitation they typically receive. We’re delighted that we can provide people with a respite from the stress they are feeling.”

And Conservancy sites are increasingly being used to provide new access opportunities for underrepresented communities and for people with mobility challenges.

We’re managing our flagship preserves as a network of publicly accessible places that provide access to multi-use outdoor recreation opportunities. We’re engaging our visitors with new signage and better trails. And importantly, we are working to create equitable access for people that have been traditionally excluded from enjoying such places.

“In an effort to expand our reach and bring nature to more people, we are starting up partnerships with organizations that represent or serve communities of color like Latino Outdoors, Outdoor Afro and Westmoreland Sanctuary. We’re piloting these partnerships in the greater New York City area, and hope to grow meaningful relationships across New York state,” Maldonado continues.

Soon, we will be making more preserves accessible to low-mobility users. Currently, Mashomack Preserve on Shelter Island, our Boquet River Preserve in Essex County and Thompson Pond in Dutchess County have wheelchair-compliant trails.



# By the Numbers

From Montauk's coast to the Adirondacks' High Peaks to the Great Lakes' shoreline and beyond, The Nature Conservancy in New York is leading the way to building a resilient future. We are united in the need to protect land, water and all the life it sustains.

As 2020 was a challenging year for all of us, we are so grateful for your support in helping us tackle the greatest environmental threats of our time. Here's a look at the recent accomplishments and cumulative efforts of our New York team. With special thanks to the multitude of partners that we work with in support of our efforts.

## 8,500

native trees planted for climate resilience in the important Tug Hill region this year.

## 1.1

miles of vital native fish habitat reconnected in the Finger Lakes region.

## 700+

volunteers in New York now enrolled and advancing our mission on the ground and in the water.

## 15

states from Maine to Florida voted to protect Atlantic Menhaden using holistic fishing management approach.

## 3,350

trees identified and measured to study the health of Mashomack Preserve's forests.

## 11%

of trees in the Adirondacks threatened by hemlock woolly adelgid, an invasive insect that we're mobilizing to control.

## 1,000+

supporters attended our Power of Nature virtual event series.

## \$3.7 million

approved in Suffolk County to fund its landmark septic system replacement program to improve water quality.

## 106

vacant parcels, totaling 22 acres of valuable wetlands conserved in a flood-prone area of Mastic Beach, Long Island.

## 28,000

saplings planted in Jamaica Bay, New York City as part of an effort to expand the urban forest.



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© Marjo Aho/The Nature Conservancy

There has never been a detailed map of the extensive network of nearshore reefs and coastal habitats throughout the Caribbean—until now. The Nature Conservancy is using aerial technologies to create precise visualizations of important marine environments, like coral reefs, throughout the region.

# Taking to the Skies to Protect the Seas

Thanks to satellites, a high-tech aircraft, aerial drones and scuba divers, The Nature Conservancy is building three-dimensional habitat models, revealing the location and condition of the Caribbean’s coral reefs, seagrass beds and other oases of underwater life—in order to best protect these vital habitats.

The maps will help guide solutions that address the unique environmental threats faced by each island nation and prioritize climate adaptation for the 44 million people who call the region home.

“Well-managed natural resources are critical to the economic security of any country—especially those in the Caribbean that are so heavily dependent on reef-associated tourism. But you cannot protect what you do not know is there. These

state-of-the-art maps provide a new level of detail about reefs and other important habitats that will help us make smarter investments in conservation. The Nature Conservancy and our partners will use the maps to guide our work in the Caribbean, and we believe this can serve as a model for other protection and management efforts around the world,” explains Dr. Robert Brumbaugh, Executive Director for The Nature Conservancy’s Caribbean Division.

Caribbean communities depend on more than one million square miles of marine resources that have sustained them for generations, including the essential coral reefs that provide livelihoods, food and tourism revenue. In fact, half of all jobs in the Caribbean region rely on healthy marine habitats. A recent Conservancy-led study found that reef-associated tourism generates close to \$8 billion annually for local economies.

## NEW YORK – CARIBBEAN CONNECTIONS

One of New York’s most vulnerable birds, the Bicknell’s thrush, spends its summers in the Adirondacks and winters in the Caribbean. This migratory songbird is facing severe loss of habitat due to deforestation and climate change. But to help populations rebound, The Nature Conservancy is protecting its specialized breeding spots: high-elevation spruce-fir forests in the Adirondacks. And in the Caribbean, we’re supporting management of Haiti’s Parc National La Visite. In addition, we’re restoring the native forests in the Dominican Republic and Jamaica which provide food and habitat for Bicknell’s thrush and a host of other migratory species.



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