

HUDSON VALLEY UPDATE | FALL/WINTER | 2020

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Access to and protection of natural resources



Dear Friend,

If you've hiked the Mianus River Gorge Preserve in Bedford, you're aware of its extraordinary beauty. A 700-acre mosaic of towering, ancient hemlocks and cascading streams provide places for people to enjoy and wildlife to thrive. These working lands also ensure fresh air and drinking water for residents. Its protection was made possible by a visionary woman who rallied her neighbors in what was The Nature Conservancy's first community-based conservation project.

Recently, many of us have found ourselves turning to places like this for respite. Supporters like you have long recognized the power and importance of nature—and in times like these, I'm sure you understand that its protection is vital.

While local, on-the-ground conservation has always been a strong pillar of The Nature Conservancy, recent world events have challenged some of our thinking and brought that vision into sharper focus. Our new CEO, Jennifer Morris, opines we can only have a vibrant, resilient and sustainable natural world with equity, justice and peace for all of humanity.

Strategies that push for equal access to nature, build communities where both nature, including people thrive, and ensure the safety and respect of our colleagues and partners, reflect the "real" and urgent work of conservation. As an organization, we need to do more.

This work will take greater investments and the unwavering backing of supporters like you. Together, we can ensure that providing access and the continued protection of natural resources are part of the same goal—one that was inspired by a visionary woman more than six decades ago.

From the small but mighty organization born right here in Westchester, to the global organization we are now, the work of The Nature Conservancy spans oceans, fresh water, lands, cities and climate. And our work has never been more urgent.

Thank you for your support.

Jim Attwood
New York Board Chair



Born in New York City at the turn of the century, Gloria Hollister Anable (pictured, center) was a forward-thinking conservationist and important part of The Nature Conservancy's history. As a child, she spent her summers exploring the outdoors at her family's home in the Ramapo Mountains. She was a zoologist, explorer, record-setting ocean diver and a catalyst for change. Thanks to Gloria, The Nature Conservancy's first land protection deal took place in New York in 1954. © The Nature Conservancy



The Nature Conservancy is a private, non-profit 501(c)(3) international membership organization. Its mission is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

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Visionary Gloria Hollister Anable and the Birthplace of The Nature Conservancy

Before the days of GoFundMe and Venmo, a letter arrived in Gloria Hollister Anable’s mailbox regarding a nearby 60-acre property that was to be sold for a sub-division in a week’s time unless a down payment could be made. Located in Bedford, New York, the land was home to towering, old-growth hemlock trees, magnificent winding waters and wildlife such as coyotes, foxes and bald eagles. Gloria was enchanted with this parcel—especially the stretch flowing through a narrow gorge.

Unwilling to sit by and watch the place she loved disappear, Gloria sprang into action with her newly formed group, the Mianus River Gorge Conservation Committee. They made a counteroffer in the nick of time and held fundraisers, raffles, and bake sales to raise needed monies—some committee members even placed second mortgages on their homes. Despite these efforts, they were still facing a large deficit and needed help. So, The Nature Conservancy stepped in to provide a loan to acquire the parcel in its first land protection deal in 1954.

“The Nature Conservancy was born in New York. We were founded on science, collaboration and partnerships, a businesslike approach, and a focus on producing tangible, lasting results,” says Bill Ulfelder, Executive Director of The Nature Conservancy in New York. “Gloria and our

founders were motivated by the benefits of nature and an appreciation of its value for all of us. I’m proud of the leadership demonstrated then, as well as the leadership the New York division continues to exhibit today. As we evolve as an organization and strive to tackle the greatest challenges of our time, we are committed to uphold and expand upon the legacy Gloria and our founders began.”

As for Gloria, she continued the work that was so close to her heart as the secretary, chairman and eventually, chairman emeritus of the Mianus River Gorge Conservation Committee. Today, we continue in her spirit by using the preserve as a “living laboratory”—a place where innovative research is taking place to study climate change, forest carbon and more.

The Mianus River Gorge Preserve has grown from 60 to more than 700 acres. In 1964, it became the nation’s first National Natural Landmark. And it’s a great example of source-water protection as the Mianus River provides clean drinking water, with little filtration, to over 100,000 nearby residents.

The Mianus River Gorge Preserve is a memorial to the beauty and the power of nature, Gloria’s perseverance and foresight, and The Nature Conservancy’s mission to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

Conservation and Communities

We sat down with Marcela Maldonado, one of The Nature Conservancy's Preserve Coordinators in New York to get her perspectives on current events as they relate to conservation.

What do you see as your biggest aha moment in recent times related to conservation and communities?

During Covid-19, the week the stay-at-home orders were issued for New York, our preserves across the state were very busy. People coming from dawn to dusk. Our trail counter later confirmed that visitation increased by three times to the prior year. Not many of the people coming were Black or people of color. As a land manager of color, this moment forced me to explore and deconstruct how we, the environmental movement and land management organizations, both protect and provide access to land. As stewards of this land, we must provide equitable access to traditionally excluded demographics and protect the ecological health and resource sustainability of the preserves we manage. Access and protection are not mutually exclusive. In fact, creating equitable access without responsible stewardship is dooming equitable access to fail.

What are some of the issues limiting access and equity?

There are many barriers to access: for example where preserves are located, how to get there and how outdoor spaces are designed and maintained. Limited uses exclude how many cultures experience nature. Add to that racism and acts of discrimination in nature, etc. Even before the pandemic hit these barriers were having real impacts on access. In fact, the 2010 National Park Service Visitor Services Project and the 2018 Outdoor Industry Association Participation Report showed non-white users were underrepresented in the National Parks and in outdoor recreation in general. The

people who are most impacted by lack of access to nature are also those who have been systematically excluded from outdoor spaces and nature and, ironically who would benefit most from access.

As a land-owning organization, we need to have a real conversation about where our preserves are located, how hard they are to get to, and how they are managed. We need to examine how these facts and practices are part of the reason why inequities in access exist. Only then can we start to bridge the gap in how people of all races and ethnicities are able to access and use outdoor spaces and nature.

What are some things that we can change in terms of how our preserves better serve local communities?

Modern land stewardship must rise to meet modern challenges. The good news is The Nature Conservancy in New York is working on putting many of these actions into play. The way I see it, there are three principles guiding our work:

- 1. Manage for sustainable, not idealized, use**
- 2. Embrace a wider idea of what nature and outdoor spaces look like and who they serve; and**
- 3. Prioritize communities that have been historically excluded and invest in equity of access.**

With all of these measures in place we can offer the best experience of nature to a wide variety of people and inspire the next generation of conservationist to get involved.

Google "Modern Land Stewardship Requires a Modern Philosophy by Marcela Maldonado" to learn more.

"In 2020 we are dealing with a reckoning. Covid-19 has laid bare the inequities in every aspect of our society and they are impossible to ignore. This reckoning is happening everywhere and that includes outdoor spaces and nature."

– Marcela Maldonado





© Ben Herndon

Conservancy Preserves are Crucial to Science and Solace

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.



© William Madden



For more information, visit nature.org/newyork



© 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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in New York and in more than 70
countries around the world, join a
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depend on
depends on us.**

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