

NEWS FROM THE ADIRONDACKS FALL/WINTER 2024

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# Adirondacks Update

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE NATURE CONSERVANCY:

The Nature Conservancy Donates  
Petty Homestead to The Wild Center  
Protecting the Waterways That Connect Us  
Hope for Trees in Peril

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# Dear Friends of the Adirondacks,



Theresa Patterson and Angie Gugino, Wild Center interns at Follensby. © The Wild Center

Summer in the Adirondacks seems to pass too quickly. But we Adirondackers know how to pack a lot of hiking, paddling and swimming into a short amount of time.

That’s also how we approach what we call ‘field season’ here, squeezing in as much outdoor work as we can before the quiet of winter sets in. This year, that’s meant developing new projects and partnerships at Follensby Pond.

Under a new agreement with New York State that was finalized in June, The Nature Conservancy retains ownership of Follensby Pond, which it has stewarded for 16 years, and New York State acquired two conservation easements—one for the Follensby Pond area and one for the Raquette River area. Together, they constitute one of the largest land protection projects in New York State in recent years.

This means that nearly 6,000 acres of land are now open for the public to enjoy on the western shore of the Raquette River.

Through the easements, the New York Department of Environmental Conservation and The Nature Conservancy also established a science consortium with federal, state and academic partners to collaborate on research and guide the ecological care of the freshwater research preserve at Follensby Pond. We are working with the state to examine global models for the consortium and convening our partners to chart the research agenda.

Over the summer, we deepened our partnership with the renowned Wild Center, a mile down the road from Follensby. Together we worked with two SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry students who interned there to develop educational and interpretive materials for guided trips into Follensby.

We’re also learning more about Traditional Ecological Knowledge at Follensby. We visited its wetlands with Keeley Jock, the Adirondack North Country Association climate justice fellow, who wrote their undergraduate thesis on Indigenous Knowledge informing the Environmental Protection Agency’s standard wetland assessments. These assessments prioritize wetland sites and help improve regulations for highly impacted wetlands. Using data from the wetlands at Follensby and other locations, Keeley included medicinal and ceremonial uses of plants to rank wetlands and to demonstrate how traditional knowledge combined with Western science could lead to expanded protections.

Follensby Pond has so many scientific, environmental, cultural and historical threads that together weave a tapestry of boundless learning opportunities for The Nature Conservancy, our partners and all who will visit this landscape for study and inspiration. Learn more at <https://bit.ly/follensby>.

Sincerely,

Peg R. Olsen  
Director



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# The Nature Conservancy Donates Petty Homestead to The Wild Center

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We're honoring two champions of Adirondack conservation, Clarence Petty, who died at age 104 in 2010, and his son, Edward "Ed" Petty, who passed away in May at age 77.

Clarence grew up living mostly off the land and became a fervent protector of the Adirondack Park. In the early 1970s, he paddled his canoe along more than 1,300 miles of rivers and streams to map the most remote regions of the park, data that later led to their protection. He also helped found the Adirondack Council, becoming its first director, and he served on many Adirondack boards, including at The Nature Conservancy. A number of environmental organizations in the Adirondacks, including The Nature Conservancy, the Adirondack Council and the Adirondack Land Trust, still host an annual Clarence Petty internship for young people who are interested in a career in conservation.

On the hundredth anniversary of the Adirondack Park, there were strong tensions and differences of opinion over preservation vs. development of the park. Clarence shared his thoughts with CBS News Sunday Morning:

"One philosophy says, 'I own the land, I pay taxes on it, so I can do whatever I like with it.' The other philosophy says, 'I'm only a temporary custodian of the land, but there are thousands of others who are going to own it in the future, and I have an obligation to those people who come after me.' That's the

difference between the two sides in the controversy in the Adirondacks today."

Clarence and Ed followed through on the latter when they donated the Petty family homestead in Tupper Lake to The Nature Conservancy in 2007. The property was designated as a "tradeland," and the plan was to sell the house upon Ed's passing with the proceeds to benefit The Nature Conservancy. But in the last few years of Ed's life, Peg Olsen, Adirondack director, and Ed worked together to change this plan and instead of selling it as a tradeland (and receiving the proceeds) The Nature Conservancy would donate the property to the Wild Center to be used for housing summer interns, visiting scientists and lecturers, and others involved in environmental study and protection.

Ed was a beloved educator, family historian and a passionate conservationist. This tangible gift perfectly honors the Petty legacy since the property will be devoted to environmental education and building community in the Adirondacks.

"I had many conversations with Ed before his passing, and I know he would be thrilled that his vision for their homestead is now becoming a reality," says Olsen. "I think Clarence would be happy with this outcome too, and I know the Wild Center will continue the Petty legacy of being mindful custodians of this land."



Clarence and Ed Petty. © The Petty Family





Brian Greene, APIPP aquatic invasive species coordinator, leads a volunteer training. © APIPP

# Protecting the Waterways That Connect Us

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It's amazing to consider how the rainwater that falls on the Adirondack region is destined to flow into one of five major waterways—Lake Champlain or the Hudson, Mohawk, Black and Saint Lawrence rivers—all of which eventually flow into the Atlantic Ocean. Along the way, those little water molecules may tumble down steep mountainsides or shimmer in the deepest valleys as they pass through any number of the 12,600 wetlands, ponds, lakes and streams of the Adirondacks. It is an epic journey that connects landscapes and impacts people, plants and wildlife.

But the majestic landscape through which these water drops flow is more vulnerable than it looks. Freshwater systems face significant threats from diminished water quality, habitat degradation and invasive species. In fact, their biodiversity is considered to be the most negatively impacted in the world. Invasives in particular do damage by degrading water quality, altering habitats, modifying food webs and reducing native biodiversity, as well as ruining recreational opportunities and costing property owners and municipalities money.

## **The Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program**

To help reduce the threat of invasive species to our waters and other natural systems, New York State launched the Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program (APIPP) more than 25 years ago. APIPP's funding is administered by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Along with another program working on invasives, Saint

Lawrence–Eastern Lake Ontario, APIPP is hosted by The Nature Conservancy in New York. APIPP's work is focused on the Adirondacks, but efforts here resonate through other ecosystems and landscapes because the waterways are all connected.

An invasive species is non-native to the ecosystem and causes harm to the environment, economy or human health. Invasive species are usually kept in check in their native habitats by predators, parasites or diseases. But when they enter a new area, they don't face these restrictions, which can give them a significant advantage over native species.

APIPP works to protect bodies of water in the Adirondacks by building partnerships with like-minded organizations and training volunteers to identify and report the presence of invasive species. To date, APIPP has worked with over 3,000 volunteers and partners who submitted more than 2,200 surveys of 499 bodies of water across the Adirondacks. Thanks to their dedication and passion, APIPP has been able to gather community-science data on where aquatic invasive species are distributed across the landscape.

Saint Lawrence–Eastern Lake Ontario has recently started a similar program, which means volunteers are monitoring bodies of water throughout the entire northern region of New York State. This work to survey and protect important freshwater resources helps The Nature Conservancy achieve our goal of protecting and connecting fresh water across New York and the entire region.



## Community Involvement Is Key

Becoming a Lake Protector with APIPP is easy. First, volunteers attend a training. Then they choose a body of water to monitor in summer or fall and report their findings. Lake Protectors learn how to identify a number of the invasive aquatic species that are common in the Adirondack region. They also learn how to scout an area for invasives, record data and report their findings using iMapInvasives, New York State's online invasive species database.

Debbie Schwarting has been involved in the program since its inception. Her first report of Sprague Pond was submitted on August 4, 2002, and she has volunteered every year thereafter—22 years total.

If you ask Debbie why she volunteers, her response is simple: She has seen firsthand the damage that invasive species can cause, and volunteering is a way to spend a day outdoors with purpose.

"The greatest benefit of the Lake Protectors program is the people. We are empowering people to be stewards of the waterbodies they love," says Brian Greene, APIPP aquatic invasive species coordinator. "Our volunteers are emotionally connected to these lakes—it may be where their kids learned to swim or where their families gather every summer—and by volunteering, they get to give back and help take care of these waters."

The positive impact of APIPP's Lake Protectors speaks for itself. Thanks in part to volunteers like Debbie, 73% of Adirondack lakes are free of aquatic invasive species. APIPP's work helps ensure a future with healthy and resilient freshwater systems for the people, plants and wildlife that depend on them.



Brian Greene presents Debbie Schwarting with the 2023 APIPP Volunteer Achievement Award. © APIPP

## Aquatic Invasive Species of Concern

Here are a few aquatic invasive species to look out for on your next paddle. Learn more at <https://adkinvasives.com>



Frog bit. © APIPP



Eurasian Watermilfoil. © APIPP



Water Chesnuts. © APIPP



# Hope for Trees in Peril

*Excerpted from a nature.org feature by Eric Aldrich*

Some of North America's iconic tree species are dying in waves across the land. They're succumbing to a myriad of non-native pests and pathogens, such as emerald ash borer and hemlock woolly adelgid. These pests are capable of removing entire species of trees from whole regions in decades.

This has huge implications for both forests and people. The potential loss of these trees will have impacts on wildlife, local economies, regional culture and our forests' ability to help fight climate change. Healthy forests that once harbored wildlife and stored large amounts of carbon can transition into thickets of invasive plants in just a few years after pest infestations sweep through. Due to the introduction of non-native pests, our forests are experiencing unprecedented damage from these insects and diseases at a time when protecting and restoring forests is one of our most important options for addressing climate change.

As pests and diseases spread, researchers are racing for ways to save the affected tree species. One approach centers on the fact that some individual trees manage to survive these threats. These "lingering trees" may have genetic resistance to the pests and pathogens—which means they might be the key to cultivating resistant trees that can grow into future healthy forests.

The Nature Conservancy and the USDA Forest Service are closely collaborating with experts from academia, research organizations and other committed partners to monitor, research and breed pest-resistant American beech, American elm, Eastern hemlock, and three of the most imperiled North American ash species.



Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program Director Tammara Van Ryn researching Eastern hemlock trees. © Jerry and Marcy Monkman/EcoPhotography

Growing trees is a slow process. It's even more complicated and time-consuming when it's combined with efforts to breed resistant trees. We have a long way to go, but we've made early progress, and scientists are enthusiastic and hopeful for large-scale success.



## Searching for Trees Resistant to Pests and Disease

These so-called “lingering trees,” a term first coined by USDA Forest Service researchers who discovered lingering ash trees, are mature individuals that have stayed healthy after most of the other trees have died in the same area. They have some genetic ability to resist the pest or pathogen that’s attacking that species. Genetic studies by the Forest Service have shown that selective breeding of lingering ash, elm and beech trees can yield trees that are more able to resist threats. Similar studies are ongoing in hemlock.

For example, in 2023, under the leadership of the New York State Hemlock Initiative and the Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program, a partnership program hosted by The Nature Conservancy in the Adirondacks, scientists developed a monitoring and management protocol specifically for hemlock. This new research tool will allow us to systematically search for lingering hemlock across a variety of landscapes. Similar ongoing efforts have been successful at locating many long-term surviving elm and beech.

The need for local knowledge and the urgency of this work is especially clear to the Indigenous Peoples living and working where these trees are being lost to forest pests. Tribal Nations such as the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe near the Saint Lawrence River are working to protect these trees, as are Tribal-partnered research groups, like the Ash Protection Collaboration Across Wabanakik from the University of Maine. Finding lingering ash, collecting seeds and building awareness can help safeguard this tree species that plays important roles in Indigenous cultures, including creation stories and basket-making.

## Breeding Trees Resistant to Pests and Pathogens

By collecting dormant twigs from lingering trees, then grafting them onto root stock, scientists can make genetically identical copies of each lingering tree. With many copies, researchers can conduct many tests.

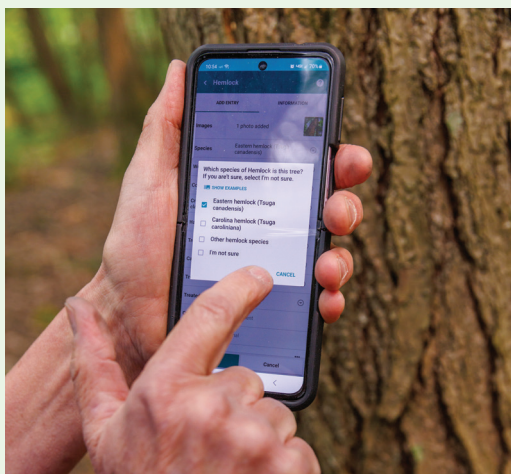
Trees—just like people—have natural defense mechanisms to fight off threats to their health. So, as researchers keep testing and breeding their best trees with other best trees, they’re seeing results. For instance, when scientists place emerald ash borer eggs on test saplings, they see that some ash trees are killing the larvae within them.

When researchers are confident they’ve developed trees with significant resistance, full nurseries of trees that will resist invasive species can be created.

Ultimately, the partnerships that we seed now will determine how forests are restored in the future.

Learn more: <https://bit.ly/treesinperil>.

*This project is made possible with generous funding from the Manton Foundation.*



## The TreeSnap App

Scientists alone can’t possibly find all of the trees that may be surviving threats of invasive diseases and pests throughout North America. They need your help!

One great tool for this challenge is TreeSnap, a mobile app that lets users virtually tag trees in their community, on their property, or out in the wild. Scientists can access and use the data for research projects. Search for “TreeSnap” in your app store to join in.



## New Recreational Opportunities on the Raquette River



Enjoy public access to nearly 6,000 acres along the Raquette River, for the first time in over a century! This section of the Raquette River is part of the iconic Northern Forest Canoe Trail and a portion of the longest canoe route in the Adirondacks, which runs 90 miles between Old Forge and Saranac Lake. It includes a beautiful and extensive stretch of silver maple floodplain forest and other wild areas that have been historically off limits to the public.

At the Raquette River Recreational Access Conservation Easement Tract, you can also enjoy camping, picnicking, hiking, hunting and fishing.

Learn more:  
<https://bit.ly/raquetteeasement>