



# New York

2024 Impact Report

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

# Dear Friends,

Thanks to your support, 2024 was a remarkable year for The Nature Conservancy—in New York and beyond. In these critical times, we are steadfast in our commitment to create a livable climate, healthy communities and thriving nature. We are a collaborative, nonpartisan organization driven by science and leading the way for a resilient future. In this report, you will read how we're seizing the opportunity to deliver on this vision through our ambitious 2030 goals.

I am incredibly proud of what we have achieved together this year. Here are just a few examples:

- **We celebrated the landmark passage of Proposition 2 in Suffolk County**—an initiative more than a decade in the making. This legislation will replace polluting septic systems with clean water technology, greatly improve water quality and help fish and shellfish rebound on Long Island.
- **We successfully advocated for New York City to set an ambitious new goal of 30% tree canopy cover by 2035** and to define trees as critical infrastructure. We will focus on getting trees into neighborhoods that suffer the most from sweltering heat and other climate impacts.

- **We protected the inimitable 14,600-acre Follensby landscape in the Adirondacks** through a new conservation deal. The agreement creates a first-of-its-kind freshwater preserve and science consortium to guide stewardship strategies in a climate-changing world, and it guarantees Indigenous Peoples' access for cultural uses.

Beyond New York, our strong partnerships established Eternal Mongolia, the largest land and freshwater protection agreement in The Nature Conservancy's history. The project conserves 30% of that country and saves one of the world's most intact and connected temperate grasslands—as well as sweeping sand dunes, rugged mountains, pristine lakes and over 13,000 kilometers of winding rivers. This milestone initiative protects millions of acres of land and fresh water, supports rare wildlife and provides a secure environmental and economic future for Mongolians.

The Nature Conservancy in New York is building on the strong history of success that you made possible. These achievements are monumental and remind us of the incredible power we have when we work together. Thank you for making a real difference.



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



## FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD

When I was elected Chair of The Nature Conservancy's New York Board of Trustees, I was humbled by the chance to lead New York in this pivotal moment. As we tackle the twin crises of climate change and species loss, I am more encouraged than ever by the victories we are delivering for nature.



In New York, we are using innovative methods of financing, accelerating land protection and tapping into the power of land trusts, Indigenous Nations and partners to achieve conservation success in new and monumental ways.

Guided by science, The Nature Conservancy in New York made historic strides this year in our mission to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends, including:

- **Protecting a staggering 10,600 acres in the vast Appalachian corridor** through the Resilient and Connected Appalachians Grant Program, which is modeled on our successful grant program here in New York.
- **Celebrating a milestone of 20 years of conservation at Great South Bay**, where our commitment to conservation has helped shellfish populations show positive signs of recovery and brought sweeping improvements to water quality across Long Island.
- **Expanding our Indigenous Partnerships Program**, which works toward right relations and collaborations in conservation—such as developing a network that supports cultural activities on our New York preserves.

As you read the following stories, know that these inspiring conservation wins are not possible without your unwavering support. We rely on friends like you, time and again, to help protect our lands and waters for a brighter future—here in New York and around the world.

Time is short, but our path forward to achieving our 2030 goals is clear. And our decades of leadership have shown us that we move most effectively when we work together. Thank you for joining us in the fight for our natural world. Together, we can show the rest of the nation and world what's possible when people like you support our important work.

With thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eich Kuwana'.

Eich Kuwana,  
*New York Chair of the Board*

LEFT TO RIGHT © A. Graziano Photography;  
© Courtesy of Eich Kuwana

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**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
**Our 2030 Goals.**

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## POLICY

# Achieving Policy Wins for Nature

Thanks to your support, our policy team consistently delivers key legislative wins in New York. After years of hard work, we are thrilled to celebrate the passage of Proposition 2 in Suffolk County this Election Day. This successful ballot initiative will restore clean water to Suffolk County by modernizing wastewater infrastructure and conserving open space and wildlife habitats.

Last spring, we helped secure record funding for environmental programs. We ran a campaign, in partnership with others, to defeat state budget proposals that would have diverted environmental funding and reduced the budget for clean water projects by half.

“Working closely with legislative leaders and partners, we made a strong case for the Environmental Protection Fund and the Clean Water Infrastructure Act. Both programs were restored in the final budget,” says Jessica Ottney Mahar, policy and strategy director for The Nature Conservancy in New York. “This year’s \$500 million for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act brings the state’s total investment in this program to \$5.5 billion since 2017, and with \$400 million in annual funding for the Environmental Protection Fund, communities can continue to protect the land and water that New Yorkers depend on.”

### Protecting Public Funding in New York

After advocating for landmark programs such as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Clean Water, Clean Air and Green Jobs Environmental Bond

Act, we are focused on driving unprecedented public funding to projects that protect nature and tackle climate change. To seize this moment, we work with state and local officials to overcome barriers that slow the distribution of public funding to communities. The positive impacts of this work are felt in every corner of the state and will make a pivotal difference for New York’s future.

### Getting Green Roofs to More Communities

New York City’s rooftops are an untapped resource. Green roofs—roofs with vegetation integrated into them—reduce stormwater runoff and energy use while lowering temperatures and providing wildlife habitat. Last spring, we successfully advocated for the extension and expansion of the green roof tax credit program in New York City. We also pushed for incentives to increase participation in areas that face greater challenges with stormwater management and the urban heat island effect.

### Accelerating Clean Energy While Protecting Nature

As we build the clean energy economy in New York, we must minimize impacts on communities, critical wildlife habitat and working lands. Our *Power of Place* national report outlines pathways for reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 while avoiding impacts to sensitive natural and working lands. We are working with key partners from the energy, agriculture, local government and business sectors to develop a similar report for New York.



## FRESH WATER

# Charting a Course for Clean Water

The Nature Conservancy's acquisition of the 13,425-acre Bluepoints Bottomlands 20 years ago was a critical moment in our journey to restore Great South Bay. At the time, it was the largest underwater land acquisition in our organization's history. As the preserve celebrates its 20th anniversary, we reflect on the catalytic action our supporters made possible here and across New York's waters.

The story of Bluepoints Bottomlands is one of unexpected discoveries and a shift in focus. Initially, our goal was to field test a hypothesis: Could rebuilding the clam population in the bay help bring it back to life? After years of restoration, monitoring and research, we learned that to restore the bay, we needed to address nitrogen pollution leaching from septic systems and fertilizers. These were the leading causes of water quality decline and required a drastic shift in our approach.

### Using Science to Understand the Problem

"Nitrogen and other pollutants had been leaking into the ground and ultimately flowing into our creeks and bays for decades, causing symptoms like harmful algae blooms that were slowly harming our waters and everything in them," explains Carl LoBue,

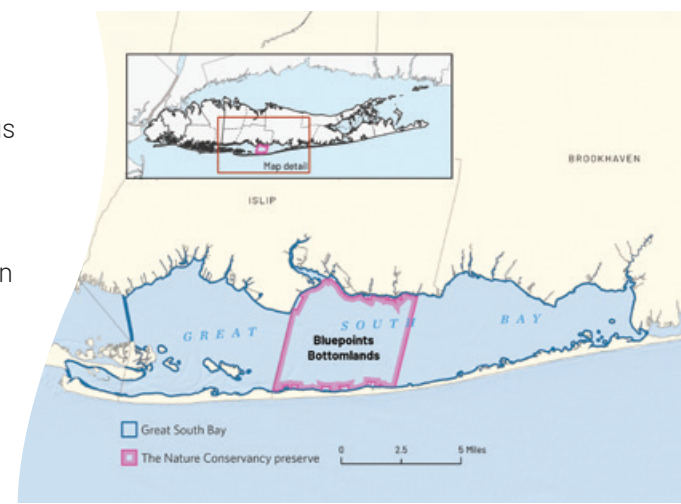
The Nature Conservancy's oceans director in New York. "It became clear that this was a threat across Long Island."

Addressing pollution at its source became our highest priority; we partnered with other advocates and state and local governments to develop and implement innovative solutions.

### Stemming the Tide on Nitrogen Pollution

With your support, our efforts have yielded tremendous results. By forming partnerships and working in coalitions, we advocated for landmark environmental restoration and policy initiatives. This Election Day, voters in Suffolk County passed a \$6 billion proposition to restore clean water. The fund provides \$4 billion to modernize wastewater infrastructure and protect Long Island's waters from nitrogen pollution and \$2 billion to protect clean drinking water by conserving open space and wildlife habitats.

Results extend far beyond Bluepoints and Great South Bay. Our work is a model for restoring shellfish, fin fish and other marine life across the island. And across the country, coastal communities can now look to Long Island's story as an important model of what can be achieved when people come together across political parties and points of view for something as essential as clean water.



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**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
Long Island's \$6 Billion  
Clean Water Victory

## PEOPLE

# Bringing People Closer to Nature Through Accessible Trails

Spending time outdoors offers many proven physical and mental health benefits, including reducing stress, increasing vitamin D, providing opportunities for social bonding and giving people a break from screens.

With your support, The Nature Conservancy is working across New York to help people of all abilities to connect with—and get into—nature. We are transforming a number of our preserves by adding accessible infrastructure and shared-use trails, and we are working with community groups to break down barriers so that more people can access nature.

“By getting more people outdoors in nature, we provide a greater appreciation for the natural world and encourage more people to want to protect it,” says Mathew Levine,

director of stewardship for The Nature Conservancy in New York. “In attracting a wider variety of nature enthusiasts to our preserves, we can help more communities learn about the importance of conservation, while also safeguarding these important places for generations to come.”

### Advancing Partnerships for Equitable Access

In a survey commissioned by The Nature Conservancy, respondents who reported having spent no or limited time in nature cited obstacles such as lack of transportation, concerns about safety, and unfamiliarity or low confidence with trail markers and maps.

To help address some of these barriers, The Nature Conservancy is learning from and partnering with organizations such as Latino Outdoors, Hunters of Color and Outdoor Afro who are leaders in tackling inequities in access to nature. Together, we offer educational programming at our preserves designed to build community and meet people’s needs.



### Engaging Communities with Different Needs

With your support, we are pleased to offer varied experiences in nature for people with diverse needs. We are providing options for more people—such as accessible biking trails at Hickory Ridge Preserve in Naples, New York, so that bikers using adaptive bikes can have enjoyable experiences on the trail.

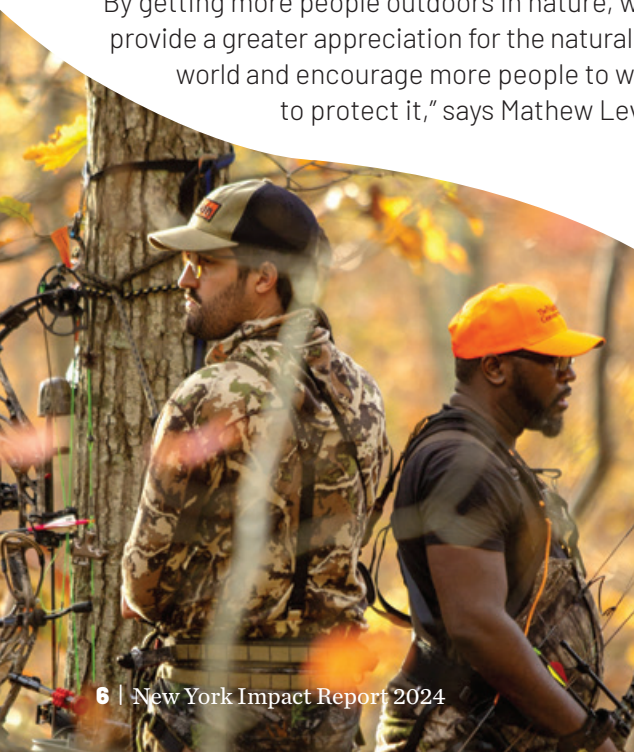
### We are excited about new accessibility features at several Nature Conservancy preserves in New York, made possible by your generosity, including:

- Boquet River Nature Preserve in Willsboro
- Thompson Pond Preserve in Pine Plains
- Uplands Farm Sanctuary in Cold Spring Harbor
- Wolf Swamp Preserve in Southampton
- Mashomack Preserve on Shelter Island
- Moss Lake Preserve in Houghton
- Hickory Ridge Preserve in Naples

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**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
Equitable Access to  
the Outdoors

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## CLIMATE

# Accelerating Reforestation in New York

Forests provide so many benefits. They filter more than half of our water supply, offer opportunities for recreation and provide critical wildlife habitat. With your support, we are harnessing the power of trees for all those reasons—and for their unmatched ability to absorb millions of tons of carbon now and for future generations.

Trees pull carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, helping to cool our planet. Relative to other natural climate solutions, reforestation (or planting trees) offers the most effective opportunity to sequester and store large amounts of carbon. In recognition of this, New York State made an ambitious commitment to plant 25 million trees by 2033. Currently, we are planting fewer than 1,000 acres of trees annually, so we have an incredible opportunity to magnify this effort.

“Nature is critical to meeting climate goals,” says Michelle Brown, senior conservation scientist for The Nature Conservancy in New York. “New York State established a bold climate agenda and now we need to think expansively about seed collection, nursery capacity, workforce training, tree planting and maintenance, and landowner incentives and outreach. Furthermore, reforestation is costly, and there is no ‘silver bullet’ for how to fund this massive undertaking.”

### Testing a Hypothesis for Change

The Nature Conservancy concluded that the best way to accelerate reforestation and meet the state’s audacious goal is to start testing practices in the field.

Thanks to your support, we are jump-starting tree planting while we assess and plan a model for scaling our work across the state. Over the next year, we will work with landowners and nurseries to plant between 300 and 600 acres of land with up to 300,000 trees. We are collaborating with organizations that have strong ties to New York State and a focus on natural climate solutions. In tandem, we will use what we learn to drastically increase tree planting to reach New York’s 2040 goal, groundbreaking work that will be a model for the rest of the country.

### Planting Seeds for Success

Climate change demands that we think big and work quickly. With your support, we can tackle climate change, plant trees that absorb millions of tons of carbon, and ensure critical habitats now and for the future.



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**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
**Restoring Forests**

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## OCEAN

# Saving Coastlines and Communities

Climate change creates warmer seas and more frequent, intense storms. But nature offers powerful solutions to adapt to these changes. Healthy and thriving coastal habitat, which harbors marine life and shelters communities from flooding, is increasingly important to our new reality. With your generous support, The Nature Conservancy is making major strides in restoring the ocean's health and protecting New York's coastline.

Salt marshes play a critical role in filtering water, supporting the coastal food web and absorbing wave energy, but many of these habitats, especially on the coast of Long Island, are degraded and need our help. Chronic nitrogen pollution from septic systems and sewers compromises salt marshes' ability to resist erosion. Sea-level rise is accelerating, and tidal marshes are essentially drowning. Without healthy marshes and wetlands, our water quality deteriorates, species lack the habitat they need and coastal communities are more vulnerable to flooding.

"By restoring salt marshes and seagrasses now, we can help communities mitigate future risk," explains Alison Branco, New York's climate adaptation director. "For those already on the frontlines of climate change, we are working to prevent loss of life, damage and economic impacts from flooding, and we're turning flood-prone

land into community assets like parks and green space."

### Protecting the Saltmarsh Sparrow

One indicator of marsh health is the saltmarsh sparrow. This threatened songbird lives only in healthy tidal marshes and links its nesting behavior with the moon/tide cycle. The Nature Conservancy has confirmed that saltmarsh sparrows are successfully breeding in Accabonac Harbor in East Hampton and on other Nature Conservancy-owned lands across Long Island, an encouraging sign in our climate-changing world.

We anticipate an exciting federal grant that—when combined with private support—will allow us to implement marsh restoration at Accabonac Harbor to help this system keep up with sea-level rise.

### Teaming Up for Nature and People

We bring back healthy salt marshes through what we do best: collaboration. We help local partners develop and implement plans to restore salt marshes by using shared techniques, building local capacity and collaborating with on-the-ground leaders—at the pace needed to protect our coasts and communities.

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**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
Restoring Coasts





## FRESH WATER

# Protecting Follensby Pond Through a Historic Deal

Nestled deep in the Adirondacks, Follensby Pond has been under the care of The Nature Conservancy since 2008. Thanks to the unwavering dedication of supporters like you, we have achieved lasting conservation with far-reaching impacts at this extraordinary 14,600-acre landscape (roughly the size of Manhattan).

By working closely with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and other partners, we reached a historic agreement this year in which The Nature Conservancy retains ownership of the property, New York State acquires two conservation easements, and a freshwater research preserve will be established as a center for scientific inquiry.

### Research to Address Climate Change

Freshwater ecosystems are some of the most threatened habitats on Earth—monitored populations of freshwater species have declined by an average of 83% since 1970. With cold, deep

and highly oxygenated waters, diverse populations of freshwater fish, mineral-rich bedrock, a healthy surrounding forest and more than 1,400 acres of wetlands, Follensby Pond is something of a freshwater marvel.

That's why we're establishing an 8,660-acre freshwater research preserve and a science consortium made up of federal, state and academic partners for monitoring and addressing the impacts of climate change while providing a refuge for cold-water fish, plants and animals.

### New Public Access and Recreational Opportunities

The conservation easements established through the deal also offer new opportunities for public recreation.

"We're thrilled to report that for the first time in over a century, 6,000 acres are open for new public

access, and new camping, hunting and fishing opportunities are available along 10 miles of the Raquette River," says Peg Olsen, The Nature Conservancy's Adirondacks director.

### Restoring Indigenous Relationships with the Land

The easements are also precedent setting because they create unique access for Indigenous Peoples' cultural practices, holding ceremonies and gathering medicinal plants. In partnership with the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry's Center for Native Peoples and the Environment, we have also been co-creating more honest narratives of Indigenous Peoples' relationship with Follensby Pond.

### Enriching Educational Experiences

The Nature Conservancy is committed to providing educational experiences at Follensby that foster a deeper understanding of the critical role nature plays in our everyday lives. By collaborating with the renowned Wild Center, which has been at the forefront of climate change education, and with other organizations, we will develop educational and interpretive opportunities that inspire future advocates for nature.

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**LEARN MORE ABOUT:  
Follensby Pond**



## PEOPLE

# Strengthening Our Indigenous Partnerships Program

The Nature Conservancy acknowledges that during our history we have failed to adequately understand and incorporate the rights and views of Indigenous Peoples into our work. With your support, we are building our capacity and competency by formalizing our Indigenous Partnerships Program in New York.

We recognize that the 160 nature preserves we manage and care for in New York were—and

continue to be—part of Indigenous Peoples’ ancestral territory. Our team is analyzing these lands to identify opportunities for providing access, developing co-management models, including Indigenous knowledge and viewpoints, and returning land to Tribal management.

### Cultural Provisioning Network

Using data from this land analysis, we’re developing a cultural provisioning network for our New York preserves by strengthening relationships with Indigenous communities and providing space for them to connect to the land and access resources. Traditional activities range from gathering berries and medicines to hunting and fishing to sourcing black ash trees that are essential to the cultural preservation of basketmaking.

This year, our program was awarded a New York State Conservation Partnership Program grant through the Environmental Protection Fund to support this transformative network. Grants like these, combined with private support, ensure our ability to deepen and expand this work.

### Telling a More Honest Story

Through our partnership with SUNY’s Center for Native Peoples and the Environment, we are also focused on a Biocultural Re-Storyation effort to co-create a more honest narrative about the places we’ve helped protect, while restoring Indigenous Peoples’ access to and caretaking of their ancestral homelands.

Follensby Pond in the Adirondacks serves as the pilot project. Notably, this year’s historic agreement to protect Follensby included precedent-setting easements we negotiated that create unique access for Indigenous Peoples’ cultural practices and show how conservation can include positive cross-cultural impacts.

**Collectively, Indigenous communities manage at least 25% of the world’s lands, and research shows that their stewardship sustains more biodiversity than government-protected areas.**

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**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
Right Relations

LEFT TO RIGHT Faithkeeper Ruchatneet Printup (Tuscarora), Chief Brennen Ferguson (Tuscarora), Activist and Faithkeeper Oren Lyons (Onondaga, Seneca), TNC CEO Jen Morris and Bill Ulfelder. © Amanda Ely/TNC; The Shinnecock Kelp Farmers, a multi-generational, women-led non-profit, is expanding their kelp hatchery and farm in Southampton, NY © Kate Frazer/TNC; Cultural Provisioning can help sustain the Indigenous practice of basketmaking by supplying black ash trees. © Eric Aldrich/TNC

## CLIMATE

# Growing a Greener, Climate-Ready New York City

Across New York City, more than seven million trees grow in sidewalk tree beds, public parks, yards, and around the places where we live, work and play. Almost nine million people rely on this urban forest to clean and cool the air. Yet our most vulnerable communities do not benefit from trees equitably. With your support, our cities program in New York is working to change that.

“In 2023, in an unanimous vote by New York City Council, we secured two significant legislative wins for the urban forest: enshrining trees as critical infrastructure and setting a goal of 30% forest canopy cover,” says Tami Lin-Moges, director of The Nature Conservancy’s Cities Program in New York. “With these historic accomplishments, we continued our momentum to achieve a more expansive, equitable urban forest and other green spaces for all New Yorkers.”

We convened Forest for All NYC, bringing together a diverse coalition of business, nonprofit, conservation and environmental justice organizations. Our shared agenda aims to better protect, maintain and expand the New York City urban forest to benefit all New Yorkers. Since that time, the coalition has increased in

size to nearly 160 members, and we are working to sustain its momentum and ensure that the city reaches 30% canopy cover by 2035.

### Advancing the NYC Urban Forest Plan

To implement 2023’s landmark legislation, New York City must create a long-term Urban Forest Plan outlining how to reach 30% canopy cover in an equitable way. The Nature Conservancy and the Forest for All NYC coalition are working with the Mayor’s Office of Climate and Environmental Justice to leverage the expertise of this diverse coalition and ensure that the Plan centers equity and our other priorities.

In addition, The Nature Conservancy is analyzing geographic data available for the first time since 2017 to understand how the distribution of the urban forest and other green infrastructure such as green roofs is changing. We are producing materials that communicate these changes to help communities gain more access to the benefits of nature.

This year, we created fact sheets about the tree canopy for every City Council District and Community District. Each fact sheet includes information about canopy cover and how it compares citywide, as well as opportunities for increasing canopy in each area. Your support is making a real difference as we work for a greener, more resilient New York City.



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**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
The New York City Urban Forest

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## LAND

# Appalachian Vision: Conservation on a Continental Scale

Stretching 2,000 miles from Alabama to Canada—and running right through New York—the Appalachian range is important locally and globally in a changing climate. This rugged chain of mountains, valleys and fresh water stores 22% of the forest carbon in the contiguous United States and provides drinking water for 36 million people. It’s one of the most biologically important areas in the world, but only 20% of this globally important landscape is protected. In a rapidly

changing climate, the health and connectedness of the Appalachians are crucial for safe communities and successful wildlife migration, and vital for the jobs, drinking water, and natural beauty that define our communities and shape our quality of life.

### Nature in New York Works Across Boundaries

New York plays an outsized role in the conservation of the entire Appalachian landscape due to its remarkably large areas of intact forests, which provide quality fresh water and air, as well as healthy food and habitat for wildlife and people. However, the benefits of protecting New York’s forests reach far beyond state borders and far into the future. Because these natural networks are all connected, when we ensure that Appalachian landscapes and waterways in New York are healthy and intact, communities and nature in all five bordering states and Canada also benefit. That’s why, with your support, we’ve developed an innovative land protection model that works across boundaries and at the pace and scale climate change demands.

### Creating Resilient and Connected Landscapes at Scale

This year, New York’s Climate Resilience Grant Program will award 10 grants to partners for projects with a climate resilience focus that will conserve 2,560 acres across the state. The program also expanded into New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, awarding a total of over \$1.2 million to 27 organizations for the acquisition of 10,580 acres of resilient and connected lands.

With your continued help, funds available for this program will continue to support all of the Appalachians. Your support helps leverage decades of experience and conservation success to ensure thriving Appalachians now and forever.

LEFT TO RIGHT © Dave Shaffer/TNC Photo Contest 2022; © Kent Mason

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**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
The Appalachians

**“Together, we can increase the pace at which we connect forests and fresh water in the Appalachians to foster community resilience locally and a livable climate globally.”**

– Heather Furman, Appalachians director

## SUPPORTER PROFILE

# Kathryn Nanovic-Morlet and Emmanuel Morlet

When they were seeking a quieter pace of life, Kathryn Nanovic-Morlet and Emmanuel Morlet brought their family to Fire Island. And when they realized the Great South Bay was increasingly harmed by pollution, they wanted to help.

The Morlets found out that The Nature Conservancy was leading a groundbreaking effort to stem the nitrogen pollution harming Long Island's waters, and they joined New York's Leadership Council. Through their appreciation for The Nature

Conservancy's leadership on Long Island, they learned more about our organization's reputation as a global convener.

"We were interested in hearing about policy at all levels—how an organization can work locally and also work globally," Emmanuel says. "I was looking for that kind of big picture and trying to understand the systems involved with changing things."

Kathryn and Emmanuel both grew up loving time outdoors: she was in Connecticut, while he was in France. Today, their time with family is time spent in nature. Stressing hopefulness for their children in this climate moment is crucial to them.



"I was reading so much and getting so distressed about climate change," Kathryn says. "The only response for me personally has been to get engaged at whatever level I can to make a difference."

The Nature Conservancy's work to bring clean water, healthy coasts and important fish like menhaden back to Long Island has already made a real difference. On one recent afternoon, the Morlets spied at least one whale in the water near their Fire Island home.

"Nature's so resilient," says Kathryn. "It's really encouraging when you can see results so quickly."

## IN MEMORIAM | A TRIBUTE TO A LONGTIME LONG ISLAND TRUSTEE

# Polly Bruckmann

Anyone who knew Polly Bruckmann could attest that she loved all creatures great and small. That passion for animals, which started in her own backyard, led to lasting impact for conservation in New York and across the globe. We mourn the loss of Polly and reflect upon her extraordinary contributions to our work.

Polly initially became involved with The Nature Conservancy as one of the first volunteer piping plover stewards in East Hampton, photographing these endangered shorebirds for pleasure and purpose.

Her images helped The Nature Conservancy and the town identify breeding pairs and their nesting habits, which led to much greater protection for the species.

As one of the earliest supporters of The Nature Conservancy's South Fork-Shelter Island Chapter, Polly served as board chairperson for many years. She also chaired

several Beaches & Bays galas, the chapter's biggest annual fundraiser, and two capital campaigns, and she introduced many friends who became some of our most generous supporters.





Polly's great spirit of curiosity and commitment to conservation didn't stop there. An avid world traveler, she supported The Nature Conservancy's work in Belize and Honduras after meeting team members and seeing our on-the-ground efforts.

Back on the East End, the walls of the Center for Conservation display Polly's pictures of plovers, which sparked her lifetime love for birds and both local and global conservation.

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# 2024 IN THE NEWS

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## TOP STORIES

# RISING SEAS ENCROACH ON MARSH

Conservationists work to preserve saltmarsh sparrow

ONLY IN NEWS/DAY

BY TRACY TRAVIS  
travis@newsday.com

Saltmarsh sparrows build their tiny nests in the dense grasses of the marsh and hide them so well that Nicole Mabier, who has been studying coastal wetlands and their inhabitants for nearly 20 years, has never spotted one on her own.

The sparrows are endemic to the marshes on the East Coast — they exist nowhere else in the world. But those habitats and the birds that depend on them are quickly disappearing, in part due to the effects of a heating planet, according to experts.

As seas rise, the salt marshes, already just fragments of the great expanses of wetlands that once fringed the shorelines, are becoming islanded by higher tides and storm surges, which are flooding out the sparrows' nests.

"With the loss of high marsh habitat and increased rate of flooding of our coastal marshes, these birds' numbers are going down across their whole range," said Mabier, a senior coastal scientist at The Nature Conservancy in New York.

The population of saltmarsh sparrows has declined by 87% in the past 25 years, from about 22,000 in 1998 to roughly 20,000 today, based on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's projections. Experts fear they could be extinct by the 2050s without intensive conservation efforts. If they do disappear, they could be the first casualties of sea level rise.

The federal government is considering listing the saltmarsh sparrow under the Endangered Species Act, which would offer extra protections to the birds and their habitats. A decision is expected in September. But Javier Lorenz, an ecosystem scientist at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, is



U.S. Fish & Wildlife's Sam Aggar, of Brooklyn, holds saltmarsh sparrow before releasing it back into wild. © Flickr: newsday

not optimistic about their prospects. "I don't see much of a future for these types of environments — for the salt marshes and for the species that are so dependent on a narrow band of the marsh to exist, like the sparrows," Lorenz said. Newsday, he and other researchers at Woods Hole estimate that 90% of the world's salt marshes could be underwater by the end of the century.

Long Island conservation groups are working to prevent that grim future, monitoring chick survival rates at local preserves and state parks and restoring degraded salt marshes to improve the birds' critical nesting habitat.

**Disappearing habitat**  
A small dark-eyed saltmarsh sparrow, held in Sam Aggar's gentle grip, blinked quickly but did not struggle as the scientist measured her wing, her delicate leg bone and her beak. Aggar, a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, blew gently on the bird's belly, revealing a blood patch, a featherless area that helps females transmit body heat to their eggs.



Nicole Mabier, left, of the NY Nature Conservancy and Sam Aggar evaluate a saltmarsh sparrow.

The spot of wrinkly pink skin was good news to Aggar and the other researchers gathered in the early morning at Pine Neck Sanctuary in East

Quogue. It meant that somewhere nearby, she had built a nest amid the dense grasses and laid a clutch of eggs and in a few days, if all went well, she would be tending to hatchlings. "They are very particular,"

nest sites near enough to the boggy low marsh to discourage predators such as foxes and raccoons from raiding their nests, but far enough from the sea to avoid daily high tides.

## DROWNING MARSHES

Climate change is endangering bird habitats on Long Island.

## FOLLENSBY POND

A 14,600-acre land deal will provide new public recreational access and recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples.



## HEAT WAVES

Millions of Americans are facing major heat waves with temperatures consistently exceeding 90 degrees.

## REGION

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## Follensby Pond to open for limited use

By Gwendolyn Craig and Mike Lynch  
ADIRONDACK EXPLORER

**SARANAC LAKE** — New York state and The Nature Conservancy reached a "novel" compromise for protecting and providing public access to Follensby Pond, the 14,600-acre property near Tupper Lake where Ralph Waldo Emerson held his historic philosophers camp.

The state is under contract for two conservation easements, one providing recreational access to the Raquette River, including the Moose Creek watershed, and one protecting the 970-acre Follensby Pond and limiting its access for research.

New York is expected to pay The Nature Conservancy about \$9.3 million for the easements out of the state's Environmental



Follensby Pond, east of Tupper Lake in the Adirondacks. Carl Helman II / Courtesy Adirondack Explorer

Preserve, a consortium of environmental organizations to study the impacts of climate change on fisheries. Partners in the consortium include DEC, The Nature Conservancy, Cornell University, Paul Smith's College Adirondack Watershed Institute, State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Wildlife Service, and the Adirondack Park State Thruway Authority.

Follensby Pond is a 970-acre lake that supports a cold-water fish community that includes lake trout. The surrounding forest contains animals ranging from black bear to moose, scarlet tanager to common loon.

The conservation easement is also unique, state and Nature Conservancy officials said, because it recognizes the importance of hunting clubs in the fabric of Adirondack culture.

"This is the largest addition to the protected lands of the Adirondacks in more than a decade. And it happens to be some of the most ecologically significant land," Seggos said.

Adirondack Park Local Government Board Executive Director Gerald Delaney called the deal "carefully crafted," recognizing the importance of hunting clubs in the fabric of Adirondack culture.

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## LONG ISLAND PRESS

## Suffolk Voters Approve Proposition 2 to Improve Water Quality

By Timothy Böker

Posted on November 6, 2024



The Forge River is seen in this view, looking south from Montauk Highway in Mastic, New York, on September 8, 2016. A report on the water quality of Long Island waterways indicates the Forge River is among those in the worst shape. (Photo by John Parakevas/Newsday RM via Getty Images)

Suffolk County voters overwhelmingly passed Proposition 2 to establish a \$3-to-\$4-billion Suffolk County Water Quality Restoration Fund to expand wastewater treatment systems and replace antiquated septic systems with high-tech nitrogen removal systems.

## WATER QUALITY

Proposition 2 establishes a Suffolk County Water Quality Restoration Fund to expand wastewater treatment systems and replace antiquated septic systems with high-tech nitrogen removal systems.

# Together, We Find a Way

The Nature Conservancy has set the biggest, most ambitious goals in our history to create a livable climate, healthy communities and thriving nature. In New York, we've worked relentlessly—for 70 years—to build the foundation needed to lead in this critical moment. We're integrating policy, data, social science, economics and innovation into our work across five key areas: climate, land, ocean, fresh water and people.

And we're not doing it alone. We're listening to Indigenous leadership and frontline communities, forging approaches based on science, Traditional knowledge and our values. We're leaning into our strength as a convener and collaborator, activating the forces of our innumerable partners.

## PROTECT

Habitat loss has contributed to a 70% decline in wildlife populations since 1970. With your help, we will conserve, steward, restore and connect important lands, waters and wildlife habitat, including the globally unique Appalachian region, where we're creating resilient corridors for wildlife, helping communities prepare for climate change, and generating new jobs and recreation opportunities.

## PROVIDE

Vibrant farms, healthy fisheries and clean fresh water are critical to New York economies and ways of life. On Election Day, Suffolk County voters secured a monumental victory for clean water by overwhelmingly passing a local ballot initiative that generates billions of dollars to modernize local wastewater infrastructure and protect nature. We look forward to helping to implement this initiative, which will help bring back clean water and the island's once bountiful shellfish, seagrasses, salt marshes and wildlife.

## TACKLE

There is no challenge more urgent than climate change. What we do now will determine whether we can slow warming enough to avoid its worst impacts. With your help, we will harness the power of New York's forests, farms and coastal habitats to combat climate change. This includes massively scaling up reforestation—planting 25 million trees by 2033—to help meet New York's ambitious net zero climate goals.





# PROTECT

oceans, land and fresh water

# PROVIDE

food and water sustainably

# TACKLE

climate change

From the sandy shores of Long Island to the forested peaks of the Adirondacks to the gorges and Great Lakes of Western New York and everywhere in between, The Nature Conservancy is working to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends.

**Join Us Today**



[nature.org/supportny](https://nature.org/supportny)

Marine Scientist Juliet Lamb safely releases a Cory's shearwater after tagging the bird as part of a study on offshore wind development. © GotOne!