

new jersey FALL/WINTER 2021 Oak leaf



Director's Letter

Despite decades of conservation effort with many successes, climate change is accelerating. Degradation of our natural habitats and systems continues to drive extinction of plants and wildlife, while also threatening places where people live. Climate change and biodiversity loss are the two great environmental crises of our time.

The Nature Conservancy is committed to addressing both issues urgently by protecting the lands and waters on which all life depends, around the globe and right here in New Jersey. All life includes everything from backyard robins to busy black bears, delicate yellow spring beauty flowers to mighty oaks, and preschool children to retired seniors. It means species that live and migrate through Bobcat Alley and the Cape May peninsula, along with the people inhabiting our cities and towns, including those where conservation efforts have not historically focused.

There is reason for hope. Nature can renew itself if we give it a chance, healing past damage and strengthening adaptability to future challenges. Imagine a world with big, connected expanses of natural areas that support thriving wildlife and provide space for people to nurture their bodies and souls...a world in which people act in concert with nature to address and perhaps even reverse negative effects of climate change like intense heat, flooding and drought. This harmonious coexistence is our vision, and it is one that is achievable with cooperation and hard work.

Having just completed a major conservation and fundraising initiative, the Campaign for the Real Nature of New Jersey, we are shifting our focus to a new set of five-year priorities that serve this vision, and we are pleased to introduce you to them in this issue (page 4). You will see that tackling the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity will be at the heart of our work, with an evolved approach to equity and inclusivity in our efforts. As always, you are integral to our success.

Yours in conservation,

Dr. Barbara Brummer, *New Jersey State Director*

P.S.: *We have been as busy in the field as in the planning room, so this issue also includes updates from our coastal and cities programs, as well as fond farewell wishes for some amazing people moving on from our Board of Trustees!*

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NJ Bay Islands Initiative

The salt marshes that greet us with expansive vistas along the Garden State Parkway and as we approach popular beach destinations are much more than landscape eye candy. They are the nursery for innumerable marine and avian species, and they buffer communities where people live and work from climate change impacts like flooding and erosion.

More than 100 marsh islands dot New Jersey’s back bays, from the Metedeconk River to Absecon Inlet, but as sea level rises and storms become more frequent and intense, many of them are drowning. Now, a coalition of organizations has banded together with the mission of rallying around our state’s salt marshes, placing special emphasis on the Barnegat Bay ecosystem.

The NJ Bay Islands Initiative is led by Long Beach Township, the largest municipality on Long Beach Island, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which owns many of the islands in Barnegat Bay. The Nature Conservancy is a critical partner, bringing scientific expertise and a track record of successfully facilitating collaboration among a variety of stakeholders.

In the past few years, TNC and partners have piloted an innovative technique that builds up the elevation of salt marshes using clean sediment that has eroded into nearby boat channels. After annual dredging to clear routes for recreational boating and commercial fishing, this valuable sediment has traditionally been stored in large “disposal” hills on top of the marshes or transported at considerable expense to out-of-state landfills. Recycling the sediment back to struggling marshes functions doubly, to bolster marshes and alleviate the challenges of disposal.

Results from the demonstration sites in Avalon and Fortescue are encouraging and have generated much interest in the technique among municipalities and agencies. To promote more widespread adoption of this natural solution, TNC led the development of the NJ Bay Islands Explorer, an online tool that provides key information to prioritize marsh island restoration needs, aids in the planning of those projects and then pairs them with nearby channel dredging needs. We have already put the tool to good use and are working with NJ Bay Islands Initiative partners to identify the first set of potential projects for Long Beach Township.



The Nature Conservancy is a private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) international membership organization. Its mission is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. The Nature Conservancy meets all of the Standards for Charity Accountability established by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance. The BBB Wise Giving Alliance is a national charity watchdog affiliated with the Better Business Bureau.

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COVER Delaware River © Chris Martino; Barbara Brummer © Jeff Burian/TNC; THIS PAGE Measuring marsh grass growth at the Avalon demonstration site © Adrianna Zito-Livingston/TNC; Red fox © Howard Wu/TNC Photo Contest 2019

Holy Cow! Restoring Nature at Phil Rizzuto Park



For many Union County residents, Trotters Branch Nature Preserve at Phil Rizzuto Park (named after the Yankees baseball broadcaster who was famous for embracing the bovine exclamation in this article's title) is the most accessible source of green open space. But the preserve, sited within the City of Elizabeth, is facing some challenges.

Within the natural area's boundaries, the Elizabeth River has become enclosed in artificial retaining walls, disconnected from its natural floodplain and no longer readily visible to people. Erosion at the Trotters Brook threatens a pedestrian footpath and bridge, and degrades wildlife habitat that represents Elizabeth's last remaining 3.5 acres of eastern deciduous forest. Native species like red foxes, red-backed salamanders, Eastern painted turtles, Eastern screech owls and downy woodpeckers, which are common in New Jersey but relatively uncommon within Elizabeth due to woodlot scarcity and urban conditions, rely on this small natural oasis to survive.

Enter Groundwork Elizabeth, a local nonprofit that focuses on building healthy, sustainable and equitable communities in the City of Elizabeth and in surrounding Union County. Committed to renewing this vital open space, they initiated a partnership with The Nature Conservancy with dual goals: repair the fragile ecosystem and foster more personal connections between locals and the Elizabeth River.

The partnership hit the ground running, as the partners worked together to install a stormwater-absorbing rain garden and build a green roof that filters air and reduces temperatures at Groundwork Elizabeth's thriving urban farm nearby. Additional planned improvements at Trotters Brook include restoring the trail and the pedestrian bridge, adding natural plantings and offering interpretive programming from students and community members. The two organizations are also combining forces to develop a Climate Safe Neighborhood initiative to educate inhabitants about

flooding, heat islands and other climate change effects in the community.

Tenisha Malcolm, director of the cities program for The Nature Conservancy in New Jersey, said, "A little TLC can go a long way to boosting the health of even the smallest patch of green in an urban setting, and then nature can do its work lifting up people and wildlife as it usually does!"

Teaming up to make nature a priority for a community that really needs its benefits...now how's that for a home run?

"A little TLC can go a long way to boosting the health of even the smallest patch of green in an urban setting, and then nature can do its work lifting up people and wildlife as it usually does!"

TENISHA MALCOLM, DIRECTOR OF CITIES PROGRAMS FOR TNC IN NEW JERSEY



Biodiversity: Healthy Lands, Freshwater and Oceans

Historic development across New Jersey has degraded and fragmented our natural habitats and ecosystems, and disproportionately created negative health impacts in our most vulnerable communities. Our path to 2026 includes bringing more equity to our work while protecting, restoring, and better managing land, freshwater and oceans, and proactively advocating for nature-forward policies at the state and federal levels.

Land

Protect 1,000 additional acres in Bobcat Alley to connect the Appalachian Range



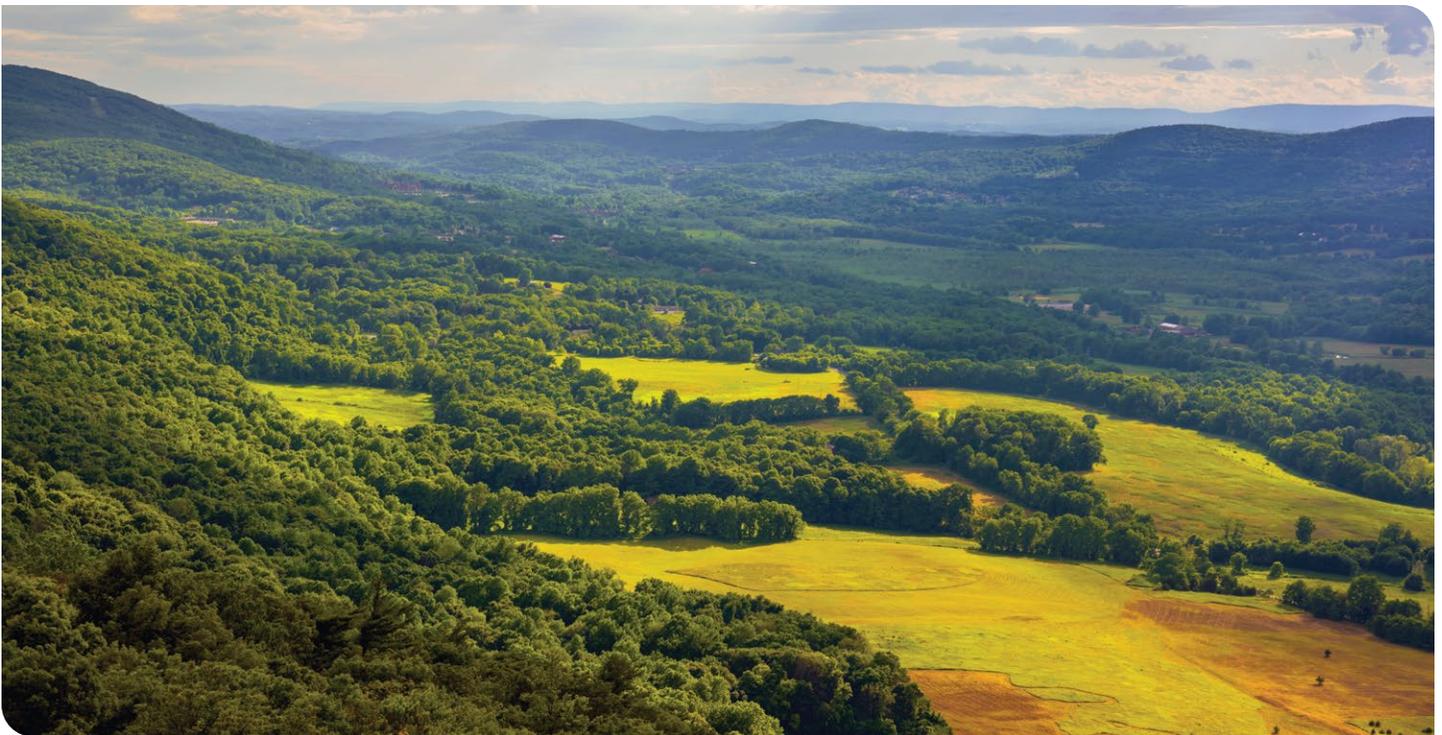
To foster biodiversity into the future and as the climate changes, we need to protect large, contiguous natural areas that serve as buffers to changing conditions and provide corridors for plant and animal species to migrate over time. Our local land acquisition efforts will focus on connecting forested habitats across northern New Jersey that not only provide homes for wildlife within our state, but also represent critical links within the Highlands and Appalachian ranges.

Use the Conservation Blueprint to catalyze protection of 20,000 acres across NJ

With much of New Jersey already protected as open space, we will spur action using the Conservation Blueprint mapping tool and inspiring collaborative investments to protect the most ecologically valuable lands and waters remaining in New Jersey, which will support biodiversity across our state.

Promote nature for all by improving access to our five flagship preserves

We will pursue welcoming enhancements at our flagship preserves, encouraging people of diverse backgrounds and abilities to experience and build a relationship with nature. We will also amplify the voices of Indigenous peoples and their access to land.



Water

Continue restoring the Paulins Kill

Removing the Columbia Dam was just the first step in maximizing the connectivity of the Paulins Kill. We will remove two additional dams upstream to further improve water quality and allow free movement of aquatic species, and we will restore the river's headwaters at the Hyper Humus site.

Build support for dam removals as a common river restoration tactic

Working collaboratively as part of the Statewide Dam Removal Partnership, we will advance the removal of 25 antiquated dams. We will also help reduce impediments to dam removal projects in New Jersey by providing data and technical expertise, and by recommending adjustments to state policies that make removing dams easier.



Oceans and Coasts

Improve management of 1,000 acres of salt marsh through beneficial use of sediment

Our work will focus on transforming coastwide dredging and restoration practices, so that the valuable sediment that washes away from New Jersey's 200,000+ acres of salt marsh and clogs coastal boat channels is routinely used to rebuild marsh elevation—helping them survive for years to come even as sea levels rise. Marshes are the unsung heroes of the Jersey Shore, providing habitat for an array of fish and wildlife, sequestering significant amounts of carbon and helping reduce flood risk for coastal communities.

Improve management of 75,000 ocean acres in designated offshore wind areas

New Jersey's plan to produce 7,500 MW of offshore wind power will be essential as a clean, sustainable energy source that reduces greenhouse gas emissions. We will focus on ensuring that, as wind facilities are developed, proper monitoring, mitigation and protections are in place to minimize negative impacts on ocean species and habitats.

Climate Adaptation and Mitigation

Intensified heat, increased flooding and other negative climate change impacts will continue to affect New Jersey as a whole, and particularly communities already overburdened with these and other stressors. Our approach will include policy and practice to bring down greenhouse gas emissions, curb air pollution, sequester carbon and test scalable nature-based solutions.



Climate Adaptation

Use forward-looking planning, policy and nature-based solutions to benefit 300,000 people

We will influence statewide and local efforts to empower all communities, including those that have been disproportionately affected, to plan for and respond to climate change in an equitable way. Key within this endeavor is to maximize the role of nature as a solution to make New Jersey more resilient while also benefiting biodiversity.

Green our towns and cities through nature-based solutions to benefit 100,000 people

In consultation with local stakeholders, we will shape the use of natural infrastructure in cities to mitigate

flooding, air pollution, extreme heat and other environmental issues, and to improve health and quality of life for residents. We hope to partner on 10 or more projects that will include planting at least 1,000 trees, with community agreement, and to promote planning and policies that help replicate similar beneficial projects around the state.

Build coastal resilience through nature-based solutions to benefit 100,000 people

We will advocate for policy and practices that empower New Jersey's coastal communities to plan and act using nature as a means of adapting to flooding, erosion and other climate change challenges.

Climate Mitigation

Reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the State of NJ by 40 percent from 2006 levels

Our work in New Jersey will include efforts to support federal legislation on climate change and to advance a suite of climate change actions at the state level, including those that prioritize addressing equity and health issues relating to emissions reductions. Within New Jersey, we will center our efforts around climate justice and influencing policies to reduce the two largest sources of carbon emissions: transportation and buildings.

Thanks and Happy Trails to Two Legacy Trustees

Dennis Toft and Amy Greene have contributed so much to the New Jersey chapter during their tenure as trustees. Among their many accomplishments, they successfully promoted planned giving among their peers. Bequests and planned gifts represent 20 to 25 percent of the organization's annual operating revenue, and donors who make them become part of The Nature Conservancy's Legacy Club.



DENNIS TOFT

"When I learned how vital planned giving is to achieve TNC's mission, I not only added TNC to my will but also gladly became a Legacy Ambassador to urge others to do the same," said Toft. "These lasting gifts support conservation for generations

to come. I want my children and grandchildren to be able to enjoy nature like I have, and that will only happen if we protect it."

TNC is grateful for Toft's generous Legacy gift and all he accomplished during his 10 years as a trustee in New Jersey, including serving on the development committee for the entirety of his tenure and being part of the cabinet that achieved the Campaign for the Real Nature of New Jersey's bold fundraising goals. A respected environmental lawyer and brownfield redevelopment practitioner, Toft also never hesitated to give us wise advice when needed, for which we are thankful.

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DENNIS TOFT, TRUSTEE LEGACY AMBASSADOR

AMY GREENE

For Amy Greene, a love of the outdoors started in childhood. "For as long as I can remember, my happiest memories are of exploring plants and critters and streams outdoors," she said. "Conservation has been my life's work, so naming TNC in my will was simply an extension of my values." Like Dennis, she recognized early on that being a Legacy Ambassador could multiply her impact, saying, "I always let people know how easy it is to include The Nature Conservancy in your will—or even more simply—to name TNC as a beneficiary of their retirement, bank or brokerage accounts or life insurance policies. It can be as easy as filling out a form online, but the impact on nature is tremendous."

We salute Greene for her 19 years of service on our Board of Trustees, for advising us on the sales of wetland mitigation credits which have generated almost \$10 million for our conservation work since 2005, and for the innumerable hours of professional service that she and staff at her environmental consulting firm have donated to optimize restoration projects.



"Conservation has been my life's work, so naming TNC in my will was simply an extension of my values."

AMY GREENE, TRUSTEE LEGACY AMBASSADOR

Join Dennis and Amy in the Legacy Club by contacting Kelly Grassi at kgrassi@tnc.org or 908-955-0359.



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BELOW RIGHT Beneficial use marsh demonstration site in NJ © Adrianna Zito-Livingston/TNC



A Legacy Club member rescues a stranded horseshoe crab at Sunray Beach in Villas, NJ. © Kelly Grassi/TNC

Plan today to pass on your values. Many of our members choose to make a gift to The Nature Conservancy through their wills, trusts, retirement accounts or life insurance policies. Taking a few minutes to make a plan can have extraordinary benefits for you and our world. Contact Kelly Grassi in New Jersey for more information.

-  (908) 955-0359
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