Land Stories

What we give is returned in abundance

SCENIC HUDSON

Prepared by Scenic Hudson and many leading conservation organizations across New York State.

PROTECTING LAND, SECURING NEW YORK'S FUTURE

New York's environment consists of diverse lands with which people have direct and meaningful relationships. They include urban waterfronts and community gardens, forests buffering drinking-water supplies, beaches, bays, waterways and community parks.

Protection and stewardship of these irreplaceable resources are realized through partnerships between New York State, local government, private property owners and the state's land trust community. Together they are working to leverage public dollars to safeguard drinking water, protect working farms and healthy food, enhance recreational opportunities and sustain tourism and forestry industries that sustain regional economies throughout the state.

Such efforts remain highly popular within all communities, urban, suburban and rural. A recent survey jointly conducted by the Democratic polling firm Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates and the Republican firm Public Opinion Strategies found that three in five voters support increased public investments in conservation at the state, local or federal levels and are willing to pay small tax increases to support them. And voter support for open space protection still runs strong at the ballot box. Of the 25 measures on ballots across the nation in 2009, 16 passed—a 64 percent approval rate.

Protected lands also ensure our communities' ability to adapt to climate change, mitigate carbon emissions, protect wildlife and their habitats, and support recreational opportunities for children and families. It's estimated that attendance at New York State parks will increase by 1.9 million in 2010.

As the following stories demonstrate, protecting land plays a critical role in the development of our communities. It's essential that the state sustain its commitment to partner with local governments, federal programs and land trusts as well as honor previous commitments to conserving open space and watersheds. The healthy, prosperous future of all New Yorkers depends on it.

PROTECTING WATER SUPPLIES

Top: Students conduct a kick net sample in the Delaware River's East Branch in Downsville (Delaware County); canoeing on the Delaware's West Branch near DeLancey (Delaware County).

Conserved lands in watersheds

Clean water cheaply…

A 2002 study for the American Water Works Association revealed that for every 10-percent increase in a watershed's forest cover, water treatment and chemical costs decrease by about 20 percent.

Prevent flooding and erosion…

Every acre of New York's wetlands provides $689,700 in annual storm-protection benefits.

Benefit local economies…

In 2006 more than 4.6 million people hunted, fished or engaged in wildlife-watching activities in New York, spending $3.5 billion.

A WORLD-CLASS TREASURE AND WATER-FILTRATION MARVEL

QUICK FACTS

The Suffolk County Water Authority (the county's main public water supplier) estimates that supplying water from wells in protected watersheds is 10 times less costly than in areas where water treatment must be provided. Land protection is a one-time transaction; annual water-treatment costs are paid by the public in perpetuity and only escalate over time.

Earth Day 2005 was an appropriate moment to announce conservation of the 309-acre WJF Realty Property in the **Dwarf Pine Barrens** region of Long Island's Suffolk County. The land's acquisition—a partnership between the DEC and county facilitated by The Nature Conservancy—not only protected the largest privately owned parcel in a globally rare natural area, but ensures residents will continue to enjoy clean water at little additional expense.

Located within the state-designated Long Island Pine Barrens Preserve, the land sits atop Suffolk County's sole groundwater source, which supplies drinking water for 1.5 million people. Letting nature protect, purify and store the water is much less expensive than constructing filtration plants that require regular maintenance, upgrades and eventual replacement. Rain and snow that percolate through Long Island's sandy soil also flows underground into bays, harbors and creeks. Thus, efforts to protect groundwater also assure that clean, freshwater mixes with the seawater, providing an optimal estuarine environment for many species essential to commercial and recreational fishing.

Residents derive many additional benefits from the land, one of only three dwarf pine barrens in the world and a haven for several rare wildlife species. The county's protected open space mitigates traffic congestion. Local studies show that land protection also increases the value of homes in adjacent communities, while reducing property taxes (because conserved lands require fewer municipal services). The Dwarf Pine Barrens and parkland generally provide places to recreate and relax; open spaces and parks also are prime attractions for tourists and second-home buyers, on whom the county depends for much of its revenue.

LETTING NATURE DO THE WORK

QUICK FACTS

New York City Comptroller William Thompson estimated that paying off the debt incurred to build a $10-billion water-filtration system would hike water and sewer rates by 30 percent.

Conserved watershed lands benefit consumers' health and wallet. Drinking two liters of city water daily costs 50 cents a year. The same amount of bottled water runs up a $1,400 tab.

Fly-fishing on the Neversink River's West Branch near Frost Valley (Ulster County).

Eight million residents of New York City and 1 million more in Westchester, Putnam, Orange and Ulster counties rely primarily on six Catskills reservoirs for their water needs—about a billion gallons a day. The city relies on protected lands around those reservoirs for a cost-effective way of keeping this water clean.

To comply with the federal Safe Water Drinking Act, in 1989 the Environmental Protection Agency required the city to build a water-filtration system. Projections put construction costs as high as $10 billion, with an additional $300 million annually to operate the new facilities.

The city's Department of Environmental Protection came up with a cheaper solution—conserving more acreage around the city's reservoirs within the 1.2 million-acre **Catskill/Delaware watershed**, which stretches across portions of Delaware, Greene, Schoharie, Sullivan and Ulster counties. In essence, they'd be increasing nature's outstanding capacity to purify the water.

A 2009 study by The Trust for Public Land describes how this process works: "Roots of wetland plants filter and remove suspended materials. Plants and algae use and remove such nutrients as nitrogen and phosphorus. Bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms decompose organic material. Forests and wetlands increase the availability of water by absorbing it, storing it and releasing it slowly during times of scarcity."

The EPA eventually allowed the city to proceed on a long-term, $1.2-billion Land Acquisition Program. Prior to its startup in 1997, the city owned 45,000 acres within the watershed. By 2007, when the EPA renewed the city's Filtration Avoidance Determination (FAD) for another 10 years, the DEP had protected 92,000

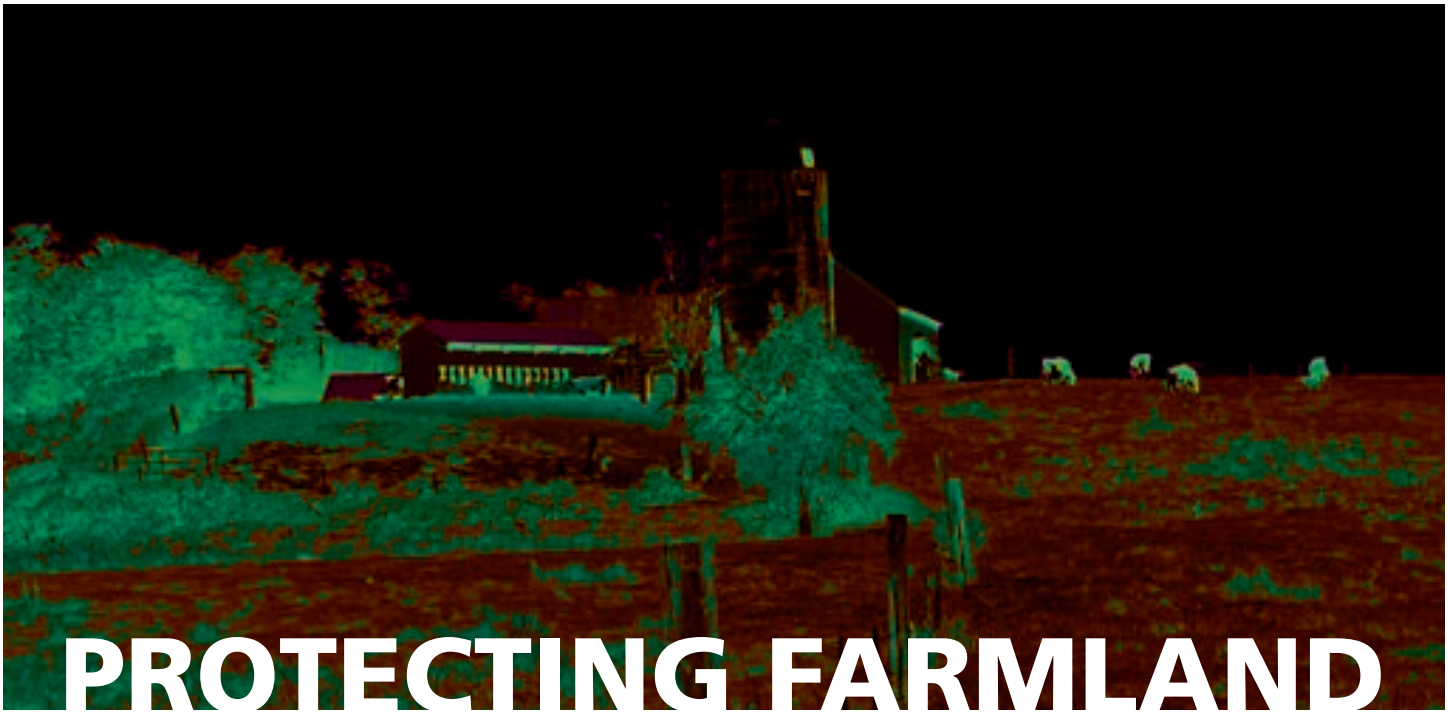
Pepacton Reservoir (Delaware County), New York City's largest water supply.

additional acres—a combination of outright purchases and conservation easements. The cost to date: less than $200 million. A sure sign of success: Despite having America's largest unfiltered water system, New York City's water meets stringent state and federal health standards.

The DEP takes special care to be a responsible landowner. Its acquisitions are made selectively, depending upon properties' natural features (such as streams and wetlands), proximity to reservoirs and development potential. Land is only purchased from willing sellers at fair market prices. Prior to any purchase, the DEP consults with the local municipality to ensure the community's interests are taken into account. New York City pays full property taxes on protected watershed lands. It further supports local economies by funding initiatives to curtail run-off, pinpoint failing septic systems and prevent stream erosion.

Federal and state regulators overseeing the FAD consider state-owned lands crucial to the watershed's protection. To date, the DEC owns more than 205,000 acres within the watershed. (Its most recent purchase, completed earlier this year, preserved 1,200 acres in Big Indian, Greene County.) The continued preservation of watershed lands was identified as a conservation priority project for DEC's Regions 3 and 4 in the 2009 NYS Draft Open Space Conservation Plan. Ongoing acquisitions are dependent upon the Environmental Protection Fund.

In addition to their hydrological benefits, conserved watershed lands provide recreational opportunities essential for the Catskill region's tourism industry. State-owned lands within the Catskill Forest Preserve are one of New York's natural wonders, offering magnificent expanses of wilderness within a two-hour drive of Manhattan. More than 51,000 city-owned acres also are publicly accessible for fishing, hiking, hunting, trapping, cross-country skiing and other passive activities.



PROTECTING FARMLAND

Top: BBTT Farm, Stuyvesant (Columbia County), protected by Scenic Hudson; a local farm's bounty.

Working farms

Drive local economies…

Farms in New York sold approximately $4.5 billion in products in 2007. Factoring in food manufacturing and agricultural services sectors dependent on local agriculture, farms have a $23-billion impact annually on the state's economy.

Safeguard water supplies…

Well-managed farmlands can act as a natural water filter and remove sediments, chemicals and nutrients from surface waters.

Moderate taxes…

For each $1 generated in tax revenue, farms require 37 cents in municipal services, while residential development requires $1.16.

Yet are vanishing rapidly…

According to the American Farmland Trust, New York is home to three of the nation's Top 20 Most Threatened Farming Regions. Each year the state loses about 10 times more farmland to development than it protects.

PRESERVING AN ECONOMIC MAINSTAY AND LOCAL HERITAGE

QUICK FACTS

Madison County's 744 farms generated $86.3 million in agricultural products in 2007—an average of $116,000 per farm—and helped create more than $240 million worth of business in other sectors.

Since 1940, farmland acreage in Madison County has fallen from 318,159 to 188,320.

Mathew and Juanita Critz knew they had a good thing—and one they wanted future generations to benefit from—so it was a no-brainer for them to permanently protect their Cazenovia farm with an agricultural conservation easement in 2009. And it was fitting that the transaction preserving the 240-acre property was Madison County's first to receive funding from the state Department of Agriculture & Markets' Farmland Protection Program. It safeguarded beautiful, highly productive land that's a local economic mainstay.

An agricultural landmark since opening in 1985, **Critz Farms** draws thousands of visitors from central New York and beyond yearlong. They come to cut Christmas trees in winter; purchase maple syrup in spring; pick berries in summer; and harvest pumpkins and apples in the fall. (Not surprisingly, the farm is a recipient of the state Department of Economic Development's Agritourism Buisness of the Year award.) In addition to employing 50 people, Critz Farms attracts tourists to Cazenovia's charming downtown. It also supports many area businesses directly. The Critz family utilized a portion of the easement funds to construct new farm buildings, with materials coming from the local lumberyard and hardware store, as well as to purchase farm equipment from a local dealership.

Located adjacent to lands previously protected by the Cazenovia Preservation Foundation (which holds the easement on Critz Farm), the transaction was the first of several envisioned to conserve farms and essential agricultural heritage in the town's highly visible southern corridor. The Critz family pass that heritage on by hosting hands-on educational tours for thousands of schoolchildren annually—and, of course, by permanently protecting their land.

LAND PLAN ENSURES A HEALTHY, PROSPEROUS FUTURE

QUICK FACTS

The annual market value of all agriculture products sold from farms in Erie County exceeds $100 million.

Agriculture's local economic impact also extends to secondary industries like food processors, which rely on area farms. Food processing sustains more than 6,000 jobs in the region.

A suburb of Buffalo, Erie County's Town of Clarence has taken proactive steps to maintain its semi-rural character. When steady population gains in the 1990s created development pressures threatening their community's small-town feel—exactly what attracted many to Clarence in the first place—residents urged that an open space plan be a central feature of the town's 2001 Master Plan. To fund the **Clarence Greenprint**, as the resulting land-protection initiative was called, voters overwhelmingly approved a $12.5-million bond resolution in 2002.

Working with the Western New York Land Conservancy, the town prioritized open space to protect. High on the list were potential parkland, working farms, scenic vistas and riparian corridors. Since 2003 nine transactions—outright purchases and conservation easements—have protected more than 1,500 acres. Three ongoing acquisitions shortly will bring the total closer to 2,000 acres. Future parks will include trails, picnic facilities and areas for passive recreation. Among the 350 acres of preserved working farmland are crop farms supplying fruits and vegetables and you-pick operations that attract tourists. Funds for farmland protection matched a grant from the state Department of Agriculture & Markets.

The Greenprint already is benefiting the town. While the recession has eroded home prices in many western New York municipalities, house values in Clarence remain steady, with strong demand among high-income families to live in a community that treasures open space and farms. This keeps Clarence's main business sector vibrant and growing. The protected properties safeguard water supplies. And by requiring fewer municipal services, they moderate property taxes. Just as important, the Greenprint's success is inspiring nearby towns interested in planning for a healthy, prosperous future.

PROTECTING COMMUNITIES

Top: View from Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park; Bob Shepard Highland Landing Park, Lloyd (Ulster County).

Parks and open space

Drive local economies…

New York's natural beauty and abundant parks are linchpins of the state's tourism industry, which generates $50 billion in local spending and sustains 672,000 jobs—6.1 percent of the state's workforce.

Reduce sprawl-related costs…

Sprawling development raises local governments' fiscal deficits by as much as 10 percent.

Attract new residents and jobs…

A poll by the National Association of Realtors found that 57 percent of respondents would be more likely to purchase a home close to green space; 50 percent said they'd be willing to pay 10 percent more to live near a park or other protected natural area.

Make communities safer and healthier…

Access to public parks and recreational facilities has been strongly linked to reductions in crime, particularly juvenile delinquency. Another study revealed that children growing up in greener neighborhoods gain significantly less body fat.

A GARDEN GROWING MORE THAN VEGETABLES

QUICK FACTS

A 2006 study by New York University revealed that New York City's active, well-maintained community gardens increase surrounding property values as much as 9 percent within five years of their opening and deliver an additional $563 million in tax revenue over 20 years.

A single mature tree absorbs 48 pounds of carbon dioxide annually and releases enough oxygen back into the atmosphere to support two human beings.

Taking concrete steps to halt the deterioration of their Bronx neighborhood, members of the Clinton Tremont Community Senior Citizen Center founded a community garden on a nearby empty lot in 1983. Replacing piles of garbage with flowers, they transformed this magnet for crime into a 17,500-square-foot urban oasis. Gradually, neighbors in adjacent buildings also became involved, planting trees and vegetables and adding amenities such as picnic tables and a pavilion.

For 15 years the **Tremont Community Garden** was a focal point for neighborhood gatherings, outdoor exercise and fresh produce. Then in 1998 its demise appeared imminent; the City of New York announced plans to sell the land on which this and 113 other local gardens were located. The day before the auction, The Trust for Public Land purchased 62 of them, including the Tremont Community Garden. (In the end, thanks to support from additional non-profits and foundations, all of the gardens were saved.)

Today under the stewardship of the Bronx Land Trust and support from the state Conservation Partnership Program, the garden continues to enrich the neighborhood. It supplies residents with myriad varieties of vegetables, some of which are sold at the popular nearby Tremont farmers' market. Its trees purify the air while offering shaded space for barbecues, socializing and after-school homework. Students from the nearby Ryer Avenue Elementary School make regular visits, learning firsthand that carrots don't grow in plastic bags. Elderly volunteers teach the youngsters how to cultivate and tend the plants, fostering a sense of cross-generational community and ensuring future stewards for the garden.

CELEBRATING WITH AN EYE TO THE FUTURE

QUICK FACTS

Parks play a major role in the mid-Hudson's tourism industry, which generates $491 million in annual spending in Dutchess County and $472 million in Ulster County.

According to a recent study by Parks & Trails New York, the state yields a $5 return for each $1 invested in its parks. About 40 percent of visitor spending attributed to state parks comes from people living outside the community where the parks are located.

Bob Shepard Highland Landing Park, Lloyd (Ulster County).

The 2009 Quadricentennial of Henry Hudson's voyage of discovery on the river now bearing his name catalyzed communities in the mid-Hudson Valley to create exciting new ways of connecting people to the Hudson—and in turn to downtowns that will benefit from the expected rise in tourism. These successes were made possible by leveraging government and non-profit funding.

Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park, the most ambitious initiative, opened to much fanfare on October 3. Initially a grass-roots endeavor, transformation of the 1889 Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge into the world's longest elevated park moved into high gear when Gov. Paterson designated it a Quadricentennial Legacy Project and allocated $28 million in state support. A 2008 economic study projected a $14.6-million boost in tourism spending attributable to the Walkway. That figure may be conservative: in its first four months of operation, the park attracted almost 500,000 visitors, nearly double estimated attendance figures for a full year. Poughkeepsie restaurants near the Walkway report increased business. A planned elevator directly linking the bridge with the city's waterfront will further boost downtown revitalization.

Building on the Walkway's tourism potential, officials in Poughkeepsie and the Town of Lloyd (at the park's western gateway in Ulster County) worked with Scenic Hudson to create the **Walkway Loop Trail**. By connecting the Walkway and nearby Mid-Hudson Bridge with scenic, cultural and historic attractions—as well as shops and restaurants—on both sides of the spans, the 3.6-mile trail encourages visitors to extend their stay in the region. A spur trail links with 250-acre **Franny Reese State Park** in Lloyd (also

Lookout at Franny Reese State Park, Lloyd (Ulster County).

dedicated during the Quadricentennial), with 2.5 miles of trails affording dramatic river vistas amid unspoiled woodland. In addition, planned connections with Ulster County's Hudson Valley Rail Trail and the Dutchess Rail Trail should attract bicyclists, rollerbladers and others to an exciting off-road route stretching more than 20 miles.

Lloyd was one of two nearby communities that took advantage of the Quadricentennial to create public waterfront access for the first time. With funding from Scenic Hudson, the Environmental Protection Fund and a federal grant, the town acquired a 1.7-acre former oil storage facility in 2008, capping a 10-year search for a suitable park site. When completed, **Bob Shepard Highland Landing Park** will feature an esplanade, boat launches, a gazebo and an education center. The amenities are being funded by additional state grants, with a citizens group providing volunteer labor—so the riverside oasis is a minimal taxpayer burden. The park will be linked to the Walkway Loop Trail, providing easy access to the nearby hamlet of Highland. Recognizing the park's potential economic benefits, Highland's business owners have been staunch proponents.

Five miles downriver, the Town of Marlborough, also in Ulster County, completed acquisition late last year on a 14.5-acre waterfront property in the hamlet of Milton, the town's commercial hub. The Trust for Public Land spearheaded purchase of this former oil terminal—a priority project of the state's Open Space Plan—with funding from the Environmental Protection Fund and Scenic Hudson. (In the case of this and the Lloyd parkland, the previous owners removed all contamination prior to the transactions.) While concrete plans for **Milton Riverfront Park** have not yet been finalized, residents are looking forward to enjoying panoramic river views while fishing, launching a kayak or simply savoring a cup of coffee. The same pleasures should entice tourists visiting nearby orchards, wineries and historic sites.

ENCLAVE FOR FEW BECOMES A MOUNTAIN FOR MANY

QUICK FACTS

According to a 2008 study, tourism in the Adirondacks generates $1.1 billion in spending and nearly 20,000 jobs—17 percent of total employment and 30 percent of labor income in Essex County.

Boreal forests are most effective in sequestering carbon and combating climate-change impacts. The Adirondack Park contains 800,000 acres of boreal forests.

Spanning four miles of Lake Champlain shoreline—the largest undeveloped tract on the lake's New York side—**Split Rock Mountain** was a prime location for luxury homes. Fittingly, this scenic and ecological marvel became the first-ever purchase made with the Environmental Protection Fund in 1994. The Open Space Institute and Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy spearheaded the 2,100-acre acquisition. The Northeast Wilderness Trust, in part with funds from the state Conservation Partnership Program, has preserved additional adjacent lands.

Outdoor enthusiasts now flock to Split Rock Mountain Wild Forest, located in the towns of Essex and Westport (Essex County). They enjoy 11 miles of trails leading to fine views of the Adirondack High Peaks, Vermont's Green Mountains and the lake. The forest is a popular destination for hiking, mountain biking, fishing, camping, rock climbing, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. In addition to tourism revenues generated by forest visitors, adjacent working farmland protected through conservation easements contributes to the towns' agricultural economies and the region's heritage as the breadbasket of the Union Army during the Civil War.

Lake Champlain's moderating climate effect allows Split Rock Mountain to sustain an extraordinary diversity of plants and animals, making it a prime attraction for wildlife watchers. The forest contains all but one tree species found throughout the entire Adirondack Park. It provides the northernmost habitat of the endangered timber rattlesnake and shelters more than 100 species of migratory birds. Peregrine falcons and bald eagles nest on the palisades overlooking the lake. And it serves as an important wildlife migration corridor between the Green Mountains and the High Peaks.

Photo Credits

Cover
Top: Aaron Bennett
Center: Coutesty of American Farmland Trust
Bottom: Ken Sherman

3
Aaron Bennett

4
Courtesy The Nature Conservancy New York State Office

5
Aaron Bennett

6
Courtesy of The Catskill Center for Conservation and Development

7
Top; Robert Rodriguez, Jr.
Bottom: James Bleecker

8
Coutesty of American Farmland Trust

9
Courtesy Western New York Land Conservancy

10
Top: Terry Hardy
Bottom: Robert Rodriguez, Jr.

11
Ken Sherman

12
Jeffrey Anzevino

13
Terry Hardy

14
The Adirondack Basecamp

Contributors

Adirondack Council

Adirondack Mountain Club

American Farmland Trust

Audubon New York

Catskill Watershed Alliance

Citizens Campaign for the Environment

Land Trust Alliance

National Resources Defence Council

The Nature Conservancy in New York

Open Space Institute

Scenic Hudson

The Trust for Public Land

Western New York Land Conservancy