

ADIRONDACK CHAPTER UPDATE | SPRING/SUMMER | 2021

50 Years

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Dear Friends of the Adirondacks,



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This year, The Nature Conservancy's Adirondack Chapter is celebrating our 50th anniversary. Milestone anniversaries lend themselves to reflection, but it's not in our nature to look back. Our team is focused on solving the challenges we're confronted with today and the ones we will encounter down the road.

While science still drives our work and helps us find innovative, pragmatic solutions to environmental threats, the pace and scale of these threats have

increased exponentially. At some point, "climate change" became the "climate crisis" and then the "climate emergency." We feel this urgency in our work. We've conserved 577,000 acres in the Adirondacks to date, which is an incredible accomplishment. But our land protection efforts alone will not be enough to meet the challenge; we must look beyond the blue line to ensure the future of the Adirondacks. We are working on a continental vision to connect the Northern Appalachians to the Central Appalachians, from the Blue Ridge Mountains in Georgia and Alabama, to the boreal forests of Canada—with the Adirondacks as a key piece of the puzzle.

This expansive vision is deeply rooted in a sense of place and a love for the unique experiment that is the Adirondack Park, where communities can thrive in a constitutionally protected Forest Preserve. That is what has always inspired our staff and Board of Trustees; it will continue to do so as we face new challenges.

Our commitment to ensuring a world in which there is equity, justice and peace for all of humanity is essential to the success of our work as we move into the next 50 years. By investing in initiatives that push for equal access to nature; restore Indigenous People's engagement with their ancestral homelands; build communities where both people and nature thrive; and ensure that our Adirondack communities are safe and welcoming for all, we can shape a bright future.

We look forward to celebrating our 50th anniversary with you, however we're able to do so, and thank you for your support over these many years.

Sincerely,

Peg R. Olsen
Director

Sarah Underhill
Chair

Celebrating 50 Years in the Adirondacks

Looking back at our 50 years of conservation work in the Adirondacks, we've protected over 577,000 acres of forests, lakes, rivers and critical wildlife habitat in this vast region. That is a staggering number—just under 40 Mannhattans—and an incredible mosaic of public and private lands. And each of these acres has a conservation story to tell.

Take Dome Island, on Lake George, a speck on the map that plays an outsized role as a living laboratory. For decades, it has been used for critical research studies and cutting-edge climate science. Studies there have measured mercury concentrations in wildlife species, determined how invasive species spread, quantified the amount of carbon that is stored in soil, and much more.

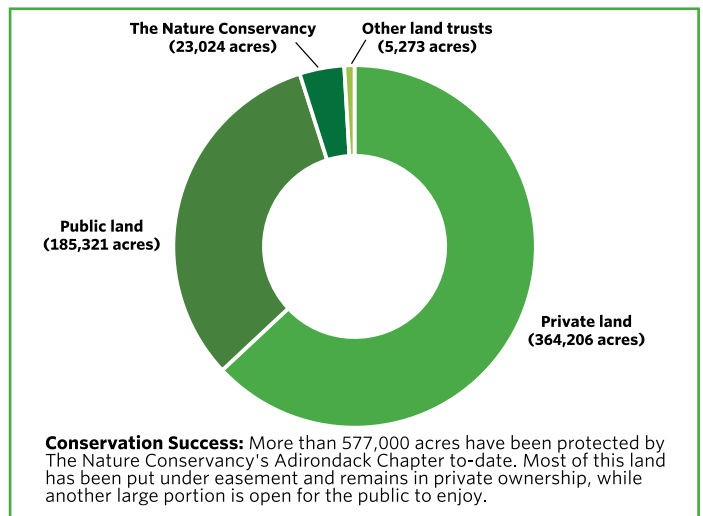
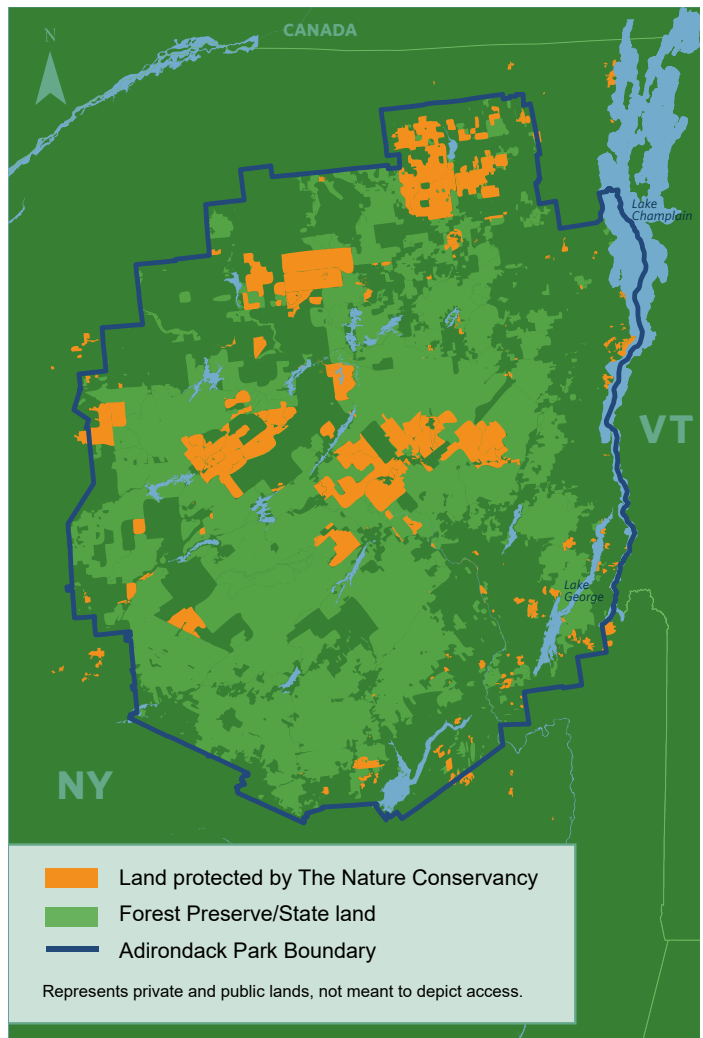
The map at the right doesn't show how fragmented some of our rivers and streams are due to poorly designed road crossings. We're tackling this problem one crossing at a time. For 10 years, we've worked with partners to survey and improve culverts with climate- and fish-friendly designs to reconnect over 100 miles of stream, reduce the risk of flooding in our communities and ensure that fish can thrive.

You also can't see the wildlife species, like bobcat and bear, that call this landscape home, including the almost two hundred thousand acres that have become public land. We're protecting land on a continental scale to ensure that species can move freely and adapt as the climate changes.

And if you can't see the bobcats, you certainly can't see some of the small invasive species that are capable of causing big problems—devastating ecological and economic damage. The Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program is working with more than 30 organizations using technology and educational outreach to help keep the most threatening invasive species at bay.

Though it may not be obvious, the map represents a protected landscape that connects us to nature and provides respite and inspiration. Think of a multi-generational family enjoying the universal access loop at our Boquet River Nature Preserve, which can accommodate walkers, wheelchairs, and strollers. Or picture a young girl encountering a bright red, carnivorous pitcher plant at our Silver Lake Bog Preserve that sparks her to go on and study botany.

Thanks to you, our impact can be measured in big numbers like 50 years and 577,000 acres stretched across the map, and in the conservation stories they tell.



Reflections from Board Chairs of The Nature Conservancy's Adirondack Chapter

We caught up with three Board Chairs of The Nature Conservancy in the Adirondacks whose tenure spanned some of the most pivotal moments in the chapter's history, from large land deals to successful partnerships to tackling climate change.

PETER PAINE, JR., 1991–1994

SETTING THE STAGE FOR CONSERVATION SUCCESS



Peter, you have an incredible history as a conservationist in the Adirondacks prior to taking the helm as Board Chair. Tell us about that.

I have been involved with land use and protection in the Adirondacks since the late 1960s. I was a member of the Temporary Study Commission on the Future of the Adirondacks (TSC) appointed by Nelson Rockefeller, which issued its report in December of 1970. The TSC led to the creation of the Adirondack Park Agency, on which I served for 25 years. It was also the TSC's recommendation that an Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy be established. Accordingly, the chapter was established in 1971, and I think we've done an absolutely incredible job—but of course, I'm biased.

Thinking back to your tenure as Board Chair, what still resonates?

There have been so many changes to conservation planning and visioning in the 50 years since the Adirondack Chapter was established—and even since my tenure as chair when the Heart of the Adirondacks (Finch Pruyn) campaign was just getting underway.

And there's no doubt that the Finch Pruyn lands were the absolute crown jewel of the park. If it had not ended up being protected, it would have meant a radically different future for the Adirondacks. Although there aren't crown jewels of that character left anymore, there is still a lot of land that deserves protection. We can't rest on our laurels. There's a lot more work to be done.

What are some lessons we can learn from the past?

The important message reflected in the Finch Pruyn transaction is that one of the great strengths of The Nature Conservancy—and this is not just confined to the Adirondacks—is the organization's willingness to work with diverse interest groups. And going forward, we're working in cooperation with local government, not in opposition.

When the Adirondack Land Trust split off from The Nature Conservancy, initially there was some concern. But in fact, it's turned out extremely well. We're working cooperatively in a number of areas, including most recently protecting the water quality and shorelines of the Boquet River. The two institutions are working collaboratively, leveraging each other's strengths. I'm very encouraged by that.

In addition, as far as the Conservancy is concerned, we are working across chapter borders in a "One Conservancy" approach, whereas historically each chapter tended to be a little bit of a silo on its own. That's a very positive direction for the future.

MEREDITH PRIME, 2006–2009 AND 2017

SECURING THE HEART OF THE ADIRONDACKS

You served as Board Chair during one of the most pivotal and challenging times in the chapter's history. What are your reflections on that?

I first became chair when The Nature Conservancy purchased the 161,000 acres of Finch Pruyn lands. And the most remarkable thing that Conservancy staff did was to persuade 27 towns to approve this deal. Without their approval, the land acquisition could never have gone through, and New York State would not have been able to buy the land from the Conservancy.



Land protection takes many years of effort and commitment. In the case of the Finch Pruyn acquisition, it took more than a decade. It's the dedication of many talented people who made it happen. I hit the gold mine during my tenure as Board Chair—we had wonderful staff, terrific trustees and the backing of the organization at large.

To have been a part of the team that protected one of the jewels of the Adirondacks makes me so proud. In the case of Finch Pruyn, the company had been very careful in their harvesting of the forest. Its amazing, beautiful lakes, streams and hiking trails were made available to the public for the first time.

I recall seeing Boreas Pond with the High Peaks as a backdrop and thinking it was absolutely breathtaking. Truly spectacular. Anyone who loves the outdoors and loves the Adirondacks will forevermore be able to enjoy this beautiful place.

What are some of The Nature Conservancy's strengths as an organization?

One of the great joys of being a part of The Nature Conservancy is working with dedicated trustees and a remarkable staff. I have very happy memories of working with trustee Ed Fowler, former chapter director Mike Carr, and founding chapter director Tim Barnett. They have done so much in helping to protect beautiful landscapes in the park. I returned in 2017 to chair the board during the separation of The Nature Conservancy and the Adirondack Land Trust. While no transition is easy, both organizations are thriving and building on their many years of collaboration.

I have a great admiration for the team in New York and am deeply grateful to them for their help with everything that's happened here in the Adirondacks. Everything we do takes a team effort, and we're so lucky that we have such wonderful leadership within the organization, staff and volunteers that inspire and motivate everyone to do their best.

SARAH UNDERHILL, 2018–PRESENT

CONNECTIONS TO THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE



What's been happening since you assumed the role as Board Chair?

I joined the board when the Heart of the Adirondacks deal was winding down. I had so much to learn, and it was inspiring to become part of the board and staff team that had accomplished such a milestone. When I became chair a year later, The Nature Conservancy had begun to shift the focus from land acquisition and protection to thinking about the role it could play in mitigating climate change, with its science-based approach, unique global reach, and portfolio of protected lands and waters. Our work has evolved quickly, and it's exciting to see the potential for impact at scale as we approach conservation more holistically. Every choice we make is grounded in our commitment to battling this urgent threat.

I would also say that under New York State Board Chair Jim Attwood's leadership, the concept of One New York became real as trustees traveled to chapter regions and as the chapter and New York State boards began to work much more closely together. This has been a big change and is critical to the success of our work here in New York.

In your tenure as current Board Chair, what has made you most proud?

I'm most proud of being part of the team that raised the funds to help secure the permanent protection of Follensby Pond. Chapter director Peg Olsen was dauntless in the face of many unexpected challenges, and it has been wonderful working with her. I have a personal connection in that my husband's great-grandparents were the first private owners of Follensby at the turn of the century. I am grateful to have the opportunity to be part of the process that will allow this magical place to have an impact far beyond the boundaries of the park, well into the future. Now we're beginning to focus on the science and educational opportunities, and I'm excited about where that will take us.

In terms of the future of conservation, where are we headed?

We know that nature can provide respite and perspective and can be a great teacher. What we are coming to understand much more deeply is that access has been a privilege for many of us who have been historically engaged with conservation. The Nature Conservancy's focus on ensuring equal access to nature, as part of an essential commitment to justice, equity, diversity and inclusion, is critical. The trustees on our board who are leading this work in the Adirondacks are dedicated and inspiring. I feel sure that their work will set the standard in New York and beyond.



© Kent Mason

Across New York, we are using cutting-edge science to protect and restore woodlands that will withstand climate change—anchoring a broad Nature Conservancy effort to safeguard swaths of resilient, connected forests from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia to the boreal forests of Canada. This 179-million-acre region stores millions of tons of carbon, sustains communities and provides a habitat bridge for wildlife, such as birds, bobcat and moose, to move through.

Songs to Fill the Air

Nothing heralds the arrival of spring like birdsong. But the calls you hear echoing through the woods today may be different from the ones you heard when you were growing up.

Nature is on the move as warmer temperatures, increased flooding and other climate impacts alter and destroy habitat, forcing species to search for new homes. And birds aren't the only example—in North America, animals are moving an average of 11 miles north and 36 feet higher in elevation each decade. Climate change is altering the home ranges and migration routes of animals worldwide.

To help address this threat, The Nature Conservancy is focused on accelerating forest protection and restoration and securing key wildlife corridors—places that wildlife need to move safely to new habitat.

The forests and valleys stretching from Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains to the Canadian Maritimes and beyond function as a climate life raft for North American species—but currently only 21% of the area's protected. New York's forest stand out as a stronghold, anchoring the larger area. We are focused on accelerating forest protection and restoration here and in neighboring states because this landscape is paramount to a thriving future for all of nature, humanity and wildlife included.

“Now is our last chance to conserve and restore a vast, connected ecosystem on the East Coast. Our work in New York is central to that goal,” explains Dirk Bryant, the Conservancy's New York director of lands. “We use science and work with partners to put that knowledge into action. We have innovated new ways to help towns and landowners revitalize their forests. And we are ramping up programs that transform privately owned forests into powerhouses of capturing carbon, a major contributor to climate change.”

One of these programs, Working Woodlands, helps landowners conserve and sustainably manage their forests and generate third-party-verified carbon credits for sale. Working Woodlands now has more than 200,000 acres under management in six states (including New York), and our goal is to expand this program to sequester more than seven million tons of CO₂ by 2030.

While our forests may harbor different species of birds in the future, with this effort underway, we can rest assured that come spring, birdsong will continue to fill the air.

Visit nature.org/workingwoodlands to find out more.

By the Numbers

In celebration of the Adirondack Chapter's 50th anniversary, we are sharing some milestones from the past and present. We are grateful for your support in helping us preserve resilient landscapes and tackle the greatest environmental threats of our time.

1971

The Nature Conservancy's Adirondack Chapter was founded.

4

wildlife corridors where we're connecting the Adirondacks to the Catskills, Tug Hill Plateau, Algonquins, and Green Mountains.

18

Conservation Associates hired since the program's establishment in 2007 in honor of former Adirondack Chapter Board member, Clarence Petty (three of whom are currently employed here).

12,500

acres in the Santanoni Preserve, our Chapter's first land protection project that was added to the Forest Preserve in 1972. Visitors to the preserve enjoy hiking, biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing.

161,000

acres (415 miles of rivers and streams, 300 lakes and ponds, 90 mountain peaks) protected by the Heart of the Adirondacks campaign (2007), the largest conservation and financial transaction in The Nature Conservancy's history at the time.

100

miles of streams reconnected in the Ausable River watershed by replacing 10 poorly designed culverts.

75%

of Adirondack lakes surveyed last year were free of aquatic invasive species.

120

acres of forest and floodplain at our Boquet River Nature Preserve, with a universal access trail named in honor of Tim Barnett, the chapter's founding director.

1998

The Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program was launched to protect the region from invasive species.

\$300,000

in available funds (for grants of up to \$25,000) to local land trusts through our pilot program to increase the pace and scale of protecting resilient and connected lands.

2020



Adirondack Chapter Trustees formed a committee dedicated to investing in justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in our work and in our workplace.



Former Conservation Associate Alissa Fadden now coordinates our Staying Connected Initiative. © Kurt Gardner



Santanoni Preserve, which The Nature Conservancy transferred to the Forest Preserve in 1972. © Carl Heilman II

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Leave a legacy for generations to come.

What better legacy is there to leave than your commitment to protecting the Earth for generations to come? Whether you are taking those first steps toward planning your estate or are in the process of updating your estate plan, The Nature Conservancy is here to help.

Don't let another day pass by.

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