

NEW YORK STATE

# CONSERVATIONIST

JUNE/JULY 2021



## Love OUR NEW YORK Lands

Counting Fish  
A Public Trail across New York  
Managing 19 Million Acres of Forest

Dear Reader,

Over the challenging past year and a half, I'm proud that DEC's expert staff sustained their focus on protecting public health and environment and conserving New York's natural resources for future generations. Conservation is nothing new in New York State; it's a longstanding tradition DEC is proud to build upon.



In his seventh annual Message to Congress on December 17, 1907, Theodore Roosevelt said, "*But there must be the look ahead, there must be a realization of the fact that to waste, to destroy, our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed.*"

At DEC, we work to protect our environment from threats like invasive species, pollution, and climate change, while at the same time finding new opportunities for people to get out and enjoy nature. Being outdoors is not only beneficial to our physical health, it's good for our mental health. Nature has the power to soothe our mind and strengthen our bodies.

As the threat of the pandemic begins to wane, we should all take a moment to appreciate the strength and resiliency that helped us during a very difficult time and to become reacquainted with the people, places, and things we loved and missed, now back within our reach.

The *Conservationist* showcases various aspects of DEC's ongoing efforts to connect people to our environment, offering advice and options on how to enjoy the outdoors, as well as how we can all strive to help preserve the resources that are critical to our health and quality of life. Whether fishing, hiking, nature watching, or simply spending time outdoors (even in your own backyard), I encourage you to take a moment to recognize the power of nature around us.

While New York and our nation still face challenges, I encourage you to maintain a spirit of optimism, and endeavor to enjoy and appreciate what we have, while working to make the world a little better.

Best wishes,  
Basil Seggos, Commissioner



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# NEW YORK STATE CONSERVATIONIST

Volume 75, Number 6 | June/July 2021  
Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of New York State

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The *Conservationist* (ISSN0010-650X), © 2021 by NYSDEC, is an official publication of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation published bimonthly at 625 Broadway, 4th Floor, Albany, NY 12233-4502. Telephone: (518) 402-8047

Manuscripts, photographs and artwork will be accepted if accompanied by SASE. Please write to the above address with an author's query or to request a Contributor's Guide. The publisher assumes no responsibility for loss or damage of unsolicited materials.

## TO SUBSCRIBE:

\$18 per year, \$24 for two years, \$30 for three years. Outside the U.S., add \$27 per year with a check drawn on a U.S. bank. All orders must be prepaid.

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for new subscriptions or changes of address. Periodical postage paid at Albany, NY, and additional mailing offices.

Send check or money order payable to:

*Conservationist*  
NYSDEC  
625 Broadway  
Albany, NY 12233-4502

or call: 1-800-678-6399

Visit the Department's website at: [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:

*Conservationist*  
NYSDEC  
625 Broadway  
Albany, NY 12233-4502



The Empire State Trail – a great way to enjoy the outdoors and amazing destinations

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A seine (\sān\ ) is a tool that can be used to determine the number or types of fish in the river, while having fun.

# Looking through the Net

BY TOM LAKE

Standing on a Hudson River beach in late spring, DEC's Hudson River Estuary staff ask our students to look upriver as far as they can see, and likewise downriver. Then we suggest that across that three-mile reach of the river live more than a million fish. This usually earns snickers or, at the very least, eye rolls, depending on the grade level. Then we haul a seine net across a hundred-foot stretch of inshore shallows, beach the net, and discover hundreds of fish in the bag of the seine. We look at the students and playfully suggest, "Do the math."

## What Is a Seine?

This is the mysterious nature of Hudson River fishes: they are

there, but you will never know the true extent unless you go looking. Our most readily-available tool for searching for fish is a seine, a net with a float-line on top, a lead-line on the bottom, and tight meshes in between. The word *seine* means a fishing net designed to hang vertically in the water, with the ends drawn together to capture the fish. Those most often used in the Hudson, for education and research, range in length from 15 to 500 feet in length, 4 to 8 feet in depth, with a mesh size from 1/4 to 3 inches, depending upon the targeted species. They are an excellent tool used to sample an area and collect aquatic animals without injuring the catch.

## The Mystery

Students frequently ask, "Why do we seine?" Seining is tool to help solve a mystery. Because we cannot see the number or types of fish in the river, we tend to underestimate their presence. Then, like a magic spell, a seine brings them into being. Seining is a window into a river that we cannot otherwise view. We seine for knowledge, for the magic of discovery. As the net comes in, the experience can be akin to opening a birthday present. Every time we haul a seine in tidewater, it is like shuffling a deck of cards: we have a chance of finding a new combination of fishes and surprises. Most of all, it's just fun!

Seining may reveal a new fish or some fish that are rarely seen.

## How Many Fishes Are There?

Scientists have documented 234 species of fish, representing 168 genera (plural of genus; a group of closely related species) and 81 families (closely related genera) in the Hudson River watershed. That is impressive diversity on both taxonomic levels. However, no one believes the list is complete. Besides being cryptic, rare fish can be elusive, or occur in so few numbers that catching one is challenging.

How do we accurately evaluate the total number of fish species in the watershed? Is 234 an accurate number? Given our Northeast climate, where the average annual water temperature in the estuary is 50 degrees Fahrenheit, and our geographic position (where the river meets the western Atlantic Ocean and the northward-flowing Gulf Stream from the tropics), 234 different species of fish in the watershed is appropriate. As we travel northward up the coast into New England and beyond, with cooler average water temperatures, the number of species decreases. Conversely, if we travel south along the coast to Chesapeake Bay and beyond, where average water temperatures are warmer, the number of fish species increases.

Our fish list includes boreal species (those that are far more at home in the cold waters of the North Atlantic), as well as tropical fishes that typically find comfort in the warm waters of Florida and the Caribbean. The Gulf Stream acts as a conduit for eggs and larvae to find their way up the coast in high enough numbers so that a few find their way into the Lower Bay of New York Harbor and through the Verrazzano Narrows. Some fishes migrate in from the sea to spawn in

fresh water, while others live out their lives entirely within the confines of the watershed.

In the uplands, we find native species such as northern pike, lake trout, and the New York State fish, brook trout, that were here when the first people arrived about 12,000 years ago. Seventy-seven percent of our fishes are designated as “native.” Our measure of native species is based on a simple question: Was the fish here when the first Europeans arrived? If so, it’s considered a native species.

Many late-arriving 19<sup>th</sup> century aquatic migrants from the Great Lakes and Mississippi River were drawn here through the New York State canal system. There is also a collection of introduced species—some intentionally, others accidentally, and some that do not play well with others. All 234 fish species have a story to tell: how they got here, their life history, why they are here, and where they are going. Seining, figuratively, offers the opportunity for the fish to be heard.

## In the Beginning ...

Netting for fish is a traditional endeavor on the river and, in that regard, has been a cultural lifeway throughout millennia. There is evidence that nets, including seines, have been used on the estuary for thousands of years. The first Native Americans to arrive here likely carried with them fishing technology they had used on their journey across North America. However, evidence of the very first use of these nets has been swallowed up by sea-level rise.

Offering historical context while enriching students’ seining experience, we like to remind them—as we stand knee-deep in the river hauling a seine—that we are not the first to set a net on this beach. Not by a long shot! The difference is that those who came before were fishing for sustenance, whereas we fish for knowledge. We can imagine that some of these early seiners also stood in awe as their net was hauled up on a beach and out spilled scores of fishes, large and small, many destined for the hearth.



The original seines were composed of organic components—natural cordage with various light-weight floats—as well as the primary surviving evidence, stone net sinkers. Net sinkers are palm-size pebbles, usually fashioned from soft sedimentary rock. They are recognizable by notches ground or pecked into either side, around which natural cordage was used to fasten them to the bottom of the net. At day's end, the net sinkers would probably be cut off and discarded, and the net would be dried and then stowed for the next time. It's doubtful they felt the need to carry rocks in their pockets (if they had pockets); making new ones was a quick and simple task. As a result, these stone net sinkers occasionally show up on Hudson River beaches, having eroded out of ancient sediments.

While the form and function of many utilitarian stone tools such as net sinkers are timeless, we cannot directly radiocarbon

date them. But we can date organics from hearths and middens that are found in association with net sinkers. The organics bio-degraded long ago, leaving the net sinkers as the only evidence of their passing. Sometimes we find them where they fell or, as archaeologists say, *in situ*.

## Commercial Seining

Seines have a long and storied legacy of use in commercial fishing in the tidewater Hudson that began in colonial times and continued until the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They used haul seines, nets stretching thousands of feet long (literally) and requiring a boat to set them and many strong arms to haul them in. While seines targeted

a multitude of species, the primary focus was American shad and striped bass.

During the American Revolution, seiners braved the possibility of a sudden arrival of British warships to capture much needed food for the Colony. These long and deep nets have since been outlawed for commercial use—in the hands of competent fishers, they were simply too efficient, leading to overharvesting.

## Science

Seines, however, are still a mainstay of fisheries managers and researchers; in addition to education, they are most frequently used in various aspects of science. For example, the DEC Region 3 Fisheries Unit (in southeastern New York) conducts annual seining surveys to create young-of-year (fish under age 1) indices for American shad, river herring, and striped bass. These indices help fisheries managers track the reproductive success of target fish populations, which assists in forming quotas and setting regulations. Other seiners include academic institutions, environmental consultants, and scientists mining for data.

Every time a seine is hauled in, it is a moment of discovery that provides an opportunity to learn something new about the river and its fishes.

## Education

A beach can be a complete classroom. Some students arrive at the river with limited understanding of a river, let alone an estuary and all of its moving parts. A level of skepticism regarding the variety, abundance, and importance of river life is part of the equation. Education, including an eagerness to learn, is the solution.

A seine is an instrument that gets us into the river. A single individual can seine by fastening the inshore end to an anchor and swinging an arc. However, seining performs best when done as a participatory activity. The most rewarding result comes from getting an entire class of students involved, hauling, beaching the net, checking and documenting the catch,

or even just encouraging the effort from the sidelines. A boisterous crowd can also be useful in the water by forming a human half-circle upstream of the net at an appropriate distance, and then stomping their feet to encourage the fish to swim into the seine. However, refrain from yelling—the fish cannot hear you.

The opportunity to hear old stories and discover new ones occurs at every seining program conducted by naturalists along the Hudson River, from the Capitol Region to New York City, and along the East River. The new stories come with the discovery of new fishes or those that we rarely see. The best part of a Hudson River seining program is the Q&A, when students get to test if our stories are true!

The lure of seining is the anticipation of natural history revealed, filled with moments of discovery. There is the excited look on the face of a student when the net unfolds to reveal a fish that no one has ever seen before in the Hudson River. That is an unrivaled thrill, though it's a rare, but not unheard-of occurrence.

Tropical species such as bonefish, butterflyfish, small barracuda, moonfish, lumpfish, and ladyfish have all provided thrills of discovery and stories that will be recounted for generations.

## The Rewards

We have referred to those who follow us into the river, net in hand to haul a seine, as students. That is done purposely. Every time we use a net, we join in an opportunity to learn something new about the river and its fishes. That means all of us are students. Most of all, seining is like reading a great book on the Hudson River, and every haul we make is a new page.

**Tom Lake** is a Consulting Estuary Naturalist for DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program in Region 3.

## DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program

Estuaries are one of the most productive ecosystems on earth. Key commercial and recreational species, like striped bass, bluefish, and blue crab, depend on nursery habitat found in a Hudson River estuary. Bald eagles, herons, waterfowl, and other birds feed from the river's bounty. Tidal marshes, mudflats, and other significant habitats in the estuary support a great diversity of life.

DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program helps people enjoy, protect, and revitalize the Hudson River and its valley. The program works to restore Hudson River fisheries by providing education programs and land-use planning and assistance to local municipalities. The program also conducts and funds research; conserves and protects natural resources; and provides grants for river access, clean water, habitat restoration, and climate adaptation projects.



# Now Open

**Unique, Statewide Trail Provides Access to Amazing Sites, Attractions, and Opportunities**



Philip Scalia

BY TONY COLYER-PENDAS WITH ANDY BEERS

Can you remember your first time on a trail? It might have been when you were young, and your parents took you out for a stroll or picnic. Maybe it was a school trip that connected you and your classmates with nature. Or it could have been to a nearby, safe place to learn how to ride a bike.

My family and I enjoy the outdoors and love to recreate locally, but our options were limited—there are no State Forests, Wildlife Management Areas, or State Parks near our house. However, those options grew exponentially recently, as I live within walking distance of the new Empire State Trail.

The Empire State Trail is a 750-mile public trail that runs from New York City to Canada through the Hudson and Champlain Valleys, and from Albany to Buffalo along the route of the Erie Canal. In January 2017, Governor Cuomo announced the plan to create the Trail, and it officially opened in December 2020.

During 2019 and 2020, I could see work being done on the trail near where I live, in Rensselaer County, and I learned that this local trail segment was one of

58 construction projects undertaken by New York State agencies and local government partners to create a true statewide trail. Since completion of the trail last December, people are able to enjoy public recreation year-round, expanding opportunities for bicyclists, walkers, joggers, hikers, cross-country skiers, snowshoers, and families to connect with nature.

The Empire State Trail was created by building more than 180 miles of new off-road trail and connecting 400 miles of previously unconnected off-road trails. Three-quarters of the route is off-road rail trails and canalway trails, featuring 10-foot-wide improved surfaces with gentle grades, welcoming bicyclists and hikers of all ages and abilities.

The Trail connects 20 existing regional trails, including the Albany-Hudson Electric Trail (AHET), a trail that is not far from my home and that my family has enjoyed for years. The AHET runs along an old trolley line that connected the City of Albany to the City of Hudson. The trolley was run from 1899 to 1929 by the Albany

The Empire State Trail goes along the Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park.



NYS Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation/J. Rozell

Hudson River Valley Greenway



The western New York start of the Empire State Trail in Buffalo Harbor State Park.

and Hudson Railway and Power Company to provide commuter and freight service to dozens of communities along the 36-mile route. More than 1 million people rode the trolley during its peak in 1902. Today, the corridor is owned by National Grid, which authorized the Hudson River Valley Greenway, a New York State agency, to construct the AHET, which runs from the City of Rensselaer to the Town of Greenport and is now a segment of the Empire State Trail.

In areas where no off-road trail options currently exist, the Empire State Trail route is designated on the shoulders of public roads, appropriate for experienced bicyclists who are comfortable riding adjacent to vehicle traffic. Detailed descriptions and online maps of each trail section, designated parking areas, and nearby attractions are available at: [www.empiretrail.ny.gov](http://www.empiretrail.ny.gov).

## New York State Trails

New York State has many multi-use trails, including paths, rail trails, and greenways. Some are short, local paths and others are part of a longer regional or statewide trail. There are more than 110 multi use trails and more than 2,200 miles of trails in the state, located across every region of New York. Chances are that there is one close to you.

Listed below are some of the long-distance trails in New York:

- Appalachian Trail: a 2,200-mile trail in the eastern United States, including parts of New York: [www.nps.gov/appa/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/appa/index.htm).
- Empire State Trail: a 750-mile trail from New York City to Canada and Buffalo to Albany: <https://empiretrail.ny.gov/>.
- Finger Lakes Trail: stretching more than 950 miles from the New York-Pennsylvania border to the Catskill Forest Preserve: <https://fingerlakestrail.org>.
- Long Path: a 358-mile trail beginning at the George Washington Bridge in Fort Lee, New Jersey, and ending at John Boyd Thacher State Park in Albany: [www.nynjtc.org/region/long-path](http://www.nynjtc.org/region/long-path).
- Northville-Lake Placid Trail: a 134-mile trail that connects Northville and the village of Lake Placid: [www.lakeplacid.com/hiking/northvillelake-placid-trail](http://www.lakeplacid.com/hiking/northvillelake-placid-trail).
- Taconic Crest Trail: a 37-mile trail in the Taconic Mountains, along the border of New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont: <https://taconichikingclub.org/taconic-crest-trail>.

If you are looking for a trail to bike, walk, run, or cross-country ski, seeking a new trail to explore, or want a map of one of your favorite trails, visit: <https://parks.ny.gov/recreation/trails/trails-in-new-york.aspx>. This website provides resources on local, state, and regional trails, and links to trail maps, organized by county.

Hudson River Valley Greenway



The Albany-Hudson Electric Trail in Columbia County, part of the Empire State Trail.

## Benefits of Trails

Trails and greenways provide community recreation options with conservation, economic, transportation, and health benefits.

- **Economic:** trails increase income at local restaurants, snack shops, and retail shops, and generate tax revenues in their communities. Greenways are also an amenity that make a community more attractive to many homebuyers.
- **Conservation:** greenways and trails provide corridors and links between fragmented habitats for plants and animals.
- **Transportation:** trails provide people of all ages with safe and accessible places to walk, cycle, hike, jog, cross-country ski, or skate.
- **Health:** trails provide outdoor recreation and exercise opportunities for individuals and families, and greenways are a useful tool to help improve air quality.

Many trails and greenways preserve historically significant transportation corridors, while enhancing the environment and the quality of life of the surrounding community.



During 2020, the 750-mile trail was cleared and graded, a surface was added, and multiple bridges were built.

Photos by Tony Colyer-Pendas



## Exploring the Trail and Monitoring Its Progress

A couple of years ago, my family and I began exploring a segment of the Empire State Trail near us. At the time, it was in a natural, unfinished condition, with a surface of grass and dirt, and bushes growing along its sides. Over the course of 2020, the trail corridor was cleared and graded, multiple bridges were built, the asphalt and stone dust trail surface was added, and crosswalks, signage, and traffic signals were installed to provide safe crossings where the trail intersects with public roads.

Across the 750-mile route, parking areas with benches and bicycle racks have been installed for visitors who don't live near the trail. In addition, 45 Empire State Trail gateways and trailheads can be found along the trail, which include signs and interpretive panels that highlight some of the ecosystems and history of the nearby areas.

The section of the trail near our house runs north to south. It is flat and fairly straight, with some gentle curves. The trail traverses open fields and wooded areas, travels alongside ponds, lakes, and wetlands, and crosses several streams and creeks.

While walking on the trail, my son and I have seen a great blue heron flying across one of the neighboring ponds, several red-tailed hawks and red-winged blackbirds perched on power lines and poles, a pickerel frog on the side of the trail, and a painted turtle making its way across the trail. Once, while biking on the trail, I had a fox come onto the trail and jog along in front of me for about 300 feet—I couldn't get a good picture, just a blurry patch of orange, but it's a fun memory.

## Enjoying the Trail Today

A few days after NY PAUSE was implemented in March 2020, I asked my son if he wanted to go for a walk nearby. He said that he didn't really enjoy going on hikes—imagine my disappointment! After another day of being stuck inside, however, he relented and joined me on an excursion on the Empire State Trail, and we have gone exploring it many more times, making it a regular outing. In fact, my son learned how to ride a bike on the trail.



## A Trail Connection

### TIVOLI BAYS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA AND HUDSON RIVER NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE

There are various DEC lands and sites that you can get to easily from the Empire State Trail, depending, of course, on their distance from your starting point, and maybe your stamina. One of these sites is Tivoli Bays, a Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and a component site of the Hudson River Research Reserve, which is located along the east shore of the Hudson River in Dutchess County.

Visiting Tivoli Bays WMA provides an opportunity to view its tidal marsh, the most ecologically pristine marsh on the Hudson River. This marsh supports a variety of breeding marsh birds, and was designated a New York State Important Bird Area in 1997. It also supports other wildlife, and is a great place for paddling (canoe and kayak), as well as waterfowl hunting and fishing. And on top of all that, you'll want to check out the view looking west at the eastern Catskills, which is truly exceptional.

The Tivoli Bays Wildlife Management Area and Research Reserve is open year-round, at no cost to visitors. When you visit this site you may encounter many resident marsh bird species, including Virginia rail, red-winged blackbird, marsh wren, least bittern, American bittern, and swamp sparrow. Raptor species commonly observed at Tivoli Bays include bald eagle, osprey, and northern harrier, and you may encounter wildlife like snapping turtles, muskrats, and beaver.

Whether it's a stop to rest and rejuvenate, or the opportunity to explore and experience the beauty and wonders of nature, the Empire State Trail connects users to DEC properties and other interesting areas and attractions you won't want to miss.

For more information on Tivoli Bay Wildlife Management Area and Research Reserve visit: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/92370.html>.



Projections estimate that 8.6 million people will utilize the trail each year. It provides easy connections to other activities, including visiting museums, cultural attractions, and historic sites located close to the trail, as well as overnight lodging and camping areas, restaurants, breweries, wineries, and farm stands. Our favorite destination along the trail is a locally owned ice cream shop—they make a pretty good root beer float.

Yesterday, my son was eager to explore the trail again and he asked me when I would be finished working so that we could go together. It's nice having this option nearby. The Empire State Trail has already attracted many visitors, providing a unique opportunity for people to get outdoors, exercise, and renew their spirits with small groups of family and friends in inspiring settings. Clearly, the Empire State Trail will be a popular destination for many years to come.

**Tony Colyer-Pendas** is Assistant Editor of *Conservationist* magazine and **Andy Beers** is the Empire State Trail Director with Hudson River Valley Greenway.



# The Beaver: THAT DAM BUILDER

BY DONALD WHARTON


I was relaxing on my bunk one evening at my backwoods hunting camp, when there was a huge splash in the creek next to the camp. Thinking it was a big bear, I grabbed my flashlight and rifle, stepped outside to see what was happening, and saw...nothing. Not even a large branch had fallen into the stream.

After looking around for a few minutes, I went back inside to my bunk wondering about what had just happened. I knew I hadn't been imagining things. Finally, it dawned on me that it might have been a big beaver. I hadn't thought about that possibility because the nearest beaver lodge was close to a half-mile upstream. But it made sense.

No doubt the east wind had carried the smell of wood smoke in his direction, and he'd probably come downstream to see what was going on. When he saw the camp lit up, he let go with a huge smack of his tail on the

water, just to let me know that this was his territory and he wasn't happy with intruders like me. Clearly, beavers are interesting creatures.

The beaver (*Castor canadensis*) was designated as New York State's official mammal in 1975. They play many roles in the Adirondacks, and elsewhere, in addition to startling unsuspecting campers like me. By building their dams, beavers create some great fish and wildlife habitat in what might otherwise be an unbroken forest. Ducks, geese, muskrats, frogs, herons, and trout are all attracted to the water that is backed up by beaver dams. And when those species are present, there are sure to be predators like mink and otters. These flooded areas also provide prime habitat for wood ducks.



To build their dams, beavers usually pick a place where there is a constriction in the terrain, to get the maximum size of the resulting pond for the effort involved; however, no one ever said beavers are lazy. Occasionally, in places where a good site is not available, the dams will stretch out lengthwise for a hundred feet or more. I've seen several dams that were eight feet tall and know of one that was an amazing 17 feet tall. The strangest beaver dam I've seen was one constructed completely of five- and ten-pound rocks on the Sacandaga River. No doubt the beaver figured, why not use what was handy, and there were a lot of rocks of that size in the river.

In addition to making good wildlife habitat, beaver dams often back up still waters, making for good canoeing. Sometimes I liked to run over a dam going downstream, which provided an exciting landing on the other side. A guide I know was once bringing a 600-pound bear out to Piseco (Hamilton County) in a canoe, by paddling through beaver ponds and over beaver dams, and he almost swamped the boat on the downstream side of one of those dams.

When beavers abandon their lodge and pond, a grassy area soon develops, which provides an entirely different type of wildlife habitat. One time, I was crossing one of those grassy areas, with vegetation up to my waist, when a bear stood up in the grass about 30 yards away. I'm not sure who was more surprised. Another time, I encountered possibly the biggest buck I've seen in the Adirondacks, rubbing his antlers on an alder at the edge of one of those grassy meadows.

About 20 years ago, we were flying into Cedar Lakes (Hamilton County) to search for a missing hiker when I noticed a large beaver meadow area below, crisscrossed by several game trails, no doubt used

by deer and bear, and likely moose as well. On the ground, the trails were barely noticeable, but they were distinct from the air.

Beaver improve wildlife habitat by cutting down trees around their ponds, initiating the growth of new vegetation that is used as browse by species like deer, moose, and snowshoe hares. Beaver normally limit the size of the trees they fell to under 12 inches in diameter, but I remember seeing one that was close to three feet in diameter on the stump—I bet they didn't drop that one in 15 minutes!

When I was a kid, I trapped a large blanket beaver that was light brown, almost blond, in pelage. When I took it to a fur buyer, he said, "That's one of those Rocky Mountain Beaver." I didn't know it at the time, but I was learning something about Adirondack wildlife history.



By 1895, most of the beaver population had been extirpated from New York State—except for a few colonies in the Adirondacks—dating back to the time when Henry Hudson began trading furs with Native Americans. Between 1901 and 1907, there was an effort by a few people to bring the beaver back to the Adirondacks, including President Theodore Roosevelt, who was influential in obtaining beavers from Yellowstone Park. Those were the blondish forbearers of the beaver I sold. Another person who worked to return beaver to New York was Harry Radford, publisher of *Woods and Waters* magazine. Radford's beavers were released in the Moose River country, south of Inlet (Hamilton County).

It didn't take long after that for beaver to begin multiplying and flourishing, to the point where New York State began fielding complaints about beaver backing up streams, felling trees, and flooding fields. It had been many decades since people had seen this kind of activity. New York State employed numerous control methods before finally declaring an open trapping season on beaver for the month of March in 1924, the first such season in 29 years.

For a couple reasons, the first half of the 1900s was the real heyday for beaver in the Adirondacks. First, its long absence had given vegetation along the banks of streams and ponds time to regenerate. In addition, during the first decade of the century, Adirondack forest fires burned about 850,000 acres, resulting in the appearance of pioneer

species like aspen and white birch, both favorite foods of the beaver. Today, many of those tree species have been replaced by hardwoods, like beech and sugar maple, which are not so desirable by the beaver.

When prices on beaver pelts were more favorable, a few adventuresome trappers would run their lines in remote corners of the Adirondack mountains. Years ago, I met a professional trapper on the upper Kunjamuk River, north of Speculator, who spent much of that fall and winter trapping out of his spruce and balsam covered lean-to. When I talked to him in the spring, he told me that he'd caught 19 beaver, along with other furbearers like otter, fisher, and mink.

A few years ago, I noticed beavers were rebuilding a dam on a small brook in Warren County. I'd previously seen some fingerling-size trout in that brook and figured I should keep it in mind for future fishing possibilities. I went back there years later and had a good catch of colorful, fat, native trout, some up to 11 inches in length.

Unfortunately, the Halloween storm of 2019 took out the beaver dam in the woods near the Town of Johnsburg, and many others like it—as well as scores of Adirondack roads. I'm hoping that someday the beaver will return and I'll be able to catch a few more native brook trout.

**Donald Wharton** loves the outdoors, including hiking, hunting, trapping, and, as noted above, fishing for trout. He is also an author who loves to share his outdoor adventures.

# On Patrol

Real stories from Environmental Conservation Police Officers and Forest Rangers in the field



## Striper Swipers—Westchester County

On March 11, ECOs Tompkins, Thibodeau, and Franz conducted a plainclothes fishing detail focused on anglers taking out-of-season striped bass. The Officers patrolled George's Island Park in the town of Cortlandt and Croton Landing Park in the village of Croton-on-Hudson. During the detail, the ECOs observed several anglers taking and keeping out-of-season fish. The ECOs issued 10 citations for violations, including possessing out-of-season fish and fishing without a valid license. The Officers seized 42 striped bass from violators and recovered 38 striped bass from large garbage bags concealed in nearby woods. Several fish were released back into the Hudson River and the rest were donated to a local wolf conservation center.

## The Goose is Loose—Queens County

On March 15, ECOs Michalet and Milliron were conducting U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) shellfish checks during low tide at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge in Queens County, when they noticed a Canada Goose struggling to walk. After a closer look, the ECOs discovered the goose had fishing line wrapped around each leg. The Officers successfully removed the lines without injury and the goose flew away. ECO Milliron collected the green braided line and now uses it as a teaching aid about the effect of litter and pollution on the environment and the species directly affected.



## Prescribed Fires—Livingston, Onondaga, and Albany County

In early April, Forest Rangers and DEC Wildlife and Forestry staff worked together on prescribed fires at Sonyea State Forest (Livingston County), Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area (Onondaga County), and the Albany Pine Bush Preserve (Albany County). Prescribed fires help promote the regrowth of native, warm-season grasses, improve wildlife habitat for bird and mammal species, maintain forest ecosystems, and provide a training opportunity for local firefighters. For more information about prescribed fires and wildfire management, visit: [www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4975.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4975.html).

## COVID-19 Vaccination Response—Statewide

New York State has established COVID-19 vaccination centers across many parts of the state. At these sites, ECOs and Forest Rangers work with other DEC staff members from more than a dozen divisions, as well as representatives from multiple state agencies, to build and support vaccination sites at multiple locations. New York State employees play key roles in this critically important operation. For information about efforts to vaccinate New Yorkers, and to check eligibility for vaccinations, visit: <https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov>.



## TO PROTECT AND MANAGE

# *New York's Forests*



## FOR LASTING SUCCESS

BY SARA HART

New York's forests generate life-sustaining clean air and drinking water, the foundations of life. Forests contribute to our mental and physical health and happiness, and they supply us with food, shelter, and renewable forest products. Forested mountains, floodplains, and barrens sustain wildlife through the rhythm of age-old seasonal changes. And for New Yorkers, the millions of plants and animals that make up a forest are also part of our cultural history and the landscape we call home.

While our forests remain abundant and healthy for the most part, keeping them that way requires active management. New Yorkers place major and ever-growing demands on our forests to support their use for homes, businesses, farming, industry, and recreation.

Now imagine having the task of managing New York's forests—close to 19 million acres, comprising more than 60 percent of New York State's land cover. Where would you start? That's the task of DEC's Division of Lands and Forests, which recently completed New York's 2020 State Forest Action Plan (the Plan).

Recognizing the importance of managing our forests for our future, DEC Lands and Forests staff focus on some key priorities that are critical to all of us. Below, you can learn about some of these efforts firsthand, from Lands and Forests experts—through a personal account of what they do, why they do it, and what it helps achieve.

## GOAL / ONE

It may seem obvious, but without forests there is no forest protection. So, the first goal of the

Plan is to **keep our forests as forests**. What may not be so obvious is that privately-owned forests account for 74 percent of all forestland in New York State.

“One of our core roles is to visit landowners and provide them with sound advice on how to better manage their forests,” says Jason Drobnack, DEC’s forest stewardship program leader. “It has always been very gratifying to walk a property with a landowner and have their children or grandchildren tag along. Sometimes the kids ask better questions than the adults! Passing on a love for the forest to the next generation bonds families together. Besides creating lasting memories, including children in forest management decisions also helps sustain a family’s legacy and keeps forests as forests.”

Strategies in the Plan assist private forest owners in managing their lands for a fundamental and increasingly critical benefit: removing carbon from the atmosphere and storing this carbon in the forest. Forests are New York’s “natural carbon sequestration machines,” removing more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than any other mechanism we know, about 26 million metric tons per year.

By keeping our forests as forests, keeping them healthy, and managing them wisely, our forests will realize their full potential as part of the climate change solution. Wise management will also allow forest owners to keep supporting the \$13 billion forest products industry by providing wood for lumber and paper.

Knowing where forestlands are and where they connect (or don’t) is essential to tailoring how they are managed. “I love maps,” says Tim Howard, director of science with the New York Natural Heritage Program, a partnership between DEC and SUNY ESF. “Just like a picture, a map can tell a thousand stories, and each patch has many stories to tell. Although the largest forested areas, including the Adirondacks, the Catskills, Tug Hill, Allegany State Park, and the Hudson Highlands are the most prominent, small- to medium-sized forests play a large role in supporting wildlife and native plants, and providing recreation opportunities.”



Jess Cancelliere of DEC is checking funnel traps for forest pests.

New York also wants to **keep our forests healthy** (goal 2), to ensure they remain resilient, adaptive, ecologically intact living systems. Jessica Cancelliere, a research scientist with DEC’s Forest Health Diagnostic Lab, regularly monitors New York’s forests for new pests through traditional methods, such as insect trapping or visual surveys. However, her most recent work focuses on novel early detection strategies.

“Improving early detection methods for forest pests is essential to protecting the health of our forests,” explains Jessica. Why? “Early detection allows us to respond quickly to an emerging threat and either eradicate it or slow its spread. With environmental DNA (eDNA) surveys, we look for genetic material that an insect has deposited in the environment. We often find eDNA when insect populations are too low to detect with the naked eye. Our lab’s research wing also began building a new emergence room to test a new method of early forest pest detection.”

## GOAL / TWO



## GOAL / THREE

Once New York's strategies are in place to keep forests as forests and keep them healthy,

the stage is set for efforts to **increase benefits for humans and all living creatures** (goal 3). These benefits include clean water and air, flood and erosion resilience, thriving native plants and animals, the employment of thousands of people in the forest products, outdoor recreation, and tourism industries, and more.



Families volunteering to help keep forests healthy.



Volunteers help improve forest lands in Rensselaer County.



Local efforts protect and support New York's trees.

From our recognition of these benefits, we hope to increase the willingness of people

## GOAL / FOUR

and businesses to **appreciate, support, and protect New York's Forests** (goal 4). This final goal brings us full circle to our first target—without our efforts to appreciate and protect them, forests will not remain forests. One way DEC's Lands and Forests staff and partners work to grow forest benefits is through community engagement.

On a sunny spring morning, 40 fourth and fifth graders sprang off a school bus at the Albert Family Community Forest, in Rensselaer County, for their annual Service Day. "This was the school's first Service Day at a community forest, or anything like it, and the kids had plenty of energy to let out," explains Ingrid Haeckel of DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program. "They channeled that energy by clearing trails, raking leaves, collecting trash, and sprucing up the mulch around signposts. The kids really took ownership that day, bringing the community forest to life and improving the forest experience for other visitors."

Urban and suburban areas are home to 87.9 percent of New Yorkers, although they make up only 10.3 percent of our state's land. This means that most of New York's residents get introduced to the joy and benefits from trees or forests through the green infrastructure near their home.

"Studies have shown that trees improve our physical and mental health in a myriad of ways," points out Gloria VanDuyne, DEC's urban and community forestry program coordinator. Spending time around trees reduces our stress and blood pressure, and boosts our immune system. When our neighborhood has many trees, our homes and streets are cooler, and we are more comfortable. We are also more likely to exercise or simply spend time outdoors, and we are more likely to develop relationships with our neighbors. Spending time looking at trees and nature gives the cognitive part of our brain—the part we use in class or at work—a break. This allows us to focus and perform better. Our neighborhood trees do so much for us, but they need our help to be their best, to grow and thrive and help us do the same.

DEC aims to manage our forests not only to benefit people, but also to safeguard the home of New York's cherished wildlife. "Large, unbroken forests are critical for wildlife," explains Laura Heady, Conservation and Land Use Program Coordinator with DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program. "This is never clearer to me than when I get to see beautiful amphibians like a spotted salamander or a wood frog. These species live in the forest, where they spend most of their time in the leaf litter and under the ground. However, they rely on small, temporary wetlands called vernal pools to breed. By conserving and managing large, unfragmented forest and wetland complexes on both public and private lands, we can sustain the small and lesser known, but spectacular, inhabitants of New York's forests."

While DEC's Lands and Forests staff manages our State forests and forest preserves, municipalities decide the future of the woods in their communities. Conservation planning helps communities remain successful and resilient. DEC's Division of Lands and Forests can assist municipalities in developing plans and zoning ordinances that promote sustainable forestry and will help communities maintain resiliency in the face of development pressures and our changing climate.

The ambitious goals and opportunities outlined in the Plan depend on the combined willingness of everyone—from local and state governments, industry leaders, and not-for-profit organizations, to individuals—to devote efforts and resources for the protection and wise management of New York's forests. New York's 2020 State Forest Action Plan offers private landowners and communities several powerful opportunities to partner with DEC's experts.

Forests will continue to play a vital role in New York's future, but the future of these forests is in our hands. How we manage them is up to us. It is impossible to assign a value to all their life-sustaining benefits. And the worth of forests is probably even more than what we understand today. As Jane Goodall said, "Don't let forests be the forgotten solution."



**Planting trees benefits people and all living creatures.**



New York's 2020 State Forest Action Plan identifies four primary goals. Similar to other sustainable systems, these four goals are equal parts of a circular framework—each goal supports the next one and achieving the fourth goal helps accomplish the first. When managing our forests for the future, such a sustainable strategy framework is not only symbolic, but essential.

Would you like to conserve the forests we have left, keep them healthy, increase the bounty of their benefits for everyone, and protect them for the future? If so, you are in the company of DEC's Division of Lands and Forests staff.



**Sara Hart** is a Natural Resource Planner in DEC's Division of Lands and Forests, and she was the lead planner for New York's 2020 State Forest Action Plan.

# ENJOY AND PROTECT OUR UNIQUE RESOURCES



## LOVE OUR NEW YORK LANDS

New York's nature is captivating and can rejuvenate minds, bodies, and spirits. People are drawn to our outdoors, where they can enjoy hiking, camping, paddling, biking, and more in the Adirondacks, Catskills, and throughout the state.

There are thousands of miles of trails, 70,000 miles of rivers and streams, more than 7,600 lakes, ponds, and reservoirs, and hundreds of campgrounds in New York where residents and visitors can connect with nature, embark on special adventures, and make new memories. As more people discover the benefits of an outdoor experience, it's important that we do our part to Love Our NY Lands.

DEC's new Love Our NY Lands campaign encourages people to enjoy the outdoors responsibly. Through education and outreach, it seeks to inspire people to enjoy, respect, and protect State lands, and share trails with others.

One of the easiest ways to ensure a safe, sustainable, and enjoyable experience on our State lands is to choose a site and activity that matches your skills, abilities, and experience. Outdoor adventures are fun, but it is important to know your limits and be prepared for anything and everything you might

While recreating on State lands, practice good stewardship. Conservation of our natural resources helps ensure that everyone can enjoy clean, healthy, and awe-inspiring lands now and in the future. Thankfully, stewardship is not difficult. The Seven Principles of Leave No Trace provide a guideline for safe and sustainable outdoor activities. Follow these principles to improve your trip experience and minimize your impacts.

- Plan Ahead and Prepare
- Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces (to prevent erosion)
- Dispose of Waste Properly
- Leave What You Find
- Minimize Campfire Impacts (extinguish the flame when you're done)
- Respect Wildlife
- Be Considerate of Other Visitors

encounter. Remember, there are millions of acres of public lands in New York. Don't limit yourself to the best-known places—choose ones that are right for you.

While you are on State lands, practice good stewardship. Conservation of our natural resources helps ensure that everyone can enjoy clean, healthy, and awe-inspiring lands. Being a good steward is not difficult; it's simply recognizing the importance of protecting valuable resources.

Some Forest Preserve lands and other State lands are quite fragile. Fires and misuse of these natural resources can cause serious, long-term damage. Always make sure you extinguish your campfire, stick to designated trails and campsites, carry your trash out with you, and leave things as you found them—or better.

Do yourself, the land, and your fellow visitors a favor before heading out onto State lands. Familiarize yourself with the rules and regulations and follow them—it will benefit you and all who enjoy these amazing areas.

DEC Forest Rangers and stewards know our State lands and the potential challenges they can present. They can provide great advice on where to go, what to bring, and how to be safe while enjoying your outdoor experience. Feel free to ask them questions or ask for assistance. Rangers are known for rescuing lost or injured hikers, but they'd rather help prevent you from getting lost or injured in the first place.

Last, but not least, remember that good stewardship isn't limited to the trail. Make sure you park in designated areas and don't block gates, entrances, exits, or other vehicles. Having access to State lands is the first step to a great adventure. And on your adventure, show your love for nature. **FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW YOU CAN LOVE OUR NY LANDS, VISIT: [HTTPS://WWW.DEC.NY.GOV/OUTDOOR/119881.HTML](https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/119881.html).**




In Praise of the

# BIRDBATH



BY TOM LINDSAY |  
PHOTOS BY AUTHOR



Most of us enjoy living in an area where there are four distinct seasons. And those seasons offer different ways to connect to the outdoors and observe its beauty.

Wildlife viewing is an exciting activity that can be enjoyed wherever you are. And when it comes to watching birds, you don't have to wake up early, travel far distances, or even venture from your home. Many birds will come to you, or at least to a spot where you can casually observe them.

One of the tools people have used to bring nature closer to them is a birdbath. The joy of watching birds frolic in a birdbath, or simply perch near its water, is something that amazed us as kids, and still does today. It's almost hypnotic when you see a bird nearby, and it's almost guaranteed to put a smile on your face.

We have provided some photos of birds (and other occasional birdbath visitors) that you might see, along with a few tips on how to make a birdbath even more attractive to birds and critters. It's easy to do, and you may see results like those highlighted here, and more.

Garden pools, fountains, and koi ponds are wonderful outdoor features for people who have both the space and budget. Not only are they visually pleasing and a source of relaxation, they also provide a host of benefits for all the wild creatures who frequent our yards (just ask great blue herons how they feel about fishing in koi ponds). But there's much to be said for the good old birdbath, when it's kept clean and filled with fresh water.

Food, water, and shelter are the three important components of any animal's habitat. But in summer, a reliable water source is often the

hardest one to find. Natural food sources are abundant in the warmest months of the year, while shelter from the elements and hiding spots from predators can be provided by the leaves of deciduous trees, shrubs, and vines. But the local robin may have a challenge finding water for drinking and/or bathing, if the area near your home lacks a stream, marsh, or pond. This will be an even bigger problem during summer heatwaves or droughts.

One day while I was walking on a gravel road after a summer rain, I came upon a bluebird splashing in a shallow puddle. The puddle displayed two of the features one should look for in a commercial birdbath. The bottom was rough, so the bird had steady footing, and the puddle gradually sloped to its maximum depth, allowing the bluebird to wade in to a water level that suited her

size. In addition, the water, which may not have been potable to human standards, was certainly fresh.

A birdbath offers similar features to that puddle. Birds, small mammals, and even insects will drink from a birdbath, and a host of avian species will bathe in one. Birds bathe to keep their feathers in top condition, and since they lack sweat glands, it's likely that they bathe to lower their body temperature as well.

At our home, we maintain two birdbaths in the yard during the warmer months, and use a heated unit mounted on our deck during the winter. One is a pedestal mounted birdbath and the other is close to ground level. We placed both of the birdbaths near sheltering trees or shrubs to provide bath users with a quick escape from hawks or outdoor cats. The beauty of these fresh water sources is that you will see species that may not visit any feeders you have.

Oriole



**“Birds bathe to keep their feathers in top condition, and since they lack sweat glands, it’s likely that they bathe to lower their body temperature as well.”**

Common grackle



American robin



Of course, the challenge of a birdbath is keeping it filled and clean, and making sure that it doesn't become a breeding ground for mosquitos. Our home is located near a cow pasture, and summertime visits from a splashing cowbird flock can empty our birdbath in a minute. Although your yard may not host cowbirds, be aware that blue jays are aggressive bathers, and a couple of them using your birdbath can empty it in short order.

The list of creatures visiting our yard has greatly increased since we decided to supply fresh water all year long. My wife and I have found that birdbaths are a small investment of money, and a larger investment of time, in the warmer months, but the payoff is well worth it.

**Tom Lindsay** is a musician and photographer who has contributed photos to more than three dozen issues of the *Conservationist*.

Cowbirds



Blue jay



Mourning dove



Eastern cottontail

## DEC Promotes Bird Conservation and Connections

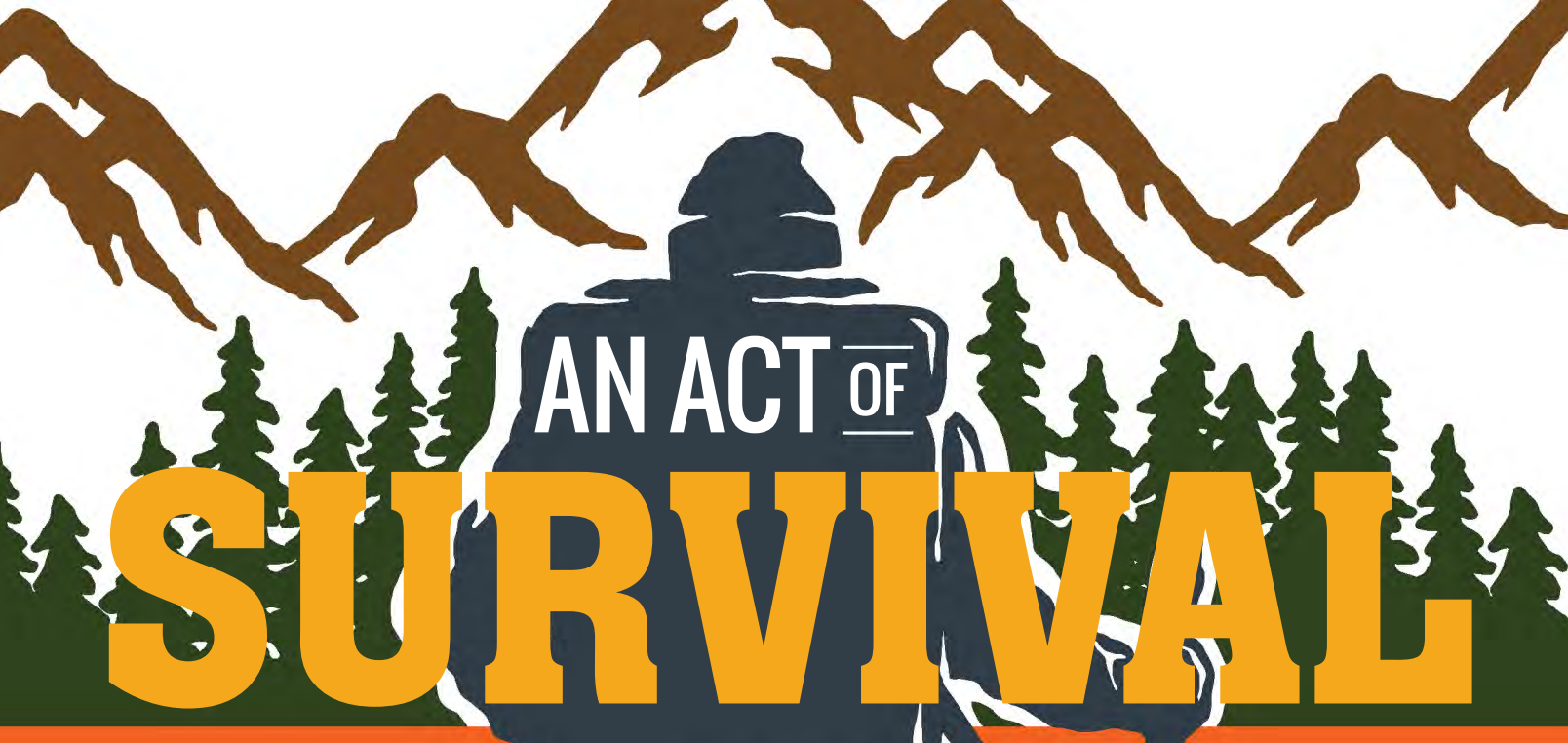
Backyard birding, or watching birds around the home, is one of the most common ways people engage in birding. Of course, it's exciting to see birds in areas beyond your yard, including in their natural habitats. There are more than 450 species of birds in New York, and numerous opportunities for birdwatching.

DEC's I Bird NY program is a great way to learn more about birds and discover ways to view various bird species in their natural habitats. Check out <https://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/109900.html> for a list of bird species and tips on how you can be a successful birdwatcher. This website even features birding videos and webcams so you can check out birds such as peregrine falcons and purple martins. Visit I Bird NY to learn tips from expert ornithologists (bird experts), listen to bird calls, and even learn how to build bluebird houses. There are also numerous links and tips on how you can become a birder.

New York is also committed to protecting bird populations and their habitats. Nearly a quarter century ago, New York established the Bird Conservation Area (BCA) Program to ensure State-owned lands and waters promote important bird conservation goals and interests. The BCA Program, which is modeled after the National Audubon Society's Important Bird Areas Program, incorporates these interests in planning, management, and research projects. There are currently 59 BCAs across New York State, which provide user-friendly features, such as kiosks and trailside interpretive panels, that offer information on birds.

There are many ways you can participate in scientific research about birds. Programs like Cornell Lab of Ornithology's NestWatch, Audubon's Great Backyard Bird Count, and New York's Breeding Bird Atlas all rely on volunteer birders to contribute their sightings to a central database.

So, no matter where you live, we encourage you to view birds in action. Their beauty and behaviors can be mesmerizing, whether it's in a forested area, soaring high in the sky, or right outside your window. Enjoy the experience.



## AN ACT OF

# SURVIVAL

BY DAVE KINGSLAND

*The following story is true; I lived it. I offer it to readers so they may learn how a wilderness environment can magnify simple mistakes. The consequences of such blunders can vary from the trivial to the major; from the humorous to the tragic. This story contains plenty of that, save the tragic, and that was close.*

It begins with my purchase of Ray Bergman's book *TROUT*. After reading it, I pass it to my fishing friends. Like me, they are impressed and excited. None of us has fished for brook trout in the Adirondacks; however, we agree it is something we need to try.

Our initial trips are to the Cranberry Lake area. Although we do catch trout, the greatest value of these trips is the lessons we learn. Now we know the essentials of an early spring trip, during that brief period between ice-out and the arrival of black flies.

Confidently, we decide to raise the degree of difficulty with a trip into the St. Regis Canoe Area. We choose this destination primarily for two reasons. One, it is a wilderness area dotted with small ponds, all containing brook trout, and seldom fished! Two, we have access to a summer camp on Upper Saranac Lake, our staging area. From there it is less than an hour drive to the state hatchery and its adjacent launch site.

To ensure exclusivity, we choose to make our base camp a full day's paddle and portage north from there. All our planning and effort prove worthwhile. The fishing is good. The weather cooperates, and we have a great time. Because of our success, we decide to repeat our trip the next year. But this time we decide to go by land rather than by water.

On our first trip, we discover a large cast iron skillet hanging from a tree, plus a stone wheel to sharpen axes, presumably for firewood; evidence that deer hunters use the same area for their base camp. Searching topographical maps, we find the trail they likely use. Hoping for an easier trip the second year, we decide to use this land route. This necessitates we build two dollies for the canoes. With these

completed, we load all gear and supplies in the canoes and expect to roll everything to base camp. It is soon obvious we made a bad decision.

A dotted line on a topographical map does not show hills, ruts, fallen trees, and other obstacles. We soon realize the



The group used dollies to transport canoes and supplies via a land route, an idea they would later abandon.

effort to paddle a canoe over smooth water is considerably less taxing than pulling a cart over uneven terrain. With this lesson learned, we choose to return to camp via the water route we used the previous year.

With two successful trips behind us, we begin planning our third trip, assuming what worked before will work again. That means no changes are necessary in camp construction, clothes, sleeping bags, etc. We only discuss changes that will give us more time to fish.

We choose an island in St. Regis Pond for our base camp, which saves us a half-day coming and going, giving us a whole extra day to fish. To the northwest are the ponds we fished the previous two years. To the northeast are lakes stocked with splake, a cross between brook trout and lake trout. These are larger, rarer, and more prestigious. However, we quickly learn we need new skills to catch them.

After a couple of days without any success, three of us decide to return to the area where we can catch brook and, subsequently, salvage our egos. As a destination, we choose a lake we had not yet fished, but is located in the same general area where we previously camped. Getting there is a challenge. It requires a route through the woods where no stream or geologic feature exists that is useful for guidance. It requires a topographic map and a compass; I have both. However, I have no orienteering experience—only unwarranted confidence—and that proves woefully insufficient.

**Getting there is a challenge. It requires a route through the woods where no stream or geologic feature exists that is useful for guidance. It requires a topographic map and a compass; I have both. However, I have no orienteering experience—only unwarranted confidence—and that proves woefully insufficient.**

Our day dawns softly with light winds and partial sun; I dress accordingly. We pack the canoe with food, extra clothes, fishing tackle, and waders. We begin with a mile paddle to a conjunction of streams and leave the canoe there. Then a mile cross-country, through the woods, brings us to a trail that leads us to the lake we intend to fish. Our companions make similar plans in their pursuit of the elusive splake. Wishing each other “good luck,” we separate and leave camp.

After an hour’s paddling, we reach our landing site and secure the canoe, pack our gear, and then open our topographic map. We orient it with our compass and consider what compass bearing best leads us to our trail. I suggest a direction and, after a brief discussion, my companions agree. We estimate it will take an hour to reach our trail. But after two hours and still no trail, we begin to worry.



Without comments, I can tell my companions have lost their faith in my leadership. Conceding this, I let them choose a new direction of travel. I keep quiet and follow their lead. They are right and we soon arrive at our lake. *(Note: For years I puzzled why my directions had proved so faulty. Only recently, I discovered the magnetic north in that part of the Adirondacks is nearly 15 degrees west of geographic north. Couple that with my attempts to read the compass while stepping over logs and dodging trees probably accounts for that poor performance.)*

After fishing the lake for an hour, we notice the temperature begins to drop. This is a surprise. We expected it to rise as the sun rose higher. Soon, dark clouds appear, and with them comes a cold rain. Unanimously, we agree to pack up and head for camp. We worry the rain will become sleet or snow, and our rain gear remains in camp. We also worry the wind will rough up the lake, making the paddle to our island exciting, if not dangerous.

We pull out the topographical map again to find the fastest route to our canoe. Retracing our initial route to this pond is not an option; truly, we never knew how we got here! Fortunately, the map shows that the creek draining this pond ends at the conjunction of streams where our canoe waits. To negate any compass-related problems, we decide to follow this creek.

Traversing a shallow grade, the stream meanders and proves difficult to follow. Where it flows as a stream, following it is easy; where it becomes a bog, it is nearly impossible to follow. Hoping to earn forgiveness for my poor performance earlier, I offer to guide. I will follow the stream, and my companions will follow me. When I have to cross the stream or tromp through a bog, my companions can stay dry. They eagerly accept my offer.

With no leaves on the trees, the cold rain pelts our backs as we trudge toward the canoe. My companions throw their waders over their shoulders, giving them some protection. I have no waders and soon my jacket is wet through. After slogging through bogs, soon my hiking boots are equally soaked. In the time it takes to reach the canoe, I am trembling from the cold. Obviously, I am pushing my body harder than I expected.

I hope to find some dry clothes at our canoe to warm me. But consistent with the other poor decisions of that day, we left the canoe upright. Now it is sloshing with rainwater. Everything left behind is soaked. Disappointed, we drain the canoe and push off. Knowing exercise can warm my body, I volunteer to take the bow, where constant paddling will be necessary.

When we reach open water, we find good news and bad news. Our route to camp puts the wind at our backs, which is the good news. However, the wind chill on the open lake is excessive (the bad news), and the rate at which I am exhausting my reserves scares me. I am nearly on “empty,” still far from home and trembling more. Can this be hypothermia? I thought that was the consequence of extreme conditions. Then I understand, for the first time, I am in extreme conditions!

Feverously paddling, I worry what we will find at camp. Assured of good weather by the morning sun and warm breezes, I choose not to stuff my clothes and sleeping bag into a plastic cover. It is now obvious, of course, this is yet another poor decision. I am also concerned whether the tarp that creates our lean-to will survive these winds.

Reaching the island, I am gratified to find our companions have returned from their splake hunt and are already disassembling camp. Later, I learn they made this decision when they realized I had no dry clothes or sleeping bag. *(Today, recalling their preemptive actions, I wonder how, or if, I could have survived the night!).*



**As the author and his companions learned, fishing conditions can be difficult at times (Cranberry Lake).**



**The St. Regis Canoe Area, renowned for Adirondack brook trout fishing.**

By now, my trembling makes conversation difficult, and my limbs begin to numb. Knowing that I am experiencing hypothermia, I worry what has yet to come. Not trusting my own judgment, I turn to others, do what I am told, and take comfort knowing I am still at least capable of simple tasks. My silent prayers and the compassion of my companions keep me hopeful.

Shortly, the camp is gone and the canoes are packed. Again, I take the bow, hoping to avoid further physical collapse. In one mile, we are at the portage. Another mile we arrive at the launch site. Soon after, we reach our staging area on Upper Saranac Lake. And soon after that, an airtight stove begins to warm the room, and me!

When my trembling allows, I join everyone with a large glass of wine. We discuss the trials of the day. It seems our companions fishing for splake had an “ordinary day” in the Adirondacks. Vicariously, they enjoy our tale of adventure, but are grateful they avoided it. After hearing about hypothermia for years, they are especially interested in my

description of it. When I confess that I worried how

I could make it through the night, all agree that breaking down the camp was the right decision.

**In the time it takes to reach the canoe, I am trembling from the cold. Obviously, I am pushing my body harder than I expected.**

With the airtight stove warming my body from the outside in, and now a hot meal warming it from the inside out, my body returns to normal. I learn the toilet requires a pail of water from the lake. Pail in hand, I head for the lake. I find the dock and in the dark, walk off its end into the lake. I am embarrassed to tears. But my companions think it hilarious, still laughing about it as we turn off the lights.

As I lay there listening to them sleep, I begin my silent thank you’s.



**The author has enjoyed fishing success, but this trip proved to be a major challenge.**

**Dave Kingsland** is an avid outdoorsman, and enjoys (usually) fishing, including fly fishing.

# ASHLAND FLATS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

BY IRENE MAZZOCCHI

Ashland Flats Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is a 2,028-acre property that offers many opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts. The area is popular for small and big game hunting, trapping, and wildlife viewing.

Ashland Flats WMA consists primarily of large grassland fields, wetland impoundments, shrublands, and forested wetlands. Due to the various habitats on the WMA and its use by several endangered, threatened, and species of special concern, as well as Species of Greatest Conservation Need, DEC designated the WMA a New York State Bird Conservation Area in May 2003.

The property contains two impounded wetlands that support nesting waterfowl and serve as an important migratory stopover for many waterfowl species, including green-winged teal, wood duck, and mallard. The WMA is one of only a handful of locations in New York State where the endangered black tern has been recently known to nest. Other listed marsh birds nesting on Ashland Flats include pied-billed grebe and American bittern. In addition to

birds, Ashland Flats provides habitat for a variety of mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. Muskrats and beaver are an important part of the marsh ecosystem on the WMA—keep an eye out for their lodges, which are often made of mud, cattails, and/or sticks.

With its large open grassland fields, the WMA is an important breeding area for several threatened and endangered grassland bird species. During the winter months, the grasslands and emergent wetlands provide cover and foraging habitat for a variety of raptors, including rough-legged hawk, northern harrier, and short-eared owl.

The property provides opportunities for quality upland game hunting for species such as white-tailed deer and wild turkey, and DEC staff release ring-necked pheasants on the area in the fall. Waterfowl hunting is allowed on the WMA; however, the larger impoundment is approximately 70 acres, so space may be limited. Trapping, especially for muskrat, is also a popular activity.



Virginia rail



White-tailed deer



**LOCATED IN THE TOWNS OF LYME AND  
CAPE VINCENT IN JEFFERSON COUNTY;  
SIZE: 2,028 ACRES**

DEC constructed an accessible observation tower overlooking the larger wetland impoundment and interior fields of the WMA in 2020, and it provides a great opportunity to view the WMA and the wildlife that utilize it. You can see migrating waterfowl, songbirds, shorebirds, marsh birds, and raptors. During the late summer and early fall, great egrets can often be seen feeding and roosting on the WMA.

Current management practices at Ashland Flats WMA are aimed at restoring and creating grassland habitat for various bird and wildlife species. With its diverse ecosystems, abundant wildlife, and varied recreational opportunities, Ashland Flats WMA is a great destination for outdoor enthusiasts in Northern New York.

**Irene Mazzocchi** is a Senior Wildlife Biologist in DEC's Watertown office.



**Northern Harrier**

## Site Features



**NOTES:** Open year-round. Small and big game hunting, trapping, birdwatching, nature study, and wildlife photography are all popular activities. This WMA is one of the stocking sites for pheasant hunting in Jefferson County. Accessible features include a parking area with an observation tower located in the center of the WMA. The wildlife diversity along with bird watching is excellent, so bring your binoculars and camera for added enjoyment.

All Wildlife Management Areas have regulations governing public use. For a list of allowable and restricted activities at WMAs, visit [https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife\\_pdf/publicuseofwmas.pdf](https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife_pdf/publicuseofwmas.pdf).



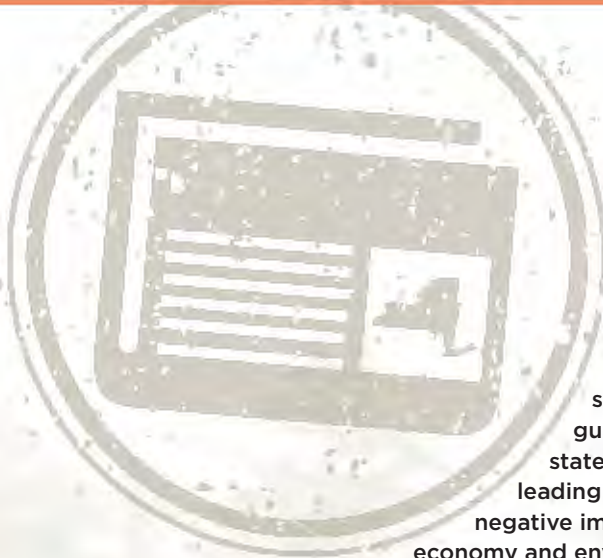
**DIRECTIONS:** Ashland Flats WMA is in Jefferson County, two miles northeast of the village of Three Mile Bay and can be accessed from Ashland Road or Burnt Rock Road.



**CONTACT:** For information on Ashland Flats WMA, contact DEC's Region 6 Watertown Office at (315) 785-2263; NYSDEC, 317 Washington Street, Watertown, NY 13601; or visit [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/35474.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/35474.html).



**Accessible observation tower**



## New York Statewide Recycling Website Launched

DEC's Recycle Right campaign launched a first-of-its-kind statewide recycling website to help people comply with New York State's residential recycling system. Recycling guidelines across the state differ significantly, leading to confusion and negative impacts to New York's economy and environment. The Recycle

Right NY website features new resources to help visitors easily find their local recycling guidelines, learn what is and is not recyclable, and how to reduce, reuse, and recycle in their communities. New Yorkers can work together to build a model of sustainable materials management for the rest of the nation. To learn more, visit: <https://recyclerightny.org>.



## Cost-Share Grants Available for Forest Landowners

Do you own between 10 and 1,000 acres of forest land and have interest in improving your woods? DEC's Regenerate NY program provides cost-share grants to New York landowners looking to enhance forest regeneration on their property. Landowners who want to plant trees, control competing vegetation, restore a degraded forest stand, or exclude deer can apply for project funding. Private landowners are encouraged to team up with a cooperating forester who may provide application support. This program is open until October 8, but grants are awarded on a first come, first served basis, so consider applying early. To find out more about receiving funding for your forest, please visit: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/119950.html>.



## The 2021 New York State Camping Guide

The digital version of the 2021 New York State Camping Guide is now available. The Camping Guide is a helpful online tool to explore the 120 campgrounds operated by DEC and State Parks. The digital version features photos, information on amenities and reservations, a statewide map, and more. Many campgrounds are located near day-use parks, trails, historic sites, golf courses, and other family-friendly destinations. For more information and to book your next getaway, visit: [https://read.nxtbook.com/nysparks/camping\\_guide/2021/cover.html](https://read.nxtbook.com/nysparks/camping_guide/2021/cover.html).



## In-Person Hunter Education Courses Available

DEC has resumed holding in-person, instructor-led Hunter Education Program (HEP) courses, but will continue to offer online hunter education courses as well. In-person courses are free and taught by volunteer HEP instructors. Courses are offered in hunter, bowhunter, trapper, and waterfowl hunter education. Registration is required. In-person courses fill quickly, so it's important to sign up early. Since March 2020, DEC has seen a dramatic increase in sales of hunting and fishing licenses. For more information, or to register for a HEP course, visit: [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7860.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7860.html).



## Adopt-a-Trailhead Program

DEC is now accepting volunteer applications for the Adopt-a-Trailhead program. The program is an opportunity for members of the public to actively care for State lands and educate visitors on the values of responsible recreation. Interested volunteers would be assigned to a local trailhead throughout the summer and fall to provide visitor education and/or litter removal. Volunteers are expected to spend time at their assigned trailhead most weekend mornings through Columbus Day weekend. DEC thanks all potential volunteers for their interest in helping us care for public lands! For more information and to apply, visit: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/122566.html>.

## The State of the Hudson

DEC and the NY-NJ Harbor & Estuary Program have released *The State of the Hudson 2020*. The report documents the status of the Hudson River Estuary's water quality, its natural communities, and the health of the landscapes around the Hudson River. The report compiles data and historical information that allows program managers, partner organizations, and the public to measure and communicate progress toward state and federal goals for conserving and restoring the River's estuary ecosystems. Throughout the Hudson River's estuary, there are dozens of organizations that provide environmental education or programs that get people on the water. These programs are critical for fostering a connection with, and stewardship of, the River and its estuary, especially for young people. To review or download the report, visit: [www.hudsonriver.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/HREP\\_SOH\\_Final\\_12-2020.pdf](http://www.hudsonriver.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/HREP_SOH_Final_12-2020.pdf).





### Unusual Bird

We recently saw this bird at our feeder. It was there for about 10 minutes or so, with no repeat visits since. After looking online, I am still unable to determine what kind of bird this is. I was wondering if you could tell me what it is?

TERESA GREEN | LOCKE

*This is an immature red-headed woodpecker. It would appear to be a bird in its first year that has not yet acquired its adult plumage. There is a lot of variation in the timing of molts of red-headed woodpeckers. As an adult, the dark coloration on the head will become a bright red color, thus the name. —Ray Perry (retired), Five Rivers Environmental Education Center*



### Mother Knows Best

Last May, we looked out our kitchen doors to find a fawn in our yard. We obviously didn't go near it and left it alone. The next day, we discovered there were two. One did go up to our pool area. Our railings were down because we were redoing the deck. Fortunately, we still had our pool cover on. We saw Mom come back several times throughout the six days that she left her fawns.

NIKKI KEATOR | SKANEATELES

*Great photos, thanks for sharing! This is an excellent reminder that young wildlife will often be discovered this time of year, appearing to be abandoned. As is the case with your fawns, the mother generally leaves the young where she thinks they will be safe, and it is best to leave them alone and let her take care of them. Learn more on our website at <https://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/6956.html>.*

## A Near Miss

I thought you might enjoy this photo of a kingfisher missing a meal on the Wynants Kill. We had set up the camera to get beaver, wood ducks, and mallards, and got a bonus picture.

THOM CARROLL | AVERILL PARK

*Belted kingfishers are almost always found near bodies of water, with their primary food consisting of aquatic prey. They will repeatedly dive into the water to catch fish, crayfish, and other animals, and although not always successful, they are excellent at what they do!*



## Persistent Turtle

My wife and I were recently at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Albany County, and wanted to share an interesting observation with you. While we were in the bird blind, we witnessed a rather unusual event. A turtle was climbing over/onto a Canada goose. As the goose did not move for the longest time, we were convinced it was a decoy. Finally, he/she did move.

TOM FEDERLIN | SARATOGA SPRINGS

*Thanks for sharing these very interesting photos with us! The painted turtle seemed very determined to try and use the goose as a sunning platform, we think. The goose was demonstrating just how hard it is to get a female to leave her nest when she is incubating her eggs.*

## Ask the Biologist

**Q:** I came across this singular tree, which appears to contain brush or other dry matter strategically placed in its nooks and crannies. Are they nests? Thank you!

JANE LASURE | CAZENOVIA

**A:** This phenomenon of very dense growth is known as a “witches’ broom,” and in this case, I believe it is caused by fir broom rust disease (since it appears the tree is a balsam fir). This is a native fungus found across the continent. I think what is shown in the pictures is old damage, from last year.

Jason Denham, Division of Lands and Forests



### CONTACT US!



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# Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

## DECinfo Locator— A Great, Interactive, and Comprehensive Resource

BY SCOTT DONNELLY

As New York State begins to emerge from under the dark cloud of COVID-19, outdoor enthusiasts may find themselves planning adventures beyond their close-to-home options.

Planning is key to a fun, safe adventure in the outdoors, and with so many great places to recreate, New York State residents have many resources to help them get informed before heading out. If you're not making use of DECinfo Locator, you should take a look.

Yes, I'm less than impartial. When I joined DEC in early 2019, my first assignment was to help with the launch of the DECinfo Locator application (app). The "first-act" of my professional career was in print journalism, so I saw real value in making DEC's environmental quality data readily available. I had often struggled to locate and obtain State information, so the search process was familiar to me. But I also knew that many people aren't savvy about how to get the information they need.

Even before DECinfo Locator went live in the summer of 2019, I was spending more and more time with the Outdoor Activity part of the app. (Note: DECinfo Locator is the first DEC tool to allow users to add both environmental quality and outdoor recreation data to the same interactive map.)

Fire towers were my "gateway" Outdoor Recreation layer. I wanted to see them all, rather than just reading descriptions of them or viewing static maps. DECinfo Locator let me scroll around for information on the nearest, farthest, and in-between towers. Adding parking areas and



Scott Donnelly is a Public Information Specialist with DEC's Office of Communication Services in Albany.



trails for hiking and cross-country skiing—I had ambitious winter plans—made it easy to plan my trips.

Once you get the hang of the app, you'll enjoy a resource that puts more than 75 layers of interactive data and information on your home computer. (Note: The app is best used on personal computers and tablets right now, but a mobile app is in the works.)

If you're already familiar with the app, check back frequently, as we are constantly adding new layers. Last month, we launched a multi-layer data set for inland trout stream fishing, allowing anglers to find a stream, view its regulations, and plan how to get there by adding parking and stream access information to the map.

We know many visitors to the site combine both environmental quality and outdoor recreation data on the same map. Maybe you want to know what air quality monitoring stations are reporting before you head out for a hike. Or you can add water quality information to your map of boat launches, so you know in advance whether a Harmful Algal Bloom could impact your trip.

There are so many ways to use the data. Here are some of the things we've heard from users:

"Love it. I use it when planning bicycle camping trips—without a car, I need a dense network of campsites (i.e., how far a person can travel in a day on a loaded bike), and this app fills this need for me."

"I love everything about this map—it will help me plan backpacking and camping trips all over New York State."

"It was easy to use on a desktop computer, but DEC needs to come out with a mobile app which is more user friendly."

Yes, we're working on that—and other user requests—so, take a look and let us know what you think!

It's a great idea to add DECinfo Locator to your adventure-planning toolbox. Start here, <https://www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/109457.html>, and be sure to use the instructional materials to guide you through using the application. When you use the app, please take a moment to fill out the survey. We have used that feedback to make many improvements over the past two years, and making the app better remains our goal.



# FREE FISHING WEEKEND

June 26-27, 2021



NEW YORK STATE

Department of Environmental Conservation

Jim Clayton

**The last full weekend in June is designated as Free Fishing Weekend in New York State,** a time people of all ages and abilities can enjoy one of the most popular outdoor activities, even if they don't have a fishing license.

We encourage everyone to take advantage of the amazing fishing available throughout the Empire State. Freshwater fish like bass, sunfish, pike, trout, salmon, walleye, musky, and other popular species can be found in New York waters. During New York's Free

Fishing Weekend, you'll have the opportunity to try your luck (and skills) without the requirement of having a fishing license. It's also a great time to introduce a friend or relative to this amazing sport, and show them why so many New Yorkers love to fish.

Additional free fishing days in 2021 include September 25 (National Hunting and Fishing Day) and November 11 (Veterans Day).

To learn more, visit: [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/89821.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/89821.html).



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