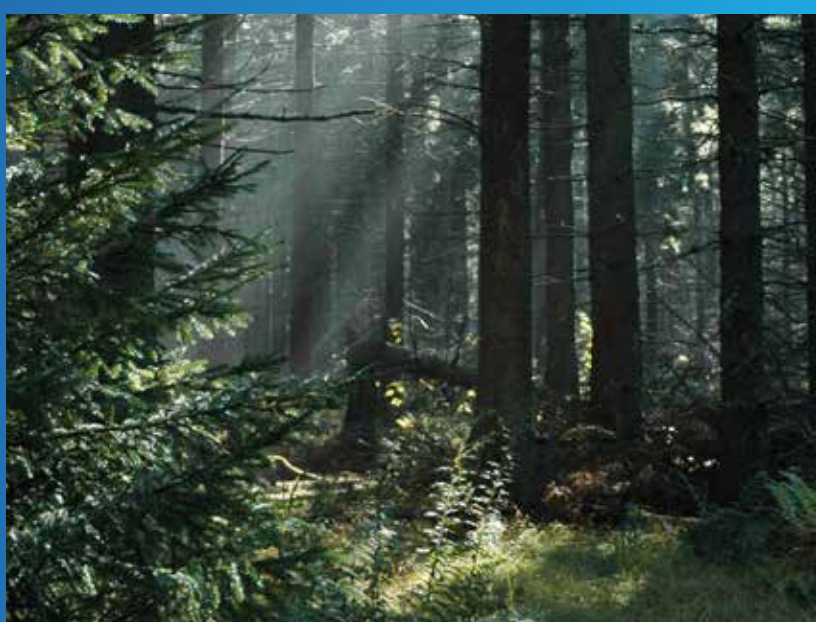




CONSERVING OPEN SPACE IN NEW YORK STATE

NEW YORK STATE OPEN SPACE
CONSERVATION PLAN

SUMMARY | 2016



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Parks, Recreation
and Historic
Preservation

Department
of State

Agriculture
and Markets

Department of
Transportation



Conserving Room to Breathe

Open space is public or private land not intensively developed for residential, commercial, industrial or institutional use. It includes farms and forests, coastal and estuarine lands, scenic lands, parks and preserves. It also includes water bodies, such as lakes and bays.

Open space is defined partly by its surroundings. A vacant lot or small marsh can be open space in a city. A narrow pathway for walking or bicycling is open space, even though surrounded by developed areas.

Conserving Quality of Life

The Open Space Conservation Plan (Plan) is a comprehensive statewide plan that describes current open space conservation goals, actions, tools, resources and programs administered by state and federal agencies and conservation nonprofits. The state agencies involved are:

- Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)
- Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP)
- Department of State (DOS)
- Department of Agriculture and Markets (DAM)
- Department of Transportation (DOT)

The Plan has become an important and popular voice for conserving our open spaces and the quality of life they provide us. It also discusses cultural and historic resources, which, along with open space, are part of our state's heritage. Visit www.dec.ny.gov/lands/317.html for the full Plan.



Conserving What We Value

Open spaces provide clean air and water, outdoor recreation, habitat for plants and animals, protection from storm surges and floods, and many other benefits. To realize these benefits, we need to conserve fields, forests, waters and wetlands vulnerable to development. We have the power to change the landscape, conserving what we value, or destroying places important to our future. How we conserve open land and historic sites, while providing space for homes, commerce and industry, will have a profound impact on future generations.



Former Governor Mario Cuomo signed the Environmental Protection Act in 1993, creating the Environmental Protection Fund.

Funding Open Space Conservation

The Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), created by the State Legislature in 1993, funds the acquisition, stewardship and management of priority open space conservation projects, among several other environmental purposes. A 2014 study by the Trust for Public Land found that for each \$1 invested in the EPF, New Yorker's receive \$7 in benefits.

“ In 2016, Governor Andrew Cuomo nearly doubled the Environmental Protection Fund to \$300 million annually, which provides resources for a variety of state and local open space programs. ”

– DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos

“ Governor Andrew Cuomo has provided an unprecedented level of funding for the rehabilitation of the state park system. This funding is already improving our magnificent state parks and is a driving force in the increased visitation we are witnessing. ”

– OPRHP Commissioner Rose Harvey

Setting Conservation Goals

- Protect water quality
- Provide accessible, quality, outdoor recreation
- Protect wildlife habitats for diversity and the sustainability of flora and fauna
- Improve the quality of life and the health of our communities
- Maintain critical natural resource-based industries; e.g., agriculture and forest products
- Address climate change through forest, wetland and riparian area stewardship, ecosystem protection, urban and community forestry, and community planning
- Provide places for education and research
- Protect and enhance scenic, historic and cultural resources

Following Conservation Principles

- Work with partners to establish and achieve conservation goals
- Deal fairly and openly with property owners and work cooperatively with local governments and citizens
- Identify and expand the variety of conservation tools, methods, strategies and actions available to communities and individuals for protecting a variety of open space resources
- Establish conservation priorities through objective measurement of urban and rural land conservation needs and broad-based citizen opinion
- Establish priorities for state action to conserve specific open space parcels and cultural resources
- Identify future funding needs and stewardship expenses
- Strive to combat sprawl through smart growth planning at the local, regional and state level
- Obtain meaningful involvement from the environmental justice community in the development of plan priorities



Photo courtesy
Grassroots Gardens WNY



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Scenic Hudson



Niagara Falls: New York's first State Park established in 1883.

Continuing Our Conservation Legacy

New York is rightly considered “the cradle of conservation.” It was here that the first “forever wild” forest preserve was created in the Adirondacks and Catskills, and the oldest state park in the nation was established at Niagara Falls. For more than 100 years, New York State has built an enduring conservation legacy.

The Open Space Conservation Plan extends this legacy by:

- Providing details on priority conservation projects nominated by Regional Advisory Committees
- Recommending projects for Environmental Protection Fund spending
- Making policy recommendations on new initiatives, such as using wetlands and forests to mitigate and adapt to climate change



New York City's Central Park



DEC's first Commissioner Henry Diamond at the first Earth Day in 1970.



Making parks of neglected urban lots benefits underserved areas.

Acquiring the Former Finch Pruyn Lands

In 2012, Governor Cuomo announced plans to acquire 69,000 acres of the former Finch Pruyn and other Nature Conservancy lands throughout the Adirondacks—the largest single addition to the Adirondack Forest Preserve in more than a century. From 2012 to 2016, important acquisitions in such areas as the Essex Chain of Lakes and Boreas Ponds brought first-time public access to streams, waterfalls, lakes, forests, wildlife habitats and trails offering exceptional recreational opportunities.

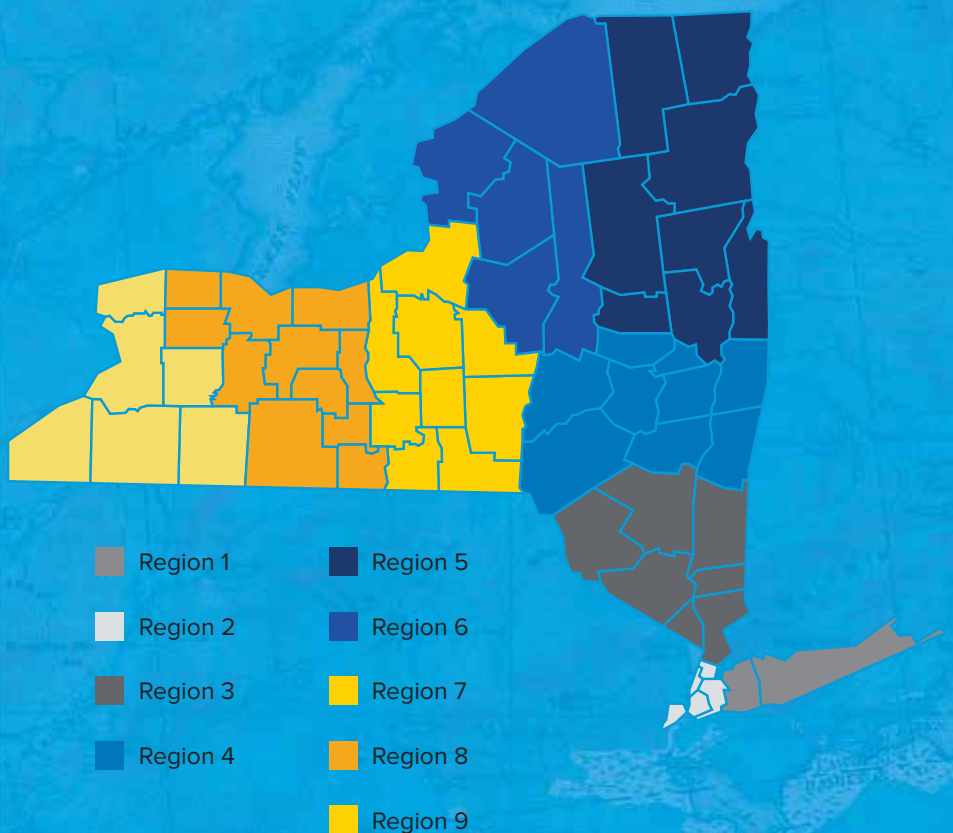
These acquisitions complement 89,000 acres of conservation easements on former Finch Pruyn lands acquired in 2010 to protect working forests across the North Country. All of these acquisitions were supported by local communities. Combined with completion of critical links in the Adirondack snowmobile trail system, they will draw visitors to local businesses that rely on year-round tourism.



Organizing Regional Advisory Committees

Each of DEC's nine regions is represented by a Regional Advisory Committee (Committee) appointed by the commissioners of DEC and OPRHP and by officials representing each of the counties within each region. Each committee submits a report containing recommended priority conservation projects for their region. The reports also contain advice and recommendations on:

- Conservation policies and priorities
- Further studies and assessments
- Economic impacts of projects
- Ecological value of projects





Several priority areas were identified for the Niagara River, including acquiring critical headwater forests.

Identifying Priority Conservation Projects

The priority conservation projects in the Plan result from:

- Extensive analysis of open space conservation needs by the Committees in consultation with DEC and OPRHP, and
- Public comments received during Committee meetings and the Plan's review process.

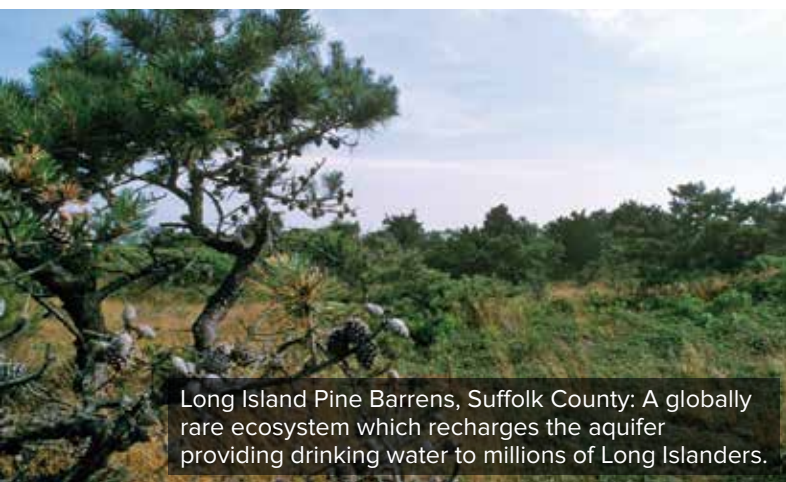
The projects represent New York's irreplaceable open spaces, encompassing exceptional ecological, wildlife, recreational, scenic and historical values.

Priority projects are eligible for funding from the state's Environmental Protection Fund and other state, federal and local funding sources. Most require a combination of state and local acquisition, land-use regulation, smart development decisions, landowner incentives and other conservation tools to succeed in conserving open space for the long-term. Many project areas are large and will require a balance between conservation and resource-sensitive economic development.



John Rozell/
NYS Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

The Hudson Highlands Connectivity Project seeks to create a wildlife corridor within the biologically rich core of the western highlands.



Long Island Pine Barrens, Suffolk County: A globally rare ecosystem which recharges the aquifer providing drinking water to millions of Long Islanders.



Hemlock-Canadice State Forest is 7,000 acres surrounding the Rochester area's two water supply lakes.

Promoting Outdoor Recreation

Understanding the environment is critical to our future, but today, children spend far less time outdoors than their parents did. They learn about nature from television and the internet, rather than from direct contact and observation. Efforts to connect New Yorkers to nature described in the Plan include:

- Providing access to nature where people live,
- Increasing environmental literacy,
- Showing how contact with nature enhances public health and quality of life, and
- Involving the next generation in caring for the environment and protecting our open spaces.

Outdoor recreation is an important part of New York's economy. In 2012, it generated \$33.8 billion, supported 305,000 jobs, \$12.4 billion in wages, and \$2.8 billion in state and local tax revenue. New York State has historically invested in recreational access. It will continue to provide greater access to state lands, improve the availability of recreation information, and improve the economic, social and environmental benefits of those investments.

Approximately one in five Americans has a disability. An increased focus on providing universally accessible amenities on DEC and OPRHP lands in recent years has resulted in the creation of wheelchair-accessible trails, designated parking, restrooms, picnic areas, campsites, fishing piers, horse-mounting platforms, and boat launches, as well as increased efforts to make all programs and services inclusive. This invites and welcomes people of varying abilities to become active in outdoor recreation, in turn supporting a healthy quality of life for all of our citizens.



Darren McGee/
Office of the Governor

The governor's recreation challenges highlight the diversity of recreation available to residents and visitors throughout NY.



Goodyear Lake, Otsego County—one of several projects that expands recreation statewide—includes universally accessible features.



The NY Parks 2020 program is a commitment of \$900 million in private and public funds for State Parks that began in 2011 and will end in 2020. The new Humphrey Nature Center at Letchworth State Park is one of the NY Parks 2020 improvements.



BEFORE



AFTER

A barrier dune removed by Superstorm Sandy protected Fire Island Lighthouse from wave action and storm surge.

Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change

Today, we urgently face two major challenges resulting from climate change: preventing further warming and adapting to changes already occurring. A clear link exists between climate change and open space conservation. The Plan includes recommendations on how state and local governments can protect and enhance riparian areas, coastal areas, flood plains and forests as part of climate-change adaptation. All this can be done while improving wildlife habitat and creating recreational opportunities. The Plan also complements Governor Cuomo's climate change fighting efforts, including the 2100 Commission Report, Community Risk and Resiliency Act, and the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery.



A \$50 million transformation of Roberto Clemente State Park on the Harlem River includes a new storm-resilient design that will better protect the surrounding Bronx neighborhood from severe storms. Funding: NY Parks 2020 Plan and the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery

Conserving Clean Water/Air/Land

The Plan describes how preserving open space can enhance the places where we live.

- Urban parks, greenways, trails and waterfront access help maintain and improve a city's quality of life.
- Brownfield cleanups enable safe redevelopment of contaminated land, a key to “smart growth,” which seeks to direct commercial and residential economic activity into developed areas and away from open space.
- Open space corridors complement urban and community forests, helping densely populated areas maintain green spaces and streetscapes.
- Watershed and water quality protection efforts prevent pollution of rivers and streams and maintain a safe water supply.
- New models of community design and transportation efficiency improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gases and energy use.

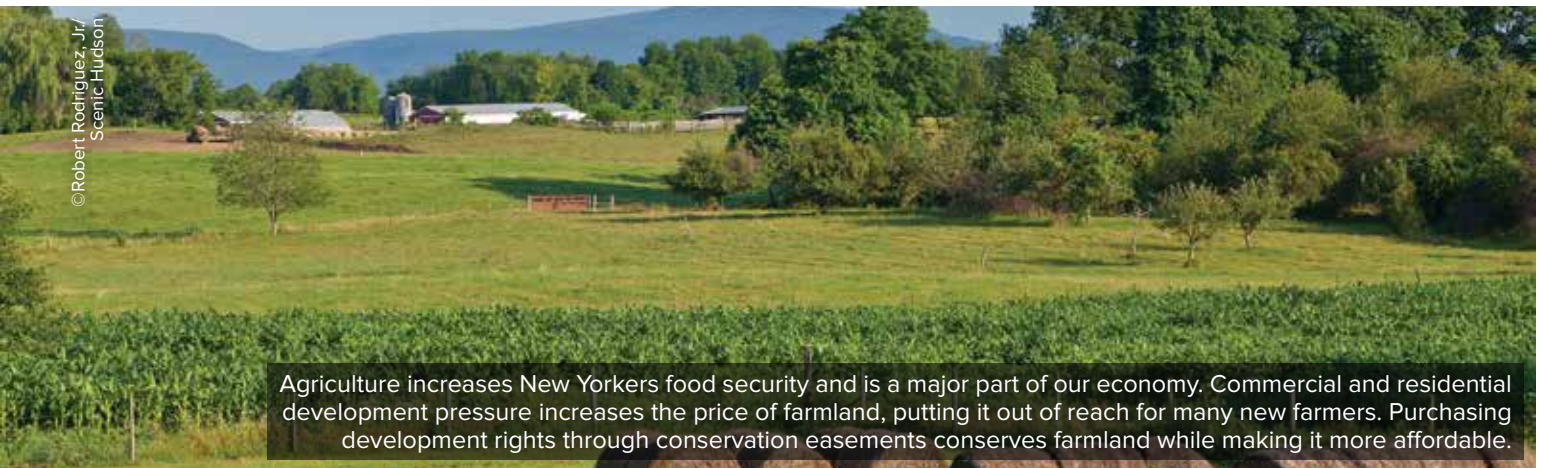


Conserving Our Natural and Cultural Heritage

New York's natural and cultural heritage links us to the past and directs us into the future. Our state has a long history of stewardship of its natural and cultural heritage. The Plan describes how wise stewardship of our parks, forests, farms, lakes and rivers ensures that they will continue to nurture and inspire New Yorkers for generations to come.



DEC's Conservation Easements program keeps forests as forests by protecting more than 800,000 acres of working forests, ensuring trees are harvested sustainably and providing public recreation opportunities.



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Scenic Hudson

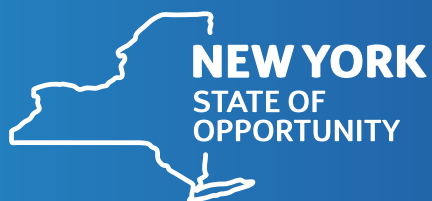
Agriculture increases New Yorkers food security and is a major part of our economy. Commercial and residential development pressure increases the price of farmland, putting it out of reach for many new farmers. Purchasing development rights through conservation easements conserves farmland while making it more affordable.



Programs like the Young Forest Initiative support wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need. These species depend on a mix of open areas and young forests for survival.



Converting the former Corning Free Academy into housing exemplifies how historic preservation enhances communities and complements protection of our natural heritage.



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