

# Year of Forests

*By Gloria Van Dyne*



When many people think of the Empire State, images of New York City—Times Square, Broadway, Wall Street, skyscrapers—come to mind. But most people would be surprised to learn that New York State is actually one of the most heavily forested states in the country. In fact, more than 60% of the state is covered in forest; that's an acre of forest for every resident.

Forests and trees are essential to the health of our planet. They protect water and air quality, shelter us from the sun and wind, sequester carbon, provide wildlife habitat, and generate employment for thousands of people in the forest products, outdoor recreation and tourism industries. To celebrate our forests, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly declared

2011 the International Year of Forests. The goal is to raise awareness of sustainable management, conservation and sustainable development of all forest types.

According to the UN, forests cover 31% of land area worldwide, are home to 300 million people, and house 80% of our terrestrial biodiversity. In addition, the livelihoods of more than 1.6 billion people depend on forests, and trade in forest products was estimated at \$327 billion in 2004.

While the UN proclamation underscores the international concern for the future of forests worldwide, here in New York we have a wonderful legacy of forests, and a proud history of forest conservation worthy of celebration. For more than a century, the Department of Environmental Conservation

(DEC) has worked with many partners to conserve and protect our forests, from the wilderness of the Adirondacks and Catskills, to the beautiful tree-lined streets that grace many of our communities.

Imagine what New York State would be like with little or no forests. Your local reservoir, campground, town, street, yard, work place, Adirondack and Catskill Parks, and Central Park in New York City would no longer be places where you'd like to live, work or spend your leisure time. And no trees would make us extremely vulnerable to the affects of global climate change. At a time of great environmental and economic challenge, planting trees, practicing sustainable forestry, and conserving our forest lands are among the most cost-effective strategies we can take to keep New York green, while building our communities and contributing to the state's economic recovery.

To celebrate the International Year of Forests, *Conservationist* will run a series of short articles throughout 2011 highlighting different aspects of New York's forests and advising you of things you can do to protect them. With care and wise investments in their future, our trees and forests can remain an important part of New York's future—a future in which we continue to reap the benefits from our rich legacy of forests.

**Gloria Van Duyne** works for DEC's Division of Lands and Forests.

## New York's Forests at a Glance

New York State's forests have undergone dramatic changes through the years. Originally almost completely covered in forest, the state was heavily cleared for settlement and agriculture. Forest land had shrunk to less than 25% of the state by the mid 1800s. However, widespread abandonment of farms in the late 1800s enabled much of the land to revert back to forest. Today, New York has more forest land area than it has had in the past 150 years.

### NYS Forest Facts

- **Forest area:** 18.95 million acres (63% of land area)
- **Privately-owned forest land area:** 14.4 million acres (76% of forest land area is privately owned by approximately 687,000 landowners)
- **Number of tree species:** more than 100 commercial and non-commercial
- **Most common forest type:** maple/beech/birch (53% of forest land area)
- **Economic contribution of forest products-related manufacturing and services:** \$14 billion (U.S. Census)
- **Forest-related tourism:** \$1.9 billion

### Urban Forest Facts

- **New York's urban and/or community land area:** 3.42 million acres
- **Urban and community tree coverage:** 1.32 million acres (40.4% of urban and community land area)
- **Estimated number of urban or community trees:** 253.6 million