

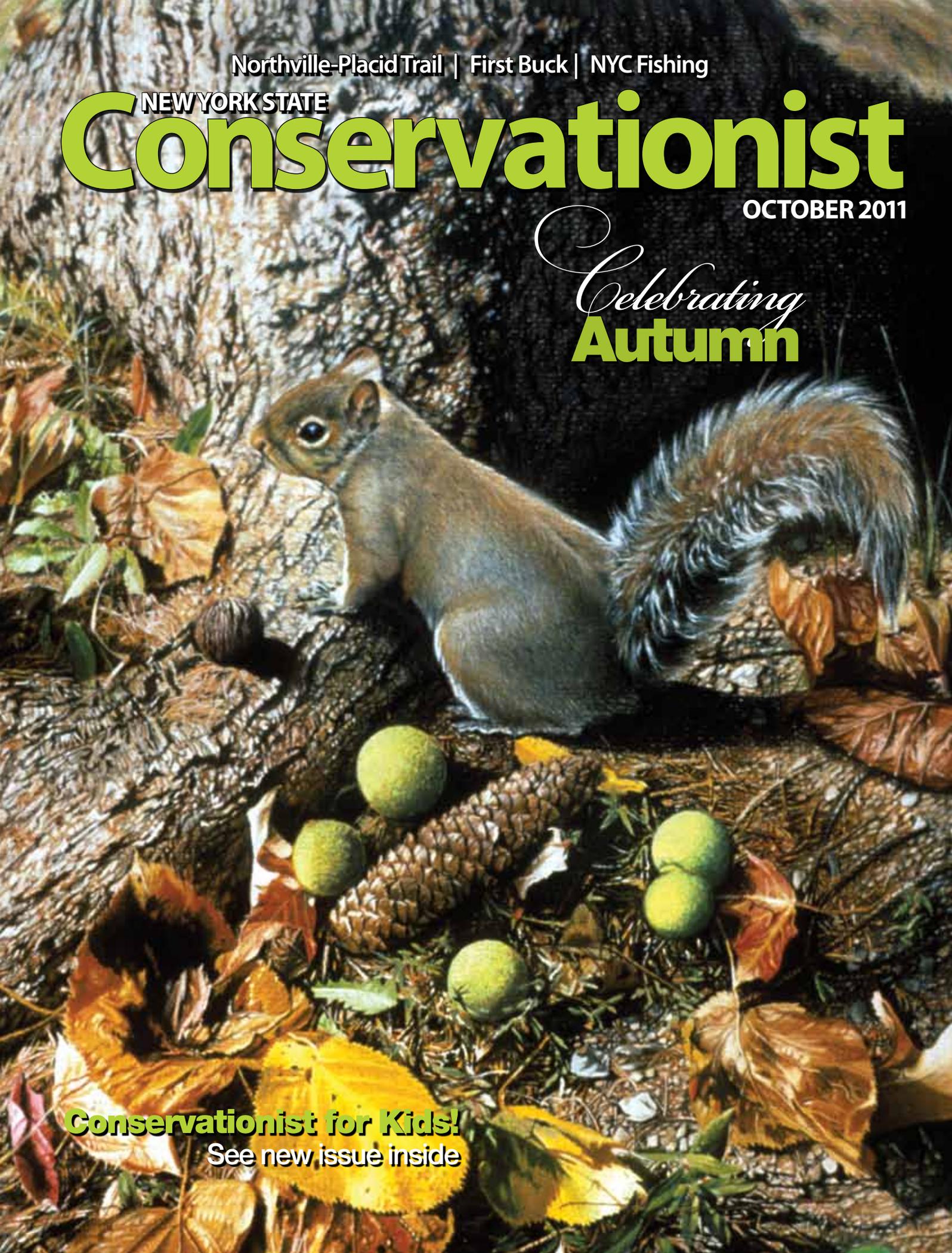
Northville-Placid Trail | First Buck | NYC Fishing

NEW YORK STATE  
**Conservationist**

OCTOBER 2011

*Celebrating*  
**Autumn**

**Conservationist for Kids!**  
See new issue inside







See page 2

Tree planters being taken to a reforestation site, early 1900s.

October 2011 Volume 66, Number 2

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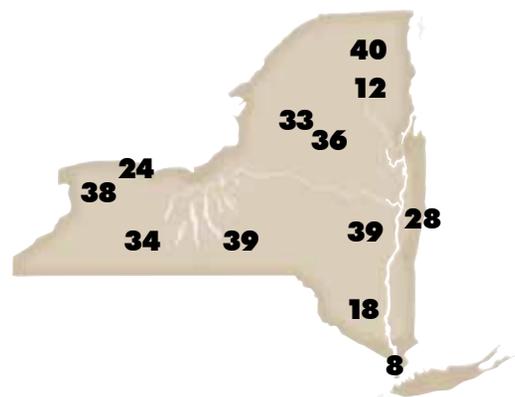
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# Conservation Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

## —celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Conservation Department

By Karin Verschoor, Eileen Stegemann and Dave Nelson  
Photos courtesy of New York State Archives

Listen carefully; you might be able to hear it in your mind. The year was 1911; the city, Albany. In the Senate Chamber, perhaps a bespectacled man with a three-piece pinstriped suit and a pocket watch cleared his throat before speaking. Taking out a kerchief, he wiped his tiny glasses and placed them once again atop the bridge of his nose before returning his gaze to the sheaf of papers he clutched in his hands.

“The Senate shall come to order.” Shuffling and background noise diminished as members took their seats.

A brief silence, and then, “The clerk shall read.”

“The People of the State of New York now consider an act, relating to conservation of land, forest, waters, parks, hydraulic power, fish and game.”

Article 2 of that bill, which was signed into law by Governor Dix on July 12, 1911, created the New York

State Conservation Department. Predecessor to today’s Department of Environmental Conservation, this new agency brought all of the existing natural resource programs under one department, reflecting the growing awareness at the time of the interconnectedness of forests, wildlife habitat and water resources.

The new Department consolidated the Forest, Fish and Game Commission, the Forest Purchasing Board and the Water Supply Commission into a single administrative unit. Three divisions were created: the Division of Lands and Forests, the Division of Fish and Game, and the Division of Inland Waters.

What caused this law to be necessary? What challenges faced resource managers then, and how do they compare to today?



# Lands and Forests

In 1911, the Division of Lands and Forests was responsible for the care and management of 1,643,244 acres of state land, the Forest Preserve, future state land acquisitions, reforestation of state lands, the state tree nursery system, forest health and tracking forest products. At the time, fire was an overwhelming priority.

Following devastating fires in 1903 and 1908 in the Adirondacks, a coordinated network of fire observation towers and telephone lines was installed in the Forest Preserve for earlier detection and notification of fires. Accordingly, Forest Rangers of the day primarily focused on fire fighting and prevention. With the advent of car-camping tourism in the 1920s, the rangers' role expanded to include educating people about fire and safety in the woods, building roadside fireplaces to reduce wildfires caused by careless campers, and rescuing lost and injured tourists. Rangers also enforced laws against timber trespass.

Another priority in 1911 was reforestation. Forested land in New York had reached an all-time low (approximately 15% of the state's land area, compared to 63% today), largely due to clearing for agriculture, rapid logging and the aforementioned fires. To combat the resulting soil erosion and flooding, billions of conifer seedlings—many grown right here in state nurseries—were planted.

Today, DEC manages more than four million acres of state land, including the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves, various state forests across New York, and nearly a million acres of working forest conservation easements. Forest Rangers continue to fight fires and educate the public, and also coordinate DEC's rapid response to environmental crises, quickly setting up incident command centers for fast and efficient mobilization of equipment and personnel.

Now consolidated into a single site, the remaining state tree nursery at Saratoga still provides seedlings. And while fewer numbers of seedlings are sold today, a wider variety of species are available; at least 50 species of trees and shrubs.



Sowing seeds, Saratoga Nursery, c. 1950.



Building Mt. Adams fire tower, 1917.



Forest ranger with firefighting tools, c. 1925.



Forest field day in Delaware Co., 1924.



Adirondack deer camp, 1920.



Chautauqua Hatchery, Bemus Pt., 1938.



Feeding chicks, Middle Island Quail Farm, 1940.

## Fish and Game

In 1911, many game species had almost disappeared from the state. Years of unregulated fishing, hunting, trapping, and landscape alteration had taken their toll on New York's populations of trout, turkey, beaver, white-tailed deer, moose and numerous songbirds. To restock some depleted populations, as well as to meet sporting interests of the state's growing human population, the Department focused on propagating fish and wildlife species. Numerous fish hatcheries and game farms were built, and protective hunting and fishing regulations were established.

Large tracts of land were purchased for recreation and game management, and state game protectors (the predecessors to today's Environmental Conservation Officers) earnestly enforced hunting and fishing regulations. Over the years, the Department began to focus more on management and conservation education. Contaminants in fish and wildlife species, and the health of freshwater and tidal wetlands as important nursery grounds for numerous fish and wildlife species also became concerns. In response, the original game protector role expanded from primarily stopping poachers to include environmental enforcement issues as well.

Today, DEC continues to manage the state's fish and wildlife populations. However, the early focus of managing individual game species and their habitats has expanded to also include managing ecological communities—a reflection on today's broader and vastly more complex ecosystem focus. Education remains an important component, teaching youth the significance of environmental stewardship.



Turkey release, Bear Spring Mt., 1953.

Camping on Long Lake, Hamilton Co., 1919.





Digging tunnel for NYC water supply, early 1900s.



Transporting pipe at Bryn Mawr, early 1900s.

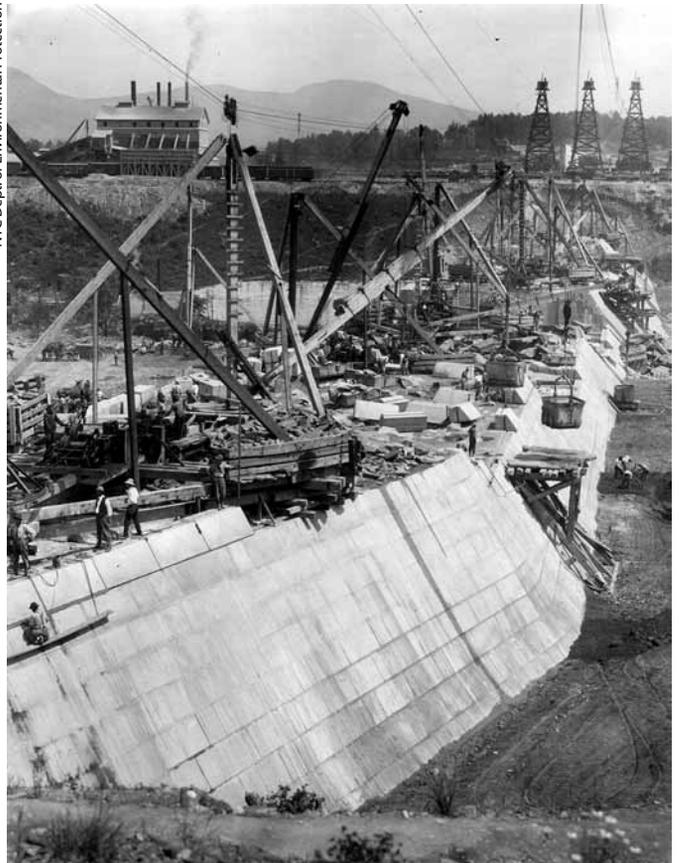


Transporting fish on Oneida Lake, 1940.

## Inland Waters

During the early years, the Division of Inland Waters focused on flood control, developing hydropower resources, regulating water withdrawals for drinking water supplies, and acquiring lands to build large drinking water reservoirs. At this time, New York City was growing at a rapid pace and its existing drinking water supply was inadequate. The City had to find a larger water source, which led to the construction of six reservoirs in and around the Catskills.

Today, the Division of Water is still responsible for protecting and managing New York's waters, but there is a greater emphasis on keeping pollution out of our lakes, streams and rivers, and restoring polluted waterbodies. Water pollution comes from many sources, and the Division is often on the cutting edge of drafting and enforcing regulations and standards that keep our waters clean. The Department also continues to be responsible for protecting lives and property from flooding and storm damage, and works with local, state and federal partners on floodplain management to address concerns regarding coastal erosion, dam failures and floods.



Ashokan Dam, early 1900s.

## Conservation for Tomorrow

While DEC has grown significantly and undergone numerous changes since 1911, the core issues identified then—protecting state-owned land, managing and regulating fish and wildlife populations, and protecting the state's valuable water resources—remain crucial parts of the agency today. The hard work over the last 100 years has paid off; New York's forests are healthy and plentiful, we have an abundance of good quality water, and our fish and wildlife populations have rebounded and are flourishing.

As this department begins its second century, conservation is more important than ever, and the one certainty about future environmental challenges is that they will always be changing. DEC will continue to protect the state's natural resources, and address new and sometimes unforeseen environmental challenges, such as climate change. We'll seek creative ways to provide incentives to encourage good stewardship by individuals, businesses and communities.

The role of education and outreach remains critical, especially to reach our future stewards who are growing up in an increasingly digital world, which limits their time outdoors, leaving many disconnected from nature. We need to pass on the legacy of the generations of environmentally aware people who have changed the environmental history of our state, including the private citizens, politicians, scientists and DEC staff who have led the way for the past 100 years, and who are eager to lead us into a new century of environmental conservation.

**Karin Verschoor** works in DEC's Division of Lands and Forests in Albany. **Eileen Stegemann** is assistant editor and **Dave Nelson** is editor of *Conservationist*.



false albacore



Kory Kapaloski



# Fishing's Great in NEW YORK...CITY?

By James MacDonald

It's early morning in the fall. Waves are gently washing over the jetty where you are precariously perched. You've been catching fish for some time now, releasing several medium-sized blues and a 27-inch striper just shy of the limit. A few blues sit in the creel for later. It's been a good morning; not great, but you know that at any moment a 50-inch behemoth will inhale your bucktail, since this is a world-class spot for striper fishing. As the tide gets higher, you knock off for breakfast, listen to the terns cry, and watch the sun rise over Staten Island... "Wait! Back up—Staten Island?" you ask? That's right! You're not in Montauk or the Chesapeake; you're in New York City!

Long disdained as a bastion of crowds and bad manners, NYC is coming into its own as a fishing destination. Cleaner and more accessible than ever before, the city offers fishing experiences that can go toe-to-toe with anywhere in the region. Stripers, blues, fluke, sea bass, false albacore, and many others can be easily caught along the miles and miles of shoreline, much of it publicly accessible. If freshwater is more your speed, many NYC parks have lakes that teem with quality largemouth bass, perch and crappie. It's all here—jetty, pier, beach, lake, flyrod, bait, offshore charter—basically every conceivable angling experience except for ice fishing, and all within walking distance of midtown. If, as the saying goes, diversity is strength, then NYC is the Hercules of angling spots.

What really sets NYC fishing apart, however, is that all these diverse opportunities are unbelievably

convenient. John Waldman, a professor of biology at Queens College, puts it this way: "I and others can



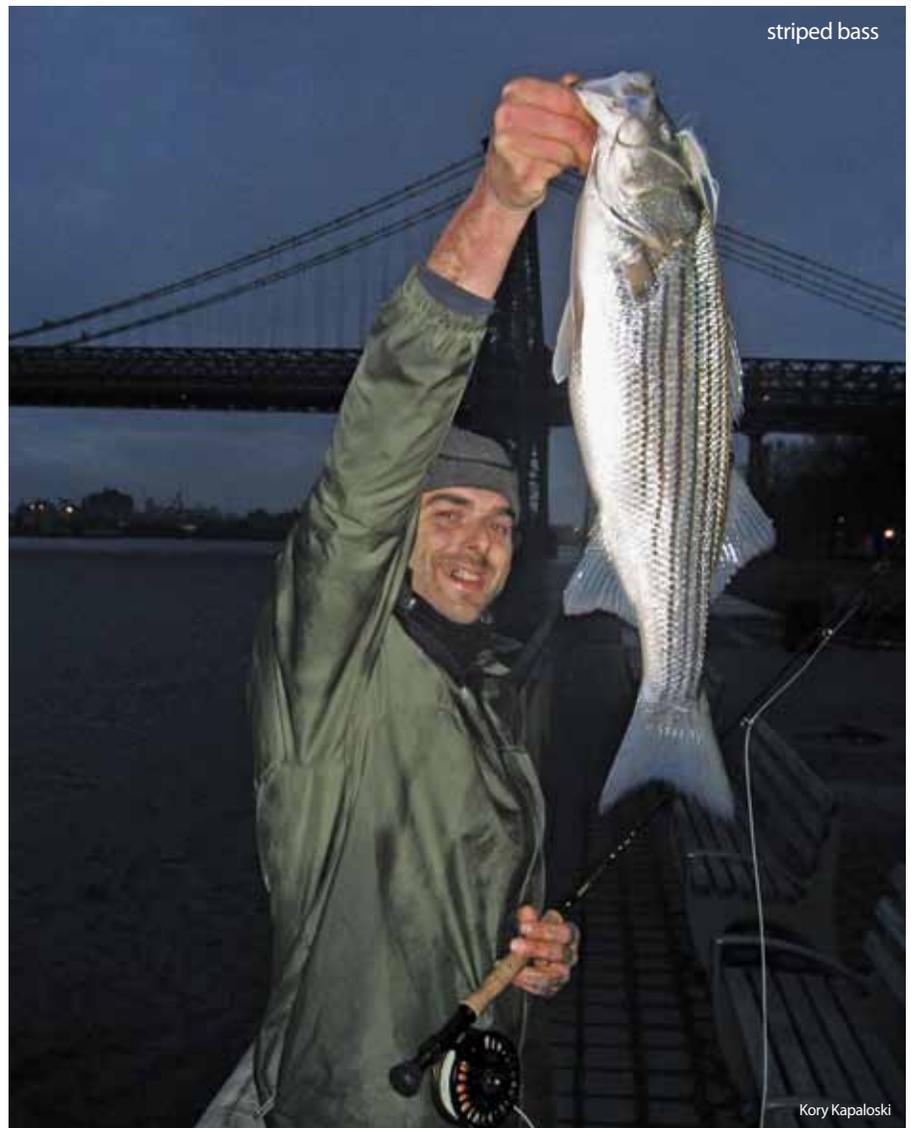
courtesy of Fish NY

visit a local bay or the surf for a few hours before or after work and have a chance to tangle with major inshore gamefish like striped bass, bluefish and weakfish. I don't have to drive all the way to Montauk to catch the same species." And if the fish aren't biting, you're within walking distance (or a quick bus or subway ride) of all the joys and temptations of the city.

"When you are out on the water, it feels like you are in another world, and then you can be back in the city and have an amazing meal, or listen to some killer music or whatever...best of both worlds!" says Kory Kapaloski, an avid local angler who has spent more time in the water world than most of us. These worlds run together at several of the Hudson River piers in Manhattan, where the perfect fishing day can end at the Pier I Café, right on the 68<sup>th</sup> street pier, or with swing dancing in Hudson River Park.

All this proximity comes with its own unique moments. Waldman recounted landing a striper and then taking a bow for a passing Circle Line tour boat full of applauding tourists, and more than one angler has unhooked a largemouth bass while a nervous would-be groom popped the question in the background on Central Park's bow bridge. Unique views abound as well, since there's nothing quite like battling a blue in the shadow of the skyscrapers. At Gantry Plaza State Park in Queens, you can try your luck for stripers and sea bass while brushing up on foreign relations. The U.N. is directly across the river from the pier, and the views of the Manhattan skyline are not to be missed.

It may seem hard to believe, but solitude is easy to find in every borough. The beaches of Ft. Tilden offer spectacular views over the Atlantic Ocean with nary a soul to be seen. There are also plenty of wooded nooks on



eel-shaped Prospect Park Lake (and many other parks) where your inner Thoreau can fish for carp, bass or immense crappie in peace.

Another great thing about having such excellent fishing in proximity to the bustling city is the restorative effect the water provides to nature-deprived urban residents. Whether or not you actually catch anything, there's nothing like a day on the water to make you forget your harried urban life. "When we went fishing, I felt so relaxed sitting on a chair and feeling the breeze," said Adam, a 4th grader from P.S. 3, describing a fishing trip his class took. Although Adam didn't

catch anything, the class was quite successful as a whole, and Adam's words perfectly express a sentiment that many of us share.

Capitalizing on the shoreline as an asset to connect urbanites to nature, several organizations offer fishing programs and advice to anglers of all levels. For instance, DEC's I Fish New York program offers fishing events to urban school children and runs several fishing clinics in both salt and freshwater each year. Would-be anglers should check out their brochure, *I FISH NY- Saltwater Fishing Guide for New York City Area* (available online at [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/8377.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/8377.html)) for a wealth

of information about seasons, species, and fishing spots in every borough. For more information on the program, call 718-482-4922.

New York City is crowded, it's true, but it is able to function because most people follow the rules, and with that in mind there are a few unique regulations that apply to fishing. All fishing in city park lakes is catch-and-release, and as is the case for all New York freshwaters, anglers must have a recreational freshwater fishing license to fish there (see [www.dec.ny.gov/permits/6091.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/permits/6091.html) for details). Governor's Island is a great place to fish and offers spectacular views of the Statue of Liberty, but this is also catch-and-release only. Other saltwater in the city follows the standard New York State recreational saltwater fishing regulations, available at [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7894.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7894.html). Most city parks are closed after dark, so for night fishing please obey all posted hours.

If you choose to eat your catch, please be aware that some fish contain chemicals that may be harmful to your health. There are health advisories regarding fish caught in New York waters; some are specific to NYC and New York Bay. In general, children and women of childbearing age are advised to avoid eating any fish caught in the city, and everyone else should limit their intake. For details, please check with the New York State Department of Health at [www.health.state.ny.us/environmental/outdoors/fish/down\\_state\\_advisories.htm](http://www.health.state.ny.us/environmental/outdoors/fish/down_state_advisories.htm).

With so many fishing spots to choose from, more anglers than ever are discovering how great New York City fishing can be. In 2010, a local angler's group, the Brooklyn Urban Anglers Association, sponsored a catch-and-release tournament along the Brooklyn waterfront. Scores of anglers participated, and the top honor went to an angler who caught a 44-inch striper.

In addition, an angler achievement award was issued to a Pennsylvania resident who pulled a monstrous 22-inch largemouth out of Harlem Meer, a small, shallow lake at the north end of Central Park. That's a fish to be proud of, no matter where you caught it!

So save your gas and hop the F train instead (although it's probably best if you wait to put your waders on until after you get off). You don't need money, you don't need fame, you don't even need a lot of time to ride this fish train (my apologies to Huey Lewis); when it comes to angling, NYC is back on the map. Whether you want to go mano a mano with a leviathan, take your kids after sunnies, or merely squeeze in a cast or two after work, this is the place to be. And if the fish aren't biting, you can always drop your rod off and party till dawn, when you can try your luck on the water again!

**James MacDonald** is a freelance science writer and DEC environmental education assistant in NYC. He is a former recreational fisheries specialist with NY Sea Grant.

(Note: the author wishes to acknowledge Diallo House and Darin Alberry for contributing to this article.)



James McDonald

I  NY





# EIGHT DAYS

*—thru-hiking the Northville-Placid Trail*

By Peter Nye & John Privitera  
Photos by authors unless noted

*A* bit unsteady due to the load on my back, I step onto the bathroom scale to assess the situation. Even before looking, I knew I was in trouble, and my fears are confirmed when the digital readout settles on 64 pounds more than I weigh. Egads. I can see some serious reduction is in order.

Avid hikers for years, my friend John and I are finally tackling the 122-mile long Northville-Lake Placid Trail (NPT). The trail winds through the heart of the Adirondacks and traverses five distinct wilderness areas, including some very remote sections. Although lean-tos are scattered along the length of the trail, our motto is “Don’t count on anything; be

prepared.” But for the planned 7-day trek to be successful, we need to pack carefully. My 64-pound pack isn’t going to cut it.

In preparation for the hike, John and I had been poring over guidebooks, maps and gear for months. For the sake of efficiency and redundancy, we decided to each pack as if we were going solo. It being the second week of October, we needed

to be ready for changeable weather. Extra socks, rain gear, sleeping bag and pad, tent, water filtration system, cook stove and fuel, first-aid supplies, and 20 pounds of food were all stuffed into my pack.

After removing as many non-essentials as I felt I could, the pack is only four pounds lighter. I wonder if I am deluding myself that we can hike our planned 16-21 miles a day carrying a load like this. The Adirondack Mountain Club's *Guide to Adirondack Trails 4: Northville-Placid Trail* suggests a pace of 1.5 miles per hour to complete the NPT in 10 days. But John and I are veteran hikers, marathoners, men of fitness and mojo; surely we can walk 2-3 mph and complete this route in a week.

A week later, hoisting my pack onto my back in the Upper Benson Trailhead parking area, I turn to John and hesitantly ask what his pack weighs. To my relief he says 60 pounds. But while the concept of "misery loves company" brings a smile to my face, I know we are both in for a challenging walk. I figure that the sooner I consume all my food, the lighter my load will be. So when John offers me some walnuts, I say that if I am going to eat anything, it will be from my own pack.

## DAY One

We begin hiking later than intended because John has to adjust the contents of his pack. Although the temperature is 34 degrees, it climbs rapidly, requiring a quick change of clothing.

Just before Canary Ponds, we spot a screech owl only 20 feet away, but then don't see another creature—animal or human—thereafter. By 5 p.m., we've covered 16.2 miles and are so exhausted that we can't continue. We had planned to go further and stay at the Hamilton Stream lean-to, but 9½ hours of hiking is enough for our first day. Besides, that nice, grassy area next to the Sacandaga River looks so inviting. Boy, are we glad we brought tents and didn't count on reaching a lean-to every night for the sake of a lighter pack. After dinner, we quickly fall asleep, lulled by the babbling river.

## DAY Two

Regardless of our good intentions, we get off to another late start. It's cloudy and cool, and most of the fall foliage is underfoot rather than overhead. We spy two young red-bellied snakes, one eastern garter snake and several large flocks of Canada geese.

Despite some easy terrain, including roadways, we cover only 15.8 miles in 10 hours—less than the previous day and four miles shy of our target: Third Spruce Lake lean-to. Again, we break out our tents at a nice site on the north side of Jessup River.

The first day's fatigue has faded, but our dinner conversation about the remaining 90 miles is influenced by unspoken concerns about our timetable, fitness and resolve. So far, effort has outweighed fun.

John ponders crossing the river at Sampson Bog Falls.



## DAY Three

Up early, we have plenty of time to brew coffee and apply moleskin to our feet. We hit the trail and reach the lean-to at Third Spruce Lake in two hours, lingering in the peace and beauty of the West Canada Lakes Wilderness Area before hiking another three miles to Sampson Bog outlet. Although the bridge is gone, previous hikers placed deadfalls across the outlet, enabling us to cross.

Already 3:30 p.m., we press past several lakes and lean-tos as we've only covered nine miles. We sign the trail register at West Lake, which shows two other parties are thru-hiking a day or two ahead of us.

As we approach Cedar Lakes after 10 hours of hiking, we find the first lean-to occupied, so we drag our tired bodies an additional half mile to the next lean-to, also occupied. However, the young end-to-enders invite us to share it with them, and their company and conversation are a welcome diversion. We're grateful for the ready-made shelter from the wind and drizzle that has developed.

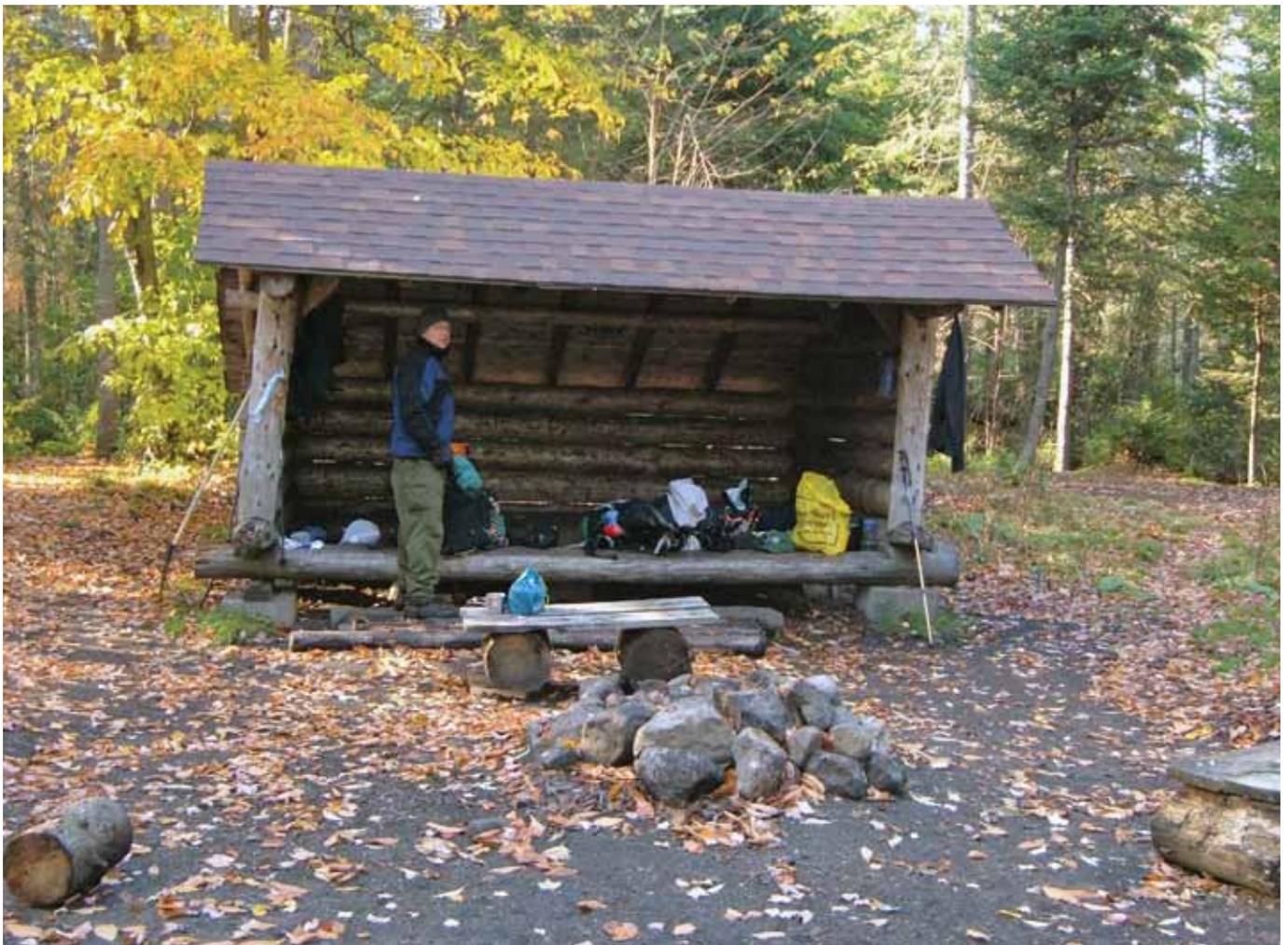
John strips off his socks to attend to the large blister he's developed on his foot, while I discover blood on my sock. Apparently two layers of socks plus moleskin have compressed my toes, causing a toenail to cut into the nearby toe. Oh well, at least it doesn't hurt.



## DAY Four

Today's section includes seven miles of private property along Cedar River Road. Rain begins, and the nearly 10 miles to Wakely Dam is a slow, wet slog. Along the way we see a large doe and numerous fresh moose tracks, but no moose. The rain stops, so we take a break to remove rain gear and change socks. It's 2 p.m. as we begin hiking Cedar River Road—too early to quit for the day, but we won't make it to the next camping area until 8 p.m. Although we're tired, John suggests getting some more mileage under our belts.

Tirrell Pond lean-to





After another five miles or so, we look for a place to camp. Finding a picturesque setting along the bank of the Cedar River, we pitch our tents, prepare a quick dinner and turn in to the sound of the river and returning rain.

## DAY *Five*

Decision Day. We awaken to clear skies, 30 degrees and ice-coated tents. Today we'll reach Lake Durant with the option of "bailing" and being picked up in Blue Mountain Lake. Otherwise, we'll need at least one extra day for our trip.

After hiking the remaining distance along Cedar River Road, we initially have trouble finding the route back to state land. A sign on private property says, "Through NPT hikers may pass," so off we go.

The area at Stephens Pond outlet is flooded, but an alternate route brings us to a deep stream which we must cross on a log. Avoiding getting dunked, we hike 3.5 miles to Lake Durant Campground. John's feet are better, but one of mine is hurting, the result of excess compression from too many layers. So I shed everything but a single pair of socks and slip into my sneakers, generally reserved for evenings. Relief is instantaneous. We use the payphone to call home about our decision to spend an eighth day completing the trail.

Several more miles take us to the lean-to at the north end of Tirrell Pond, where we settle for the night. We've covered only 12 miles, but with an extra day, we're confident we can complete the remaining 47 miles in three days. While having dinner, we marvel at the grandeur of Tirrell Mountain.

## DAY *Six*

It's only 26 degrees, and we welcome the warmth of the fire during breakfast. Fortified, we climb the roughly 1,000 feet over a saddle around Blue Mountain. After a strenuous hike up Tarbell Road, we enter the woods and head north on the east side of Long Lake. The day has been cool and clear, but by late afternoon, it's cloudy and very windy.

Five miles up the lake, we meet four guys camping at the Kelly Point lean-to. They have a roaring fire and insist we join them for a beer. After six days on the trail, it tastes mighty fine. Unfortunately, it begins raining, and we still need to reach Rodney Point, more than a mile away. So we don our rain gear, gratefully accept more beer to drink later, and then take off.

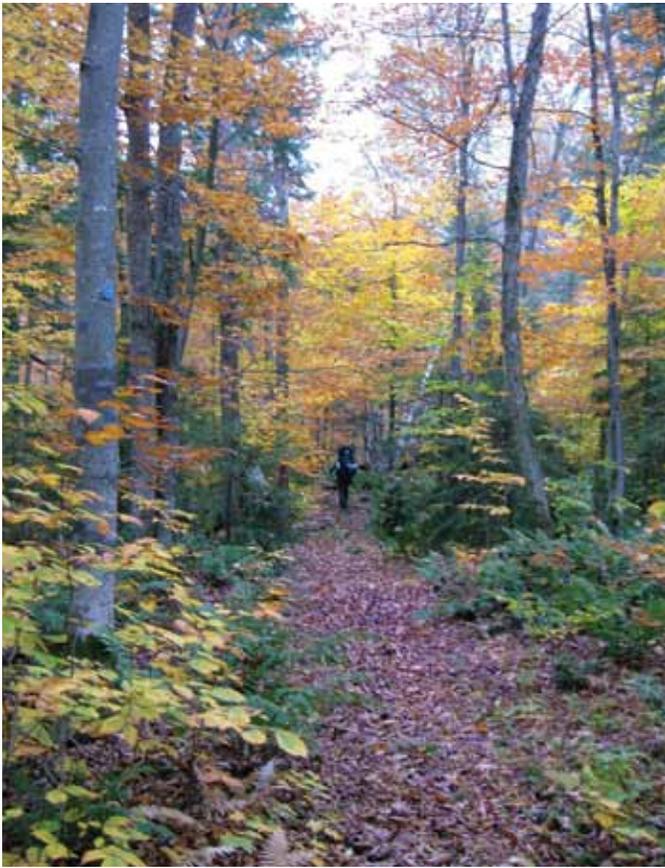
Our lean-to has a nice view of the lake, but we're bushed and it's still raining, so we go to bed early. It's cold during the night, which makes me wish I hadn't had those beers as I have to leave my warm sleeping bag several times...



Our campsite along the Cedar River.



Although some are in rough shape, man-made bridges like this one aid hikers in crossing streams and other wet areas.



## DAY Seven

Morning greets us with drizzle and temperatures in the 30s. Wearing fleece pants and coats, we begin our 17-mile trek. Within a half hour, though, we shed some layers.

The trail at the north end of Long Lake is pretty rugged. When it begins sleeting, we pull out rain gear, but because the ground and vegetation are so wet, we soon get soaked anyway. Precipitation continues throughout the day.

This is the wildest and most scenic section of trail, much of it following Cold River, and we enjoy it despite our discomfort. We're squarely within the High Peaks Wilderness, and snow-capped mountains sparkle in the distance on both sides of the trail. There are lean-tos along this stretch, and we long to take side trips to challenging peaks like MacNaughton, Street and Nye. Of course, we stop at Noah John Rondeau's hermitage on Cold River, where he lived for more than a decade in the early 1900s (see "Secret Scratchings" in the February 2011 *Conservationist*).

Eventually, after 10.5 hours on the trail, we arrive at the well-used, Cold River #2 lean-to. We're dripping wet, so I start a fire, and we dry our clothing and footwear. Our tired limbs absorb the soothing heat, renewing us for tomorrow's final push. We quickly fall asleep to the fire's flickering glow on the ceiling of the lean-to.

## DAY Eight

It's our final morning, the stove's going, coffee's brewing and our toes are all re-wrapped and ready for the last 13 miles. One mile in, we arrive at Duck Hole as the mist is rising. Beyond, the forest is dark, and the ground is muddy and slippery from the previous day's rain. Roots and rocks are plentiful, requiring careful travel.

As we ford pools created by beaver dams, John slips into a deep one but manages to keep his pack upright and dry. Our trail guide says this stretch is "very rough, and the hiker should not plan to make good time here." No kidding. After a little more than five miles, we pass the lean-to at Moose Pond and soon reach beautiful Wanika Falls.

The remaining seven miles are uneventful, and we finally emerge into the afternoon sunshine at the trailhead on Averyville Road. Proud of our accomplishment, we wait eagerly for someone to come along and snap our picture. Later, we remove our packs and head into Lake Placid for a fine "civilized" lunch.

Reflecting on the trip, we tally figures and discover that we hiked 75 hours in 8 days, and averaged 15.2 mi./day at a speed of 1.6 mi./hr.—almost exactly what the guidebook said. We agree this pace is not for everyone, especially those who want to really enjoy the beauty and serenity of the trail, but revel in the fact that we did it.

That night's three-hour trip back to Northville went quickly—Led Zeppelin in our ears, the Northville-Placid Trail in our hearts, and our mojo intact.

*Editor's Note: In the wake of Hurricane Irene, be sure to check for current trail conditions before venturing out. Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7865.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7865.html)*

Wildlife Biologist **Peter Nye** oversaw DEC's Endangered Species Unit in Albany prior to retiring in 2010. **John Privitera** is an attorney and partner at McNamee, Lochner, Titus and Williams in Albany.



We made it!



Ed Jakubowski

# FIRST BUCK *at 49!*

By Thomas Monahan

I started hunting a bit later than many in the fold. My father didn't hunt, nor did his father, nor did any of my friends. That's not unusual if you grew up like me in the 1960s on Long Island.

Instead, I *married* into hunting!

My brother-in-law Patrick is a real outdoorsy guy. He's big on safety, ethics, terrain and scouting. You know the type; he would make an excellent hunting guide. Unofficially, that's exactly what he is to me.

Patrick lived upstate in Ulster County. Every time our family visited, he would set up a target range in the "back ten" to encourage some male bonding. I've always been interested in guns, dating back to my Boy Scout days and, oh, the Crosman 760 Powermaster BB gun I had as a kid.

About seven years ago, Patrick lost his long-time hunting buddy to cancer. Over the decades, they amassed quite a number of stories, some of which are still shared with me a bit too often! Noting the missing element in his pursuits, I decided to surprise Patrick that October and took a hunter

education class without his knowledge. I went to a "big box" sporting goods store and bought a Remington Model 870 pump-action shotgun, a box of shells, some camouflage apparel from an army-navy store, and I was in business for a fall turkey hunt.

Truth was, it was time to hang up my softball cleats. I was in my early

*To be honest, buck fever hits me instantly and I begin to breathe as if I had just run the NYC marathon.*

40s then and needed a new pastime. While I am truly blessed with three daughters, the idea of spending a couple of days with "the boys" on occasion was plenty inviting.

With my gear in the trunk and the entire family in the car, we drove upstate for a family visit (and, I hoped, an afternoon of turkey hunting). As soon as we hit the NYS Thruway, I was looking for turkeys, so to say I was excited would be an understatement. When I turned into the driveway, I popped the trunk and proudly displayed my hunting gear to Patrick. Wouldn't you know it, rather

than commending me on my choices, he asked to see my license! I can still remember the look on his face when I showed him my current license, with turkey hunting privileges. The hunt was on.

We went to a few hot spots that afternoon and he taught me about turkey sign, habitat, calls, etc. But no turkeys.

And later that month, no deer either!

Over the next several years, Patrick and I spent literally hundreds of hours (more of his time than mine) scouting various state land in Ulster and Sullivan Counties. But after six years of deer hunting, I hadn't taken a single shot. I can only get away four days a year to hunt deer, but I've got plenty of other reasons for not having a successful harvest: the wrong sex animal appears, low-quality shot, rain, full moon, etc. I've got a bunch of excuses after six years! But all along we always saw excellent sign: scrapes, rubs, prints, droppings, etc.



Fast forward to last autumn: November 23, 2010 at about 3:00 p.m. It is the fourth and final day of our deer hunt. The area is hot with rubs and scrapes. We had seen plenty of doe the first few days, and a small buck the evening before. When you come down to it, it's all about being in the right place at the right time.

I'm set up in a folding chair (camouflage, of course) approximately 90 yards from four fresh rubs and an active scrape the size of a doormat. Patrick is sitting about 60 yards from me and we are back to back. He's looking to get a buck that might come up from a small ravine. There are quite a few downed trees and branches in the area, but I can see a good 200-yard deer path sloping downward from a fairly high ridge in the distance. To my extreme right is a road, not far from where we parked the truck, so no shot there. On my left are small white pines and directly in front of me is a small flat ridge about three feet higher than where I am.

I am holding a Remington Model 700 bolt-action with a scope, so I know I have a good chance if I see a buck

here. That is, if I see him before he sees me. I'm thinking that the buck will be coming down the high ridge directly to me, or from the left out of the small white pines. BUT NO! He suddenly appears on my right, but not too far right, approximately 75 yards in front of me, coming from the scrape area, heading right to the area with all the rubs. All I see is his head and antlers! A few large trees are blocking his body and I have a bunch of downed tree limbs somewhat obstructing my view, but they are obstructing his view, too!

To be honest, buck fever hits me instantly and I begin to breathe as if I had just run the NYC marathon. He is standing completely still just looking to see what is making that stupid breathing noise. He can't smell me because the wind is in my favor; that's a big advantage. I adjust my scope to its lowest setting, look for a window of opportunity, and find a triangular opening in the downed limbs about 25 yards out. He is still standing there about 50 yards past the window. I use my scope to check his head and antlers: okay, he's got at least three tines on one



side, so he's a legal buck in this area, which is part of a pilot antler restriction program. But he'll have to take a step or two before I can get a good shot. There he goes: one step, two...BANG! I see him going down in my scope. I chamber another round, keep looking through the scope, listening for any further movement (leaves rustling, branches breaking, anything), but not a sound. He was down. Believe it or not, after six years, it was all over in three minutes!

I was still breathing heavily as I radioed Patrick to tell him "I GOT ONE," though I knew he had heard the shot. The buck was a beautiful, high-racked 9-point, about 150 lbs. He was on my wall after a few months, and I had my first venison meal. My first buck...finally!

**Thomas Monahan** lives in Deer Park and hunts with friends in Ulster County.





# Turtlehead



By Barbara Nuffer

Photos by author

As I savor an autumn day from my kayak on a still Adirondack pond, I soak up the slanting rays of the sun. Keeping me company are several painted turtles basking on the rocks and absorbing the precious warmth before they dig into the mud for their winter sleep. Joining us along the shoreline is another type of “turtle” in the form of a white flower, the turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*).

In bloom from late summer into fall, the turtlehead is a one- to three-foot tall herbaceous, perennial plant that likes having its “feet” wet. It is related to the common garden snapdragon. Four species of turtlehead live in North America; they vary in color from white to pink to purple.

Only insects with powerful wings can force their way past the hairs on the lower lip of the turtlehead’s tubular flower, causing the entire plant to sway. You may do a double-take as a large bumble bee crashes around getting in and out of the flower, giving the appearance that the flower is chewing up the bug.

The resemblance of the white turtlehead’s flowers to a turtle (known for its long life) led many Native Americans to believe the plant would prolong life. The Iroquois brewed turtlehead tea to protect them against evil spirits. Algonquins mixed the leaves with cedar bark to produce a medicinal tea. Early American colonists used small amounts of turtlehead leaves, harvested when the plant was in flower, as a tonic for the liver and gall bladder, as well as to treat depression.

The vivid pink turtlehead that you see in perennial gardens is most likely “Hot Lips” (*Chelone lyonii*). Hummingbirds enjoy feeding on this tubular flower as much as on the native turtlehead. However, deer also enjoy browsing on turtlehead flowers of any color. I use it as an indicator plant for deer activity in my moist, shady flower bed. The horticultural variety is a nice addition to the garden for its pure pink color and long-lasting flowers late in the season.

The turtlehead is the host plant for the Baltimore checkerspot butterfly. Late in the season, the Baltimore checkerspot lays its eggs on the undersides of the plant’s leaves. After the eggs hatch, the tiny larvae (caterpillars) feast on the leaves and then overwinter, half-grown. The following spring, each caterpillar matures and forms a chrysalis, emerging ten days later as a butterfly. The orange and black larvae and adult stages of the insect are brightly colored signals of their toxicity to predators; the toxicity is a result of ingesting the turtlehead plant.

As the autumn chill starts to settle around the beautiful wetlands, rivers, ponds and lakes of New York State, walk the fringes of these waterways and keep your eyes open for any “moving” flowers. You may just come across a turtlehead plant with a bee thrashing about inside!

DEC retiree **Barbara Nuffer** is a flower and gardening enthusiast.

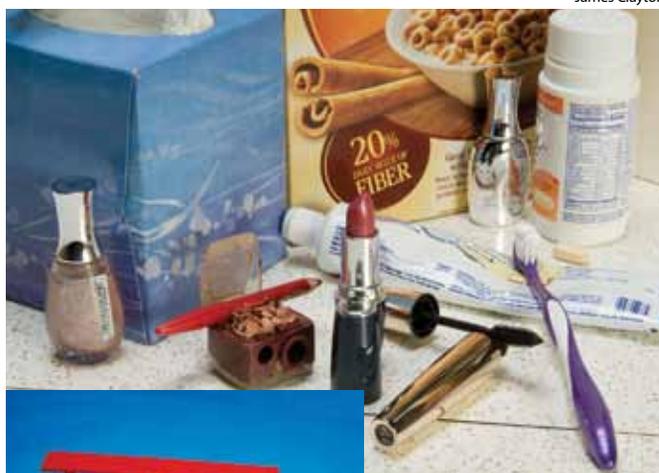


realized there was so much more, such as the siding, decking and framing—studs, joists, rafters—of the house, as well as the framing in my couch and upholstered chairs. In fact, as I really examined my home, I spied a seemingly endless number of things made from wood.

Everyday items like cooking spoons, kebob skewers, matches, cutting board, board games, ping pong paddles, closet doors and molding were all made from wood. I also found boxes and packaging for everything from staples and other office supplies to all kinds of food packages including juice boxes, milk cartons, egg containers, and frozen dinners, just to name a few. Looking in my garage and outside I noted the tool handles, my mailbox, trellises, bark mulch, firewood and bird houses. The list went on and on.

When I added in the paper products—books, photos, greeting cards, printer paper, toilet paper, napkins, my son's homework—it seemed as though virtually everything was connected to wood. Even the labels on plastic, glass and metal cans were made from paper!

Recalling my earlier discussion at work, I read labels and discovered cellulose listed as an ingredient in my hairspray, toothpaste, liquid nail polish, soap, laundry detergent, and several of my cosmetics, including my mascara and lipstick. Likewise, the crackers and pancake mix in the cupboard, and the ice cream in my freezer also contained a form of cellulose. To me, it was fascinating and exciting, and it reinforced my feelings about the importance of our wood industry. I've always been proud to be involved with forestry—especially the renewable resource aspect of it—and love the fact that our trees provide so many benefits.



Many everyday items are made of wood or contain wood cellulose, including toothpaste, high-fiber cereal, vitamins and children's toys.



When it comes right down to it, trees are amazing. They provide us with basic amenities (food and shelter); can be used for fuel, furniture, toys, fabric; and are part of an endless list of products we use every day. I take comfort in the fact that when managed sustainably, our forests will continue to provide these valuable resources for future generations.

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

### If you own a woodlot, you may find the following resources helpful for properly managing your land:

**NYS DEC's Landowner Assistance Program:** DEC foresters work with landowners to develop management actions tailored to meet individual ownership goals. Topics covered include wildlife habitat improvement, erosion control, tree planting, recreation enhancement, sugar bush management and silviculture. Check out [www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4972.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4972.html) for more information, including information about federal cost-sharing programs and state property tax reduction programs.

**New York Forest Owners Association:** NYFOA is a grassroots organization of NYS woodlot owners that promotes sustainable forestry and improved stewardship on privately owned woodlands. Local volunteers work with DEC, Cooperative Extension, Cornell University and SUNY-ESF, to provide seminars, facilitate on-site guidance, woodswalks and other services to help fellow woodlot owners achieve their personal forest objectives (improved wildlife habitat, overall forest health, pure water and air, wood products, recreation). <http://nyfoa.org>

**Cornell Cooperative Extension ForestConnect:** ForestConnect offers landowners educational workshops offered by Cornell Cooperative Extension or partner organizations, as well as advice from a trained forest-owner volunteer, a Master Forest Owner and CCE educators to help landowners plan for the continued health of their private forest land. [www2.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/forestconnect](http://www2.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/forestconnect)



## New York Grown

With 18.95 million acres of trees (63 percent of the state's land area), New York is rich with forests. Of those, hardwoods like maple, birch, beech, oak, poplar and ash dominate the landscape. Because of the diversity and quality of our lumber, a number of companies have made New York home, including: Steinway Pianos, Finch Paper, Harden Furniture, Stickley Furniture, AMF Bowling Products (pins and lanes), Beaver Mountain Log Homes, Catskill Craftsmen (cutting boards and cabinetry), Rawlings Adirondack baseball bats, Ames True Temper ash tool handles, and TC Timber/Habermaas wooden toy trains and tracks.

The wood-using industry is an extremely important part of New York's economy, and plays a major role in the responsible harvest and management of New York's forests. For a directory of individuals and companies that primarily utilize lumber or other semi-finished wood products connected to the state's forests, check out the Directory of Secondary Wood-Using Industry at [www.dec.ny.gov/lands/33307.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/33307.html) on DEC's website.



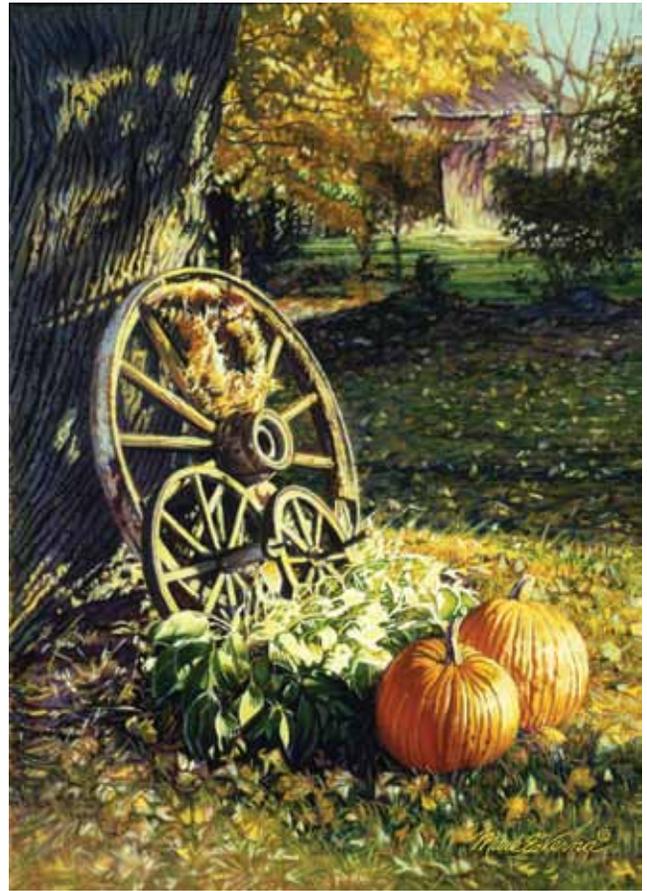
W. Haley

# *Nature on Paper*

ART AND TEXT BY *Mark Verna*



*When I was seven, trees and animals were my first subjects. Since then, I have been continually inspired to paint and draw scenery of the Finger Lakes and the Adirondacks.*



My art has evolved over the years, but realism, or some form of it, has always held my interest. I enjoy paintings with strong time of day, a certain light or evening look, and will use bolder colors at times. Fall images are at the top of my list. I use pastels, oils and acrylics, and my work ranges in size from 11" x 14" all the way to 5 ½ feet! The bigger they are, the longer they take to complete—up to four months.

I take many photos as reference for my art; a “wow factor”—something that inspires me the second I walk into a scene—is how I determine a subject to photograph and then paint. My artwork, then, is a representation of a time and place that touched me. And, if my work inspires others in some way, that’s the icing on the cake!

**Mark Verna** has been painting since he was first inspired as a boy by his grandfather’s farm in Naples, NY. He lives in Monroe County, and his work can currently be seen at the Lake Placid Lodge in Lake Placid, The Art Stop in Webster and the Mill Gallery in Honeoye Falls.

***Who heard the tree fall?*** The meandering creek going from shade to sun was the inspiration for this large pastel. I also loved the fallen tree that crossed the creek, and as this is a popular trout stream, I decided to add a fisherman in the distance.



When creating the oil painting *Ausable Fall*, I focused on the intense sunlight I had seen on one side of the water. I also liked depicting the light filtering through the leaves and the underwater rocks. The falling leaves were my personal addition.



*Durand Delight*. This 12" x 16" pastel painting depicts a road meandering through Durand Eastman Park at Lake Ontario just after a fall rain; the sun was coming out and the trees were almost black with rain-soaked bark. I was inspired by the strong colors and perspective, as well as the element of sun peeking through the trees in the background.



***Inner Sanctum:*** This 36" x 66" picture was my first large painting done in oils. I was excited about the different directions that the trees took, the canopy of leaves that surrounded the two main trees, and the sun in the background. The falling leaves in the foreground were my own personal touch.

# HOME SWEET HOME on the Rensselaer Plateau

*—a discovery hike in my own backyard*



By Fred DeMay

Photos courtesy RPA unless noted

It was an absolutely beautiful day. The sky was clear; the air cool and crisp. Fall foliage was spectacular, providing a background palette of colors that has to be experienced in the northeast to be believed. The fifteen people wandering around the Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center parking lot were introducing themselves and anxiously awaiting the vans provided by Rensselaer County to take them to the starting point for the first north to south, two-day traverse hike of the Rensselaer Plateau, a 105,000-acre area of contiguous northern forest. We knew the place was unique, but didn't realize just how much it stood out as a region.

Like many others, I always associated long hikes and climbs with a trip to the Adirondacks or Catskills. I had always thought about the Plateau as an area with lots of interesting places to visit, but not as a large wilderness area. Yet the Rensselaer Plateau, about ten miles wide by thirty miles long, is home to the fifth largest forest in the state.

Part of the Plateau's rugged character lies in its unique geology. Pushed into its current location more than 400 million years ago, the Rensselaer Plateau eroded to form the present day escarpment that steeply rises to heights of 1,000 to 2,000 feet above the surrounding landscape. An extremely hard and erosion-resistant bedrock, called greywacke, is responsible for both the longevity and rugged topography of the Plateau. For us hikers, it meant two days of challenging terrain that gave few hints of being an ordinary "flat-top" plateau.

The idea for the hike began several months earlier with the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance (RPA), a grassroots organization established to promote the long-term health and vitality of the Plateau (see Note, page 32). During one of the first meetings I attended, Jim Bonesteel, President of RPA, announced that he and several other members were scouting routes for a traverse hike of the Plateau from Pittstown to Stephentown. The goal: to knit together all those interesting places to go, and to help people see the region as a whole.

Because there was no established trail across the entire region, Jim needed to map the route and obtain permission from the private landowners whose land we hoped to cross. The concept struck me as brilliant, because even though I have lived on the Plateau for decades and spent many a happy hour cycling, trail-running, cross-country skiing, fishing and exploring the area, the idea of hiking across the whole thing never occurred to me.

We began our trek near Pittstown State Forest, making a two-mile march up the 800-foot plateau escarpment to Grafton Lakes State Park. Nick Conrad, President of the Rensselaer Land Trust, led the first section, taking us up an old logging trail that turned into a streambed I remembered from a mountain biking trip several years earlier. Our path followed along the western fringe of Grafton Lakes State Park, past Shaver Pond, south over Route 2, to the shores of Dunham Reservoir where we stopped for lunch.

While eating, we spoke with a couple of kayakers who were out for a leisurely meander around the lake, and I made a mental note to get my kayak up here soon. Hearing a loon's haunting call echo off the surrounding hills, talk turned to



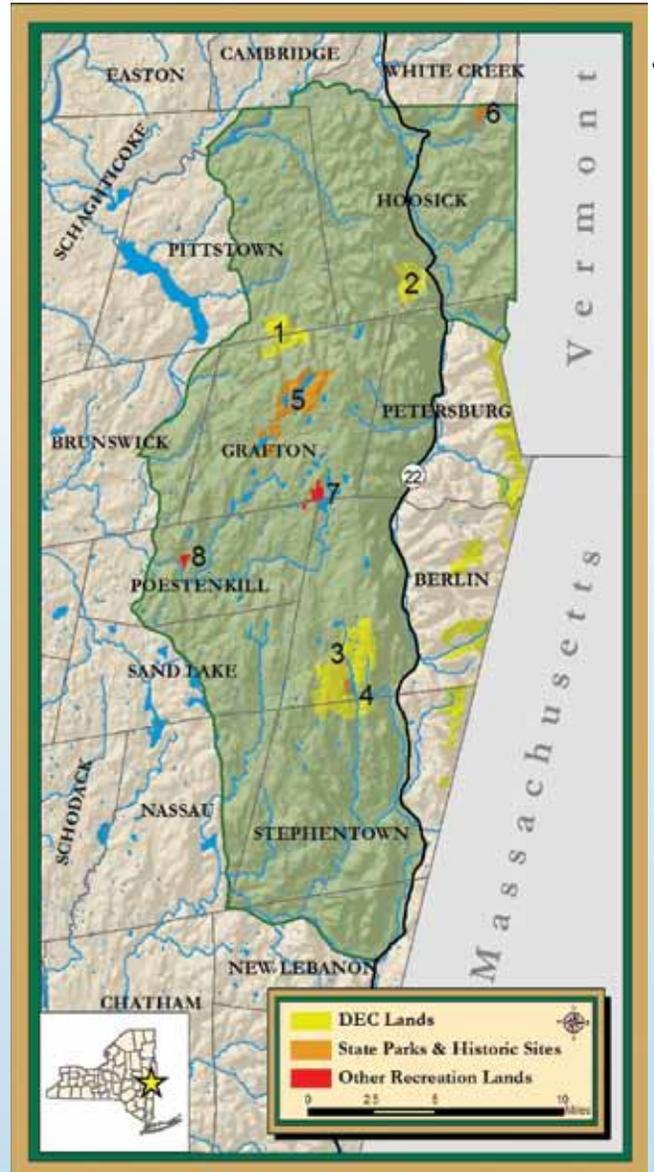
the birdlife found here. I learned that the Plateau is one of Audubon's Important Bird Areas because it supports a diversity of forest breeders, including many at-risk species such as Cooper's hawk, northern goshawk, red-shouldered hawk, wood thrush and Canada warbler.

Sitting by the reservoir, I discussed with one fellow hiker (a forester by profession) how the Plateau is essential to the forest industry, creating jobs and income while maintaining traditional land-use practices. He pointed out that with more than 80 percent of the Plateau privately owned, the sustainable forestry practiced today by many owners supports the forest industry, protects the environment, and helps make sure the woods on the Plateau stay as a forest. It's the stewardship of private forest owners and state forests, he observed, that defines this unique plateau as a working and protected landscape serving many needs and values.

*Sitting by the reservoir, I discussed with one fellow hiker (a forester by profession) how the Plateau is essential to the forest industry, creating jobs and income while maintaining traditional land-use practices.*



After lunch, Rachel Riemann, a USFS forest economist, and Lisa Hoyt, Director of Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center, took over navigation duties and led us southeast through undulating northern hardwood forests and dense hemlock groves to the enchanted wetlands and elevated plank trails of the Dyken Pond Center, where we camped for the night. I checked my trusty GPS and saw we'd gone 11 miles. Sweet dreams campers!



Josh Houghton

- 1. Pittstown State Forest
- 2. Tibbits State Forest
- 3. Capital District Wildlife Management Area
- 4. Cherry Plain State Park
- 5. Grafton Lakes State Park
- 6. Bennington Battlefield State Historic Site
- 7. Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center (owned by Rensselaer County)
- 8. Barberville Falls (owned by The Nature Conservancy)

In the morning, the aroma of wood smoke and fresh coffee drifted through the air as we stretched tight muscles, yawned and packed up for day two. Trail-master duties fell to Jim Bonesteel who had mapped the route and contacted landowners for permission. We were all appreciative and recognized that the hike would not be possible without landowners' support. Jim was a little anxious and wanted to hit the trail early since he had estimated the distance to be considerably more than what we covered the day before. Some hikers from day one had to leave, while several new folks joined us; overall we had 13 hikers and one dog.

The first few hours took us south out of Dyken Pond through rolling backcountry terrain that skirted wetlands, and then along beech and maple groves on the eastern edge of the popular Pineridge Cross Country Ski Area. Here we followed Old Cropsey Road and emerged onto Plank Road, which we followed east for a bit before turning south on an old logging road that ran through the former Cowee Forest Products' lands. For more than a century, this tract has been managed for lumber and forest products, and our visit let us see firsthand what a good example of traditional sustainable land use looked like.

*We encountered challenging rock formations, numerous short, but steep rises and drops, occasional wetlands and constantly changing forest types.*

It was in this area that we reached our highest elevation (a little more than 1,900 feet), saw abundant signs of recent moose activity, and crossed the remnants of the colonial era Albany-Boston road, now mostly reclaimed by the forest. The terrain certainly made me appreciate the challenges of travel 200 years ago!



James Clayton



## A Forest Legacy

In 2010, the U.S. Forest Service designated the Rensselaer Plateau as a Forest Legacy Area, recognizing its many unique characteristics, including being the fifth largest contiguous forest in the state. The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) began in 1990 and is a federal grant program that helps protect participating forest lands from conversion to non-forest uses. Most of the country's forested lands are privately owned, and landowners are continually facing growing financial pressure to convert their lands, such as for residential and commercial development. Participation in FLP offers landowners an alternative that helps keep their forested land intact, and is entirely voluntary.

The main method of protecting land under the FLP is through the purchase of conservation easements whereby forest landowners sell a portion of their property rights, but retain ownership of the land. This allows landowners to continue their current land practices, such as forestry, but at the same time ensures that important public values such as wildlife habitat, natural areas, forest resources, and outdoor recreation opportunities are protected.

For more information about FLP, check out [www.dec.ny.gov/lands/63117.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/63117.html).

The recently restored Dickinson Fire Tower, now maintained by Grafton Lakes State Park, offers 360-degree views into Vermont, Massachusetts, the Catskills and the Adirondacks.



Our route took us from the Cowee tract into the Capital District Wildlife Management Area and Cherry Plain State Park, where there are miles of rugged trails for all-season activities, trout streams, waterfalls and a lake with camping facilities. We encountered challenging rock formations, numerous short, but steep rises and drops, occasional wetlands and constantly changing forest types. After 13 miles, we took a long break for lunch.

With only a few hours of daylight left, we decided to shorten the planned route, and set off past a wetland that fed the Black River (a headwater to Kinderhook Creek). Beyond Buckwheat Hill we stopped briefly to check out an incredible old stone foundation, then crossed some power line access trails and continued on to the southern portion of the Plateau around the shoulder of Turner Mountain. The final push took us down a steep decent on the southern wall before reaching the vans at Garfield Road, just as sunlight faltered. Twenty-two miles for the day!

All totaled, the trip was 33 miles long and had an elevation change (up and down) of about 3,000 feet; my body felt every step. As an Adirondack 46er, I'm used to epic hikes, and I can honestly say this ranks right up there.

I feel like this is a new find for me: a landscape and resource in my backyard that is not only beautiful and challenging to hike and explore, but also steeped in traditions of stewardship and history. What a treasure, and one I'm looking forward to exploring again.

A longtime resident of the Plateau, **Fred DeMay** is retired from the NYS Education Department.



**Note: The Rensselaer Plateau Alliance is a not-for-profit, grassroots organization with a diverse membership comprised of local individuals and groups. The organization was created in 2006 to better recognize the unique resource of the Plateau and work cooperatively with landowners and local governments for the conservation of its natural resources and traditional uses. With the help of a grant from the Hudson River Estuary Program, RPA is working with these stakeholders to develop a Regional Conservation Plan. To learn more, check out RPA's website at [www.rensseplateau.org](http://www.rensseplateau.org).**



## Sporting Tradition

The unique character of the Rensselaer Plateau enables a richness of plant and wildlife species to live here. The area's habitats resemble that of the Adirondacks, with large unfragmented blocks of forest providing habitat for bear, bobcat, fisher and moose, while numerous ponds, streams and wetlands are home to a variety of aquatic species.

Generations of hunters and anglers have enjoyed the fantastic hunting and fishing found on the Plateau. Healthy populations of deer, bear, turkey, grouse and other game species provide hunters with plenty of opportunity. In addition, the numerous waterbodies keep anglers busy as they pursue a variety of species, including bass, pickerel, sunfish and trout.

Several hunting and fishing clubs are scattered across the Plateau, affording members a unique private hunting and fishing experience. Some clubs have been there for decades and play an integral role in passing along family sporting traditions.

The Plateau also offers visitors the chance to pursue a number of other recreational activities, including hiking, swimming, mountain biking, cross-country skiing and bird watching. And while much of the land in the Rensselaer Plateau is privately owned—be respectful and don't trespass without landowner's permission—there are a number of public lands that offer plenty of recreational opportunities for everyone (see map on page 29).

For more information about the Rensselaer Plateau region, contact DEC at (518) 357-2450, or check out the following DEC webpages:

Places to Go:  
[www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/347.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/347.html)

State Lands Interactive Mapper:  
[www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/45478.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/45478.html)

Google Maps:  
[www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/42978.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/42978.html)



# On Patrol

Real stories from Conservation Officers and Forest Rangers in the field

Contributed by ECO Lt. Tom Caifa and Forest Ranger Lt. John Solan

Carl Heilman II

## Window Poaching—Steuben County

Recently, a resident from Bath contacted ECOs Tom Flaitz and Dave Hulett to report that an eagle had been shot; he had a picture on his cell phone of the injured bird. The officers went to the accused man's residence, which was an adult, assisted-living home. The facility operator, a 71-year-old female, stated she shot the eagle, but both officers suspected she was trying to protect the real suspect. Finally the woman admitted that one of her residents, an 87-year-old retired dairy farmer, shot the eagle from his second-story bedroom window. The ECOs found a scoped rifle and box of ammunition next to the window in his room where apparently he would sit and shoot at wildlife that ventured onto the property. The firearm and the eagle carcass were seized, and the man was ticketed for illegally taking a protected bird, for which he paid a heavy fine. Additionally, the man's other firearms were locked in the facility owner's gun safe, available only for legitimate hunting activities.



## Boathouse Bust—Lewis County

While conducting land surveys for the Brookfield Power Company in Croghan, surveyors noticed trees were missing from the property. After reporting the stolen timber, a company representative visited the site with ECOs John Murphy and Tim Worden, and discovered that approximately 100 hemlock trees had been taken. Tracks on the property led back to a private camp on the Beaver River where the officers saw a brand new boathouse made of rough-cut hemlock. The officers took a few photos and left. A few days later, the ECOs met with one of the camp owners, who denied any knowledge of the trees being removed from the adjoining property. When presented with the photos, however, he told officers to speak with his brother. The ECOs did, and the man confessed to taking the trees. He was ticketed for trespassing and timber theft.

## Dog Tired—Essex County

A visitor recently stopped at a DEC forest ranger's office in the Adirondacks to report that his hiking partner was in need of assistance on the trail below the summit of Dix Mountain. The missing hiker had become exhausted after attempting to carry his dog—which had collapsed—down the mountain. Two forest rangers were dispatched and located the hiker and his dog 1/4 mile from the Lillian Brook lean-to. The hiker was exhausted, but willing to walk to the lean-to, escorted by the forest rangers carrying his dog. Once at the lean-to, forest rangers rehydrated and fed both the hiker and his dog. When the pair was able to travel on their own again a short time later, the rangers accompanied them to the trailhead where the two reunited with their hiking partner.

## ASK THE ECO

**Q:** I would like to get a hunting license this year, but I can't find my hunter safety training course certificate, which I got several years ago, and I don't have an old hunting license. Can I still buy a hunting license?

**A:** Most likely yes. DEC keeps computer records of all licenses sold after September 2002, so you can call License Sales at 518-402-8843 to see if they have your information. If, however, you bought your last license before then, the vendor who sold you the license may have a record of it. If there is no record, you can use your hunter education certificate as proof of eligibility. If (as you describe) you can't locate your certificate, try contacting the person who taught the course. The DEC Sportsmen Education Program (1-888-486-8332) may also be able to help you locate proof that you took the course. Remember, it's your responsibility to keep all your hunter education certificates in a safe place. If all else fails, you can always take the course over again; it's free and would be a great refresher for any hunter.

# Hunters Helping Out

*The Venison Donation Coalition helps meet the needs of those less fortunate.*



By Ellen Bidell

We have all seen pictures of hungry children—rail thin with swollen bellies and pleading eyes. The urge to help these children touches many people. But the problem of hunger isn't one that is confined to poor and developing countries. Nearly one in seven American households didn't have enough food to meet their needs at some point in 2009, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Even though plenty of good food is grown in New York State, one of every eight New Yorkers reports trouble feeding his or her family. More than 2.1 million people in New York use emergency food programs like food pantries each year.

One New York-based group has a way for you to help right in your own community.



James Clayton

The Venison Donation Coalition, Inc. (VDC) is a nonprofit organization that coordinates and funds venison (deer meat) processing and distribution to feed those in need throughout New York State. Created by a group of hunters in 1999, the coalition is supported by sportsmen's organizations, food banks,

*Those going hungry are families, children and single parents, and the donation of venison can help feed these people.*

businesses, the NY Farm Bureau, DEC, USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service, civic and religious organizations, and individual citizens.

The program allows hunters to donate venison to be distributed by food banks to food pantries and soup kitchens that feed people in need.

The Coalition's mission is to transform a renewable natural resource into nutritious food for those less fortunate. Because donated deer must be professionally processed, the VDC has coordinated a program where legally tagged and properly field-dressed deer can be taken to participating processors...at no cost to the hunter.

Since 1999, the Coalition, based in Bath, NY, has coordinated the collection, processing and distribution of

more than 413 tons of venison—equal to more than 3.3 million servings of healthy, low-fat, high-protein meat—for distribution by regional food banks. They work with 110 meat processors in 50 counties throughout the state.

Hunters donated an average of 75,000 pounds per year for the past eleven

years, averaging more than 350,000 meals each year. Depending on its size, one deer can provide up to 160 servings of venison. The Coalition uses money from individuals and food banks to pay meat cutters to process the donated deer. The venison is processed and packaged according to state law, and the meat is picked up by food banks for delivery to soup kitchens and food pantries throughout New York. From there, it ends up on the tables of thousands of families, providing wholesome meals and an important source of protein.

VDC is truly a collaborative effort. In addition to the hunters, processors, food banks and pantries, the New York Resource Conservation and Development Councils (NYRCDC) play a role as well. The NYRCDC are



Greg Fuerst

not-for-profit organizations that help groups like VDC carry out activities that conserve natural resources and enhance the standard of living in the community. It is their job to pay the bills and provide bookkeeping for the Coalition.

According to Joanne Dwyer, Director of Food Industry Relations and Business Development Representative for the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York, the Food Bank has participated in the program since 2002. They work with 1,000 non-profit programs in 23 counties of northeastern New York.

“Venison has tremendous nutritional value and we are always in need of protein sources for our clients. Last year, we distributed 5,594 pounds of venison, and 6,600 pounds the year before. Venison works well in all kinds of cooking and sometimes we provide recipes and cooking tips for clients. We are very grateful to have the opportunity to participate in the program,” Joanne Dwyer explained.

The hungry aren’t the only ones in need. State funding for the program has dwindled from \$100,000 annually from 2000 through 2005 to \$11,000 in 2009. Because of this decline, donations to sustain the program from people like *Conservationist* readers are more important than ever. While the Coalition receives \$10,000 per year on average from deer hunters, its share of processing costs in 2010 was \$40,000 (food banks pay the majority of these costs). Without significant additional donations each year, the Coalition faces an uncertain future.

According to VDC President Greg Heffner, “With the downturn of the economy, budget cuts throughout the country, and increased layoffs, more and more Americans are feeling the crunch and being left hungry. Those going hungry are families, children and single parents, and the donation of venison can help feed these people.”

This year, food banks will play an even larger role in the venison donation program to help offset some of the costs.



James Clayton

The Food Bank Association of New York State is a non-profit organization representing the eight regional food banks located across the state. According to John Evers, Executive Director, the Association was recently awarded a grant from the NYS Department of Health to help administer the program. The five-year grant will help defray the cost of processing venison.

So when you’re buying your hunting license this fall, consider supporting this important program. DEC’s license sales system is set up to receive donations to the VDC. You’ll be helping to feed your neighbors and supporting a good cause, all while enjoying your pastime!

**Ellen Bidell** is a citizen participation specialist in DEC’s Albany office.



## HOW YOU CAN HELP

- You can make a cash donation at any Town Clerk’s office or anywhere hunting and fishing licenses are sold. Just tell the licensing agent that you’d like to contribute to the Venison Donation Program. The money is deposited directly into the Venison Donation Fund, and ninety-five cents of every dollar donated goes toward processing deer into venison to be distributed to food pantries.
- You can also send a check payable to the Venison Donation Coalition, Inc., 415 West Morris St., Bath, NY 14810 or donate online through their secure website: **www.venisondonation.org**.
- All donations are tax-deductible.
- For more information, call (866) 862-DEER.



### New Record Brookie

Don Germain of Forestport, Oneida County, recently broke the state record for brook trout. On June 15, Don caught a five-pound, eight-ounce brookie while fishing on South Lake in the southwest corner of the Adirondack Park. Mr. Germain sent details of his 22-inch fish to DEC's Angler Achievement Awards Program, which allows anglers to receive special recognition for impressive catches. Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7727.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7727.html) to learn more about the program, see past winners, and to find out how to apply with your own luncker.

### Deer Season Forecasts

Now that big game hunting seasons are right around the corner, we thought it would be a good time to look back on last year—and forward to this fall. In 2010, hunters took a total of 230,000 deer: 123,000 antlerless and 107,000 adult bucks, up slightly from the past few years. More than 16,000 junior hunters contributed to the harvest by taking approximately 4,900 deer. This fall, hunters should expect the statewide deer take to increase slightly again. Also, DEC tested 1,780 hunter-harvested deer

for Chronic Wasting Disease last year, and found no infected deer. For complete 2010 harvest details, visit [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/42232.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/42232.html), and check out [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/37304.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/37304.html) for 2011 season forecasts.

### Bowhunter Sighting Log

Many bowhunters participate in DEC's Bowhunter Sighting Log by keeping a diary of their bowhunting activity and the number of animals they see. This data helps DEC keep track of deer and other wildlife populations. DEC needs more bowhunter participation in many northern, eastern and southeastern counties, and in Westchester and Suffolk Counties. If you'd like to participate, please send an e-mail to [fwwildlf@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:fwwildlf@gw.dec.state.ny.us) and provide your name, address, hunter ID (back tag number), a list of the counties where you hunt, and whether or not you have previously participated in New York's bowhunter log.

### Junior Bowhunting

Recent legislation allows 12- and 13-year-olds to hunt big game with a Junior Bowhunting license. See the Junior Hunter Mentoring Program ([www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/46245.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/46245.html)) for detailed information on youth hunting requirements.



DEC photo

### Crossbows

Hunters may now use crossbows to hunt deer and bear in parts of New York. However, crossbows are not legal in bowhunting-only areas of the state. When using a crossbow, hunters must carry a certificate stating they have reviewed the legal requirements and safety information regarding crossbow use. For information on legal hunting areas and seasons, and to find a Certificate of Qualification, see [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/68802.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/68802.html).

### More Bear Hunting

DEC recently opened several areas east of the Hudson River to black bear hunting and changed bear hunting season dates in the Southern Zone. The



Bill Banaszewski

regular black bear season will now open earlier in parts of central and western New York. For more details about bear hunting, see [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/28605.html#Black](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/28605.html#Black), and visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/6960.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/6960.html) to learn more about black bears.

### Did You Know?

DEC publishes a periodic electronic newsletter about deer and bear management and hunting opportunities in New York called *NYBigGame*. To subscribe, visit: <http://lists.dec.state.ny.us/mailman/listinfo/nybiggame>.





Susan L. Shafer

### Forest Photos

In honor of the United Nations' designation of 2011 as International Year of Forests, DEC is holding a "Forest Photo Contest." People may submit forest-oriented photographs in several different categories, including "enjoying the forests" and "forest products." All submissions should be sent by November 1<sup>st</sup>, and will be reviewed by DEC. Winners will be announced on December 1<sup>st</sup>. For specific details, including a list of submission categories and where to send your photos, visit [www.dec.ny.gov/lands/75396.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/75396.html).

### Reducing Fish Kills

Every day, industrial facilities in New York use more than 16 billion gallons of water for cooling purposes. In turn, more than 17 billion fish of all life stages (egg, fry, juvenile, adult) are killed during these processes. To reduce this impact, all industrial facilities will soon be required to use the best technology available for their cooling systems. One such technology is a closed-cycle cooling system, which has a significantly reduced impact on fish. Visit DEC's "Aquatic

Habitat Protection" page at [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/32847.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/32847.html) for more information.

### Marine License Refunds

On August 5, Governor Cuomo directed DEC to refund all license fees paid by individuals and charter operators for marine recreational fishing for the 2011 season. All payments are expected to be mailed by the end of summer. In place of the marine license, the NYS Legislature established a no-fee recreational marine fishing registry. The registry will allow fisheries biologists to gather data to help better manage marine resources. See [www.dec.ny.gov/permits/54950.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/permits/54950.html) for more information on the marine recreational fishing registry.

### Year of the Turtle

Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and various other conservation groups designated 2011 as Year of the Turtle to help raise awareness of the threats to turtle populations. Many turtle species are in danger of extinction due to habitat loss, pet trade, and exploitation for human use. Visit [www.yearoftheturtle.org](http://www.yearoftheturtle.org) to learn more and to find ways to join turtle conservation efforts.



Donna Kalled

### Three Fishing Lines Legal

New York freshwater anglers may now use up to three fishing lines, with or without a rod. Before this new law went into effect, only two lines were permitted. This amended law does not change fishing season dates, size limits, or daily limits.



### Cougar Traveled Through NY

Recent DNA testing confirmed that a mountain lion spotted in December 2010 in Lake George, NY, was the same animal that was killed by a motor vehicle in Milford, CT in June this year. A necropsy conducted by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection revealed that the lean, 140-pound young male most likely had never been in captivity. Genetic testing linked this mountain lion to a breeding population in the Black Hills of South Dakota, indicating he traveled about 1,800 miles—the longest distance ever recorded for a mountain lion. Further details on this mountain lion are available at [www.dec.ny.gov/about/74534.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/about/74534.html).



### Little Stinker

While walking in the woods, I came across this unusual thing growing on the forest floor. Can you tell me what it is?

Paul LeMieux  
Franklin County



*In the Northeast we call this a veiled stinkhorn mushroom. Members of the stinkhorn family often get our attention with their unpleasant foul odor, but they're irresistibly delicious to flies and beetles. Interesting to note is that this specimen is almost devoid of the olive-green to olive-brown spore slime usually covering its top, and which insects eat and spread to other sites in their travels. Either the spores were already consumed when you came upon it, or they might have been washed away by rain. Most people are acquainted with the far more common dog stinkhorn—the color and shape of a small carrot. You may very well find it too; just follow your nose!*

—Frank Knight, retired DEC Environmental Educator



### Into the Wild

I thought you might enjoy this shot of a deer taken in the early morning at Knox Farm State Park. She had two fawns with her, but they never came out in the open.

Don Nieman  
East Aurora, Erie County

### Big Toothache

While walking my family's property on Black Lake, I found these two skulls. The larger skull has a portion of a smaller skull wedged in its teeth. I'm guessing the larger animal killed the smaller, but couldn't free the head from its mouth, which might have eventually killed it. Does this sound plausible, and do you know what animals these might be?

John A. Eustis,  
Black Lake, St. Lawrence County

*What a unique and interesting find. The large number of teeth, pronounced sagittal crest (ridge) on the top of the skull, and the overall shape, identify the larger skull as an opossum. However, we are unable to determine from the photo what species of small mammal the other skull is from. To properly identify it, we would need to see it, so I encourage you to bring it in to a local DEC office if possible.*

*As to how the opossum may have died, we cannot say for sure, but feel that given the location of the smaller skull, it is likely that a healthy opossum could have freed this skull from its tooth. Had you found this near a road, for example, then we might surmise that the opossum (an opportunistic feeder) was feeding on roadkill when it was hit by a car.*

—Andrew MacDuff, DEC Wildlife Biologist



## ✉ LETTERS



### Pond Beauty

The dragonfly article in your June issue inspired me to bring my camera down to our pond. I had a lot of fun taking photos!

Karen Velez  
Hillsdale, Columbia County

*It's great to hear you were inspired!  
Thanks for sharing your photo with us.*

—Conservationist staff



### Lounging Around

While hiking near a cliff edge above Lick Brook in Ithaca, I came upon this snake lounging in the leaves. Do you happen to know what species it is?

Nigel P. Kent  
Rochester

*You've captured a photo of an Eastern ratsnake (*Elaphe alleganiensis*). It is similar to an Eastern racer (*Coluber constrictor*), but has some distinguishing characteristics. The primary feature that identifies this snake is the raised ridge,*

*or keel, running lengthwise through the center of each scale. An Eastern racer's scales lack that keel. Additionally, the ratsnake's eyes are situated closer to the front of its head, while a racer's eyes are situated farther back.*

—William Hoffman, DEC Fish & Wildlife Technician



### Model Dog

I wanted to share this photo of my three-year-old dog sitting on a muskrat house. She's a wonderful dog with a great disposition. It took her some practice to actually retrieve ducks, but now she is very proud of herself when she does!

Kathy Forbes  
Albany County

*What a great pose. A proud girl, indeed!*

—Conservationist staff



**Write to us** Conservationist Letters  
NYSDEC, 625 Broadway, Albany, NY 12233-4502  
or e-mail us at: [magazine@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:magazine@gw.dec.state.ny.us)



### Ask the Biologist

**Q:** Recently a pair of red fox have been spotted hanging out near a local school. They routinely let people get close, which is causing concern about safety, such as someone being bitten or the worry about rabies. Is it normal for fox to exhibit this kind of behavior? And is it safe for people to be so close? Should something be done?

—Jim Getman, Schoharie

**A:** It is not unusual to see foxes in developed areas, especially in late spring/early summer when they are actively rearing their young and therefore are constantly searching for food. There is no reason to be concerned about this, as long as people keep their distance and the animal appears healthy and is acting normally. Remember, for both adults and children, it is very important to keep all wildlife at a distance and make no attempts to get close. Pets should be kept restrained at all times as well. If any person or pet does happen to come in direct contact with a red fox (e.g., a bite or scratch), a medical doctor or veterinarian should be consulted since any mammal is capable of carrying rabies.  
—Gordon Batcheller, DEC Wildlife Biologist



# Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

John Bulmer

## Discovering Adirondack

by Terra Osterling

*Editor's note: The following essay was the grand prize winner in DEC's Great Stories from the Great Outdoors contest.*

It is an October morning, surprisingly cold, but drenched in the bright sunshine of early autumn. I am about to hike my first mountain trail: Baker Mountain near Saranac Lake, deep in the Adirondacks. My husband, having some experience in the High Peaks region, is wise to allow me to set the pace; I move slowly and deliberately along this upward, rocky path.

Ahead there are places where the very bones of the Earth poke through: straight white birches, exposed roots—the sinews of the trail. Boulders covered with patchy moss are like giant, green-furred animals. Laying my hand on one is like petting a sleeping mammoth, I imagine: a reverent and awesome moment. I keep moving up the trail, drawing energy from the mountain itself with every brush of pine and thud of boot on rock.

At my first ledge, gazing out over jeweled lakes surrounded by bursting autumn, I feel something inside me is complete. A puzzle piece thought long lost is found and fitted into the waiting void. The sunshine here is different, the air is different, and I am different. Everything is “more,” including me.

*Every footfall marches  
me closer to a place  
where the creation  
of the earth and the  
creation of humanity  
come together.*

Over the next three years, I hike Rooster Comb, Owl's Head, Baxter, Poke-O-Moonshine, Cascade, Hurricane and Phelps. I can't think of another circumstance where I would walk for six hours in silence, uphill, then back down, often in intermittent rain, and be elated to do it again the next day. When I am on a trail, time ceases, and on a summit I stretch out on bare rock with nothing between me and the blue dome of sky above.

Often a summit is the picture of hospitality: flawless sky and the Great Range laid out in a patchwork of autumn, majestic pine, and blue-green lakes. Other times the summit provides a spectacular view of a thunderstorm moving across a valley. Wrapped in wild gusts, I watch mist gather upward from forest far below, rising into clouds, then drifting across peaks and over valleys. And one time I climb directly into a cloud, the wind made of icy pin pricks as a silver curtain draws over the vista, leaving

me alone with altitude-stunted spruce and fir. Both the trees and I cling to the mostly bald peak for dear life.

The person I am on the mountain trail is alive in a way that does not exist in the “me” of flatland life. It is as if, in a dream, I find a lovely room in my house that I never knew existed. With each hike I am drawn deeper into the embrace of the Adirondacks. Every footfall marches me closer to a place where the creation of the earth and the creation of humanity come together. I miss the mountains as soon as I cannot see them.

**Terra Osterling** lives with her husband Mark in Irondequoit. Her favorite Adirondack hike so far is the trail to Hurricane Mountain.



# 2010 Big Buck Club Awards

***The New York State Big Buck Club, Inc.*** is a private organization that maintains records of large deer and bear taken in New York. Each year since 1972, the Big Buck Club has recognized the hunters who take the largest trophy bucks in the state. The winner in each category receives an original painting by renowned artist and former Conservationist art director Wayne Trimm.



**Largest Archery Deer:**  
Taken in: Genesee County  
Score: 173-3  
Typical  
Points: 13  
Taken by: Patrick Dermody



**Largest Gun Deer:**  
Taken in: Cortland County  
Score: 182-0  
Typical  
Points: 16  
Taken by: Dave Edwards

artwork by Jack Mesick

For more information write to: NYSBBC, Records Office, 360 McLean Rd., Kirkwood, NY 13795  
Or visit their website at: [www.nys-big-buck.org](http://www.nys-big-buck.org)



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Ed Jakubowski

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