

# CONNECTING NEW YORKERS WITH NATURE & RECREATION

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CONNECTING OUR CHILDREN WITH NATURE

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COMMUNITY GREENING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

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BUILDING URBAN FARMS & COMMUNITY GARDENS

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ENSURING ACCESSIBLE RECREATION

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CONNECTING NEW YORKERS  
WITH NATURE & RECREATION

*Connecting our Children with Nature*



The 19th Century conservationists recognized the importance of nature as a refuge from the noise and bustle of city life. Today, understanding the environment is critical to our future. But the sad irony is that as the natural environment becomes more

important, fewer and fewer people, especially children, are in contact with it.

Earlier generations of New Yorkers played outdoors much of the time. Today, most children spend far less time outdoors than did their parents. Kids are learning about nature indirectly, from television and the internet, rather than directly from contact and observation. Their outdoors experience is often limited to the artificial environment of groomed lawns and playing fields.

We conserve our environment not just to protect our health and enforce the law, but to ensure that we, and future generations, can experience the joy of a hike or a hunt in the woods, the thrill of a swim at a clean beach, or the beauty of an unspoiled view.



Whether it is a stroll in an urban waterfront park or a paddling trip in the wilderness, these connections to nature can refresh, teach, and sustain us. While use and demand for our State's campgrounds, education centers, and youth camps remains high, participation in hunting, fishing and trapping has declined. Meanwhile, research has documented a shift away from outdoor activities in the general population. We can reverse this trend by helping more families rediscover the natural world.

Our efforts to connect New Yorkers to nature will be conducted with the goal of providing access, increasing environmental literacy, enhancing public health and quality of life, and building the interest and involvement of the next generation of New Yorkers to carry on the traditions of caring for the environment and protecting our State's open spaces.



*Camp Colby*

## ACTIONS

- ***Continue to support partnerships that multiply the State's efforts to inform the public about natural resource and environmental quality topics, such as those with the Student Conservation Association AmeriCorps program and the Naturalist Intern programs at Five Rivers, Stony Kill Farm, Rogers and Reinstein Woods Environmental Education Centers.***

    - *Continue offering regularly scheduled public interpretation and outreach programs by DEC & OPRHP State Parks and environmental educators, including special events such as fall festivals and Earth Day celebrations.*
    - *Develop and implement an environmental interpretive and education to guide OPRHP State Parks.*
    - *Enhance existing aquatic and water-related programs such as Project WILD Aquatic and Project WET (Water Education for Teachers) by developing information specific to New York and by linking with the I FISH NY program.)*
  - ***Design improvements to DEC's Environmental Education Centers and Camps, including constructing a new environmental education facility at Five Rivers and in the Catskills, making Rogers accessible to persons with disabilities, maximizing green features and their educational value, and making improvements at summer youth camps.***
  - ***Continue to expand youth programs within DEC's education centers, such as offering weekly after-school outdoor discovery programs and family-friendly programs on weekends.***

    - *Expand the number of children able to attend DEC's summer residential environmental education summer camps.*
- *Expand the number of educator workshops using standards-based, national environmental education programs such as Project WILD, Project WET (Water Education for Teachers), and Project Learning Tree.*
  - *Continue to offer Nature Recreation and Junior Naturalist Programs at campgrounds.*
  - *Expand DEC's After School Conservation Club by training urban area educators and youth service providers in this 10-week environmental education program that teaches elementary students about natural resources and environmental quality through fun, educational activities and stewardship projects.*
  - *Maintain partnership programs such as the After School Conservation Club (in New York City, Buffalo, and Beacon), Naturalist Intern Program with the four friends groups of DEC education centers, and the AmeriCorps program with the Student Conservation Association.*
  - *Enhance DEC's Campership Diversity program by partnering with local schools and after-school program providers. The Diversity Program connects urban youth, who would not have the opportunity to participate in outdoor educational or recreational experiences, to the natural environment through hands-on activities and stewardship projects. Participants then go to one of DEC's four summer camps for a free, one-week residential experience and post-camp activities offer career exploration in natural resources and environmental quality.*
  - *Expand environmental education facilities and programs to train young people in safe and ethical hunting practices; expand opportunities for hunting, fishing and trapping on appropriate public lands to encourage a new generation of outdoors men and women through junior mentoring programs.*

- *Continue DEC's Cooperative Forestry conservation education which focuses on providing rural, suburban and urban youth with activities such as county level Conservation field days, county fairs, and school Arbor Day and seedling programs.*
- *Work for the passage of the No Child Left Inside Act of 2008. This Act would provide grant funds for state educational agencies to develop a K-12 plan to ensure environmental literacy among elementary and secondary school students along with environmental education for professional teacher development and student programs.*
- ***Continue and enhance I Fish NY and other fishing programs.***
  - *Continue angler education programs at water-based DEC campgrounds and selected summer youth camps.*
  - *Provide in-school fishing/aquatic resource training, along with fishing clinics and other programs to teach fishing skills and increase knowledge of the State's aquatic resources.*
  - *Continue collaborative efforts with the Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation on the angler recruitment program, Angler Legacy, in addition to encouraging these efforts among local governments to increase fishing participation in New York State.*
- ***Gather quantitative & qualitative information in partnership with SUNY/CESF about recreational use and impacts in the Forest Preserve to better inform our future planning.***
- ***Continue to improve public access to NYC Watershed lands in partnership with NYC Department of Environmental Protection.***

*Community Greening  
for Environmental Justice*



[www.cenyc.org](http://www.cenyc.org)

Community greening efforts, such as tree planting and community gardens, are valuable to minority and low-income communities particularly in urban areas where green open space is scarce. Community greening offers a significant impact with smaller scale efforts. It can help to revitalize and beautify neighborhoods, and at the same time: serve as carbon sinks to reduce local carbon dioxide levels; help alleviate urban heat island problems associated with concrete and stone structures, and serve as a filtration system for storm water. In addition to being beneficial to the environment, such activities foster good stewardship and community commitment from which cultural and economic benefits can follow.

**ACTIONS**

- ***Develop new and enhance existing programs to provide equitable open space and recreational resources for underserved communities.***
  - *Continue to implement the Environmental Justice (EJ) Community Impact Grant Program to assist community organizations in addressing environmental and human health impacts in their neighborhoods.*

- *Continue to partner with government, non-government organizations and local community groups to develop and implement green infrastructure and green street initiatives.*
- *Support community centered environmental learning for urban youth in conjunction with colleges, trade schools and job training programs that provide training in green roof installation and maintenance, urban farming, and green collar jobs.*
- *Complete mapping to identify environmental justice issue areas to inform policy making and to prioritize open space conservation in EJ communities.*
- *Establish a set of criteria or benchmarks by which to measure progress achieved in the equitable distribution of open space in underserved communities. Prioritize and increase purchases of small parcels or open space in urban EJ communities.*

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***Building Community  
Gardens & Urban Farms***

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**CONNECTING TO OUR FOOD  
& OUR NEIGHBORHOODS**

State law defines community gardens as "public or private lands upon which citizens of the State have the opportunity to garden on lands on which they do not individually own." There are well over 1,000 registered or permitted community gardens in New York's cities and many more cases where residents have rescued derelict private or public lots in an effort to build more livable neighborhoods. In many of New York's cities, not-for-profit urban farms provide access to fresh fruits and vegetables, knowledge of agriculture and nutrition, economic opportunities and healthier environments to the communities they serve.



Buffalo, NY

Massachusetts Avenue Project  
[www.mass-ave.org](http://www.mass-ave.org)

**FARMERS' MARKETS**

Urban agriculture has benefitted from the rapid growth and popularity of our State's nearly 400 open-air farmers markets, many of which operate in low-income neighborhoods with support from the State's Farmers Market Nutrition Program. Farmers' markets are frequently located in public open spaces such as parks, school yards, and even at community gardens and urban farms, and are typically sponsored by municipalities and community-based organizations. They can provide: urban farms with marketing opportunities that encourage youth and adult entrepreneurship in agriculture; infrastructure programs that enable construction and improvement of permanent farmers' market facilities; and can create new semi-permanent open air market sites to ensure community access to fresh, nutritious locally-grown produce while supporting both rural farmland and community gardening, open space protection efforts.

Community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, urban farm stands, and mobile markets that bring local produce to underserved neighborhoods also have proven critical to preserving rural and urban farmland. The majority of New York's community gardens and urban farms are in low-income and minority communities. However, there is also increasing interest in food producing community gardens in rural areas where land is available, but access to retail outlets for fresh fruits and vegetables is limited.

Community gardens and urban farms provide precious green space in areas where public parks are scarce, provide urban families with a way to grow nutritious fresh foods, and can serve as emergency food sites, provide food for farmers' markets and local restaurants. Community supported agriculture programs help educate community members about the natural world, the value of local foods, good nutrition and that environmental stewardship is relevant to neighborhood urban areas not just far-off wilderness forests. These green spaces also provide safe spaces for exercise in communities with poor access to physical activity outlets. They deliver environmental benefits such as reduced city heat, decreased storm water run-off, safer soil, composting sites and natural habitats. And they bring community members together, filling an important social function in neighborhoods where gathering spaces are limited.

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#### ACTIONS

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- *Continue to educate urban children about sources of food and demonstrate sound agricultural practices at Stony Kill Farm Environmental Education Center, which has a Community Supported Agriculture program, community garden plots and raised beds for persons with disabilities. As part of Operation Explore, upper elementary school students from New York City visit Stony Kill and learn about sustainable agriculture practices and how plants grow, and have an opportunity to see farm animals up close (pigs, cows, sheep and chickens) to learn where their milk, eggs, bacon and hamburgers come from.*
- *Promote local food production and development of a conservation ethic by providing and maintaining opportunities and resources to facilitate the initiation and continuation of urban farming and community gardening.*
  - *Continue to fund grant programs that support community gardens and urban farms, especially focused on low income communities.*
- *Encourage the dedication of vacant private and publicly owned land in low-income communities for community gardening and urban farming, including the use of "underutilized" park land for productive community gardening and educational farming purposes.*
- *Promote brownfield remediation in low income communities with dedicated reuse for open space with raised-bed planters for community gardens and urban farming opportunities.*
- *Collaborate with State and municipal agencies to provide adequate technical assistance to assess the toxicity of potential community garden and farm sites.*
- *Assist in extending land trust opportunities (e.g. Trust for Public Land's New York City land trust gardens) to community gardens with limited or no municipal protections and at risk of losing sites to development or sale of public or private land.*
- *Extend the State's matching Community Parks Grants and Acquisition Program, administered through OPRHP, to better assist community-based gardening organizations in the acquisition of private or public land. (This is especially important in cases where municipal park agencies have limited resources and community-based not-for-profits lack the funding match requirement yet have the labor resources to maintain successful permanent community garden sites.)*
- *Encourage the inclusion of community gardeners in municipal open space planning, as gardeners are natural partners for "greening the cityscape."*
- *Allocate resources to existing urban farm sites and community gardens to expand environmental stewardship efforts. As small, nimble organizations, community gardeners are often able to take the lead on best practices such as rainwater harvesting & decentralized city composting programs.*

*Ensuring Accessible Recreation*



*Indian Carry, Saranac Lakes Wild Forest*

**UNIVERSAL ACCESS**

Approximately one in five Americans has a disability and much needs to be done to enable people with disabilities to fully participate in our communities and in New York’s outdoor environments. Many people with disabilities have not traditionally sought the benefits of outdoor recreation because they have been deterred by its challenges. Many have yet to discover for themselves the enjoyment and ease of access that Universal Design provides.

Over the last several years, there has been an increased focus on providing universally accessible outdoor amenities on DEC public lands and at OPRHP facilities. The result has been the creation of wheelchair accessible trails, designated parking, restrooms, picnic areas, campsites, fishing piers, equestrian mounting platforms, and waterway access sites as well as increased efforts to make all programs and services inclusive. Many of the modified outdoor facilities keep in mind the beauty of the surrounding environment that is sought and display innovative examples of natural and site-sensitive design solutions. This invites and welcomes people of varying abilities to become active in outdoor recreation and find serenity in nature – in turn supporting a healthy quality of life for all of our State’s citizens.



*Salmon River Falls*

*We all chase the same dreams, but we have different ways to get there. By creating a universal environment and inviting people to recreate together, we are taking steps toward a more inclusive society that will diminish perceptions of differences.*



*Northampton Beach Campground*

**ACTIONS**

- ❑ *Formally assess trails at DEC Education Centers for appropriate designations related to accessibility standards; make improvements where possible.*

- ❑ ***Ensure the availability of accessible recreation opportunities throughout the State.***
  - *Complete planned projects and develop new projects to increase access for people with disabilities to State lands and recreational facilities.*
  - *Utilize appropriate DEC administered lands to provide hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities for people with disabilities.*
  - *Initiate training and education for anglers and hunters with disabilities.*



*Accessible Hunting Blind*