NEW YORK STATE

CONSERVATIONIST

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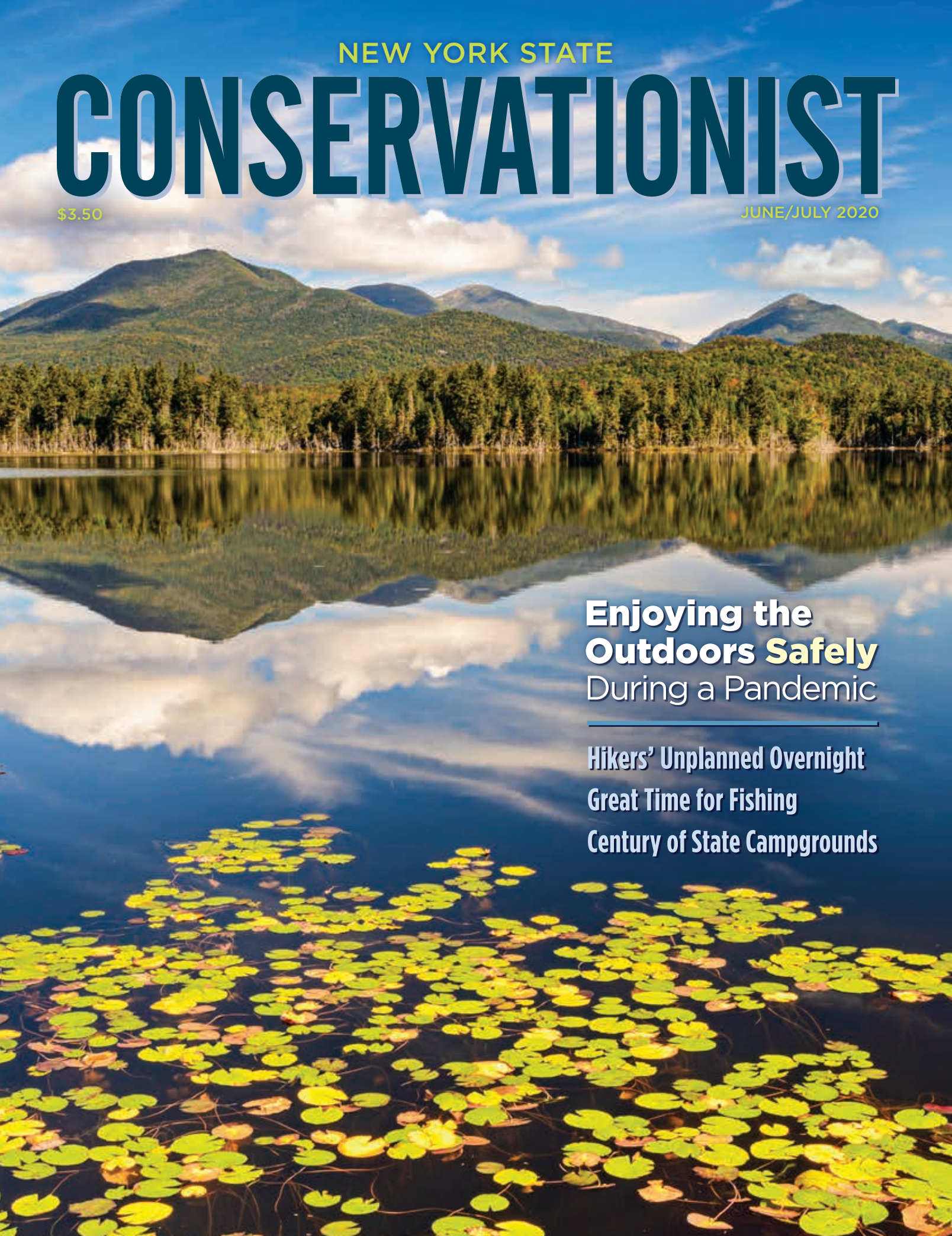
JUNE/JULY 2020



Enjoying the Outdoors Safely During a Pandemic

Hikers' Unplanned Overnight

Great Time for Fishing

Century of State Campgrounds

Dear Readers,

This year marks some significant anniversaries for our agency, including the 50th anniversary of DEC and the first Earth Day. It's also the 100th anniversary of state campgrounds, which have become popular destinations for generations of families. You can learn about the opening of the first state campgrounds and view some historic and current photographs of these sites (pg. 10).

As the state begins to advance through the phases of NY Forward, individuals and families will have opportunities to enjoy the outdoors again. There is no question that this has been a challenging time for all New Yorkers, and we must all remember to Play Smart * Play Safe * Play Local (pg. 6) and learn how to protect ourselves and others. This issue also highlights the importance of being well-prepared when exploring the outdoors (pg. 14) and how you can reduce your impact on nature, while ensuring your own safety and enjoyment (pg. 17).

With the warmer weather upon us, now is the perfect time to get outside and take advantage of New York's recreation opportunities. In this issue you can learn about geocaching (pg. 30), a high-tech outdoor treasure hunt, that can help motivate you to spend time exploring New York's outdoors, which is always open. You can also learn about the outstanding fishing resources and opportunities in New York State (pg. 2), and discover two sites in the Capital Region where nature's beauty is part of the neighborhood (pg. 22).

As you follow guidelines to ensure your good health, I hope we can continue to work together to protect the environment and prevent the spread of invasive pests. In this issue, you can learn about emerald ash borer—an invasive beetle—and efforts to help ensure that ash trees do not become extinct (pg. 32). You can also learn about how you can help protect New York's oak trees (pg. 20).

Be safe and smart when exploring outside this summer. While you do your part to prevent the spread of COVID, rest assured knowing that DEC will continue to protect our environment and natural resources for the people, plants, and animals of New York State.

Sincerely,
Basil Seggos, Commissioner

NEW YORK STATE
CONSERVATIONIST

Volume 74, Number 6 | June/July 2020
Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of New York State

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Joe Mulone

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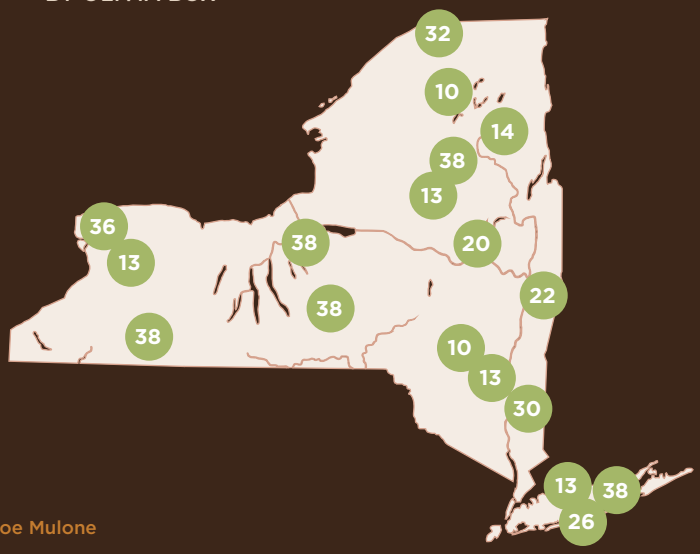


FRONT COVER: Boreas Ponds by John DiGiacomo | **BACK COVER:** Fishing by Joe Mulone

Fishing is About the Smiles

BY EILEEN C. STEGEMANN

I started fishing when I was very young. I remember going with my family to a local shallow pond to fish for sunnies and bullheads. Being from a large family—nine kids—we didn't have enough fishing rods and reels, so my father fashioned additional set-ups out of bamboo poles, a length of string, and a fishing hook attached to the end of the string. (He said it was what he used when he fished on the Mississippi River as a young boy.) For bait we used dough balls made from bread, or worms we dug up. Sometimes we'd have bobbers to attach to our lines, but most times we didn't. We'd spread out along the bank, drop our lines in, and wait for that nibble.

It was always exciting when someone caught that first fish—the lucky person would be all smiles and it would spur the rest of us on to try to outdo everyone else. I don't think my father ever got to fish on these outings, as he was always helping one of the younger kids rebait their hook. But I'd like to think he took delight in our success.

Up until high school, I lived near the Jersey Shore. Summers were spent at the beach and vacations were spent traveling and camping across the U.S. We'd always have a few fishing rods with us and would take turns fishing. We'd have contests to see who caught the most fish and who caught the biggest fish.

It didn't really matter who won (ok, that's a lie—we were very competitive and it always mattered who won), but we were all smiles—some genuine, some envious—whenever someone caught a fish.

When we moved to New York State, I rarely fished. After all, I was in high school and other things occupied my time. However, when I met my future husband in college, fishing became a part of my life again. Both of us loved to paddle and camp, and we always brought along fishing gear in the hopes of securing a fresh fish dinner. While it was a good thing that we didn't rely on our success to eat, we enjoyed our hours on the water, casting our lines.

When our children came along, we continued to fish, introducing them to the sport. Fishing with young kids is so much fun. The excitement (and smiles) of catching their first fish, and every fish they catch thereafter, is infectious. Of course, our own ability to fish was hampered as we spent the majority of the time baiting their hooks, untangling lines, and unhooking and releasing caught fish. And this is all at lightning speed because, for some reason, children seem to be able to catch fish at a much faster rate than I ever could! I remember one time when fishing on a pond near our house, the pumpkinseeds were biting so fast that it was hard to keep up and we quickly ran out of bait. The kids were so disappointed. In an effort to appease them, my husband said to just cast out anyway—"There's still the smell of worms on your hooks and the fish will bite," he said. I gave him one of those "are you joking" looks, but darn if both kids didn't catch two more fish each!

E. Stegemann

Fishing is truly a lifetime sport that puts a smile on your face, no matter your age.

A DEC staffer teaches a young angler to fish at a DEC-sponsored fishing clinic.

"It was always exciting when someone caught that first fish—the lucky person would be all smiles and it would spur the rest of us on to try to outdo everyone else."

I spent the first half of my career with DEC working for the Bureau of Fisheries. My main focus was outreach—talking with anglers, promoting New York's great and abundant fishing resources, and working on developing a fishing program to introduce youth to the joy and basics of becoming anglers. Called the Sportfishing Aquatic Resources Education Program—or SAREP for short—the program enlisted the help of volunteers to create clubs across the state where youth participants could learn about New York's aquatic resources, become future stewards of those natural resources, and also enjoy the rewards of

Fishing is a fun family activity.

the lifetime sport of fishing. I was always struck by the enthusiasm of both the instructors and the participants, and reveled in the smiles on all of their faces. While SAREP no longer exists, the same values and goals continue in DEC's I FISH NY Program, a popular program that introduces people to the sport of angling through a variety of different approaches (see sidebar).

When my daughter was in Girl Scouts in the early 2000s, I was surprised to find they didn't have a fishing badge. There were camping and hiking and wildlife badges, but no fishing badge. So, our troop decided to create our own fishing patch, and the local Girl Scouts Council signed off on it. They even made it available to any other troop whose members wanted to pursue fishing and earn a patch. (Note: Since then, the National Girl Scouts has added a fishing badge to their list of badges.)

After the patch was completed, our troop held a council-wide event for other young Girl Scouts in the area to earn the patch. Close to 50 young scouts spent the day on the water with us learning about fish species, aquatic resources, and, of course, fishing. Everyone had a blast and all participants caught at least one fish.

John Stegemann

The author with her niece and her first fish—a pumpkinseed.

Catching a big one always puts a smile on an angler's face.

One of my brothers is a veteran. When he returned from overseas, fishing was one of the few activities that put a smile on his face. He enjoyed the peace and quiet that fishing provided and loved the challenge of landing a fish. His favorite quarry were pike. A couple of times he visited us near Watertown (where we were living at the time) and he and my husband would head out to fish a local marsh behind a barrier beach on Lake Ontario. They often had the place to themselves and would spend the day just floating in our canoe and fishing.

Since pike like to hide in the weeds to ambush unsuspecting prey swimming by, my brother and husband would cast towards the weedline hoping to coax a strike. At the time, our favorite lures for fishing these areas were red Dardevle Spoons and Mepps spinners. The Dardevles could come with a weedguard, which would cut down on the number of weeds you'd pick up. Mepps spinners came outfitted with treble hooks, so my husband would often clip off two of the hooks to make it a single, which made it easier to unhook and release fish. The trade-off, however, was that it also cut down on the number of fish they successfully caught. But regardless of their success, they always had an enjoyable time.

I find fishing incredibly relaxing—whether I'm catching fish or not. Perhaps it's the quiet being on the water allows, or maybe just the repetitive motion of casting a line out and then slowly retrieving it. Whatever it is, I find it therapeutic.

My favorite prey are bass and sunfish. I especially love pumpkinseeds—they are so colorful and readily bite a variety of offerings. They, along with yellow perch, are great fish to pursue when fishing with young kids or introducing new people to the sport. Bass take a little more effort to catch, but are well worth the effort and provide excitement when hooked.

Fishing is a fun outdoor activity that can be enjoyed by everyone, no matter your age or ability. And it doesn't require expensive equipment—you can spend as much or as little as you like. Plus, with the current necessity for social distancing, fishing provides the perfect opportunity to get outside and be active, while still maintaining personal space.

While I confess I haven't done as much fishing as I'd like in the past few years—something always seems to get in the way—I look forward to spending more time out on the water. And maybe if I'm lucky, I'll be able to introduce my future grandchildren to this enjoyable sport.

So, whether you're age two or 102, why not try fishing? It's truly a sport that can be enjoyed for your lifetime and will put a smile on your face. Just ask all those anglers.

Eileen Stegemann is editor of *Conservationist*.

B. Stegemann

The author with a bass she caught a few years back.

I FISH NY

If you're new to the sport and would like to learn how to fish, or if you haven't fished in a long time and just want to get back into the sport, check out the I FISH NY Program. The program's primary goal is to increase fishing participation and awareness of the outstanding fishing opportunities in New York State. The fishing education part of the program introduces people to the sport of angling through a variety of different approaches, including:

- The I FISH NY Beginners' Guide to Freshwater Fishing—The guide will give you the information you need to start fishing (**www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/98506.html**).
- Free Sport Fishing Events—DEC-sponsored fishing events where participants can fish for free; no freshwater fishing license or enrollment in the Recreational Marine Fishing Registry is required. For more information: **www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/27123.html**.
- Fishing Rod Loaner program—A list of participating libraries where you can borrow a fishing rod, and information on how to sign up for the program (**www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/98019.html**).

For information about the I FISH NY program, check out DEC's website at **www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/89362.html**.

If you want to learn to fish, try attending one of DEC's fishing events, like these happy anglers did at Six Mile Waterworks in the Albany area.

LOCAL is THE PLACE TO BE

During the COVID-19 Crisis, Explore the Opportunities Near Home and Recreate Local

Like most people, we look forward to spending time outdoors, and the nice weather this time of year is an alluring invitation. Yet, due to COVID-19, people need to take special precautions when heading outdoors. Safety must be a priority.

When you head outdoors, DEC and New York State Parks encourage New Yorkers to "Play Smart * Play Safe * Play Local," and always use common sense to protect yourself and others. This public safety campaign highlights three key actions to enjoy nature safely:

- Stay close to home;
- Plan ahead; and
- Practice social distancing and wear a face mask if you are unable to maintain a distance of six feet from others.

Pledge to Play Smart

DEC is encouraging outdoor adventurers to take the Play Smart pledge to enjoy the outdoors safely and responsibly:

> I pledge to respect the rules and do my part to keep parks, beaches, trails, boat launches, and other public spaces safe for everyone.
>
> I will stay local and close to home.
>
> I will maintain a safe distance from others outside of my household.
>
> I will wear a mask when I cannot maintain social distancing.
>
> I accept that this summer, I may have to adjust how I enjoy the outdoors to help keep myself and others healthy and safe, even if it means changing my plans to visit a public space.
>
> I will be respectful of others by letting them pass by me if needed on a trail and keeping my blanket 10 feet apart from others on the beach.
>
> I will move quickly through shared areas like parking lots, trailheads, and scenic areas to avoid crowding.
>
> If I'm not feeling well, I will stay home.

Plan Your Adventure

New York is a large state with abundant forests, lakes, streams, mountains, hiking trails, and much more. This provides an opportunity for people to find a perfect spot for an outdoor adventure close to home and away from crowds, which is important to prevent exposure to COVID-19. Whether you want to be outdoors to walk, jog, hike, swim, ride a bicycle, golf, fish, hunt, go horseback riding, go boating, or visit a park or state lands, you can find a spot that will provide what you are looking for. And you can enjoy the activity safely by following some simple precautions. Sure, it will be a change from what you are used to, but during this health threat, safety must be a priority.

Many parks, grounds, forests, and trails are open during daylight hours, seven days a week. However, some recreation activities, may be closed or restricted on a case-by-case basis, including popular sites or trails that do not allow for appropriate social distancing. In addition, indoor spaces and restrooms at State Parks and DEC public facilities may be closed out of an abundance of caution to prevent community spread of COVID-19. Given current circumstances, DEC strongly advises New Yorkers to plan their outdoor adventures ahead of time and choose alternate destinations if their first choice is closed or crowded.

Check **parks.ny.gov** and 511 for park capacity closure alerts, and visit the DECinfo locator to find the nearest DEC-managed lands. The DEC and State Parks websites also feature guidelines to help people safely engage in outdoor activities. You can use the #PlaySmartPlaySafePlayLocal and #RecreateLocal hashtags on social media for some great ideas on sites and activities that offer great outdoor experiences. Visit **on.ny.gov/playsmartNY**.

Enjoy the Outdoors Safely

New York is focused on getting people back to work and easing social isolation without triggering the further spread of COVID-19. Responsible, respectful, local recreation is a crucial part of continuing to help New Yorkers stay active, spend time with immediate household and family members, and reduce stress and anxiety.

Remember that other people also visit the sites you enjoy, so follow sensible guidelines to reduce your risk of exposure:

- Keep your visits short.
- Limit the size of your group, preferably to only immediate household members.
- Maintain a safe distance from others, especially in areas where people often congregate. These areas range from trailheads and scenic areas to the parking lots at those areas.
- Avoid participating in sports, games, and other activities that require close contact with others, such as basketball or soccer.
- Avoid common playground equipment that are frequently used by others, such as slides and swings.
- If you planned a site visit, but encounter a crowd when you get there, search for an alternative site, or come back at a different time. You can limit you risk by altering your plans.

While New York has taken aggressive steps to help prevent people from being exposed to COVID-19, it's imperative that everyone continues to take the necessary precautions to protect themselves and others. Here are some vital guidelines you should follow:

- Stay home if you are sick or have any COVID-19 symptoms, such as fever, coughing, or trouble breathing.
- Even if you feel healthy, practice social distancing—maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from others, even when you are outdoors.
- Avoid close contact with other people, including shaking hands, hugging or high-fives.
- Wash your hands more frequently than normal (and when you do, wash them for at least 20 seconds). If soap is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Try to limit contact with surfaces that others may touch, such as doorknobs and handrails. And wash your hands after touching these surfaces.

Can't Get Outdoors? Adventure at Home

If being outside is not practical, you can enjoy an outdoor experience online. DEC's popular Adventure NY program has gone virtual. As part of #AdventureAtHome, DEC is preparing weekly content that will provide inspiration on how to enjoy the outdoors close to home. To access various activities when you are at home, such as new live specials, videos, and at-home tools and games, visit #Adventureathome (**www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/120387.html**) —it's a great place to find fun options for the whole family.

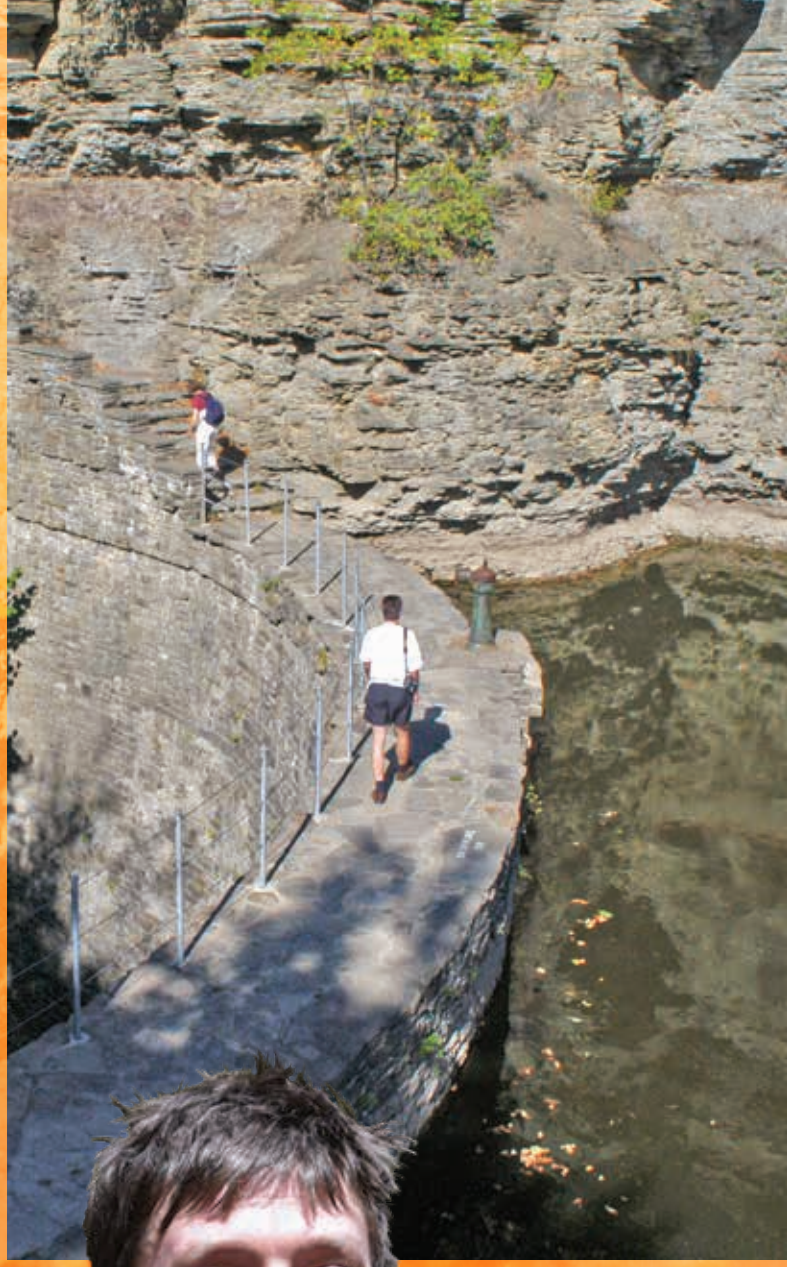
In addition, check out DEC's caregivers webpage (**www.dec.ny.gov/education/119886.html**) to help keep young children at home connected to nature. The site offers various activities that will allow them to explore nature.

Safe Summer for All

The COVID-19 crisis requires that we change some of the routines we have been accustomed to, especially during the summer months when the weather encourages us to get outside. We hope you can take advantage of the opportunities that will allow you to enjoy nature in a manner that protects the health and safety of you and others. That should always be your priority.

We encourage you to #RecreateLocal and use common sense when you head outdoors. And remember to check the DEC and NYS Parks websites for updated information on what sites are open and any guidelines you must follow if you visit them.

Safety is the top priority to ensure all New Yorkers—young and old—remain healthy during this challenging time.



DEC CAMPGROUNDS TURN 100

Rollins Pond Adirondack campground circa 1950s

Hearthstone Point Adirondack campground circa 1940s

Fish Creek Pond Adirondack campground circa 1940s

BY RICK GEORGESON

The mesmerizing flicker of the campfire, the sweet taste of s'mores, the fresh scent of a pine forest, the haunting cry of the loon. These are just some of the memorable experiences that make camping in New York's Forest Preserve so extraordinary. For generations now, families have packed up their cars, fleeing the stresses of everyday life in search of that rejuvenating experience that can only be found in the great outdoors.

While this year marks the 50th anniversary of the creation of DEC, it also marks the 100th anniversary of the opening of the first state campgrounds by DEC's predecessor, the New York State Conservation Commission. In 1920, the Commission opened two Adirondack campgrounds—Sharp Bridge Campground on the Schroon River in Essex County, and Sacandaga Campground on the Sacandaga River in Hamilton County.

Sharp Bridge was a brand-new camping area. Sacandaga Campground, however, was a well-established, informal camping area before it was turned into an official campground in 1920. Previously, Sacandaga had served as a stopover for people passing through the area. It was locally known as "The Forks," likely because the campground sat where the East and West branches of the Sacandaga River come together. Both campgrounds are still popular today with anglers and hikers, just as they were when they first opened a century ago.

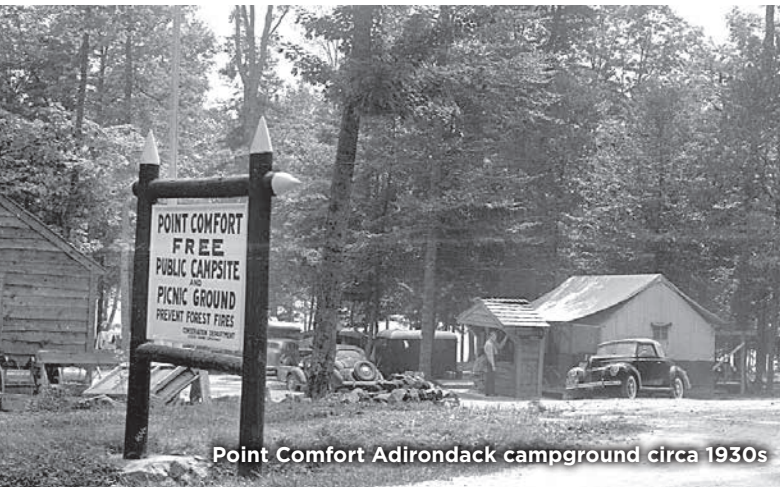
OUNDS

Prior to the creation of state campgrounds, the well-to-do could experience the beauty and rejuvenating nature of New York's forests in places like extravagant Adirondack great camps, but there were only limited options for those of more modest means who also longed to escape the overcrowded, loud, and dirty cities of early twentieth century America. That changed under the state's Conservation Commission, which was responsible for managing the relatively new forest preserve lands in the Adirondacks and Catskills.

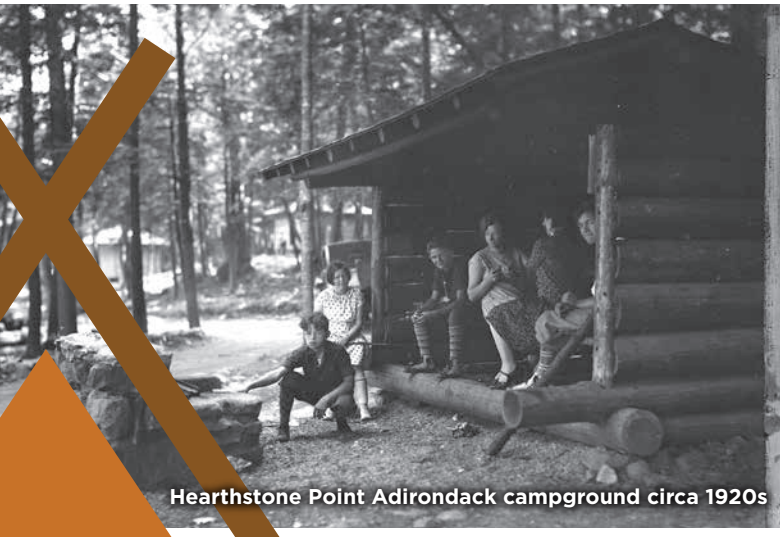
Creating state campgrounds in these areas opened new opportunities for people to enjoy New York's amazing natural resources. This is how the Forest Preserve was described in the July 1920 *Conservationist*:

Nowhere in the world may be found such a combination of wild, grand scenery and delightful easy travel, lying at the very threshold of so dense a population. From this point of view they are accordingly the most important public vacation grounds in the United States. The Commission believes that the work of improving and marking trails, the building of open camps and the construction of fireplaces throughout the Forest Preserve should now be undertaken on a scale commensurate with the great use that the people are making of this public property. The Preserve should be made more interesting and accessible to the people, as a service to which they are well entitled.

The following year, the Conservation Commission declared that, "....the use of the Forest Preserve, which is the people's own playground, should be encouraged, and every reasonable inducement should be offered to make that use enjoyable and profitable to the public."



Point Comfort Adirondack campground circa 1930s


Hearthstone Point Adirondack campground circa 1920s

Fish Creek Pond Adirondack campground circa 1920s

By the 1930s, campground development was expanded by the Civilian Conservation Corps, followed by the Post War Construction Program of the 1940s. By 1957, there were 29 campgrounds hosting 12,058 campers and 21,246 day users. Today, DEC boasts 52 campgrounds that accommodated 340,000 campers and 375,000 day users in 2019.

The current array of campgrounds provides a wide variety of experiences, including island camping, tent and trailer camping, boat launching facilities, hiking trails, beaches, environmental education programming, and day-use areas with picnic tables and grills.

With its beautiful scenery, wide range of lakes, streams, and forests, and nearly unlimited opportunities for recreation, New York is a perfect spot for camping, for both experts and beginners. As we celebrate the 100th year of camping, DEC remains committed to offering amazing camping experiences for people of all ages—continuing to build on the efforts that began way back in 1920.

Rick Georgeson is a contributing editor for *Conservationist.*

Editor's note: With the ongoing and ever-changing conditions of the COVID-19 crisis, be sure to check DEC's website for the latest on the status of the state's public lands and campgrounds, and be sure to continue to practice social distancing and wear masks when outside to help control the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Carl Heilman II

On Patrol

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

CONTRIBUTED BY ECO LT. LIZA BOBSEINE AND FOREST RANGER CAPT. SARAH B. GEESLER

Great Horned Owl in Need—Suffolk County

On March 18, ECOs Chris DeRose and Connor Paschke responded to a call from a hiker who saw two baby owls at the base of a tree, off a walking trail, in a wooded area in Smithtown. Upon arrival, the ECOs found two great horned owl chicks, approximately two to three weeks old. The ECOs examined the owl chicks and found them in relatively good health, and brought them to a local wildlife rehabilitator. After three days, the chicks were healthy enough to be released. ECO DeRose, with volunteers from Wildlife in Need of Rescue and Rehabilitation, mounted an artificial nest and released the owls in a neighboring tree. The owl chicks have taken to the nest and are being cared for by their parents.

Striped Bass Poachers—Ulster County

On May 7, a retired New York State Trooper observed a gill net with several striped bass being hauled into a small vessel on the Hudson River, near the Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge. The retired Trooper relayed the information to the Town of Ulster Police Department. Local police officer Michael Miller and ECO Jason Smith were dispatched to the scene, where they located a gill net hidden in the boat, with 24 striped bass, 12 herring, three white perch, and two yellow bullhead. The gill net operator was issued tickets for taking fish by means other than angling; taking striped bass out of slot size; taking striped bass over the allowable limit; taking herring over the allowable limit; and failing to carry a marine registry.

New York State COVID-19 Response—Statewide

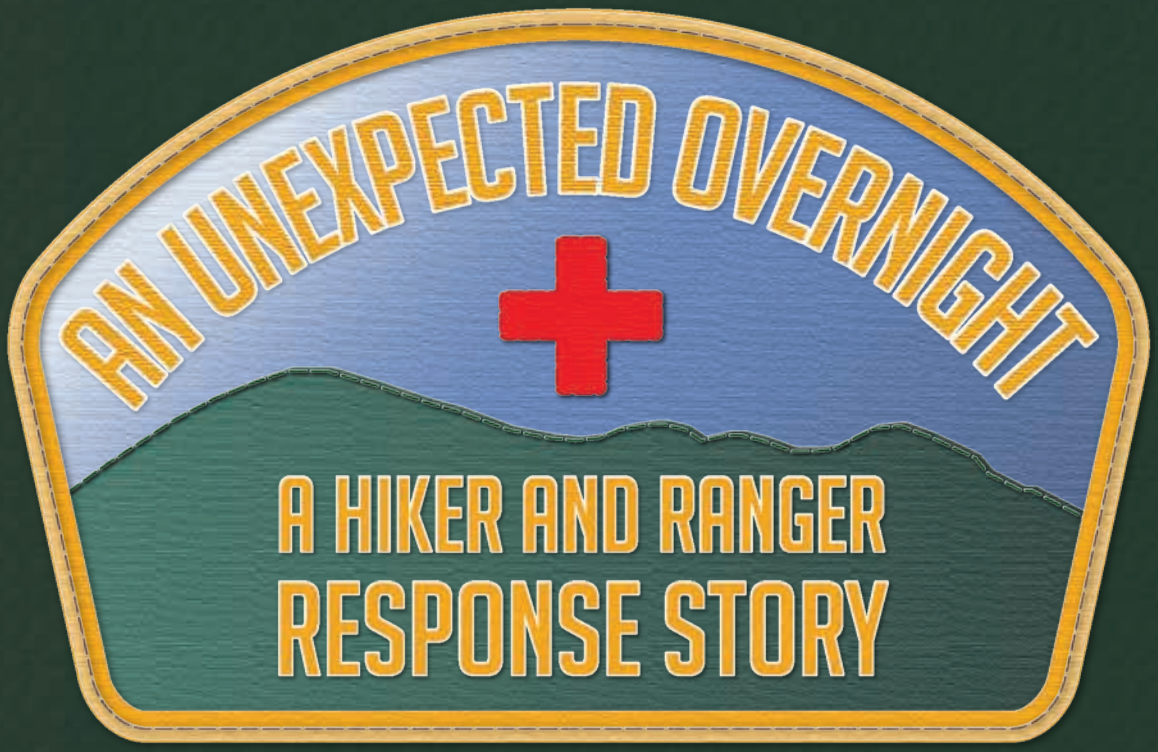
DEC personnel from across agency divisions and regions are supporting the State's response to COVID-19. Personnel from more than 20 New York State agencies have been working on response efforts to stop the spread of the virus. ECOs and Forest Rangers have been assisting at various test centers throughout the state and have been mobilized for a variety of roles, including Incident Command System (ICS) functions, performing site security and check-in at testing sites, fit testing of respirators for medical personnel and first responders, and applying ICS to wide area searches, making them a key part of this statewide effort.

Swiftwater Rescue—Hamilton County

On May 4, while conducting a fly-over patrol, New York State Police Aviation noticed a vehicle in West Stony Creek. Forest Rangers Lt. Dave Kallen, Melissa Milano, and David Nally responded to the call and found a 61-year-old man from the town of Northville trapped in a vehicle, down a steep embankment, 25 feet from the shore. The Forest Rangers brought cold water gear and a small inflatable watercraft to help rescue the trapped motorist from swift water conditions. The Rangers and local fire department personnel secured the vehicle to shore, as rescuers waded out to the motorist to bring him back to the shore using an inflatable kayak. Once on shore, emergency personnel secured high angle rescue rigging in place to get the man up the steep embankment to an awaiting ambulance. The ambulance then transported the man to a helicopter, and he was taken to a nearby hospital.

Wilderness Rescue with a Drone—Wyoming County

On April 8, DEC's Central Dispatch was contacted to assist with locating a missing 13-year-old boy in the village of Warsaw. The boy was playing tag with his two brothers and a friend in a wooded area near his home, when he became disoriented and got lost. Forest Rangers Lt. Tim Flanigan and John Kennedy responded to the call. Kennedy conducted drone flights while police, friends, family, and volunteers searched the area. The boy was located by Warsaw Police Officer Nick Wright and was brought back home, where he was evaluated by Warsaw Ambulance and reunited with his parents.



BY EILEEN MOWREY

When it comes to hiking in the backcountry, even the best laid plans can go awry. Beautiful, rewarding, and alluring, nature has a way of delivering the unexpected, even to the most experienced outdoor enthusiasts. Few people understand that better than three seasoned hikers who spent an unanticipated night in the woods last summer.

September 2, 2019 was a rainy day in the Adirondacks. A small group of hearty hikers, unbothered by the weather, arrived at the Adirondack Loj ready for a day in the woods. Given the poor weather and limited visibility, they set their sights on two of the viewless High Peaks—Street and Nye mountains.

At 4,166 feet, Street is number 31 on the list of 46 Adirondack High Peaks. Nye is also on the list at number 45, reaching 3,895 feet. To hike both mountains in one day, the hikers would have to traverse almost 8.5 miles round trip and gain close to 2,000 feet in elevation. Furthermore, there are no marked or maintained trails up these mountains, so the hikers would have to follow rugged herd paths. It is a challenging hike, both mentally and physically, and the wet conditions would only add to the difficulty.

Not deterred, the party began their journey from the Adirondack Loj parking area after a brief stop in the High Peaks Information Center. Prepared with rain gear and full daypacks, they set off toward the peaks. The hike begins gently, following a gravel path to and along the shore of Heart Lake until it reaches a trail register where backcountry hikers sign in before proceeding. Soon after the register, the trail comes to a junction. To reach Street and Nye, hikers must take the Rock Garden Trail, passing the turn for Mount Jo and continuing into unmaintained territory, leaving trail markers and maintained trails behind them.

Just 0.8 miles from the Adirondack Loj, the hiking party encountered their first real challenge—Indian Pass Brook. To reach Street and Nye, hikers must cross Indian Pass Brook. However, because there is no maintained trail, there is also no bridge. The brook is wide at this juncture, and in late summer its water level is typically low enough to be crossed without much difficulty. However, heavy rains the night before had caused the brook to rise, making the normal rock-hopping method of crossing impossible. After stopping to consider their options, some of the party decided to turn back. However, three intrepid hikers—a young married couple visiting from out of state and a seasonal resident familiar with the trail—chose to press on, and they carefully made their way across the brook to the herd path on the other side.

With the first and most difficult crossing behind them, the hikers continued their trek up the mountains. They passed through an open hardwood forest, crossed two more small brooks, and tackled a steep climb to an intersection in the herd path. In one direction, Street Mountain, in the other, Nye. In time, the three hikers ascended both peaks, then turned and headed back toward the trailhead.

Anyone who has hiked up a mountain can likely relate to the feelings of relief, sense of accomplishment, and elation that come with returning down a trail after summiting a peak. With the hard work of the ascent behind them, all the hikers had left to do was return to their warm, dry cars. Unfortunately, instead of receding over the course of the day, Indian Pass Brook had swelled significantly. When the hikers arrived back at the water's edge, they knew they were in trouble. The brook they had successfully traversed that morning had transformed into a formidable barrier. Now deep and swift with rapids present in places, the brook had become impassable.

Their past experience on trails had taught these hikers to recognize and assess risk. They knew crossing the brook was too dangerous and straying from the trail could easily lead to getting lost. They decided to stay put and call for help. They contacted a family member—one member of their hiking party who had turned back that morning—and made him aware of their situation, providing their exact location. The family member then called DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch to request assistance for the hikers. Forest Rangers were alerted and dispatched to their location. It was 5:47 p.m. The hikers had been on the trail all day, but it was starting to look like their time in the wilderness was nowhere near over.

Having received the distress call, DEC Forest Rangers Jim Giglinto and Kevin Burns responded to the Adirondack Loj and began the almost mile-long hike to the Indian Pass Brook crossing. They arrived at the brook at 7:42 p.m. Once they determined that the hikers were safe and well, the Rangers began assessing options. The brook was still high and moving fast, and a safe crossing seemed unlikely for both the hikers and the Rangers. With nowhere else for the hikers to go and the rain petering off, Rangers Giglinto and Burns determined the safest option was for the hikers to remain in place overnight and attempt the crossing in the morning, when water levels had subsided.

Wet, cold, and tired, this was far from ideal for the hikers, but their outdoor experience and knowledge allowed them to keep calm despite their situation. They had been well-prepared for their hike; they had headlamps, rain gear, some dry clothes, and extra food. Ranger Giglinto returned with a throw bag that he used to deliver additional supplies to the hikers across the raging waters, including a flare to help them start a fire. Once the hikers were settled into their makeshift camp, the Ranger departed with plans to return in the morning.

In the early morning of September 3, Ranger Giglinto again set out from the Adirondack Loj with the intent of meeting the hikers at the Indian Pass Brook and assisting them in crossing the now-calmer waters. But before he even reached the troublesome crossing, he encountered the three hikers on the trail headed back to the Loj. They had awoken at first light to find the brook once again transformed, so they packed up their impromptu camp and safely made their way back across the brook. Worn out from their day-hike-turned-overnight-camping adventure, the hikers were happy to finally be out of the woods. Ranger Giglinto hiked the remainder of the way back to the trailhead with the three hikers and at 7:13 a.m., almost a full 24 hours after the group had started their hike, he informed DEC Dispatch that the incident was concluded, safely.

Eileen Mowrey

Earlier in the day, the hikers experienced a relatively straightforward crossing at Indian Brook (like the one pictured here). However, hours later the brook had swelled from rain, and the deep water and swift rapids made a return crossing impossible.

DEC Forest Rangers conduct hundreds of rescue responses each year. Always properly prepare for your adventure and adequately equip for unexpected surprises as weather and trail conditions can change quickly and drastically.

While this story and this experience seems unimaginable to many of us, unplanned nights in the woods happen more frequently than most might think. Many situations can cause a day hike to turn into an unexpected overnight. As in the case of these three hikers, weather can quickly and drastically change the conditions of a trail, making sheltering in place the safest and sometimes the only option. Injuries and getting lost also account for many unplanned nights in the backcountry. That is why it is important that any time you hike, you are prepared—both physically and mentally—to spend the night in the woods.

Physical preparation for an unplanned overnight will help keep you safe and comfortable should the unexpected happen. In addition to the supplies you would bring for your day hike, pack the following items just in case:

- A headlamp, flashlight, and first aid kit. These items should be brought on all hikes, no matter the length.
- Extra food and water, and a water filtration device. A small backpacking stove and a container for boiling water are also a good idea.
- Warm layers and rain gear.
- A space blanket.
- A fire-starting kit.
- Rope and a tarp or other materials/equipment for making an emergency shelter.
- Means of calling for help. Service is not always available in the backcountry, so it's helpful to bring a beacon in addition to your phone. Be sure to save the local emergency dispatch number in your phone, too; that way you can call for help directly.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Jim Giglinto: Forest Ranger

Like many DEC Forest Rangers, Jim Giglinto's interest in nature dates back to his youth. He was fascinated to learn about natural resources in his 7th grade science class, and has always enjoyed backpacking and camping, so working outdoors was a natural fit.

Jim is a graduate of Paul Smiths College, and early in his career worked as a wildlife technician, with a focus on waterfowl. He served as an Associate Ranger for DEC in the High Peaks Wilderness Area from 1992 to 1994, and then, as a Forest Ranger, he was assigned to Long Island for a brief period before he took the opportunity to return to the Adirondacks.

Giglinto's work as a Ranger extended well beyond law enforcement and emergency response; his goal has always been to educate people on the responsible use of New York State's wildlands, including Leave No Trace (see pg. 17). That ethic reflects his service and commitment to the local community beyond his duties on search-and-rescue missions and other vital tasks.

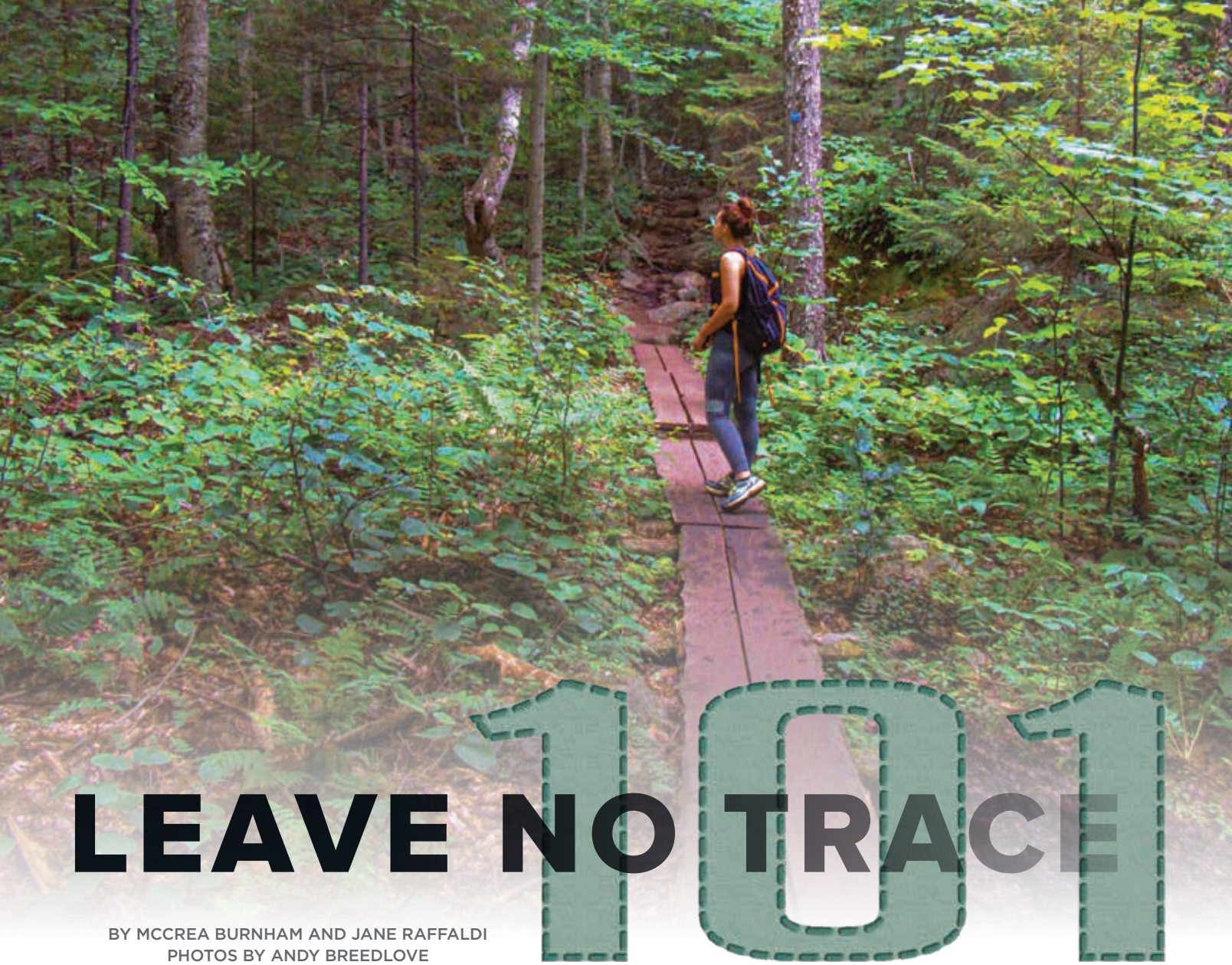
Although he plans on retiring this year after working as a DEC Forest Ranger for more than a quarter century, Jim definitely plans to stay connected to the outdoors and explore the lands he has always loved.

Mental preparation is just as important as physical preparation. The "it will never happen to me" mentality can lead to shock and poor decision-making if the unexpected happens. Acknowledging the possibility of an unplanned overnight will make the situation easier to handle properly, should the occasion arise.

It is also important to know that a Forest Ranger response doesn't always mean an immediate rescue. Forest Rangers conduct hundreds of rescue responses each year in New York State, and most incidents are resolved quickly and with relative ease. In an emergency, Rangers must assess the risk to everyone involved—hikers, the Rangers themselves, and other rescue personnel. Sometimes the safest option for everyone is to stay put and wait for conditions to change.

New York State has something to offer all outdoor enthusiasts. But before you head out for your next outdoor adventure, be sure to properly prepare and expect the unexpected. If something happens, you'll be glad you did.

Eileen Mowrey is a Public Participation Specialist in DEC's Ray Brook office.



LEAVE NO TRACE 101

BY MCCREA BURNHAM AND JANE RAFFALDI
PHOTOS BY ANDY BREEDLOVE

If you're reading this magazine right now, there's a pretty good chance you enjoy being outdoors. Whether your favorite escape to nature involves paddling a pond or strolling at your local park, there is an endless amount of enjoyment to be had by spending time outside.

In recent times, self-isolation and social distancing practices have motivated people to think about preparing for their outdoor visits more than ever. Watching the weather report, researching destinations, and preparing backup plans in case you encounter busy trailheads have become part of the norm for anyone looking to escape to nature even for just a brief visit. Preparation is practical not just in a pandemic, but all the time—in fact, it's the first principle of Leave No Trace, a set of seven sustainable principles for any visitor to the outdoors. These principles were created by the Center for Leave No Trace Ethics and are strongly promoted by DEC.

The seven principles of Leave No Trace help safeguard your own safety and enjoyment, and also help ensure that our beloved natural places remain wild, protected, and untouched by our time in them. As we all gain practice in planning ahead and preparing, now is the perfect time to read up on the other principles and apply them to your next outdoor visit.

Seven principles may sound like a lot, but if you've ever been on a walk in the woods, then you may have already followed a few of them. If you're already familiar with Leave No Trace, why not check out our list and adopt a few more sustainable practices before your next adventure? Every one of us can reduce our impact in some way, no matter how big or small—and together, those efforts can add up to more conservation and a better-protected natural world.

1▶ PLAN AHEAD AND PREPARE

Arguably, the most important principle, and definitely the one that can impact your adventure the most.

- When planning your trip, visit websites and read notices for the area you want to visit so that you have the most up-to-date information on trail conditions, special regulations, and advisories.
- Check the weather forecast, and don't hesitate to postpone plans if things take a turn for the worse. That trail, mountain, or river will still be there next week.
- Pack and prepare for unexpected extreme weather and emergencies.
- Wear layers and avoid cotton when possible. Cotton is the first ingredient in a recipe for hypothermia, even in warm seasons.
- Inspect your equipment ahead of time—you don't want to discover your coat has a tear when you're already in a rainstorm!
- Know how to use a map and compass and bring them with you. Remember that cell phones may not work in a lot of remote areas.
- Bring a first aid kit and know basic first aid skills.
- Always leave your trip plans with a friend or family member. Tell them where you're going and when you expect to return.

Even for a day hike, always carry the "10 Essentials" – map and compass, extra layers, light source, first aid kit, whistle, fire-building materials, food, water, sun protection, and emergency shelter.

2▶ TRAVEL AND CAMP ON DURABLE SURFACES

Reduce your impact and make your local trail builder proud by sticking to the trail.

- Stay in the middle of the trail, even through mud and puddles. It prevents the trail from being widened and plants from being squashed. A mucky trail is part of the great outdoor experience!
- Set up your tent in an established site. No official campsite in sight? Then seek out a spot that looks like it's been used before or isn't on top of fragile flowers, for example.

3▶ DISPOSE OF WASTE PROPERLY

Pack it in, pack it out.

- When nature calls, answer responsibly. Use a bathroom when available and know how to dig a cat hole as a backup. Google it if you're drawing a blank right now, or check out DEC's YouTube page for "The 'Leave No Trace' 7 Principles."
- Bring all trash and garbage home with you. Bonus points for picking up litter!

Leave No Trace

The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics is a national organization that teaches and inspires people to enjoy the outdoors responsibly. DEC partners with Leave No Trace to provide education and resources through online content, workshops, and trainings. To learn more about the Center and the seven principles, visit: **https://lnt.org/**.

DEC has quick and easy how-to videos for each Leave No Trace principle on our YouTube page. Be sure to check them out.

4▸ LEAVE WHAT YOU FIND

Let others experience that cool flower you find too.

- Don't hammer nails into or carve trees. There are less impactful ways to hang your hammock or express that you "♥Tina."
- Beyond being fun for others to experience, little pieces of nature, like leaves and antlers, serve a function in the forest as well. Leave what you find not just for visitors, but for wildlife too.
- Take a picture, it will last longer.

5▸ MINIMIZE CAMPFIRE IMPACTS

Build campfires, not wildfires. The next visitor should never know a true Leave No Trace campfire was ever there.

- Use an existing fire ring or pit if available.
- Collect firewood that is down, dry, dinky, and distant. Ideally, wood should be smaller than your wrist and more than 200 feet from your campsite. If we all collect wood away from our sites, we're still leaving downed wood in the area for the bugs, chipmunks, and birds that need it.

6▸ RESPECT WILDLIFE

After all, you're visiting their home.

- Observe wildlife quietly and from afar. Use the thumb rule: If you hold your thumb up and you can see the animal on either side, you are too close.
- Never feed wild animals.
- If camping without a car, store your food and hygiene products in a bear canister. If you don't have a bear canister, you can safely store items by gathering them in a bag and hanging the bag 12 feet off the ground; 6 feet from any surrounding tree; and at least 200 feet away from your campsite.

If you don't have a bear canister, you can keep your food and hygiene products safe from wildlife with a "do-it-yourself" bear hang.

7▸ BE CONSIDERATE OF OTHER VISITORS

Help everyone else have a good time too.

- Keep your dog on a leash. Even if you have a friendly dog, respect that other visitors may not want to meet him/her.
- If listening to music is your jam, do it with headphones. Some visitors come to enjoy the sounds of nature.
- Take breaks on durable surfaces off the trail.
- Keep right on the trail except to pass.

Following the principles of Leave No Trace is a way to be responsible and courteous to both nature and others. Whether you're enjoying a stroll in the park, a backcountry camping trip, or the millions of options in between, if you follow and stick to the seven principles, you're almost guaranteed to have a safer time while protecting the places you love for generations to come.

McCrea Burnham and **Jane Raffaldi** work in DEC's Division of Lands and Forests office in Albany.

COMBATTING Oak WILT

A Threat to New York's Forests

BY KELSEY MCLAUGHLIN

Did you know that oaks are the national tree of the United States? And for good reason. Oaks provide a wide array of benefits, such as cleaning the air and water; producing acorns eaten by deer, squirrels, and turkeys; and providing timber. Yet, the "mighty oak" is facing a major threat.

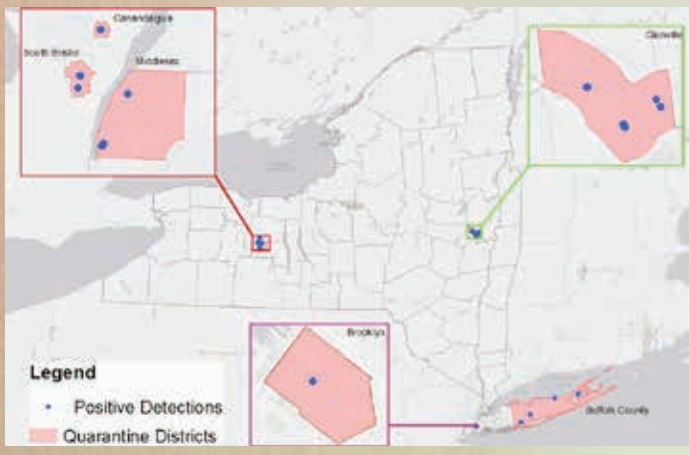
Oak wilt, a fungus that affects red and white oaks, kills thousands of oaks in the United States each year. New York's oaks are not immune to this threat, but New Yorkers across the state are stepping up and taking action to demonstrate that this invasive is not welcome here. You can join this effort to help protect New York's oaks by learning about the symptoms of oak wilt, how to prevent the spread of the disease, and how to report symptomatic trees.

The most common symptoms of oak wilt are leaf discoloration and early leaf drop. Leaves often look like they have been "dipped in brown paint," with uniform discoloration starting at the tips. Infected red oak trees will begin to lose over half of their leaves in July and August. Since oaks typically do not lose their leaves until late fall or early winter, infected trees will stand out from other oaks. However, white oaks develop the disease much more slowly, and only one or two branches may be symptomatic per year. A less common symptom in both oak species is the formation of bark cracks, which hide sweet-smelling spore mats. Symptoms can vary based on disease progression, and homeowners are encouraged to report any oak that has similar discoloration and defoliation.

Oak wilt was first detected in New York in 2008 by a concerned homeowner. Several trees in the Glen Oaks neighborhood in the town of Glenville, Schenectady County, had rapidly discolored and begun dropping leaves. At the time, the nearest known oak wilt infections were nearly 250 miles away in Pennsylvania. A branch sample taken from the symptomatic trees confirmed the trees were infected with oak wilt.

Since the Glenville detection, nearly every oak wilt infection in a new town has been found and reported by a concerned homeowner. Of the 45 infected trees that were detected across the state between 2008 and 2019, 27 were discovered by a member of the public. Most of the others were found by DEC Division of Lands and Forests (DLF) staff doing follow-up surveys around these infection sites and would not have been detected without these initial tips that oak wilt was present in the area. For example, in 2019, a homeowner in the town of Middlesex, Yates County, reported two infected trees. DLF quickly conducted an aerial survey of the area and identified eight other infected trees. All the infected trees were removed before the spring, which reduces the chance that oak wilt will continue to spread around Middlesex.

The public also plays a vital role in preventing the spread of oak wilt. One way to prevent the spread is to not prune or wound (expose the inside tissue) oaks from mid-March to September. Oak wilt spores can be spread by beetles when they land on open tree wounds, so sealing any



New York State Oak Wilt Detections and Quarantine Districts

A symptomatic red oak during the month of August. Oak wilt can cause rapid browning of leaves and leaf loss in red oaks.

wounds made during the beetles' active season with paint can help prevent infection. Even oak stumps from tree removals should have the outer rings covered with paint if possible as beetles could be attracted to the stump surface, and oak wilt can spread from the stump to other nearby oaks through connected roots.

Another way to prevent the spread of oak wilt is by not moving firewood. Experts believe that many of New York's oak wilt infections were caused by the transport of firewood or other oak wood that was harboring oak wilt spore mats or beetles with spores. It is illegal to bring untreated firewood from any other state into New York. By not moving firewood, especially firewood from other states or in Oak Wilt Quarantine Districts within New York, oak wilt is much less likely to spread to new areas. The existing Quarantine Districts are located around past tree infections in Canandaigua and South Bristol in Ontario County, Brooklyn, across the entire towns of Glenville and Middlesex, and all of Suffolk County.

If you think you've seen a tree that is symptomatic of oak wilt, inform DEC by sending the following information to the Division of Lands and Forests via email to **foresthealth@dec.ny.gov**, or call the Forest Health Info Line at 1-866-640-0652.

PHOTOS

Photos of the whole tree, leaves, and bark provide crucial information about tree health and help DLF staff diagnose other problems that may cause similar symptoms to oak wilt.

SITE INFORMATION

Have there been changes on the site, such as adding or taking away soil, which can cause oaks to begin to lose their leaves? Construction, herbicide use, and nutrient or fertilizer additions can also contribute to tree health. Are there other symptomatic trees nearby?

TREE INFORMATION

Determining if a tree is a red or white oak will help determine what symptoms staff should be looking for. Red oaks, such as northern red oak, pin oak, and scarlet oak, have pointed leaf lobes. White oaks, such as eastern white oak, chestnut oak, and swamp white oak, have rounded leaf lobes. Information about tree size/age or planting (if it's a recent transplant) is also helpful.

SYMPTOM INFORMATION

What symptoms are you noticing? How fast are they progressing? When did they start occurring, and was the tree healthy in previous years?

CONTACT INFORMATION

A name, phone number or email, and location will help DLF staff to follow up. Knowing the tree's location will also help staff relate it to past infection areas and outbreaks of other oak pests and pathogens.

For more information about oak wilt symptoms, spread, and management, go to: **https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/46919.html**.

There's a proverb dating back to the fourteenth century that says, "mighty oaks from little acorns grow," and to this day, people young and old marvel at the size and sturdiness of oaks. By taking some precautions and reporting possible symptoms of oak wilt to DEC, we can work together to protect these treasured trees.

Kelsey McLaughlin works in the Division of Lands and Forests in DEC's Albany office.

DEC's Actions Against Oak Wilt

- In 2020, 19 trees were removed from infection centers in Middlesex, helping to reduce the spread of the disease in this new area.
- A study from the University of Toronto recently recognized New York as the "Most Risk-Adverse State" with the lowest risk of oak wilt spread due to its management practices.
- DEC continues to investigate and research oak wilt by:
  - Partnering with the New York New Jersey Trail Conference's Conservation Dog program to train dogs to detect oak wilt in surveys.
  - Partnering with Cornell University Plant Disease Diagnostic Clinic to test nitidulid beetles for the oak wilt fungus, which could be a new detection method.
  - Trapping nitidulids across the state to better inform pruning guidelines.
  - Using helicopters and drones to survey around infection centers and identify other potentially infected trees.
- For more on DEC's oak wilt response, check out the 2019 Annual Report under the Management section on our website: **www.dec.ny.gov/lands/46919.html**.

Nearby Nature —in the Capital Region

BY MICHAEL ECK AND BRIAN NEARING; PHOTOS BY THOMAS LINDSAY AND JOCK ELLIOT; INTRODUCTION BY *CONSERVATIONIST* STAFF

New York is blessed with natural beauty and offers many places where people can enjoy it. One of the goals of the *Conservationist* is to highlight outdoor opportunities that can help connect people with nature. We often showcase areas across the state where you can experience the beauty of nature firsthand. But you don't have to travel far to enjoy nature—its beauty can often be found close to home. There are countless places in New York where you can enjoy the early morning on or along the water, or take a walk through local woods or at a nature preserve, alone or accompanied by family or friends.

Nature is all around us, but sometimes we forget to notice or to take advantage of the opportunities it provides.

Here are two examples of places in the Capital Region where nature's beauty is part of the neighborhood. Sites like Oakwood Cemetery and Peebles Island State Park are local assets—great settings for a nature stroll or picnic. All regions of New York State have places like these and, from time to time, we'll try to feature some of them in the magazine.

Exploring local outdoor gems provides the perfect (and beautiful) environment to spend time with friends or family, any time of year.

Oakwood Cemetery

By Michael Eck

Located in the city of Troy, Oakwood Cemetery was established in 1848 and consecrated (dedicated) in 1850. It is one of the earliest examples of the mid-nineteenth century rural cemetery movement—cemeteries were designed to provide solace to families by having their loved ones interred in a park-like setting.

The cemetery's narrow roads and byways meander through hillocks and ponds, gliding past sculptures and mausoleums, with robust flora and fauna throughout. Many plots feature benches, amplifying the pastoral feel.

By nature and design, Oakwood Cemetery is ripe with trees, plants, and rare grasses. Oaks, of course, are plentiful. Some are centuries old, but there are also hickory, maple, ginkgo, larch, and beech. A dozen state-listed rare, threatened, and endangered plants have been identified in the cemetery, and 628 specimens collected are now displayed at the New York State Museum.

Even the most casual visitors to the cemetery will notice the wildlife. Small groups of does routinely cross the grounds, with fawns in tow. Woodchucks sun themselves atop granite headstones, and rabbits gather at the foot of any number of Celtic crosses that adorn the park. Coyotes are not unknown, and during the evening, after the gates have closed, opossum, racoons, and skunks are invited in to explore.

The cemetery also has more than 70 avian species, including orioles, indigo buntings, scarlet tanagers, wood ducks, catbirds, mockingbirds, and red-winged blackbirds. These birds return to Oakwood each year, as well as plentiful turkeys, crows, and woodpeckers.

True to its natural setting, Oakwood Cemetery has five ponds, including Long Lake, which abuts one of the cemetery's many shale ravines. A steep trail along a waterfall is populated by ferns and flowers, including maidenhair, walking fern, and polypody. Once spring arrives, you can also find ginger, blue cohosh, red baneberry, bellwort, Jack-in-the-Pulpits, and more.

Just south of the lake, the Robert Ross Memorial provides stunning vistas. Views include a sweeping hilltop panorama capturing the foothills of the Adirondacks to the north, the Cohoes Falls to the west, the Catskills to the south, and the historic village of Lansingburgh, which is located downhill to the west and north of the cemetery.

As visitors travel through the cemetery, they'll notice some familiar names among the 60,000 gravestones and monuments that tell stories of the deceased, including Samuel Wilson (1766-1854), better known as "Uncle Sam." They'll also encounter various mausoleums and the cemetery's ornate crematorium, whose bells chime on Christmas Eve.

Across the Hudson River, and just about one mile north of Oakwood Cemetery, along the river's west bank, lies another unique outdoor gem–Peebles Island State Park.

Peebles Island State Park

By Brian Nearing

Situated at the confluence of the Mohawk and Hudson rivers, this 190-acre State Park is located between the city of Troy and the town of Waterford, within easy reach of most Capital Region residents. There are bridges leading into the park from both Waterford and the city of Cohoes, with parking located at the northeastern edge of the island.

With 190 mostly wooded acres, Peebles Island is open year-round and features five miles of gently rolling, well-marked trails for hikers and joggers. Visitors can be treated to views of wildlife ranging from whitetail deer to many varieties of birds, including eagles. During the winter months, when there is sufficient snow, the trails are good for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing.

A walk along the 1.8-mile Perimeter Trail, around the edge of the island, offers numerous vistas overlooking the Mohawk River and its rapids. There are five picnic areas interspersed along the Perimeter Trail. Two other trails—the Deer Run Trail and Fire Road—cut through the wooded interior of Peebles. There is a large lawn at the northern end of the island, with a picnic pavilion, grills, and tables.

At the northern edge of the island, near the parking lot and Visitor's Center (note: the Visitor's Center and restrooms are currently closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic), there is a put-in on the Mohawk River for those who want to kayak or canoe. A short paddle around Peebles' southeastern shoreline is rewarded with a breathtaking view of a waterfall. While there is some paddling to the west from the put-in, it comes to an end at a dam for the State canal system. But the open Hudson River is only a short paddle to the east.

As volunteers from The Friends of Peebles Island can tell you, the island has a colorful and long history, dating back to its occupation by Native Americans who benefitted from the excellent fishing that it provided. Henry Hudson's expedition may have visited the island in 1609 on a trip north to what's now Stillwater. During the colonial period, the island was used for cattle grazing, and was transferred into Dutch ownership in the 1660s.

Later, soldiers camped on Peebles during the French and Indian War. During the Revolutionary War, the Continental Army and Colonel Thaddeus Kosciuszko fortified Peebles against potential attack from a British army heading south from Montreal; that British army was defeated at Saratoga, a turning point in the war.

Around the beginning of the twentieth century, the island was sold to Cluett, Peabody and Company, which constructed a bleachery that is now closed, though the building's remains are still there. New York State bought Peebles Island in 1973, preserving this historic and recreational site.

If you want to explore Peebles Island State Park, check out the park website at: **www.nysparks.com/parks/111/details.aspx**. A trail map can be found at: **https://parks.ny.gov/parks/attachments/PeeblesIslandTrailMap.pdf**.

Peebles Island is a great place for families and picnics, leisurely strolls and scenic sites—a place you can visit time and time again. But remember, as with any time spent outdoors, it's important to protect yourself from ticks and be sure to check yourself for any ticks upon returning home.

Michael Eck is a writer, musician, and artist with deep roots in the Capital Region. **Brian Nearing** is the Deputy Director of Public Information for the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation.

Chelsea Miller

Chelsea Miller

Alyssa Lefebvre

NO SHELLFISHING—Why?

BY ALYSSA LEFEBVRE

Living on Long Island, working for DEC's shellfish program, and operating boats year-round, I am constantly being asked how the water quality is and how marine life is doing. This is especially true as the season changes from spring to summer, the heat intensifies, and boaters begin to hit the water. The parking lots surrounding the boat ramps fill with empty trailers, many of which belong to shellfish harvesters who are in search of—yup, you guessed it—shellfish.

After a cool spring, the water is generally clear and the water quality is typically good—two conditions that help shellfish thrive. Within New York State, there is a wide assortment of shellfish and many are available for harvest. In fact, the shellfishing industry is one of New York State's oldest enterprises, predating the modern industries of finance and technology.

The list of harvestable shellfish in New York's coastal waters includes: bay scallops, blue mussels, hard clams (a.k.a. quahogs), oysters, soft clams, and surf clams. To legally harvest these shellfish, commercial harvesters must obtain state permits, and depending on the township, recreational harvesters may be required to get town permits as well. Commercial harvesters are allowed to take larger quantities of shellfish and sell them at markets or to dealers, who, in turn, supply them to restaurants.

On occasion, harvesters may find that their shellfishing area of choice is "closed," which means that shellfish are prohibited from being taken from that area. These closures are put in place to protect the public's health.

There are two classifications of closures: regulatory and temporary. Regulatory closures are based on annual water quality analyses and pollution sources in a specific area, and they do not change frequently. In contrast, temporary closures occur when an area experiences a sudden, short-term degradation of water quality due to stormwater runoff, biotoxins in the water, or harmful algal blooms. In these cases, immediate action is necessary to protect public health. After such an event, when it has been determined that conditions have returned to their normal standards and the water quality has improved, the area can be reopened for harvest. There are two major reasons for seemingly sudden, yet temporary, closures: excessive rainfall and summer holidays.

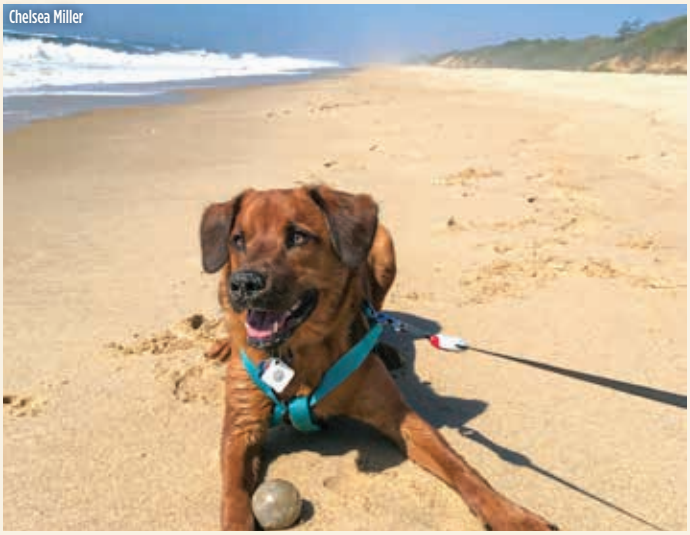
How Does Rain Affect Harvesting?

It may seem strange that rain can impact shellfish in marine waters; yet, excessive amounts of rainfall (or snowmelt) pose a major threat to water quality and the shellfish that live there. The reason is that rain can lead to pollution moving from land into the water.

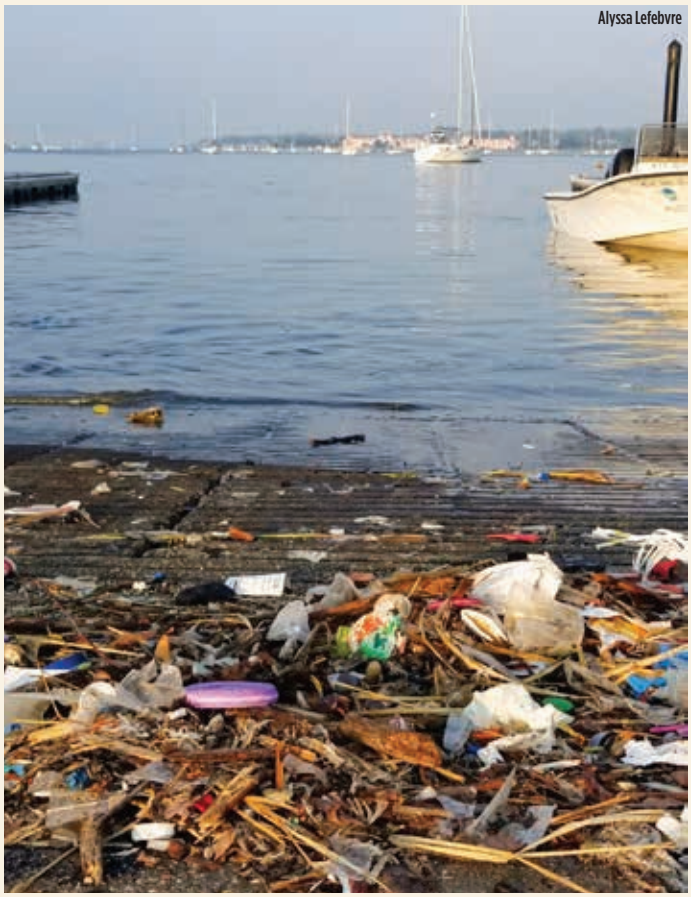
When heavy precipitation reaches the ground, it can pick up a wide range of debris and contaminants as it flows across the land. It sweeps up materials that will then pass unimpeded though pipes and storm drains, ultimately emptying directly into marine waters. This process is known as runoff. Although certain substances like fertilizers, insect and weed killers, litter, livestock and pet waste, and spilled gasoline and oil, are land-based, heavy rains transport and dump these pollutants into marine waters.

Regardless of how foreign waste gets in the water, it happens, and when it does, it has the potential to harm not only a body of water, but the receiving waterbody's entire ecosystem. It should come as no surprise that plants and animals can be harmed or threatened when foreign waste enters into their environments. Because of how they feed, shellfish are particularly vulnerable to the accumulation of runoff-borne contaminants.

Shellfish are filter feeders, which means they feed by pumping water across their gills and capturing any food particles suspended in the water. These particles typically consist of organic matter such as detritus, microorganisms, and phytoplankton (microscopic algae or plants), but may also include unwanted pollutants such as gasoline, oil, septic waste, etc. Shellfish do not have the ability to selectively filter their food, so any particles in the water—whether healthy food or dangerous contaminants—will pass through their gills and into their bodies.


Chelsea Miller

Pet waste can pollute marine waters and harm shellfish and the people who eat them. Be sure to pick up after your dog.


Alyssa Lefebvre

Marine debris primarily originates on land, but poses a major threat to the land, marine life, and water quality.

After periods of heavy rain, when the waterways have received intense runoff from farms, homes, streets, and/or sewage treatment plant overflows, the shellfish end up consuming these contaminates. This can cause a public health risk for humans if people eat these shellfish; human consumption of any shellfish containing impurities poses a serious health threat to our bodies. As such, after excessive rainfall, DEC will temporarily close certain areas of New York's marine waters to prevent the harvest of shellfish that could be dangerous to eat.

So, Does an Area Get Closed Every Time It Rains?

Not exactly. It takes a certain amount of rainfall to close an area. DEC has been collecting and examining water samples from locations affected by heavy rainfall for many years. Results have indicated that excessive stormwater runoff following rainfalls greater than three inches has significant adverse effects on water quality. In 1989, DEC issued the first rainfall closure based on this three-inch threshold. Results from studying these water sites have also shown that water quality improvements are detectable by the third and fourth day after an event.

To track rainfall, DEC monitors rain gauges on Long Island daily. Measurements are documented, and when rainfall accumulation is greater than three inches within a 24-hour period, DEC's Shellfish Unit will immediately:

- Close the area that received excessive rain under an official closure order;
- Post an updated message on the shellfish closures hotline (631-444-0480);
- Post a notification on DEC's public website, and update the status of affected areas on the Shellfish Mapper (on.ny.gov/shellfishmapper); and
- Deploy staff to the closure area(s) to collect and deliver emergency water samples to the DEC shellfish microbiology laboratory for proper testing.

If the water quality results show high levels of bacteria, the area will remain closed until further testing confirms it meets certified criteria. DEC understands how important the shellfishing industry is to Long Island, and staff work diligently to closely monitor each temporary closure so that areas can be reopened as soon as the water quality has improved and the risk of eating contaminated shellfish has been alleviated.

Staff collect water samples and deliver them to DEC's Shellfish Microbiology laboratory for water quality testing.

How Do Holidays Affect Shellfishing?

Alyssa Lefebvre

Summer holidays bring more people and boats to the state's marine waters, and with it, an increased risk of harvesting potentially contaminated shellfish. Illegal sewage waste discharges from these vessels is the main concern. Many recreational boaters moor in coves, and some will remain overnight, living aboard their boats through an extended holiday weekend. With more boats gathered in an area, the risk of incidents increases. Since 1995, DEC has designated several bodies of water as temporarily uncertified for harvest during several major summer holidays, including Independence Day and Labor Day.

Sewage discharge from boats can be detrimental to shellfish and degrade existing water quality. This has the potential to contaminate nearby shellfish beds with pathogenic bacteria or viruses, which render shellfish unsafe for consumption. Whether intentional or not, discharging waste into New York waters is illegal, and puts shellfish and those who consume them at risk, which is why boaters are required to use appropriate pump-out facilities.

Unfortunately, intentionally discharging waste in open waters has happened before, and, of course, accidents do occur, so to prevent this risk, the States' Shellfish Unit temporarily closes these boating hotspots as a precautionary measure.

How Can I Tell If an Area Is Closed?

The easiest way to check if an area is closed is to call DEC's shellfish closure hotline: (631) 444-0480. A recorded message is available 24 hours a day, including weekends. It remains up-to-date with any temporary closure information, including dates and locations. You can also reference the DEC Shellfish Mapper online, which shows any temporary closures. Visit **on.ny.gov/shellfishmapper** to view the color-coded interactive map.

Additionally, you can identify closures by viewing signs surrounding the perimeter of the closed area. Marine staff deploy signs at the tidal line of the affected area several days before each holiday closure, and signs are displayed at permanently closed areas year-round. All signs consist of a red and white emblem atop a metal post. Closure dates are marked on the sign for easy viewing from the water.

Violations of the closure are serious and could result in legal action. They also subject people to potential health risks. So play it safe—legally and medically—and don't harvest shellfish in areas where you see closure signs!

DEC staff entering Zach's Bay, at Jones Beach, to collect water samples.

Closed area sign for a summer holiday.

Some storm drains, like this one in the Town of Hempstead, lead directly to the bay.

What Can I Do?

You can't regulate acts of nature like rainfall, but you can be mindful of what you put on land to reduce pollution that affects our environment. If you fertilize your lawn, check the weather forecast to avoid fertilizing before heavy rain, which can cause excess nutrients to enter our waters. You can also make sure your trash is securely closed and protected from inquisitive wildlife to help prevent inorganic waste from being knocked into the street, where it can ultimately find its way into a nearby storm drain, many of which connect to our waterways.

Finally, do your best to stay diligent. Monitor for fuel leaks in your car, pick up and properly dispose of your pet's waste, and take seemingly small steps to keep our lands and waters clean of debris.

As for mariners, you can help in several ways: responsibly empty your holding tanks at pump-out facilities; perform routine maintenance checks; assess gas and oil leaks; and, most importantly, share stories of the appreciation of your time spent on the water so that friends, neighbors, and future generations will understand the importance of a caring connection to our environment.

Our marine waters are a magnificent resource that offers world-class recreation, supports various industries and our economy, and is home to a variety of marine life. Protecting these waters will protect marine resources, public health, and our quality of life.

Alyssa Lefebvre is a Fish & Wildlife Technician in DEC's Shellfish Harvest Area Classification Unit on Long Island.

Restoring Shellfish and Reaping the Benefits

Under Governor Cuomo's "Revive Mother Nature" initiative, New York and its partners are working to enhance and restock shellfish populations in New York's coastal waters over the next decade, which includes doubling the current shellfish restoration efforts on Long Island. The program builds on the Long Island Shellfish Restoration project, already underway, to establish five shellfish sanctuary sites in Suffolk and Nassau counties to be stocked with up to 168 million locally grown, locally harvested shellfish. The project, led by DEC, includes Stony Brook University, Cornell Cooperative Extension, municipalities, and volunteer organizations. In addition to bolstering New York's shellfish population, these efforts will improve water quality, increase biodiversity, and bolster coastal community resiliency.

Cache Me Outside

ENJOYING A HI-TECH SCAVENGER HUNT

BY MARY ELIZABETH

Using GPS to locate the cache.

"Found it!" my daughter called out from a few feet off the trail as her friend Garrett and I were still searching around trees and rocks below. We scrambled up the outcropping of rocks to open the weathered green canister that was hidden, camouflaged under carefully placed pieces of shale, excited to find out what was concealed inside.

You may be asking yourself "why was there a box hidden in the woods under rocks and leaves", and "why would anyone want to spend an afternoon looking for it"? The answer is simple: it's a game called geocaching.

First, a little history. Geocaching, as we know it today, has only been around for twenty years. On May 2, 2000, the U.S. government permitted private citizens the use of global positioning systems (GPS)*. In a nutshell, GPS allows people to identify a location anywhere in the world, using signals that are bounced off several satellites. All kinds of industries use GPS, from fishing to forestry to navigating the roads we drive on. And people are now using it for an exciting outdoor adventure.

On May 3, 2000, the first geocache was placed by Dave Ulmer, a computer consultant and GPS enthusiast from Oregon, simply because he wanted to test the system's accuracy. He hid a bucket in the woods that contained a few trinkets (known as a cache) and a logbook to be signed by those who found it.

Still searching.

Found it!

He posted the cache's coordinates in an online forum for other like-minded GPS buffs. Three days later, a user of that site found Ulmer's container and the game of geocaching was born.

According to **www.geocaching.com**, the official website for all things geocache, there are more than 3 million caches hidden today in more than 190 countries, and their "finds" have been logged by more than 640 million players. The containers range in size from very small (micro) to a common ammo box size, and occasionally larger. All caches have a log to be signed, and larger boxes typically contain trinkets you can choose to take from the container (as long as you leave another in its place).

Geocaching is a fun-for-all-ages adrenaline rush that can be experienced in caves, woods, parks, roadsides, and, sometimes, virtually. I started geocaching sixteen years ago, when my daughter, Amanda, was six years old, to break up long day hikes. She still enjoys hiking and treasure hunting with me, so on this day we chose a hike close to home at Margaret Lewis Norrie State Park in Staatsburg, Dutchess County.

Before heading out, we checked the geocaching website and marked an area on our map where the box should be hidden. I packed a small daypack with geocaching essentials: a map so we knew which trails to take; a pen in case the containers did not have one; our bag of trinkets to make a swap; a compass to point us in the right direction; my smartphone with the geocaching app installed; and wet wipes, because sometimes you get a little dirty.

Souvenir from western New York.

The ammo box, its cache, and the log.

Following the clues left by the geocacher who hid the box, we were able to unearth a well-disguised ammo box. Amanda, Garrett, and I carefully examined all the charms inside, left by people from all over the country, trying to decide which one we wanted to keep. Garrett chose a superball, so we made our swap, signed the log, and then continued our hike.

It's as simple as that. After creating a free account on **www.geocaching.com**, you'll have access to coordinates you can download to a handheld GPS unit or your smartphone app to start searching for treasure on your next adventure.

For many people, a hike is about a destination, such as reaching a quiet spot with amazing scenic views or a beautiful area that helps them escape from the bustle of everyday life. Others focus more on physical activity, testing their bodies against nature's challenges. And others simply like to enjoy the outdoors with family or friends. Regardless of why you enjoy an outdoor hike, the curiosity of the cache is another reason to begin a journey.

An avid outdoor enthusiast, **Mary Elizabeth** is a graphic designer in DEC's Albany office.

*GPS was available in 1989, however, the Department of Defense intentionally made the system extremely inaccurate, fearing military rivals could use it to their advantage.

Note: You may not place a cache on a Wildlife Management Area without obtaining a permit. Visit **www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/98952.html** for more information.

Basic Geocaching Rules & Etiquette

- Be discrete.
- While caches are concealed just off a trail, they should never be buried. Avoid cache locations that could cause visitors to trample plants or disturb wildlife.
- If you take something, you must also leave something; do not leave food or smelly items that would attract animals, or dangerous items that would do harm to others.
- Put the cache back how you found it in the same location.
- Sign the logbook and leave a message if you can.
- Use wet wipes before and after handling a cache to protect yourself and other users from germs and disease.
- Have fun, stay safe, and leave no trace.

DEBARKING AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Emerald Ash Borer on the Saint Regis Mohawk Reservation

BY OLIVIA BOX

Les Benedict knew it was coming. Emerald ash borer (EAB, *Agrilus planipennis*), that is. And he knew it would bring trouble. But how much?

In 2003, Benedict, assistant director of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe's Environment Division, took a trip to Michigan and saw firsthand the effects of EAB, a highly destructive invasive tree pest first reported in the U.S. the year before. "Visually, it has a dramatic impact," said Benedict, referring to the abundance of dead ash trees that result from an emerald ash borer attack. Unfortunately, the infestation would not be confined to Michigan.

Emerald ash borer was found in New York in 2009 in Cattaraugus County, and Benedict knew that it was only a matter of time until EAB made it to the Saint Regis Mohawk Reservation, in Akwesasne, Franklin County. He knew that EAB attacks North American ash species, including green, white, black, and blue ash trees—species found in New York State and on the reservation.

Native to Eastern Russia, Northern China, Japan, and Korea, the emerald ash borer is smaller than a penny, measuring $^1/_2$-inch long and $^1/_8$-inch wide. It has bright, metallic green wings covering a coppery red or purple abdomen. It is highly destructive, killing whole forests of ash trees.

EAB likely arrived in the U.S. via solid wood packing materials. It was first discovered in Michigan in 2002, but tree ring research shows that it was already established—and killing trees—in the 1990s. Since its arrival and establishment, an estimated 20 million ash trees have died due to EAB infestations, and the outlook of ash as a species is bleak, since every North American ash species is susceptible to EAB.

EAB attack only ash trees. Its larvae enter the tree through crevices in the bark, then feed on the inner tissues of the tree. This disrupts the tree's ability to transport nutrients and water, which gradually kills the tree; most trees die within two to four years of becoming infested. The U.S. Forest Service estimates that 99 percent of ash trees will die from EAB. Currently, thirty-five U.S. states and five Canadian provinces have confirmed cases of EAB, threatening nearly the entire range of ash trees in North America.

There are a variety of treatment options that can serve as a control measure for the EAB, but no cure. When the borer comes in, many foresters recommend cutting all the wood before EAB destroys it. However, this may not always be the appropriate strategy.

It appears a small percentage of ash trees may be genetically tolerant to an EAB attack. The resistant trees that do not succumb to the attack, often called "lingering ash," remain on the landscape. However, scientists are not sure if the lingering ash are truly resistant or are just declining at a slower rate; more research is needed to determine the dynamics of tree vulnerability. Maintaining genetically resistant ash trees could help to ensure the species isn't functionally extinct, meaning it would no longer have a significant, beneficial role in the environment. However, it appears only about 1 percent of ash trees are genetically resistant to EAB infestations.

But to some, that 1 percent is a reason to have hope. Les Benedict, along with Nate Siegert, from the U.S. Forest Service, and other collaborators, their team co-designed a delimitation survey to locate where EAB is already present on the landscape—planning for its impending arrival, with the tribe's cultural resources in mind.

Siegert, a forest entomologist, emphasized the value of conducting a delimitation study early. "A delimitation survey tells us where EAB is and at what densities. We can then make predictions on how it will spread." Knowing where EAB is and how quickly infestations are building helps prepare the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe for future management decisions.

The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe has long used the wood from black ash trees for cultural purposes. Ash basketmaking dates back 4,000 years, and many tribes in the Mohawk Nation Confederacy still use traditional methods to make the baskets. The wood from black ash trees is pliable and easily separated into strips for basketmaking—when peeled, it splits into thin layers and one tree can make as many as 100 baskets.

Signs of an EAB infestation include canopy dieback, evidence of woodpecker activity, D-shaped holes on the trunk or branches, and S-shaped tunnels under the bark.

The study was conducted in the winter months, and fieldwork occurred when the temperature dipped below freezing. A team of forest technicians surveyed nearly every tree across 21 square miles of the Reservation, searching for damage from EAB. The initial damage of the borer may be canopy dieback and thinning, where branches may fall from the crown; in healthy ash trees, lower branches will die off, but the canopy remains full.

Some woodpeckers eat EAB larvae, and evidence of increased woodpecker activity, such as splintered bark and feeding holes, is often the first sign of an EAB infestation. Similarly, a D-shaped exit hole on the trunk or branches may be found when an adult beetle emerges from the tree in the spring.

The survey crew girdled (stripped a ring of bark around the trunks) 200 infested trees in the area during the spring. Ash trees that are girdled are weakened and more susceptible to an adult EAB attack. In the fall, the crew felled these trees to examine the damage. Each tree was then cut into 4-foot long bolts, and some of the bolts were taken back to a warehouse on the Reservation for further investigation. The survey team stripped the bark, searching for below-bark signs, such as characteristic S-shaped, serpentine galleries or tunnels directly under the bark created by feeding EAB larvae. Debarking is a standard practice to investigate damage and survey for EAB.

While Benedict and Siegert's study methods were standard, their use of materials kept with, and respected, cultural traditions. After stripping the bark and checking for signs of EAB, undamaged materials were then passed along to community basket makers or to other tribal members for ceremonial use. The wood that was deemed unusable for basketmaking was split into firewood for the

Ash Trees

Ash trees are flowering trees that can grow in a wide variety of soil conditions There are 45 to 65 different species of ash trees found in the northern parts of Europe, Asia, and North America. Depending on the species, an ash tree can reach 30 feet to 120 feet in height, have a crown width of 30 to 40 feet, and the trunk can reach up to six to seven feet in diameter.

The bark of ash trees is grayish and is smooth in young trees and furrowed with diamond-shaped segments in older trees. Ash trees have a strong and wide root system, and these trees can live to be 30- to 300-years-old, depending on the species.

Ash trees were once the most-planted urban tree across the U.S. They are very common in many New York communities, often used as shade, lawn, and street trees. Ash were widely planted during the 1960s to replace native elm trees lost to Dutch elm disease. They are also a common and valuable forest species—the seeds are a food source for many birds and mammals. Deer and moose like to browse on the branches and leaves of young ash trees, and mature trees provide shelter for birds and animals.

White, green, and black species of ash comprise almost eight percent of all trees in New York State. The loss of these trees will affect the economies of forestry-related industries, recreation activities, residential yards, and state and local governments that must remove dead or infested ash trees.

For more information on the emerald ash borer, visit: **www.dec.ny.gov/animals/45409.html**.

Emerald ash borer damage

The survey crew girdled trees, searching for evidence of an EAB infestation.

Many species of ash trees have special cultural and historical value to Native American tribes. Ash logs have the bark stripped off and are checked for signs of EAB. Undamaged materials are then passed along to community basket makers or to other tribal members for ceremonial use.

An Akwesasne St.Regis Mohawk tribe member making a black ash basket.

community sugarhouse and other local uses. Little wood was wasted, and the community gained a deeper insight about a future with emerald ash borer.

Siegert and Benedict hope their work will generate critical information to help make management decisions regarding the Tribe's ash resources and support future research. Additional benefits of this work are the development and strengthening of partnerships, old and new, and helping to prepare for the next threat that comes along.

EAB infestations are expected to continue to expand across New York State and the Northeast, but efforts are underway to keep ash trees in the forests, on the landscape, and as a critical part of the cultural practices of the Tribe.

"There will be a lot of dead standing trees no matter what we do, but making the right management decisions now will help ensure that ash trees will better withstand the EAB invasion and be poised to rebound afterwards," said Siegert.

What is sure to be a long battle with emerald ash borer has just begun. While the future of ash trees and EAB is yet to be defined, Benedict, a self-described optimist, remains hopeful. "I envision a future that includes ash", he said. The optimism is based on his working with many experts on this issue and believing that their work will make a difference.

Olivia Box is a graduate student and freelance writer based in Vermont.

EAB in New York

DEC is working with a number of partners to control EAB in New York State through a variety of ways, including:

- Supporting efforts to establish biological control (in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, USDA).
- Through the Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISMs) and other collaborations, searching for signs of host resistance that could lead to the development of resistant nursery stock.
- In the short term, the agency is offering urban & community forestry grants and invasive species grants to help communities deal with EAB and its aftermath.
- Monitoring the expansion of EAB's range in New York, with a specific focus on areas of the state that currently are not infested.

Look for the Zero

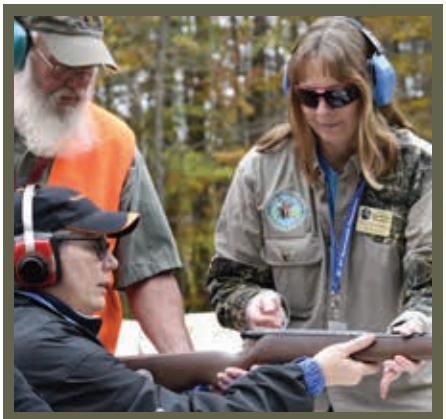
As property owners work on their lawns, DEC encourages them to "Look for the Zero" and buy phosphorus-free fertilizer. Fertilizer labels have three numbers—the number in the middle is the percentage of phosphorus in the product. Excess phosphorus is a threat to many New York waterbodies, making these waters unsafe for swimming and fishing, and harmful for fish, pets, or people who use these waters. New York's nutrient runoff law prohibits the use of phosphorus lawn fertilizers unless a new lawn is being established or a soil test shows that the lawn does not have enough phosphorus. By using phosphorus-free fertilizer, New Yorkers can help protect water quality and public health.

State Record White Bass

On May 6, Morgan Fonzi caught a New York State record fish—a white bass weighing three pounds, eight ounces. Morgan caught the bass while fishing with his father on the Lower Niagara River near the town of Lewiston. Congratulations Morgan! With more than 7,500 lakes and ponds, 70,000 miles of rivers and streams, and hundreds of miles of coastline, New York State has some of the finest fishing in the country and fishing opportunities are always nearby. For more information on fishing in New York, visit: **www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/fishing.html**.

If You Care, Leave Them There

This time of year means the arrival of newborn and just-hatched wildlife. It is important to understand normal behavior for these animals before assuming that they need help. Often, wild animal parents stay away from their young when humans are near, leading some people to think the young wildlife are orphaned or abandoned, and mistakenly trying to rescue them. This can be harmful to the young wildlife—adult wild animals are the best at raising their young to survive on their own. And you should never consider young wildlife as possible pets—it is illegal and harmful, and young wildlife are not well suited for life in captivity. If you encounter a young wild animal that is obviously injured or orphaned, call a Wildlife Rehabilitator for advice and help. *They are the only people legally allowed to treat distressed wildlife.* To locate a Wildlife Rehabilitator in your area, contact the DEC regional office nearest you: **www.dec.ny.gov/about/259.html**.



Online Hunter Education Course Booms

Due to COVID-19 and the need to protect public health and safety, DEC has been unable to offer in-person Hunter Education courses. However, this course can now be completed online, and more than 28,000 hunters have already successfully completed it. The online course includes a virtual field component that replaces the previous in-person part. The NY Hunter Education course (Hunter Safety course) is required to purchase a hunting license in New York. The course covers the necessary safety techniques and responsibilities that a hunter must know when using a gun, muzzleloader, crossbow, or bow to pursue wild game. To take the online course, applicants must be at least 11 years old and a resident of New York State. The online Hunter Education Course is a limited time option that will only be available until August 31. For more information and to register for a course, visit: **www.hunter-ed.com/newyork/**.

DEC's Forest Health Diagnostic Lab

If you need help identifying insect pests, trees, plants, or tree diseases, contact DEC's Forest Health Diagnostic Lab. Lab staff can also help to resolve problems with trees and plants, and the service is free. Simply email **foresthealth@dec.ny.gov** with a clear photo of a specimen, depicting something to reference its size, along with information about where and how you found it, and the damage it caused. The more information you can provide, the easier it will be to identify. To learn how to collect and submit a sample, and for other resources, visit: **www.dec.ny.gov/lands/79716.html**.

Answering the Call in a Time of Need

Sometimes, major challenges arise out of the blue, and they can change our lives. It is clear that we are now living in turbulent times. The onset of COVID-19 occurred quickly, forcing all of us to deal with this major health threat, which has changed the way we live and work. As DEC celebrates its 50th anniversary, we can look back at other threats and challenges we faced, including the tragic events of 9-11. As with other crises, DEC has been on the front lines, responding quickly and decisively to this health emergency. For example, in late May, Commissioner Basil Seggos worked side by side with other DEC volunteers at the Schenectady County COVID-19 Response Task Force, a coalition of community-based organizations, county agencies, and the National Guard, to provide food and household supplies to more than 145 families in need. DEC staff have also helped distribute key supplies, including facemasks and personal protective equipment in local communities to help ensure people are safe. And many DEC employees have volunteered to help people apply for unemployment benefits that are crucial to families during this difficult time.

Clearly volunteer services are especially meaningful right now, and DEC will continue to answer the call to service. As many individuals and families struggle with a deep sense of loss, our actions must reflect and rekindle a sense of hope. Throughout its history, DEC has worked to protect and improve our environment and people's lives. These efforts are even more important today, and you will find DEC employees on the front lines fulfilling this mission.

Oddly Colored Leaves

While walking at the Skaneateles Conservation Area, I discovered this trillium, which I had never seen before. Is this a variegated variety or a coloration caused by a nutritional issue?

HANNAH NACZI
MARCELLUS, NY

This color variation in the leaves is caused by a mutation, which is not that uncommon in trillium. It can also produce flower color differences within one species.

—STEVE YOUNG, CHIEF BOTANIST, NY NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM

Ask the Biologist

Q: We took this photo of two foxes on our property in Smyrna. We believe one is a female, as the one sitting down seems to have mammary development. When do foxes give birth and do male and female stay together?

—GERT FEDERICI,
CHENANGO COUNTY

A: *Breeding occurs between mid-January and May. The gestation period may range between 51-63 days. Pups are usually born in a den in March or April, nearly hairless, blind, and helpless. Single litters contain 2-7 pups. Weaning occurs between 8-10 weeks of age, at which time they venture out of the den and begin hunting with the parents by 3 months. Families disperse in the autumn when young are nearly full-grown. Males reach sexual maturity sooner than females, but both are capable of reproducing in their first year.*

—MIKE SCHIAVONE, DEC WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

Two Halves Don't Make a Whole

I live in Suffolk County on the South Shore of Long Island, near the Moriches Inlet, and found an odd mollusk shell on the bay beach this morning. The shell is one of two I found there, which are not from the same individual organism as they don't fit together. Can you tell me what it is?

DOUG DEFEO
EAST MORICHES, NY

This looks to be the Florida Spiny Jewel Box, Arcinella cornuta. *In live/fresh specimens, the spines would be longer. The natural range of this species is from North Carolina southward to Florida and Texas. I would be very surprised if these were living in our New York waters. I would guess that someone dropped the shells on the beach. I have seen other subtropical/tropical species that somehow ended up on our beaches.*

—STEVE TETTELBACH,
CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
SUFFOLK COUNTY MARINE PROGRAM

Shrinking Mountain?

In your 2020 calendar in the December 2019 issue, I noticed that the photo of an elevation marker for Whiteface Mountain on the January calendar shows the summit as 4,867 ft. above sea level. This reminded me of a photograph of myself taken in about 1950 in front of a marker showing the summit as 4,872 ft. above sea level. Is the mountain shrinking?

JOHN LAGRAFF
JAMESVILLE, NY

We do not think the mountain is shrinking. According to Verplanck Colvin [state surveyor] on September 6, 1872: "Whiteface first appears in print as having an elevation of 2,686 feet. This great error was corrected by the geological survey, and its height as given in the State Natural History is 4,900 feet above tide. My measurement confirms this result, and makes the height of the mountain 4,918 English feet above the sea." Colvin later reported after better measurements and setting the first benchmark ever set on Whiteface Mountain on October 14, 1878 that the elevation was 4,871.655 feet. Measurement techniques of land surveyors have improved over time and I believe that's why the elevation has changed.

—KALEB WINTERS, LAND SURVEYOR, DEC DIVISION OF LANDS AND FOREST

Colorful Catch

Can you tell me anything about this blue-colored perch that was caught by my grandson Jacob in Oxbow Lake?

DENISE RHINE
HAMILTON COUNTY

Color variation in yellow perch (and other fish species) is common and is usually related to differences in age, reproductive condition, habitat, and/or diet. However, a blue color phase of a perch has been reported in many northern states and Canada. Theories vary as to why this color exists. Some believe it is a form of albinism (i.e., the lack of pigmentation results in the "blue" color), while others report this color phase is occurring because of the presence of a blue pigment in the actual mucous (slime) of the fish. In any case, it is usually a rare occurrence.

Caught in the Act

I thought your readers might enjoy some photos I caught on my trail cam of different wildlife interacting with my turkey decoy. As you can see, it was even the target of an attack by a bald eagle and an immature red-tailed hawk.

JOHN TUCKER
BELMONT, NY

Thanks for sharing these great images with us! Your decoy certainly saw a lot of action. We are sorry for your decoy's misfortune, but do enjoy seeing the photos it has generated.

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Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

Walley Haley/NYSDEC

I've Got an Itch to Scratch

BY RACHEL MOORE

I love nature. Preferably from a distance. Possibly with a wall, window, and door between us.

All kidding aside, I want to be more outdoorsy than I am, but nature finds a way to keep me indoors. The main culprit? Plants. I marvel over the white and purple clover that dots my front yard. I pat trees and pluck dandelions. But I've never been great at identifying the plants that can cause rashes. Oh, I know that poison ivy has three leaves, like in that rhyme, "Leaves of three, let it be." Except when it doesn't. And poison ivy's leaves are glossy. Except when they're not. It's about knee-high. Except when it's a vine, capable of dropping off a tree branch and ambushing me from above.

My love of nature and fear of rashes began when I was a kid, running wild through the meadows (hello, ticks!), climbing trees (hello, hornets!), and wading through creeks (hello, leeches!). I wantonly brushed against everything green and leafy, then claimed ignorance when the rashes started. My parents bought some sort of ivy block, which was like sunblock, designed to prevent poison ivy sap from touching my sensitive skin. It might have worked... had I remembered to apply it.

Poison ivy is hard to identify and harder to eradicate. Heck, we had poison ivy intermingled with our wild raspberry bushes. They both had leaves of three. Some produced berries. Others induced blisters. Once, I even developed an inhalation-induced poison ivy rash. The neighbors had been burning weeds and debris in their yard. Turns out that urushiol, that colorless, odorless oil/resin/sap, can carry on the wind. Blisters in my mouth and throat made for a miserable September. (Note: Please, don't burn poison ivy.)

If you've ever had an allergic reaction to poison ivy, you'll understand the incessant itch, the unscratchable, rashy swathes of skin that make you look like a comic book villain emerging from the toxic vat. You'll know about the blisters, the weeping (both yours and your skin's), and the scars it can leave. The remedies are plentiful, but also unpleasant. There's always calamine, that strange pink liquid that delivers brief relief, but makes a person look piebald. But it eventually dries and flakes, leaving you as itchy as before and needing to apply more coats until you resemble a topographic map. There's also a clear version, equally soothing, which skips over the pink-patch issue but makes the afflicted areas look like you've rolled in school glue. There are oatmeal baths. Don't dump a cup of regular oatmeal in a bathtub. Attempting to bathe in water mixed with whole oats (rolled, old-fashioned, steel-cut, or, ugh, flavored quick oats) yields a chunky, clumpy, gritty experience. Use colloidal oatmeal instead, which offers some relief as you wallow in the soupy mixture, but tends to leave glutinous rings on the bathtub and a vague, breakfast odor.

You also can take some simple precautions. Wear long pants tucked into socks and a long-sleeved shirt. The poison ivy will be too busy snickering at your unstylishness to spread urushiol. Ticks will also realize your fashion faux pas and search for more au courant prey. Be sure to thoroughly wash any clothing that may have come in contact with poison ivy, using the hottest water you can. Remember to decontaminate your shoes. Or follow my lead, and frantically shed the contaminated clothes as soon as you reenter the house, then shove them and your shoes into a vat of hot water with a healthy glug of bleach. My reaction to poison ivy rivals that of the WHO's Ebola protocols. Or you could use a topical ivy block. It could work, but only if you remember to apply it before connecting with nature.

There are other rash-inducing plants lurking outside—poison sumac, ragweed, the dreaded giant hogweed—and I could write a Stephen King-length book on them, but I'll spare you the horror. Lest you think this article is all hyperbolic fear-mongering and general agoraphobia, let me be clear—I'm not discouraging people from appreciating the outdoors. New York has breathtaking hikes (sometimes literally), plentiful fishing sites, serene lakes, award-winning beaches, and a stunning variety of wildlife. Go outside and enjoy. Just beware of the plants you may encounter.

Rachel Moore is an editor in DEC's Bureau of Publications in Albany.

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Joe Mulone

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