Working Together, Protecting Our Future

2025

Agency Highlights and Accomplishments

NEW YORK STATE

Department of Environmental Conservation

Governor Kathy Hochul | Commissioner Amanda Lefton

FRONT COVER: Miyawaki mini forest planting at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center

THIS PAGE: DEC announced a land acquisition to preserve more than 3,300 acres in Herkimer County.

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Letter from the Commissioner

At the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), we understand that there is no greater calling than public service—to work in government and uphold our laws; carry out our values of equity, accessibility, integrity, and accountability; and, most especially, to carry out our agency's mission to conserve, improve, and protect New York's natural resources and environment.

For decades, our long-standing commitment to protecting the environment has more than paid off. We have advanced cleaning the air and water, remediating industrial sites for beneficial reuse, and protecting our natural resources. As a result, families are breathing easier. Habitats are healthier. And our economy has grown stronger and more resilient.

These are not easy times and, as we reflect on 2025, we can be very proud of how we have persevered. I say time and time again, that New York State is proof that it's possible to have strong environmental protections and a robust economy. In fact, they go hand in hand.

Here at DEC, we are bolstering and creating more resilient communities and ecosystems by addressing climate change and its impacts, leveraging natural and nature-based solutions to reduce risk to people, the environment, and infrastructure. We're particularly lucky to have Governor Kathy Hochul in our corner, a governor who continues to support our priorities and fight back against federal rollbacks—helping to safeguard our state's clean air and clean water, and defend our environmental policies, programs, and investments.

Finally, I talk a lot about focusing on customer service, which I believe goes hand in glove with public service. I am proud of how we are engaging stakeholders more broadly, improving our effectiveness as an agency, our connectivity, inclusivity, and communication. To me, those are pillars of customer service.

Thank you for all that you do to protect New York's environment and the people that depend on it. I know that we will rise to the challenge and continue to deliver for the 19 million New Yorkers and our critical natural resources. I look forward to working with all of you as we continue delivering transformative environmental progress.

I am proud to be a part of this incredible team.

Amanda Lefton, Commissioner

Bond Act

The Clean Water, Clean Air, and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act of 2022 (Bond Act) provided a historic $4.2 billion investment for projects and initiatives that are helping transform communities statewide. DEC continued its leadership in implementing the Bond Act by working with multiple State agencies to launch projects and initiatives that promote equity and affordability, protect water quality, help communities adapt to climate change, improve resiliency, and create job opportunities.

Bond Act Supports Fish and Wildlife Habitat Restoration and Enhancement

In 2024 and 2025, Bond Act funding was made available through the Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) Consolidated Funding Application for aquatic connectivity restoration and stream and wetland restoration and enhancement projects. These projects will, as their primary goal, improve impaired, degraded, or marginal fish and wildlife habitat by directly addressing one or more factors that are compromising the habitat's value and function to serve as a high-quality spawning, nursery, wintering, migratory, nesting, breeding, or foraging environment for one or more species of fish or wildlife of conservation concern or interest. In 2025, about $22 million in Bond Act funding was awarded to 28 projects to restore aquatic connectivity or restore and enhance wetland and stream habitats. This was up from $7 million and 11 projects in 2024.

Fish hatchery moderization

Rendering of improvements to Caledonia Fish Hatchery

Fish Hatchery System Modernization Underway

New York State (NYS) committed at least $100 million, with $75 million coming from the Bond Act, to support the modernization of six DEC fish hatcheries. Modernization centers on employing contemporary culture technologies to maximize fish production and ensure greater sustainability by using the best technology available to reduce energy use and minimize the carbon footprint. DEC will implement the modernization plan in three phases, with Phase 1 beginning in 2025. Highlights of Phase 1 include: refurbishing ponds at the South Otselic Hatchery for increased walleye production; overhauling the water supply system at the Salmon River Hatchery; building a new hatch house at Chateaugay Hatchery; and replacing the existing hatchery at Randolph with a brand-new facility.

Funding to Support Resiliency Initiatives

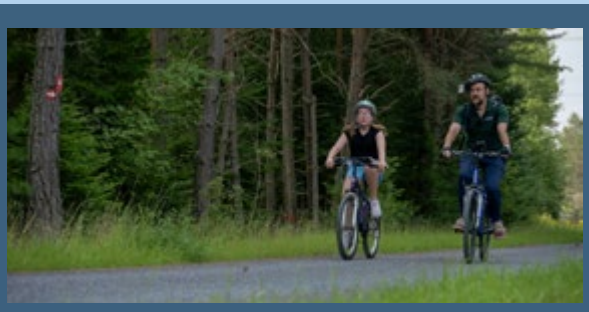
In February, Governor Hochul announced the availability of $45 million toward DEC's Resilient Watersheds Grant Program through the Bond Act to enhance climate resiliency across the state. Funded initiatives will promote flood risk and ice jam reduction and habitat restoration, enhance flood and climate resilience, and implement natural and nature-based feature construction while supporting healthy riparian habitats. These projects build on the success of the Resilient NY program, advance the State's goal of strengthening infrastructure, and protect New Yorkers from the impacts of extreme weather.

Protecting Open Space

Acquisition of 866 acres in the Town of Olive, Ulster County, forms the largest addition to the Catskill Forest Preserve since 2011. Securing the parcel, which included Bond Act funding, supports the long-term protection of drinking water in the Ashokan Reservoir watershed and offers an undisturbed viewshed of the Catskills from points east, including the Ashokan Reservoir and Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge.

DEC also worked closely with the Open Space Institute (OSI) to secure the parcel after the organization took ownership in 2019. Notable landmarks include Wagon Wheel Notch, Low Point, and Little High Point. This acquisition provides critical connectivity between High Point Mountain Road and the Sundown Wild Forest, allowing for more parking and access to the Catskill Park. The $4.2 million purchase was the State's first land acquisition funded by the Bond Act.

In November 2025, Governor Hochul announced the availability of $25 million through the first round of the Open Space Conservation Grant Program, a new program to protect and preserve open space in NYS. Municipalities, not-for-profits, and Indian Nations or Tribes can apply for Bond Act funding to purchase land for permanent conservation.



Completion of the Rail Trail Connecting the Heart of the Adirondacks

The Adirondack Rail Trail, a 34-mile, multiuse recreational corridor between Lake Placid and Tupper Lake, was officially completed and open for use in October 2025. Free of charge and open year-round for all-season enjoyment for hikers, bikers, cross-country skiers, and snowmobile enthusiasts, this major recreation and transportation project showcases the beauty, accessibility, and adventures available in the Adirondacks. Funding for the project included $13.1 million from the Bond Act, in addition to capital investments from New York Works and the State's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF).

Adirondack Rail Trail

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park Coastal Shoreline Project

Governor Hochul announced $10 million to support the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park's Coastal Shoreline Project in the City of Buffalo. This Bond Act investment is helping New York State safeguard communities from extreme weather, protect natural resources and drinking water, and ensure people have places to explore nature and access to public recreation.

Climate

Climate-Friendly Refrigeration Systems

DEC took important steps to reduce refrigerant emissions contributing to climate change. New regulations help reduce hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), which are extremely potent greenhouse gases often used in refrigeration and cooling. HFCs have a global warming potential—a metric that measures the ability of gases to trap heat in the atmosphere—hundreds to thousands of times higher than alternative refrigerants.

In April 2025, DEC and the North American Sustainable Refrigeration Council announced two stores in the Bronx transitioned to climate-friendly refrigeration systems, thanks to approximately $350,000 through the State's EPF to support projects that invest in natural refrigerants to lower costs and emissions.

DEC also continued prioritizing installing equipment at its own facilities that utilize climate-friendly refrigerants, including a new walk-in cooler at Pack Forest Environmental Education Camp.

25 Million Trees Initiative "Tree Tracker"

In 2025, New York State launched a new webpage and interactive tracking tool to help monitor progress toward the State's goal to plant 25 million trees by 2033. The new "Tree Tracker" allows anyone to report the location and number of trees planted into the tracking tool—which measures progress in the statewide effort. New York's tree planting goal will advance climate equity and reforestation goals, and support New York's broader efforts to reduce pollution contributing to climate change.

Certified Climate Smart Communities

New York State's successful Climate Smart Communities (CSC) program, led by DEC, includes more than 168 certified and 469 registered in the CSC program across the state. In 2025, with the addition of New York City, this number represents nearly 17.9 million New Yorkers, or 92% of the state's population. Also in 2025, DEC received the most applications for certification and CSC grants in the program's history. In December 2025, DEC announced $22.7 million in CSC Grant awards for 43 projects to help municipalities take action to address climate change; in addition, more than $5 million in funding was made available for the installation of electric vehicle charging stations for public use and rebates toward the purchase or lease of electric vehicles for municipal fleets.

Kingston Climate Smart Communities event on September 22, 2025

Community Reforestation Program Launch

In celebration of Arbor Day, Governor Hochul and DEC announced $15 million worth of grants to communities, nonprofits, and Tribes across NYS to establish and expand resilient forests through the new Community Reforestation (CoRe) Grant program. A total of 16 projects support more than 100,000 trees being planted across the state, significantly mitigating extreme heat impacts at the local level.

Arbor Day 2025

Extreme Heat Action Plan

DEC and State agency partners made significant progress in implementing the *Extreme Heat Action Plan* (*EHAP*), including providing expanded insurance coverage for cooling at home, improving access to cooling centers and swimming opportunities, and providing new resources to plan for and adapt to extreme heat. The plan provides a roadmap for coordinated State action on extreme heat adaptation and includes nearly 50 actions. An *EHAP* update, released in June 2025, provided an overview of the most recent implementation successes.

In partnership with SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF), DEC is also developing maps and tools to identify areas that are disproportionately exposed to extreme heat, including urban disadvantaged communities (DACs). DEC is developing final heat exposure maps, expected in 2026, that will incorporate future-looking data and include duration, frequency, and intensity of extreme heat events.

Modernization of Saratoga Tree Nursery

DEC's Colonel William F. Fox Memorial Saratoga Tree Nursery was established in 1911 and is the oldest State forest tree nursery in the country. As part of the 25 Million Trees initiative and with support from the Bond Act, the nursery is undergoing improvements that will help scale-up seed collection and bare-root tree production for new forests. The first phase of this effort, which is the installation of a growing fields fence, was completed in October 2025. This fence will safeguard tree seedlings from deer and other animals and protect these green investments.

Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan for Extreme Weather

During Earth Week 2025, Governor Hochul directed DEC, in partnership with the NYS Energy Research and Development Authority, NYS Department of State, and NYS Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, to develop a comprehensive statewide Adaptation and Resilience Plan for New York State. The plan will establish a statewide framework to guide adaptation planning and implementation to advance climate adaptation and resilience through a coordinated strategy to build adaptive capacity across New York's communities and develop tools and resources to help communities thrive in a changing climate.

Protecting Communities

Lawrence Aviation Superfund Site on Long Island

Cleanup of the former Lawrence Aviation Industries in the Town of Brookhaven, Suffolk County, has reached a significant milestone in the removal of contamination and has achieved removal criteria to be delisted from the State Superfund Registry. Approximately 120 acres meets criteria to be delisted, while 5 acres of the site will remain in the federal and State Superfund programs for continued maintenance and monitoring. Site cleanup operations included the removal of approximately 2,500 drums, containers, and cylinders containing toxic substances; 3,000 gallons of machine oils recovered from leaking machinery; 18 aboveground and underground storage tanks containing industrial waste and fuel oils; 20 leaking PCB transformers; 1,600 gallons of PCB oils; and 17,000 tons of contaminated soil excavated from multiple areas of the site.

Lawrence Aviation Industries, circa 2022

Lawrence Aviation Industries in 2024

Grumman Cleanup Milestone

In October 2025, under DEC oversight, Northrop Grumman contractors successfully completed the second phase of the thermal cleanup at the former Grumman settling ponds in Oyster Bay, Nassau County, addressing contamination deep in the soil below portions of the present-day Bethpage Community Park. This scientifically proven and safe cleanup method removed over 460 pounds of volatile organic compound (VOC) contamination during this phase. In total, the thermal remedies have removed nearly 1,900 pounds of VOCs from soils beneath the park. This milestone builds on the ongoing progress being accomplished with DEC's comprehensive plan to contain and clean up the groundwater plume associated with the Northrop Grumman Bethpage Facility and Naval Weapons Industrial Reserve Plant sites in the town, with more than 276,000 pounds of contamination related to the plume removed to date.

From Historic Environmental Settlement to New Community Opportunity

DEC announced $878,500 in enforcement penalties against Reworld Hempstead, formerly the Covanta Hempstead Resource Recovery Facility, in Nassau County. DEC's investigation found historic violations dating back to 2006 for the facility's handling of municipal waste combustor ash. A total of $500,000 of the penalty will fund an environmental benefit project to help improve the region.

Brownfield Program

In 2025, DEC marked the 22nd successful year of overseeing New York State's Brownfield Cleanup Program (BCP). The BCP encourages the voluntary cleanup of contaminated properties across the state so they can be reused and redeveloped, and helps protect public health and the environment while revitalizing neighborhoods and strengthening local economies—with a special focus on underserved communities most impacted by historical industrial pollution. During 2025, DEC accepted 64 new sites into the program and issued 43 Certificates of Completion, including 20 for affordable housing projects. For more information, visit DEC's Brownfield Cleanup Program website.

Great Lakes Cheese Response on Ischua Creek

In August 2025, Ischua Creek in Franklinville, Cattaraugus County, experienced a major fish and wildlife die-off that resulted from Great Lakes Cheese facility's operations. At Governor Hochul's direction, DEC took enforcement for the illegal discharge, resulting in an October 2025 consent order that included a $475,000 penalty, of which $150,000 is allocated to an environmental benefit project. In addition, DEC required significant operational changes at the facility, including enhanced real-time water quality monitoring and other actions overseen by DEC to ensure effective implementation.

Fifty Years of SEQR

It has been 50 years since New York State passed the landmark environmental legislation, the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) Act. This regulation applies to all State and local agencies that are directly undertaking, funding, or approving an action that requires consideration of environmental factors early in decision-making processes. Environmental factors include land, air, water, flooding, plants and animals, aesthetics, open spaces, recreation, human health, and community character, among others. SEQR provides a structure for public participation, disclosure of projects impacts, and informs decision-making. DEC maintains guidance and tools that help agencies navigate this process including *The SEQR Handbook*, standardized Environmental Assessment Form, and an online "Environmental Resource Mapper." Online SEQR workbooks also offer detailed step-by-step guides to assist municipalities in completing SEQRs for projects. A conference at Albany Law School in November celebrated 50 years of the landmark legislation, bringing together practitioners and planners from local and State governments and private practices.

Actions and Resources to Protect Communities from PFAS

DEC announced several significant actions and resources to protect, educate, and assist New York communities in addressing the ubiquitous threat of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination. DEC released a progress report detailing New York State's leadership in addressing PFAS and a new study detailing the presence of PFAS on the landscape. In addition, DEC finalized important wastewater treatment plant guidance that protects drinking water and other surface waters and has proposed new policies directing DEC's actions in PFAS investigations and sampling of biosolids products. DEC held a series of virtual meetings in early 2026 about ongoing actions and key priorities to address PFAS contamination and protect NYS communities. Stay up to date about these initiatives by visiting: dec.ny.gov/pfas.

Reclaiming Mined Land

DEC requires reclamation of every mine site once mining operations have ceased; in 2025, mine operators reclaimed over 536 acres of mined land in NYS, as required by the Mined Land Reclamation Law. Below are two interesting examples of operator-conducted reclamation at mine sites.

On August 14, 2025, DEC approved final reclamation of 6.7 acres affected by mining at the Ridge View Farm Pond Mine in the Town of Dover, Dutchess County. Due to the mine's proximity to known habitat for the New York State threatened timber rattlesnake, the mine operator reclaimed the former mine area during timber rattlesnake winter hibernation, which is November 1–March 31. The property owners enlarged the existing mine pond for aesthetics and returned the surrounding affected areas to agricultural production.

At another mine site in the Town of Shawangunk, Ulster County, DEC approved the reclamation of the last 2.5 acres of the 33-acre Stewart Farm Mine. The permittee vegetated the mining-affected areas to reestablish agricultural fields and grasslands. Previously reclaimed areas of the mine were turned into a solar array and a residential home site.

Ridge View active mining

Ridge View mine reclamation

Orphan well during plugging

Orphan well after plugging

Locating and Plugging Orphaned Gas Wells

DEC uses drone-based technology to locate old wells that were drilled and abandoned prior to the existence of DEC. Many of these old wells may release methane, brine, or oil and impact groundwater, surface water, and soils. Abandoned wells are difficult to locate as historic information is limited and the wells may be buried, lack identifying features, or may be hidden in thick vegetation. Using a magnetometer-equipped drone, DEC can survey a large area and collect data that may indicate the presence of these old wells. In 2025, DEC conducted 135 drone survey flights covering 811,588 linear feet and located 16 possible wells as indicated by magnetic anomalies picked up by magnetometers.

In 2025, DEC directed the plugging of two high-priority orphaned gas wells using federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding. Orphaned wells are wells for which DEC cannot identify a person or company responsible for plugging the well at the end of its useful life. In total, the IIJA State Initial Grant-funded projects have resulted in the plugging of 34 orphaned wells and stopped over 2,300 grams per hour of leaking methane emissions—a powerful greenhouse gas that drives climate change.

Micron New York Semiconductor Manufacturing Project

In December 2025, DEC issued nine environmental permits that helped support the start of construction for the transformative Micron New York Semiconductor Manufacturing LLC project in the Town of Clay, Onondaga County. DEC staff contributed substantially at each step of this large-scale permitting process to ensure rigorous and timely environmental reviews to protect human health and the environment. The permits issued included freshwater wetlands, endangered and threatened species, and six mitigation projects to create, restore, and enhance wetlands, in addition to a Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certificate. Permitting details and updates can be found on DEC's "Micron New York Semiconductor Manufacturing LLC" webpage.

Equity & Justice

Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

DEC's Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights rolled out a suite of initiatives that includes a robust inclusivity program for DEC employees, featuring cultural awareness events and outreach; the launch of a statewide non-discrimination team to ensure DEC public programs are fully compliant with Commissioner Policy 76, which supports Title VI of the Civil Rights Act; and the continued expansion of accessible recreation opportunities and engagement of people with disabilities. The "Accessible Recreation Destinations" mapper launched in 2024 has proven to be a huge success with more than 35,000 map views in its first year, vastly expanding DEC's reach to New Yorkers interested in accessible hiking, boating, fishing, camping, and day-use facilities. DEC offers a rapidly growing number of destinations, currently 272 sites statewide, with wheelchair-accessible outdoor recreation opportunities, including education centers, campgrounds and day-use areas, waterway access sites, and trails.

Environmental Justice Siting Law Amendments

In January 2025, DEC released draft updates to SEQR regulations to require consideration of potential and existing burdens in DACs. Additional changes include efforts to streamline SEQR reviews for certain small-scale, multifamily housing developments. These draft regulations mark a significant milestone in DEC's efforts to implement environmental and climate justice when new projects are sited.

Decreasing Operational Impacts on Disadvantaged Communities

DEC Commissioner Lefton signed Commissioner Policy 79 that outlines actions to decrease, and ultimately eliminate, the negative environmental impacts that DEC operations may have on DACs. DEC will prioritize facilities within DACs for efficiency and other environmental upgrades that will lower negative environmental impacts on these communities.

Capital Pride Parade 2025

DEC celebrates Arbor Day with a tree planting at Conscience Bay property.

Arbor Day Tree Planting at Conscience Bay

In preparation for Arbor Day, Commissioner Lefton joined Peconic Land Trust, Strong's Neck Civic Association, Three Village Civic Association, Town of Brookhaven, and the Setalcott Nation to plant dozens of native trees at Conscience Bay–Little Bay Tidal Wetland Area in Setauket, Suffolk County. The plantings complement recent improvements to the property that include a three-car parking lot to allow public access. Since 2015, DEC has worked with partners to purchase and conserve North Shore properties, adding a total of 15.52 acres to the existing 52-acre tidal wetland area.

Engaging Diverse Perspectives in Accessibility Policy Development

DEC held a series of focus group sessions in 2025 to engage the range of interested groups in the development of a policy that will guide the use of mobility devices called Other Power-Driven Mobility Devices (OPDMDs) on lands managed by DEC. OPDMDs are devices other than wheelchairs that people with mobility disabilities use for locomotion, including track mobility devices and electric bicycles, that are increasingly popular nationwide. This summer, DEC brought together a diverse group of people representing the disability community, conservation organizations, scientific institutions, and sporting groups to provide their input and perspectives regarding suitable locations for the use of different types of OPDMDs. These focus group sessions were designed to promote dialogue and understanding among the various viewpoints of interested parties and were lauded for success in meeting that objective.

Waste & Recycling

Keeping Toxic Chemicals Out of Consumer Products

In 2025, DEC added new programs to its robust portfolio aimed at keeping toxic chemicals out of consumer products and our homes. Restrictions on the sale of apparel containing intentionally added PFAS took effect in January, and a restriction on the use of replacement parts containing flame-retardant chemicals in reupholstered furniture took effect in December. In addition, DEC continued its work to implement bans on PFAS in food packaging; benzene, asbestos, and tris (1,3-dichloro-2-propyl) phosphate in children's products; and mercury in personal care and cosmetic products. Throughout the year, DEC also made progress on regulations for PFAS in apparel and mercury in cosmetic and personal care products by hosting pre-rulemaking meetings to gather valuable input from stakeholders. These actions are keeping New York State at the forefront of preventing pollution at the source through sales restrictions, which lead to better outcomes for human health and the environment.

CleanSweepNY

During a weeklong event in fall 2025, CleanSweepNY collected free of charge 340,997 pounds of pesticides and other hazardous chemicals for disposal from farmers, municipalities, businesses, schools, and other entities in Long Island and New York City. This event set a record for the amount of materials collected since the program began.

DEC established CleanSweepNY in 2002 to promote proper disposal practices of potentially harmful chemicals that may otherwise have been disposed of in landfills. Since its inception, CleanSweepNY has collected 3,539,827 pounds of materials, including 2,073,728 pounds of pesticides and 1,018 pounds of elemental mercury. DEC is planning more collection events for spring and fall 2026.

Waste Reduction, Recycling, and Household Hazardous Waste Management Funding

NYS municipalities continue to support and fund valuable recycling programs to ensure their long-term viability and reduce the amount of waste being disposed of in landfills or combusted. DEC's state assistance programs provide grants for funding municipal waste reduction, recycling coordination, and household hazardous waste management, and assist local governments in funding recycling coordinators, educational initiatives, and safe, proper disposal of hazardous materials to reduce the overall waste stream. In 2025, these programs provided more than $9 million to municipalities across NYS, including nearly $4 million for household hazardous waste collection event grants; $1.2 million for Recycling Coordination, Education, Planning, and Promotion grants; and $3.87 million in Capital Project grants.

A total of 63 million pounds of food were donated.

Hazardous Waste Management Facilities

DEC is federally delegated to implement the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) program for New York State. As a delegated agency, DEC adopts and enforces regulations, issues permits, oversees remediation activities, conducts inspections, provides technical assistance, and gathers and processes data related to hazardous waste management. DEC promotes sound waste management and helps minimize the generation of industrial hazardous wastes, which are common by-products of commerce and industry. In 2025, DEC oversaw the operation, closure, and remediation of 46 regulated facilities, reviewed approximately 936 annual reports from RCRA facilities, conducted 227 RCRA compliance inspections, issued more than 77 notices of violation, made 11 determinations of significant noncompliance, and issued five final compliance orders.

Radiation Control and Technical Assistance

DEC plays a key role in the regulation, inspection, and permitting of radioactive materials releases from manufacturing facilities, hospitals, and radiopharmacies (a.k.a., nuclear pharmacies). In 2025, DEC reviewed applications for radioactive emission permit renewals and permit modifications, conducted 10 inspections, and issued five notices of violation. In addition, DEC provides comprehensive technical support and oversight of sites with radioactive contaminants, including sites contaminated from the nation's early atomic energy program and the West Valley Demonstration Project. DEC also supports emergency services involving environmental threats from radioactive materials. DEC provided continued oversight of the decommissioning and restoration of the Indian Point nuclear power site and offered technical assistance to solid waste management facilities that detected radiation in incoming solid waste. In 2025, DEC radiation program staff recorded and responded to more than 600 instances of portal alarms being triggered at solid waste facilities to ensure communities are protected.

Decade-Long Decision to Deny Hazardous Waste Facility Permit

In October, DEC issued a decision denying the permit applications submitted by CWM Chemical Services, LLC, for a proposed hazardous waste landfill in Niagara County. After more than a decade of permit reviews, public comments, and hearings proceedings, CWM failed to demonstrate that the proposed facility was necessary, in the public's interest, or that it conformed to the State's hazardous waste siting criteria.

Air & Water

Monitoring Greenhouse Gas Emissions

DEC released draft regulations that would require reporting from certain significant greenhouse gas emissions sources to help better inform the State's efforts to reduce pollution, deliver cleaner air, and improve community resilience. Examples of types of facilities that may be required to report include electricity generation, stationary combustion, landfills, waste-to-energy, natural gas compressor stations, wastewater treatment, and agriculture infrastructure. By understanding emissions data, New York State can develop effective strategies that reduce harmful air pollution and direct critical investments where they are most needed.

Investments to Improve Water Quality

In May 2025, as part of DEC's WQIP program, Commissioner Lefton announced at least $78 million was available for projects to safeguard drinking water, reduce flood risk, improve infrastructure, and enhance resiliency. DEC's WQIP program is a competitive, statewide reimbursement grant program for municipalities and nonprofits that funds construction and implementation projects and offers tools and resources to NYS communities—essential for their ability to withstand the impacts of climate change.

Improving the Niagara River Watershed

Preventing runoff of pollutants into waterways is central to protecting New York State's water quality and habitat. In 2025, DEC partnered with Attorney General Letitia James and the Buffalo Sewer Authority to reach a landmark agreement to address water quality violations, implement a modernization plan, and upgrade infrastructure for Buffalo's wastewater management. Protecting the Niagara River's water quality is essential to preserving vital habitats and communities in Western New York.

Niagara River

Protecting Groundwater

Governor Kathy Hochul signed legislation in July 2025 to help New Yorkers upgrade to advance septic systems that will significantly reduce water pollution and announced another $30 million for the State's Septic System Replacement Fund. The new law allows eligible property owners to be reimbursed 50% of eligible installation costs up to $10,000, or 75%, for costs up to $25,000. In addition, $30 million was distributed to counties to aid residents who need to upgrade or replace failing septic systems.

Drinking Water Source Protection

Earlier this year, DEC and The Nature Conservancy partnered to protect a record 768 acres in the Black River Valley between the Tug Hill Plateau and the Adirondack Park. Through the State's WQIP program, the Hinckley Reservoir, a drinking water source for more than 125,000 New Yorkers, will remain protected with lasting impacts to ensure healthy water quality and natural habitats.

Upholding Water Quality Protections

In May 2025, DEC, New York City, and NYC contractor IPC Resiliency Partners worked to resolve environmental violations associated with a coastal resiliency project along the East River waterfront, resulting in $531,558 in civil penalties.

Village of Hoosick Falls New Water Supply

Construction of a new permanent water transmission line for the Village of Hoosick Falls was completed in March 2025. The new water supply distribution system is funded through a $45-million agreement between New York State, Honeywell, and Saint-Gobain. In addition to the municipal water supply line, DEC installed and maintains hundreds of point-of-entry treatment systems for individual homes in the surrounding area. DEC worked closely with the community and local leaders to evaluate water supply options and ensure the new groundwater source is fully compatible with the water treatment plant's capabilities. This critical upgrade marks a landmark moment in the State's commitment to address water contamination and emerging contaminants.

Cybersecurity Regulations

In June 2025, DEC proposed cybersecurity regulations for wastewater treatment facilities to safeguard New York State's critical wastewater infrastructure from cyberattack so New Yorkers will continue to have access to safe and reliable wastewater services. Additionally, the proposed rulemaking requires certified wastewater operators to obtain cybersecurity training and mandates cybersecurity incident reporting for State Pollution Discharge Elimination System (SPDES) permittees.

Strengthening Protections of Saline Waters

In October 2025, DEC adopted water quality standards and classification regulations to strengthen water pollution protections in the majority of waterways in and around New York City, ensuring future generations will inherit cleaner, safer waterways for swimming, boating, and fishing. These regulatory updates amended key water quality classifications under State environmental regulations, including upgrading the classification of 30 waterbody segments, significantly expanding the areas that are protected for swimming and fishing; strengthening water quality standards for saline waters, ensuring better protection for recreational and ecological uses year-round; and providing enhanced protections for historically impacted areas such as the Harlem River, Gowanus Canal, New York Harbor, and Long Island Sound.

Water Withdrawal Regulatory Updates

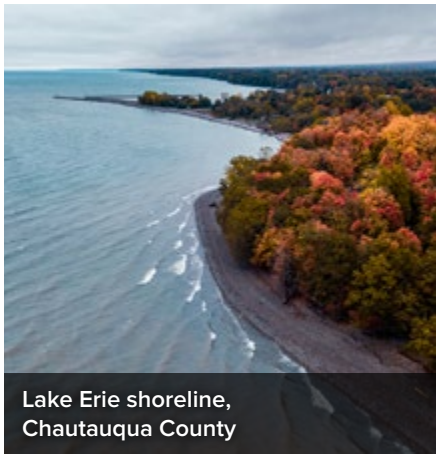
On November 14, 2025, DEC's updates to New York State water withdrawal regulations that implement Environmental Conservation Law Article 15, Title 15, and the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River Basin Compact became effective. These regulations were last revised in 2013 and 1986, respectively. The revisions improve regulation clarity, consistency, and efficiency based on valuable input from the regulated community, industry groups, DEC staff, and other stakeholders.

New York's Great Lakes Report

New York's Great Lakes Report 2022–2024 is now available. **Advancing shared goals for NYS lands and waters requires partnerships with many State and federal agencies, Indigenous Nations, universities, nonprofit organizations, and local communities. This report highlights Great Lakes Program and partner efforts from 2022 through 2024.**

Improving Great Lakes Resilience

Through the State's Resiliency and Economic Development Initiative, DEC announced the start of construction of a nearly $13 million wastewater collection and treatment facilities improvement project awarded to the Town of Kendall, Orleans County. This upgrade will help protect water quality, reduce pollution risks, safeguard public health, and strengthen community resilience against flooding.



Lake Erie shoreline, Chautauqua County

Great Lakes Basin Small Grants Program Awardees

DEC and New York Sea Grant awarded $199,696 in small grants for five Great Lakes basin projects. The initiatives support local community plans to restore water quality, protect ecosystems, and strengthen community resilience and stewardship. These selected projects support measurable progress toward the priority goals of the *Great Lakes Action Agenda 2023* for New York's Great Lakes watershed. One awardee, Genesee County Parks, will use the funding to support an initiative called Healthy Headwaters: Empowering Youth to Restore Riparian Habitat in the Upper Black Creek Watershed. New York's Great Lakes Basin Small Grants program has awarded more than $2 million in small grants to date for a combined total of 66 projects since the program's inception in 2015.

Public Lands

Open Space Conservation

In the 2025 State of the State address, Governor Hochul prioritized creating and protecting parks and green spaces to ensure more people can enjoy time outdoors. In November, Governor Hochul and Attorney General James announced a landmark agreement to expedite permanent protection of natural resources in NYS. The agreement modernizes and streamlines the review process to facilitate and expedite open space projects that preserve water quality, protect wildlife habitat and diverse ecosystems, promote working lands and support rural economies, increase climate mitigation and resiliency, and expand recreation and public access opportunities across the state. Working closely with nonprofit partners, DEC continues to support this effort by purchasing lands and conservation easements. These actions contribute to New York's 30x30 Initiative, which aims to conserve 30% of State lands and waters by 2030. Examples of DEC land acquisitions and conservation easements in 2025 include:

- **3,387+ Acres Along Spruce Creek in Herkimer County**: DEC acquired forests, several miles of Spruce Creek, and nearly 900 acres of wetlands in the towns of Salisbury and Norway in Herkimer County. The parcel, purchased from the OSI, will be managed for forest products, expanded recreational access, protection of critical drinking water sources, and enhancement of ecosystem resilience.
- **5,848-Acre Church Pond Tract, St. Lawrence County**: Located just west of the Carry Falls Reservoir, this conservation easement in the Town of Colton adjoins an existing forest preserve and conservation easement in the Adirondack Park, providing improved public access to Church Pond and the North Branch of the Grass River. This new connection will also allow for a snowmobile connector trail, motorized access, and parking, while providing for sustainable forest management.
- **900-Acre Addition to Sundown Wild Forest**: The largest addition to the Catskill Park since 2011, this parcel is located in the Town of Olive in Ulster County and will help ensure the long-term protection of drinking water in the Ashokan Reservoir watershed. More information on this acquisition, also referenced in this report's Bond Act section, can be found on Governor Hochul's website here.

Lake Erie shoreline, Chautauqua County

- **100 Acres at Broad Cove, Suffolk County**: This conservation easement is located in the Peconic Estuary and within the legislative boundaries of the Peconic Pinelands Maritime Reserve. The property was at high risk for shoreline development and will now protect fish and wildlife habitat; coastal water quality; and natural, cultural, and historic resources—including 83 acres of upland coastal pine-oak forests and grasslands, tidal wetlands and creeks, and over 8,000 feet of frontage on Terry Creek and Broad Cove in Flanders Bay. Preserving this coastline advances protection of the Peconic Estuary. The wetlands, creeks, and shorelines provide important marine and waterfowl habitat, supporting commercial fisheries, water-based tourism, and recreation that includes ADA-accessible trails, hunting, and fishing opportunities.
- **1,600+ acres of conservation easements in Clinton and Essex counties** were acquired from the OSI. Approximately 1,414 acres were acquired through a conservation easement held by OSI in Clinton County. A 210-acre conservation easement in the Tahawus Core Historic Area (historically known as the villages of Tahawus and Adirondac or McIntyre) in the Town of Newcomb, Essex County, was also purchased on OSI lands. Protecting this area improves public access to one of the busiest trailheads leading into the southern High Peaks Wilderness Area.
- **Phase 3 of the Pouch Camp Easement in Richmond County, Staten Island**, is complete, enabling the entire 121 acres of the William H. Pouch Scout Camp to be covered under a conservation easement. Protection of the remaining 25 acres, known as Camporee Field, permanently protects the landscape in the heart of Staten Island's Greenbelt.

Camp Pouch

North American beaver (*Castor canadensis*)

Owasco Flats Wildlife Management Area

DEC, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, worked together to double the size of the Owasco Flats Wildlife Management Area (WMA) by protecting an additional 92 acres in the Town of Moravia, Cayuga County. The property offers public access to 5,000 feet of Owasco Inlet shoreline, offering fishing opportunities for native trout, pike, and bass. The Owasco Inlet is also the largest tributary to Owasco Lake, making it an important source of water and nutrients that flow into the lake, which is a drinking water source for more than 40,000 people. Visitors to this WMA may observe a range of birds including Mallard and Wood Ducks, Canada and Snow Geese, Bald Eagles, and songbirds. Owasco Flats provides nesting and foraging habitats for raptors, white-tailed deer, and wetland-dependent species like muskrat, mink, and beaver.

A Plan to Improve Safety on Long Path Trail

The Long Path, a 358-mile-long trail that extends from New York City northward through the Catskills, is one of New York State's premier long-distance hiking trails. In May, DEC unveiled plans to improve pedestrian safety on a section in the Vernooy Kill Falls region of Ulster County. Upgrades to the Long Path will redirect approximately 8 miles of trail away from public roads to enhance hiker safety. The trail relocation project also improves access to a range of recreational opportunities by linking to existing trails in the Sundown Wild Forest, Vernooy Kill State Forest, and a popular mountain bike system at Lippman Park in the Town of Wawarsing. The new Long Path trail segment will showcase the wild beauty of the Catskill Park while enhancing the overall experience and safety of visitors.

Protecting Rare Pine Barrens on Long Island

DEC announced the permanent protection of more than 43 acres of globally rare pine barrens in Brentwood in the Town of Islip, Suffolk County. The property contains species typical of a pine barrens ecosystem, including a pine-oak-heath forest, a scrub-oak and blueberry understory, and a herbaceous layer of ferns, sedge, and wintergreen—all in the sandy soils of glacial outwash plains and moraines. DEC acquired the conservation easement from the Sisters of St. Joseph and will jointly manage the property for groundwater and habitat protection. There will also be a designated parking area for visitors in an area historically underserved by parkland, offering access to existing trails for walking, hiking, birdwatching, nature study, and quiet enjoyment.

2025 DEC State Land Acquisitions

In 2025, DEC completed a total of 30 real estate closings comprising 14,700 acres, composed of 6,400 acres of property acquisitions and 8,300 acres in conservation easements.

Region	Property Name	Access Size
6	Church Pond Tract Conservation Easement	5,848.0 acres
6	Spruce Creek State Forest	3,398.0 acres
5	Chazy Resource Management Conservation Easement	1,413.8 acres
3	Sundown Wild Forest	912.3 acres
4	Mount Lebanon–Shaker Swamp	703.0 acres
9	East Otto State Forest	689.7 acres
4	Capital District Wildlife Management Area	357.7 acres
4	Binnenkill Wildlife Management Area	237.3 acres
8	Big Flats Wildlife Management Area	209.5 acres
5	Tahawus–Core Historic Area Conservation Easement	205.0 acres
7	Robinson Hollow State Forest	139.3 acres
9	Rock City State Forest	116.1 acres
1	Broad Cove	100.0 acres
4	Cowee State Forest	99.3 acres
8	Bare Hill Unique Area	93.3 acres
6	Buckton State Forest	53.8 acres
6	Lesser Wilderness State Forest	50.0 acres
9	Coyle Hill State Forest	46.7 acres
1	Sisters of St. Joseph Conservation Easement	43.0 acres
6	Brasher State Forest	29.8 acres
2	Pouch Camp Conservation Easement	25.6 acres
5	High Peaks Wilderness	4.7 acres
4	Addition to Stamford Office Complex	4.1 acres
1	Lyman's Marsh Tidal Wetlands Area	1.0 acres
1	Conscience Bay–Little Bay State Tidal Wetlands Area	0.7 acres
1	Rocky Point Natural Resources Management Area	0.5 acres
7	Nine Mile Creek Public Fishing Rights	0.7 acres with 3.6 miles of public fishing rights
9	Cohocton River Public Fishing Rights	0.2 acres with 0.4 miles of public fishing rights
9	Fenton Brook Public Fishing Rights	0.4 miles of public fishing rights
7	Oquaga Creek Public Fishing Rights	0.2 miles of public fishing rights

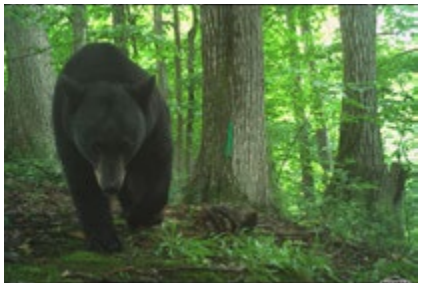
Growing Pharsalia Woods State Forest

DEC acquired 190 acres in the Pharsalia Woods State Forest, Chenango County, conserving the entire Round Pond wetland complex and growing the forest to 9,469 total protected acres. This area provides vital habitat for several rare plants and an array of resident and migratory bird species, including waterfowl, raptors, and songbirds. In addition to bolstering conservation efforts, the property offers year-round recreational opportunities, including hiking, biking, fishing, hunting, trapping, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, and skiing. The Camp Pharsalia demolition and site restoration project, located at the former NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision site, includes the removal of all aboveground facilities as well as any belowground facilities. Following demolition and remediation, the site will be graded and restored to native grasses and/or replanted to forest.

Fish & Wildlife

Snapshot NY

Announced this summer, DEC, along with the New York Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Cornell University, launched Snapshot NY, a statewide citizen science program that allows the public to participate in wildlife monitoring through the deployment of trail cameras. The project will help improve the way DEC monitors and manages more than a dozen wildlife species over time by collecting critical data to track wildlife populations. This will help DEC continue to make informed decisions for wildlife conservation and management strategies. To date, there are nearly 800 volunteers, over 1,500 trail cameras, and more than 3.3 million photos submitted of bears, moose, deer, foxes, bobcats, fishers, and many more.



HuntFishNY Events Connect New Yorkers to Nature

DEC developed a new online resource for both new hunters and organizations offering mentored hunting opportunities and a registration platform for "HuntFishNY events" (advanced skills workshops). This tool connects novices with experienced hunters and anglers who will help them develop the skills needed to be safe and successful when afield. In 2024, 61 mentored hunts registered through DEC's hunting events webpage, including 51 sponsored pheasant hunts coordinated by DEC's Reynolds Game Farm. In 2025, 77 mentored hunts registered through the DEC portal, including 61 pheasant hunts.

Building Public Archery Ranges

Participation in archery, either target shooting or bowhunting, is a proven technique for getting people outdoors. Among several DEC programs to get more people into the sport of archery, DEC has begun constructing publicly accessible archery ranges across the state. Currently, 10 ranges are planned, with the first ranges to be completed in 2026 at Black Creek Marsh WMA in Albany County and at Tinsley Park in the Town of Nelson in Madison County.

E-Tags for Deer, Bear, and Turkey Hunting

Hunters in NYS can now choose to use DEC's HuntFishNY mobile app for their licenses and tags for deer, bear, or turkey as an alternative to paper licenses and tags. In October 2025, DEC adopted several changes that streamline and improve the purchasing and reporting experiences of users. When using e-tags, hunters no longer need to attach a physical tag to their harvested deer, bear, or turkey while they remain in possession of the carcass, including in their vehicle and at their home. Paper licenses and tags remain an option for deer, bear, and turkey hunters, but they must now report their harvest within 48 hours.

Trek for Trout

In May 2025, a collaborative one-day Trek for Trout event took place where DEC and volunteers from numerous partner organizations and colleges hiked to add new signage at remote Adirondack brook trout ponds as a part of a citizen science effort to collect angler data and support baitfish regulations. A pond-specific QR code on each sign directs anglers to a survey form for collecting key data that will inform management of each unique fishery. A total of 266 miles were trekked, with 120 volunteers posting signs at 149 ponds within 11 counties and 40 towns. Since the event, DEC staff posted 74 more signs, bringing the total to 223. To date, 307 survey responses have been received, with more to come during the upcoming spring fishing season.

Trout Stocking at Six Mile Waterworks

DEC Commissioner Lefton kicked off the fishing season in April by stocking 2,100 catchable-size rainbow trout in Rensselaer Lake at Albany's Six Mile Waterworks. Attendees assisted DEC with stocking fish, and partners from the Albany Pine Bush and Capital District Fly Fishers were on hand for fishing and family-friendly activities. The lake provides an excellent opportunity for spring trout fishing.

Protecting Native Fish Species

In 2025, the New York list of endangered, threatened, and special concern species was updated for the first time since 1999 to reflect the latest status of rare fish and wildlife populations across the state. Freshwater fish, such as round whitefish, bluebreast darter, and eastern sand darter, received an improved status due to recovering populations resulting from effective conservation measures. Conversely, burbot, lake whitefish, several minnow species, and longnose suckers received added protections due to declining populations from invasive species and habitat loss. Conservation strategies for imperiled species are being developed to aid in their recovery.

Six Mile Waterworks fish stocking

First Year of Black Bass Fishing Tournament Permitting Complete

The new DEC Black Bass Fishing Tournament Permit process marked its first full fishing season in 2025. A total of 806 permit applications were approved, with most tournaments occurring on Lake Champlain, Onondaga Lake, Cayuga Lake, and Oneida Lake. DEC is currently developing an annual report that will be shared with the public to highlight results from the Black Bass Fishing Tournament Permitting and Reporting System.

Crossbows Allowed for Bowhunting

Beginning in fall 2025, hunters across NYS were allowed to use a crossbow in the same seasons, places, and manner as a vertical bow for hunting deer and bear. Until now, New York State law limited the locations, times, and types of crossbows that could be used. Changes signed into law by Governor Hochul make hunting with a crossbow more accessible and provide a more effective tool for deer management. Expanding the use of crossbows in areas previously restricted to only vertical bows creates more opportunities for many hunters to hunt closer to home. To hunt deer and bear with a crossbow during the bowhunting seasons, a hunter must have a hunting license and bowhunting privileges.

Habitat Rehabilitation and Site Access Improvements

Funds collected through the sale of the Habitat & Access Stamp help support various projects related to habitat conservation and improved outdoor recreational opportunities. The 2025 projects listed below are ongoing or were completed by DEC in collaboration with numerous partners to restore popular fishing, hunting, and wildlife-viewing access sites and enhance critical fish and wildlife habitat:

- **Mongaup Creek, Sullivan County**: This project removed and replaced deteriorating log cribbing with a secure rock retention wall and in-stream grade controls to reinforce and stabilize the stream, serving to improve fishing access and habitat for native brook trout.
- **Schenevus Creek, Otsego County**: Boulder clusters and in-stream root wads were installed in the stream to create refuge for wild trout during the summer months. This will protect fish seeking cold groundwater to avoid harmful exposure to high water temperatures.
- **Schroon River, Warren County**: A popular canoe and kayak launch site and parking area was greatly improved by creating a new hand launch area and stabilizing the site through erosion control techniques and stormwater drainage upgrades.
- **Naples Creek, Ontario County**: To create pool habitat for native rainbow trout populations in Canandaigua Lake during spawning runs, five degraded pool diggers were removed and replaced, and three new log weirs were added along the Public Fishing Rights portion of the stream.
- **Wiscoy Creek, Wyoming County**: At the Boy Scout Camp fishing access site, the degraded stream bank was repaired and stabilized using large stones for erosion control, and three engineered log clusters were added to enhance adult wild brown trout habitat.
- **Linus Pond, Suffolk County**: Improve habitat at Peconic Headwaters Natural Resources Management Area, Otis Pike Preserve, by removing invasive plants (phragmites).
- **New York City Department of Environmental Protection (NYCDEP) Public Land, Greene County**: Improve public access to the NYCDEP Greene County Route 2 pheasant stocking site by upgrading the parking area, trails, and signage.
- **George Allen Hollow, Rensselaer County**: Improve wildlife habitat at George Allen Hollow by burning and replanting about 5 acres of native grasses.
- **Cole Hollow Creek, Schoharie County**: Improve public access to the Long Path in Burnt-Rossman Hills State Forest by replacing a bridge over Cole Hollow Creek.
- **Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, St. Lawrence County**: Improve public access by replacing a boardwalk at Indian Creek Nature Center.
- **Genegantslet Creek, Chenango County**: Improve trout habitat by removing pool digger material and installing in-stream grade control structures.
- **Conesus Inlet WMA, Livingston County**: Replace three boardwalks and viewing platforms.
- **Lake Shore Marshes WMA, Wayne County**: Improve public access by constructing a parking area and boardwalk to extend Whistlewood Trail.
- **Canadaway Creek WMA, Chautauqua County**: Improve public access by improving the parking area, trail, and signage.

Self-Sustaining Lake Trout Populations in Lake Champlain

Lake Champlain lake trout populations have officially been reestablished thanks to a long-term cooperative effort by DEC, Vermont Fish and Wildlife, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to manage environmental impacts and invasive sea lamprey. As a result of self-sustaining populations, the 75-year-long effort to augment native lake trout with hatchery-reared fish has concluded. The health of lake trout will continue to be monitored, and a plan will be established for reinstituting stocking if wild lake trout numbers appear to be declining. Get more details on this success story.

Adirondack Moose Health Survey

In collaboration with New York Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Cornell University and SUNY ESF, DEC completed a multiyear assessment of moose parasite risk in the Adirondacks. Moose were outfitted with GPS tracking collars to monitor survival for a two-year period. DEC captured 25 adult moose between 2015 and 2017 and an additional 34 juvenile moose between 2022 and 2023. DEC collected data on moose mortality and completed necropsies to determine the potential causes of death. Survey results found that juvenile moose had lower survivorship than adult moose and had a greater likelihood of death associated with liver fluke parasites. These results suggest that the increasing abundance of white-tailed deer, the parasite's primary host, may be influencing the prevalence of liver flukes in the Adirondacks. Researchers also determined the current population trajectory suggests that the Adirondack moose population continues to steadily increase and will likely continue to grow slowly.

Lake Sturgeon Reintroduced into Cattaraugus Creek

In an effort to reestablish an adult lake sturgeon spawning population in Cattaraugus Creek, DEC, the Seneca Nation of Indians, and the USFWS joined forces to stock 1,000 juvenile lake sturgeon into the creek for the first time. These fish will leave the creek and head to Lake Erie for several years before making a return to the creek to spawn. Lake Erie historically supported at least 19 spawning populations of lake sturgeon, including in Cattaraugus Creek, but today only two wild spawning populations remain. Efforts to restore lake sturgeon across the state are described in the *New York State Lake Sturgeon Recovery Plan 2018–2024*, which is currently being updated to reflect Cattaraugus Creek restoration efforts and future conservation management.

New Management Plan for Adirondack Brook Trout Ponds and Trek for Trout

The brook trout is New York's state fish and an iconic symbol of the Adirondacks, and brook trout ponds are an important component of the area's natural heritage—providing unique angling opportunities in often secluded locations. Retaining this resource is imperative to preserving the state's Adirondack natural heritage and a key element of the ecosystem. Unfortunately, up to 90% of brook trout pond habitat has been lost due to forest development, acid rain, and incompatible and detrimental fish species introductions.

To address this, DEC recently released the *Adirondack Brook Trout Pond Management Plan*, developed after an intense review of what fisheries managers have learned over the past four decades, public feedback, and input from a focus group of sportspersons and conservation organizations. The new plan identifies the current risks, challenges, and opportunities that will guide the State's management actions at Adirondack brook trout ponds for the next 15 years.

More information about Adirondack brook trout pond management can be found on DEC's website.

Hudson River Shortnose Sturgeon

New research estimates the Hudson River's shortnose sturgeon population to be nearly 70,000, potentially the largest of any sturgeon population worldwide. Once abundant along the Atlantic Coast, shortnose sturgeon declined due to overfishing and habitat loss, leading to their endangered status under the 1973 Endangered Species Act. Initial population surveys in the 1980s estimated there were around 6,000 adults, but a 1990s' study indicated a substantial increase, suggesting a growing population.

In 2021, a collaborative research project led by DEC and partners, including the U.S. Geological Survey and Cornell University, updated population estimates using acoustic telemetry and side-scan sonar. This technology allowed researchers to track tagged sturgeon and create detailed images of river habitats. The study also identified that more than 40% of the population congregates in an area with significant human activity, such as commercial shipping, highlighting sturgeon vulnerability to local disturbances. The findings emphasize the resilience and ongoing challenges faced by this ancient species.

New York State-record brook trout

New State Fish Records Established

Through the New York State Angler Achievement Awards Program, four new state records were set in 2025:

- **Fallfish**: 4 lbs. 1 oz. from the St. Lawrence River, St. Lawrence County, on May 13, 2025. Caught by Alex Pidhorodeckyj.
- **Channel Catfish**: 37 lbs. 9 oz. from Black River Bay (Lake Ontario), Jefferson County, on May 3, 2025. Caught by Dylan Kampnich.
- **Brook Trout**: 6 lbs. 3 oz. from the St. Regis Canoe Area, Franklin County, on July 5, 2025. Caught by Benjamin Furguson.
- **White Perch**: 3 lbs. 4 oz. from the Cross River Reservoir, Westchester County, on November 23, 2025. Caught by Yongfeng Tian.

Fishing on New York's Great Lakes: Another Banner Year

Lake Erie anglers experienced an excellent year of fishing. Walleye fishing in 2025 was the best year on record, with an average of 11 walleye caught per boat trip and two in five walleye trips reaching their six-fish limit. The yellow perch catch rate (35 perch/trip) and average size for harvested yellow perch (11.5 inches) in NYS remains the highest in Lake Erie.

On Lake Ontario, salmon and trout fishing was outstanding in 2025, with catch rates averaging 4.8 fish per boat trip, ranking the sixth highest on record and about 7% above the recent 10-year average. Anglers experienced record catches of Atlantic salmon, averaging 300% higher than normal, and coho salmon catch rates were the second highest on record.

Groundbreaking Habitat Restoration Method Developed on Lake Erie

In an effort to clean and restore spawning habitat impacted by invasive zebra and quagga mussels, a groundbreaking high-velocity jetting method was developed and tested at two experimental sites on Brocton Shoal, a historical lake trout spawning site in Lake Erie. Over the past 30 years, invasive mussels have rendered the habitat unsuitable for spawning by filling in the available rock crevices used for lake trout egg incubation. After comprehensive planning, the high-velocity jetting method successfully removed silt, sand, and the invasive mussels covering the rock piles and crevices. In the coming years, the sites will be monitored for lake trout spawning success and invasive species recolonization. Learn more about this groundbreaking habitat enhancement project.

New York State Wildlife Action Plan Revision

The *New York State Wildlife Action Plan* (*SWAP*) was revised and submitted to FWS for approval. *SWAP*s must be updated every 10 years and are required for states to receive federal State Wildlife Grant funding. DEC receives about $2.5 million annually from this program, which is the primary funding source supporting DEC's work on amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates, and rare fish.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife worked with other DEC divisions, conservation partners, and the public to identify rare or declining Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), describe threats impacting their populations, and conservation actions that are likely to benefit SGCN and their habitats. The *SWAP* includes 570 SGCN, with 230 considered High Priority SGCN. For the first time, plants are included in the *SWAP*, with 269 plants identified as SGCN.

The *SWAP* will be used by DEC and partners to guide conservation work over the next decade, through projects that monitor, manage, and restore species and habitats. For more information, visit DEC's "*SWAP*" webpage.

Outdoor Recreation

"Get Offline, Get Outside" Challenge

This past fall, Governor Hochul announced DEC's new challenge encouraging New York's young people to have fun outdoors. The "Get Offline, Get Outside Challenge" is part of the State's many efforts to help address the youth mental health crisis by encouraging teens to engage in interesting and exciting outdoor activities. The challenge includes 50 activities, such as fishing, birding, starting a nature journal, identifying five tree species, going for a bike ride, and learning about hunting safety. The challenge is designed to be completed by anyone and encourages youth ages 12–18 to try new activities and visit new parks, forests, wildlife management areas, and other outdoor locations in their communities and across the state.

"Get Offline, Get Outside" Challenge at Reinstein Woods Fall Festival

2025 National Archery in the Schools Tournament

DEC hosted the 15th annual New York National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP®) State Tournament on March 14. More than 550 students across 39 schools participated in the tournament at the New York State Fairgrounds in Syracuse. Students competed in one of three divisions: high school (grades 9–12), middle school (grades 6–8), and elementary school (grades 4–5). Awards were given out in each division and students in the top 10 qualify to represent New York State at the National NASP® Tournament in Louisville, Kentucky.

NASP® 2025

Expansion of the New York State Birding Trail

In 2025, DEC added 30 new locations to the New York State Birding Trail, bringing the total to more than 400 sites statewide. The new additions provide enjoyable, affordable opportunities for all New Yorkers, regardless of age, ability, identity, or background, to have access to locations and experience the joy of watching birds. DEC coordinates the New York State Birding Trail in collaboration with the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (State Parks) and the many partners who own and manage specific sites on the trail.

Electric Wheelchair Program at Great Camp Santanoni

DEC announced the continuation of its free electric wheelchair program at Great Camp Santanoni in the Town of Newcomb, Essex County, and expanded dates to reserve an electric wheelchair to improve access for persons with disabilities. In partnership with Adirondack Architectural Heritage, the 2025 program offered reservations to qualified members of the public at no charge on certain weekends and holiday Mondays. Camp Santanoni Historic Area includes one of the oldest Adirondack great camps and is a unique historic treasure and a popular destination accessible only by foot, mountain bike, horse, or electric wheelchair.

Love Our New York Lands Stewardship Days

New Yorkers across the state gave back to the public lands they love at a series of stewardship events. Nearly 700 people completed service projects at their local parks and recreational areas during I Love My Park Day, Adirondack and Catskill Park Day, and Wildlife Day. The events were part of the Love Our New York Lands stewardship campaign—a series of themed public stewardship events that encourage year-round volunteerism, promoting outdoor recreation and the need to safeguard these valuable natural resources.

Public Safety

Forest Rangers Battle Western Wildfires

New York State regularly deploys highly trained wildland firefighters to help battle fires in other states and nations as part of interstate and international firefighting compacts. These deployments also offer the opportunity to support and learn from the emergencies and bring back invaluable knowledge and experience to New York.

Ten DEC Forest Rangers traveled to California in January 2025 to help contain the wildfires that devasted parts of the Los Angeles region. The fires started on January 7, fueled by Santa Ana winds. Two 10-person crews, led by Forest Rangers and comprised of Forest Rangers and other DEC employees, were deployed on 14-day assignments—one crew to both Colorado and Idaho. In September 2025, 16 wildland firefighters and support staff, led by DEC Forest Rangers, returned to NYS after two-week assignments in Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming. The firefighters assisted on the Red Canyon fire in Wyoming, the Beulah fire in Utah, the Cottonwood Peak fire in Nevada, and the area of Helena, Montana. Rangers with higher-level qualifications were also sent to assist on the Deer Creek fire in Utah, the South Rim fire in Colorado, the Camp House fire in Minnesota, the Pomas fire and the Rattlesnake fire in Washington, and as initial attack for fires in the High Cascades Ranger District in Oregon.

DEC staff fight wildfires in Idaho.

11th Annual Finger Lakes Regional Youth Deer Hunt

During Columbus Day and Indigenous Peoples Day weekend in October, Environmental Conservation Police Officers (ECOs) assisted young hunters at the 11th Annual Finger Lakes Regional Youth Deer Hunt at Deer Haven Park, LLC, a former munition storage facility turned ecological park in the Town of Romulus, Seneca County. Twenty-seven youth hunters, joined by their parents and mentors, attended the event after a mandatory pre-hunt dinner and instructional shooting range session where the young hunters reviewed firearm safety and hunter ethics. Firearms instructors from DEC's Division of Law Enforcement led the training and were assisted by volunteer hunter education instructors and DEC Wildlife employees. During the hunt, the youth deer hunters, parents, and mentors scattered in different locations throughout the 4,000-acre property—resulting in 25 youth hunters each harvesting a deer over the course of the weekend. Thanks to a generous landowner, ECOs, DEC employees, volunteers, and sponsors, this year's event was an overwhelming success.

Drought Conditions Increase Fire Risks

Throughout 2025, New York State experienced below-normal precipitation, and dry conditions were especially extreme during the hot summer months. In September, New York State announced a drought warning in 12 counties and a drought watch statewide, except for New York City and Westchester County. The drought conditions, combined with lack of precipitation, high temperatures, and low relative humidity, also resulted in several ground fires that Rangers responded to. Many of these fires were the result of unattended or improperly extinguished campfires.

Starting on October 2, Governor Hochul implemented a temporary statewide burn ban due to increased fire risk because of continued dry conditions. The ban remained in effect for 14 days until October 15 and prohibited outdoor fires, including campfires and open fires used for cooking, except for contained fire pits and campfires less than 3 feet in height and 4 feet in width or diameter. New Yorkers were urged to protect water resources and conserve water whenever possible.

From August 1 to October 31, Forest Rangers responded to 101 wildfires. On October 5, the largest of these fires started in the Silver Lake Wilderness in Hamilton County. It consumed 37 acres before it was declared out on October 14.

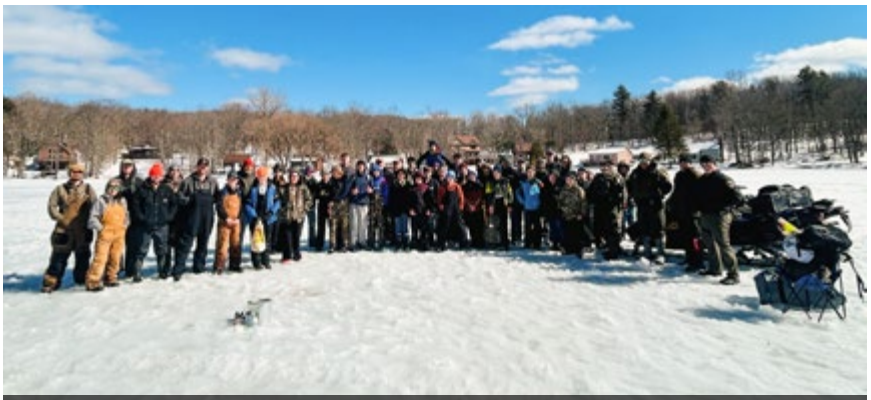
Mission Moose Rescue

DEC Forest Rangers and ECOs rescued a moose in January 2025 that broke through the ice and fell into the icy waters of Lake Abanakee in Hamilton County. Dressed in cold-water rescue gear, ECOs and Rangers ventured out onto the ice and used a chainsaw to cut a pathway for the moose to free itself. After successfully guiding the moose to shallow water near shore, it made several attempts to get up before standing on stable ice and walking off into the woods.

Moose rescue

Ice Fishing Outreach

In February 2025, ECOs participated in a youth ice fishing clinic at Summit Lake in Schoharie County with assistance from Schoharie County Sheriffs, DEC Bureau of Fisheries employees, and the Schoharie County Youth Bureau. More than 40 6th–12th graders from the Schoharie County Central School District attended the fishing clinic. The day began with a presentation on New York State's ice fishing regulations, species found in Summit Lake, ice safety, and an overview of the equipment needed before setting out. Students then grabbed their gear, loaded buses, and met with DEC employees down by the lake. Staff provided jig rods, bait, tip-ups, and advice to first-time anglers and anyone else who needed it. The New York Conservation Officers Association assisted with providing lunch to the participants, and many students successfully caught their first-ever fish.



ECOs participate in a youth ice fishing clinic in Schoharie County.

Outreach & Education

DEC Summer Camps

The Environmental Education Program operated all four Summer Camps in 2025 for the first time since 2019. There were 1,108 campers and 93 youth attending through donated camperships, an increase of 29% and 342%, respectively, over 2024. One third of DEC campers elected to take a free New York State hunter, bowhunter, or trapper education course during their session.

Summer camp

Life Release Outreach Pilot Program

DEC's Region 2 Bureau of Fisheries conducted specialized outreach to address life release events within New York City. Life release, also known as mercy release or prayer release, is when people purchase live, captive animals and then release them into the environment. The animals released are often non-native and, at times, invasive. Region 2 educated communities on the environmental impacts of the practice. Through a collaboration between Language Access Services and the Aquatic Invasive Species Program, a translator was onboarded to help staff effectively communicate with constituents. Staff facilitated two rounds of dialogues that yielded insight about attitudes and perspectives on life release and provided community members with educational flyers that explained why life release is ecologically unsound, along with alternatives for promoting positive animal welfare.

DEC Does What?! Award-Winning Podcast

The Association for Conservation Information awarded *DEC Does What?!* third place in the "Audio Program or Podcast" category for the quality, creativity, and effectiveness of the podcast. The award was specifically given for Episode 13, "Sturgeon Thunder," which examines DEC's efforts to inspire the next generation of scientists and environmentalists through programs like A Day in the Life of the Hudson and Harbor, the Hudson River Eel Project, and The Institute Discovering Environmental Scientists.

Throughout 2025, *DEC Does What?!* released 13 episodes and had over 10,400 downloads, an increase of 15.6% from 2024.

Spreading Awareness at the Invasive Species Expo

The 2025 New York State Invasive Species Expo, held in September at the Saratoga Spa State Park, Saratoga County, brought natural resource professionals and practitioners together with the public to discuss invasive species and the impact they have on New York's environment and communities. DEC hosted the event with NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, and State Parks. Through collaboration, education, and action, DEC is working alongside valuable partners to safeguard New York's ecosystems and build healthier, more resilient communities.

Invasive Species Expo

Onondaga Lake Visitor Center

Onondaga Lake Visitor Center

DEC received ownership of the Onondaga Lake Visitor Center as part of the Honeywell International, Inc., cleanup efforts in Syracuse, Onondaga County. The center was originally opened in 2012 by Honeywell to share information with the public about the cleanup of Onondaga Lake. Renovations at the facility, operated by DEC's Bureau of Environmental Education, will establish and support a community visitor center to teach about the region's historical connections to First Nations and their use of traditional knowledge, the industrial legacy that led to significant contamination of Onondaga Lake, the cleanup and current research helping to restore the lake, and the future of the watershed and communities that depend on it.

Stay Connected to DEC

DEC continues to engage with people who care about protecting and conserving our natural resources and environment across numerous platforms.

SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS					
FACEBOOK	INSTAGRAM	X	LINKEDIN	THREADS	BLUESKY
233,000 (+32,000)	124,000 (+18,000)	44,200 (+1,000)	26,000 (+3,500)	21,000 (+3,000)	965 (Launched in 2024)

DEC.ny.gov: Nearly 30 million views in 2025- an average of 81,972 daily page views

DEC Delivers: Approximately 1,856 e-newsletters sent to 949,374 subscribers

Language Services: 735 over-the-phone interpretation conversations totaling over 7,000 minutes of interpretation services provided

A total of 230 videos produced, including 170 videos and 60 shorts

A total of 244 completed projects, including reports, kiosks, digital graphics, and promotional materials

The Nature of Nature: Biodiversity in the Hudson Valley

The Nature of Nature: Biodiversity in the Hudson Valley documentary celebrates the living fabric of the region's unique landscape. From high-elevation forests to the globally rare tidal marshes along the Hudson River estuary, the 30-minute documentary film is guided by biologists whose work is centered in the Hudson Valley and captures the beautiful, the complex, the familiar, and the unknown plants and animals in the region. Shot locally in significant biodiversity areas in 2024 and 2025, the film is a collaboration between the Hudson River Estuary Program's Conservation and Land Use team and the award-winning Flicker Filmworks. Watch *The Nature of Nature* on DEC's YouTube channel.

Advancing the DEC Mission

Composting at Campgrounds

DEC launched a composting program allowing campers to compost their food scraps at three campgrounds in the Adirondacks: Fish Creek, Meadowbrook, and Wilmington Notch. The program allowed campers to reduce waste sent to landfills and for the composted food scraps to fertilize the flowers and pollinator gardens that they'll see next season.

New Employee Training Day in Buffalo

Throughout 2025, DEC staff in the Buffalo office developed and conducted six training days for new staff. Each day was comprised of eight training courses that were designed to support staff acclimation to the office and address questions that frequently arise during the first couple of years of employment. Collectively, 76 employees participated.

Quieter and Greener Operations

DEC continued to lead by example by investing in electric equipment for its operations to reduce air pollution and provide quieter experiences for visitors to its facilities. Purchases included DEC's first electric utility vehicle, more riding mowers and lawn equipment, a wood splitter, a mobile sawmill, solar-powered light towers, and solar generators to power field equipment in remote settings, instead of relying on noisy and polluting gasoline generators.

Driving Sustainable Purchasing

New local governments joined the Green Purchasing Community program, which provides a free and user-friendly program for local governments to purchase more sustainable products. The program leads to healthier facilities and less waste for communities that participate. Overall, there are now 17 local governments participating, representing $582.2 million invested annually on greener products.

Growing Team DEC

In 2025, DEC's Division of Human Resources successfully onboarded 248 new staff while also promoting another 248 existing staff members to higher level positions throughout the state. Staff worked with the Department of Civil Service and received approval to reclassify all our existing Fish Culturist 1s to Fish Culturist 2s in one of several ongoing efforts to assist the hatcheries with maintaining continuity of operations.

> **DEC attended 261 recruitment events statewide.**

On June 11, 2025, the NYS Civil Service Commission conferred competitive class status to employees hired under the NY HELPS Program between June 26, 2024, and June 11, 2025. There were 474 DEC employees appointed under the NY HELPS Program during this period and all were changed to competitive class status and granted competitive mobility and promotion rights based on this appointment.

Training to Boost Staff Development

- Coached 49 DEC employees in the Being a Leader Coaching Program
- Launched the seventh DEC-wide Mentoring Program and 172 staff participated
- Hosted 100 training classes in the 2025 calendar year with over 2,100 staff completions

DEC's First Mini Forest

DEC planted its first-ever Miyawaki, or mini forest, at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Delmar, in the Town of Bethlehem, Albany County. The forest, planted by volunteers, includes over 550 trees and 2,000 plants in a 2,000-square-foot space. This planting method can lead to a fully mature forest three times faster than traditional planting methods. Data are being collected from the forest to quantify the resiliency benefits of mini forests for communities.

Amanda Lefton, Commissioner

Michelle Marchello, Executive Deputy Commissioner

Adriana Espinoza, Chief of Staff; Deputy Commissioner, Equity and Justice

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Marline Agnew, Director, Division of Human Resources

Megan Allard, Director, Office of Internal Investigations

Mark Cadrette, Director, Office of Employee Relations

Katherine Calogero, Director, Division of Fiscal Management

Richard Clarkson, Director, Division of Materials Management

VACANT, Director, Office of Federal Affairs

Scott Crisafulli, Director, Office of General Counsel

Laura DiBetta, Director, Office of Outdoor Recreation

Catherine Dickert, Director, Division of Mineral Resources

Shannon Dougherty, Director, Great Lakes Program

Harold Evans, Director, Division of Communication, Education, and Engagement

Andrew Fischler, Director, Office of Internal Audit

Patrick Foster, Deputy Commissioner, Sustainable Development Response

Karen Gaidasz, Director, Division of Environmental Permits

Martin Gary, Director, Division of Marine Resources

Lauren Gomes Atwood, Director, Office of Strategic Planning/Performance Management

Andy Guglielmi, Director, Division of Environmental Remediation

Logan Hardy, Director, Office of Legislative Affairs

Alanah Keddell-Tuckey, Director, Office of Environmental Justice

Margaret LaFarr, Director, Division of Air Resources

Carol Lamb-Lafay, Director, Division of Water

Maureen Leddy, Director, Office of Climate Change

Corey Lehman, Director, Emergency Management Unit

Jacqueline Lendrum, Director, Division of Fish and Wildlife

Anthony Luisi, Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel

Carey Merrill, Deputy Commissioner, Risk and Innovation

Andy Niles, Director, Division of Operations

Katharine (Katie) Petronis, Deputy Commissioner Natural Resources

Karen Przyklek, Director, Division of Law Enforcement

Suzanna Randall, Chief Resiliency Officer

Peter Reuben, Director, Office of Indian Nation Affairs

Mark Sanza, Deputy Commissioner, Hearings and Mediation Services

Melinda Seiden, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Public Protection and Emergency, Director, Division of Forest Protection

Sanjay Seth, Deputy Commissioner, Climate Change, Air Resources, and Energy

Alexander J. Smith, Deputy Commissioner, Water Resources

Jeffrey Stefanko, Deputy Commissioner, Administration

Michele Stefanucci, Chief Administrative Law Judge, Office of Hearings and Mediation Services

Gaurav Upadhyay, Director, Office of Information Technology & Innovation

Cecilia Walsh, Director, Office of Media Relations

Fiona Watt, Director, Division of Lands and Forests

Tonia Wheeler, Chief Diversity Officer, Director, Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights

Brendan Woodruff, Director, Office of Sustainability

Maureen Wren, Deputy Commissioner, Public Affairs

Cathy Haas, Regional Director, Region 1

Ryan McGarry, Assistant Regional Director, Region 1

Antonia Pereira, Regional Director, Region 2

Stephen Watts, Assistant Regional Director, Region 2

Kelly Turturro, Regional Director, Region 3

John Petronella, Assistant Regional Director, Region 3

Sean Mahar, Regional Director, Region 4

Kevin Frazier, Assistant Regional Director, Region 4

Joe Zalewski, Regional Director, Region 5

Randall Young, Regional Director, Region 6

Dereth Glance, Regional Director, Region 7

Stephanie Webb, Assistant Regional Director, Region 7

Tim Walsh, Regional Director, Region 8

Bernette Schilling, Assistant Regional Director, Region 8

Julie Barrett-O'Neil, Regional Director, Region 9

Chad Staniszewski, Assistant Regional Director, Region 9

Wildlife Day 2025 at Seneca Meadows Wetlands

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