Tropical Storms | Utica Tramps | Record Fish

NEW YORK STATE

Conservationist

AUGUST 2012

Wildlife Watching

Dear Reader,

Just a year ago, two powerful storms bore down ominously on the eastern United States. Separated by only days, their one-two punch did enormous damage across the Northeast. In New York, rainfalls totaling a foot or more caused historic flooding throughout the eastern half of the state, from the lower Hudson Valley to Lake Champlain and from Binghamton to Tupper Lake.

As you will read in this issue, DEC's Forest Rangers and Environmental Conservation Officers rescued stranded residents and delivered emergency supplies. Our dam safety inspectors and spill response teams worked 24/7 to monitor threats to public safety and the environment. The National Guard quickly mobilized into the hardest hit areas, assisting with emergencies and beginning the cleanup of damaged properties. Department of Transportation employees repaired numerous roads and bridges on a fast track to restore basic routes between communities and even housed those displaced by flooding.

Countless volunteers, from firefighters to scout troops, from community and religious groups to next-door neighbors, with support from businesses large and small, pumped water from basements, shoveled mud from homes, removed debris and cleaned personal belongings.

As these two storms fade into the past, upstate communities continue to rebuild. Driving through these storm-ravaged areas, you can hear the sounds of hammers and saws. Houses are being restored. Each day, businesses reopen their doors and daily lives return to normal.

With waterways once again contained within their banks, we can now look at rivers from a different perspective. In this issue, we take our readers to the mighty Hudson, showing how our Hudson River Estuary Program is using the river as a classroom to connect school children with their watershed, learning and laughing at the same time.

We also take you to Montezuma Wildlife Refuge—beginning a series that will highlight the tremendous wildlife watching opportunities available right here in New York. You'll go "tramping" through the woods with one of our state's oldest hiking groups, read a "fish tale" about catching a state record fish, and even learn a few tips on how you might do the same.

Collectively, these experiences and adventures remind me of the importance of outdoor recreation to our lives, and to our livelihoods. From Long Island to the Finger Lakes to the Adirondack High Peaks, New York's nature-based tourism industry is another example that New York is indeed open for business.

Visit **www.dec.ny.gov** or **www.parks.ny.gov** to find a public campground, park, trail or beach where you can experience New York's world-class outdoors. You'll experience the best nature has to offer and discover local communities that welcome visitors with world-class hospitality.

Enjoy New York!
Commissioner Joe Martens

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Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of New York State

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Chris Bowser


See page 20

August 2012 Volume 67, Number 1

Contents

What Is It?

See pg. 31

Departments

Front cover: Wood duck by Eric Dresser | **Back cover:** Northern leopard frog by Wayne Jones

Mother Nature's Fury

— how Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee affected New Yorkers

By Ellen Bidell

The summer of 2011 was a great time for Heidi and Ryan von Linden. They had a baby and were renovating their home in the Village of Schoharie. As a young couple that had been living with Ryan's parents, they bought everything they needed for their house and their new baby.

Then one day the rain started. The von Lindens didn't think much of it—maybe the basement would get some water in it, but they had a sump pump to keep things under control. Sometime later, Ryan's father phoned and told them he received an automated call suggesting that people near the Schoharie Creek evacuate. Heidi and Ryan gathered what belongings they could and threw them into their vehicles. They made it over the bridge out of town just as the roads were being closed. For the next day, they waited in darkness at Ryan's parents' house (several power outages were affecting the region). The next evening, they were allowed to return to the village and saw the unimaginable devastation. Five feet of water had invaded their home, leaving appliances askew, and furniture toppled and covered with muddy silt. Virtually everything they left behind was destroyed, just weeks after they had moved in.

Over the next several weeks, Ryan cleaned the mud and ruined belongings from his home, with a lot of help from coworkers at the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). They gutted the house, eliminated the mold, and dried the place with space heaters. Almost a year later, their plan is to raise

John Bulmer

the little ranch house nine feet, but they can't do anything until they receive their grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. So for now they mow the lawn and pay the mortgage and wait for the day when they will be in their new house again.

The von Lindens aren't alone. Nearly 80 percent of the homes in the village were damaged by the storm. Life is slowly returning to normal—a few children ride their bikes through once quaint neighborhoods, farm stands are open, and the sounds of hammers and circular saws pervade the village.

But stately Victorian homes that once had picturesque views of the creek are now boarded up. Many "For Sale: As Is" signs can be seen throughout the village: a sad reminder of the devastation.

Meanwhile in the Town of Hunter, Jessica Tompkins was sleeping in because she had been at a wedding the night before, which lasted into the early morning hours. She awoke when water started lapping over the sides of her bed. She immediately called her father to pick her up and grabbed whatever belongings she could. Her father arrived just before her road was closed—any later and she would have been trapped. Jessica works in DEC's Division of Operations and had spent the previous days assisting in the evacuations of DEC campgrounds.

She hasn't been back to her rental cottage since the storm, except to meet with inspectors. Most of her furniture and possessions were unsalvageable. She now lives in a home owned by family in a nearby town. When Jessica returned to work, she spent weeks processing refunds for thousands of campers who were forced to evacuate. Despite her personal tragedy, she made sure that everyone got their money back, even if it was only a few dollars.

"I was amazed at how quickly my entire community, and the surrounding communities banded together to offer help to neighbors, friends or complete strangers. I was also very humbled by the help offered to me by my coworkers here at DEC. Because of their generosity I was able to make a donation to the people of Prattsville in the name of the employees of DEC," Jessica said.

When ECO Scott Daly woke up on the morning of August 28 and turned on The Weather Channel, he was shocked to learn that Hurricane Irene had changed paths during the night and hit upstate New York instead of Long Island. He started packing life preservers, ropes and waders on an all-terrain-vehicle and a boat, and headed to Greene County to meet fellow ECO, Anthony Glorioso. By 8:30 a.m., he heard other ECOs on the radio calling for help—too many rescues and not enough people.

ECOs Daly and Glorioso responded to Maple Crest, where an older couple was in their mobile home as the flood waters rose. The husband went to the garage to retrieve his cell phone and in the short time he was gone, the home was swept away. The last time he saw his wife, she was in the doorway of the home as it was ripped off its foundation and carried down the creek.

courtesy of the von Linden family

Flood waters toppled appliances and covered things in mud at the von Linden's home in Schoharie.

The ECOs headed downstream to the house. Along with several troopers and firefighters, they fastened a rope over the raging water and secured a ladder along the rope so that ECO Glorioso could climb across the creek to reach the building. Everything inside was gone.

"I have been a volunteer firefighter since I was 16, so I am familiar with tragedy. But this was the first time I had to tell someone their loved one was gone," ECO Daly remembers. "I knew scenes like this one were happening all over the area. It was at that point that I realized this wasn't a tragedy; it was an all-encompassing disaster that will affect the victims for the rest of their lives."

Reports started coming in over the radio for rescuers to report to Prattsville (a small town in the Catskills). "They were calling it "ground zero" of the damage. When we got close, we realized that we couldn't make it. Bridges and roads were washed out, trees were still coming down. In some areas, roads were blocked by debris, including homes," ECO Daly said.

They went back to Windham to help out there. "It was so frustrating for us that we couldn't get to where the help was needed the most. After the water receded and we cleared enough debris, we were able to get into Prattsville on ATVs. Local farmers came together and cleared the roads with tractors so that emergency vehicles could get in," he explained.

What they found was complete destruction. The village looked like a war zone—there wasn't a home or business that wasn't damaged or destroyed. An entire mobile home park was washed away. The water had reached so high that a propane tank was hanging from the telephone wires.

"It was a lot worse than anyone expected. But thanks to the quick thinking of Prattsville Fire Department, everyone got out safely. They went house to house to get everyone out," ECO Daly recalled.

ECO Scott Daly

Rescuers ran a rope and ladder accross the raging creek to check a house.

"In a nearby town that was cut off from help, we found a woman who had been eating grass because all her food had washed away. Her husband was wearing garbage bags on his feet. Everyone was stretched so thin from working 16-hour days. But finding those people gave us the strength to go on and recharged our batteries," ECO Daly said.

During the following two weeks, ECO Daly and his colleagues focused on helping people live until they could get somewhere safe. They brought food and water to communities on their ATVs from a makeshift distribution center set up at the Schoharie County Fairgrounds. Later, they shifted their focus to environmental clean up, going from house to

ECO Nathan Doig

DEC ECOs transporting flood victims to dry ground.

Forest Ranger Joan Oldroyd

Forest rangers used airboats to rescue flood victims.

house looking for petroleum spills, sewage and leaking propane tanks.

Ten days later, while ECOs and DEC forest rangers were still working to clean up from Hurricane Irene, Tropical Storm Lee hit. The flood waters of the Susquehanna River didn't crash through the Southern Tier in a raging torrent like its predecessor. There was still destruction, but few houses were swept away.

Forest Ranger Rick Schroeder was operating an airboat in Appalachin, west of Binghamton. "Residents were separated from higher ground by the flooding. They were without power, surrounded by contaminated water and had no access to food," Ranger Schroeder recalled.

"We lowered victims off their roofs down into the airboat without a ladder," he said. About 50 people were rescued by airboat, some from the second story of their homes, and relocated to a shelter at the fire department.

"It was emotional seeing all the families that had their homes destroyed by the flooding. Some residents who lost their own homes were still helping their neighbors and the elderly overcome the damage," he said.

ECO Scott Daly

While flood waters caused by Lee were relatively calm, damage to homes and businesses was still devastating.

A Slow Recovery: Prattsville

Walking through Prattsville in late spring, I couldn't help but notice the red "X" marks on most of the houses on the main street; a sign used to indicate they were searched for victims during the floods. One vacant lot has only a foundation; its house washed three lots away and is now perched precariously behind another home. Outside a home with a condemned sign on it, the smell of mold permeates the air along the sidewalk. There are only a few people on the street: a man raking stones around a crumbling foundation, and a group of volunteers meeting at the Prattsville Methodist Church. Looking around town, it feels like the days immediately after the storm, even though it's been nine months since the flood waters devastated the town. It feels…forgotten.

But there are many volunteers that won't let that happen. They travel from around the state; this weekend it was volunteers from the Westbury United Methodist Church in Long Island and Holmes United Methodist Church in Dutchess County. They wear matching T-shirts and carry brown bag lunches as they head into the church, happy to be giving up their time on a beautiful late spring weekend to help strangers.

"Each week, volunteers arrive to help move dirt and rocks and plant trees, and our activity is not slowing down. When the residents see us out here helping, it lifts their spirits. The job is too overwhelming for them to face alone," the

Reverend Lorraine DeArmitt from Westbury United Methodist explains.

A Heroic Response

DEC ECOs and forest rangers were among the front-line responders during both storms. However, many other state employees and citizens provided invaluable assistance and support during the emergency. DEC operated full command centers in several areas of the state. DEC meteorologists worked with the National Weather Service to determine the storms' impacts on different areas. Based on their recommendations, Operations staff evacuated hundreds of campers from DEC campgrounds before the severe weather began.

Engineers from DEC's Division of Water began checking dams to make sure they were structurally sound. As the water rose, spill responders from DEC worked with contractors to contain numerous petroleum and oil spills.

Many residents of the Catskills found themselves without shelter in the hours and days following the storms. The staff at Belleayre Mountain Ski Center remained around the clock, providing shelter and food to nearly 170 evacuees. They cleared mud and debris from area roads and prepared food for volunteers and emergency workers.

In the days after the storms, DEC staff removed debris from streets and streams, pumped raw sewage out of basements and educated residents about safely removing hazardous waste.

Department of Transportation employees cleared 6,400 miles of roads and repaired an additional 1,300 miles of roads, 30 bridges, thousands of feet of streams and numerous culverts. These dedicated employees completed the majority of this work in less than two weeks. The Army Corps of Engineers was deployed in Irene's aftermath to open roads and provide emergency response;

ECO Scott Daly

ECO Anthony Glorioso

After flood waters receded, ECOs checked damaged homes (top pages 6&7) for environmental issues (such as leaking petroleum tanks) and delivered supplies (bottom) to victims.

at times their numerous military vehicles made the area appear to be the center of a war zone...in some ways, it was.

These and many other dedicated public servants worked tirelessly by responding to both storms. Volunteers from all walks of life donated time, money, food and supplies. Thousands of New Yorkers have shoveled, cleaned, served food, and dropped off clothing and furniture. They came to the aid of strangers through their churches, civic organizations, youth groups and neighbors. Governor Cuomo's Labor

ECO Brian Canzeri

DEC photo

Assisted by local fire departments, Forest Ranger Lt. Stephen Preston used an inflatable kayak to rescue three stranded canoers (one at a time) from flood waters on the Sacandaga River.

for Your Neighbor initiative brought 2,000 volunteers into the storm-ravaged Schoharie Valley in the crucial days immediately following Hurricane Irene.

While the storms only lasted a few days, the recovery and revitalization efforts continue one year later. Victims of both storms still face great challenges. But with the help and support of neighbors, friends and strangers, all the residents will be able to return to a normal life—even if it is very different from before.

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

Ellen Bidell

Helpers from United Methodist Church

Helping Hands

It's not too late to help out. Here is a sampling of organizations that continue to provide volunteers and assistance.

Schoharie Recovery
www.schoharierecovery.org
518-390-8828

SALT – Schoharie Area Long Term Recovery
www.saltrecovery.org
518-702-5017

NY Annual Conference – The United Methodist Church
http://nyac.com/pages/detail/1786
914-615-2226

Catholic Charities of Broome County
http://catholiccharitiesbc.org

Rebuild 123
http://rebuild123.org

PERFECT STORMS

—how Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee slammed NY

By Steve Stanne

On August 15, 2011, a patch of showers and thunderstorms crossed the North African coast, and headed west over the Atlantic Ocean. The unsettled weather accompanied a tropical wave, an area of low pressure spawned in the searing heat of the Sahara Desert.

Four thousand miles away, forecasters at the National Hurricane Center in Miami took note: Nearly 85% of the Atlantic's major hurricanes develop from such tropical waves. As the system neared the Lesser Antilles on August 20, the center dispatched an Air Force Reserve aircraft for reconnaissance. Based on its report, the hurricane center christened the squalling newborn Tropical Storm Irene.

What mother's milk is to a growing baby, water vapor from warm ocean water is to tropical cyclones. Drawn upward in vast amounts, the moisture cools and condenses, a process that produces drenching downpours and releases heat energy that powers strong winds.

Irene was fed well as it passed over the Leeward Islands and into the Caribbean Sea. The hurricane center foresaw a growth spurt, a prediction realized by Monday, August 22, when Irene became the first hurricane of the 2011 Atlantic season. In discussing the storm's future, a center forecaster opined that "It would not surprise me if this cyclone became a major hurricane at some time during its lifetime…"

Above: Satellite image of Hurricane Irene just 28 minutes before landfall in New York City.

Also keeping an eye on Irene were staff in DEC's Division of Air Resources. Its main mission is improvement and maintenance of air quality, but the division also provides daily information on potential weather hazards to the State Office of Emergency Management (OEM). Division meteorologists started paying close attention to Irene on Tuesday, when the track forecast was highly uncertain; they could only report that the storm posed a significant threat.

Two days later, various track-predicting models began to agree, and the center posted a hurricane watch from the Virginia/North Carolina border northward to Sandy Hook, New Jersey. New York Governor Andrew M. Cuomo had already ordered OEM to be ready for Irene; now he declared a state of emergency. Preparations went into high gear on Friday as forecasters elevated the watch to a warning.

Tropical storm conditions were expected to reach Long Island early Sunday morning with hurricane-force winds by noon. Scientists predicted a storm surge of 4 to 8 feet, with destructive waves pounding the coast. DEC meteorologists were especially concerned about the 6 to 12 inches of rain predicted to fall on already saturated soils, warning that it could cause widespread flooding, including life-threatening flash floods.

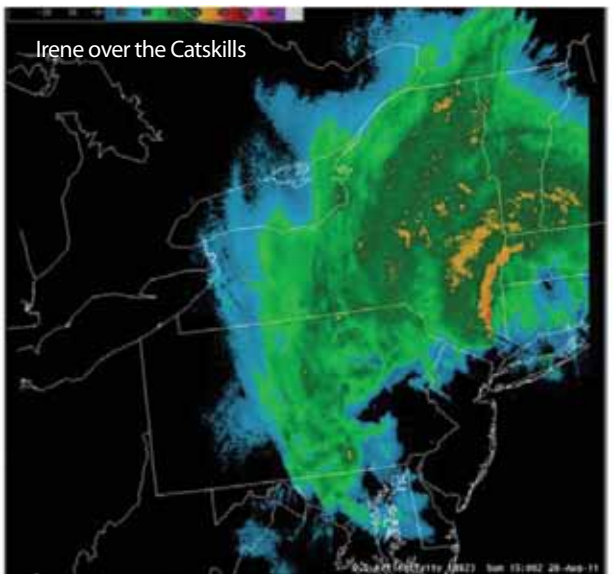
After the dire warnings, it seemed that New York City had dodged a bullet when Irene moved on... Upstate New York was not so lucky.

Given New York City's coastal location, low-lying (and in some cases, subterranean) infrastructure, dense population, and media megaphone, storm preparations there received plenty of attention. Officials ordered about 370,000 residents of flood hazard areas to evacuate. The Metropolitan Transit Authority shut down subways, buses and commuter railroads at midday Saturday. Broadway theaters cancelled their Saturday evening and Sunday shows.

With the Great White Way dark, drama moved to a larger stage. Irene played its leading role to the hilt, taking a direct shot at the city. The cyclone's center came ashore over Coney Island at 9:00 a.m.

James Clayton

New York City's subways shut down as Irene approached.



Radar imagery courtesy of National Weather Service

The yellow and red areas in these radar images show Irene's heaviest rainbands over the Catskills at 11:00 a.m. and over the Adirondacks and Green Mountains at 2:00 p.m. on August 28.

Sunday and continued north over Manhattan. Coinciding with high tide, storm surge added more than four feet to already higher-than-usual lunar tides. The resulting flooding caused hundreds of millions of dollars in property damage in the city and on Long Island.

At landfall, Irene weakened to a tropical storm, with winds strongest east of its center. New York City thus escaped severe wind damage; Long Island was less fortunate. The heavier winds and water-logged soils there brought down many trees, tree limbs and electrical wires; a half-million customers lost power, some for a week or more.

One group of hardy outdoor folk found a silver lining to the storm. Birders flocked to shoreline vantage points, seeking oceanic birds swept inland and north. They weren't disappointed; terns from tropical waters and petrels from the open sea flew over the Hudson River Sunday afternoon. The storm even pushed an exhausted white-tailed tropicbird from its normal range in the Florida Keys to Rensselaer County, some 1,500 miles to the north.

After the dire warnings, it seemed that New York City had dodged a bullet when Irene moved on. Life there would more or less get back to normal in a few days. Upstate New York was not so lucky.

The storm's heaviest rainbands were west of its center, and as Irene rolled north, they ran headlong into the Catskills. The heavy, moisture-laden air lifted as it passed over the mountains, intensifying condensation as it cooled. The effect was like squeezing a sopping wet sponge: 7.55" of rain fell at Whiteface Mountain in the Adirondacks; 11.48" at Tuxedo Park in the Highlands; and 13.3" at East Durham on the Catskills' northern slopes.

This was simply too much rain, in too short a time period, for the land to absorb. The results were catastrophic.

Elissa Jun

Scott Daly

Flooding from Irene destroyed many miles of railways and roads, including these tracks in Middletown and this highway.

Adam DuBrowa/FEMA

Flooding at Lock 9 of the NYS Barge Canal on the Mohawk River at Rotterdam Junction severely damaged the lock and a nearby bridge.

NRCS New York

Along many rivers in eastern New York, Irene ruined harvests, fields and farms, including this one in the Schoharie Valley.

Across the state, and in neighboring Vermont, tiny rivulets became mighty rivers of never-before-seen proportions. In dollars, losses reached hundreds of millions; the human cost was incalculable. Eight people died in the flooding. Three entire Catskill villages were rendered uninhabitable. In the Adirondacks, the Keene Valley Volunteer Firehouse was but one of many municipal buildings, homes and businesses that suffered knockout blows. Washouts closed roads and railways for months. Contributors to DEC's Hudson River Almanac reported pumpkins floating down the river; their bright orange symbolized not the joyful spirit of the harvest, but the emergency conditions on the watershed's farms, where damage to crops and land was devastating.

Where communication networks remained operational, frantic calls came into emergency responders, including DEC's environmental conservation officers and forest rangers. In just one of many such incidents, DEC officers waded through rapidly rising water at a bungalow colony in Sullivan County to carry some ten children to dry ground. Where communications were down, responders went looking for people who had been cut off, making sure they were safe and had food, drinking water and critical medicines.

...scenes of destruction...were typical of hard-hit regions. Open canyons, gravel piles and debris littered what used to be roadways, blocking vehicles.

The scenes of destruction throughout McKinley Hollow, Burnham Hollow and Oliverea Valley in Ulster County were typical of hard-hit regions. Open canyons, gravel piles and debris littered what used to be roadways, blocking vehicles. First thing Monday morning, DEC Region Three Natural Resource Supervisor Bill Rudge and his son Caleb hopped on their mountain bikes, took orders for supplies from their neighbors, and pedaled miles to the nearest emergency command station to deliver them. Prescription refills were given to police to be filled and returned to the Rudges to take back to those stranded. Bill was even deputized by the postmaster to deliver mail.

In Schoharie, DEC spill response specialists were called to the Ottman and Enders Bulk Oil Storage Terminal, where the Schoharie Creek had upended a 60,000-gallon and two 20,000-gallon tanks. As the water receded, they worked through the night with spills contractors, collecting oil to prevent further contamination.

The Belleayre Mountain Ski Center, a magnet for winter sports enthusiasts, became an evacuation center for tropical storm refugees, where DEC staff eventually accommodated 130 adults and 40 children. A homeowner on Lower Catskill Creek reported that his flooded cellar sheltered refugees of a different kind—he rescued two pumpkinseed sunfish, a white perch and a spottail shiner from his sump pump pit.

Forest Ranger Joan Oldroyd

During the flooding caused by Lee, DEC airboats rescued many people stranded in Broome County.

Elissa Jun

Elissa Jun

Above: Prattsville was one of the Catskill Mountains communities hit hardest by Irene.

Those fish were lucky. There were worries about the Hudson's 2011 class of newborn river herring and American shad, whose populations are in decline. The estuary is a nursery for these little fish until they move downriver and out to sea in late fall. In Irene's wake, massive freshwater flows swept these youngsters downstream much earlier than usual. Andy Kahnle of DEC's Hudson River Fisheries Unit wonders if they would have had the time and food needed to grow large enough to survive their first winter in the ocean. The answer? "We won't know until it's time for these fish to return to spawn years from now."

Once streams receded, biologists with DEC's Stream Biomonitoring Unit waded in to investigate the record flooding's impacts on benthic macroinvertebrates. These bottom-dwelling insects, crustaceans, and other small creatures are prime indicators of habitat quality and critical food for gamefish. Staff focused on the Upper Esopus Creek, a premier Catskill trout stream, which they had been studying closely since 2009 (see "Bioneers" in June 2010 *Conservationist*). Early findings indicate that species richness decreased on average by 60%, with up to 20 species lost from bottom communities. The dramatic loss of biodiversity, coupled with major physical alterations in the watershed, suggest that ecosystem recovery in the Upper Esopus and similar streams could take years.

Meanwhile, the tropical weather scene remained active. One system gained tropical storm status as Jose for a few days before dissipating. Another, named Hurricane Katia, stayed well offshore. And while Katia howled over the Atlantic, an area of disturbed weather in the Gulf of Mexico became Tropical Storm Lee on September 1.

Lee showed little ambition to become a hurricane. Its tropical storm status lasted only a few days, and by the time its remnants reached New York, Lee was no longer even a cyclone. But while drifting over the Gulf's warm waters, Lee accumulated a huge reservoir of water vapor.

Susan L. Shafer

In the affected region's streams, diversity among macroinvertebrates that support gamefish populations was significantly reduced by record floods.

Heading ashore, Lee dropped 10 to 15 inches of rain on Mississippi and Louisiana. Its moisture pushed north, ahead of the storm's center, and met a weather front that lifted it upward. The result repeated what happened when moisture was wrung out of Irene by condensation over New York's mountains.

From September 6 to September 8, rainfall totaled 10 to 12 inches just west of Binghamton, and exceeded 5 inches over large parts of eight counties in the region. The Susquehanna River rose to record levels, overflowing retaining walls and flooding downtown Binghamton and other communities. Ninety-five percent of the Village of Owego was under water. As with Irene, losses ran from hundreds of millions of dollars when they could be measured to uncountable sums in lives upended and dreams ruined.

Again, emergency workers braved the deluge. Forest rangers responded to calls for assistance with airboats to rescue people from swiftly rising waters in Nanticoke and Conklin. After Broome County initiated mass evacuations, one of the airboats safely rescued 62 people from flooded homes in Johnson City. Temporary repairs to roads and bridges upstate were dealt a second significant, albeit lesser, blow.

National Weather Service/Binghamton

In this radar image of the remnants of tropical storm Lee, the yellow and orange areas indicate very heavy rainfall in the Southern Tier on September 7, 2011.

As with Irene, losses [from Lee] ran from hundreds of millions of dollars when they could be measured to uncountable sums in lives upended and dreams ruined.

The collective damage from Irene and Lee precipitated much discussion on dealing with floods. DEC authorized emergency construction and repairs in Irene's wake, but as Commissioner Joe Martens noted, "Restoring streams must be done properly to ensure that lives, property and the environment are protected."

With good intentions, many local officials and residents called for deepening or straightening stream channels and armoring and raising streambanks with heavy stone. While these seem like commonsense solutions, in many cases they do little or nothing to limit future flooding impacts. In fact, they can worsen flooding and erosion by increasing a stream's velocity, and transfer the problems downstream.

Maintaining connections between a stream and its floodplain reduces water velocity and flood height while decreasing erosion and sedimentation. According to Scott Cuppet, watershed coordinator for DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program, "Poor choices about watershed development have placed people and investments in floodplains and directly in harm's way. Although difficult, the only sure way to reduce flooding is to keep our assets out of these areas, while creating a more resilient watershed that can absorb and retain rainfall from intense storms."

Direct hits on New York by hurricanes like Irene are uncommon. More frequently, the remnants of tropical systems produce heavy rainfall and flooding, as happened with Lee. While scientific models suggest that climate change could increase the intensity or frequency of hurricanes, data so far do not show that either has happened.

However, tropical storms are not the only serious threat. Over the last half century, the frequency and intensity of extreme precipitation events have increased in the Northeast. As residents of a coastal state, New Yorkers must prepare to deal with the impacts of these events locally, regionally and statewide—by keeping development out of floodplains and by creating robust emergency response capabilities. Just as meteorologists issued watches and warnings for Irene and Lee, the storms themselves reminded us that we must prepare now for extreme weather events likely to blow our way in years to come.

Steve Stanne coordinates the education efforts of DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program through a partnership with Cornell University.

New York's Hurricanes

Since the mid-1800s, 13 hurricanes have scored direct hits on New York State. The most intense was 1938's "Long Island Express," also called the Great New England Hurricane. It killed more than 600 people in New York and New England, largely due to storm surge. Storm tide heights reached 14 to 18 feet on Long Island, while sustained winds around 100 miles per hour (a 181-mph gust was recorded near Boston) drove 30 to 50 foot waves into the coast. The damage estimate for the 1938 hurricane was $620 million. Today, that cost would be closer to $41 billion.

Nearly 80% of New York's coastal residents have never been through a storm as intense as the Long Island Express. In the last couple of decades, Hurricanes Gloria and Irene have been the strongest to make landfall in the state, but neither came close to the power of the 1938 storm. Emergency officials worry that modern tracking and forecasting technologies have made us complacent; it's worth remembering that while these techniques can predict what's coming, they are unable to lessen the blow. And intense storms will come; there is a 90% probability that during the next 50 years a hurricane as intense as 1938's will strike New York City or Long Island.

As Irene and Lee demonstrated, the intensity of a storm's winds is not the only measure of the disruption it may cause. Flooding from rainfall can be devastating; in this respect, 1972's tropical storm Agnes, whose costs totaled $702.5 million (not adjusted for inflation) in New York, probably outdid Irene. (For more information on Agnes, see the June 1997 *Conservationist*.)

Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge

Located near Syracuse in Central New York — Size: 9,153 acres
A premier watchable wildlife site

Bill Banaszewski

Wayne Jones

Where to Watch Wildlife in New York State

Editor's Note: With its amazing natural beauty and rich diversity, New York has many places to watch wildlife. To celebrate this, DEC will soon be publishing an updated and expanded guide to New York's "Watchable Wildlife" sites. The following is the first in a series of excerpts from the guide, highlighting the intriguing creatures and fascinating places waiting to be seen and explored.

This birder's paradise of mudflats, marshes, open-water wetlands, flooded and upland forests, shrubland and grassland is one of the busiest stops for migrating birds (particularly waterfowl) on the Atlantic Flyway. An estimated 1 million birds representing more than 240 species pass through Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge each year.

In addition to birds, 43 species of mammals, and more than 20 species of reptiles and amphibians call this place home. Visitors can explore Montezuma by car or on foot. Water is the refuge's dominant feature, and wetlands make up about 85 percent of its acreage. Two large diked marshes and several small ones are included within its borders. It is also rimmed by the New York State Barge Canal, the Cayuga-Seneca Barge Canal and Cayuga Lake.

Wildlife to Watch

Many visitors are fortunate to see bald eagles. Bald eagle restoration in New York State began at Montezuma in 1976, resulting in one of the state's most successful wildlife restoration efforts. Today, as many as five bald eagle nests and up to 60 eagles have been observed, many overwintering.

Ospreys (a species of special concern), red-tailed hawks, American kestrels,

Laurie Dirkx

Bill Banaszewski

northern harriers (a threatened species), eastern screech-owls and great horned owls breed on the refuge, while peregrine falcons and short-eared owls (both endangered species), rough-legged hawks, turkey vultures, and Cooper's and sharp-shinned hawks are seasonal visitors.

Waterfowl flocks in spring and fall reach epic proportions. In early spring, the number of Canada geese routinely exceeds 100,000. During peak migration, one can stand and see geese aloft in any direction; their collective honking is a veritable cacophony. In late fall, mallard numbers have approached 100,000 birds. More than 150,000 snow geese visit the area during spring migration.

Shallow pools attract an abundance of great blue herons, green herons, great egrets, black-crowned night herons, Virginia rails, soras, American and least bitterns, common moorhens, pied-billed grebes, American coots, and American bitterns.

Killdeer, spotted sandpiper, American woodcock, and common snipe are shorebird species that typically breed on the refuge, although virtually every species of shorebird that migrates through central New York has been seen here. And black terns (an endangered species) have recently returned to nest in Montezuma's wetlands.

White-tailed deer, cottontail rabbits, several kinds of bats, Virginia opossum, eastern chipmunk, woodchuck, eastern gray squirrel, red squirrel, beaver, muskrat, red and gray fox, and coyote are among the many kinds of mammals you may see. Snapping turtles are commonly seen in the warm months, as are several species of frogs. In spring, big carp often congregate along the shallow edges of the canals.

With so much to see, why not visit one of New York's premier watchable wildlife sites like Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge? You won't be disappointed. Visit **www.dec.ny.gov\outdoor\55687.html**.

Site Features

Visitors can find parking, a visitors center, restrooms, hiking, bird-watching, photographic opportunities, special waterfowl and white-tailed deer hunting seasons. Fishing is prohibited in the refuge's pools, but the refuge maintains an accessible fishing pier at May's Point, off NY-89N, as well as a boat landing/seasonal dock along the NYS Barge Canal, just north of the US Route 20 bridge, east of the refuge entrance road.

Trails: A self-guided wildlife drive takes you about 3.5 miles from the visitors center into the refuge. Five walking trails run for 5.5 miles through all of Montezuma's many wildlife habitats. Observation towers and decks offer great views and wildlife photography opportunities.

Accessibility: Accessible features include the visitors center, fishing pier, observation decks and trails.

Site Notes: Owned by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the refuge is open during daylight hours seven days a week. Please call ahead (315-568-5987) to check visitor center hours or if you intend to take the wildlife driving tour.

Directions: Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge is located off US Route 20 near Seneca Falls. Visitors can access the refuge via Exit 40 of the NYS Thruway/I-90 coming from the east, and from exit 41 of the NYS Thruway/I-90 coming from the west.

Contact Information: Call: 315-568-5987; or write to: Montezuma NWR, 3395 US Route 20 East, Seneca Falls, NY 13148; or visit: **www.fws.gov/refuge/Montezuma**

Nearby: Montezuma Audubon Center and DEC's Northern Montezuma Wildlife Management Area. See: **http://ny.audubon.org** and **www.dec.ny.gov**.

Courtesy Dan Germain

Dan Germain
Forestport, NY

FISH STORIES

catching a state-record fish

By Chris VanMaaren

Call it skill, luck, good karma, or a combination of all three, but for Dan Germain of Forestport, NY, it was the thrill of a lifetime when he landed his state-record brook trout—a whopping 22-inch, 5-pound, 8-ounce fish—from South Lake in Herkimer County on June 15th last year. While he'd been studying and fishing the lake for some time, hoping to catch a trophy fish, Dan will be the first to tell you that it takes perseverance when fishing for the big ones.

I met Dan the day he brought his fish to be verified. As a DEC regional biologist who specializes in brook trout management, I needed to confirm that the fish was indeed a brookie and not a splake (a cross between a brook trout and lake trout). So while I carefully examined the fish's digestive tract to make sure, Dan told me his story.

Dan began fishing South Lake nearly 20 years ago, just after DEC started stocking brook trout there. He knew that such a large, coldwater lake (with a surface area of nearly 500 acres and maximum depth of 60 feet) had the potential to produce some lunker fish. Living nearby gave him the ability to fish the lake often, and he eventually became efficient at catching brook trout while other anglers struggled.

During our conversation, Dan shared some of his secrets for successfully catching large fish. And while I won't pass along all his tricks, here are a few tips on how anglers might increase their chances of catching trophy fish.

Wes Winters

Julia Ketner, age 7, with her trophy chain pickerel.

Tip #1—Know Your Target Species

If you want to catch an exceptional specimen of your favorite fish, then you can't rely on common knowledge. Do some research and reconnaissance to find out as much as you can. You can start with sporting magazines, but keep in mind that a lot of what gets published is still common advice that's been given over the years.

Dan suggests you find the answers to some key questions:

➤*When does the species spawn and where do the fish congregate (stage) prior to spawning?* Typically the biggest fish of a species are the females just prior to spawning. Understanding the timing and staging areas of spawning fish will allow you to locate big females prior to when the fishing season closes to protect them during spawning.

➤*Do the larger specimens of your target species feed on something different than the main population?* Most fish, big or small, feed on whatever is most available, so know what prey species are available and when. Keep in mind, however, that a big fish may have gotten big because it feeds differently than other fish and thus has not been susceptible to the typical angling tactics.

➤*What stimulates your fish's feeding?* Some fish key to smell, others key to color and motion. Could there be something else that triggers them to feed?

➤*Is there a temperature or dissolved oxygen concentration that the fish prefers?* If so, locate and fish those areas.

James Clayton

Choosing the right lure, bait or fly may help you catch a trophy fish.

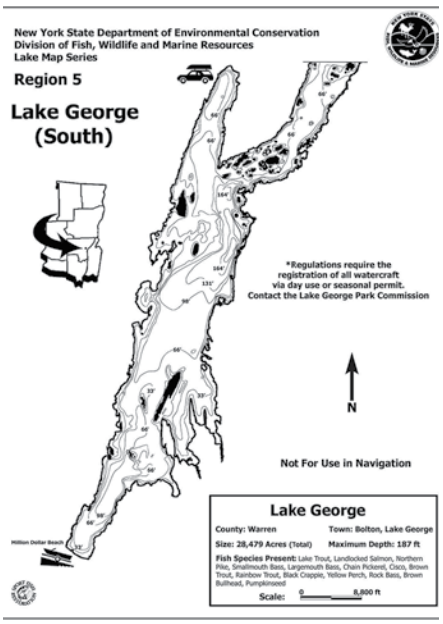
Tip #2—Pick a Water Body and Learn its Every Detail

Not all waters contain big fish, so you need to find those waters that have the right conditions to potentially grow a state record. While there are a myriad of factors to consider, there are three fundamental components a natural system needs to grow big fish: a good food supply free from excessive competition with other species; limited harvest of big fish; and basic genetics that enable a fish to live long and grow big.

For example, if brook trout are what you are looking for, then you might want to look for a large lake with a deep-water section as well as plenty of shallow warmer water to aid in developing a forage base (food supply). The deep-water section should mix seasonally (turnover) so that oxygen gets mixed throughout the depths, and the lake should have few competing fish species. Also, ideally the strain of brook trout that lives there would be one that lives longer, such as our New York

heritage strains or a Canadian strain, and there would be some control mechanism to keep them from overpopulating (e.g., regulated angling harvest, a well-measured stocking rate, or some sort of natural predation). Finally, the water needs to be a place where you can catch fish. I know this seems obvious, but fish can be nearly impossible to catch when there is an abundance of structure or when there is so much forage that it becomes very difficult to get them to take a hook. So, as you can see from this example, many waters would not have the proper conditions to contain a catchable state record.

Once you locate the water you want to fish, you should map out its habitats and determine the depths where fish congregate. Modern fish/depth-finding sonar devices can be valuable tools in identifying hot spots, but I would caution not to rely too heavily on them. Lake contour maps like those found on the DEC website (**www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/9920.html**) are great tools to mapping out prime habitat. In the end, the best method of learning a water is to do what Dan did: spend a great deal of time exploring its every corner and studying how it changes through the year.



Example of a contour map.

Courtesy Jonathan McNamara

Current record fallfish

Tip #3—Protect the Water

Once you have found a water to fish, it's important that you help keep the water system healthy. As a first step, be sure to follow the regulations listed in the *NY Fishing Regulations Guide*—season closures, size and creel limits, and prohibitions on the use of baitfish are all designed to protect the resource and optimize fishing quality. You should also protect waters by washing your boat and gear to get rid of any plant or animal hitchhikers, thereby helping to prevent the spread of invasive species. Finally, you can minimize the stress on fish you plan to release by using barbless hooks, and when possible, unhooking fish while they are still in the water.

Tip #4—Mix it Up

The final bit of advice is to mix it up and try new tactics. Perhaps try some techniques that you might normally use when fishing for a different species. This can be especially appropriate in waters where you are not targeting the largest fish species living there. For example, lake trout could be the largest fish species in a lake where you are fishing for smallmouth bass, and it would not be uncommon for the larger smallmouths to share the same water and target the same prey. By trying techniques to catch lake trout, you might catch that lunker bass you sought.

So next time you're out fishing, try some of Dan's tips. You may just hook a big fish. And if you are lucky enough to land that lunker, be sure to enter it into DEC's Angler Achievement Awards Program, because you never know, it just might be a state record.

To find out more about the Angler Achievement Awards Program, check out DEC's website at **www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7727.html**.

Chris VanMaaren is a senior aquatic biologist in DEC's Watertown office.

Editor's note: Just recently, William Altman caught a new state-record brook trout, surpassing Dan Germain's record by 6 ounces. Altman caught the 5-pound, 14-ounce brookie in the West Canada Wilderness Area in Hamilton County on May 5th. It's the seventh time in eight years that a new state-record brookie has been caught.

On Patrol

Carl Heilman II

Real stories from Conservation Officers and Forest Rangers in the field

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

"Dumbsters" Choose Wrong Place—Oswego County

ECOs Shawn Dussault, William Burnell and Matt Dorrett investigated a situation involving two couches, a recliner and assorted trash that had been dumped onto ECO Dorrett's property. As they searched through the furniture and trash, they found a cell phone that had fallen deep inside one of the couches. The battery was dead, so they went to the nearest AT&T store a few miles away. With the help of store employees, they were able to retrieve a few names and numbers from the phone. One number was for a woman who lived a short distance from ECO Dorrett, so the officers drove to her house. After a brief interview, two family members confessed to dumping the furniture and trash. When they learned whose property they had dumped it on, the look on their faces would have given them away even if they hadn't confessed. The men were ticketed for unlawful disposal of solid waste and ordered to clean up the mess.

Lost Hikers—Essex County

On a spring day, five visitors from Florida left a Schroon Lake inn at 10 a.m. and traveled to the Upper Works Trailhead to hike into the High Peaks. When they had not returned by 11 p.m., staff at the inn called Essex County 911. As two forest rangers prepared to search for the hikers, a State Police officer reported having found their vehicle in the trailhead parking lot. The rangers searched area trails throughout the rainy night to no avail. The next morning, six additional rangers joined the search; two entered the High Peaks Wilderness from the north. At 10:05 a.m., they found the group near Calamity Brook. The hikers were wet and cold but otherwise healthy. After rehydrating and warming them, the forest rangers escorted the group back to their vehicle. (Note: Know your abilities and the area you plan to hike. Always carry a map and compass, and know how to use them. In addition, carry a flashlight or headlamp at all times.)

Dangerous "Pet"—Kings County

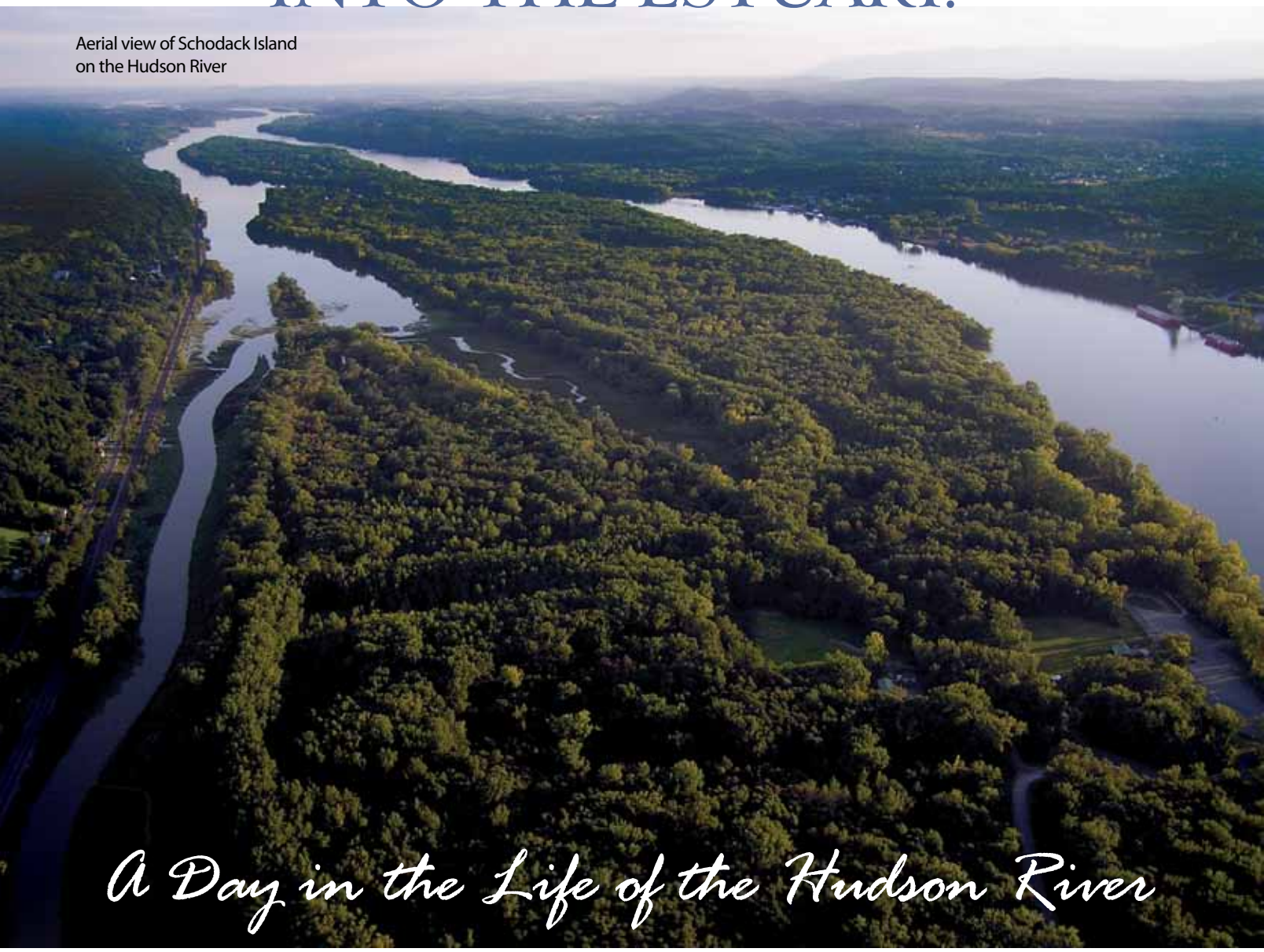
Lt. Matthew Lochner and ECO Matthew Baker responded to a call from the New York City Police Department about an unusual and potentially dangerous pet. NYPD officers had been serving an arrest warrant in Brooklyn, when one of them climbed onto a back porch and heard hissing. He thought the sound was coming from an air conditioner until he saw a five-foot alligator (larger than the one pictured above) just below his feet. ECOs removed the "pet" and issued a ticket to its owner for unlawful possession of a regulated species.

ASK the ECO

Q: I have seen anglers use a setup called an "umbrella" or "Alabama" rig. I was wondering whether these setups are legal to fish in New York. Is there a hook limit on a single line?

A: In New York State, there is a limit to the number of hook points and baits/lures that can be used per line. In general, umbrella and Alabama rigs are legal as long as they have a maximum total of 15 hook points (in any combination) and there are no more than 5 baits or lures (with hooks) per line. There is no limit to the number of lures, flashers, spinners or other devices used to attract fish as long as they do not have hooks attached. This regulation can be found in the *New York State Fishing Regulations Guide* under the definition of "angling."

OUT OF THE CLASSROOM, INTO THE ESTUARY:



Aerial view of Schodack Island on the Hudson River

A Day in the Life of the Hudson River

By Chris Bowser

Photos courtesy of the Hudson River Estuary Program

It all begins on Thursday, October 4th, 2012.

That day, at 60 sites on the Hudson River Estuary, from the Federal Dam in Troy to the Verrazano Narrows Bridge in New York City some 150 miles downstream, you can find a diverse mix of students, teachers, volunteers and environmental educators armed with clipboards, seine nets, thermometers, water quality test kits and—most important—unbridled excitement for learning.

"It" is the Hudson River Estuary Program's (HREP) tenth annual "Day in the Life of the Hudson River," a one-day blitz of river study that last year brought more than 3,400 students and teachers out of the classroom and into the river…some for their first time, and often with the help of environmental educator partners. After a day of catching fish, testing the water's salinity and dissolved oxygen content, and describing the river in both scientific and aesthetic terms, teachers submit their classes' data to the HREP to be posted online for all to see and use.

The event was conceived by HREP's Steve Stanne back in 2003. "The idea was to join schools and environmental educators, in a coordinated look at the whole estuary," Stanne

Students participating in Day in the Life of the Hudson River have fun collecting samples, while gaining a greater appreciation for the river's importance in our lives.

reflects. "By looking at their local piece of the river and comparing it to others, they would begin to understand the whole ecosystem."

In that first year, students visited 13 sites, and Steve was able to personally visit each one. Nowadays, two dozen DEC educators and scientists visit three or four sites each to collect samples, answer questions, and reinforce the interconnectivity of the entire estuary. "Not just the river towns, but the watershed as well," says Steve. "When you paste all the sites together, you get a real snapshot of the whole system on that one day."

Each year exposes a new set of young citizen scientists to the wonders of the Hudson, illustrated by the following two events conducted three years apart.

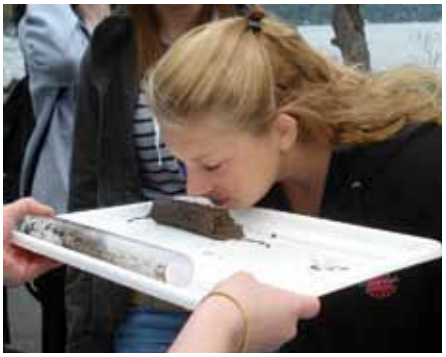
Day in the Life 2011, October 18: The students of Ossining High School arrive at their community riverfront park and immediately start dividing into teams, assembling equipment, and figuring out who will do what. Teacher Bridget Bauman matches their energy by shuttling between groups and pointing kids in the right direction. She says all the work is worth it. "This day makes the students' connection to the river more tangible. We do a whole unit on the Hudson…right here is where classroom lectures become reality." One of her students comes waddling out of the river in giant rubber waders three sizes too big, holding a six-foot length of PVC pipe with a red valve at one end. "I got it!" he smiles, and proudly shows off a ten-inch cylinder of river bottom sediment—a core sample he and his colleagues can examine.

To help support Bauman and other teachers, HREP provides lesson plans and other resources to help extend the field exploration into the classroom. The seine net at Ossining, for example, revealed both brackish-water Atlantic silversides and freshwater spottail shiners, an indication that the leading edge of salty seawater was nearby. Both fish species are commonly caught at other sites; by analyzing this data students can compare these species' distributions and learn a great lesson about the link between the physical river and its biology.

"This event makes science exciting for kids," says Margie Turrin, education coordinator for the Lamont Doherty Earth Observatory of Columbia University and a lead member of the Day in the Life team. "It's not easy to get kids excited about dissolved oxygen and turbidity, but once you give them the tools and the understanding of how these important pieces fit this puzzle…you just watch the light bulbs turn on."

Part of this puzzle is how the river is changing, or might change in the future. "We're looking at a small data set, just one day out of a year," continues Turrin. "But this is real science. The kids get out here, collect data, compare sites and years, and think of new questions to ask about a changing environment."

And if this event has proven one thing in nearly ten years, it's that the Hudson estuary is a dynamic ecosystem full of surprises. Rainy years may push the salt front all the way downstream to Piermont, while dry years see it creep north to Poughkeepsie. Sometimes the seine pulls up the "usual suspects" like white perch or striped bass; but when you least expect it there's a beautiful crevalle jack fish swept in from southern waters, or an impossibly slender pipefish, or a



Studying the river can be a lot of fun.

claw-clacking blue crab. In October 2011, students measured high levels of turbidity from suspended particles clouding the water, a firsthand lesson that the effects of a big storm like Hurricane Irene last a long time and can travel far.

Day in the Life 2008, October 7:
Genesis and Yahdi, two students from the Young Women's Leadership School in East Harlem, slowly made their way through the muddy waters of the Inwood Park tidal basin, a small inlet of the Harlem River. Yahdi tottered uncertainly (it was her first adventure wearing waders) and then sat down in the water with a theatrical splash. The wet jeans and muddy faces couldn't hide the big smiles on the girls' faces, and the nets and traps yielded a school of mummichogs, small killifish whose name means "goes in crowds." Their research revealed that this mud-filled tidal lagoon teemed with aquatic life in the midst of the big city.

While the Harlem River is not technically the Hudson, it is undeniably connected as part of the network of waterways around New York City. The estuary connects the freshwater streams running off the hills bordering the Hudson Valley and the saltwater lapping at the ocean's shore. And thanks to active interest from both teachers and environmental organizations, over the years, Day in the Life sites have blossomed on the Harlem, Bronx, and East Rivers, as well as Jamaica Bay, Newtown Creek, and seaward to Rockaway Point. In this tenth year, the event is even expanding into the Mohawk River and Long Island Sound. These regions will have to tailor their methods and protocols, but the goals are the same: students and education partners collecting useful data, and making a personal connection with their waterways.

Each Day in the Life becomes a Hudson River logbook, recording the expected and the unusual from year to year. If results from Day in the Life of the Hudson River show anything, it's that the Hudson, from the top of Mount Marcy to the Albany waterfront to the Staten Island beaches, has come a long way from environmental conditions of 40 or 50 years ago. But many challenges remain. A key solution may lie with the students who explore the river during this annual event. These students establish memories and build connections to the Hudson which will hopefully translate into a future citizenry that cares about this ecosystem; a community of stewards who understand that an estuary is complex, dynamic, and worthy of protection.

Samples collected during the event are brought back and analyzed.

So this October, come rain or shine, dozens of classes will once again leave their classrooms for a chance to explore the mighty Hudson…making it their river.

Chris Bowser coordinates Day in the Life of the Hudson River for DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program and National Estuarine Research Reserve, in partnership with Cornell's Water Resource Institute. For more information, including how to register as a participating school, partner, or volunteer, please go to: **www.dec.ny.gov/lands/47285.html**

Don Fellows

Don Fellows

Don Fellows

Tramps of Utica

By Patricia Malin

You're undoubtedly familiar with some form of the slogan, "Neither rain nor snow nor gloom of night can stay these messengers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds."

If that brings to mind hardy postal officials, think again! While it has been used as a credo of sorts for postal carriers, dedication to succeed on their "rounds" seems to also have been bestowed on members of the Tramp & Trail (T&T) Club of Utica, the oldest hiking club in New York State.

Mother Nature has often thrown down the gauntlet during a T&T activity, but she has rarely succeeded in preventing the completion of appointed rounds. In the last 90 years, there have been times when the club's members went hiking in 100-degree heat, cross-country skiing in near blizzards, cycling along rural roads littered with the debris of a hurricane, or kayaking on streams diminished by droughts or bolstered by floods.

Such persistence is deeply entrenched. On Dec. 17, 2011, the members (known fondly as "Tramps") recorded the club's 6,000th hike on a Black River Environmental Improvement Area trail on Egypt Road in the Town of Boonville, northern Oneida County. The event drew about 25 hikers who endured (gasp!) a 40-degree temperature on trails devoid of a single snowflake.

On the club's 5,000th hike on Feb. 15, 2003, on this same trail, the actual temperature was -10°F, but otherwise clear and sunny. The members, who had carpooled from a central location about 25 miles away, parked on the shoulder of the road, dutifully gathered up their poles and skis, breached the high snowbanks and proceeded to the trailhead. There was plenty of powder and the snow glistened invitingly. The participants skied the quarter-mile to the warming hut, then darted in and out of the building, tempting the cold to freeze their noses. The hardy group explored

the well-marked, groomed and tree-lined trails, but there were almost no other skiers in the vicinity that day. Who's crazy enough to do that?

Well, today's members shake their heads in disbelief when reviewing the trips their predecessors pursued in the early decades of the twentieth century. The first recorded T&T hike on April 30, 1921 was a mere 5 ½ to 6 miles in Utica's Roscoe Conkling Park and the surrounding Cascade Glen. That hike drew 17 hikers (6 men and 11 women). Their names and photographs were later submitted to the Utica Public Library, which houses the club's records to this day.

The original schedule called for four "walks" a month, but early club members deemed it necessary to include one all-day hike (the first one was 14 miles), plus occasional auto trips. Such an itinerary bore the stamp of a gentleman named Meade Dobson. A real estate executive who was not a Utican, Dobson is remembered as an "enthusiastic hiker and climber," and suggested the name of the club to the organizers.

Dobson had been active in hiking clubs elsewhere, including the Appalachian Club and Green Mt. Club, and felt there was a need for a similarly well-rounded and recreational organization in the Mohawk Valley. Though he lived in Utica for less than two years, he accomplished his goal. In June 1921, Dobson published an article in the *New York Evening Post* entitled, "New Tramp and Trail Club of Utica Finds Many Alluring Paths," and marveled at the contrast, even then, between bustling downstate and rural upstate's inviting wooded valleys. Dobson appears to have been a Johnny Appleseed of the hiking world! After leaving Utica, he went on to establish the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) in Glens Falls in 1922.

Despite their common origin, these two organizations proceeded to evolve in vastly different directions. T&T remains

Don Fellows

Don Fellows

insular and interested in local activities, though not in a negative way. The emphasis is on hiking within a loosely formed social, apolitical environment. ADK, on the other hand, has chapters throughout the state and at-large members in other states. The board of directors at headquarters emphasizes advocacy and directs its members to pursue issues related to wilderness and conservation.

In early years, T&T Club members made about 40 hikes annually, but then discovered the pleasures of winter hiking and cross-country skiing. Soon they became full, four-season outdoor enthusiasts. Now T&T's hike committee meets four times a year to plan a three-month schedule based on member submissions. The club organizes a total of about 104 hikes per year. Depending on the outing, a "hike" might feature cycling, kayaking, skiing or snowshoeing, or an actual walk on a woods trail. The event might include a swim, a picnic, and perhaps a discussion of wildflowers or birds. Plus, there is always sightseeing!

A different activity is scheduled for every Saturday and Sunday. Participation, which is not mandatory after the initial year, can bring out any number of the 230 club members. And whether it's a jaunt in a local town park or a difficult snowshoe trek on the Tug Hill Plateau some 50 miles to the north, there is no guarantee that the weather on May 17 will be any better than November 17. Nevertheless, the leader and co-leader of the hike guarantee that they will show up and carry out their duties, rain or shine.

Most of the hikes are within a two- or three-hour radius of Utica and are described as easy, moderate or difficult. Conventional woodland hikes, snowshoeing and skiing are from three to

seven miles long on marked DEC trails. Many of the bike rides typically average 25-30 miles. Kayaking trips (canoes are rarely used) vary in length.

Utica is a gateway to the Adirondack Mountains, so it's almost certain that participants will find snow throughout the winter, although in recent years the ski season appears to be slowly shrinking. Because of this observation, the club's descriptions of its hikes throughout the past nine decades become an unexpected gem of meteorological interest.

If there is no snow or if conditions are otherwise poor at the designated trailhead, the members go in search of better conditions elsewhere. The hike still proceeds and gets officially recorded. The club does not condone hazardous travel; leaders attempt to find a more acceptable substitute hike closer to home.

One of the club's favorite events is High Peaks Weekend held in early August. T&T reserves about six campsites at the ADK campground near Lake Placid and approximately 30 or 40 members tent there for the weekend. It's a boom time for members who are trying to bag their 46 peaks, but it's just as acceptable for a member to kayak in Heart Lake or to climb Mt. Jo.

Considering the convenience of modern, lightweight clothing and equipment and freeze-dried, packaged food, it's hard to believe that the Tramps began tackling the High Peaks in 1925 and frequently experienced wilderness camping. In August 1940, the members endured a long railroad trip to the Canadian Rockies in preparation for the club's 1,000th hike. One member reported that they spent a few nights "wrapped in several layers of white Hudson Bay blankets" under a canopy of snow-covered tents. In Jasper Park, they embarked on an 18-mile "walk" at elevations of more than 8,000 feet. Today's Tramps never face such a demanding test.

The 3,000th hike came during a two-week vacation to Wind River, WY, in the summer of 1979. T&T celebrated its 4,000th outing with a conventional ski at local Carmichael Hill on Mar. 7, 1993.

Pat J. Malin

The T&T Club's "hikes" include a variety of activities, from biking and kayaking to cross-country skiing.

In addition to the official weekend schedule, many of today's retirees and senior citizen Tramps have organized into two unofficial weekday groups known as the "911" (for the hearty) and the "shorties."

Well aware of its history in the Mohawk Valley, the T&T Club has increased its visibility in the last decade. It publicizes its hiking schedule in local newspapers; members share videos of their vacations with the public; and the club invites guides, authors or speakers to participate in "Interesting Evenings." At least three times a year, the club donates its manpower to clearing and maintaining hiking and ski trails. DEC has officially declared Tramp & Trail the caretaker of the Carpenter Road trails on the backside of the Snow Ridge Ski Resort in Turin. The Tramps also take a personal interest in cleaning up the Erie Canal and Barge Canal trails that connect to the Utica Marsh Wildlife Refuge. Every June, July and August, as part of the summer-long Utica Monday night cultural series, T&T Club members volunteer to lead the public on tours of local parks.

As with any social group, there are good times galore. Just last October, two elderly grandmothers threw a "46ers" party. Through a slide presentation, they related their roller-coaster journey over the years to hike each of the 46 Adirondack mountains over 4,000 feet. Their quest to climb the High Peaks began with early enthusiasm, joyfully singing "Climb Every Mountain." More often than not, though, their success was reflected more by the lyrics of "Mama Told Me There'd Be Days Like This."

As it was in 1921, it's never about the destination; rather, it's about the journey, sharing conversations and recollections among members young and old. And despite our often painful experience with blisters, bruises, broken equipment, worn-out hiking boots, endless years of black fly bites, sun, shadows, fog, rain, sleet, snow, and mud on our faces, the quest to reach our goal continues. In the end, the Tramps fully expect to be unstoppable for yet another century.

Patricia Malin is a freelance writer based in New Hartford, NY. She has been a member of the Tramp & Trail Club for more than 20 years.

BRIEFLY

Compiled by Jenna Kerwin and David Nelson

Catskill Mountain House by Thomas Cole

Art Trail Expands

The renowned Hudson River School Art Trail has recently expanded to include 17 sites in New York, one in Massachusetts, and two each in New Hampshire and Wyoming. The Art Trail was launched in 2005 by the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, in partnership with the Olana State Historic Site and other organizations, to provide a series of trails that lead visitors to places that inspired America's first great landscape paintings in the nineteenth century. The artists who created those paintings, including Thomas Cole and Asher B. Durand, were part of the Hudson River School art movement and created landscapes throughout the Hudson Valley and beyond. For more information, visit: **www.hudsonriverschool.org**.

Archery Program Grows

The National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) continues to grow nationally, with 1.7 million students participating in the program during the 2010-2011 school year. In New York, the program is sponsored by DEC and has reached more than 21,500 students at 141 schools from 97 school districts. NASP promotes student education and physical education, and is a great way to introduce young people to archery and other shooting sports. Anyone interested in volunteering in the program or nominating a school should contact Melissa Bailey, the state program coordinator, at (315) 793-2515 or mrbailey@gw.dec.state.ny.us. Visit **www.dec.ny.gov/education/81939.html** for more information about the New York program.

Dredging Onondaga Lake

Honeywell International is scheduled to begin dredging contaminated sediment from the bottom of Onondaga Lake this summer. The project, being overseen by DEC, the US Environmental Protection Agency and the NYS Department of Health, is removing contaminants left from previous industrial activities which continue to negatively affect the lake's ecology. Hundreds of scientists, engineers and other local laborers are involved in the dredging of 185 acres of the 3,000-acre lake bottom, as well as 21 acres adjacent to the lake. An estimated 2 million cubic yards of material will be removed. Dredging and capping operations are expected to be completed in 2015 and 2016, respectively, and habitat restoration activities should be completed in 2016. For more information (including how to sign up to receive DEC's Onondaga Lake News e-mail updates), visit **www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/37558.html**.

James Clayton

BRIEFLY

Invaders Alert

Summer means enjoying the great outdoors, and while you're outside, be on the lookout for invasive plant and wildlife species. Invasives are non-native species that can cause harm to people or the environment. Here are a few plants to be aware of:

James Clayton

Leslie J. Mehrhoff

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service / Murray

Giant Hogweed: Introduced to the U.S. in the late twentieth century, giant hogweed can reach up to 14 feet, has large, compound leaves, and white flower heads that can grow up to 2½ feet in diameter. Giant hogweed can cause serious health threats. When combined with moisture and sunlight, its sap can cause severe skin and eye irritation, including blisters, scars and even blindness.Visit **www.dec.ny.gov/animals/39809.html** for more information on how to identify and report instances of this plant.

Mile-A-Minute Vine: This vine gets its name from its rapid growth rate—up to six inches per day. Native to East Asia, it prefers moist soils, and has recently been spotted in the Upper Delaware River Valley. It has pale green, triangular leaves, a narrow, reddish stem with downward pointing barbs, and berry-like, iridescent blue-covered seeds produced from June through fall. Mile-a-minute has the potential to overtake native vegetation by smothering seedlings and outcompeting mature plants for space, nutrients and sunlight. If you spot mile-a-minute vine, report it at **www.nyimapinvasives.org**.

Hydrilla: A relative newcomer to the state, hydrilla is an invasive aquatic plant that is plaguing parts of the Cayuga Inlet. It is considered one of the most invasive aquatic plants in North America, and has resulted in significant ecological, recreational and economic impacts in other regions of the country. Hydrilla spreads rapidly, out-competing native species and dominating aquatic ecosystems. As a reminder, boaters and anglers must remember to inspect and disinfect equipment before using it in another body of water. Visit **www.dec.ny.gov/animals/48221.html** for more details.

For more information about nuisance and invasive species, check out DEC's website at **www.dec.ny.gov/animals/265.html**.

New Record Tree

While hiking on the Appalachian Trail in southeastern New York, DEC employee Jim Close came across a massive white oak in the Town of Pawling. Impressed by its huge size, Jim nominated it for the National Register of Big Trees maintained by American Forests. Trees nominated for the register are ranked by total points based on a specific formula. (See "Silent Giants" in the April 2011 *Conservationist*.) After measuring the "Dover Oak" (as it is fondly referred to), a DEC forester confirmed that it is a new champion in New York State. It scored 397 points; the national champion white oak has a score of 458 and is located in Clay, Indiana. Nevertheless, the Dover Oak has its own distinction: It is the largest tree of any species along the entire length of the Appalachian Trail!


James Close

LETTERS Compiled by Eileen Stegemann and Jenna Kerwin

After the Burn

Robert J. Kent sent us these photos of a burned forest in the Pine Barrens in Manorville, Suffolk County. The top photo was taken right after the fire; the next photo was taken a couple of months later. We can't help but notice that they show an excellent example of forest regeneration. Does anyone else have any photos like this they'd like to share? If so, mail them to us!

Smart Shedding

I took this photo at our camp in Harriman State Park. The decorative band that was around this basket had been eaten by mice, leaving a one-inch wide space. Apparently a snake found this to be the ideal spot to shed its skin because next spring we found his calling card woven right around the ribs of the basket—head and all!

Tom Moberg

Lisle, Broome County

It looks like the shed snake skin in your photo belongs to either an eastern ratsnake (Pantherophis alleghanensis) *or a black racer* (Coluber constrictor). *It's hard to tell which one. The woven basket offered enough resistance for the snake to pull off the old, worn, ill-fitting skin to expose a new, shiny dermal layer. Snakes prefer to occupy dryer, warmer sites for the purpose of shedding. Typically, the direction of the tail is the direction the snake was heading while shedding; it appears this snake may have used its own body weight to shed as it dropped from the basket when the shed was complete.*

—William Hoffman, DEC Fish & Wildlife Technician

In-flight Snack

I wanted to share this photo of an osprey carrying a brown trout. Enjoy!

Mandy Applin

Rochester, Monroe County

Great picture! In New York, ospreys live mainly on Long Island, in the Adirondacks, and along major river systems and large lakes. They feed primarily on fish, which they catch with their long talons. Once listed as endangered, osprey have made a strong comeback since the insecticides responsible for their decline were banned. For more information about osprey, check out DEC's osprey fact sheet at ***www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7088.html****.*

—*Conservationist* staff

LETTERS

Resting Eagles

I thought your readers might like to see this photo I took while on Lake Ontario.

Everet D. Regal

Phoenix, Oswego County

A great photo! Bald eagles mate for life and construct nests in tall pine trees like this one. Some nests can grow to weigh hundreds of pounds and can be more than eight feet deep!

—*Conservationist* staff

Leek Look-alike

We had two readers advise us that they had bad experiences eating false hellebore (a poisonous plant) which they mistook for wild leeks (profiled in April 2012 *Conservationist*). ALWAYS positively identify any wild plant before ingesting it.

Ask the Biologist

Q: I found a turtle in my yard and was wondering if there is a way I can determine its age?

A: Unfortunately, there is no known reliable method of aging a turtle.

There have been studies to determine the accuracy of aging a turtle by counting the growth rings (called annuli) on the scutes (individual scales) of turtle shells, similar to how foresters determine the age of trees. However, this method is unreliable. During winter and inactive periods when feeding halts, a turtle's metabolism slows and growth is no longer evident. These gaps in growth and development can appear as rings on the turtle's shell. This is mostly seen in juvenile turtles when they are rapidly growing. At this time, counting annuli may give you a general idea of the turtle's age. But once turtles reach sexual maturity, their growth rate decreases and annuli development is less notable. Also, not all turtle species have countable scutes; some have smooth shells.

For older turtles, biologists sometimes examine the wear on the turtles' scutes to estimate age. For instance, wood turtles may deposit countable annuli for up to 20 years, but then growth slows and the scutes show signs of wear.

So, unless you know when and where a turtle hatched and then permanently marked it to identify it in the future, for now a turtle's true age is anyone's guess.

—William Hoffman, DEC Fish & Wildlife Technician

Write to us

Conservationist Letters
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Albany, NY 12233-4502
or e-mail us at: magazine@gw.dec.state.ny.us

What Is It?

If you guessed it's a close-up of an eastern coyote's fur, then you guessed correctly. Robert Cook of Hamilton sent us this photo of a coyote appearing to pose for the camera. Eastern coyotes live throughout upstate New York. They are highly adaptable and can live near people; some have even been sighted in New York City. Their diet ranges from deer, rabbits and mice, to berries, pet food and even pets themselves. Coyotes are organized in "family units," and though comprised of just a few members, the units can be very noisy! Visit DEC's eastern coyote page at **www.dec.ny.gov/animals/9359.html** for more information.

Fair Haven Challenge

by Nicholas Calabrese

The following essay was a winner in the Young Writer's category in DEC's Great Stories from the Great Outdoors contest.

Have you ever won a fishing challenge? I have.

It started out on a cool summer morning when I went fishing on Lake Ontario with my dad, his friend Paul, and my uncle. We motored out to the middle of the lake and set the lines. Then we waited about an hour. Bang! Five hundred feet of copper fishing line released. The drag on the reel screamed like a supersonic jet taking off. It took me about half an hour to reel in the salmon at the other end. After that, my arms felt like noodles. When we got the fish in, we weighed it: 21 pounds, 15 ounces. We put it in the cooler.

Soon after that the center downrigger released and my dad mastered the fishing pole and reeled in a more modest fish—7 pounds, 8 ounces. Then we waited for what seemed like an eternity. Bang! We caught another one. It was 16 pounds, 11 ounces.

After we caught our fish we brought them by car to Fair Haven. My dad and uncle were in the front seat and I was in the back seat, tired but happy after a good day fishing. When we got to the site where the fish were weighed-in, I saw the people and the shiny gold awards. I smelled fish and food being cooked.

We waited about an hour to have our fish weighed. I entered my fish in the youth division. I felt the slime of the fish and the scales on the gills as I put it on the scale. We had to wait ten minutes, which seemed like hours, and then the host started to raffle off the door prizes. We didn't get lucky winning any of the door prizes…little did I know how lucky I was going to become.

The drag on the reel screamed...It took me about half an hour to reel in the salmon...

Then the host started to give out the awards. It was getting boring, so I went to the bathroom, which was a long way away. When I returned, my uncle told me that I had won the youth division. At first I hesitated, then I walked up to the host and said, "I'm Nicholas Calabrese."

He said, "Good. How big was your fish?"

In a confused voice, I said, "21 pounds, 15 ounces."

Then he said, "Here is your award for the biggest salmon in the youth division." He handed me my plaque, which was coal-black in color. I felt its smoothness. I heard the applause of the people and the voice of the host. I felt like I was going to cry.

Then the host said, "And that's not all; you also get your fish mounted for free. So go and get your fish."

I was so excited that I ran as fast as I could and got my fish. I felt like I was going to trip and fall on my face. I brought it back and laid it in the grass for all to see.

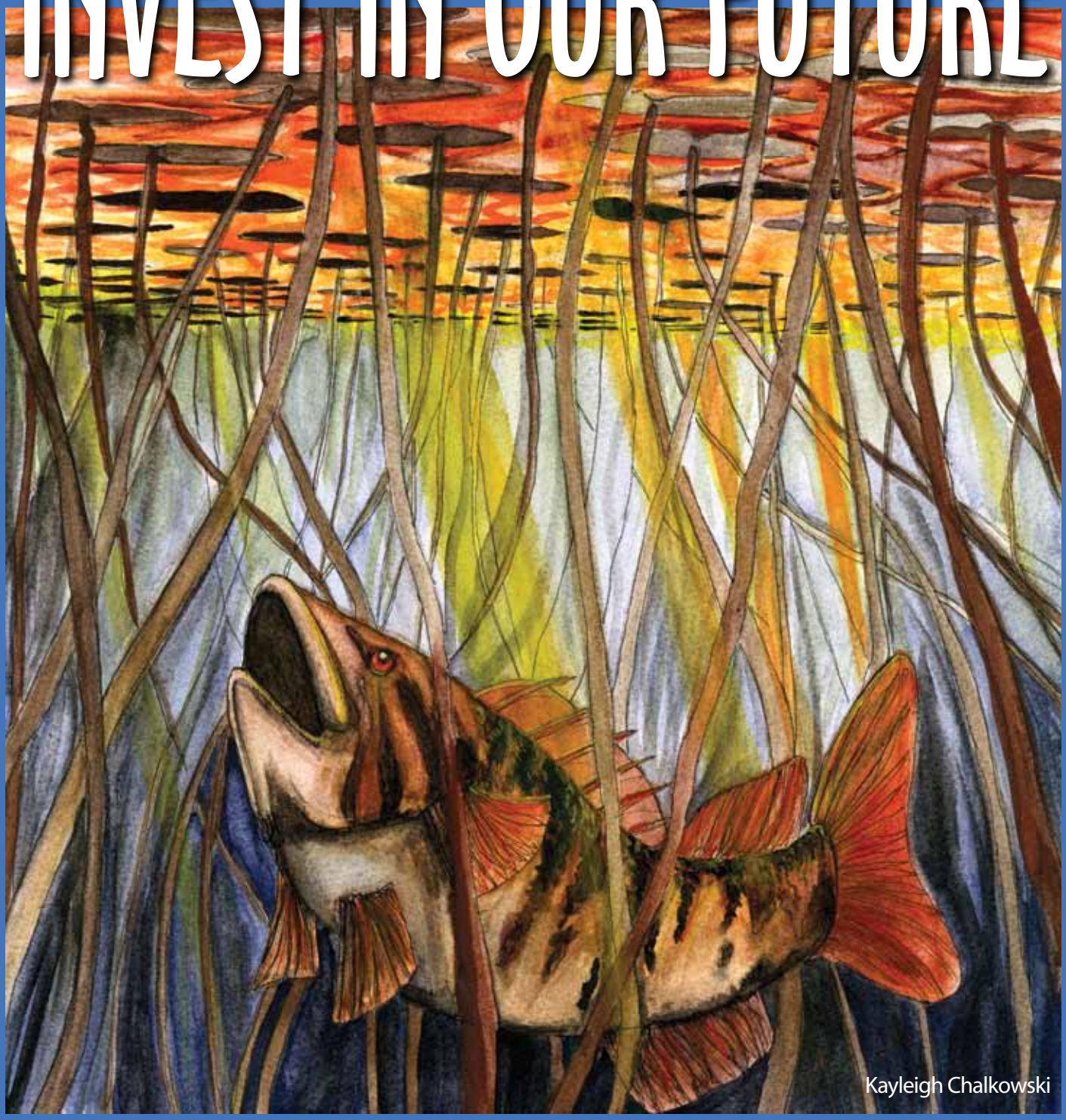
After dinner at a barbecue restaurant in Oswego, we went home and I told my mom about my action-packed day and my winning fish. She was not too happy because now she had to find a place on the wall to hang the mounted fish.

Winning the Fair Haven challenge is an outdoor moment I will never forget.

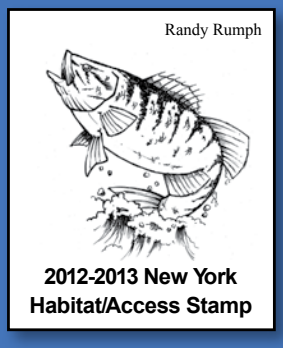
Nicholas Calabrese was a sixth-grader at Camden Middle School when he submitted this essay.

Note: This year, the Fair Haven Challenge occurs on August 25th. Check out **www.fairhavenny.com/calendar.html** for details.

INVEST IN OUR FUTURE



Kayleigh Chalkowski



When you purchase a $5 Habitat & Access Stamp you help open and improve land for outdoor recreation. It's a perfect way to conserve New York's wildlife heritage. All funds are deposited in the Conservation Fund's Habitat Account.

For more information, visit your license issuing agent, or visit

www.dec.ny.gov

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

Wayne Jones

northern leopard frog

See page 14