

PRESS RELEASE

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New York Natural Heritage Program Named Top in the Nation

Arlington, Virginia — NatureServe, an international conservation group, has named the New York Natural Heritage Program as the 2003 Outstanding Natural Heritage Program in the NatureServe Network. The New York Natural Heritage Program was selected for special recognition from among 74 similar programs that comprise an international network working across the United States, Canada, and Latin America.

“The New York Natural Heritage Program is doing innovative research that brings the highest-quality science to bear on important conservation issues,” said Mark Schaefer, President and CEO of NatureServe. “They also are sharing their innovations with others in our network, which influences conservation even beyond New York’s borders.”

In singling out the New York Natural Heritage Program as the nation’s most outstanding, Schaefer cited a long list of exceptional achievements, including:

- Completing a comprehensive six-year assessment of New York’s state parks that has identified more than 1,000 occurrences of sensitive species and habitats;
- Developing in-depth maps and conservation guides for land-use planning in the lower Hudson River Valley;
- Producing a detailed blueprint for conservation of the 1,200-square mile Lake Erie Gorges region in western New York;
- Designing and creating a hand-held tool and database for scientists to collect data in the field, and sharing this software for free with fellow natural heritage programs throughout North America;
- Developing a popular web-based botanical atlas of New York in partnership with the New York Flora Association and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden;
- Working in a spirit of partnership with The Nature Conservancy, state agencies, local governments, the scientific and academic community, and dozens of other partners to help conserve New York’s most important natural areas.

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The New York Natural Heritage Program is a partnership between the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and The Nature Conservancy. The program's 21-person staff includes ecologists, botanists, zoologists, and information management specialists. Established in 1985, NY Natural Heritage is housed within the DEC's Division of Fish, Wildlife, & Marine Resources.

"We're very proud to be recognized as a national leader," said David VanLuven, Director of the New York Natural Heritage Program. "Our success is possible because of the strong support we receive from the Department of Environmental Conservation, The Nature Conservancy, and our many partners throughout New York."

"The efforts of the New York Natural Heritage Program's talented and intrepid scientists are providing us with an increasingly complete picture of New York State's extraordinary biological diversity," said Henry Tepper, director of The Nature Conservancy of New York. "We are proud to join with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation in support of this truly invaluable program."

DEC Commissioner Erin M. Crotty added: "In New York State, we are fortunate to enjoy a unique abundance of natural resources. This award illustrates the dedication and commitment we've shown to protecting, improving and understanding our ecosystems."

NY Natural Heritage enables and enhances conservation of New York's rare animals, rare plants, and significant ecosystems. The program uses field inventories, scientific analyses, expert interpretation, and the most comprehensive database on the biodiversity of New York to deliver high-quality information that is used for natural resources planning, protection, and management.

NY Natural Heritage scientists currently monitor 659 rare plant species, 440 rare animal species, and 166 natural community types across the state, tracking more than 10,500 locations where these species and communities are found. This information is used by public agencies, conservation groups, developers, and others to aid in land use planning and natural resource decisions.

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NatureServe is a non-profit conservation group dedicated to providing the scientific information and technology needed to guide effective conservation action. NatureServe represents a network of 74 natural heritage programs and conservation data centers in the United States, Canada, and Latin America that collect and analyze information on plants, animals, and ecosystems. NatureServe is a leading source for detailed scientific information about rare and endangered species and threatened ecosystems. Visit us on the web at www.natureserve.org.