

Conservation Connects News

Winter 2013



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Dear Reader:

There was never a dull moment over the past six months at Conservation Connects. Dena VanCurran (environmental intern) and Liza Norment (biologist/GIS tech) joined us to explore streams, watershed planning, green infrastructure, sustainability mapping, and more. We continued our work with regional sustainability, developed a partnership and a successful grant application for NYSDERDA Cleaner Greener Communities funds, we were invited to serve on the Sustainability Workgroup for the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council and in October we were recognized by NYS as an MWBE success story. Somehow in the midst of all of this Charlotte Brett (Sr. Environmental Planner) and Jennifer Martino (Admin. Assistant) brought forth to the world two beautiful baby girls - Georgia and Aubrey (respectively). So, it is with gratitude and joy that we wind down 2013 and with great excitement and anticipation that we consider the New Year. Please read on about the high costs associated with **not** building trails and protecting green space, EPA's proposed rule for defining wetlands, the plight of the northern long-eared bat, ideas for sustainable gifts, and the connection between food allergies and sustainability planning. We wish for you a peaceful and joyful holiday with plenty of time to play in the snow!

~Sheila S. Hess
Principal Ecologist/CEO

Something to think about:

The future will be green, or not at all. This truth lies at the heart of humankind's most pressing challenge: to learn to live in harmony with the Earth on a genuinely sustainable basis. -Sir Jonathon Porritt

CLARITY AND THE CLEAN WATER ACT

Which "bodies of water" are considered "waters of the United States" and are thus protected by the Clean Water Act? That is a confounding question that EPA is proposing to answer with a rule submitted this fall to the Office of Management and Budget. While the draft rule is not yet public, it is closely associated with the science of hydrologic connectivity as presented in the draft report at the link below:

[**Connectivity of Streams and Wetlands to Downstream Waters: A Review and Synthesis of the Scientific Evidence.**](#)

The rule does not propose changes to the regulation of jurisdictional waters, it does, however, specifically affect which waters are regulated and why. The intent of the proposed rule is to ensure that clean water is protected. It is hoped that this rule will, at a minimum, provide greater consistency and predictability for all. [More information from EPA](#)

Conservation Connects helps corporations and communities balance development plans with natural resource conservation. It is possible to achieve economic vitality while preserving a healthy environment and a high quality of life.

Visit us [online](#)

THE HIGH COST OF GREEN

And the higher cost of none...

Sheila Hess, Principal Ecologist/CEO

In my town we can hop on our bicycles or lace up our trail shoes and follow a scenic (non-motorized vehicles only) lane into the village and directly to the park. The lane meanders through fields and forests, past wetlands and along a stream corridor. Once in the village, we conveniently pass two very important streets. One tree-lined street has the post office and the library (which includes a coffee shop and free wifi) and the other street, in addition to ample parking and wide sidewalks, has small retail including a grocery store that carries local produce and other necessary staples. The park to which we are headed is a 15-acre natural area with a playground, outdoor classroom, interpretive trails and a small visitor center with amenities. Just past the park is the school...



Okay, not really. I'm dreaming. But wouldn't it be nice? Isn't this (along with diverse and abundant job opportunities and high quality health care) what we all want? It is. In fact, the protection of green space and development of green infrastructure and trail networks (green ways) are increasingly popular. But typically the first question is – how much will ***that*** cost? So...I did some research...

And I found out the answer...***A lot!***

Initially, as with most planning, design and construction projects, the investment in siting, design, approvals and construction is significant. Not to mention maintenance costs. In fact, the only thing that could cost more is NOT doing it. Not investing in open space, green infrastructures, trails and greenways could eventually be more costly than taking the leap. Why? The answer is in the myriad of benefits realized by such investment which in turn support a resilient environment and facilitate a high quality, sustainable standard of living (think clean air, clean water, energy conservation, groundwater recharge, residential value, economic vitality, public health, and on and on). Here are some links for further reading. Happy Trails!

- [Banking on Green – the benefits of green infrastructure](#)
- [Benefits of Green Space according to the Environmental Health Research Foundation](#)
- [An overview of the benefits of greenways](#)
- [A thorough review of the benefits of trails](#)
- [The cost of environmental degradation is a global issue](#)

NEW ENDANGERED SPECIES?

In October, 2013, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) proposed to list the northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*) as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. The decline of the species is primarily a result of the continuing spread of white-nose syndrome (WNS). White-nose syndrome is named for a white fungus (*Geomyces destructans*) that infects the skin of hibernating bats. The alarming and astounding result of WNS is an estimated 80% decline in bat populations in the northeastern U.S. In New York State, the



NYS Department of Environmental Conservation observed a 98 percent decline in northern long-eared bats since the emergence of WNS in 2006. The species is now considered to be an extremely rare species in New York State and, if listed, will be the second bat (joining the Indiana bat, *Myotis sodalis*) on the endangered species list. The rapid decline of bats will result in ecological changes that could include negative impacts on agriculture, forestry and other wildlife. Click [here](#) to learn more about the proposed listing of the northern long-eared bat. To learn more about WNS and see a range map click [here](#).

TOP 10 GREEN GIFT IDEAS FOR THE HOLIDAYS!

Jennifer Martino, Administrative Assistant

We have compiled a list of Eco-Friendly and Recycled gifts that are sure to be a hit this holiday season. Whether you are buying for a child or a professional these gifts you can feel good about giving.



1. [Eco-Dough –Uncommon Goods](#)
An all-natural sculpting dough colored with dyes from fruits and veggies.
2. [Organic Gift Basket –Gourmet Gift Baskets](#)
These organic gift baskets are filled with organic snacks that meet the USDA Organic Certification requirements.
3. [Back to the Roots Aquafarm –The Grommet](#)
This unique aquaponic system includes a self-cleaning tank that allows fish to remain happy and healthy underneath the water while a plethora of your fresh herbs, flowers or plants grow on top.
4. [Save a Life: Provide Clean Water with Charity –Just Give](#)
Your caring family members, friends, and colleagues will love this gift that makes a real impact. Your donation to Blue Planet Network saves a life and supplies one person with clean drinking water.
5. [Recycled Glass Pillar Candleholders –World Market](#)
Recycled Glass Pillar Candleholders handcrafted from crushed recycled glass.
6. [Eco-Kids Eco-Crayons \(6 crayons\) - Amazon](#)
Exploratory crayons handmade with natural and organic fruit plant and vegetable extracts Eco-Kids Eco-Crayons are Non Toxic.
7. [Big Green Book of Recycled Crafts - Amazon](#)
Each project in this book uses one or more items that would ordinarily end up in a landfill.
8. [Eco-FANPRO Bamboo Laptop Stand with Fan - Amazon](#)
Organic and eco-friendly bamboo material holds up to 17” laptops. This stand comes with two 2.5” fans and is USB powered.
9. [Archipelago Botanicals Signature Soy Wax Candle - Nordstrom](#)
Hand-poured candle features a lead-free wick and premium wax blend with essential oils.
10. [Bamboo USB Flash Drive \(Engraved Monogram\) - Personalization Mall](#)
Easily transport all of your important information with this personalized Bamboo USB Flash Drive. Made of 100% natural bamboo, and eco-friendly and renewable material.

SPOTLIGHT ON FOOD ALLERGIES: An Issue at the Intersection of Society-Environment-Economy

Charlotte Brett, Senior Environmental Planner

At Conservation Connects, we follow issues that affect sustainability. Sustainability can be broadly described as the interface between society, environment, and economy. Food allergies is one such issue: with recent spikes in the prevalence of food allergies, there are clear social and economic costs; research into potential causes of food allergies leads to questions about environmental toxins, societal norms, and genetics. And the holiday season increases risk of accidental ingestion for those with food allergies.

Chances are, you have heard more about food allergies in recent years than ever before. If you are 60 years old you may have gone most of your life without hearing anything at all about food allergies, and you may now find yourself with a grandchild with a severe allergy to a common food like eggs or peanuts. If you are 30 years old and a parent you likely know a child with a food allergy. If you have kids in elementary school you may have received notes home forbidding peanut butter and jelly sandwiches as a packed lunch item, or a list of foods to be avoided when it's your turn to send snacks for the class. Even if you have no children, grandchildren, or personal experience with food allergies you may have noticed allergen warnings springing up on restaurant menus and ingredient labels.

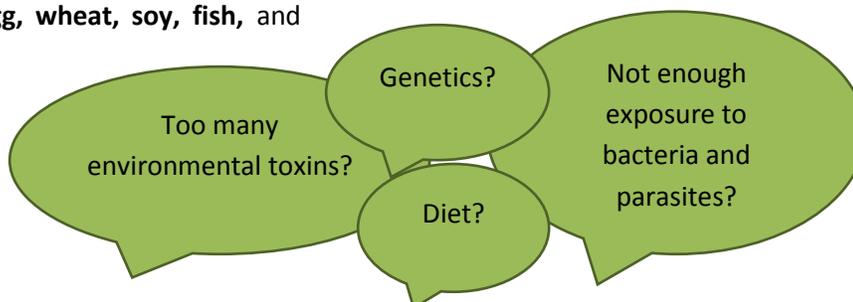
You may also have noticed that journalists from the New York Times, NPR's Tom Ashbrook, Parents magazine, and countless other publications are reporting on food allergies.

You may be wondering, what's going on here? And do I have to pay attention to all of this? The simplest answers to those two questions are: no one really knows yet, and yes (please).

The New York Times reports that the **rate of food allergies** has **more than doubled** over the past decade, with an estimated 5.9 million children in the U.S., and another 2.3 million adults, living with a food allergy. This corresponds to roughly 1 in 13 children, or **1 in 10 preschoolers**, as food allergies are more prevalent in children between 3 and 5 years old. It is important to note that **food allergies are very different from intolerances or preferences**. A food allergy is an immune system response to a food protein that results in the release of abnormally large amounts of the antibody immunoglobulin E, which releases histamine and other chemicals, triggering the symptoms of an allergic reaction. A food allergy is a serious medical condition that can result in death.

There are 8 foods that cause a cumulative 90% of all food allergy reactions in the United States. These are: **peanuts, tree nuts, milk, egg, wheat, soy, fish, and shellfish**. Research into the causes of food allergies has examined potential factors including:

- *environmental toxins*: whether exposure to pollution, pesticides, or cigarette smoke may contribute,
- *diet*: a mother's diet during pregnancy, an individual's diet during early childhood, and a shift in dietary habits of families due to migration from one part of the world to another have all been studied,
- *sanitation*: the "hygiene hypothesis" evaluates whether our modern sanitation habits weaken our immune systems by depriving them of exposure to bacteria and parasites, and



- *genetics*: an increase in allergies or asthma in parents does increase the risk of food allergies in children.

To date, no definitive answers about what causes food allergies have been identified. Competing theories have come in and out of favor, and it seems most likely that there are a variety of factors at play.

There are also no clear answers about how to prevent, or cure, food allergies. With research unfolding in “real time,” even the basic question of whether those with food allergies should completely avoid known allergens or introduce small quantities of them into their diet is still up in the air. Meanwhile, Food Allergy Research and Education reports that **every 3 minutes, a food allergy reaction sends someone to the emergency room** for treatment (generally a combination of antihistamine and epinephrine). While the human health costs are borne by those with allergies, the economic costs are more broadly distributed.

So what can be done? If you are fortunate enough to have not been directly affected by food allergies, the simplest and most helpful thing that you can do is be aware that these allergies exist and that they are potentially life-threatening. The holiday season, traditionally rife with bowls of nuts, glasses of eggnog, and freshly baked cookies, can be a time of great risk for people with food allergies. When you have guests, be gracious about their inquiries into ingredients in dishes served. And don't offer a child any food without their parents' consent.