

CONSERVATION ACTION PLAN

Rockefeller State Park Preserve



Photo Credit: Todd Cameron

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Rockefeller State Park Preserve is treasured for its history, scenic landscape, and wildlife. The Preserve, currently 1425 acres, is designated by the State as a “park-preserve” to highlight and protect its natural, historical and cultural values.

When designing their Pocantico Hills estate, John D. Rockefeller Sr. and Jr. were inspired by their personal love of the outdoors and the 19th century American Romantic movement, which promoted the beauty of nature for people’s physical and spiritual health. Thanks to the Rockefeller Family’s farsighted and generous gifts to State of New York, visitors can continue to experience the wonders and solace of the natural world while following the historic carriage roads through the landscape.

Over the last 50 years, the forested hills and valleys, fields, lakes and streams have become ever more important for a host of native birds, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, fish, native pollinators, and insects, many of which are at risk. NY Audubon has designated the Preserve as an Important Bird Area (IBA), one of a state network of sites selected for their role in conserving vulnerable bird species. Wood thrush, worm-eating warblers, and Coopers hawk are three vulnerable species that nest in the Preserve; all told, over 200 species of birds are recorded.



Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

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Photo Credit: Susan Antenen

WHAT WE WANT TO CONSERVE

Active management of the land is essential to preserve the Rockefeller Family legacy for future generations.

To conserve the native biological diversity, the Preserve began a science-based conservation program in 2014 to protect and restore (a) ecosystems that characterize the Preserve and are habitat for many common species of flora and fauna, and (b) species groups that are important in the Preserve and/or vulnerable and require special attention:



Photo Credit: Paula Sharp / Ross Eatman



Photo Credit: Todd Cameron

Forest

Fields And Grassland Birds

Swan Lake

Pocantico River, Wetlands And Streams

Wild Bees And Wildflowers

Carnivores

At-Risk Reptiles And Amphibians

Woodland Nesting Birds



THREATS TO ROCKEFELLER PRESERVE'S LANDSCAPE

The above focal conservation targets face multiple, sometimes interacting, threats which jeopardize their long-term survival. Based on information from surveys, monitoring, and personal observation over the last thirty years, we ranked the condition and threats for each conservation target in the Preserve. The most critical threats are:

Invasive Non-Native Weeds, Which Modify The Habitat

Intense Browsing By White-Tailed Deer

Pests And Diseases

The forest which comprises about 70% of the Preserve is particularly at risk. Non-native Insect pests and diseases are killing trees prematurely. Hemlocks, which once shaded the Pocantico River, American elm, and white ash are almost eradicated from the Preserve. While towering tulip poplars, oaks, maples and beech dominate the forest canopy, few young trees are poised to fill the gaps created when large trees die or fall during storms. The large numbers of white-tailed deer browsing on native tree seedlings and saplings, shrubs and wildflowers are literally eating the forest of the future. Deer

Mowing That Is Poorly Timed

Road And Agricultural Run-Off That Carries Nutrients And Sediments Into Waterbodies

are native and part of the natural system, but their numbers have soared in the Preserve and Westchester County, leading to unhealthy, impoverished forests. The wild orchids, trilliums, columbine, bloodroot, and many wildflowers enjoyed by the Rockefellers 100 or even 40 years ago are rarely seen today, if at all.

In addition, over 40 species of aggressive, invasive non-native vines, tree, shrub, non-woody species are crowding out native trees seedling, wildflowers and shrubs. These invasives grow densely, creating a “green wall” that blocks forest vistas and scenic views from the carriage trails.

The fields and sunny forest edges are threatened by invasive species. Fields and their edges can easily become dominated by just a few invasive species, such as mugwort, black swallowwort, porcelainberry vine, and multiflora rose. As the abundance and diversity of grasses and wildflowers diminish, populations of butterflies, native pollinators, all sorts of insects and small rodents, bird, and predatory hawks are affected. Timing of mowing is another factor which affects nesting of bobolinks and grassland birds and flowering of late summer asters, goldenrods, milkweeds, and wild peas.



OUR GOALS

OUR STEWARDSHIP

Is to sustain the history, beauty and native biodiversity of the landscape by:

Maintaining the mosaic of forest, fields, streams and wetlands

Maintaining the historic features, such as carriage road and rock walls

Increasing native tree regeneration throughout the forest

Increasing and diversifying native wildflowers and shrubs

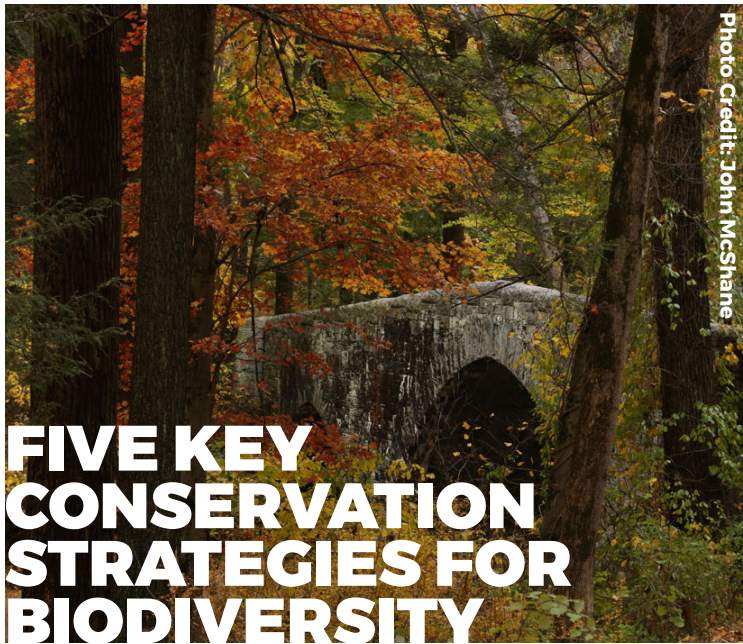


Photo Credit: John McShane

FIVE KEY CONSERVATION STRATEGIES FOR BIODIVERSITY

Identify important areas for biodiversity

Time mowing to protect key wildflower areas

Manage deer to achieve levels compatible with native tree regeneration

Remove, cut, and control invasive non-native vines, trees, shrubs, annuals and perennials

Protect and plant native trees, shrubs, and wildflowers

The Preserve has initiated an ecological stewardship program to actively care for the land and its diversity of species which is based on science-based planning and conservation goals. Our program:

Works with natural processes

Adopts best management practices

Anticipates and accepts change

Enlists volunteers to encourage personal relationships to the land

Favors native species and natural communities



Photo Credit: Steven D'Alco

MONITORING

Trends in abundance, composition, and distribution of tree regeneration and wildflowers

Trends in abundance and distribution of priority invasive species

General status of focal target species, including nesting success of bluebirds and wood thrush

Trends in deer density