



NEW YORK SEASCAPE PROGRAM

A COMMITMENT TO OCEAN CONSERVATION

IN SEPTEMBER 2009, the Wildlife Conservation Society established a partnership with the City of New York to protect the sea, to connect people to the ocean world, and to inspire conservation action. This initiative has two interconnected components:

- Transformation of the New York Aquarium, with a new, state-of-the-art exhibit building and enhancements to the visitor experience
- Renewal of WCS's commitment to marine conservation through the New York Seascape Program

AN ECOLOGICAL TREASURE TROVE

One of the world's greatest cities is also home to one of the world's great seascapes. The waters surrounding New York are an ecological treasure trove, providing habitat for migratory whales, sea turtles, sharks, seabirds, and other threatened marine species. This amazing diversity of marine life is partly a result of extreme seasonal water-temperature fluctuations, leading to the mingling of subtropical and other species as they migrate through the mid-Atlantic. The New York seascape also encompasses an extraordinary array of habitats: highly productive estuaries, nearshore migration corridors, a sandy continental shelf, as well as deepsea canyons and soaring seamounts that rival the majesty of the American West.

New York City is situated in one of the world's largest natural harbors, and is the center of one of the most populous metropolitan areas in the world. The waters around New York are not only part of a globally important ecosystem, but are also vital to the local economy. Activities that rely on healthy, accessible, and clean oceans—such as tourism, recreation, fisheries and marine transport—generate billions of dollars each year and provide hundreds of thousands of jobs.



CHALLENGES

Coastal waters and marine wildlife in the New York Seascape have sustained three centuries of abuse, resulting from its use as a dumping ground for raw sewage, heavy metals, pesticides, and other toxic chemicals. Countless oil spills and nutrient overloads have polluted the water, while extensive commercial and recreational fishing has depleted many species.

Since the Clean Water Act was passed in 1970, progress has been made in cleaning up the Hudson River and New York coastal waters. However, expanding and competing uses for these historic waters mean that many threats remain: Unsustainable fishing practices result in overfishing and habitat destruction; extensive vessel traffic leads to collisions with whales, dolphins, and sharks; offshore mining, energy development, and nutrient run-off from coastal development damages ecosystems; and the impact of climate change compounds these effects.

Despite these immediate threats, marine conservation efforts are under-prioritized in the New York region, standing in stark contrast to other areas of the United States.



WCS RESPONDS

WCS has been a leader in science-based conservation for nearly a century, having established marine conservation programs in over twenty countries around the globe. WCS now brings this marine expertise to the metropolitan region. The New York Seascape Program will drive conservation efforts to restore key local wildlife populations and protect critical habitats in the tri-state area. New investments of \$7.5 million over ten years will enable WCS to realize this goal and become a leader in conserving New York's marine environment.

Through comprehensive regional planning, field and policy-oriented activities, and educational outreach, this important initiative will reconnect New Yorkers to the great seascape at their doorstep.

The New York Seascape Program currently employs one full-time doctoral-level scientist, Dr. Merry Camhi, and a few part-time staff and skilled consultants, who are engaged in three initial projects:

- Tagging and monitoring targeted shark species in the New York waters. The data we are gathering will assist in building a robust scientific understanding of these species' movements and habitat needs, and will inform decision-making and marine and coastal management to ensure the persistence and revival of these species.
- Improving passage for American eel and diadromous fishes from the Bronx River out into the New York harbor. WCS is committed to the restoration of this urban waterway, and is working in collaboration with its partners to develop adaptive and ecosystem-based management plans for targeted species.
- Engagement in comprehensive ocean planning in New York State and the Mid-Atlantic region. WCS, along with a number of NGO partners and key stakeholders, is participating and actively involved in the process led by the New York Department of State to create an Atlantic Ocean Amendment to the state's Coastal Management Program.

NEXT STEPS

Future plans call for an expansion of staff to include conservation and education officers, two research fellows, as well as a policy officer, who would work closely with WCS government relations staff in New York and Washington, DC. WCS currently seeks a lead gift to increase the momentum of this time-sensitive program.

The New York Seascape Program is a joint venture of the New York Aquarium and WCS's Global Marine Program. Additionally, the program is an integral part of the campaign to transform the New York Aquarium by 2015, and a mission-driven priority of the Wildlife Conservation Society.