



SLELO PRISM

St. Lawrence Eastern Lake Ontario Partnership for Invasive Species Management
"Teaming Up to Stop the Spread of Invasive Species"

2026 Winter Newsletter

*Reflecting on 2025 Accomplishments
Together, we ensure SLELO PRISM remains
protected, connected, and resilient
for generations to come.*



About the Cover: Reflecting on 2025 Accomplishments

Brittney Rogers, SLELO PRISM

Throughout 2025, SLELO PRISM made exciting and meaningful progress in strengthening the ecological resilience of the St. Lawrence Eastern Lake Ontario region. Together, we advanced prevention, monitoring, management, restoration, and community engagement efforts that reflect our shared commitment to protecting native ecosystems and staying ahead of emerging environmental threats.

Prevention remains a foundational pillar of the PRISM. No Tier 1 invasive species were detected. The NYS Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation and SUNY ESF Watercraft Inspection Stewards stationed at nine launches intercepted 242 invasive species and educated 7,155 visitors.

Early detection and rapid response efforts continued. Teams completed hemlock woolly adelgid surveys at 14 locations, undertook terrestrial surveys at 113 Highly Probable Areas, and conducted aquatic vegetation surveys across seven Priority Conservation Areas.

Invasive species management included the removal of over 9,600 terrestrial stems and 7,200 pounds of aquatic invasive plants, while 77 HPAs received focused chemical treatments to suppress persistent infestations. Giant hogweed efforts resulted in 44% of sites showing no regrowth.

Ecological restoration advanced across multiple landscapes. Nearly 1,400 native plants representing 22 species were installed at four high-priority restoration sites, while an additional 500 trees were planted at Rainbow Shores Preserve through collaborative reforestation efforts.

We recognize that our achievements are not the result of any single effort, but rather the collective commitment of a diverse network of partners. From the dedicated staff who work tirelessly in the field, to the agencies and organizations who provide guidance and support, each contribution strengthens our ability to safeguard native ecosystems and combat invasive species, SLELO PRISM Staff share our deepest gratitude for those efforts.

We invite you to dive deeper into these accomplishments and explore the full scope of our work in the [2025 Annual Report](#). Looking ahead to 2026, continued collaboration, community engagement, and science-driven action will be essential. Building on this year's momentum will ensure the region remains protected, connected, and resilient for generations to come.

Thank you to our partners for being an essential part of this work. We're excited to continue this journey with you all.



Understanding SLELO's Tiered Approach to Invasive Species Management

Brittney Rogers, SLELO PRISM

Across New York State, the Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) Network uses a standardized, data-driven Tiered List approach to prioritize invasive species prevention and management. This system, developed by the New York Natural Heritage Program (NYNHP) using data from iMapInvasives, categorizes high-impact invasive species based on their abundance, distribution, and feasibility of management. It provides a unified framework to guide regional decision-making and ensures that management actions align with the invasion curve and available resources.

The Tiered List assigns species to one of several groups. Tier 1 species are high-risk threats not yet present within a region but found nearby, making them prime targets for early detection and prevention. Tier 2 species are present at low abundance, where eradication remains feasible. Tiers 3 and 4 include species with increasing levels of establishment that require strategic suppression or localized control, while Tier M identifies species that warrant additional monitoring or research to better understand their impacts.

Within this statewide structure, SLELO PRISM refines the full list into a more focused, program-specific set of priority species. By distilling hundreds of statewide listings into a manageable subset, SLELO equips partners, land managers, and community members with clearer guidance for detection, reporting, and action. This localized list highlights species that pose the greatest

ecological risk to the region and represents those most actionable based on current data and management capacity.

SLELO's priority species span the full range of tiers from prevention targets such as Hydrilla and Spotted Lanternfly to management-intensive species like knotweeds, Phragmites, and hemlock woolly adelgid. Each listing reflects the best available science, regional mapping data, and expert evaluation, helping ensure that resources are allocated where they will have the greatest ecological return.



To explore SLELO's regional priority Tier list, statewide tier tables and interactive maps, visit the SLELO PRISM [website](https://www.sleloinvasives.org).

Hope for Blanding Turtles: Restoring Habitat

Alivia Bleau, St. Lawrence County Soil and Water Conservation District

The Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) is one of New York State's rarest turtles. Habitat loss, road mortality, and invasive species have all contributed to population declines across the state. They are found in only four limited populations in NYS, one in Saratoga County, one in Dutchess County, one in Erie County, and up North in Jefferson/St. Lawrence County. The Blanding's turtle is a New York State Threatened Species.

Healthy wetlands are essential for Blanding's turtles. They depend on shallow marshes, open water, and nearby upland areas for basking, feeding, and nesting. When these wetlands change, turtles feel the impact quickly. Especially as a long-lived species with delayed sexual maturity.

The habitat of the Blanding's turtle is increasingly threatened by the spread of non-native invasive species, particularly Phragmites, honeysuckle, and buckthorn. These invasive plants have overrun critical wetland and upland areas, significantly degrading the quality of the Blanding's turtle's habitat by outcompeting native vegetation, altering water quality, reducing available food sources, and access to safe nesting sites. Phragmites, in particular, creates dense stands that outcompete native vegetation and reduce available food sources, while honeysuckle and buckthorn contribute to habitat fragmentation and a loss of biodiversity. The continued expansion of these invasive species threatens not only the Blanding's turtle population but also the broader ecosystem that supports a wide variety of plant and animal life. With support from the SLELO PRISM, invasive species management work was able to happen in Blanding's turtle habitat in St. Lawrence County.



Alivia Bleau at project site. ©St. Law. SWCD.

In the summer of 2025, funding was provided to St. Lawrence County Soil and Water Conservation District for this project. The funding allowed in-house staff to provide the ongoing, day-to-day management of the project, including iMapinvasives, while hiring contracted professionals for management of the 53-acre project area in Madrid, New York.

As invasive plants are brought under control, native vegetation has space to return. Wetlands regain open water areas and natural flow patterns, making it easier for turtles to move between wetlands and nearby nesting sites. By removing invasive species, we hope to restore the health of these critical habitats, ensuring that Blanding's turtles have a better chance of survival and reproduction, ultimately contributing to the conservation of this threatened species and the biodiversity of the area. St. Lawrence County Soil and Water is planning to continue to monitor this site to look at natural regeneration in the spring, with a plan to manually remove any remaining invasive species, and plant native trees and shrubs selected to increase biodiversity and improve wildlife habitat as needed.

Habitat Restoration in Jefferson County

Linda Gibbs, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust

When the 410-acre David S. Smith Public Conservation Area was protected in 2022, one of the driving forces behind the effort was the opportunity to maintain and improve important habitat for two endangered species: the Indiana bat and the northern long-eared bat which rely on healthy, mature woodlands for roosting.

The property contains a combination of hay and crop fields, old agricultural fields returning to grassland and shrubs, a small area of forested wetland, and forests that serve as summer roost habitat for the endangered bat species. The land serves a partial headwater for Philomel Creek, which ultimately contributes to the Black River near Glen Park.

But protecting the land was only the first step. Along the woodland edge, a thick tangle of invasive buckthorn has crowded out native vegetation and diminished the ecological value of the surrounding brushland for many years.

This past fall, with funding from and partnership with SLELO PRISM, restoration work began last fall to expand and improve critical habitat. Contractor F&W Forestry removed approximately 17 acres of invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle between grassland and forest habitats last November using targeted methods that minimize disturbance to desirable native trees. Once the invasive canopy is gone, native plants, including trees ideal for bat roosting, can begin to thrive again. It's this kind of patient, careful work that restores balance to the land, and builds habitat from the ground up. The cuttings will be treated in the spring and native growth encouraged as 2026 progresses.

The goal is to open up space for natural regeneration, allowing young native trees to



Goldenrod and forested area at the project site.

©Linda Gibbs THTLT

grow without competition from invasives. Follow-up work is planned for 2026 to ensure long-term success.

Looking ahead to 2027, THTLT is looking toward second phase of restoration in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, as 10 acres of open meadow will be transformed into new forest. The goal is to plant 5,000 trees such as oaks, pines, maples, and hickories. The project would expand habitat for bats and many other woodland species. Trees like shagbark and pignut hickory, in particular, provide the loose bark structure that endangered bats seek for roosting.

By increasing the amount of forest on the landscape, this project would support broader efforts to improve climate resilience in New York. Larger, connected forests help clean our air and water, store carbon, and buffer the effects of a changing climate.

Plans are in the works to establish an entry and parking area that will make it easier for school children, families, and the Fort Drum community to experience this land, creating space for discovery, connection, and the healing power of nature close to home.

Advancing Early Detection Rapid Response

Spencer Busler, Thousand Islands Land Trust

The Thousand Islands Land Trust (TILT) is pleased to share progress from its recently awarded SLELO-PRISM Special Project focused on invasive species detection and management along TILT's Signature Preserve trail systems. This project represents a proactive investment in protecting some of the region's most ecologically significant and frequently visited conservation lands.

Through this initiative, nearly 20 miles of public trails across multiple TILT Preserves were systematically surveyed for invasive species, with a primary focus on problematic invasive plants. Staff conducted on-the-ground assessments, documenting infestations at each site and recording observations using iMapInvasives. Collecting and reporting data in this shared regional database ensures that invasive species occurrences are tracked consistently, are accessible to partners, and incorporated into broader landscape-scale management efforts.

Following data collection, results were carefully reviewed and prioritized. Each detection was evaluated based on ecological risk, feasibility of control, and proximity to high-quality natural communities. From this analysis, site-specific management recommendations were developed, allowing the Land Trust to prioritize the most serious and time-sensitive infestations while making efficient use of limited management resources. This targeted approach supports early intervention, when invasive populations are still manageable and before they can spread further along trail corridors.



This spring, TILT will transition from assessment to action. Physical/mechanical and chemical treatments will be implemented to address the highest-priority infestations identified during the surveys, following best management practices and utilizing licensed applicators where appropriate. At compatible sites, restoration activities such as reseeding or planting native vegetation will occur following treatment to stabilize soils, improve habitat quality, and reduce the likelihood of reinfestation.

Post-treatment monitoring will continue in the coming months and years to evaluate treatment effectiveness, detect any regrowth, and guide future management decisions. This long-term commitment to monitoring ensures that management actions remain effective and that new infestations are addressed quickly.

The Land Trust is grateful to SLELO-PRISM, The Nature Conservancy, and NYS DEC for their support of this Special Project. Their investment strengthens regional partnerships, builds local stewardship capacity, and protects native habitats while keeping TILT's Preserves healthy and enjoyable for everyone.

Invasive Species Through a Biogeographical Lens

Nicholas Dietschler, Cornell University's NYS Hemlock Initiative

Why can some forest pest be destructive in one part of the world, yet relatively harmless in the place it comes from? Invasions by non-native forest pests leading to ecological impacts are often studied exclusively in their invaded range. However, important insights come from examining these species in their native range. Classical biological control (CBC), the use of specialist natural enemies, relies on expeditions to the native range to identify effective predators. Yet native range CBC research typically ends once biocontrol agents are collected, overlooking the broader ecological context in which the pest evolved. The recent paper *Multitrophic interactions and niche partitioning in the native range inform biological control in forests invaded by the hemlock woolly adelgid*, examined the predator-prey community associated with the hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) through a biogeographical lens in its native western North American range.

Hemlock woolly adelgid was introduced to eastern North America in the early 20th century from Japan and has since caused decline of eastern and Carolina hemlock forests. Interestingly, there are several distinct populations of HWA in Asia, and one in western North America. Predator collections from multiple native ranges have identified suitable biocontrols, and western North American HWA provide a unique opportunity for research into predator-prey interactions. In the west, predators that keep HWA populations in check include a beetle (*Laricobius nigrinus*) and two fly species (*Leucotaraxis argenticollis* and *Le. piniperda*). The goal of CBC is to replicate natural predator communities that regulate pests populations, and understanding native community interactions can support management. Cornell University's NYS Hemlock Initiative conducts extensive research in western North America, to inform management efforts.



Studying multi-trophic interaction, or more than one level in the food chain, gives researchers context of what keeps pest populations in check. Biocontrol programs use multiple predators targeting pests at key points, and the two fly species feed on HWA at different times, complementing each other in a biocontrol scenario. While the two fly species overlapped with the beetle predator, we found they were present on separate twigs, suggesting they are avoiding each other. Observations in the native range show predators feeding on HWA in harmony, but what if they are released together in the east? We put the two fly species into direct competition in the lab, and found the flies performed equally well when released together. The native western and introduced eastern HWA are closely related, but have observable differences. Adelgid in the invasive range has two generations per year, with western HWA fluctuating between one and two annual generations, with unknown impacts on their predators or hemlock host trees.

These studies provide valuable insights into invasive pest community dynamics that inform management efforts. HWA offers an example that can be replicated in other pest systems, and the study can be accessed in [Biological Invasions](#).

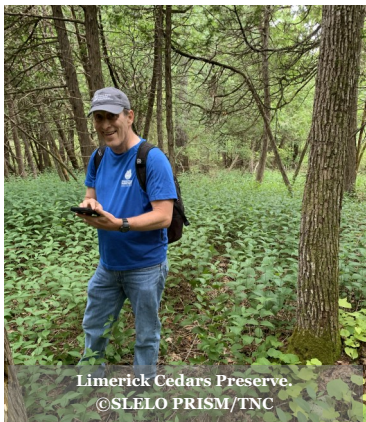
Terrestrial Restoration and Resiliency Updates

Robert Smith, SLELO PRISM

2025 Field Survey Results

Results of last summer's field season showed the presence of 14 Tier invasive species. Of the 113 highly probable areas (HPAs) that we visited, the most common species found was common buckthorn, present at 42 HPAs, followed by honeysuckle at 39 Sites, pale swallowwort at 28 Sites, and wild parsnip at 27 sites.

The fewest number of tier invasive species occurred at Three Mile Creek Preserve with 3, while the largest number of tier invasive species was found at Tug Hill ISPZ with 11 species. The field report that includes this information is now available on the SLELO PRISM [website](#).

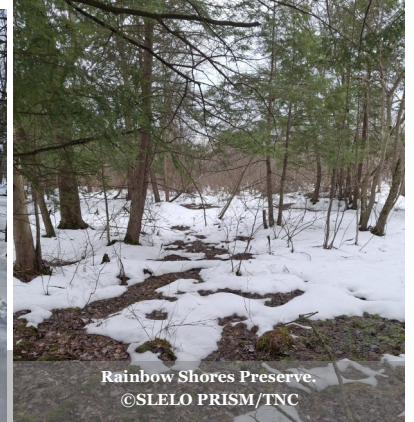
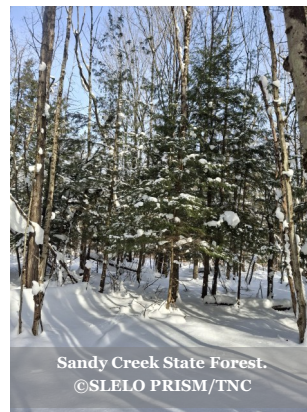


2026 Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Surveys

We started our HWA surveys in January and plan to survey up to 14 sites. We brought back some sites, such as Sandy Creek State Forest and Three Mile Bay WMA and removed Great Bear Recreational Area and SUNY Oswego where HWA was found last year. In addition, one new site, Pixley Falls State Park. Four of the sites we have surveyed in previous years will also be collaboratively surveyed by SLELO PRISM and OPRHP, including Pixley Falls. This additional staffing will increase efforts and probability of detecting HWA.

In December we hosted an introductory HWA webinar, Session 2 was held at Independence Park on 12/18, a site known to be infested with HWA. In addition to staff surveys, volunteer led surveys will be led by our Education and Outreach Coordinator, Megan Shaw in collaboration with the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust at Trenton Greenbelt, Forest Park, and Salmon River Falls. [Sign up](#) to join them!

Lastly, we will be conducting an HWA Mortality Survey at Independence Park in early April to determine the percentage of HWA that survived the winter. This varies from year to year, depending on the severity of the winter, and has an effect on the degree of spread that may occur during the rest of the year. Results of these surveys will be posted in a later edition of the newsletter and in the 2026 HWA Survey Report on our [website](#).



Aquatic Restoration and Resiliency Updates

Adrien Owens, SLELO PRISM

Water Protectors Program

SLELO successfully hosted our second 3-part Aquatic Invasive Species Learning Experience (AISLE) in 2025, focusing on native and invasive aquatic plant identification and survey methods in the region. In addition, attendees are invited to adopt a waterbody to survey and report invasive species. In 2025, 17 water protectors signed up to help safeguard 12 waterbodies.

The program will continue with another 3-part AISLE planned for June through August. This training is a great fit for anyone interested in learning more about aquatic plants and early detection efforts. Learn more about the program and sign up to be notified of the program registration announcement on our [website](#).

NEAPMS 27th Annual Conference

The Northeast Aquatic Plant Management Society (NEAPMS) held its 27th annual conference in Mystic, CT in January. Adrien attended this conference amongst a wide array of stakeholders focusing on the management of aquatic vegetation. This conference provides scientific and educational advancement of members, encourages scientific research of aquatic plant management, promotes an exchange of information among members and develops understanding in the discipline of aquatic plants.

Aquatic Invasive Species Management

SLELO plans to host water chestnut removal hand pull events on the Oswegatchie River, as well as at Guffin Bay, and Lakeview WMA South Colwell Pond this coming summer. Our staff has been dedicated to monitoring these efforts over the years to track progress managing this invasive species while engaging connected communities. If you are interested into helping control water chestnut, sign up to volunteer on our [website](#). In addition, SLELO is constructing a management plan for a highly invasive Tier 2 species, fanwort, recently detected on the Little Salmon River.

Restoration Considerations

SLELO PRISM continues to enhance terrestrial and riparian restoration efforts to close the loop between invasive species management and habitat resiliency. Building on restoration principles we are now directing our focus to support the reestablishment of native aquatic vegetation post invasive species removal. Partnering with SUNY Oswego, SLELO hopes to launch a pilot aquatic plant restoration program in 2026.



Team SLELO at work on the water.
©SLELO PRISM/TNC.

Protectors Activity

Winter isn't just for cozy fires and snowy hikes; it's also the perfect time to spot invasive species. Many invasives hold their leaves, berries, or egg sacs through winter, offering clear visual cues for hikers, landowners, and volunteers. Identifying them now helps protect forests, trails, and wildlife year-round.

Invasive shrubs such as **barberry**, **honeysuckle**, and **buckthorn** form dense thickets that crowd out native plants, alter soil chemistry, and create humid microhabitats that support deer and mice—key hosts for ticks. Their berries persist into winter but offer poor nutrition for birds. Invasive woody vines like **porcelain berry** and **bittersweet** climb and choke trees, blocking sunlight and adding weight that leads to breakage. Invasive bittersweet also hybridizes with the native American bittersweet, threatening its survival.

Prevention Tips:

- Avoid planting invasive species.
- Clean boots, tools, and gear.
- Monitor disturbed soils and edges.
- Choose native plants for landscaping.

Management Tips:

- Cut new growth before it seeds; bag and dispose of debris.
- Smother low-lying patches with landscape fabric in early spring.
- For established plants, use repeated cutting/pulling or apply selective herbicide to cut stumps.

Identification Tips:

- **Barberry** – Thorny arching stems; small red berries that persist.
- **Honeysuckle shrubs** – Hollow stems, grooved bark, paired red berries.
- **Common buckthorn** – Short thorns at branch tips; yellow orange inner bark.
- **Glossy buckthorn** – No thorns; smooth gray bark with white lenticels.
- **Porcelain berry** – Bright speckled berries in blue, purple, and turquoise; white pith inside stems.
- **Oriental bittersweet** – Vines tightly twining around trees; yellow capsules with red berries along the stem.



Hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) and **balsam woolly adelgid (BWA)** kill trees by feeding on sap, leading to needle loss, dieback, and eventual mortality. Their spread reshapes ecosystems and reduces habitat quality.

Prevention & Management

- Practice Early Detection and Rapid Response.
- Report sightings to **NYiMapInvasives**.
- Clean gear and avoid infested areas.
- For high value trees, certified applicators may use systemic insecticides.
- In dense HWA infestations, biocontrols such as *Laricobius* beetles and *Leucotaraxis* silver flies may be released.

Identification Tips:

- **HWA** – White, woolly egg sacs on the undersides of hemlock branches.
- **BWA** – White woolly spots on fir bark, twig swelling "gout," and distorted crowns.

Read the [full blog](#) to view a webinar and images to aid identification.

Become a Protector

Receive monthly emails with easy ways to care for our lands and waters. Take part in fun blog challenges for a chance to win prizes, explore helpful resources, and share inspiring content from our social media library.

iPledgeToProtect.org

Upcoming Events



[Get Details](#)



[Get Details](#)



[Get Details](#)

- Now through March 15th: [NYiMapInvasives HWA Winter Mapping Challenge](#)
- March 3rd-5th: [Spotted Lanternfly Summit](#)
- March 7th: [TILT's Annual Winter Gathering](#)
- March 9th: [THTLT The Home-Scale Forest Garden Online Watch party](#)
- March 19th-21st: [LIISMA PRISM's Resilient Long Island Symposium accepting poster submissions](#)
- April 3rd: [TILT's Owls & Outdoor KidsTrek](#)
- April 21st: [THC Local Government Conference](#)
- April 18th: [Stewardship Day with IRLC](#)
- March 26th & April 30th: [THC Winter Wildlife Webinar](#)

Job and Funding Opportunities

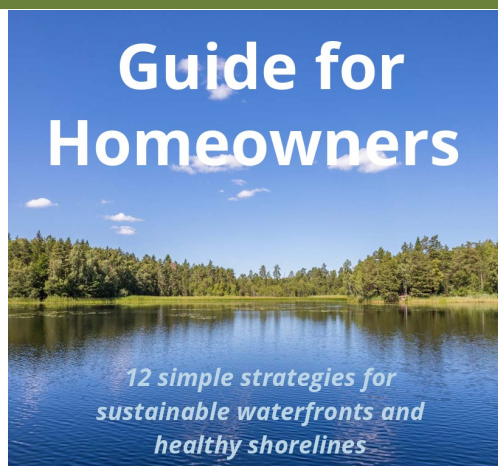
Job Opportunities

- [New York Natural Heritage Program](#).
- [SUNY ESF /OPRHP: Watercraft Inspection Steward Lead Steward, view flyer.](#)
- [Thousand Islands Land Trust & Save the River.](#)
- Fort Drum is looking for a heavy equipment operator and invasive plant technician, email Crystal Wixon crystal.e.wixon.ctr@army.mil.

Funding Opportunities

- [Great Lakes Protection Fund](#): Deadline 3/18.
- [NY Great Lakes Basin Small Grants](#): Deadline 3/27.
- [Great Lakes AIS Landing Blitz Grant](#): Deadline 4/5.
- [Round 5 of Regenerate NY](#): Deadlines 3/10 & 8/31.
- [Open Space Conservation Grant Program](#): Deadline 4/15.

Notable Announcements



[View the Guide](#)



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From the Director's Desk



As we settle into the winter season, it's a perfect moment to reflect on the collective progress we made throughout 2025 and to look ahead with optimism and renewed purpose. Our [Annual Report](#) showcased the meaningful strides we've taken together to strengthen the ecological resilience of the SLELO region, from expanding early detection efforts to advancing restoration at our PCAs. These accomplishments speak not only to the dedication of our staff, partners, and volunteers, but also to the power of collaboration at every level of our work.

This newsletter highlights some of the stories and efforts behind those accomplishments. You've read about habitat restoration supporting the Blanding's turtle, progress on restoration and forest health, advancements in early detection and rapid response along highly visited trail systems, and emerging research that deepens our understanding of invasive species across ecosystems. These articles illustrate the diversity, reach, and impact of SLELO's partnerships across the region and how integrated our work has become, from riparian systems to upland forests.

As we turn our attention to the year ahead, our [Annual Work Plan](#) builds on this momentum with purpose and clarity. Guided by our

Strategic Plan, our actions for 2026 strengthen prevention pathways, expand early detection networks, enhance management effectiveness, and deepen our investment in ecological restoration and community engagement. New initiatives, such as piloting aquatic plant restoration, expanding biocontrol opportunities, improving data and UAV-based monitoring, and advancing our Pledge to Protect campaign, demonstrate how innovation and collaboration remain central to our mission.

The year ahead will undoubtedly bring new challenges, but it also brings remarkable opportunity. Our region is strongest when we work together. When agencies, land managers, scientists, volunteers, and community members unite around a shared vision of resilient lands and waters. I am continually inspired by your dedication, your expertise, and your belief in what we can accomplish collectively.

Thank you for being a vital part of this partnership. Let's carry forward the momentum of 2025 and step boldly into 2026 with curiosity, determination, and a commitment to protecting the lands and waters we all cherish.

SLELO PRISM is hosted by The Nature Conservancy. Funding for SLELO PRISM's activities is provided from the NYS Environmental Protection Fund as administered by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.



The Nature Conservancy



Department of Environmental Conservation

