



How to Make Friends and Protect Nature

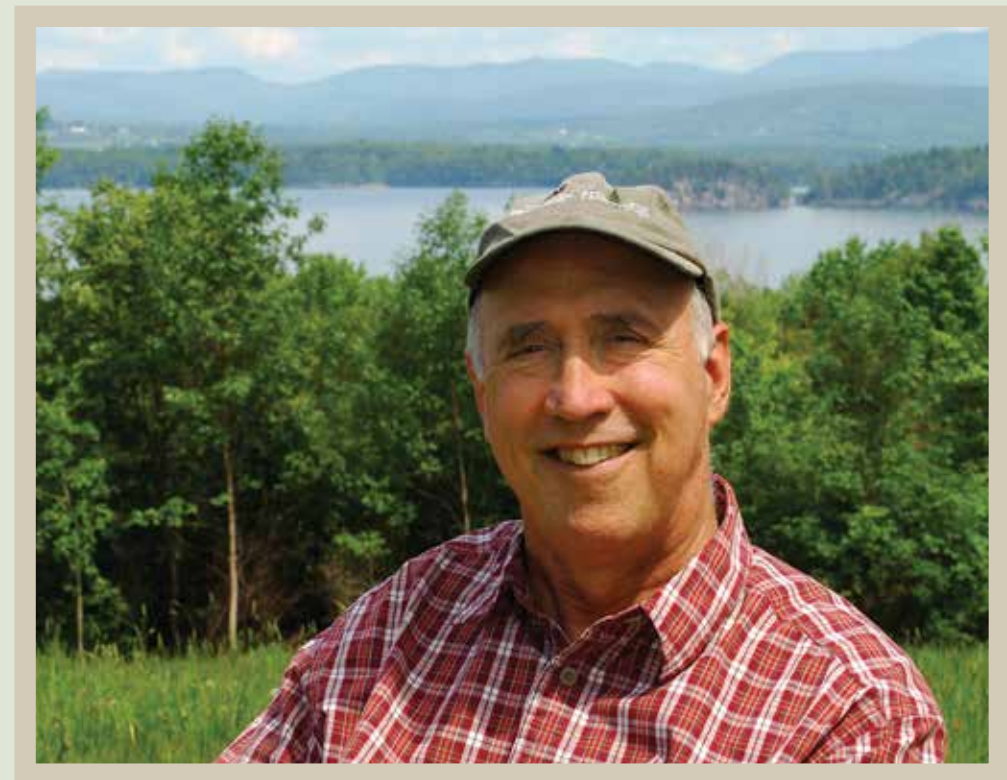
**Tim Barnett's Adirondack
Conservation Playbook**





Tim Barnett

Resilient Statesman of Northwoods Diplomacy

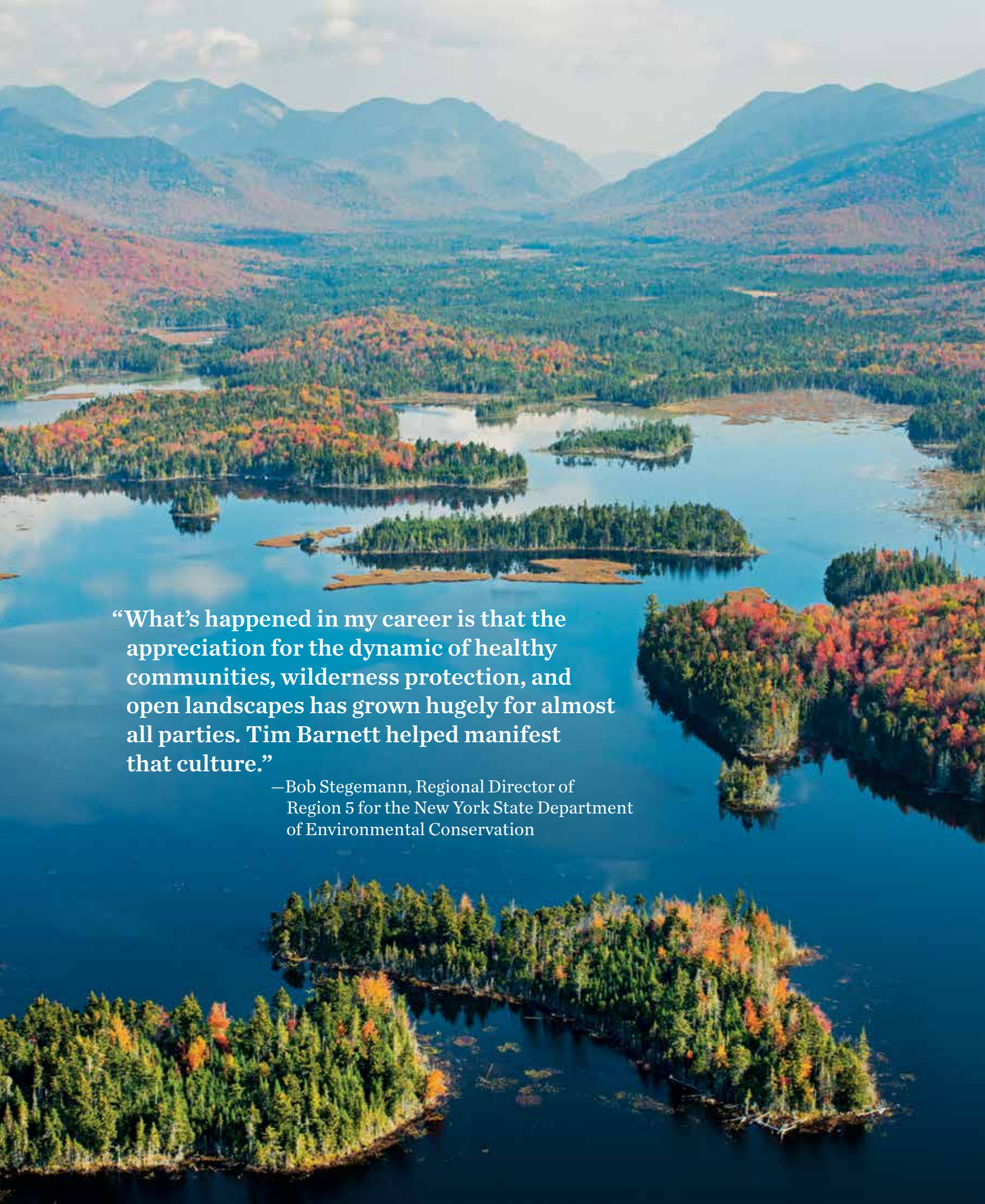


Cover: Tim Barnett, Adirondacks.
© Tim Barnett

Inside cover: Boreas Ponds is the jewel of the seminal 161,000-acre land deal between The Nature Conservancy and New York State. The Nature Conservancy's Heart of the Adirondacks decade-long land protection effort created the third-largest wilderness area east of the Mississippi.

© John DiGiacomo

The Nature
Conservancy 
Adirondacks



A Resilient Legacy



Top: Peg Olsen, Executive Director of the Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

Bottom: Peg and Tim on the summit of Mt. Marcy preparing for a winter ski descent.

© The Nature Conservancy

“What’s happened in my career is that the appreciation for the dynamic of healthy communities, wilderness protection, and open landscapes has grown hugely for almost all parties. Tim Barnett helped manifest that culture.”

—Bob Stegemann, Regional Director of Region 5 for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

When I heard Tim Barnett speak for the first time, I was just a college student, and he had been a leading voice in Adirondack conservation for close to a decade. I still worked up the nerve to introduce myself to Tim, then the founding director of The Nature Conservancy’s Adirondack Chapter. That conversation began one of the most fruitful professional relationships of my life.

A few years later, Tim called to encourage me to apply for a job as director of the Conservancy’s Eastern New York Chapter. But I already had a job offer. And I was in graduate school, with a Ph.D. up next. Tim’s response: “What are you going to do—be a planner all your life?” I took his advice and applied for the job, which launched my conservation career.

During ten years as the Eastern New York Director (and another four in the Asia Pacific region), I lobbied Tim to at least pretend concern for the Conservancy’s work outside the Adirondacks. But while his life’s mission remained laser-focused on this region, his vision was truly expansive. As a result, the Adirondacks remain an intact forest landscape.

All along, Tim understood that conserving large landscapes would lead to a host of benefits. Wildlife would thrive. Communities could, too. Today, our resilient landscape serves as an essential connector for the Northern Appalachian-Acadian Region. This vast ecosystem runs from Lake Ontario to Nova Scotia, from the Massachusetts Berkshires to Quebec’s Gaspé Peninsula. And while climate change was virtually unknown when Tim launched his career, his vision wound up benefiting that, too: Protecting and conserving one of the largest intact temperate deciduous forests left on Earth gives flora and fauna the capacity to adapt to a changing climate and also helps in carbon sequestration.

That’s enough reason to celebrate Tim, who retired in 2018 after 46 years with The Nature Conservancy. But there’s so much more to his legacy, including the many aspiring conservationists whose careers he launched and supported.

That includes my own. My first meeting with Tim shaped the course of my life. Through this book, I hope he may inspire you as well.

Peg Olsen
Adirondack Chapter Director
The Nature Conservancy

The Grand Experiment

HOW DO HUMANS AND NATURE COEXIST?

The Nature Conservancy works toward answers in the Adirondack Park, a landscape with global significance in the fight against climate change.

Hike Jay Mountain, a 3,600-foot summit northeast of the High Peaks, and you'll gain perspective on the conservation legacy that shapes the Adirondack Park. As you scramble along an exposed ridge on the final approach, study the 360-degree panorama. Behind you rises the Great Range's jagged skyline. In the valley below, the AuSable River curves past hamlets where iron forges and grist mills once labored. Lake Champlain glitters straight ahead, its western edge a patchwork of small farms. And in every direction, you see forest—vast, intact, climbing from backyards to mountaintops.

This view holds global significance. A 2018 study found that 80 percent of the world's forests have been damaged by human impact. That's a crippling blow to the ecosystem best equipped to absorb carbon

emissions and counter global warming. The good news? The Adirondacks anchor the Northern Appalachian/Acadia Region, an intact forest landscape of 80 million acres that stretches from New York's Tug Hill to Nova Scotia. More importantly, the six-million-acre Adirondack Park offers the Nature Conservancy a testing ground. Here, our international organization perfects land protection tools, then deploys them worldwide to protect more forest.

We owe this opportunity to the region's unique history, a past shaped as the American environmental movement matured. In 1892, New York created the Adirondack Park, and forest began to regenerate. This conservation instinct became part of the state's Constitution in 1894, when Article 14 decreed



that “the lands of the state ... shall be forever kept as wild forest lands.”

The 1960s sparked further nationwide action to protect wilderness against pollution and development. Again, New York's politicians responded: the Adirondack Park Agency was created to regulate land use; a government study recommended an Adirondack Nature Conservancy that could pursue land gifts to the reserve.

At the time, The Nature Conservancy was a small, Virginia-based NGO with a national roster of volunteers. In 1972, Adirondack members hired Tim Barnett, a Manhattan television ad salesman, as the Adirondack Chapter's founding director. He arrived on the cusp of another seismic shift in conservation: the transition from a species-based perspective to landscape-scale land protection. “Tim looked at the Adirondacks in its totality, and he fiercely pursued that,” says Chuck Bassett, who was the Conservancy's New York State Director early in Barnett's career. And in the following decades, from the 1972 bond act to the 1993 creation of the Environmental Protection Fund, New York voters empowered the state to engage in this mission.

Early on, Barnett was guided by advisors such as naturalist Greenleaf Chase and wilderness advocate Clarence Petty. “All I had to do was listen, and work with their ideas,” he says. He then honed a people-first approach to conservation, building relationships with landowners, business interests, Adirondack communities, and local government. Soon, market forces reshaped the timber industry. Tax burdens threatened to splinter family estates. And development threatened to swallow farms and open space. But, because he was trusted and

The Adirondacks anchor the Northern Appalachian/Acadia Region, an intact forest landscape of 80 million acres that stretches from New York's Tug Hill to Nova Scotia.

understood the objectives of individual stakeholders, Barnett could broker deals that kept forests whole.

“He has enormous vision, and of course enormous energy,” says author and activist Bill McKibben. “That's a potent and rare combination.” And nearly a half-century later, the chapter Barnett built has protected 585,000 acres—an area roughly the size of Luxembourg. The Adirondacks remain the largest contiguous protected natural area in the Lower 48, necessary to the survival of plants, animals, and humans in a changing climate. “The Nature Conservancy has redrawn the map of the Adirondacks,” says Mike Carr, executive director of the Adirondack Land Trust. “And that is Tim's legacy.”

Left: Jay Mountain at sunset. © Jake Sporn

Above: Tim Barnett in his element. © The Nature Conservancy





78 years with Tim Barnett

A closer look at the people and places that matter to the Adirondack Chapter's founding director.

1.5 MILES. The length of Tim's Trail, a universally accessible loop found within Willsboro's 110-acre Boquet River Nature Preserve.

7 YEARS from Barnett's first class at Middlebury College to receiving his bachelor's degree at the University of Colorado. "Tim likes to call himself a failure," says Chris Jage, the chapter's land protection manager. "But his true legacy is his ability to establish trusting relationships with people who have differences of opinion."

39 YEARS, Barnett's age when he quit smoking and started running. Daily jogs led to marathon finishes. His personal best? Three hours and 40 minutes. "I just kept plowing on," he says.

24 HOURS. The time between Barnett's fall from horseback in Kyrgyzstan's Tien Shen Mountains and the rescue team's arrival. The 1997 accident left Barnett with a fractured C-4 vertebra.

5 MILES PER HOUR. The maximum speed of Barnett's motorized wheelchair. "I've been in Manhattan with Tim, and when he motors down Fifth Avenue, I can't keep up," says Adirondack Land Trust Executive Director Mike Carr. "He can get any door open, anywhere in the world."

130 BIRD SPECIES found in the boreal habitat at Spring Pond Bog. The wetland, the second largest open peatland in New York State, was purchased by the Conservancy in 1985.

11 MILES of hiking trails at Split Rock Wild Forest, the largest undeveloped swath of shoreline on Lake Champlain. In 1993, the Conservancy and the Open Space Institute partnered to protect 1,800 acres, which became New York State's first land acquisition using the Environmental Protection Fund.

Top: Staff and members observe a variety of typical northern bog plant species during a photography seminar at Spring Pond Bog Preserve, the second largest open expanse of peatland in New York. © Erika Bailey

18 MILES of Hudson River shoreline, purchased from Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation in 1994. This protected ice meadows where rare plants typically found in arctic regions thrive.

1,490 ACRES. The surface area of Lake Lila, the largest moterless lake in the Adirondacks, protected in a 1998 transaction between New York State and the descendants of industrialist William C. Whitney.

240,000 ACRES protected during Barnett's tenure as executive director from 1972 to 1997. The chapter also grew to 15 staff, with 4,200 members in 41 states.

2 SONS, Ian and Ned.
6 grandchildren.

52 YEARS. Tim has been married to his wife Claire, the founder of Healthy Schools Network, a nonprofit dedicated to children's environmental health in educational spaces. "He saves land, and I save kids," she says. "We've got it covered."



Tim's mentors Clarence Petty, Greenleaf Chase, and Gary Randorf were guiding lights throughout his career. © Tim Barnett



Tim's trademark bracken fern technique to keep deer fly away. © Tim Barnett

The Barnett Playbook

“EVERY GREAT IDEA I’VE HAD, I STOLE FROM SOMEONE ELSE.”
That’s how Tim Barnett explains his success. But a careful study of his Adirondack career reveals a few common themes. Read carefully—and make these ideas your own. It’s what Tim would do.



Field staff use game cameras to monitor wildlife movements throughout the Adirondack region. The data helps link forests, extending to the Canadian Maritimes, to ensure wildlife have room to roam. © Erika Bailey

science-based conservation

“Tim would get onto his knees to look at bat caves, and wipe away bugs in a bog to look at plants,” says conservation ecologist Mike DiNunzio. “He was always out in the field, zooming around like a madman.” As the Nature Conservancy invested in biological inventories and founded the Nature Heritage Network, Barnett partnered with Adirondack landowners and corporations to perform baseline ecological assessments on their vast holdings. These proved invaluable when prioritizing later land acquisitions. Barnett also organized DiNunzio and artist Anne Lacy to create the Adirondack Wildguide, a natural history published in 1984 to educate citizen scientists.

cultivate strong partners

Farmlands, working forests, and river corridors did not qualify as ecologically significant or rare species habitat—the Conservancy’s priorities in the 1980s. How to protect them? Barnett backed land trusts, private groups that focused on open space preservation. That included the fledgling Lake George Land Conservancy. And in 1988, Barnett brought the Adirondack Land Trust in house. For 29 years, the two groups worked together to achieve landscape-scale protection. “Tim approaches every situation as an opportunity. He has no template,” says Tom Duffus, a former director of the ALT. Today, the Adirondack chapter also works with the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust and the Northeast Wilderness Trust to strengthen connectivity to the west and east.



Staff evaluating road-stream crossings in the Adirondacks. © Erika Bailey



Kayla White, chief summit steward, poses on the summit of Mount Marcy. © Erika Bailey

support grassroots stewardship

In 1990, the Conservancy partnered with the Adirondack Mountain Club and New York State’s Department of Environmental Conservation to establish the Summit Stewardship Program. This effort stations trained professionals on busy peaks to educate hikers about protecting a fragile alpine habitat, home to 27 plant species. Photo analysis proves vegetation has recovered since the 1960s, and nearly 175 acres of alpine habitat exists in New York today. That’s due in part to the program’s massive reach: stewards and volunteers log upwards of 300 field days annually, with an average of 100 daily contacts. In 2019, the summit stewards reached half a million people.

educate future leaders

“Success in conservation lasts longer than your presence, longer than you live,” says Adirondack Chapter Director Peg Olsen. “And sustainability means that you create a cadre of people who go forward and spread what they learned.” Barnett’s legacy reaches many of the partner organizations and agencies in the Park and beyond, through people he hired, mentored, or engaged with as director. “Don’t think about what’s happening in the office today,” says Melissa Eisenger, a Barnett hire who was formerly vice president of the Adirondack Foundation. “Step way back, and think about what’s really happening here. That’s what Tim taught me.”



Cora King, a second grader at the time, submitted the winning entry for the 2015 preserve name contest: the Boquet River Nature Preserve. © The Nature Conservancy

“Step way back, and think about what’s really happening here. That’s what Tim taught me.”

—Melissa Eisenger,
Vice President (ret.), Adirondack Foundation



How to Make Friends and Protect Nature

Tim Barnett, the Adirondack Chapter’s founding director, pioneered landscape-scale conservation within The Nature Conservancy. And despite a life-changing injury, he remained on the job for 46 years, a resilient statesman of northwoods diplomacy.



By Olivia Dwyer

The Barnett Center for Conservation sits in Keene Valley, a town of 1,000 residents nestled in the Adirondack High Peaks. Porter Mountain and Rooster Comb stand behind the two-story building. A shady porch overlooks a lawn framed by tall pines and glossy maples.

The The Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy’s home office is named for Tim Barnett, the chapter’s founding director. He got the job in 1972, and only stepped down after a 1997 horseback riding accident in Kyrgyzstan left him with a fractured C-4 vertebrae. “They had to break my neck to get rid of me,” he says with a puckish grin.

Still, Barnett’s devotion kept him close. In 1998, the Conservancy named Barnett vice president for special programs. Twenty years later, an aide drives

the 79-year-old from his Saratoga Springs home to the office one day a week.

That’s where I find Barnett on a chilly afternoon in April 2018: at work, protecting land. He pilots his motorized wheelchair from his desk to a conference room. There, he spends an hour deftly untangling generations of family histories, corporate interests, Park politics and social issues—plus scientific theory and land protection methods. I learn that a landscape-scale approach conserved this intact forest landscape, now able to perform vital ecological functions in a changing climate.

As we talk, Barnett will share an off-color anecdote with raised eyebrows, or lean in with a conspiratorial smile to land a punchline. Then he veers off, his right hand driving the wheelchair to a bookshelf or a map. He’s a boiling cauldron, ideas always bubbling to the surface. That’s his legacy: after 46 years on the job, Barnett connects today’s staffers to the chapter’s past, their resilient link between the Park’s history and the 21st century.

Left: Tim Barnett on the newly opened 1.15-mile universal access trail, aptly named Tim’s Trail, at the Boquet River Nature Preserve in Willsboro. © Ken Aaron

Above: A younger Tim is all smiles at the beach. © Tim Barnett



Left to right: Tim, Claire, and their two sons, Ian and Ned, at their home in Westport; Tim and Claire pose for a family photo at the top of Whiteface Mountain. © Tim Barnett

An early rendering of the Adirondack Chapter's Keene Valley office; the finished building, named in Tim's honor. © The Nature Conservancy

TIM'S ADIRONDACK STORY BEGINS ON THE SHORES OF LAKE CHAMPLAIN.

His parents, Lincoln and Hildegard, moved to Westport after his father retired from Life magazine. "My father had attended Camp Dudley, so there was a powerful draw," says Tim's brother Robby, 10 years his junior. "My mother wanted us to feel free to explore this larger world that belongs to all of us, but also know that we were part of this larger community." Tim ventured

out early, heading to Camp Dudley each summer. In eighth grade, his parents dispatched him to boarding school.

Middlebury College followed, but Tim preferred ski areas to library stacks. He volunteered for the Army in 1960. Why enlist? "I needed discipline," he says. But hiking through the German Alps on long-range patrols—salami, cheese, and bread in his pockets, pack on his back, Ski Patrol in Garmisch, Germany—he found freedom in the outdoors. After

"I was totally curious about everything, and if an opportunity came up that was better than the one I was failing at, I moved on."

—Tim Barnett

his service, Tim headed to the West. "I was totally curious about everything, and if an opportunity came up that was better than the one I was failing at, I moved on," he remembers. He graduated from the University of Colorado in 1965 and returned east for a job at a Manhattan polling firm. He invited a coworker named Claire Lillis, a recent Mount Holyoke grad, for a sail on the Staten Island Ferry. They married in November 1966.

Most weekends, the couple traveled north to the Adirondacks. Shortly after their son Ian was born in 1972, a family friend suggested Tim apply for a job with a new private group focused on buying land for conservation. The organization would be a chapter of the Nature Conservancy, a national nonprofit established by scientists in 1951 that was quietly building a reputation for saving land. Tim met Adirondack volunteers at the Howard Johnson's in Lake George, charming philanthropist Winnie LaRose and preservationist Paul Schaefer while Claire waited with the baby. "Younger folks were doing this back-to-the-land thing," says Claire. "So when the opportunity came, that's what we did."

The family relocated to Westport in 1973, and soon welcomed their son Ian. Tim commuted to the Conservancy's Elizabethtown office in a beige Volkswagen Beetle. He had no direct report at the national office; the nascent state chapters were left to set local agendas. And Barnett's volunteer corps had already purchased Great Camp Santanoni, a 12,000-acre New York State property funded by the voter-approved bond act of 1972. They had plenty to keep Tim busy. As he says, "The board handed me a list and said, 'Go forth and negotiate!'"

Which he did, tirelessly. Guided by mentors such as the naturalist Greenleaf Chase, Tim learned which plants and animals were ecologically significant. Conservationist Clarence Petty tutored him in land use history, from the creation of the Blue

Line to Governor Nelson Rockefeller's Temporary Study Commission and the newly formed Adirondack Park Agency. Meanwhile, the national Conservancy was focused on meticulous scientific inventories to identify rare and endangered species with state-level Natural Heritage programs. But while others were focused on creating postage stamp-sized preserves for the benefit of a single species, Tim realized there were vast tracts of land at risk in the Adirondacks.

That was a result of economic realities. Large family estates under increasing property taxes, those owned by the marquee names of the gilded age, looked to subdivide and sell. With rapidly changing markets, timber companies considered divesting. Tim saw an opportunity. Here, his natural affinity for people—and a tireless interest in each individual's life experience, knowledge, and personal relationship to natural resources—informed his work. In a negotiation, Tim could see the view from each stakeholder's chair; he could understand everyone's goal, and worked to pair conservation objectives with their needs.

"Tim had already figured out landscape-level conservation was the way to go," says Mike Dennis, the Conservancy's general counsel from 1980 to 2005. "He challenged the organization to shift focus and the way it did business. That was Tim's great legacy." By 1980, the Adirondack Chapter had protected nearly 100,000 acres. Nearly half that total was contained in two parcels, Brandon Park and Bay Pond, where Tim used conservation easements to obtain a legal interest in land without outright ownership. Owners retained their land; the Conservancy held development rights.

When the Adirondack Land Trust started up in 1984, Tim quickly recognized why its work mattered: Open space such as farms, working forests, and shoreline did not meet the Conservancy's standards

Introducing Claire Lillis Barnett

Supporters of The Nature Conservancy’s Adirondack Chapter know Claire Barnett as Tim’s wife of 52 years. For decades, the couple fed and housed visiting staff and donors at the family home. “Nothing in my life would have happened without her,” says Tim.

But nationally, Claire is recognized as a pioneer in children’s environmental health. In 1995, she founded Healthy Schools Network (HS Network), a nonprofit that works to ensure schools are environmentally safe for children and others. And as Tim enters retirement, Claire’s work continues. If that sounds unusual for a grandmother in her 70s, you don’t know Claire.

Before Tim joined the Conservancy, Claire worked at



Claire Barnett receives the 2017 William K. Reilly Award for Environmental Leadership given by the Center for Environmental Policy at American University in Washington, D.C. for her efforts to promote environmentally healthy schools. © Tim Barnett

Time magazine in New York City. She became the second woman ever to write for the business section, and later helped organize more than 140 professional women at Time Inc. who sought equal recognition as reporters and writers. Then, as the Watergate scandal was brewing, she and Tim left the fast-paced world of Manhattan to

live in the Adirondacks. Their first home was three miles north of Warrensburg on a dirt road. Each morning, Tim drove their only vehicle to his new Conservancy job in Lake George. Claire stayed home with their infant son, Ian. “It was an intense introduction to the North Country,” she says.

While in Warrensburg, she drove to Glens Falls weekly to volunteer with Planned Parenthood. Later she joined the staff of Essex County Mental Health, where she expanded

programs for people with disabilities. After completing a master’s degree, she worked on Adirondack sustainable development projects at SUNY Plattsburgh. Her years of community service led to her appointment to Governor Mario Cuomo’s 1989 Commission on the Future of the Adirondacks in the 21st Century, where she championed local access to natural resources.

Meanwhile, she raised their sons Ian and Ned. When Ned became ill after pesticide exposures at school, Claire contacted state agencies: none responded. She then took her quest for child-safe school facilities from the local parent organization to the New York State Board of Regents. The resulting Regents’ report embedded the nation’s first adopted policies recognizing children’s vulnerabilities to environmental hazards.

Not content to wait for the Regents, Claire acted. She organized 30 groups into a statewide coalition to back the report that later became HS Network. Since then, it has won laws to eliminate toxics in schools and funds for public school renovations. HS Network also fosters coalitions in dozens more states and convenes a national Coalition that has secured new federal programs and funds for the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Education. In 2017, Claire and HS Network’s leadership were recognized with the prestigious David P. Rall Award for contributions to public health through science-based advocacy from the American Public Health Association, and the William K. Reilly Award for Environmental Leadership from American University.

In a typical day, the office fields requests from agencies, advocates, parents and community groups. At home, Claire Skypes, Facetimes, and travels to visit with the Barnetts’ sons, daughters-in-law, and six grandchildren, all in Colorado. Her advice to the next generation?

“It was a great privilege to live and work in a rural area, where you are never far from the human cycles of birth and death, and where everyone must live with the results of their best intentions,” says Claire. “Talk to people, understand their interests, and you can build better systems for healthier people.”



Left to right: Conservancy staff and partners gather at a graphite mine near Hague, NY, to conduct a hibernating bat census, led by Al Hicks, DEC director of nongame species unit.

Tim Barnett and ranger, Peter Fish, enjoy a reprieve on Mt. Marcy’s summit. © The Nature Conservancy.

Tim running the Fort to Fort 18-mile road race from the Champlain Bridge at Fort Crown Point to Fort Ticonderoga. © Tim Barnett

“Tim’s approach was: if you know the land, if you know the people, and you know what needs to happen, go make it happen. Don’t wait for someone to tell you what to do or to give you permission to save the land.”

– Tom Duffus, Former ALT Director

for protection, but these features all contributed to an intact landscape. In 1988, Tim negotiated a joint operating agreement for his organization and the ALT so they could complement each other rather than compete for similar resources within the Park’s constituency. It was unorthodox—which made it textbook Tim. “He followed his instincts,” says former ALT Director Tom Duffus. “Tim’s approach was: If you know the land, if you know the people, and you know what needs to happen, go make it happen. Don’t wait for someone to tell you what to do or to give you permission to save the land.”

As Tim’s staff grew, he sent scientists to perform baseline assessments of corporate timberlands. When speculators scooped up acreage for development—say, in the 96,000-acre Diamond-Lassiter deal—he intervened. And when farmers in the Champlain Valley faced a financial impasse, the ALT brokered conservation easements as tax relief. And he

increased the chapter’s capacity to counter threats: By 1997, the Conservancy had a staff of 13, with 4,200 members in 41 states. Meanwhile, the parent organization had adapted Tim’s strategy, creating massive biological preserves around the world.

The hectic pace didn’t phase Tim. He and Claire opened their house to all; when Claire served on Governor Mario Cuomo’s Commission on the Future of the Adirondacks in the 21st Century, heated debates broke out before the first cup of coffee. Tim delighted in leading groups to walk Spring Pond Bog, ski 5,344-foot Mount Marcy, and hike Noonmark.

When the Adirondack Chapter moved to the Keene Valley building, he’d lap the building daily, stopping for a chat with each staff member. He’d lean his 5 foot, 11 inch form against the door frame, scratching his back like a black bear against a tree. On Friday afternoons, work stopped at 4 p.m., and everyone gathered on the porch for beers. A tent



From left to right: Tim with the Kyrgyzstan team assembled for the GEF transboundary project; Yrysbe, a Kyrgyzstan government representative, and a park ranger look back at an area the group traveled through; a high altitude marmot, similar to what the team was searching for on the day of Tim's accident, found only at high elevations in very limited settings in central Asia.

© The Nature Conservancy

Native goose flies over wetlands; looking back to the high alpine environment and site of Tim's accident and ensuing rescue; the Kyrgyzstan team traveling with Tim during the time of his accident. © Tim Barnett

appeared on the lawn often for square dances and cocktail parties. "He promoted what we did by establishing relationships," says Melissa Eisinger, who worked for the Adirondack Chapter from 1990 to 2011. "That was how he operated."

By 1996, the Adirondack chapter had protected 240,000 acres, a figure that made up 96 percent of all Conservancy land acquisitions in New York State. And after 25 years on the job, Tim decided to take a sabbatical.

HE LANDED IN CENTRAL ASIA—FLYING BUSINESS CLASS TO ALMATY, KAZAKHSTAN. "That was the first thing I heard about Tim," laughs Nigel Coulson, the program manager for the World Bank's Tien Shen Trans-Boundary Program. "They stuck me in economy."

Together with colleagues from international non-government organizations, Barnett and Coulson set to work on a massive undertaking: build interdisciplinary teams in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan that would manage

By 1996, the Adirondack Chapter had protected 240,000 acres, a figure that made up 96 percent of all Conservancy land acquisitions in New York State. And after 25 years on the job, Tim decided to take a sabbatical.

natural preserves spanning three countries. The Tien Shen Mountains dominate the landscape, marching 1,500 miles from the Chinese border southwest to Uzbekistan's steppes. Saw-toothed peaks climb to 24,000 feet, glaciers cling to their shoulders, frigid rivers carve high-angled valleys, and travelers climb from sub-tropical forests to navigate 11,000-foot mountain passes. The ecosystem features the untamed forbears of walnut, apple, and tulips. Snow leopards and the Eurasian eagle-owl number among nearly 3,000 species of flora and fauna.

It was necessary work. After the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, resources had disappeared—the Russians even took maps back to Moscow. Six years later, government ministries still lacked the capacity to manage the ecologically rich area where poor local populations overused natural resources because these were their only means of survival. The World Bank team started with planning sessions in the capital cities, then ventured to remote villages high in the mountains. There, dignitaries welcomed them with a feast of baked sheep's head, rounds of vodka toasts, and guided horseback tours for field research.

By June 1997, Coulson worked from a house in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. He relied on a single map to track the multi-national project. This was four years before Google Earth brought satellite imagery to desktop computers—and a decade before the Apple iPhone put GPS in consumer devices. That single paper map? Barnett had tracked it down in Burlington.

Now the map was tacked to a wall above a phone in Tashkent. At 5 a.m. on June 16, a shrill ring woke Coulson. He stumbled down the hall, picked up the phone receiver, and heard only background noise. Then a voice.

"Nigel, this is Yrysbek..." (Yrysbe Malenov, a Kyrgyzstan team member, currently with Barnett

in Kyrgyzstan's Besh-Aral preserve to study Menzibier marmot habitat.) "There's been an accident. Tim is injured. We need a helicopter."

"A helicopter?" Coulson asks. "That sounds serious. Where are you, Yrysbek?"

"Come to Jany Bazaar."

Coulson looks at the map in front of him, and places a finger on Jany Bazaar just as the line goes dead.

Now what? A tense border separated Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, complicating any rescue effort. Rugged terrain restricted access to horseback only; Coulson knew that if Tim had only a broken bone, Malenov would manage the uncomfortable ride out. He realized it must be serious, and began to call embassies and in-country NGOs.

Hundreds of miles away in Kyrgyzstan, it had been a long night for Farida Balbakova. The conservation activist had ridden into the alpine terrain with Tim and Malenov the day before. On the descent, around 3 p.m., Barnett lagged behind to take a few photos. Then, as he stepped into the stirrup, his horse bolted—dragging him over stony ground until Barnett was thrown free. He landed unable to move, fading in and out of consciousness, until team members backtracked. When they found him, Balbakova rigged a shelter to protect him from the sun and wind. Malenov set off to ride 35 kilometers to the village of Ak-Tash for help. "The Kyrgyz horse saved your life," Malenov tells Barnett later. "He was almost always in a gallop, even when the darkness made the trail invisible for me."

Coulson knows the narrow herd paths that traverse sheer slopes in the Tien Shen. One errant step can have dire consequences—as Barnett's recent injury demonstrated. And riding at top speeds, in darkness? "That journey should have been impossible," Coulson says. "Yrysbe's determination was the critical factor. He made the impossible possible."

Tim saw an opportunity. Here, his natural affinity for people—and a tireless interest in each individual’s life experience, knowledge, and personal relationship to natural resources—informed his work.

Back in Uzbekistan, Coulson matches Malenov’s resolve. When official parties deny help, he scrambles to locate a helicopter, a pilot, a backboard that had arrived in Tashkent just days earlier, and two doctors. After that frantic effort, Coulson jumps into the helicopter wearing only a cotton T-shirt. That’s fine for the hot Uzbek steppes, but he quickly grows cold as they climb into thin alpine air. They touch down in Jany Bazaar to pick up Malenov and the Besh-Aral warden, who navigates a flight path based on familiar topographical landmarks.

Finally, 20 hours after Tim’s fall, the bird touches down above Barnett and Balbakova. Coulson sprints downhill, and when he peeks under the cloth canopy rigged on four sticks, he sees Barnett lying on his back. There’s only slight movement in his left arm—otherwise, he’s completely still. Even a casual acquaintance like Coulson knows that’s rare for the garrulous Barnett. He realizes this is the worst-case scenario.

Then Barnett looks at Coulson. “Where the f—k have you been?”

Coulson smiles. “Bit of a long story, Tim.”

The doctors load him onto the backboard, move him to the helicopter, and the rescue mission restarts. Barnett’s money belt, with his project’s entire \$10,000 budget, is tucked away in a nearby village. They land long enough for Coulson to ransack Tim’s quarters for the cash and his passport—which the pilot demands if he’s to risk an unsanctioned border crossing with an American on board.

In Tashkent, difficulties continue. As they wait for ambulance at the airport—local doctors heard they flew to a Kyrgyz city—Barnett becomes more dehydrated. At the hospital, Uzbek neurologists want to rush Barnett to surgery. But in another prescient move, Barnett’s insurance covers an air ambulance to world-class care in Switzerland.

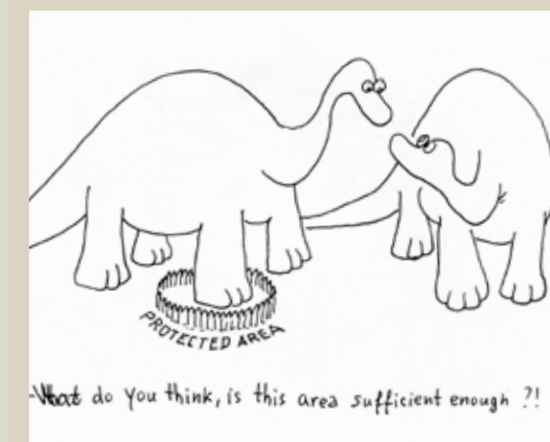
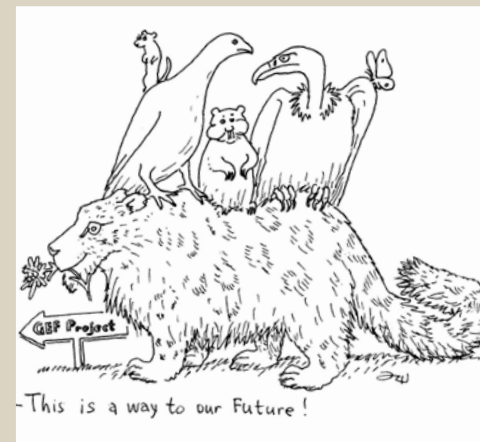
Coulson negotiates with more doctors. Then he calls Claire, whom he’s never met, to tell her that her husband’s injury and she must travel to Zurich immediately. Finally, when the Swiss arrived, Coulson tucks his daughter’s teddy bear into Tim’s stretcher, and says goodbye.

“I honestly thought it was the last time I would see Tim,” he says today.

Surgery follows in Zurich, then a nine-week stay in the hospital, with Claire as his advocate. “For somebody who wants to be out running marathons and taking people to the top of Mount Marcy,” says Claire, “this was devastating.” But Tim’s passion for work kept him focused on the future. “It was a wretched shock,” says Melissa Eisenger, who was acting director in Tim’s absence. “All of us just wanted to go be with him.” But Tim had no patience for that—instead, he wanted updates on land transactions and staffing developments.

Tim returned to the U.S. to continue healing at the Kessler Rehabilitation Center in Newark, New Jersey. Meanwhile, Claire moved their home from Westport to Saratoga Springs, closer to the medical services Tim relies on. “I think it takes a while to adjust to any disability,” she says. “It took a long time to begin to come to grips with it, for both of us.”

At the same time, Claire was building the Healthy Schools Network to advocate for nutrition, air quality, and green cleaning products in schools. She launched the non-profit in 1995 to advocate environmental health in school buildings; in 2017, her work earned recognition from the American Public Health Association and the American University School of Public Affairs. Balancing this work with Tim’s recovery proved taxing. Fortunately, Tim’s colleagues were ready to bolster Tim’s spirits and help when they could. Phil Tabas, the Conservancy’s general counsel, remembers visits at Kessler. “He was always smiling, always had a joke,” says Tabas. “He was not diminished



From left to right: Tim taking in the sites of a new country with Yrysbek (far left) and the group’s translator; Tim with team members before leaving on their expedition; Years later, Tim and Nigel Coulson in front of the Keene Valley office.

The project’s lead scientist, Emil, was a talented cartoonist and produced a whole series of satirical cartoons about the conservation hurdles in the region. ©Tim Barnett

Mike Carr, former director of the Adirondack Chapter. © Erika Bailey

by his physical circumstances.” In fact, new Kessler patients often became Tim’s roommate because staff found his positive attitude helped young people grapple with a life-changing spinal cord injury.

When Tim was ready to leave rehab, his Adirondack colleague Mike Carr traveled to New Jersey, driving a company van to bring Tim home to Saratoga. As Carr pushed Tim’s wheelchair from his room to the lobby, Tim demanded he stop. “I’m walking out that door,” he says.

Then the 57-year-old quadriplegic pulled himself up. He gripped a walker, and slowly began to drag one foot, then the other, toward the front door. Several months after arriving from Zurich on a stretcher, he stepped across the threshold on his own two feet.

Outside, exhausted, Tim returned to his wheelchair. “We get in the van, and I’m all broken up,” says Carr. “Then he says, ‘I haven’t had decent French fries in eight months. We’re going to McDonald’s!’ Tim was still there.”



From left to right: Tim and Claire on top of Whiteface with a view of Lake Placid behind them.
 Tim skiing at Breckenridge, Colorado; Tim hard at work on the middle road in Essex, NY looking at the High Peaks.
 Tim headed out on the first wheelchair-accessible trail at John Dillon Park. © Tim Barnett

The lesson for future conservationists in Tim’s career:
 “To stick with one place and one approach till you understand
 the whole ecosystem, natural and human.”

- Bill McKibben, author and activist

THERE WAS MORE FAMILIAR GROUND TO RELEARN AT THE KEENE VALLEY OFFICE. But Tim used humor to vault over hurdles. When asked how he’d been injured, he’d tell people he fell off a barstool. “He didn’t break his brain, and he didn’t break his heart,” says Chuck Bassett, a former New York State director for the Conservancy. “He still had the same fire in his belly for the work of the Conservancy.”

Soon, Tim was visiting donors to recruit support for the Adirondacks, and taking every opportunity to foster connections between people and nature. When the Conservancy took groups to see Follensby Pond by pontoon boat, he rolled on board. “Here he is in a wheelchair—he can’t swim,” says Carr, who was the Conservancy chapter director at the time. “He was fearless.”

Tim’s effort and foresight paid off. As the effects of climate change became clear, scientists theorized that intact forest landscapes would become more important. At scale, ecosystems are resilient in the face of natural disturbances such as floods, fire, and wind or storm events. As global warming alters habitat, plants and animals need connected landscapes to migrate and strengthen gene pools.

Another landmark came in 2007. Nine years prior, Tim had encouraged the Conservancy and the Adirondack Landowners Association to award Finch, Pruyn & Co. a conservation award. Environmentalists protested—a stewardship award to timber harvesters? But in 2007, Finch sold 161,000 acres in the heart of the Adirondacks to the Conservancy for \$110 million, which then worked with 27 towns to plan a transfer to the state. “Tim’s reputation got us in the door and got us at the table with so many people,” says Carr, who led the Conservancy in the Finch deal. “He built these relationships for decades. He understood, better than anyone else, that conservation works when you bring people together.”

IN EARLY MAY, I VISIT TIM AT HIS HOME IN SARATOGA SPRINGS. From his home office, he can see the cheerfully painted Victorian homes on Fifth Avenue. Inside, an honorary PhD from Paul Smiths hangs near a certificate from the School of Knee Pad Negotiation—respect and humor given equal weight, as always. There’s an illustration titled “Charismatic Megafauna of the Adirondacks” with portraits of bear, moose, wolf, mountain lion, and Tim, his wheelchair perched on a summit dome. Framed photos capture mountain adventures on skis and foot. There’s a snapshot from the Tien Shen, a glacial valley where scree fields tumble to gassy slopes, the place Tim last stood with the confidence that his legs could carry him all day long.

The afternoon sun warms the back porch, and we head for Tim’s favorite spot. His red checked button-down is tucked into khaki slacks. With sturdy brown leather shoes, a wristwatch, and a canvas ball cap stitched with the Nature Conservancy’s logo, he looks ready to lead a field trip to Spring Pond Bog.

We pick up where we left off, and soon Tim is enlightening me on pollution threats to Lake Champlain, the ecology of pitch pine-heath barrens, and recalling a day, years ago, when he joined Bill McKibben to snowshoe Huckleberry Mountain. The author and activist sees a lesson for future conservationists in Tim’s career: “To stick with one place and one approach till you understand the whole ecosystem, natural and human.”

When it’s time to leave, Tim sees me to the door, where he says: “If you’ve got a job to do and you really want to do it, it’s easy to inspire others. I’m just in awe of how much fun I had.” And with another deft touch at the controls, he steers his wheelchair back to the office.

A Legacy Evolves

The Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy has conserved 585,000 acres through more than 250 separate transactions since 1971.

Now these parcels work with protected state lands to create a connected and resilient landscape, making the Adirondack Park a vital ecosystem for North American species adapting to climate change. Here, a closer look at how Tim Banett’s leadership built the foundation for our work in the 21st century.

bedrock principles

Indispensable to The Nature Conservancy’s success are our unique values—the distinguishing attributes that characterize how we conduct ourselves in our drive for tangible, lasting results. Here are a few ways Tim naturally embraced these values to forge a lasting legacy.

conserve and protect

By 1980, the Adirondack Chapter had protected nearly 100,000 acres. Nearly half that total was contained in two parcels, Brandon Park and Bay Pond, where Tim used conservation easements to obtain a legal interest in land without outright ownership. Owners retained their land; the Conservancy held development rights.

build trust

When green groups saw corporations as adversaries, Barnett worked to make them partners. He brokered a 1992 deal with International Paper to protect bat hibernaculums in graphite mines. Two years later, he led negotiations with Niagara Mohawk Power Authority to secure shoreline protection at the Hudson River’s headwaters. Why? Because intact habitats support biodiversity.

nature for all

Barnett advised planners for John Dillon Park, a 198-acre reserve that opened in 2006 in Long Lake. With trails designed for wheelchair access, plus lean-tos with ramps and fold-down beds, this site introduces people of all abilities to natural wonders.

forward progress

Those principles are the North Star for all we want to accomplish. When it comes to conservation, it helps to have a fixed point to aim for: Even modest visions can take years to complete. And our visions aren’t modest. As we move forward, these big-picture projects will ensure the Adirondacks remain viable for wildlife and people alike.

healthy communities

In 2007, when The Nature Conservancy purchased 161,000 acres in the heart of the Adirondacks, land protection and scientific assessment were just the start of what we wanted to achieve. Ultimately, our goal is to see that good conservation fosters strong communities. That’s why we worked hand-in-hand with 27 towns to shape management plans on those lands. Then we provided 29 grants worth \$750,000 to businesses and municipalities in the Upper Hudson to jump-start local economies. The outcome: communities embrace conservation to fuel tourism.

resilient ecosystems

While the Adirondacks are among the most climate-resilient areas in the United States, ecosystems still need our help. We’ve helped upgrade culverts in the Ausable River watershed to link 100 miles of tributaries, creating more migration and breeding opportunities for native fish species. In Northern Appalachian areas where climate change-induced extreme weather events are on the rise, this approach also provides a valuable tool to increase flood resiliency and protect property.

connected landscapes

The Adirondacks are a critical link in the Northern Appalachian Forest, connecting the Tug Hill Plateau to a region that extends all the way to Nova Scotia. Our forests and waterways allow fish and wildlife to move freely in the face of climate change—and to make those connections on land and water even stronger, the Conservancy is protecting strategic areas and implementing innovative, science-based solutions. For example, a critter shelf, New York’s first, was installed beneath a major road traversing the Black River Valley, an important wildlife corridor in the southwestern Adirondacks. This two-foot-wide walkway, in a culvert under Route 12, was installed in 2017 after years of monitoring wildlife and extensive landowner input.

Left: Autumn at the Boquet River Nature Preserve. © Nancy Bataglia
Above left: Conservancy staff work closely with many local, state, and regional partners to achieve the right solutions. © Nancy Bataglia
Above right: Staff educating members about foraging for mushrooms and fungi. © Erika Bailey





Your gift. Your legacy.

Tim Barnett would be the first to say: Anything he accomplished was achieved only because of the hard work of countless others. Like the scientists whose research forms the basis for our conservation goals. Or the landowners and other partners whose cooperation is behind every single acre we protect.

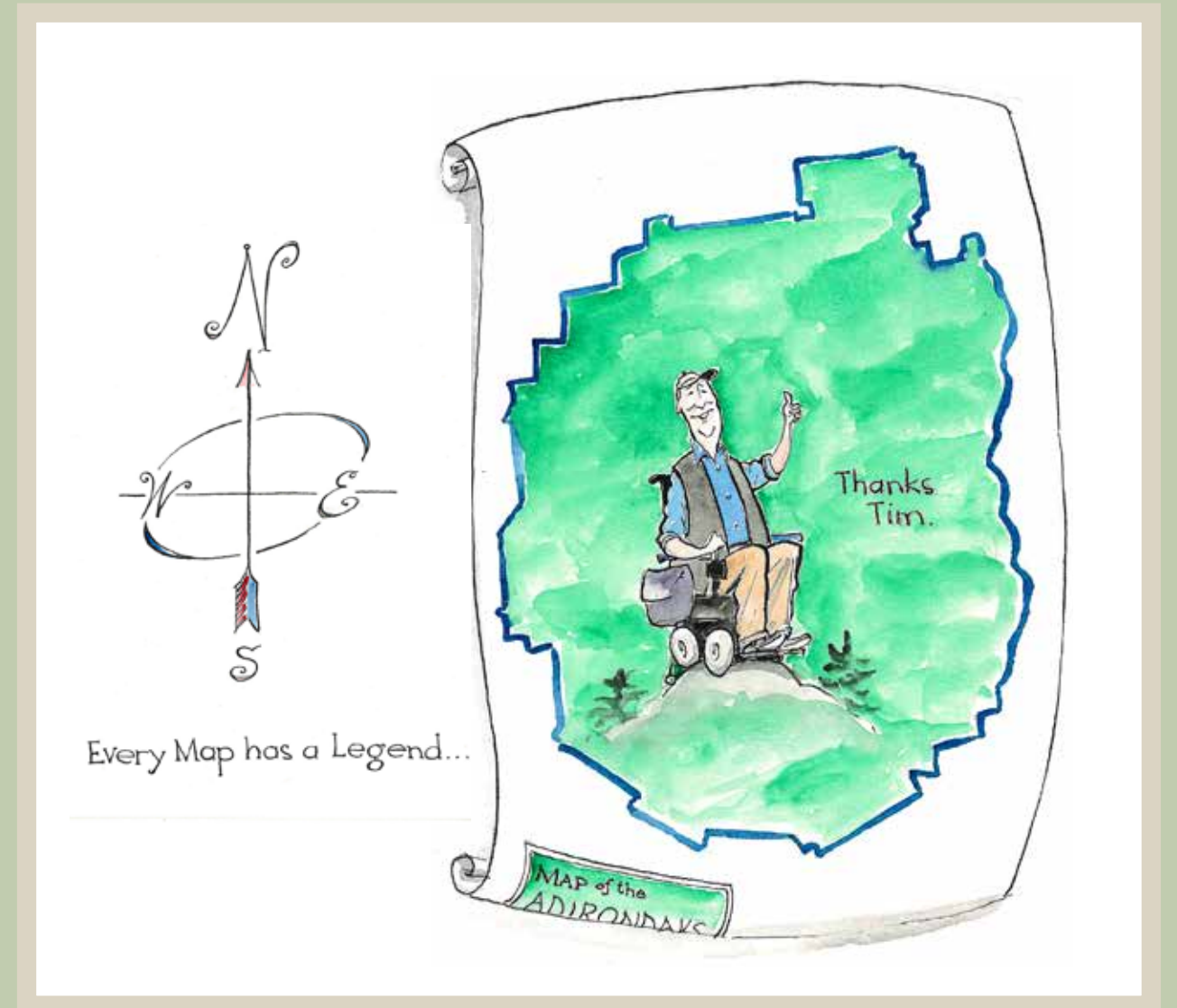
And our donors. People like you.

Your gift ensures the work of Tim's career—the past 46 years—will be a stepping stone for even bigger things to come. So the world we depend on can continue to depend on us.

Call us today (518) 576-2082. Find us at nature.org/newyork or adirondacks@tnc.org.



Top: A summit steward educates hikers about the fragile alpine plants. Bottom: Staff and members paddle Boreas Ponds. Right: and back cover: Mark Wilson



CHARISMATIC MEGAFAUNA of the ADIRONDACKS



•bear•



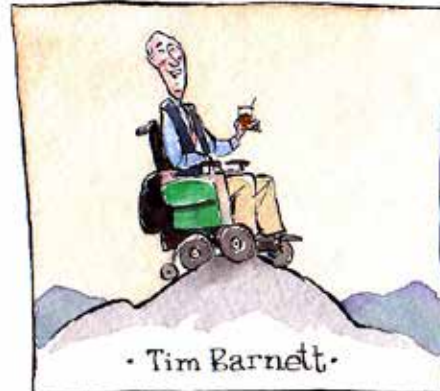
•moose•



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•mountain lion?•



• Tim Barnett •

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