

Nature based Solutions Goal:

Erie County will promote equitable nature-based solutions to protect intact landscapes, restore degraded ecosystems, and improve equitable access to green infrastructure, tree canopy, and open space for all residents. These efforts will increase the quality of life for humans and create or protect habitats for wildlife, therefore promoting healthy natural resources, biodiversity, and resiliency.

Erie County lies on the shores of Lake Erie, provider of drinking water for 12 million people and one of the Great Lakes through which over 20% of the world's freshwater flows. The Niagara River, which forms part of Erie County's western border, was officially designated as a Wetland of International Importance in 2019 under the Ramsar Convention, an international treaty that promotes the sustainable use of the world's wetlands. The Niagara River corridor has also been named a "globally significant" Important Bird Area. Erie County manages nearly 10,000 acres of traditional parks, natural habitat parks, and forestry lots. In addition, the County is responsible for over 1,000 miles of roadway and the adjacent rights-of-way. There is tremendous opportunity within Erie County to use nature-based solutions to improve the County's natural environment.

The region's ecosystems, habitats, and biodiversity are under stress from development and climate change. This crisis, driven largely by poor land use choices, threatens one million species worldwide and poses a profound threat to the Earth and to human well-being—a threat borne disproportionately by low-income communities and communities of color. Loss of biodiversity, or the variety of living organisms, impacts our health, food, air quality, water quality, soil, and culture. Careful planning is needed as we work to rectify these human-caused issues to ensure a balance between species diversity, climate resiliency, and native species.

In addition to providing habitats for flora and fauna, the diverse landscapes throughout Erie County offer residents and communities green spaces to be active and enjoy nature, greatly improving health and emotional well-being. However, as a result of environmental racism, discriminatory land use practices, and unequal public investment, low-income communities and communities of color commonly reside in areas of Erie County that have fewer trees, as well as less access to parks and recreation. Erie County will work to ensure all residents have equitable access to open space and green infrastructure by ensuring new projects take into account and seek to remedy historic injustices.