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## From the Editor



**Paul Salopek** started his journey around the world, mostly on foot, in 2013.

He set out from Ethiopia where humans first walked out of Africa some 60,000 to 120,000 years ago.

Thirteen years later, Salopek is still on the move, following the migration paths of our ancient ancestors. His final destination is Tierra del Fuego at the southern tip of South America. He filed one of his latest dispatches in early March, from Glenn Highway in Alaska.

The *National Geographic* photographer and journalist began this “storytelling walk across the planet” to “enhance cross-cultural understanding through slow journalism and education,” according to the [Out of Eden project website](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/outofeden/). He’s traversed war-torn regions of the Middle East, the Silk Road through central Asia, then India, China, South Korea and Japan. Barred from entering Russia to reach the Bering Strait, he hitched a ride on a container cargo ship in Japan to cross the Pacific Ocean. He eventually reached Shishmaref, Alaska, located on a barrier island in the Chukchi Sea on the far western edge of North America. The community of about 600 mostly Iñupiaq residents has existed for at least 400 years but is now threatened as the sea level rises and houses are literally falling into the surf. In 30 years, experts say, it will be entirely underwater.

Still, the community hangs on, hunting seals and caribou, fishing for smelt, herring and salmon, gathering wild tundra berries, making art out of walrus ivory and even taking the time to treat a stranger as a friend.

“I was welcomed everywhere with kindness,” Salopek wrote. “This was, it must be said, a familiar feature of walking the Earth, especially among the less affluent curators of our planetary home. It was easy to be humbled in Shishmaref.”

Wherever he went, even aboard one of the seemingly soulless warehouse ships that traverse the globe, he encountered humans being sustained by living in community even in the harshest circumstances. It is perhaps the human superpower we need most to cultivate in our world today as it faces enormous environmental challenges. Individual actions small and large can add up, but none of this can compare to the collective power of joining with others.

This issue highlights some inspiring examples of the power of community right here in Connecticut. From the Riverfront Recapture group on the Connecticut River to the Six Lakes Park Coalition in Hamden and MyCoast Connecticut users along the shoreline, state residents are finding connection and purpose in coming together for a common goal. That’s true, too, for the participants in a statewide conference on conservation and the celebrated young photographer using film, gallery exhibits and a book to bring people together to enhance their appreciation of nature and motivate actions to take better care of it.

Author and environmental activist Bill McKibben perhaps said it best in a program at The Connecticut Forum on March 12. He was joined by journalist Elizabeth Kolbert and former U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael Regan in a discussion at the Bushnell Performing Arts Center titled, “The Future of the Environment.”

“The most important thing an individual can do,” he told the 2,000 or so people in the audience, “is to be a little less of an individual and join together with others in movements large enough to make change.”

The Out of Eden project can be found at: <https://outofedenwalk.nationalgeographic.org/>



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**Cover**, Justin Farmer, left, talks about the Six Lakes property to a group as part of the Six Lakes Park Coalition’s efforts to build community support for getting the area cleaned up and turned into public open space. Photo courtesy of the Six Lakes Park Coalition  
**Above**, In 2013, *National Geographic* Explorer Paul Salopek set out on foot to retrace our ancestors’ global migration. (Map by Sam Guilford/*National Geographic*)

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# About Our Contributors

## MAGGIE COZENS

Maggie Cozens is the Long Island Sound Partnership outreach coordinator with Connecticut Sea Grant and UConn Extension. She works to increase appreciation, stewardship, awareness and understanding of Long Island Sound through the development of engaging and inclusive outreach and educational programming. She holds a Master of Science in Environmental Science from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, with a special focus on salt marsh and wetlands conservation.



## JOHANN HEUPEL

Johann Heupel is a shorebird biologist for the Connecticut Audubon Society, having graduated from UConn Avery Point's Marine Science and Maritime Studies programs as a University Scholar in 2022. With a passion for environmental outreach and public education of history, and a background in museum and conservation work, Heupel will be beginning a Master's of Environmental Science and Management program at URI this fall with a focus in Environmental Communication and Outreach.



## OWEN PLACIDO

Owen Placido is an assistant extension educator focused on nature-based approaches to climate adaptation. He works to connect individuals and communities to resources that can help them adapt to climate impacts, implement nature-based solutions and restore critical habitats in the Long Island Sound watershed. He is interested in how science, art and the environment intersect to create a sense of place. Owen joined Connecticut Sea Grant in 2023 after earning his Master of Science in environmental science from the University of Rhode Island.



## PAUL SALOPEK

Paul Salopek was born in the United States and raised in Mexico. As a writer and journalist, he has traveled to more than 50 countries and has earned two Pulitzer Prizes for his reporting on human genetics and war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Paul has worked as a commercial fisherman in the Atlantic and Pacific ocean, mined gold in Australia, and managed a cattle ranch in Mexico. He was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University and taught journalism at Princeton University.



## JUDY BENSON

Judy Benson has been communications coordinator at Connecticut Sea Grant and editor of *Wreck Lines* since 2017. Before that, she was a newspaper reporter and editor, concluding her journalism career at *The Day of New London* covering health and the environment. She is the author of two books, the latest titled, *The Book of Todd*, a collaboration with her late husband published in cooperation with New London Librarium (nllibrarium.com). She earned both a bachelor's degree in journalism and a Master of Science in natural resources from UConn.

