HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL OF THE ENVIRONMENT

The school was established in 1900 as "The Yale Forest School" with a founding gift from the family of Gifford Pinchot, B.A. 1889, LL.D. 1925, a pioneer in the conservation movement who would later become the first head of the U.S. Forest Service. Through Pinchot's vision and the work of the Forest School, Yale led the way in creating a new model of forest management and natural resource conservation, educating many of the nation's first foresters—a vanguard of professionals who shaped our modern understanding of conservation, environmental education, and public lands. In fact, during its first four decades, the school would produce the first four U.S. Forest Service chiefs.

Over the past century, the school has grown from a more narrowly focused forestry program to an international institution with a diverse array of students from across the world graduating each year. In 1972, in recognition of its increased scope, the school changed its name to the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies.

Then, on July 1, 2020, the School again changed its name to the Yale School of the Environment (YSE) to better reflect its established role as a leader in environmental scholarship and practice.

At the same time, the school established The Forest School at the Yale School of the Environment in recognition of its founding mission and because the teaching and study of forestry and forest science remain one of its core strengths. YSE students learn the principles of natural resource management through the innovative research and sustainable practice occurring at the nearly 11,000 acres of actively managed forests in Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont that constitute Yale Forests.

In addition to forest science and management, research and teaching at the Yale School of the Environment cover a broad range of environmental disciplines, including ecology, ecosystems, and biodiversity; environmental justice; environmental management and social ecology in developing societies; green chemistry and green engineering; global change science and policy; health and environment; industrial environmental management; policy, economics, and law; urban science, environmental planning, design, and values, among others.

The school has more than 5,800 alumni who are working across the globe on a range of environmental challenges. They work in NGOs, government, business, academia, law, public health, and communications, among numerous other sectors.

Over the past two decades, the school has strengthened its connections within the wider Yale community and with external partners, introducing joint programs with Yale Law School and with the Yale Schools of Engineering & Applied Science, Management, Public Health, and Architecture, as well as with partner universities including Pace Law School, Vermont Law School, and Tsinghua University in China.

During the 1990s, YSE established and invested in a range of new centers, programs, and initiatives to expand its work beyond faculty research and classroom learning. Today, they number more than twenty-five and serve as dynamic foci for outreach

to alumni, wider professional audiences, and community organizations on critical issues such as climate change, environmental justice, tropical forestry, environmental communication, industrial ecology, and urban ecology, among others.

In 2017, YSE unveiled an ambitious new Strategic Plan. Among the plan's goals was the development of new curricula that track current and evolving strengths; increased programs and hiring to address environmental equity and diversity issues; a new emphasis on research and training in environmental communication; and expanded interdisciplinary research. Since then, the school has adopted a new curriculum for the Master of Environmental Management program, which places more emphasis on subject specialization while maintaining its signature flexibility; introduced the Yale Center for Environmental Communication. The school also is continuing to develop and strengthen strategic initiatives focused on environmental data, urban science, and environmental health and justice. In 2019, YSE launched Yale's first online certificate programs – Tropical Forests Landscapes through its Environmental Leadership and Training Initiative and Financing and Deploying Clean Energy through the Yale Center for Business and the Environment. YSE has continued to develop new online programs for career professionals and has launched certificates in Urban Climate Leadership; Clean and Equitable Energy Development; Green Chemistry for Climate and Sustainability; Environmental Data Science Certific, and Strategic Climate Change Communication. To date, YSE's certificate programs have trained more than 1,000 professionals globally on conservation and sustainability.

In 2020, the school welcomed to the faculty Dorceta Taylor and Gerald Torres, two of the country's preeminent scholars in the field of environmental justice. In 2024, they were awarded YSE's first endowed chairs for environmental justice. In 2020, Yuan Yao also joined the faculty as an assistant professor of industrial ecology and sustainability systems. In 2021, Luke Sanford, whose research examines environmental stewardship from a political science perspective, was named assistant professor of environmental policy and governance. In 2023, Sparkle Malone, an expert on disturbance ecology and ecosystem dynamics, and Paulo Brando, an internationally recognized expert in tropical ecosystems, joined the faculty. In 2024, the school welcomed Arianna Salazar-Miranda, an expert in urban data science to the faculty. In 2026, YSE welcomed four new faculty members: Michael Kern, an internationally recognized collaborative solutions leader; economists David Keiser and Karl Aspelund; climate adaptation scientist Brianna Castro. Forest ecologist Sara Kuebbing, research director of the Yale Applied Science Synthesis Program, was appointed to a new faculty position.

In 2021, a $100 million gift from FedEx to Yale helped to establish the Yale Center for Natural Carbon Capture (YCNCC), which focuses on developing natural solutions for reducing atmospheric carbon. Liza Comita, the Davis-Denkmann Professor of Tropical Forest Ecology, served as the inaugural co-director of the center, along with David Bercovici, the Frederick William Beinecke Professor of Earth and Planetary Sciences. In 2025, Peter Raymond, the Oastler Professor of Biogeochemistry, was named to succeed Comita as co-director. Professors Malone and Brando, whose positions are supported by YCNCC, also serve on its Scientific Leadership Team, as do YSE faculty members Mark Ashton, Mark Bradford, Sara Kuebbing, James Saiers, and Julie Zimmerman.

In 2022, the Yale School of the Environment partnered with the Three Cairns Group to launch the Three Cairns Climate Program for the Global South, a transformative initiative aimed at supporting the next generation of environmental leaders. Established with a historic gift from the Three Cairns Group, the cornerstone of the program is the Three Cairns Scholars program, which allows YSE to meet 100 percent of the demonstrated tuition need for qualified master's students from the Global South who are committed to combating climate change in their home countries and regions. The Three Cairns Fellows program expands access to YSE's highly regarded online certificate programs. The gift supports the Urban Climate Leadership certificate program and the development of a certificate program in environmental data science for climate solutions, both with a focus on the Global South.

In 2024, an exciting gift from Anita and Joshua Bekenstein '80 to YSE, the largest in the school's history, established the Bekenstein Climate Leaders Program. This transformative, university-wide program aims to increase the ranks of Yale graduates in climate leadership roles and accelerate the pace of climate action. Through a combination of scholarships, internship stipends, and post-graduate incentives, the program will help make it more affordable for emerging leaders to pursue high-impact careers in areas of high need, such as government and the nonprofit sector.

In 2025, YSE highlighted its 125th anniversary with the theme "Leadership, Innovation, and Impact." Anniversary celebrations included a social media campaign featuring students and alumni, a photo essay in *Canopy* magazine, and anniversary-themed activities at events and conferences throughout the year.