

Kathy Moser, T ‘84, MF ‘85

“It was a great knowledge base to launch into different career areas” on receiving her MF degree

Meet Kathy Moser, former Duke soccer star turned environmental activist who knew from an early age that she wanted to be a forester. When a college recruiter told her about Duke’s 3-2 Program (three years in undergraduate studies followed by two years in graduate school to complete the MF program), she was determined to attend. At the time, no other school offered a program to receive your undergraduate and forestry masters in five years. Duke was the perfect starting point for her successful career in natural resources.

After arriving at Duke, Kathy was captivated by the 5,000-acre living lab in Duke’s backyard, with decades of research to build upon at her fingertips *(the Duke Forest now has 7,000 acres in 2023)*. She used this time to create a tight-knit community of about 30 other graduate students, many of whom she still keeps in touch with today. Some of her most memorable experiences at the Nicholas School included field trips to national forests in the mountains of North Carolina, where she and her classmates saw first-hand the effects of climate change and acid rain in the ‘80s.

After graduation, Kathy excelled in many different roles, from working for a pulp and paper company in Virginia to being a Peace Corps volunteer establishing a national nature preserve in Honduras (and igniting her passion for DEI advocacy work) to managing approximately 5 million acres of state-owned land in New York. The foundation for her wide variety of experiences can be attributed to her Duke University Masters of Forestry. According to Kathy, “My degree was a great knowledge base to launch into different career areas.”

Today, Kathy works for the Open Space Institute (OSI) in New York as the Chief Conservation Officer. Her primary role is in conservation strategy, combining the implementation of on-the-ground projects with policy/funding efforts through projects such as creating greenways or expanding protected areas in the Adirondacks. OSI is staying on top of ever-changing trends by making space for everyone at the table, diversifying the outdoors, and getting more urban communities into open spaces. Kathy’s commitment to this mission is evident through her leadership in Open Spaces for All, a post-Covid-19 report to make New York’s outdoor spaces accessible and equitable to everyone, regardless of background. Since its launch, other states and governments have picked up this innovative project and are developing similar efforts.
The popularity of rail trails - think the High Line in NYC - displaces long-time residents, so Kathy actively works with urban populations to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are considered in any conservation decision. She wants to navigate the link between greenways and affordable housing, developing trails while not displacing people, and paving the way for future conservationists to be open to such new and innovative ideas. Kathy’s approach within the conservation sector and passion for open spaces is inspiring.

Kathy maintains an intentional connection with her Duke community and is a member of the Nicholas School Alumni Council where she works alongside her peers to engage and strengthen the alumni-student community. She also seeks to connect students with her contacts from 30+ years of working in natural resources, specifically within the state of New York. She is always willing to contribute her knowledge to the next generation of environmental leaders. Her advice to current students? Don’t feel pressure to move up the ladder - moving laterally is also a good thing. “Be open to opportunities…to figuring out what you're passionate about.”