The Sierra Club (http://www.sierraclub.org) is a national environmental organization founded in California in 1892 by naturalist and explorer John Muir with the mission to "explore, enjoy and protect the wild places of the earth." The Atlantic Chapter is responsible for the Sierra Club’s membership and activities in New York State, and deals with a variety of environmental issues in the state, related to land use and development, pollution, energy, recycling, and endangered species and habitat protection. First formed in 1950, the Atlantic Chapter originally spanned the entire eastern seaboard, but a number of state organizations were formed in the 1960s and early 1970s, and, from 1972 on, the name “Atlantic Chapter" was restricted to just New York.

The Atlantic Chapter, headquartered in Albany since 1978, has devoted much of its energy to opposing what it regards as environmentally unsound development projects, and to cleaning up or eliminating pollution. In the late 1960s and 1970s the chapter fought the proposed nuclear power plant at Storm King Mountain on the Hudson River and the proposed Westway Highway in Manhattan; sought to prevent the resettlement of Love Canal, a neighborhood heavily contaminated with toxic waste; raised concerns about construction at the Lake Placid Olympic site; and issued warnings about acid rain. The Chapter also pushed aggressively for the removal of PCBs that had been dumped into the Hudson River.

The 1980s was a mixed decade for the Chapter. It racked up a number of successes, such as taking part in the petition drive to remove James Watt as U.S. Secretary of the Interior, lobbying for beverage container recycling, supporting the election of Mario Cuomo as New York governor (though later disagreeing with him on a number of issues), fighting to protect the Lake Minnewaska/Shawangunk Mountains area, and successfully campaigning for passage of the Environmental Quality Bond Act of 1986. But the Chapter also suffered financial and ethical problems. Expenses early in the decade far exceeded income, resulting in a debt of $60,000 by 1983, which forced the national organization to put the Chapter into trusteeship in 1987. The Atlantic Chapter was also plagued by infighting and the embarrassing discovery that the Chapter’s delegate to the Sierra Club Council had been illegally dumping toxic chemicals from his pest-control business.

The Chapter recovered in the 1990s and undertook some of its most intense activity ever, pushing for passage of the unsuccessful Environmental Quality
Bond Act of 1990, urging environmentally sound land use policies in the Adirondack Forest Preserve, and taking part in the widespread opposition to the James Bay hydroelectric project. The Chapter opposed the candidacy of George Pataki for New York governor, but later developed an uneasy working relationship with him after his election. The Chapter supported Pataki on some issues, while opposing him on a number of other initiatives such as regulatory reform and budget and personnel cuts at the Department of Environmental Conservation.

Around the turn of the century, the long effort to protect Sterling Forest, a major nature and recreation area near New York City, from development proved largely successful. More recently the Chapter also persuaded the State Legislature to approve the Bigger Better Bottle Bill, a comprehensive recycling program for plastic water bottles. However, energy-related issues dominated the Chapter’s interaction with the Legislature and successive governors: an expanded net metering law allowed renewable energy systems to sell surplus power back to the electronic grid; the “Green Jobs/Green NY” legislation pointed the way to a green energy future that would swell the ranks of the employed as well.

From about 2010 on, the Chapter was in the forefront of the opposition to hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, a destructive technique in which huge amounts of water were blasted horizontally into deposits of shale, thus accessing large deposits of natural gas. The Chapter’s efforts were made difficult by the National Sierra Club’s support of natural gas as a temporary “bridge” source of energy until “green” sources became more viable.

**Administrative Organization**


The executive committee (Ex-Com) consists of about 28 members. Nine are elected by the Chapter membership at large, serving two-year terms. The others are appointed annually by the ExComs of the regional groups (see below), under
a bylaws formula based on the size of each group. Nine members of the executive committee are elected to a steering committee, which is authorized to make limited decisions between executive committee meetings. Three people serve as delegates to larger Sierra Club bodies: two to the Northeast Regional Conservation Committee, and one to the Sierra Club Council of Club Leaders (CCL).

The state organization further consists of administrative committees and conservation committees. Administrative committees and officers handle the various operational concerns of the chapter. These include Bylaws and Standing Rules, Compliance Officer, Computer, Elections, Financial Affairs, Fundraising, Honors and Awards, Legal Advisor, Membership, Nominating, Office and Personnel, Online Media, Outings, Political, Publications, and Webmaster.

Conservation committees, most of whose work is overseen by the Conservation Chair, deal with specific environmental issues at the state level. They include Adirondacks, Air Quality, Beyond Coal, Biodiversity/Vegetarian Outreach, Clean Water/Watershed, Energy, Environmental Education, Environmental Justice, Farm and Food, Gas Drilling, Global Warming, Great Lakes, Hudson River PCB Cleanup, International Population, Open Space/Sprawl, Solid Waste, Sterling Forest/Highlands, Sustainable Forestry, Toxics, Transportation, Westchester Airport, Wetlands, and Wildlife/Wilderness.

The Atlantic Chapter divides New York State into eleven regional groups that deal with local environmental issues, possess their own internal organization, issue their own newsletters, and send representatives to the state Executive Committee. The regional groups are: Finger Lakes, Hudson-Mohawk, Iroquois, Long Island, Lower Hudson (aka Westchester/Putnam), Mid-Hudson, New York City, Niagara, Ramapo-Catskill, Rochester, and Susquehanna.

The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter retains two full-time and one part-time staff member- the Chapter Conservation Manager, the Chapter Conservation Assistant, and the Chapter Coordinator. The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter currently possesses a membership of about 36,000. A paid editor produces the Sierra Atlantic, a newsletter sent to all members that is available in print and online.