2021 promised to be an important policy year for NY’s Environment. With progressive supermajorities in both legislative houses, the unfolding of NY’s nation leading climate law, and the deepening environmental crisis, the potential for further reform seemed ripe, if not imperative.

But for the first half of the year, Andrew Cuomo’s descent into a quagmire of scandals paralyzed New York’s political landscape. Lawmakers were reduced to negotiating with a governor largely in hiding as charges of sexual harassment and misconduct intensified. Enacting any new policy suffered as a result. His resignation in August, precipitated by a scathing report from Attorney General Letitia James, saw the swift transfer of power to Kathy Hochul - a lieutenant governor largely unknown to the general public.

Will this abrupt transition continue to stall much needed environmental action, or will the end of Cuomo’s reign and controlling nature lead to better things for the climate movement? At this early stage, it appears there is some hope for the latter.

Hochul is New York’s first woman Governor, the first Western New Yorker to hold the office in more than a hundred years, and the first since FDR not to hail from NYC, its suburbs or their supporting political machines. Andrew Cuomo she is not. While her record as a member of congress reflects centrist policies and campaign ties with fossil fuel interests and their allied unions, her past platforms appear to be more a product of survival in a conservative district than her personal ideology. As lieutenant governor, Hochul was tasked with typical ambassadorial duties and took pride in visiting all 62 counties of New York every year. Many of these trips were in the company of DEC Commissioner Seggos, and one gets the sense that with every park ribbon cutting, clean-up announcement and tree planting - a deeper connection with New York’s environment was forged.

Kathy Hochul’s quiet gubernatorial inauguration on September 24, was ushered in by the destruction of Hurricane Henri, just a week after hurricane Ida bombarded New York City, Long Island and the Hudson Valley, drowning neighborhoods, transit lines and wreaking havoc on infrastructure.

These once-in-a-thousand-year weather events that are now happening just years apart, are clearly linked to Climate Change. Hochul did not hesitate to draw the connection at press events as she scrambled to secure state and federal funding for the clean up and reclamation of flood damaged areas. As lieutenant governor, Hochul played a significant role in shaping and campaigning for the “Restore Mother Nature Bond Act” a $3 Billion dollar program that will fund the restoration of wetlands and climate resilience programs across the state. It appears her work was prescient. If Hochul is fortunate enough to be the Democratic nominee for Governor in 2022 she will be campaigning alongside the bond act that will also go before the voters that November. To kick off climate week Governor Hochul reinvigorated this connection by declaring her intention to increase the bond act to $4 billion and to continue to make the issue of climate resilience a priority - which includes finally bringing wetlands regulatory reform to New York after an unresolved, 20-year fight over who has jurisdiction to protect New York’s most important aquatic habitats. Hochul also said the state would spend another $600 million on water and drainage infrastructure improvements after the storm.

While Andrew Cuomo can claim an important environmental legacy in his 10 years that includes the fracking ban, a nation leading climate law, and a myriad of bans on toxic products, including the plastic bag and styrofoam bans and the Child Safe Products Act- his leadership style often got in the way of the steady flow of so many more reforms, as every agency action had to be approved by his office, creating policy log jams and an inconsistent implementation of rules.

The hope is that Hochul will lead with confidence in her own agency staff and allow career experts at DEC, NYSERDA and the DOH to execute policy decisions with some autonomy and consistency.
From the Conservation Chair: Time for Gas Sunset
by Ellen Cardone Banks

Most readers of the Sierra Atlantic will recall the intensity of the movement to ban natural gas hydrofracking in New York that led in 2014 to an executive ban on fracking in our state, and in April 2020 was codified into law and signed by former Governor Cuomo. We also remember the three-year campaign to pass the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, passed and signed in 2019, that established grid electrification and carbon emission reduction goals. If you were there, you remember the rallies, the signs, the lobby meetings with legislators, and the community meetings where we explained to our neighbors that fracking was wrong for New York and that climate goals, enacted into law, were essential. You remember the apprehension about seemingly daunting goals and the excitement when these victories were won.

It’s time to do it again!

We are still using fracked gas from Pennsylvania and other fracking states. We still have gas-fired power plants and the specter of gas-powered cryptocurrency mining (detailed elsewhere in this issue). We are still heating most of our homes, heating water and cooking with gas. Building heating accounts for about 30% of greenhouse gas emissions in our state, second to transportation and ahead of electrical generation now, thanks to progress in renewable power. Two-thirds of gas combustion in New York is used for onsite combustion in buildings.

We cannot continue to burn dirty fossil fuels to heat our homes, and alternatives are here with ground-sourced and air-sourced heat pumps.

The gas industry is not going away without a fight, and we can expect a barrage of fear-mongering communications about (as a President once said) “shivering in the dark.” They are still promoting, and charging rate-payers for, expansion of gas pipelines into regions where homes are heated with propane, new gas power plants and pipelines for export, liquid natural gas (LNG) truck transport and the false promise of “renewable” methane.

It is going to take all of us to counteract the messages of the biggest and wealthiest industry in world history. We need to be well-informed about safe, renewable alternatives to fossil fuel combustion, toxic methane leaks from aging pipes, 100,000 premature deaths in the US annually from air pollution, and the inevitable explosions that will occur as long as we dig up and burn fossil fuel. We are complicit in the poisoning of land, forests, water, humans and wildlife from fracking in our neighbor states as long as we use their products.

Sadly, the State Assembly failed to act on several bills that passed the State Senate in the session that ended in June, including the Clean Futures Act (S.5939-A/A.6761-A), which would have prohibited eight new gas-fired power plants, the Climate and Communities Investment Act (S.4264-A/A.6967) that would charge fees to polluters with proceeds going to public investment in impacted communities, and several building-related fossil fuel subsidies. New bills will be introduced in the next legislative session to sunset gas infrastructure in new residential buildings, and other bills will be reintroduced to level the playing field for renewable heat by stopping ratepayer subsidies for new residential gas lines.


Submissions. We welcome our readers to submit brief timely articles for consideration in the SA. Send your requests and ideas to the Sierra Atlantic Committee: Email: elizabeth.ahearn@sierraclub.org, or US Mail: Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, P.O. Box 28225, Albany, NY 12203. Please write “Sierra Atlantic” in the subject line. Submission deadline for Winter Issue: December 1, 2021.
and increasing tax breaks for renewable heat. We need to support electrification of buildings and transportation and to confront the false promise of “renewable” or “green” gas alternatives to fossil methane. And when our neighbors balk about “industrial” wind and solar energy we need to remind them that all our electricity, transportation, and heating are “industrial” and that dirty and clean industries are not equal.

Sierra Club volunteers can prepare now to learn more about gas alternatives and to be ready to join our coalition partners in public information sessions, other anti-gas events, and letters to editors. As the new legislative session begins in January 2022, we will be pushing for inclusion of anti-gas and pro-renewable legislation in Governor Hochul’s State of the State and the executive and legislative budgets. Bill memos on the Legislation tab on the chapter website (atlantic2.sierraclub.org) are an excellent source of information. Please watch for Atlantic Chapter email communications and petitions and be prepared to meet with your State Senators and Assembly members and encourage them to sponsor the bills our legislative committee supports.

Please remember that all lobby meetings must be reported to the chapter legislative committee using the form on the chapter webpage. This step is very important to comply with state law and to retain Sierra Club’s tax-exempt status.

Albany update continued from p.1

It appears, with her expressed admiration of DEC commissioner Basil Seggos, and her intention of keeping him in the new administration, that is her inclination. In her first two weeks, major environmental announcements were made on issues that for months felt like they were stuck in bureaucratic purgatory under Cuomo.

In early September, Hochul signed legislation that would end the sale of internal combustion vehicles in New York by 2035 and at the same time began a regulatory process to adopt the Advanced Clean Truck (ACT) rule, which follows California’s lead in phasing out diesel pollution in favor of zero emissions vehicles. She also declared that she would increase New York’s solar installation goal from 6 gigawatts to 10 gigawatts by 2030, including $36 million to establish “clean energy hubs” in dozens of environmental justice neighborhoods. Hochul also announced the implementation of the largest pollution study ever undertaken in the United States, to monitor air quality in disadvantaged communities across NY and use the data collected to develop strategies to reduce pollution in these communities, including the greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. With that she also included $59 million for the Clean Green Schools Initiative, a program to boost indoor air quality and lower carbon emissions for more than 500 public & private Pre-K-12 schools in those same communities.

Hochul followed with an announcement that she will be lifting the hiring freeze of state workers, sending a hopeful signal that the decimated DEC workforce can see the first major reinforcements in more than a decade during which time staffing for the agency was cut by a third.

The Hochul administration also untied the DEC’s hands in the regulation of energy intensive bitcoin mining, by announcing that they may not renew a Title V air permit for the Greenidge power plant and its associated cryptocurrency facility, on the grounds that this energy ravenous industry does not comply with NY’s climate laws. The Sierra Club is already engaged in litigation against the plant, and welcomes the opportunity to comment on a permit that was granted under Cuomo and should be rescinded.

This Title V air permit challenge is part of a larger fight to have agency actions comply with the new climate law. While regulations for the administration of the law will not be finalized until 2024, New York State is still struggling with a barrage of applications to build or renew permits for fracked gas power plants, pipelines, compressor stations, bitcoin mines and hazardous waste incinerators. The pressure will be on Hochul to bring consistency in all agency actions in keeping with the goals of the climate law. As DEC commissioner Seggos recently commented: “Anything that comes in front of us that is demanding a huge draw on the state’s clean energy resources, or is going to pollute, we have laws designed to protect us right now, because of the state’s climate work.”

There is some irony that with all this positive movement of what was once entrenched Hochul also greenlighted a massive Canadian hydroelectric transmission project that the Sierra Club has opposed, in all its iterations, for decades. The Champlain-Hudson Power Express (CHPE) line was awarded under Tier 4 of NY’s Clean Energy Standard, bringing power from Canadian company HydroQuébec to NYC - but also opposition from First Nations, potentially irreparable harm to our Hudson River, and possibly no reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. It could
be argued that this decision was a hold over from the Cuomo administration that had too much inertia to deny, but it is still a bitter pill to swallow - especially in the context of all this new "hope."

A second contract was also awarded to the New York Power Authority’s Clean Path NY transmission line which will maximize in-state renewable generation from upstate to the city, without unacceptable environmental and human rights issues. We hope that the difference between the two projects will be instructive moving forward. Ultimately, it is too early to know what impact Governor Hochul will have upon New York’s environment compared with her predecessor. But there is hope that her positive actions in the opening weeks of her term will grow into an important shift in New York, not only for the kind of policies we need to solve the climate crisis, but the transparency and dignity New York should demand of its leaders.

Reinvigorating Atlantic Chapter Conservation Committees to face the Climate Crisis
by Kate Bartholomew, Chapter Chair

Currently, the Atlantic Chapter has eighteen Conservation Issue Committees on record that focus on topics ranging from Energy to Wildlife & Wilderness; from Environmental Justice to Water; from Transportation to Environmental Education. Unfortunately, some of these committees have become inactive, partly due to the pandemic and partly due to volunteers turning to other areas of concern. Chapter Conservation Chair Ellen Banks and I are in the process of assessing each of the Conservation Committees, contacting members and determining the level of interest present to remain with the committee. This will be a rolling process, with critical committees chosen first.

And which, you may ask, are critical committees? Well, the most obvious answer is those linked most directly with the global crisis of Climate Disruption. Hence, Energy; Water; Gas Action; Nuclear; Environmental Justice; Farm & Food and Transportation would be in the first round of attention, followed closely by Environmental Education; Population, Environment & Consumption; Open Space/Spawl and Pollution, Waste & Toxics. The remaining committees would then be assessed. Our goal is to ensure that we have viable, functioning committees peopled by members determined to achieve measurable active goals, whether by lobbying, letter writing, working with like-minded partners in communities to pushback against an environmental injustice, attending rallies or hearings, or any other form of ACTIVE PARTICIPATION with the committee’s issue. And we will expect a brief report from each committee at our quarterly Chapter ExCom Meetings. This is the grassroots, ‘boots on the ground’ part of the Sierra Club — the people power — and the power responsible for so many of our recent victories. With like-minded action-driven folks we prevented fracking in New York, stopped major pipelines, shutdown Indian Point and many others. Here are our Conservation Committees:

- Adirondacks
- Biodiversity/Vegetarian Outreach
- Energy
- Environmental Education
- Environmental Justice
- Gas Action Committee
- Farm & Food
- Great Lakes
- Hudson River Committee
- Indian Point Task Force
- Nuclear
- Open Space/Spawl
- Pollution, Waste & Toxics
- Population, Environment & Consumption
- Transportation
- Water
- Westchester Airport
- Wildlife & Wilderness

If reading this has ignited a fire in your belly and you feel drawn to one or more of these committees as a way to get involved and fight back against the impending global catastrophe or to give back to the earth and the future, then simply send an email to: atlantic.chapter@sierraclub.org or call: 518-426-9144, and we will respond immediately to get you connected and involved.

More Online:

Endorsements - For a full list of Sierra Club endorsed candidates for the November 2021 General Election, see our website. atlantic2.sierraclub.org/content/politics-and-issues

Article - “The Movement to Ban Gas Plants is Getting Stronger,” by Shay O’Reilly, NYC + Hudson Valley Organizing Representative, Beyond Coal Campaign
2021 Chapter At Large Elections
At-Large Delegate Selection for the 2022-2023 At-Large Term

PAPER BALLOT VOTING DEADLINE DECEMBER 31, 2021
YOU CAN VOTE ONLINE – ONLINE VOTING DEADLINE DECEMBER 31!

Please check your email inbox in early December for your official, non-transferrable link to the 2021 Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter online ballot, which will be sent to all members with email addresses on file. Submit your vote via the official online ballot, do not email your vote. You must choose to EITHER vote online OR by filling out the paper ballot at the end of this newsletter. There are five vacancies on our executive committee ("ExCom").

Candidate Statement of John Szalasny
I am placing my name for consideration as an At Large Delegate for the two year term on the Atlantic Chapter Excom beginning January, 2022. Taking office at that time would be sweet serendipity coming at the same time as the start of the NY Expanded Polystyrene ban as the plastics issue is the one that really moved me forward as an environmental activist. I have been on the Niagara Group Excom since 2017 and have been working on waste and recycling issues since 2019. Before I became an Excom member, I was active in the Niagara Group’s Writers Group, becoming a regular contributor to the letters-to-the-editor sections of the Buffalo News and the Amherst Bee. Through that affiliation, I was contacted by the editors at Buffalo Rising, an online news source for Western New York. I have been sharing and expanding articles that I have originally written for our Trailblazer, as well as writing additional pieces (the last two are named below) that have allowed me to share the environmental message with a wider audience.

Are New Bitcoin Operations and NYS Climate Goals Compatible? – Buffalo Rising, May 8, 2021
How Does New York Clean Up Its 200 Year Fossil Fuel Production Legacy? – Buffalo Rising, June 14, 2021

It would be a privilege to serve on the Atlantic Chapter ExCom starting in January.

Candidate Statement of Robert Heinemann
I’ve been a Sierra member since 1985. After retiring from a 34-year career in the federal court system in Brooklyn and Long Island, I had time to participate more actively. I moved to the Hudson Valley in 2015 and joined the Mid-Hudson Group in 2016. I have been an ExCom member for MH since the latter part of 2016, and served as Chair of MH in 2018 and 2019. During those two years, I attended seven of the eight Atlantic Chapter meetings representing MH. I also have been the Legislative Chair for MH from 2016 to the present, and write articles for Mid-Hudson's quarterly newsletter, Fresh Air, since 2017. Global warming and air, water and soil pollution are the most significant crises faced by humanity in our lifetimes. The earth is rapidly reaching a tipping point caused by rising temperatures that negatively affect the oceans, agriculture, migration, and the ability of nature to react due to the speed of the changes. Plastic pollution, contaminated water and air pollution are increasing rates of serious diseases especially in economically depressed regions of New York, and throughout our country and rest of the world. We are running out of time to slow down disastrous climate change and pollution caused by human activity. I am determined to do whatever I can to preserve our unique planet and its environment for future generations. We need to work together toward that goal. There is no longer any time for delay. I’d be honored to serve as an At Large Delegate to the Atlantic Chapter. If you trust me with your vote, I promise to do my best to promote the environmental goals of New York’s Atlantic Chapter.

Candidate Statement of Kate Bartholomew
I can’t remember a time when environmental and social justice didn’t figure prominently in my consciousness. For extra credit in fifth grade I tried my hand at designing a solar steam generating power plant — naive, yes, but I was hopeful. Then I planned to either give back our whole farm to the Seneca Nation (if they wanted it), or turn it into a forest preserve (if they didn’t). And that was before I entered high school; then possibilities and concerns emerged with overwhelming and interdependent devastation and complexity — there was no beginning or end to entangled injustice and exploitation of the natural world, other species and one another by systems constructed to maintain the power of a few over the many. Hence, I’ve been a dedicated deconstructionist ever since this realization. I work to dismantle structures of oppression and violence and living beings and ecosystems wherever I see them. I oppose all forms of “-isms.” I believe in the basic rights of all people to life, liberty, clean water, clean air, healthy food and the ability to be heard. And I believe all living things have an inherent unique right to live free of exploitation simply because THEY ARE HERE — they have their own inalienable rights to exist as themselves, not as commodities to serve us. This is the same for a tree, or a river or a mountain — they are unique unto themselves and have the right to be respected in that capacity. This is where I stand. I am currently serving as Atlantic Chapter Chair, and have for the last 3 1/2 years. I am also Conservation Chair for the Finger Lakes Group. In the past, I also served as Atlantic Chapter Conservation Chair and as Finger Lakes Group Chair as well as being on several Chapter Conservation Committees.
Candidate Statement of Guy Jacob

In the 1990s, I served as a member of the Sierra Club Long Island Group ExComm, as its Vice Chair and as its Chair. I also served on the Atlantic Chapter Political Committee. During my tenure as LI Group Chair, I personally initiated a conservation campaign to transform the old Kings Park Psychiatric Center into a state park. We garnered the support of conservation and civic groups, local governments, and NYS officials. Today, Nissequogue River State Park is the legacy of our work— all 400 plus acres, including wetlands and old growth forest. In 2000, I became Nassau Hiking & Outdoor Club Conservation Chair. NHOC is affiliated with the NY NJ Trail Conference. At that time, I initiated a conservation campaign to transform a right-of-way into a state park. The property was saved from being sold off, and once again Governor Pataki heeded the call of conservation. Today, Trail View State Park protects over 400 linear acres. I maintain my role as NHOC Conservation Chair to this day. We are currently supporting efforts to extend the NYS Empire Trail onto Long Island. Three years ago, I joined the Board of Directors of South Shore Audubon Society, and I currently serve as SSAS Conservation Co-Chair. I focus on opposing fracked gas infrastructure, supporting clean energy initiatives, minimizing plastic pollution, and urging bans on pesticides. I lobby public officials, write articles for our club newsletters, collaborate with like-minded organizations, write to our elected officials, and have had numerous letters published in the Albany Times Union, Newsday, and the Long Island Herald. I have collaborated and lobbied with Roger Downs as well as with the Nassau Clean Energy Sierra Club group. I seek to work more closely with the organization in which I first fulfilled my conservation yearnings and help support efforts to engage more members, including outreach and training for lobby visits. Thank you for your consideration of my candidacy for At Large Delegate.

Candidate Statement of Jill Weber

My commitment to environmental advocacy and my passion for nature is life-long, starting with developing inner-city gardens as a teen, becoming a science teacher and an environmental educator in the New York City and Buffalo public schools, and a hiking and biking trip leader for American Youth Hostels as a young adult. I graduated from SUNY Buffalo with a degree in Environmental Science and began a forty year career working in Parks Department management. I held many positions in the New York City Department of Parks, including the Central Park Landscape Manager, the Director of the Parks Opportunity Program (the nation’s largest welfare-to-work training program) and the Rockaway Parks Administrator, where I managed the restoration of the beaches and wetlands following Hurricane Sandy. In 2015 I became the Commissioner of the Department of Parks and Recreation for the Town of North Hempstead, where I prioritized open space management and habitat restoration. Other jobs that I’ve held include instructor with the New York City Street Tree Consortium and the Gardening and Horticulture Education Program Coordinator at the New York Botanical Gardens. All of these experiences provided me with an opportunity to gain insight and skills, while acting locally and thinking globally. With the current political climate and growing concerns about climate change and environmental degradation, advocacy for the environment is more important than ever. I am a proud long time member of the Sierra Club. I joined the Long Island Group Executive Committee in February of 2020, am on the Political Committee and serve as the group’s Conservation Chairperson. I aspire to be an At Large Delegate to the Atlantic Chapter Executive Committee and to continue to work to advance the interests of the Club and its members.

Sierra Club’s Priorities for Reconciliation Legislation

by Elizabeth Ahearn, Atlantic Chapter Conservation Staff

The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report, released on August 9, 2021, unequivocally concludes that climate change is widespread, rapid, and intensifying. The same week the IPCC Report was released, the U.S. Senate passed a historic bipartisan Infrastructure bill focused on investments in roads, railways, bridges, and broadband internet, with some funds allocated to replacing lead drinking water pipes, building charging stations for electric vehicles, and funding electric transit and school buses. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act calls for $1 trillion in overall spending, including $550 billion in new spending, but it still needs to pass the House of Representatives and get signed by President Biden.

Following the infrastructure vote, the Senate also voted 50-49 to begin debate on a separate spending measure, a $3.5 trillion Reconciliation spending package including federal investments in childcare, family leave, education, housing, and green energy initiatives. Presented solely as a budget item, the $3.5 trillion Reconciliation bill would allow for the passage of the spending measure by a simple majority vote, instead of the 60 votes required to pass most legislation in the Senate. Many progressive Democrats have stated they won’t vote for the smaller Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act before the $3.5 trillion Reconciliation spending program is passed, as many initiatives are vastly underfunded or missing from the Infrastructure bill. The Sierra Club supports the stance that any vote on the bipartisan Infrastructure proposal must be preceded by passage of the Reconciliation bill. The budget Reconciliation bill is a crucial step toward delivering bold investments at a national level, and it will help us tackle the climate crisis, create millions of jobs, and fight economic, racial, environmental, and gender injustice.

A Raw, Existential Void in the Chest —
The Impact of Environmental Anxiety and Grief on the Individual and Society
by Kate Bartholomew, Chapter Chair

Two headlines caught my attention this week, one from the BBC News, “Climate change: Young people very worried - survey,” and another from Time Magazine, “75% of the Young People Around the World are Frightened of the Future Because of Climate Change.” The period of our youth is a time that, ideally, should be opening up to expansive possibilities for the future — for optimism, for excitement, for hope. It should not be an age for growing anxiety and deepening despair. And yet that is what it has become, thanks to the undeniable reality of Climate Chaos and its increasing disruption of what had been relatively stable natural systems for millennia.

My last professional educator position was at a public charter school focused on sustainability and preparing young adults to enter the world to create a sustainable society and future. For the first time in my career I was able to honestly discuss human responsibility in ecosystem degradation and global warming; in systemic racism, a toxic planet and resource exploitation; in species’ extinction and public health threats. We were all — faculty, staff and students — speaking the same language. The problem boiled down to putting a positive spin into the narrative. After a certain point, the difficulty of shifting gears and convincing students that there were solutions available or yet to be discovered and that they could be the ones to bring about that change began to lack resonance — especially since so many were borderline nihilists to begin with even before the academic year began.

And who can blame them when they see the lackluster response to the Climate Crisis from world political leaders. Despite the lofty climate package President Biden put together, he still gave a green light to restarting drilling in the Gulf of Mexico and building smaller modular nuclear reactors. China has touted its zero carbon emissions plan yet continues to rely heavily on coal fired power plants and environmentally devastating hydroelectric dams. According to CNN reporter Ivana Kottasová, “Not a single G20 country is in line with the Paris Agreement on climate, analysis shows.” (3:02 AM EDT September 15, 2021). In one profoundly ridiculous (from an environmental standpoint) decision, El Salvador voted to make Bitcoin@ legal tender; Bitcoin@ being the most energy consumptive of all cryptocurrencies (the energy needed to “find” 5 Bitcoin@ could power the city of Albany). Soon there will be no more road left for governments to kick the can down.

Of course it’s not just governmental decision makers who appear oblivious to the dire — CODE RED — status the world is in. We have titans of capitalism — Jeff Bezos, Sir Richard Branson and Elon Musk — building rockets to go into space whether to take supplies and personnel to and from the International Space Station, market tourist space cruises, or to inaugurate humanity’s odyssey beyond earth — to Mars and beyond. The latter would elicit sublime and unbridled joy in me (being a diehard Gene Roddenberry Star Trek aficionado), if I didn’t recognize how dire the situation was for earth and how much that money should be devoted to solving problems here before looking beyond. These men are capitalist tycoons who play at philanthropy while expending vast sums of money for flashy sideshow ventures when they could be doing real good for humanity and the planet — and the pathetic part is they don’t realize how readily people see through them. Certainly my students did.

Of course there’s also the new company called Colossal with $15 million of start up money planning to resurrect the Woolly Mammoth under the pretense that these relics of the Pleistocene would help preserve the Siberian tundra and thus combat Climate Disruption. Let’s not bother to consider that the DNA required to make this extraordinary feat of genetic engineering possible will be derived from the bodies of Mammoths recovered from the rapidly thawing permafrost due to Climate Change, or that said reborn hybrids (not wholly Mammoths, rather a little Asian elephant in the mix) would be the only component of that ancient paleo-ecosystem present; or that the whole process will take decades to achieve. For the concept to have even the most minuscule hope for a positive outcome, many more elements — flora and fauna — of the extinct ecosystem would need to be recreated. As proposed, the project appears to be an outlandish waste of resources far better allocated elsewhere if combatting Climate Disruption is truly desired.

When young people — or anyone of any age for that matter — read of Mammoth resurrections or the several incredibly expensive and experimental methods of carbon sequestration or ideas of shading the earth to cool it through various (unproven) methods of geo-engineering, their level of skepticism and anxiety increases. They are very much aware of news reports featuring “increases in extreme weather events,” “the hottest summer on record,” “wildfires in the west affecting air quality on the east coast,” “Hurricane Ida brings flooding to NYC subways” and “record Manatee die off due to starvation.” And on top of all of this we have the COVID-19 pandemic still blasting its way around the globe, randomly mutating and taking advantage of the unvaccinated pockets of people wherever it can. How can people not feel the loss of the security of the
The excretions of the SLF attract make them vulnerable to disease. Feeding can stress plants, which trees, grape vine, and hops. SLF species, including maple trees, apple bugs. The SLF is a destructive pest is a pla few and far between. Haven't seen a swallow in years — sparse and the species fewer — I from where I grew up, the birds are up fields like sparklers. Now, though I live only five miles away from where I grew up, the birds are sparse and the species fewer — I haven't seen a swallow in years — and the butterflies and fireflies are few and far between.

The greatest medicine is the emptiness of everything. ~ Chinese fortune cookie

For a list of books related to this topic, see the digital version of the Fall Sierra Atlantic on the Chapter's website.

The Spotted Lanternfly
by Jeanne Walsh, New York City Group member

An unwelcomed guest has arrived in New York State! The Spotted Lanternfly (SLF) is an invasive species from Asia. First discovered in the United States in 2014 in the State of Pennsylvania, it is believed to have been brought here from imported landscaping trees. Since then, they have been found in New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia. The first official infestation in New York State was discovered in August 2020, at Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve, located in Staten Island.

The SLF is a planthopper insect related to cicadas, aphids, and stink bugs. The SLF is a destructive pest that feeds on more than 70 plant species, including maple trees, apple trees, grapevine, and hops. SLF feedings can stress plants, which makes them vulnerable to disease. The excretions of the SLF attract "sooty molds," which interfere with plant photosynthesis and result in poor growth and low fruit yield. This can have a devastating effect on our agricultural economy.

If you've noticed a different type of insect flying about recently, it may be the Spotted Lanternfly. They are very active from late August into September, as this is the time when the adults begin laying their eggs. The egg masses are covered by a protective coating, which helps the eggs to overwinter and hatch in Spring.

Because SLFs can jump and fly short distances, they spread mostly through human activity. They lay their egg masses on vehicles, trailers, firewood, outdoor furniture, and even on stones. When people travel or transport items to other areas or other states, they basically hitch a ride.

Obviously some of this could be youthful recollections seen through rose colored glasses, but the overall decreasing trend is real, and I've been observing it for decades. And every year I grieve a little more for what was and is no more. I also think of my mother who died back in the 1980s. She was always curious about the world, loved to travel, and believed in a brighter future for humanity. She was also an educator. Though I miss her daily, in some sense I am glad she is not here to see what is happening to the planet because I know how much it would devastate her, just as it is causing so much emotional and psychological anguish to so many now (in addition to the physical traumas unleashed in the wake of the impacts of Climate Chaos).

I make no claim to be anything other than a layman observer and fellow sufferer. This problem is so vast, no article I can write can really do it justice or fully explicate the breadth and scope of the issue. There are many books that attempt to do so, some of which I include at the bottom of the online version of this article. Just as there seems to be no clear pathway out of the predicament of Climate Disruption (or at least not one we are collectively willing to take), there appears to be no obvious remedy or cure for the accompanying anxiety and grief. But, perhaps, that's the way it has to be. Anxiety may spur us to action, and grief is not unwarranted. It is appropriate to mourn that which is lost, and, in so doing, honor the fact that it existed but now lives as a memory.

Ultimately, we must trust in the resilience and enduring nature of relationships and community to survive. Relationships with one another, with other living beings, with the planet itself, because those connections are truly the only things that matter.

You can help by spreading the word to your family, friends, and neighbors that these insects are an invasive pest that can harm our agriculture. Check out photos and information on the DEC's Spotted Lanternfly page (dec.ny.gov/animals/113303.html) to enable you to identify these invasive pests and their egg masses so we can all participate in eradicating them.

image: Lawrence Barringer, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, bugwood.org

An unwelcomed guest has arrived in New York State! The Spotted Lanternfly (SLF) is an invasive species from Asia. First discovered in the United States in 2014 in the State of Pennsylvania, it is believed to have been brought here from imported landscaping trees. Since then, they have been found in New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia. The first official infestation in New York State was discovered in August 2020, at Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve, located in Staten Island.

The SLF is a planthopper insect related to cicadas, aphids, and stink bugs. The SLF is a destructive pest that feeds on more than 70 plant species, including maple trees, apple trees, grapevine, and hops. SLF feedings can stress plants, which makes them vulnerable to disease. The excretions of the SLF attract "sooty molds," which interfere with plant photosynthesis and result in poor growth and low fruit yield. This can have a devastating effect on our agricultural economy.

If you've noticed a different type of insect flying about recently, it may be the Spotted Lanternfly. They are very active from late August into September, as this is the time when the adults begin laying their eggs. The egg masses are covered by a protective coating, which helps the eggs to overwinter and hatch in Spring.

Because SLFs can jump and fly short distances, they spread mostly through human activity. They lay their egg masses on vehicles, trailers, firewood, outdoor furniture, and even on stones. When people travel or transport items to other areas or other states, they basically hitch a ride.

Obviously some of this could be youthful recollections seen through rose colored glasses, but the overall decreasing trend is real, and I've been observing it for decades. And every year I grieve a little more for what was and is no more. I also think of my mother who died back in the 1980s. She was always curious about the world, loved to travel, and believed in a brighter future for humanity. She was also an educator. Though I miss her daily, in some sense I am glad she is not here to see what is happening to the planet because I know how much it would devastate her, just as it is causing so much emotional and psychological anguish to so many now (in addition to the physical traumas unleashed in the wake of the impacts of Climate Chaos).

I make no claim to be anything other than a layman observer and fellow sufferer. This problem is so vast, no article I can write can really do it justice or fully explicate the breadth and scope of the issue. There are many books that attempt to do so, some of which I include at the bottom of the online version of this article. Just as there seems to be no clear pathway out of the predicament of Climate Disruption (or at least not one we are collectively willing to take), there appears to be no obvious remedy or cure for the accompanying anxiety and grief. But, perhaps, that's the way it has to be. Anxiety may spur us to action, and grief is not unwarranted. It is appropriate to mourn that which is lost, and, in so doing, honor the fact that it existed but now lives as a memory.

Ultimately, we must trust in the resilience and enduring nature of relationships and community to survive. Relationships with one another, with other living beings, with the planet itself, because those connections are truly the only things that matter.

You can help by spreading the word to your family, friends, and neighbors that these insects are an invasive pest that can harm our agriculture. Check out photos and information on the DEC's Spotted Lanternfly page (dec.ny.gov/animals/113303.html) to enable you to identify these invasive pests and their egg masses so we can all participate in eradicating them.
We first met Carl on the second floor of St. Thomas More church on Manhattan’s Upper East Side in late January 2020.

It was our first time attending a meeting for the Sierra Club. We had just gotten involved with volunteering since moving to New York City and we didn’t know anyone. Serendipitously, we ended up sitting next to a svelte, salt-and-pepper man who began to chat with us, interested in who we were, why we were there. Carl Arnold was a member of the Sierra Club for many years, holding numerous leadership positions since 2011. He served in numerous roles at the local, state, and national levels, and helped work on projects as far reaching as fracking bans and regenerative agriculture.

It was good luck that we sat next to him that day. We had the pleasure of meeting one of the most stalwart, committed environmentalists many of us will ever know. More so, it was the fortuitous start of a burgeoning friendship.

By this time, Carl had already finished his term as Atlantic Chapter Chair for several years. He had dived into his role as co-chair of the Grassroots Network Food and Agriculture Team, while still continuing to guide the NYC Group. Even though he had been around the block (more than once), Carl relished seemingly nothing more than engaging with newcomers. That was one of the unique strengths of Carl Arnold as a person, an activist, and a colleague – even though he was so deeply involved, had so many personal connections, and had such a long tenure in his volunteer work, he always prioritized bringing in new members and engaging novel ideas, even when it would have been easy and natural to get wrapped in inertia or stuck in his ways. Carl was an incredibly flexible member, not in his steadfast ideals or values, but in his ability to see from new perspectives, think around an issue, and even reconsider accepted systems. This type of agility and acumen is rare, and was a true gift to all those who could work with and learn from him. Many whom we’ve spoken to about Carl’s passing in May of this year mention a particular trait during times of reminiscence: his mentorship. Carl had a unique knack for finding and nurturing new environmentalists – it was probably a fun combination of his dry wit, encyclopedic knowledge of, well, everything, and genuine commitment to youth activism that made it seem almost irresistible to get involved.

We are fortunate enough to have learned quite a great deal from Carl, getting to know him as a fellow activist, but even more as a mentor and a friend. There is one memory that sticks out in this regard. Facing an internal crisis and not sure what to do with a difficult career choice, we called Carl on the phone to talk through it one night. That was another of Carl’s many great qualities, and sometimes a quirk: he valued in-person dialogue greatly and would often deliver a phone call out of the blue, a dying practice among our age group. Carl stayed on the phone for the better part of an hour, listening and weighing in on the pros and cons of different environmental career options, thoughtful and encouraging. These are some of the things we will miss the most, receiving a call in the middle of the day to talk about farm practices and somehow link into a conversation about Middle Eastern archaeological sites, learning from Carl’s measured, yet always intensely passionate demeanor, or simply soaking in his astonishing body of work and ability to recall recommended organizations, names and publications to help set anyone on a path in support of their work and provide tangible next steps.

Since his passing, an emptiness has pervaded our Zoom meetings. There was a comfort that came with Carl being in attendance. A resolution was always met, and although not all sides necessarily agreed, we would come together and make progress. Whether it was on a video conference or in person, the flow of a meeting could be measured by what Carl was doing. When there was bickering or unstructured dialogue, Carl could be seen standing and pacing. If a conversation had truly devolved into impassioned chaos, he would leap in and fix it. He was a voice of reason – not moderation or unnatural compromise – but of actionable solutions.

When talking with Sierra Club NY leaders who knew Carl far longer than we had the privilege to, they mention how distinctly lucky they were to have him in the group. He was a fierce fighter for the earth, a kind friend and a true Renaissance man. We will all miss him sharing cartoons, telling things as they are, not getting bogged down in the politics, adding levity, bringing in new blood, nurturing longstanding relationships, working relentlessly, keeping out personal bias, enjoying the little victories, and many, many other things.
Lisa Dix and the Path to New York Offshore Wind
by Ellen Cardone Banks

New York’s first offshore wind farm, the South Fork Wind Farm, is scheduled to begin construction in January 2022, quickly followed by Sunrise Wind and Empire Wind, and will start generating electricity for over a million homes by 2024, supporting our state’s climate goals by replacing energy from dirty fossil fuel plants. As with all climate victories, this didn’t happen by itself; years of organizing and coalition-building made it happen, and one of the many who led that process was Lisa Dix, during her 9 years with the Sierra Club as Senior Campaign Manager for the Beyond Coal Campaign.

Lisa grew up in Utah, acquiring an early love of the outdoors in a family of campers and fishers. After college she lived and worked in Alaska and then traveled and lived in several Asian countries. Her early activism was with organizations opposing open air nuclear testing and promoting nuclear disarmament, motivated in part because her home region of Utah had been harmed by pollution from the nuclear industry.

After completing a graduate program in Montana, Lisa’s next project was wildlands protection. She worked with nonprofits dedicated to preserving national forests, including fire management and forest restoration, and was a leader in the Roadless Campaign that protected 60,000,000 acres of forests across the US from road construction, logging, mining and grazing.

The accelerating urgency of the climate crisis inspired Lisa’s next professional endeavor in 2012, when she was tapped to lead the Beyond Coal Campaign in New York, the center of Sierra Club’s efforts in the electric sector.

When Lisa started this role, coal in the electric sector was the largest contributor to carbon emissions nation-wide, so eliminating coal fired power plants, stopping coal plants from converting to fracked gas, massively scaling clean, homegrown renewable energy to replace New York’s coal and gas plants and ensuring a just an equitable transition for workers and communities was the mission. Meanwhile, the harms of hydrofracking were just beginning to be understood. At that time, she said, Governor Cuomo was pro-coal, pro-fracking and uninterested in renewable energy at scale. With allied organizations the Beyond Coal team in New York focused on the goals of scaling renewables as quickly as possible while phasing out coal and stopping fracked gas plants in the electric sector and preventing fracking in New York. To achieve these goals, the Beyond Coal Campaign concentrated on “moving the Governor” and influencing the State Legislature. There were five coal-fired power plants in New York at that time. Even after three were successfully retired, the remaining two, Somerset and Cayuga, were responsible for over 20% of the state’s electric sector emissions. “The strategy was always that when we were phasing out coal, we would stop all efforts to replace coal with fracked gas and scale renewable energy and...we believed in making sure that we were working toward a just and equitable transition to a clean energy economy that would provide a glide-path and uplift workers and communities in New York,” Lisa said in a recent interview. Most public and Sierra Club discussion on renewable energy was about distributed solar at that time, and many environmentally-inclined people were still wary of large-scale renewable energy, believing that energy efficiency and roof-top solar would solve the climate crisis.

The Jacobson report on how the world’s energy needs could be met with large-scale renewables was one influence on changing public awareness of the magnitude of fossil fuel replacement that would be required to hold off the worst effects of climate change and the calculations showing that a 100 percent renewable electric sector was achievable. Gradually, with help and support from many Sierra Club allies, partners and a powerful and effective renewable energy movement, New York State finally committed to sourcing 50%, and a few years after 70 percent of electricity from renewable energy by 2030.(Since then, the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act of 2019 has mandated New York achieve a 100% decarbonized grid by 2040.)

Mobilizing Sierra Club’s people power and building a climate movement to push New York decision makers to make climate change a priority were parallel goals of BCC, especially on Long Island, adjacent to the continental shelf where offshore wind (OSW) will be sited. The Sierra Club’s OSW campaign was launched in 2013. The Long Island Power Authority (LIPA) was facing a decision—either build a massive new gas plant and refire several existing oil and gas plants at a cost of $6 billion, or to embrace OSW, roof-top and large-scale solar efficiency. With Sierra Club in the lead, New York Wind was launched, a multi-organizational coalition that eventually grew to about 60 organizations. While focused on OSW, scaling upstate land-based wind, utility-scale solar advocacy, distributed renewable energy, storage, energy efficiency and anti-fracking were BCC’s campaign priorities. Mobilizing Sierra Club’s base and building a state-wide
climate movement to create the political and public support to get the dirty energy out, lock in a state renewable energy policy framework and compel our decision leaders to take the political action necessary to decarbonize New York’s electric grid was the goal.

Sierra Club volunteer Matt Kearns helped launch Sierra Club’s offshore wind campaign on Long Island with the Wind100, a 100-mile run for Wind from Montauk to Jones Beach, with volunteers holding rallies at communities all along Long Island that had been hit hard by Hurricanes Irene and Sandy. The storm devastation convinced many local residents of the reality of the climate crisis and the need to decarbonize. The coalition worked to build people power and to convince the public, municipal elected officials, and LIPA to support OSW. To engage communities, coalition volunteers attended many community meetings, knocked on doors, distributed literature, had one-on-one conversations, met with local and state elected officials, and rallied at countless LIPA board meetings, with hundreds of pro-wind community members attending. The offshore wind coalition grew to 60 groups as conservation-minded people realized the dual perils to Long Island (LI) from ever-intensifying storms and pollution from fossil fuel plants. Contrary to negative publicity about wind turbines spoiling views from beaches, the public learned that OSW would be far offshore, scarcely visible from land.

Progress at first was incremental, Lisa said, and volunteers and staff had to learn to embrace small victories: at first LIPA shortened the gas contracts from 30 years to 12 and approved huge increased investments in large-scale and distributed solar and energy efficiency for LI, with a future intention expressed to make OSW work for LI, which LIPA eventually approved and led the state to advance New York’s first offshore wind farm, the Southfork Wind Farm. Later, a major victory was achieved when the Governor committed to a 2.4 GW offshore wind target, then 5 GW, and now the State’s plan is for 9 GW of OSW by 2035, the largest commitment in the nation.

Organized labor’s involvement was crucial, and the Long Island Federation of Labor and Long Island Building and Construction Trades were involved in creating the vision and building the movement from the beginning. Lisa consistently led with the emphasis on working side-by-side with unions and ensuring that victories around labor standards, ports, workforce training, local manufacturing and supply chain were integral to the overall vision and strategy. As a result, New York has the boldest labor standards in the nation for offshore wind and other significant victories such as requiring projects are done with project labor agreements, several New York-based ports including an assembly port at the South Brooklyn Marine Terminal, huge investments in union-led job training and home-grown manufacturing of blades towers and foundations. As other Eastern Seaboard states develop OSW, New York will have the advantage of manufacturing and transport for more wind development and will set the standard for family-supporting jobs in other states. All these victories have been influenced by the Sierra Club Beyond Coal Campaign under Lisa’s leadership, including staff and hundreds of Sierra Club volunteers and coalition partners and the people of Long Island who stood up for clean energy and curbing climate change.

Lisa Dix has moved on from the Sierra Club and is now establishing a New York State presence of the Building Decarbonization Coalition to tackle the massive carbon emissions from fossil fuel heat. She says of Offshore Wind, “It was the best work of my career...we built a movement... and we convinced an administration that renewables had to be done faster and done right to ensure workers and communities across New York will benefit.” The Atlantic Chapter owes her much gratitude for her leadership, creativity, energy and firm commitment to a clean energy future that leaves no one behind.
Please vote for up to five candidates. If you vote by paper ballot, cut off this whole back page and mail to Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, PO Box 38225, Albany, NY 12203, so that it is received no later than December 31, 2021. Do not separate the ballot from your mailing address. Member information, needed to verify that the member has not also voted online, will be separated from votes before votes are tabulated to ensure secrecy.

Sierra Club
Atlantic Chapter
PO Box 38225
Albany, NY 12203

Vote here:

☐ Jill Weber
☐ Guy Jacob
☐ Kate Bartholomew
☐ Robert Heinemann
☐ John Szalasny

If you have a joint membership, 2nd member vote here:

☐ Jill Weber
☐ Guy Jacob
☐ Kate Bartholomew
☐ Robert Heinemann
☐ John Szalasny

*If you have a single membership, this column will be ignored when votes are counted.