



SIERRA CLUB
FOUNDED 1892

TERRA FIRMA

SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER 2023

PUBLISHED BY VOLUNTEERS FROM THE LOWER HUDSON GROUP SIERRA CLUB

NO TIME TO WASTE: TELL GOV HOCHUL TO SIGN THE BIRDS & BEES PROTECTION ACT TODAY!

We won a huge victory last June when the New York State Senate and Assembly passed the Birds and Bees Protection Act, an historic, nation-leading bill that will end the unnecessary use of a class of toxic pesticides known as neonicotinoids (neonics). Neonics have caused an alarming crash in pollinator populations nationwide and the EPA has recently reported that the continued use of these toxic pesticides will likely drive hundreds of endangered species toward extinction. This is vitally important, as many of our crops depend on pollinators.

But our fight isn't over yet. Governor Hochul needs to sign the bill into law, and the chemical companies that produce these pesticides are now spending millions in a misinformation campaign urging her to veto this groundbreaking legislation.

The bill has had widespread support from the organic farming community, environmentalists, health professionals, brewers, wineries, and advocates like you. We need your help in pushing back, so that NY's pollinators, waterways, and communities are protected from these unnecessary toxic pesticides.

Send your message to Governor Hochul, urging her to sign S.1856-A/A.7640: The Birds and Bees Protection Act into law today! Call her office at 1-518-474-8390 or sign a prewritten message at <https://act.sierraclub.org/actions/Atlantic?actionId=AR0396333>.

We are so close to achieving a huge win for New York's environment. This reasonable approach would not prevent invasive species treatment or any agricultural uses beyond treated corn, soybean, and wheat seeds. It would benefit pollinators, our state's farmers who depend on them, New York's ecosystems, and all New Yorkers who value clean soil, clean water, and their own health. Send your message to Governor Hochul today!

To learn more about the bill and why neonics are harmful, see this issue of *Terra Firma*, pages 4-5, and the fact sheets on our website at SierraLowerHudson.org.

Join us to work on environmental issues in Rockland County!

Rockland Sierra Club was one of the groups leading the successful effort to defeat plans to desalinate Hudson River water for Rockland's drinking water. We are now helping the County craft a sustainable water management policy. We are also working to limit new fossil fuel infrastructure and have partnered with 350.org on efforts to address climate change through divestment and through promoting Climate Smart/Clean Energy Communities programs for towns and villages.

Rockland Sierra Club usually meets on the second Monday of each month. Check RocklandSierraClub.org for dates and locations. For more information: pkurtz9@gmail.com or call 845-709-0802.

Want to take additional action? You can send a physical letter of support to Governor Hochul, letting her know you support the Birds and Bees Protection Act. See <https://atlantic2.sierraclub.org/content/send-letter-governor-hochul-urging-her-sign-birds-and-bees-protection-act> for template language and more info on where to send letters.

The Save the Hudson Act signed into law!

Just as *Terra Firma* was going to press, Governor Hochul signed the Save the Hudson Act, S.6893 (Harckham)/A.7208 (Levenberg), which will prohibit the discharge of any radiological agent into the waters of the Hudson River. This important bill from Senator Pete Harckham and Assembly Member Dana Levenberg will prevent Holtec International from dumping radioactive wastewater into the Hudson as part of the company's decommissioning process of Indian Point.

The bill had bipartisan support from state and county legislators and town supervisors on both sides of the Hudson. Numerous rallies were held this summer, after the bill passed the Senate and Assembly last June, to urge the governor to sign the legislation into law. The need for action was urgent, since Holtec had planned to start dumping a million gallons of this water on September 15. The public learned at the July 31st meeting of the Decommissioning Oversight Board that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission would allow Holtec to discharge the wastewater without waiting for the results of testing for strontium-90 which has not been done yet. Strontium-90 is a radioactive element that is easily absorbed into the body and has been linked to bone cancer and child leukemia.

Please call the governor at 1-518-474-8390 to thank her for signing The Save the Hudson Act into law. At the same time reiterate the need to have independent testing of the wastewater, safe storage of the radioactive wastewater onsite, and a more democratic Decommissioning Oversight Board with monthly meetings including public comment and presentations from independent health, safety and emergency preparedness experts.

Thank you for your advocacy on this issue—this bill became law because of all the calls and emails from concerned citizens.

Membership Meeting Schedule

Visit SierraLowerHudson.org and select Events

Visit RocklandSierraClub.org

All meetings via Zoom, link on websites

THE HUTCH - A HISTORY OF TAMING A RIVER

by: Joseph Dunnigan

A River Gets Its Name

Imagine if you will, it's the early 1600s and you gaze out from your new home overlooking the Long Island Sound. Nearby is a trail that passes a rock formation where the boulder has been divided in two and has been aptly named Split Rock. You follow this trail that was established by the Siwanoy People (also called Weckquaesgecks in their own language) who are part of the western band of the greater Wappinger tribe. You come to a flowing river surrounded by large red cedar trees, and you stand at the edge as you watch a great blue heron stalk the waters, schools of alewife fish scatter from your presence, and turtles sunbathe on logs as oysters and mussels sit nestled at the sandy bottom. You are told this river is called *Aquacanounck* in the *Munsee language*. It is a peaceful place that runs free and harbors so much life, for now.

Over the next hundred years, wars will break out bringing the first wave of deaths to the river's shores. Starting with the Wappinger War, also called Kieft's War, the Lenape and Wappingers fought for their right to these lands against the Dutch West India Company. Just before the start of the war, a Puritan named Anne Hutchinson arrived after fleeing persecution in the Massachusetts Colony. She chose land near the Siwanoy People, and she may have possibly walked the same path we had just imagined and looked out over the river that one day would bear her name.

Anne Hutchinson was a nurse, religious reformer, and tragic victim. She was persecuted for her reformative beliefs and fled seeking refuge in New Netherland. For a while she found peace in the area called Pelham Bay. This was in 1642.

At the same time, the Dutch West India Company, under the direction of William Kieft, was clashing with the various bands of the Wappinger tribe. The conflict escalated with killings and raids on both sides as the Director increased his pressure in the region. By 1643, an all-out war broke out when about 1500 Lenape soldiers raided New Netherlands. The goal of the Lenape soldiers was to eradicate the land of the Dutch invaders. Unfortunately, settled in the middle of this battlefield landscape was Anne Hutchinson.

The Hutchinsons were killed. Susanna Hutchinson, the daughter of Anne and sole survivor, escaped but was eventually taken captive. Possibly and ironically, Susanna was believed to have used the Native American landmark known as Split Rock as an area of refuge. Afterwards the land that had been the Hutchinson's home was known for a time as "Anne Hoeck," and the river where we had imagined ourselves standing, which had been called *Aquacanounck* and *Eastchester Creek*, was renamed the Hutchinson River.

The Hutchinson River flowed through time as new owners became lords over the land, such as during the reign of the Pells from their Manor at Pelham. The river continued its journey during the American Revolution as new battles brought the blood of patriots, loyalists, and British troops to its shores. And then came the dams.

Damming a River

The Hutchinson River flowed freely until the late 1800s when it was dammed. In the late 19th century, the Mount Vernon Water Company and the New Rochelle Water Company dammed the river in two places, creating two reservoirs. Afterwards, the river was dammed two more times, creating a total of four reservoirs. The water from these reservoirs was able to flow to the prospective towns using only gravity.

"I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree...
And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes
dropping slow..."

- Excerpt from "The Lake Isle of Innisfree"
by William Butler Yeats

In the 1930s, the land around Reservoir 1 was beginning to be developed. Developers changed the name of Reservoir 1, and it became known as Lake Innisfree, after the poem "Lake Isle of Innisfree" by William B. Yeats. Lines from "Lake Isle of Innisfree," read, "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree... And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow." Yeats wrote the poem while living in a bustling city and remembering his childhood when he had been closer to Mother Earth. Clearly, Yeats was longing for those more peaceful days closer to nature. It is ironic that after the seizure of the natural world by man in the form of a reservoir, the development was named after that same poem.

The reservoirs served Mount Vernon, Tuckahoe, Bronxville, New Rochelle, Pelham, and Eastchester area for a time, but their use was eventually replaced by other means. Now they are mere relics of a period when man began to tame the Hutchinson River. While upsetting to the ecosystem of the Hutchinson, the reservoirs were not the last disturbance to impact the river.

A Road to Nowhere

The Hutchinson River Parkway, known simply as "the Hutch," was originally conceived by the Westchester County Park Commission. By the late 1920s, the parkway was completed between Pelham and White Plains, enabling a quicker route for local traffic to the county seat. But the Hutch was still disconnected from New York City until a notorious urban planner named Robert Moses came around.

At about the same time as the construction of developments around Lake Innisfree, the parkway along the Hutchinson River was also being eyed by Robert Moses, who was infamously instrumental in creating most of the major infrastructure that flows through and around New York City. But he was most remembered by the people he displaced as a despot of their communities.

Robert Moses conceived a plan to extend the Hutch from Pelham to the Bronx, thus completing the connection of the parkway to New York City and opening the route to millions more travelers. An estimate by the NYC Parks Department states that, "by the 1990s, approximately 110,000 vehicles use the parkway each day." The proximity of the parkway to the Hutchinson River no doubt added tons of pollution to the waters since the time of its construction and extension. Unfortunately, the roadway would not be the only source of pollution to reach the river.

A Channel of Contamination

The Hutchinson was a river of pristine waters teeming with vast amounts of marine life, such as the alewife (*Alosa pseudoharengus*), a type of fish that would swim upstream to spawn. But because of the dams, alewife have been absent from their ancestral waters, and they are not the only victim.



The Hutchinson River Restoration Project

The Hutchinson River Restoration Project (HRRP) was founded over a decade ago by Eleanor Rae and Toby Lieberman, after Eleanor explored her interest in the life of Anne Hutchinson and the state of the river that bears her name.

HRRP is a non-profit organization that aims to promote the conservation of the Hutchinson River by working with local communities, politicians, and volunteers to restore the river's ecosystem. Their mission is to create a river that can be accessible and enjoyed by all. To accomplish this HRRP organizes many activities around the education and preservation of the Hutchinson River such as clean-ups, river walks, and tabling events.

Currently, the Lower Hudson Group is working closely with HRRP to assist them in reclaiming the land around the river in Mount Vernon to create a more accessible path to the water and help restore the river's ecosystem to its natural state.

Recently, HRRP held a call-for-volunteers event at which they informed the new cohort of participants about the opportunities for supporting their organization. But they still need support. HRRP welcomes the opportunity for you to showcase your unique skills or to develop new ones within their organization. If you would like to learn more about volunteering with HRRP you can visit their website at <https://www.hutchinsonriver.org>.

Conclusion

It has been over 400 years since the first Europeans set their eyes upon the shores of the Hutchinson River; since then, the waters have been combating centuries of control, pollution, and disturbance. But with organizations like the Hutchinson River Restoration Project, the Hutch may have a fighting chance once again. Evidence that the tide is turning has occurred, such as with the reappearance of alewife in the river. But there is more to do, and it can only be accomplished with the help of the river's most valuable resource, which is your support.

Contamination has also been a factor in deterring wildlife in and around the Hutchinson River. In fact, according to the organization Environmental Justice Atlas, the Hutch is almost uninhabitable near Mount Vernon due to the high level of pollution. This is corroborated by other sources, such as an article in *NY1* by Amy Yensi who quoted an advocate from Save the Sound stating that the rash of fish die offs in the river are likely caused by sewage and polluted waters. It's no wonder that in 2017, a dolphin was found dead in the river after having swum upstream from the Long Island Sound. You may be asking, "Where is all this pollution coming from?"

Besides the pollution from the dozens of industrial buildings that line the river, such as concrete plants and metal scrap yards, plus the effects from the traffic of the parkway and Amtrak, the river has contended with runoff from sewage. According to a monitoring project administered by Save the Sound, it is believed that the sewage begins in the city limits of Mount Vernon where much of the river has such high levels of a bacteria indicative of fecal matter that it is deemed unsafe for human activity. Additionally, NYC has over 400 combined sewer overflows (CSOs), some of which are also affecting the quality of water in the Hutchinson River.

The Hutchinson River is battling so much all at once it seems dizzying to think of all its issues. What are we as Sierra Club members to do about all these problems? Well, fortunately there is an organization devoted to answering that question.



Candidate Environmental Forum for Westchester Board of Legislators

September 13, 2023 at 6:00pm

Greenburgh Public Library

300 Tarrytown Road, Elmsford, NY 10523

Candidates for election to the Westchester County Board of Legislators this November will join us to answer questions about environmental issues. We'll hear from each candidate, and then take questions from the audience.

HIKES AND OTHER OUTINGS

Don't forget to check the Get Outside page on our group website for all kinds of outings. They're fun and invigorating, and a great way to meet like-minded people of all ages and walks of life.

Visit SierraLowerHudson.org and click Get Outside.

Protect New York from Toxic Pesticides that Are Killing Bees and Threatening People

Neonics are widely used pesticides with widespread consequences:

- They are a leading cause of the mass losses of pollinators (like bees) we depend on for food.
- This shortage of pollinators has already caused an estimated 3 to 5 percent drop in the world's production of fruits, vegetables, and nuts.
- Neonics spread easily in the ecosystem, exposing more than 50 percent of the U.S. population to neonics on any given day through our drinking water, food, soil, and more.
- This is bad because neonics are linked to birth defects of the heart and brain, autism-like symptoms, memory loss, finger tremors, and more.

The bottom line is that neonics are dangerous. That's why we've joined forces with our local partners to urge Governor Kathy Hochul to sign the Birds and Bees Protection Act, which will make New York the leading state in prohibiting harmful and needless neonic uses that have devastating consequences for New York's ecosystems and public health.

Tell Governor Hochul to restrict the use of toxic neonics by signing the first-of-its-kind **Birds and Bees Protection Act** (A7640/S1856A) into law TODAY.



Scan QR code here to [sign the petition](#)



SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON THE BIRDS AND BEES PROTECTION ACT (A7640/S1856-A)

(excerpts from a fact sheet by the same name from the Birds & Bees Coalition, which includes Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, available at SierraLowerHudson.org)

With U.S. beekeepers experiencing unsustainable annual colony losses,¹ and declines of wild bees, butterflies, and insects reaching levels some now call an “insect apocalypse,”² there has never been a more urgent need to address a key leading cause of insect declines—the widespread use of neurotoxic neonicotinoid pesticides, or “neonics.” A 2020 Cornell University review of over 1,100 peer-reviewed studies (“Cornell Report”) reveals that the neonic uses that pose the greatest threats to New York’s bees are also those that provide little-to-no benefits to users or are easily replaceable with safer alternatives.³ At the same time, neonics threaten whole ecosystems⁴ and pose risks to human health.⁵

The Birds and Bees Protection Act (A7640/S1856-A) would prohibit the wasteful neonic uses identified in the Cornell Report—specifically, neonic-treated corn, soybean, and wheat seeds and non-agricultural, turf, and ornamental uses that make up 80-90% of the neonics entering the state’s environment each year. But false, misleading, or unsupported claims have arisen regarding the bill. These claims are addressed below:

What Does the Birds and Bees Protection Act Do?

Myth: The bill would prohibit neonic use on fruit and vegetable crops.

Truth: The bill only prohibits the sale or distribution of neonic-treated corn, soybean, and wheat seeds. These “seed treatments” account for 73% of all agricultural neonic use in New York⁶ but provide “no overall net income benefit” to New York farmers according to the Cornell Report.⁷ The bill does not restrict any other agricultural neonic uses—including fruit and vegetable crops or even other applications on corn, soybean, and wheat crops.

Myth: The bill would prohibit use of neonics against invasive species like hemlock wooly adelgid.

Truth: The bill explicitly allows the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to permit neonic use to protect against any pests that present risk of significant harm to New York’s environment, including invasive species.

How would a neonic-treated seed prohibition impact farmers?

Myth: Non-neonic-treated corn, soybean, and wheat seeds would be unavailable for New York farmers.

Truth 1: Non-neonic-treated conventional soybean and wheat seeds are already widely available.

Truth 2: Where seed is unavailable, the bill allows DEC to suspend the ban.

Myth: Loss of neonic seed treatments would drive corn and soybean farmers away from cover cropping and no-till farming.

Truth: Elimination of neonic corn and soybean seed treatments is likely to encourage climate-and-soil-friendly practices like no-till and cover cropping.

Myth: The loss of neonic-treated corn, soybean, and wheat seeds would be bad for farmers and lead to more harmful pesticide use.

Truth 1: The findings of virtually every literature review and peer-reviewed study show neonic seed treatments do not benefit producers or increase yields.

Truth 2: Other jurisdictions have abandoned neonic seed coatings on corn and soybean seeds, which hasn’t led to additional spraying or more harmful alternatives.

How do neonics threaten human health?

Myth: Neonics are safe for people.

Truth: Experts are increasingly raising alarms about neonics’ harms to New Yorkers’ health.... A recent study of 171 pregnant women in New York and five other states found that over 95% had neonics in their bodies, with the highest rates in Hispanic women, and levels steadily rising over the 4-year study (2017-2020). Neonics easily flow from the mother to the fetus, and studies link neonic exposures during fetal development to risk of heart and brain malformations, reduced cognitive abilities, and autism-like symptoms. Like lead and mercury, neonics are neurotoxic, and the existing research shows that there may be “no safe level” when it comes to these chemicals and childhood neurological development. Research in adults has also linked neonics to memory loss, muscle tremors, decreased testosterone, and lower sperm counts and motility.

¹ Nathalie Stienhauer et al., United States Honey Bee Colony Losses 2020-2021, Bee Informed Partnership (Jun. 21, 2021), <https://bit.ly/3TKDeuV>.

² Brooke Jarvis, The Insect Apocalypse Is Here, New York Times Mag. (Nov. 27, 2018), <https://nyti.ms/2Aq0jMX>.

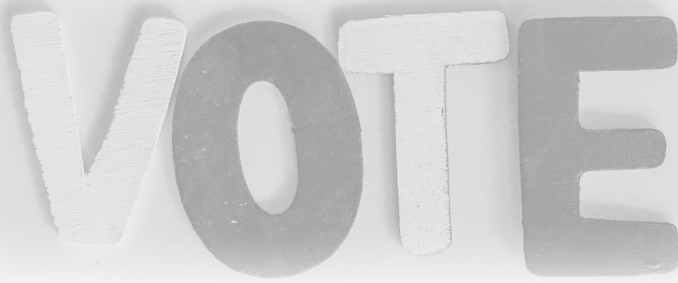
³ Travis A. Grout et al., Neonicotinoid Insecticides in New York State, Cornell University, 236 (Jun. 23, 2020), <https://bit.ly/2XIB2cA> [hereinafter “Cornell Report”].

⁴ See Daniel Raichel and Jennifer Sass, Bigger Than Bees: How Neonics Contaminate Water, Threaten Ecosystems, and Cause Human Health Concerns in New York, NRDC, 3 (Jan. 2020), <https://on.nrdc.org/2YQeMkV>

⁵ Jen Sass, Neonicotinoid Pesticides: Potential Risks to Brain and Sperm, <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/jennifer-sass/neonic-pesticides-potential-risks-brain-and-sperm>.

⁶ Pierre Mineau, An Assessment of Neonicotinoid Insecticides with Emphasis on New York: Use, Contamination, Impacts on Aquatic Systems, and Agro-nomic Aspects, 49 (2019), <https://on.nrdc.org/3eeav0g>.

⁷ Cornell Report.



2023 ELECTION BALLOT
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, SIERRA CLUB LOWER HUDSON GROUP
VOTING DEADLINE DECEMBER 31, 2023

You can vote for Lower Hudson Group’s Executive Committee in ONE of two ways:

**With the paper ballot below
(follow instructions)**

OR

Online:
**Please check your email Inbox in
December for your Lower Hudson Group
ballot (included in your 2023 Sierra Club
Atlantic Chapter ballot) which will be sent
to all members with email addresses on file.**

For the group election, you may vote EITHER with the paper or online ballot, but not both.

There are five vacancies for our Executive Committee (“ExCom”).

2023 CANDIDATE STATEMENTS FOR LHG EXCOM

Candidate Statement of Linda Brunner

It’s been an adventure to be on the ExCom of the LHG these past few years. My role has primarily been as a liaison with organizations such as Friends of the Great Swamp in Putnam County and the Airport Coalition, and elected bodies (Westchester County Board of Legislators and Yonkers City Council), where our impact is increased by cooperation. Representing LHG in committees such as Container Gardening, and Steering for the Planting Westchester effort initiated by County Executive Latimer was another great way to cooperate. I especially appreciate being involved in vetting with candidates for election and determining whether we will endorse them. I am convinced that knowing whom we can rely on to vote and exercise their voice and power in line with Sierra Club principles and guidelines is critical.

Candidate Statement of Joe Dunnigan

I joined Sierra Club Lower Hudson Group (LHG) to learn more about the field of advocacy and to bolster my understanding of the environmental issues facing the Hudson Valley. I became interested in the environment after the pandemic when I started to avidly hike the Catskill and Hudson Regions. Afterwards, I enrolled in a graduate program in Oregon State University, where I am currently studying Forests and Climate Change.

Because of my hiking experiences and educational journey, I have become concerned about climate change in our area and the various invasive species that could be affecting our ecosystems. My goal is to learn more about the history of the land, its native species, and how best to adapt them to a changing climate.

After joining Sierra Club, I became active in the LHG’s monthly meetings. Eventually, I wrote an article that was featured in *Terra Firma* where I was able to communicate my concerns about the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid and its effects on Eastern Hemlock stands. Following this, I became a liaison for the Sierra Club with the Hutchinson River Restoration Project (HRRP). HRRP is a non-profit organization aimed at conserving the Hutchinson River and dealing with its issues such as pollution, invasive species, and river access.

I hope to continue writing articles in *Terra Firma* to promote discussions and understanding about the effects of climate change and invasive species in New York. I ask for your vote so I may continue my efforts in protecting the diversity of our ecosystems in the Lower Hudson Valley and beyond.

Candidate Statement of Gail Dutan

I've been a member of Sierra Club since 1998 when I started doing the layout for our newsletter, *Terra Firma*, and have since printed and mailed it from my family's business. I became a Sierra Club Outings Leader last year and have started leading hikes in our area. I love visiting farmers markets so you will find all my hikes will be paired with a local market visit. I've also enjoyed tabling at Green Ossining the past two years as well as some other local events.

Candidate Statement of Marilyn Elie

The most critical issue we face today is climate change. The solutions are about a lot more than keeping fossil fuels in the ground. Economic justice, reforming the way we generate electricity, planning for more resilient communities and electing progressive decision makers all have a part to play. Organizing and outreach that informs and inspires people to action is crucial. Closing Indian Point has been my focus for the the last 25 years. It has meant a lot of organizing, public education, demonstrations, legislative visits and, of course, emails! I would welcome the continued opportunity to bring these skills to bear in a wider arena by serving on the Executive Committee for another term and would welcome your support.

Candidate Statement of George Klein

I ask for your vote in order to work on opposing the expansion of the Westchester County Airport, work for voting integrity in NY state, find ways for our activists to work together more effectively, deepen our outreach to younger members, seek new ways for the group to communicate our values and messages more widely and forcefully to both members and the public, keep our group financially strong, encourage everyone to enjoy our great outdoors, and, personally for me, to continue work with our wonderful activists.

Candidate Statement of Sarah Wilson

I have been our group treasurer since 2010. I support the work of our passionate, committed group ExCom. I have conducted carbon footprint workshops and promoted electric vehicles, Community Solar, and other green initiatives at numerous public information events. I run the quarterly Yorktown Repair Cafe, and support expanding the Repair Cafe concept to other towns in our area. I serve on the Board of Yorktown100, a grassroots community-based organization that seeks to reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions in Yorktown, NY to net zero by 2040, and am on the Yorktown Climate Smart Communities Task Force. I also serve on the steering committee of Sustainable Putnam, whose mission is to develop sustainable communities across Putnam County. As vice-chair of the ExCom I focus on efforts to solicit and encourage broader and deeper participation by you, our valued members, in activities of the LHG.

BALLOT

Please vote for up to five candidates. If you vote by paper ballot, cut off this whole page and mail to Laura Burkhardt, 3406 Kendal Way, Sleepy Hollow, NY 10591 so that it is received no later than December 31, 2023. 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.

Vote here:

- Linda Brunner
- Joe Dunnigan
- Gail Dutan
- Marilyn Elie
- George Klein
- Sarah Wilson

*If you have a joint membership, vote here also:

- Linda Brunner
- Joe Dunnigan
- Gail Dutan
- Marilyn Elie
- George Klein
- Sarah Wilson

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



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LOWER HUDSON GROUP

SIERRA CLUB

WESTCHESTER, PUTNAM, ROCKLAND & SOUTHERN ORANGE COUNTIES

*"July 2023 was the
hottest month on record." NASA*



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