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THIS IS NO TIME TO SIT ON THE SIDELINES: PROTECTING WHAT WE LOVE

By Peggy Kurtz

There's no way around it: The next four years are going to be very tough and even heartbreaking for all of us who care deeply about the climate crisis. We can expect an onslaught of drilling, mining, and the rollback of critical legal protections for the environment and for human health.

It's only human to feel discouraged. But this is not the time to "unplug".

This is when we are all most needed. We must not turn away. These next four years are absolutely critical to avoid catastrophic global warming. This is the great task of our generation, all of us who are adults today: To ring the alarm on climate and the crisis of extinctions, to lobby and protest, to focus on actions where we can make the most difference. To protect what we love. **Most of all to help build a big and vital climate movement, both locally and nationally.**

The strength of Sierra Club is in our broad local and national grassroots networks. By working together, we find community with others who feel as strongly as we do - and we can often create change most effectively locally and at the state level.

Democracy is not just about voting. It's about being engaged in your community, about speaking out, and about the renewed work to protect what we cherish most.

We must hit the ground running in the new year. Whether you are new to environmental activism or whether you've been involved for many years, this is no time to sit on the sidelines. **Let's get to work. At our next Zoom meeting on Monday, January 13, 7 pm, we'll discuss some of our most critical priorities at the state level, including groundbreaking**

climate legislation. We'll hear from Advocacy and Organizing Director Lisa Marshall of New Yorkers for Clean Power, a long-time member of the Renewable Heat Now campaign team. Here's the link: www.bit.ly/scjan13. Or visit our website SierraLowerHudson.org, and click on Events for the Zoom link.

Some of our other priorities for the new year:

- The major crisis of extinctions: A stunning 73% decline in the average size of global wildlife populations in just 50 years.
- Light pollution and the loss of dark skies
- Local climate and water action
- Working for a PFAS Free New York.
- Lobby and protest on climate and other environmental issues
- YOUR priorities

Bring your energy and enthusiasm, your skills, and your ideas! Join us at the January 13th meeting. In the meantime, feel free to reach out to us at rocklandclimate@gmail.com, which serves all members of the Lower Hudson Group. Or, you can take a full survey at www.tinyurl.com/SierraClubClimateSurvey.

On November 18th, 2024 Lower Hudson Group of Sierra Club hosted a well-attended talk on light pollution, titled "Dark Skies: Do We Need the Dark?" The speaker was Mark Grosz from Dark Sky International. Visit SierraLowerHudson.org, and click on Rockland for the link to the video.

Membership Meeting Schedule

Visit SierraLowerHudson.org and select Events

Visit RocklandSierraClub.org

All meetings via Zoom, link on websites

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.

CLIMATES: THEY ARE A-CHANGIN' (PART III IN A SERIES)

WATER VAPOR AND CARBON DIOXIDE

By Joseph Dunnigan

After the recent drought it may come as a surprise that the most abundant greenhouse gas in the atmosphere is water vapor. This begs the question, why is the discussion surrounding climate change always focused on CO₂? This article will explore the 'greenhouse' effect and how it keeps our Earth from freezing as well as why carbon dioxide is the focus of climate change discussions.

The "Greenhouse" Effect

John F Mitchell, a climate scientist, discussed in his article 'The "Greenhouse" Effect and Climate Change' how the Earth is kept warm. Here is a summary:

The atmosphere is what keeps the Earth warm. Earth emits radiation and in the absence of an atmosphere the radiation would not be captured. The planet would be substantially colder at around minus 18 degrees Celsius. Luckily, the atmosphere contains water vapor, carbon dioxide, and other gases such as methane and nitrous oxide. These gases, especially water vapor, absorb Earth's radiation, re-radiate it to Earth and space, creating a balance with solar radiation. This is what is called the "greenhouse effect."

Water Vapor and CO₂

Today, we often hear the phrase "greenhouse effect" as synonymous with climate change. Scientists found that most of the greenhouse gas concentration in the atmosphere is water vapor. If this is so, then why is carbon dioxide so often associated with climate change?

This is due mainly to the rise in greenhouse gas emissions. In an article by NASA, they discuss the relationship between water vapor and the rise in greenhouse gases causing a warmer climate. It goes a little like this:

- The increase in water vapor is a result of an increase in other greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide.
- This increase in carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases causes Earth's temperature to rise and with this rise in temperature is a rise in evaporation.
- As the air temperature increases it can hold more moisture (i.e. more water vapor).

Researchers state that this added moisture or water vapor prevents radiation from escaping causing a warmer atmosphere which continues the cycle.

Humans play a role

As discussed in the previous article of this series, the rise of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases is most associated with human activity. Specifically, the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation (Luo 2007). The IPCC and many news outlets have reported that 2023 was the hottest year on record. The World Meteorological Organization is set to report 2024 as the new record-breaking year.

Back to the Climate Future:

It has been reported that the future of climate and environmental protective legislation is in peril with the incoming administration. Now, it is more vital than ever to contact local politicians to express the need for alternative energy sources and to find ways to reduce carbon emissions. Because as has been expressed by countless news outlets, environmental activist groups, and the scientific community...

... Climates they are a changin'.

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DARK SKIES: DO WE NEED THE DARK?

by Mark Grosz, President, Dark Skies PA

Since 2019, my love for a naturally dark night sky, full of stars and planets has led me to recognize the larger importance of preserving the naturally dark nighttime environment and a naturally dark night sky. To be sure, a naturally dark night sky is not dark at all. It is ablaze with unspeakable beauty. And yet the light is so far away and so subtle that we can easily overcome it with our own lighting. Blinded by our own artificial light, we fail to understand how profoundly we affect the natural world.

From the beginning of time, light has been like a great clock or like the conductor of a great orchestra, arranging and timing all life on Earth.

The dark is a fundamental part of the habitat of wildlife. Artificial light at night alters predator-prey interactions and the competition between diurnal vs nocturnal predators, and camouflage for prey species. Taken together, these are a major factor of prey population decline, signaling degraded habitat health.

Disruption of the biological signal or the entrainment of nature to the solar day/night cycle desynchronizes nature. We see this in the disruption of seasonal rhythms, with diurnal species foraging at night, and altered timing of migrations. Two examples are the birds in migration that are killed when they are drawn toward brightly lit buildings – and the disruption of the mating signals of fireflies, which has led to steeply declining population. Daily and seasonal timings of the plants and insects which are food for the exquisitely timed broods of animals are mistimed, along with flower blooms and pollinators. Many nocturnal creatures depend on the Moon's phases for

their synchronicity with everything within their nocturnal habitat, but our perpetual twilight sky can easily mask the signal of the Moon's phases.

The health of an ecosystem depends on the reciprocal nature of services provided by individuals, species, even habitat to habitat exchanges in the ecosystem. The diurnal habitat cannot truly flourish without a naturally dark sky.

We are also losing part of our human birthright that joins us with all generations before us, with the sense of awe at the stars in the night sky. It is sad that many people today don't even realize that the Milky Way and the sky full of stars is there but is not visible to us because of our own lighting.

Preserving the natural night as much as possible by using DarkSky International's Five Principles is one way we can all respect and support nature by minimizing light and keeping it controlled, targeted, and warm-colored. DarkSky International's website also includes model ordinances that can be used to reduce unnecessary lighting.

Being mindful of the impact of our light on the world around us is one gift we can give back to the Earth as our grateful thanks.

On November 18th, 2024 Lower Hudson Group of Sierra Club hosted a well-attended talk on the topic of dark skies, by Mark Grosz. Visit SierraLowerHudson.org, and click on Rockland for the link to the video.

WE NEED YOUR INPUT

As we prepare for the critical 2025 county-level elections in Westchester, Putnam, Rockland, and Orange Counties, we need *your* input to ensure we prioritize the climate issues that matter most to our members. Completing our **Membership Climate Survey** will help the Sierra Club Lower Hudson Group identify key environmental concerns and guide our endorsements for candidates committed to sustainable policies.

Your voice is essential in shaping a greener future for our region. The survey takes just a few minutes, and your feedback will make a lasting impact.

Use this address in your browser to participate: tinyurl.com/SierraClubClimateSurvey.

Thank you for standing with us in the fight for climate justice!

In solidarity,

Ed Berry, Political Co-Chair

Paul Presendieu, Political Co-Chair

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME

By Gale Pisha

This line, often misquoted from the 1989 movie “Field of Dreams,” commonly means if you build something of value, people will come to use it. However, the line also expresses the concern of environmental groups in the Lower Hudson Valley about a \$1 billion proposal to expand Route 17. They are afraid that this expansion will attract even more traffic to the area, waste taxpayer money, and impact the environment.

In September 2024, the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) released its *NYS Route 17 Mobility and Access Improvements Project Scoping Report*.¹ The purpose of this report is to identify issues that need to be studied as the department plans to expand Route 17 between US Route 209 (Exit 113, Wurtsboro) in Sullivan County and Interstate 87 (Exit 131, Harriman) in Orange County. The proposed project would cover a length of about 31 miles and would add a third lane in each direction to the already existing two lanes.

NYSDOT claims that this project is needed for several reasons, including to improve safety through reducing crashes, to address design standards needed to transition the road to I-86, and to reduce congestion during peak travel periods within the project area, which includes several tourist destinations such as Legoland, Woodbury Commons Premium Outlets, Resorts World Casino and the southern foothills of the Catskill Mountains.

Three Sierra Club groups, Mid-Hudson, Lower Hudson and Susquehanna, have joined Catskill Mountainkeeper and other organizations in the “Rethink Route 17 Alliance” to present local concerns to the NYSDOT about this project. The state has indicated a willingness to listen to community concerns and has met at least twice with the Alliance to discuss possible alternatives. While the project

opponents also wish to “improve safety conditions and create new economic opportunities along Route 17,”² they are concerned about an increase in air pollution and associated health risks, more severe traffic accidents due to higher speeds on I-86, more concentrated traffic on Friday evenings which will congest local roads, climate impacts, and failure to address community needs. A 2021 feasibility report issued by NYSDOT states that adding a third lane will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which is questioned by the Alliance, and it also excludes bus rapid transit and accessible public transportation options.

According to NYSDOT, “Route 17 serves as both a major commuter route and a primary recreational travel route. Commuter use (Monday through Thursday) results in recurring traffic congestion on weekdays, while recreational use results in recurring congestion on Friday and Sunday evenings.”³ The Alliance believes the \$1 billion would be better spent in a more environmentally friendly and fiscally responsible way through developing ride share and public transportation alternatives that employ more people and relieve current traffic congestion for both commuters and tourists.

The principle of “induced demand” operates when new roads are built or lanes added, which encourages more driving, more congestion, and more vehicle emissions. As talks between NYSDOT and local environmental advocates continue, be on the lookout for emails that suggest ways you can help advocate for solutions that address safety and improve climate resiliency transportation options while ensuring the vibrancy and health of the region.

1 https://www.route17.dot.ny.gov/docs/project%20scoping%20report_final_09.19.24.pdf [Scoping Report]

2 https://www.catskillmountainkeeper.org/rethink_rt_17_alternatives
3 Scoping Report, pp. 21-22

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.



HRRP AND ITS ACTIVITIES ON THE HUTCHINSON RIVER

By Joseph Dunnigan

In October, I sat with the Hutchinson River Restoration Project (HRRP) organization's Project Manager, Ms. Melissa Sotelo-Wright, to discuss their current and future plans for HRRP. As we spoke, I could feel my hand cramp as I tried to keep up with all the updates she had to tell me.

Ms. Wright described river cleaning events this past year such as the Sanford Sweep, behind the Target store in Pelham, and the Turtle Cove and Thomas Pell Sanctuary in Pelham Park. An article written in 2023, by Kira Findikyan, of the Pelham Examiner, stated the Sanford Sweep removed about "9 shopping carts, 2 bicycles, and more than thirty 50-gallon drums worth of litter." According to HRRP, the second sweep this October was just as successful.

HRRP was recently able to acquire a pontoon boat with funds from the Long Island Sound Community Impact Fund. The pontoon vessel is used for HRRP's Hutchinson River educational Eco-Tours, cleanup support, and water sampling. With the support from funding from this same grant, HRRP has begun to collect samples for chemical contaminants in the water and soil around the industries that are adjacent to the river. HRRP hopes they will be able to identify if or what contaminating factors could be in the river due to industrial waste or overflow.

HRRP has hired a field manager and two new interns. The two interns have been hired through Environmental Leaders of Color (ELOC), a Westchester based nonprofit whose mission is to "incubate the next generation of environmental advocates, entrepreneurs, and innovators in the county's underserved communities."

Additionally, HRRP plans to continue their winter walks.

Melissa remarked how fast HRRP has expanded in the last year and that they will be searching for volunteers.

HRRP is looking for volunteers of all ages and skills. They aim to add canoe trips to their programs in 2025 along with their river cleanup events and more walking tours. The new calendar will be out in January 2025.

If you would like to join a volunteer event, a trip up the Hutchinson, or inquire about other opportunities with the Hutchinson River Restoration Project, log onto their website at www.hutchinsonriver.org.

REPAIR CAFES ARE POPPING UP THROUGHOUT OUR REGION!

Repair Cafes are free community events where you bring your broken but beloved items and volunteer repair coaches help you FIX THEM for free!

What kinds of items get fixed?

LAMPS • CLOCKS • CHAIRS • ELECTRICAL ITEMS • SMALL APPLIANCES • DIGITAL DEVICES • CLOTHING & TEXTILES • DOLLS • STUFFED ANIMALS • TOYS • JEWELRY • AND MORE!
MOST ITEMS GET FIXED – but even when they don't, we have a good time trying!

In Westchester, 2024 saw Repair Cafes pop up in Cortlandt, Croton, Dobbs Ferry, Greenburgh, Hastings, Irvington, Mamaroneck, Ossining, Peekskill, Pleasantville, Pound Ridge, Tarrytown/Sleepy Hollow and Yorktown. In 2025 we expect to see the debut of the first Repair Café in New Rochelle.

Rockland Repair Cafes cover their entire county, because Rockland is the smallest county in New York State outside of New York City. There are five towns in Rockland that are unique and diverse, and Repair Cafes are rotated throughout those five towns to ensure that all communities have access. They hosted two Repair Cafes in 2024.

In Putnam County, Sustainable Putnam established an ambitious schedule of holding quarterly Repair Cafes in

Mahopac. The Putnam Valley Library has begun hosting small Repair Cafes as well.

Orange County has well-established Repair Cafes in Highland Falls, Middletown, Montgomery, Newburgh, Port Jervis, Warwick and Woodbury, with Chester and Goshen expected to start their own Repair Cafes this year!

To find upcoming Repair Cafes in our area, go to Repair Cafe Hudson Valley www.repaircafehv.org and check the calendar.

DO YOU WISH THERE WERE A REPAIR CAFE CLOSER TO HOME? CONSIDER ORGANIZING ONE IN YOUR COMMUNITY! Contact Repair Cafe Hudson Valley www.repaircafehv.org to learn what's involved.

Sarah Wilson, Chair of Sierra Club's LHG ExCom, has organized 23 Repair Cafes in Yorktown, and she is happy to speak with any interested groups wishing to bring Repair Cafes to their community.

REPAIR
CAFE HUDSON
VALLEY

WESTCHESTER GOVERNMENT HOLDS LINE ON AIRPORT EXPANSION IN 2024

By George Klein

Background

Sierra Club Lower Hudson Group is part of the Coalition to Prevent Westchester Airport Expansion - ctpwaec.org.

Back in 2003, Westchester County's Board of Legislators passed a non-expansion resolution for the county's airport, based on concern for protecting the nearby Kensico Reservoir and other adverse environmental impacts.

The Kensico Reservoir supplies drinking water for over half of Westchester's 1 million residents, plus millions more in New York City.

At the end of the Astorino administration (2009-2017), one fixed based operator ("FBO") leasing space at the airport, Million Air, was allowed to build a new hangar and terminal in 2017.

In 2018, the Latimer administration took steps to manage expansion and the airport's environmental impact, mainly by re-starting "sentinel" wells at the airport that test the groundwater for pollutants which might find their way into the Kensico Reservoir. They also took on planning for remediation of PFAS contamination found at the airport in 2017.

Meanwhile, Million Air wanted to build a second hangar, and asserted its right to do so under their lease. Furthermore, Million Air wanted to deny ground services and parking space to smaller planes, known as "light general aviation".

The Latimer administration disagreed with Million Air and the two parties found themselves in court starting in 2021.

The Settlement - Great News

This year, the parties finally settled, with Million Air backing off its plans for a new hangar, and agreeing to accommodate light general aviation.

This is great news for Westchester residents and avoids the incremental environmental impact that this project would have created.

The Coalition to Prevent Westchester Airport Expansion extends its appreciation to:



Coalition to Prevent Westchester Airport Expansion

1) the Westchester County Law Department under John Nonna, including attorneys Justin Adin, Sean Carey, and Shawna MacLeod and the persistence of Westchester County Director of Operations Joan McDonald; and

2) the advocacy of the seven municipalities nearest the airport, the diligence of the Airport Advisory Board that raised multiple concerns about the project, the awareness and action of our Westchester County Legislators, and comments made by citizens and Coalition members.

The Future of Westchester County Airport

We expect new challenges to continue to come down the pike, and must remain vigilant.

Ground services businesses and airlines at the airport will want to expand. But what's good for them is not necessarily good for the health of Westchester residents - our drinking water, for our air, or for our ears.

To help future decision-makers with what happened in our time, we appreciate the action of Nancy Barr, the Westchester County Legislator whose district includes the airport and Harrison, Rye Brook and Port Chester.

At the 11/18/2024 meeting of the Board of Legislators, Legislator Barr took a few minutes to describe Million Air's regrettable behavior, and it's worth a few minutes to see what she said. She appears at 1:04 - 1:13 on this video recording:

https://westchestercountyny.granicus.com/player/clip/7349?view_id=1&redirect=true

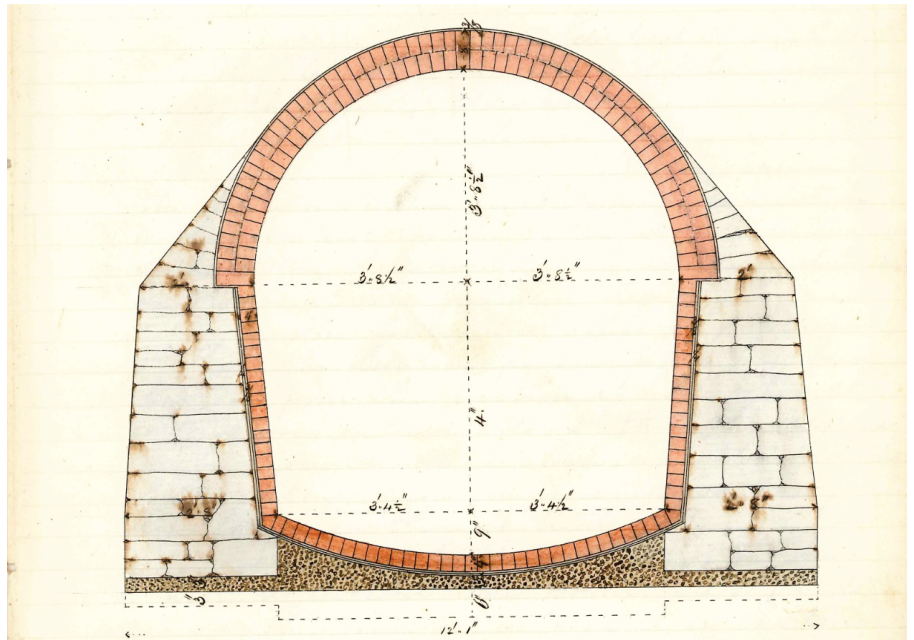
HOW AN INVISIBLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE ENCOURAGES YOUNG PEOPLE TO GET OUTSIDE

By Lesley Y Walter, President Friends of The Old Croton Aqueduct

The Old Croton Aqueduct tunnel is an architectural gem that is virtually untouched. As far as we know, it is basically as John Jervis, chief civil engineer, built it in the 1830s. As he says in his memoir, the "Croton Aqueduct was an improvement for which there was no specific experience in the country or hardly any in modern times." Now listed on the National Historic Register, the tunnel's only visible mark above ground is known as the aqueduct trail, or the Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park, <https://aqueduct.org>.

Once built, the tunnel needed constant maintenance and repair. Six engineers lived in houses spaced along the 41-mile path. Thus, another telltale sign of the water course is the Keeper's House in Dobbs Ferry. A small but delightful relic of the 19th century, it was last inhabited in 1962. Its rehabilitation, which began in 2001, was a collaboration between the Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation and Stephen Tilly, Architect. Today the Keeper's House holds the offices of Parks staff and is an active weekend visitor center.

And what about weekday visitors? School children often came to walk the trail and see the house - until last year when a state bus grant was curtailed. The Connect Kids bus money helped public schools from Yonkers to Port Chester and Chappaqua to Mount Vernon, pay for field trips to state parks that schools otherwise had no budget for.



A general cross-section of the 7 1/2 foot by 8 1/2 foot tunnel.

In fact, The Friends of The Old Croton Aqueduct has recently discovered that some public school districts no longer budget for regular class field trips. We would like to encourage Sierra Club members to write their NYS senators to urge reinstatement of the Connect Kids Bus program, <https://parks.ny.gov/environment/connect-kids.aspx>. Parks strives mightily to bring young people to enjoy the outdoors. It is an especially important for children in households without cars, or for those whose parents do not make family trips on weekends. We believe that the future of green space depends on youngsters who grow up enjoying the outdoors.



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*"This is No Time to Sit on the Sidelines."
—Peggy Kurtz*



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