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TERRA FIRMA

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IT'S TIME TO MOBILIZE THE CLIMATE VOTE

Dear Climate Cousin,

As Sierra Club members, we share a commitment to protecting our environment, strengthening our communities, and advancing a more just and sustainable future. One of the most powerful tools we have to advance those values is our vote.

This election cycle presents two critical opportunities to make our voices heard.

First, if you are a registered Democrat, the June Democratic Party Primary Election will take place on June 23rd, with early voting beginning on Saturday, June 13th. These dates are more than just milestones on a calendar, they are moments where we can collectively shape the direction of our communities, our state, and our country.

Voting is not just a civic duty; it is an extension of our advocacy. The policies that impact clean air and water, climate resilience, environmental justice, and public health are shaped by those elected to office. When we participate in elections, we help ensure that these issues remain a priority.

I encourage every Sierra Club member to take a few simple steps. For a start, make sure you are registered to vote, June 13th is the deadline to register. You can access voter registration forms here: <https://tinyurl.com/SierraClubNYVoterReg>. Next, plan how and when you will vote, whether during early voting or on Primary Day. You can find your polling location here: <https://tinyurl.com/SierraClubNYVotingSite>.

Second, vote in the general election in November.

Equally important, talk to your friends, family, and neighbors. Encourage them to vote and share why this moment matters to you. Our collective impact grows when we engage others in the democratic process.

Together, let's show up, make our voices heard, and continue building the future we believe in.

In solidarity,

Paul Presendieu
Sierra Club Lower Hudson Group Conservation &
Political Co-Chair

Membership Meeting Schedule

Visit SierraLowerHudson.org and select Events

Visit RocklandSierraClub.org

All meetings via Zoom, register 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 third Monday of each month. Check RocklandSierraClub.org for dates and locations. For more information: pkurtz9@gmail.com or call 845-709-0802.

THERE ONCE 'WAS' A MAN FROM LA MANCHA

by Harry Vetter

When the Leader of the Free World addressed the World Economic Forum at Davos Switzerland this past January, certain statements popped out that produced some audible gasps and befuddled giggles from his audience. His animosity toward the “scourge” of wind power should not come as a shock to anyone familiar with his nightmarish visions about “wind mills”. There’s a distinct resemblance to a fictional character, perhaps rebranded as Donald Quixote. Chuckling from embarrassment may be an understandable reaction, akin to how one might shrug shoulders or roll eyes when listening to an “all-knowing” flat Earther, a group that claims a resurgence these days. The Chinese, the attendees at Davos were told, “sell their windmills to the stupid people” while China itself allegedly uses mostly coal, oil and gas and is doing just fine. “Each time a windmill turns around, you lose \$1000.” Additional points that were made went like this: China manufactures almost all of the existing and planned wind farms in the western world, but they sell them to foreign markets and have no use for them in their own country.

Oh, where to start? Why is it unacceptable to point out when a statement is a blatant case of BS, even by a bigwig official, let’s say the biggest wig there is?

China’s wind power made up 16% of its power generation in 2025. They produced 570 to 580 gigawatts and will expand to 1300 GW by 2030. That is more than the US’s total current energy capacity. America’s wind power capacity in 2025 was 148 GW and is being stymied, since the administration has canceled five East coast offshore projects near completion at a cost topping a billion dollars in fines alone, including in New York State. Meaning a “gigantic” amount of taxpayer money has been tossed into the wind, so to speak, for no benefit at all. Good union jobs are lost; workers with expertise forced from the areas. Clean wind power energy is likely being set back by a decade.



I find myself literally enjoying it when I see one of the many elegant, churning marvels of technology whose efficiency has dramatically improved. We’re doing the right thing, I’m thinking, as around and around it goes. I understand not everyone feels this way and not being a NIMBY (not in my back yard) about it will be hard to prove. I was never fond of utility poles or huge transmission towers running through forests, but understand their necessity. It makes sense to carefully select spots where clusters of wind turbines are viable, for ecological and community reasons.

In the wooded hill country where I grew up, they were greeted with little opposition. The tallest wind turbine in Germany (and the world) at 1,200 feet is being put in place on the grounds of a former coal mining town with the goal of harnessing more persistent, higher-altitude wind power in areas with weaker ground winds.

Wind will never be the sole source of clean energy, but it is a smart, indispensable part of the mix. It’s not a faux phantom at which to lunge with a lance.

WANT TO STEP UP?

By George Klein

The Lower Hudson Group welcomes new blood. If you want to get more active on any environmental issue with us, please contact me - at lowerhudson@gmail.com - or any other member of our executive committee. We supply information, encouragement, connection with other activists on the same issue, and help with organization and communications.

ASSAULT ON NEW YORK'S CLIMATE LAW

by Gale Pisha

As New Yorkers marched in the streets this past year protesting efforts by the Trump administration to gut environmental protections, little did we realize we would also have to defend our own Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) from being weakened here at home. This nation-leading law was passed in New York State in 2019, and is supposed to lower greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 in order to prevent catastrophic climate change.

Where did this latest threat to CLCPA originate? With our very own Governor Hochul, who blames the Climate Law for high energy bills this winter and proposes to weaken the law in the name of affordability. Her logic is flawed, because the regulations to implement the law were due in January, 2024, but her administration has never released them. These regulations would have included a plan to help New Yorkers afford their energy bills, so delaying them has actually hurt affordability.

The reality is that surging energy costs are due to our reliance on fossil fuels, which have spiked in price beginning in October, 2023, exacerbated by an unusually cold winter. The continued surge in gas and oil prices since the war with Iran shows the flaws in the governor's argument that blames a law which was never implemented for the crushing energy bills experienced by many this winter.¹

In contrast, renewable energy from wind and solar backed up by battery storage is cheaper to build, and once built, the wind and sun are free so operating costs are much lower.² If the governor had implemented the climate law on schedule in 2024, there would be more renewable energy available today to cushion the impact of soaring fossil fuel prices.

Renewable energy is generated here, and is not subject to disruption by crises such as the war in the Middle East. Renewable projects built in New York provide jobs for New Yorkers and keep our energy dollars in the state instead of sending them out of state to buy fossil fuels. Since they have no fuel costs once built, renewables stabilize energy prices, making energy costs predictable and affordable.

This is in stark contrast with other forms of energy the governor is supporting in her "all of the above" policy. Natural gas pipelines cost \$6 million per mile to build and

repair, and the supply is subject to global market price fluctuations. Nuclear power plants are the most expensive energy source and projected costs for new nuclear plants are going up while the price of renewables is going down. While nuclear plants have lower emissions than coal- and natural gas-fired power plants, they emit twice as much carbon as solar photovoltaic and six times as much as on-shore wind farms, so they are not a solution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, especially given their long timeline to build.

As *Terra Firma* goes to press, the governor and the NYS legislature are negotiating a budget which was due April 1 but is not close to completion. Governor Hochul has been pressuring lawmakers to move the deadline for the regulations to implement CLCPA from 2024 to 2030, plus she wants to change the way the state accounts for methane impacts to make it look like we are closer to achieving the climate emissions reductions mandated by the law than with the original accounting. She has also acted outside the budget process by mandating state websites to expunge any mention of the climate law, while one of her state agencies issued a projection that wildly overestimates the cost to New Yorkers of the transition to renewables.

The environmental community has reacted strongly to this threat to CLCPA by contacting their legislators and asking them to stay strong to defend our climate law. By the time you read this article, the budget will likely be adopted—look for information at SierraLowerHudson.org.

But whether we have a budget or not, **please call the governor's office at 1-518-474-8390 and ask her to advance the Cap-and-Invest program as soon as possible** to reduce New York's greenhouse gas emissions and to make energy truly more affordable for New Yorkers!

¹ https://gothamist.com/news/ny-energy-experts-advocates-say-iran-war-shows-need-for-hochul-to-implement-climate-law?link_id=2&can_id=d-357e8234362d736ed69f41f46e5f72d

² <https://pv-magazine-usa.com/2023/07/01/solar-cost-of-electricity-beats-lowest-cost-fossil-fuel-even-without-tax-credits/>

LOOKING BEYOND THE NEW YORK STATE BUDGET

The budget is the one bill that the NYS Legislature must pass each year to keep the state running. It's due on April 1 of each year, but the legislature passes extender bills to delay the deadline until the Senate and Assembly finish negotiating the budget with the governor.

Once the budget is passed, the remaining time in the session (through early June) is spent on passing standalone bills. Here are some of the bills Sierra Club is supporting in New York:

- **Comprehensive PFAS Ban: S.9073-A (Harckham)/A.7738-A (Glick):** This bill would phase out the sale of many products with intentionally added PFAS chemicals, including architectural paint, cleaning products, polishes, cookware, fabric treatment, rugs, ski wax, textiles, outdoor apparel and PPE (personal protective equipment). These “forever chemicals”, used since the 1940s, have found their way into the environment, and accumulate in our bodies, increasing the risk of health problems like testicular and kidney cancer, endocrine and thyroid disruption, reproductive toxicity and impacts on the immune system. This bill would help turn off the tap on these toxins, and improve public health and reduce the costs of healthcare and expensive filtration of drinking water.
- **Healthy Homes Right to Know Act: S.1280-B (Krueger)/A.73-B (Solages):** Unventilated gas appliances pose health dangers because they emit pollutants, including nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide, benzene and formaldehyde, which reach indoor levels higher than limits for outdoor exposure. One study showed that 12.7% of current childhood asthma cases can be attributed to gas stove use. This bill would require the display of warning labels on gas stoves, similar to warnings on cigarette packages, to allow consumers to make informed choices about their health when purchasing appliances. (If you have a gas stove and are interested in getting a free test of your indoor air quality as part of a scientific study, see box.)
- **Packaging Reduction & Recycling Infrastructure Act: S.1464 (Harckham)/A.1749 (Glick):** Over a quarter of a billion tons of municipal solid waste is generated every year in the U.S.; nearly a third is just packaging materials. Municipalities (and taxpayers) get stuck with handling and paying for the collection, transportation, sorting and processing of waste. This bill would require producers to finance the recycling of their packaging materials, be rewarded for creating easily recyclable products and use higher percentages of post-consumer recycled material. Programs like this in other countries have reduced the waste going into landfills without an additional burden on taxpayers and have reduced methane emissions by increasing recycling rates.
- **Clean Deliveries Act: S.1180-B (Gianaris)/A.3575-B (Mitaynes):** With the explosion of e-commerce since the pandemic, increased truck traffic to warehouses has resulted in more greenhouse gas emissions, as well as harmful air and noise pollution in neighborhoods nearby. New York already regulates emissions from major facilities like factories but does not address the cumulative impacts of hundreds of trucks that drive in and out of warehouses each day. This bill would create a process of review for large warehouses that would require a plan to mitigate emissions, especially in sensitive locations like schools and hospitals. It allows the facility to choose mitigation actions, which could include replacing diesel trucks with zero-emission vehicles, installing solar panels or batteries, and considering alternative transportation modes where appropriate, with on-site worker input.
- **Accelerate Solar for Affordable Power (ASAP) Act: S.6570-A (Harckham)/A.8758-A (Barrett):** Solar generation is the most affordable form of supplying electricity, even without subsidies or credits. New York households are estimated to save over \$1 billion per year with the continued development of solar and battery storage, and energy produced within the state is not subject to the soaring fossil fuel prices or supply issues we've seen all too clearly with recent international conflicts. This bill would increase New York's goal of distributed solar capacity to 20 gigawatts by 2035 and reform the utility interconnection process to reduce costs and speed solar development.
- **The Voting Integrity and Verification Act of New York: S.7116 (Cleare)/A.6287 (Cunningham) and Hand- or marking device-marked paper ballots: A.9314 (Pretlow):** Voting machine manufacturers are aggressively offering expensive new touchscreen machines that mark ballots, which are supposed to be verified by the voter before they are scanned. These bills would codify and reinforce our current system of hand-marked paper ballots by giving voters the option to mark an human-readable, voter-friendly paper ballot by hand or through an accessible ballot-

marking device that does not count votes. This will also save taxpayer money through avoiding the need to purchase the expensive new machines.

- **Whale Awareness Act: S.2292-B (Harckham)/A.8515-A (Kassay):** Whales play a critical role in maintaining healthy marine ecosystems, yet they face significant threats from human activity. Roughly 40% of necropsied humpback whales along the U.S. Atlantic Coast died from either vessel strikes or fishing gear entanglements. Vessel strikes are a leading cause of mortality for North American right whale populations, but speed restrictions and other preventive measure can significantly reduce the risk of fatal collisions. This bill would require the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to develop marine mammal interaction prevention recommendations and distribute them to boat owners and operators and to participants in boating safety courses, in several downstate counties of NYS including Westchester and

Rockland. This bill has passed both the Senate and Assembly, and we will be advocating for the governor to sign the bill into law this year.

The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter (NY state) supports, or in a few cases, opposes many bills each year. Please visit <https://www.sierraclub.org/atlantic/legislation>, for more information on the bills above or on any of the 70 bills described there!

Nationally recognized experts on indoor air quality are conducting a scientific study in New York to document the levels of pollution from gas stoves. If you would like to have a free air test done as part of this study (which takes 50 minutes) contact corneliusguin@gmail.com for further information. Many of us in Lower Hudson Group have had the test done, and have been surprised to find out the hidden dangers of our gas stoves!

WHAT IS “LEAVE NO TRACE?”

LEAVE NO TRACE is a set of principles that empower people visiting the outdoors to leave nature as unchanged by our presence as possible.

It's a way of protecting the natural world that can be applied anywhere—when you visit national parks or your community's natural spaces and even your own backyard.

THE 7 PRINCIPLES



– Get Outside –

Don't forget to check the Get Outside page on our group website for all outings updates.

Visit SierraLowerHudson.org and click “Get Outside.”

For the most up-to-date notifications email us at LHGOutings@gmail.com

SLEEPWALKING TO DISASTER: WE ARE UNRAVELLING THE VERY WEB OF LIFE

By Peggy Kurtz

Over the last fifty years, wildlife has declined by 73%. Think about that for a moment. That stunning finding is in a report by the World Wildlife Fund, that stated that ‘parts of our planet are approaching dangerous tipping points.... which pose grave threats to humanity¹.’ In a recent UN report², scientists warned that as many as one million species are threatened with extinction by the end of this century, with many extinctions within just decades. We are destroying the very web of life, on which we depend - and we are running out of time to reverse this decline.

Mammals, birds, amphibians and aquatic organisms have been especially hard hit, but the loss of biodiversity and extinctions are widespread across the span of wildlife, plants, and even fungi and lichens. The biomass of mammals (as opposed to number of species) has declined by 83%. The biomass of insects has declined by 75%. The “insect apocalypse”, as it has been dubbed, could devastate our food supply (think pollinators for crops and fruit trees), as well as impacting the many species that eat insects, including birds, freshwater fish, and amphibians.

What’s driving the crisis of extinctions?

Climate change is only one of the key factors, which include:

- Loss of habitat (agriculture, urban and suburban expansion, deforestation) - currently the single biggest current driver of loss of biodiversity.
- Climate change
- Population growth
- Overexploitation of resources (primarily overfishing and logging)
- Chemical pollution
- Invasive species that disrupt habitats

In the midst of this very serious crisis, the Trump administration has sought to weaken the Endangered Species Act. The two federal agencies that oversee the ESA have experienced deep cuts in funding under the Trump administration, which also seeks to grant broad exemptions from the Endangered Species Act, to enable oil and gas companies to proceed more easily with deep water drilling.

How do we slow or stop this decline?

The magnitude and complexity of the problem make it challenging. One of the main solutions is to stop climate change. But another major solution is to safeguard habitat. The “30 by 30” movement seeks to preserve 30% wild

lands by 2030, as a stepping stone toward the goal of “Half Earth” dominated by nature. The EU has set an official goal of protecting 30% of land and marine habitats by 2030.

Looking locally, land use decisions are made parcel by parcel, in towns and villages. But given the magnitude and urgency of the problem, we must re-think the way we make land use decisions, to better balance property rights with protecting the greater good.

What can we do as individuals?

You can plant pollinator gardens, minimize lawn, plant native trees, and leave “a bit of mess” at the edges of your property for small wildlife. You can refrain from using pesticides and other harmful chemicals, eat a more plant-based diet, and waste less food and water. Turn off or minimize lights overnight, since dark is a critical part of the natural habitat of wildlife, too. By doing so, we also help to restore the dark skies that have been part of our heritage since earliest human existence.

The good news is that given a chance, nature can restore itself surprisingly quickly. When the dam on the Klamath River in Oregon was removed, salmon returned to their historic spawning grounds within a year - and there are numerous other examples of individual species and entire ecosystems rebounding quickly.

Ultimately, this is not just about the eco-services that nature provides. Rather than seeing nature as a resource to be used, we need to see ourselves as we truly are, as a part of nature, as an integral part of the entire web of life. We must shift to a perspective that respects the right of all life to thrive and flourish. What’s needed is a radical notion: an awareness of the sacredness of all life.

Over the last year and a half, Lower Hudson Group of Sierra Club and co-sponsoring partners have presented a series of online public programs on biodiversity, including a program on Dark Skies, on the connection between the loss of biodiversity and pandemics, and on birds and biodiversity. Join us to work on this critical issue by emailing rocklandclimate@gmail.com to join our email list for announcements.

¹ <https://livingplanet.panda.org/en-US/>

² <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/05/1037941>

UPDATE ON GRANITE POINTE ON THE AMAWALK RESERVOIR

by Fred G. Higham, Somers Resident

Granite Pointe (28.8 acres) in the Town of Somers is a mostly forested promontory which slopes down and is surrounded on three sides by the Amawalk Reservoir, a critical piece of Westchester and New York City's water supply. Since 1988 Suelain Realty of Somers, NY has sought approval to build 23 1-acre single family luxury homes there. The project was held up in 2015 when it was discovered that Granite Pointe was the site of a former gun shooting range. New York State recently completed an \$18 million Superfund Cleanup there. Most of the mature trees on 7.75 acres had to be cut down so that lead and other toxic metals could be removed from the soil.

On February 10th, David Wilson, a former investigative reporter for *The Journal News*, published a report about Granite Pointe and the Amawalk for the online **New York Focus**, "*A Real Estate Battle Tests the State's New Superfund Powers.*" In his article Wilson quotes Matthew Geho, Executive Director of the Northern Westchester Joint Waterworks (NWJWW): ***"The Amawalk does not have the best quality as to taste and odor . . . That's caused by existing developments. Another 23 homes by the reservoir won't be the best thing with all of its runoff."***

Recently, a professional engineer informed me that just about all of the remaining mature trees at Granite Pointe would have to be removed during the construction process. Remember, mature tree roots suck up nutrients and protect soil from erosion especially on sloping land. Those mature trees will be replaced with hard surfaces comprised of connecting roads, driveways, patios, walkways and roofs. Manicured lawns slopping downhill with their brew of toxic herbicides, insecticides and fertilizers spread throughout the growing season will further pollute the Amawalk.

95,000 people or nearly 10% of Westchester County's population rely on the Amawalk Reservoir through the NWJWW as their water source. That total includes 4,000 in the Shenorock section of Somers, 36,000 in Yorktown and 55,000 in Cortlandt. As a member of the LHG Sierra Club, I ask you the following question: **How would you feel, if your family members (sick or well) — spouses, children, aging parents, friends and neighbors will be forced to drink, cook and bathe in water on a daily basis that originates from the Amawalk, after 23 1-acre single family luxury homes are built there ?**

Don't count on Town of Somers government officials to stop Granite Pointe from being developed. On March 11th, the Somers Planning Board granted Suelain Realty its 35th 3-month extension on their development proposal. Now we are up to 8 and 3/4 years' worth of extensions ! WOW ! WHY ?

As David Wilson points out in his **New York Focus** article, the 2025 reauthorization of the NYS Superfund Law makes it easier to recoup money from property owners or polluters. NYS has identified Suelain as the party responsible for the \$18 million cleanup.

I urge you write separate letters to Gov. Kathy Hochul and Attorney General Letitia James urging them to collect the \$18 million owed to New York State for the Superfund Cleanup on the Suelain property. Granite Pointe is probably the most environmentally sensitive piece of undeveloped land in all of Somers. Also urge our NYS government officials to find a way to preserve Granite Pointe as protected open space forever ! **THANK YOU !** Here are Hochul and James mailing addresses:

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

The Honorable Letitia James
New York State Attorney General
The Capitol
Albany, NY 12224-0341



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WESTCHESTER, PUTNAM, ROCKLAND & SOUTHERN ORANGE COUNTIES

"This 'climate change,' it's the greatest con job
ever perpetrated on the world."
— Donald Trump at the U.N. in 2025



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