



SIERRA CLUB
ATLANTIC CHAPTER
Lower Hudson Group

TERRA FIRMA

September - December 2026

PUBLISHED BY VOLUNTEERS FROM THE LOWER HUDSON GROUP SIERRA CLUB

HOW DO WE MOVE FORWARD FROM NEW YORK'S ASSAULT ON CLIMATE?

By Gale Pisha

In our last issue of *Terra Firma*, I reported that environmentalists were fighting to keep New York State's seminal climate and environmental protections from taking a hit in the 2026-2027 Budget. We were outraged, shocked and profoundly saddened to see that the damage was worse than we feared.

Climate policy which had taken years to draft after passage of the 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) was gutted in secret, one-sided negotiations between the governor and legislative leadership. The budget had been due on April 1 but didn't emerge until May 26, partly due to the governor's pressure to weaken state environmental protections that she claimed New Yorkers could not afford. Legislators do not get paid until the budget is passed, so she had strong leverage in negotiations.

What did we lose?

We lost the requirement to release climate regulations by 2024, the subject of a lawsuit by Sierra Club and environmental and social justice partners against the state because of its failure to release any by mid-2025. Though we won in court, that decision is moot because the requirement to release regulations was postponed until 2030. Ironically, the cap and invest program, which the governor had planned to release but pulled back, would have helped make energy bills more affordable for New Yorkers.

We lost the strong target dates by which to transition from climate-destroying fossil fuels to renewable energy. This will likely prolong our reliance on expensive fossil fuels which continue to exacerbate the impacts of climate change we have been seeing this summer in the form of more severe storms, wildfires and heat waves across the country.

We lost the accounting method for methane emissions that considers its strongest effects in the first 20 years after its release. Looking at a 100 year time-frame makes the impacts of methane emissions seem less severe, making it easier to reach target emission levels and delaying the transition to renewable energy.

We also lost environmental review protections for housing construction which had been in existence for more than 50 years, without any requirements for that housing to be affordable. Without this review, "new housing could be

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CLIMATE IS ON THE BALLOT IN 2026

*By Paul Presendieu, Political Co-Chair,
Sierra Club Lower Hudson Group*

Climate is on the ballot this November, and our votes can help determine whether New York continues moving toward a healthier, cleaner, and more resilient future.

The 2026 General Election is an opportunity for environmentalists across the Lower Hudson Valley and throughout New York to make our voices heard in elections for Governor, the State Legislature, and Congress. These offices have enormous influence over clean energy, climate action, environmental justice, public transportation, conservation, and the investments our communities need to prepare for a changing climate.

But voting is only the beginning.

Our collective power grows when we organize. If you care about climate action, talk with your neighbors. Call your family. Text your friends. Ask the people in your

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How Do We Move Forward From New York's Assault On Climate?

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mired in wetlands, built on toxic contamination sites or decimate irreplaceable habitat, with little recourse for an impacted community to challenge.”¹

Where do we go from here?

While these regressive rollbacks of policy will reverse years of environmental progress in our state, resulting in continued reliance on fossil fuels, higher energy costs for residents, more air and water pollution, and increased sprawl, there is a bright spot for New Yorkers. Both the governor and legislators came up with plans for a 1 year data center moratorium to give the state breathing room to craft guardrails which would protect residents from the impacts of these huge projects. We will work with the governor and legislature to reconcile their respective plans, making sure policies come with requirements for clean energy, onsite power generation and thermal energy networks, battery storage and water conservation.

Also, the state is on schedule to meet its 2030 goal of developing 10 gigawatts of distributed solar on rooftops and solar farms, and environmental advocates are pressing for more. Solar combined with battery storage helps us save money in several ways:

- By reducing carbon dioxide emissions and other pollution through replacing fossil fuel generation, we stop making climate change worse and we improve public health. This saves costs from impacts of severe weather, as well as healthcare costs.
- Reducing reliance on fossil fuels shields ratepayers from the kind of fossil fuel price volatility we've seen in the past year, especially since the war in Iran.
- When the grid can tap into that solar and battery network as a virtual power plant, it makes the grid more stable and saves ratepayers from expensive, dirty peaker plant power on the hottest days. This summer in New York, “as the country celebrated its 250th anniversary, solar was our savior... as temperatures soared over 100 degrees. [S]olar reduced our peak demand by nearly 8%—and saved ratepayers from paying an additional \$200 million for electricity.”²
- Increasing the deployment of distributed solar and storage is estimated to save \$1 billion in avoided energy costs throughout the state in 2035.³

Sierra Club will continue to support offshore wind projects as part of the nationwide energy transition. The South Fork wind farm, operational since July 2025, is delivering “enough clean, renewable electricity to New York's Long Island grid to power the equivalent of 70,000 homes.”⁴ Building this project created over 1,000 jobs, using more than 1.5 million hours of union labor. Offshore wind production tends to be highest in winter, when gas prices for heating are usually higher, so this saves ratepayers from the kinds of fossil fuel price spikes we saw last winter.

Because the state failed to prioritize meaningful action on toxics and pollution this year, we will continue to work to stop the scourges of PFAS contamination and plastic

Climate Is On The Ballot In 2026

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community whether they have a plan to vote. Help them understand when and where they can cast their ballots. Most importantly, remind them that their participation matters.

New York provides multiple ways to vote, including early voting and early mail voting. For the 2026 general election, early voting runs from October 24 through November 1, with Election Day on November 3.

Starting in **October**, the Sierra Club Lower Hudson Group will launch our series of **Climate Voter Phone Banks**. We will work together to reach Sierra Club members and encourage them to make a plan to vote early or on Election Day.

You can be part of this effort. Register today at <https://tinyurl.com/SierraClubPhoneBank> to join our phone banks and help turn climate concern into climate votes.

Every conversation can make a difference. Every voter we reach strengthens our movement. And every vote is an opportunity to build the climate future our communities deserve.

This election, let's vote. Let's organize. Let's win for climate.

proliferation, and make sure that warehouses reduce the emissions of their operations through electrification.

Despite the assault on the environment in this year's budget, we must not give up in despair. We will continue to encourage our government to develop more renewable energy generation to replace fossil fuels, making energy more affordable. Fortunately, wind and solar backed up by battery storage are cheaper to build and operate than other forms of energy, so the economics will help drive their adoption and lower energy bills. We will push to turn off the tap on PFAS chemicals, which will eventually save millions of dollars that we currently have to spend to clean up our contaminated drinking water.

Sierra Club will continue to make clear that there is a truly affordable pathway forward through renewable energy development, emissions and toxic pollution reductions, and environmental justice.

Thank you for being a Sierra Club member, which supports this vital work of volunteers and staff to explore, enjoy and protect the planet. See the Volunteer tab at SierraLowerHudson.org for more ways you can get involved!

¹ <https://www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2026/05/sierra-club-condemns-rollbacks-climate-law-and-seqra-fiscal-year-2027-ny>

² <https://www.timesunion.com/opinion/article/n-y-reached-goal-solar-great-now-keep-going-22375274.php>

³ <https://www.synapse-energy.com/sites/default/files/SolarStorageBenefitsNY%2025-113.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/2026-1-spring/notes-here-there/winds-clean-energy-keep-blowing>

YOUR VOTE REALLY, REALLY COUNTS - AND HERE'S HOW TO SUPERCHARGE IT!

By George Klein

This election is one of the most important opportunities to advance our goals in Congress, and in state and local races.

That's why Sierra Club is mobilizing volunteers to help elect our endorsed candidates up and down the ballot.

You can view our endorsements by visiting SierraLowerHudson.org and clicking on the Endorsements link.

Your vote really counts, but cynical politicians want you to think otherwise.

But there's more - You are the key to helping others realizing that their vote really counts, and it's crucial that they take the trouble to vote. You can pitch in by calling other members and supporters.

Phone banking is one of the most effective ways to reach voters and increase turnout—and you can participate from anywhere.

Remember: Every election comes down to turnout.

Phonebanking leverages your beliefs into action.

Whether you're an experienced volunteer, or making calls for the first time, we'll provide:

- Training
- Calling scripts
- Technical support
- A welcoming volunteer community

Phonebankers gather via Zoom to make calls, so everyone feels part of our greater group.

Every conversation brings us one step closer to electing leaders who will fight for clean air, clean water, environmental justice, bold climate action, and restoration of the social safety net.

Sign up today at <https://tinyurl.com/SierraClubPhoneBank>.

Thank you!

Sierra Club Lower Hudson Group

CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS! PHONE BANK FOR CAIT!

Sign up for our
Climate Voter Phone Banks
in support of **Cait Conley**,
our endorsed candidate
for New York's
17th Congressional District.

Click below to check dates and times available
<https://tinyurl.com/SierraClubPhoneBank>

Phone Bank Shifts Start
October 17-November 1st
Sign Up Now!



SIERRA CLUB
ATLANTIC CHAPTER
Lower Hudson Group

*Thank you for volunteering to support
our endorsed candidate Cait Conley.
Defeating Congressman Mike Lawler is
crucial to our goal of electing candidates
at all levels of government who will
protect our natural resources.*

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.

INDUSTRY OPPOSITION SINKS NYS ASSEMBLY DEBATE ON THE PACKAGING REDUCTION & RECYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE ACT YET AGAIN

By Suzanne Barclay

If you've been following the saga of the Packaging Reduction & Recycling Infrastructure Act (PRRIA) bill, you know that for the third time the bill was not debated by the NYS Assembly. Three times the New York State Senate has passed PRRIA bill and three times the bill has failed to even make it to the Assembly floor.



Support for the PRRIA Bill

PRRIA stalled despite the bill enjoying tremendous support from a wide range of New Yorkers. A Sienna poll in April 2025 revealed that 73% of those polled want companies with revenues of over \$1million to reduce their packaging. Over 300 organizations including Sierra Club, the NRDC, LWVNY, the City of New York, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation as well as scores of municipalities, counties, cities, and faith communities supported this legislation.

Perhaps it shouldn't be a surprise: it's a complicated bill attempting to address an enormous and complex problem in a comprehensive way. There is no guidance coming from the federal government. At the state level we have a patchwork of programs and policies but no comprehensive waste management policy. As states struggle to keep up with how to manage, dispose of and pay for plastic trash, the volume of plastic waste only increases. If and when PRRIA

passes, New York will be only the eighth state to address this issue head on.

Opposition to PRRIA

So, what doomed passage of PRRIA this year? As currently written, PRRIA will require companies to reduce packaging by 30% on items manufactured in or imported into New York state, improve recycling infrastructure, prohibit the use of 12 toxic chemicals used in plastic packaging, financially support municipal recycling programs and prohibit chemical or advanced recycling from counting toward the 30% recycling target. It is the chemical recycling language that appears to be the deal breaker. In addition to the 60 amendments already made to the legislation to accommodate industry objections, the American Chemistry Council wants the unproven chemical recycling process to count towards the recycling target. Another theory is that lobbyists from Walmart, L'Oreal, Coca Cola, etc. convinced some lawmakers that consumer goods would increase in price, despite a study by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality that refuted this claim.

Looking to the Future

Whatever the reason PRRIA failed to move forward, as consumers we don't have to wait for PRRIA to take action. To reduce our personal exposure to microplastics and nanoplastics, the most urgent advice is to avoid drinking water in plastic bottles and eating food that has been microwaved in a plastic container. And you can be sure, that come January, PRRIA will be reintroduced and advocates will double down to ensure its passage in 2027.

Suzanne Barclay and Laura Graves co-founded a local chapter of Beyond Plastics in Rockland County. For more information, please contact Laura Graves at lauragraves@earthlink.net.

– 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

LEARN ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AFFECTING YOUR COMMUNITY: JOIN OUR MONTHLY PUBLIC MEETINGS

Learn more about the environmental issues directly impacting your community - and what you can do about them! We meet monthly online via Zoom.

All members are welcome. Generally, we feature a speaker who explores a topic in some depth - followed by discussion. See below for how to join upcoming meetings.

This fall, our meetings will feature discussion of the following:

- Factory farming - the impacts on animals and on our air and water
- Zero waste - Can we reduce our waste dramatically to create a "circular economy"?
- Data centers - What are the harms to our communities and how do we stop the most harmful data centers?
- Warehouses - Massive new distribution centers are being proposed for our communities. Is this what we want for our communities?

Some recent events:

1. The birds we love are in alarming decline: What can we do to protect them?

North America has lost around a quarter of its bird population just since 1970. What is causing this loss of biodiversity? The good news is that conservation efforts can make a real difference. What are the concrete steps we can take individually and as a society to reverse this loss of birds?

Dustin Partridge, Ph.D., the director of conservation and science at NYC Bird Alliance and adjunct professor at Columbia University, is a pioneering scientist in urban green space conservation research in North America.

2. The Unseen Fungal Networks Beneath Our Feet

Almost invisible underground networks of fungi support nearly all plant life on earth. You may have read that trees communicate with each other and share nutrients. The fungal networks play a central role in these exchanges, maintaining 80 to 90% of the plant life on which nearly all life on earth depends. As plants and wildlife are increasingly threatened by loss of biodiversity and extinctions, some of the same factors are driving the loss of the diverse fungal networks.

Soils are among the most complex ecosystems on earth. Symbiotic relationships between plants and fungal networks in the soil are around 475 million years old and these relationships play fundamental roles in the Earth's biosphere and even in regulating climate.

Prof. Corrales is a Lead Field Research Scientist and Underground Explorers Program Director for SPUN, the Society for the Protection of Underground Networks.

3. Trash Talking: Why Zero Waste matters for people, the planet, and our pocketbooks

Waste systems in the US cost us dearly, with communities around trash incinerators and landfills dealing with air, soil, and water pollution and planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions. We pay the price with damage to our environment and impacts on our health. Zero waste is the solution but government at every level is failing to act.

Cancer researcher Dr. Courtney Williams talked about the health and environmental impacts of incineration and landfilling municipal trash. Dr. Williams is founder of Westchester Alliance for Sustainable Solutions (WASS, visit WASSPeekskill.org) which advocates for the closure of Westchester County's largest industrial air polluter, the Wheelabrator trash incinerator in Peekskill, NY.

4. Do Lakes, Trees and Rivers Have Rights?

Learn about a new movement that is growing around the rights of nature, arguing that rivers, lakes, and forests should have legal rights for themselves, not for their value to human beings. Life on earth depends on the integrity of these ecosystems. Is this just another strategy - or is it a very different way of viewing the world, expanding the circle of our moral compass to include nature itself?

Tish O'Dell, Consulting Director for the Community Environmental Defense Fund, discussed this new movement, which is based on traditional ways of honoring the natural world.

Want to suggest an issue or topic? Email rocklandclimate@gmail.com.

How to join the meetings:

Public meetings are held online, usually on the third Monday evening of the month.

Notice of each meeting appears on our group website, SierraLowerHudson.org, on the "Events" page.

Meetings are recorded on video, and you can view these recordings lower on the Events page under "Past Events".

2026 ELECTION BALLOT

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, SIERRA CLUB LOWER HUDSON GROUP

VOTING DEADLINE DECEMBER 15, 2026

YOU CAN VOTE ONLINE!

Please check your email Inbox in November for information on how to vote online in your 2026 Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter and Lower Hudson Group elections, which will be sent to all members with email addresses on file.

You must choose to EITHER vote online OR by filling out this paper ballot.

There are four vacancies for our group's Executive Committee ("ExCom").

Candidate Statement of Ed Berry

Public elections are essential to our survival as a democracy. We also need an engaged and informed public. Both of these factors made me volunteer as Co-Chair of the Political Committee for our group. Politics today is a hard and difficult arena. Who can you believe? Who do you trust? On environmental issues we do that work: We check voting records. We track public statements. We do interviews with candidates. And we try to find new people with promising ideas. In April we ran a Zoom public forum for candidates in the Democratic primary for CD 17 (Rockland, Putnam, and northern Westchester). And we endorse candidates, and work to help get them elected. We work with like minded groups such as labor unions, faith based groups, and grass roots communities. This November we all know is a decisive struggle for the future of our country, one we need to win. Together we can. Remember our shared values and vote. Please also vote to keep me on our ExCom.

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 continue to do so. I became a Sierra Club Outings Leader a few years ago and since then I have assumed the Outings Chair position. I've enjoyed planning my own hikes, but have also partnered with interesting people and organizations. Green Ossining's Earth Day event continues to be one of the best ones for our group to table so I have continued to do it for the last 5 years. I would be honored to have your vote to keep me on our ExCom.

Candidate Statement of Peggy Kurtz

Climate change and the crisis of extinctions are the two great tasks of our generation. A lifelong environmental advocate, I've led Sierra Club in Rockland County since 2006. I was also one of the leaders of the Rockland Water Coalition's successful fight to stop Suez's energy intensive desalination proposal, and I'm a member of the Rockland County Water Task Force and an active participant in Nyack 2030's exciting climate work. I also led the successful campaign for a renewable energy program for tens of thousands of Rockland residents. More recently, I've led the effort to provide information to Rocklanders

about toxic PFAS chemicals in our drinking water, actively participate in local weekly protests, and have helped to organize opposition to a data center and two massive warehouses in Rockland. I believe in the strength of Sierra Club's network of activists working for change and would love to continue to serve on the ExCom.

Candidate Statement of Paul Presendieu

Serving as your representative on the ExCom has been an honor of a lifetime. As your Political Co-Chair, I have facilitated our candidate endorsement process, and helped organize our Get Out The Vote Operation to help showcase the strength of Sierra Club membership at the ballot box for climate candidates. I have also been able to support candidate forums for congressional office, organizational position papers in partnership with our Conservation and Water Committees, and helped bring attention to historical environmental justice issues to exemplify our ability to serve as advocates for our most vulnerable neighbors. If elected to another term, I will be committed to helping engage our academic institutions of higher education throughout the Lower Hudson Valley, to extend our organizational membership with environmental majors, and streamline our programming for climate-themed extracurriculars amongst students and young professionals who care about the environment, but don't know how to get involved.

Candidate Statement of Jeff Schumann

As we know, the climate crisis is upon us. And while the change in climate patterns is already affecting us in NY, there are still things we can do to mitigate the worst of what may come. Promoting and building out renewable energy resources in NY is one of them. I am currently the Energy Chair of the Lower Hudson Group and co-chair of the Atlantic Chapter Energy Committee. My volunteer work with the Sierra Club is focused primarily on supporting renewable energy projects. Our Lower Hudson area has great potential for small scale solar and energy storage. By serving on our ExCom I can help our members, in collaboration with other organizations and local governments, advance the development of renewable power in our area.

Please vote for **up to four** 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 15, 2026**. 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.

2026 ELECTION BALLOT

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, SIERRA CLUB LOWER HUDSON GROUP

VOTING DEADLINE DECEMBER 15, 2026

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 November for instructions on how to vote online in the 2026 Lower Hudson Group and Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter elections, which will be sent to all members with email addresses on file.

You may vote EITHER with the paper or online ballot, but not both.

There are four vacancies for our group's Executive Committee ("ExCom").

BALLOT

Please vote for **up to four** 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 15, 2026**. 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:

- ☐ Ed Berry
- ☐ Gail Dutan
- ☐ Peggy Kurtz
- ☐ Paul Presendieu
- ☐ Jeff Schumann

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

- ☐ Ed Berry
- ☐ Gail Dutan
- ☐ Peggy Kurtz
- ☐ Paul Presendieu
- ☐ Jeff Schumann

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



TERRA FIRMA

c/o GAIL DUTAN
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LOWER HUDSON GROUP

SIERRA CLUB

WESTCHESTER, PUTNAM, ROCKLAND & SOUTHERN ORANGE COUNTIES

*"Climate change is the greatest threat
to our existence in our short history
on this planet. Nobody's going to buy
their way out of its effects."
—Mark Ruffalo*



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