



**SIERRA  
CLUB**  
FOUNDED 1892

# TERRA FIRMA

MAY - AUGUST 2021

PUBLISHED BY VOLUNTEERS FROM THE LOWER HUDSON GROUP SIERRA CLUB

## HUNDREDS TURN OUT FOR DANSKAMMER HEARINGS

By Laura Burkhardt

An unanticipated record number of people turned out at public hearings on March 31<sup>st</sup> that kicked off the legal proceeding for the Danskammer proposal to build a new-gas fired power plant in Newburgh. But many who waited for hours to speak were left unheard.

The hearings were scheduled in two sessions, four hours each. Over 500 people registered, but only 186 were able to speak, even though each session was extended for an additional half hour. The majority of speakers (175) opposed the project, citing adverse health effects from increased pollution, effects on disadvantaged communities such as the City of Newburgh, lack of need for the plant, and the project's conflict with the mandates of the 2019 climate legislation (Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act). Speakers covered the entire age spectrum including the youngest at 6 years old, high school and college students, parents and grandparents. There were also teachers, business owners, several medical doctors, county legislators and researchers, and volunteers with expertise in energy modeling and assessing investments from all across the Hudson Valley.

A minority of speakers (11) advocated for the project: PILOT payments to Marlboro School District, Town of Newburgh and Town of Marlboro, as well as local union jobs of unknown number, certainty and duration, were touted as its chief benefits. These speakers included union representatives and town supervisors.

Dr. Patric Stanton, Professor of Neurology at New York Medical College in Valhalla, referred to the number of chemicals, heavy metals and particulate matter that are widely used in, or are byproducts of, unconventional oil and natural gas and said, "These [substances] have been linked to significant neurodevelopmental health problems and childhood cancers in infants, children and young adults."

Assemblymember Chris Burdick (District 93) spoke of his strong opposition to the plant and concluded by saying that he is a proud co-sponsor of the Clean Futures Act, the New York bill that would ban permitting and construction of any new fossil-fueled power plants, or repowering of existing plants.

Kudos to Shay O'Reilly, one of our Sierra Club organizers, and to Lower Hudson Group, Mid-Hudson Group, and Chapter leaders for their hard work in encouraging this turnout!



And it's not too late to express your opposition. Here's what you can do:

- **POST A COMMENT** on the Public Service Commission website (<https://on.ny.gov/2FiZDgn>) to tell them that you oppose the Danskammer project.
- **CALL** your state Senator and Assembly member to tell them why we don't need a new plant and urge them to speak out against it.

### Membership Meeting Schedule

**Visit [SierraLowerHudson.org](https://SierraLowerHudson.org) > Events**

**Visit [RocklandSierraClub.org](https://RocklandSierraClub.org)**

**All meetings via Zoom, link on websites**

**Confirm meeting on websites  
close to meeting date**

**Monday, May 10 at 7pm - Rockland issues**

**Wednesday, May 26 at 8pm**

**Thursday, June 24 at 8pm**

**Thursday, July 22 at 8pm**

**Wednesday, August 25 at 8pm**

# TOXIC PFAS CHEMICALS IN OUR DRINKING WATER

By Peggy Kurtz and Gale Pisha

All of a sudden, PFAS chemicals are in the news, with articles documenting serious health risks. The latest threat seems to be to our reproductive systems, based on the research of Shanna H. Swan, an epidemiologist at Mount Sinai Medical Center. She's written a new book, *Count Down*, which warns us that chemicals in our modern world, including PFAS, are reducing sperm counts of men in Western countries and altering male and female reproductive development. The average sperm count dropped by 59% from 1973 to 2011, with an accompanying reduction of semen quality.

An article published by Erin Brockovich in *The Guardian* on March 18, 2021<sup>1</sup>, and another by Nicholas Kristof in *The New York Times* on Feb. 20, 2021<sup>2</sup>, give short and easily readable summaries of this research and recommendations to prevent increasing human infertility.

What's needed is right in line with what Sierra Club and partner groups have been advocating for. On the national and state levels, we need more research about these impacts, labeling of products which contain these chemicals, regulation of the chemical industry that produces them, and regulation of the chemicals as a class rather than one by one.

On the personal level, we recommend storing and microwaving food in glass rather than plastic containers, buying organic produce if possible, and avoiding pesticides. And we hope you'll get involved in our efforts to clean up contaminated drinking water in the Hudson Valley.

Last November, Rockland residents received legal notices from Suez and Nyack Water that our drinking water contains toxic PFAS chemicals that exceed New York State drinking water standards. Similar notices were sent to Suez customers in Putnam County and to families in several school districts in Westchester and Putnam County.

Since then, Sierra Club has worked hard to get more information to the public. Well over 1,000 New York residents have signed a petition to Governor Cuomo. We are calling for thorough clean-up of all toxic PFAS chemicals from our drinking water, stricter standards to protect the public, and legislation to ban non-essential products using PFAS.

Are you concerned about the safety of your drinking water? Get in touch to help: email [rocklandclimate@gmail.com](mailto:rocklandclimate@gmail.com) or call 845 709-0802.

Rockland Sierra Club's next (online) meeting is May 10 at 7 pm. You can find details online at [www.RocklandSierraClub.org](http://www.RocklandSierraClub.org).

1 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/mar/18/toxic-chemicals-health-humanity-erin-brokovich>

2 <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/20/opinion/sunday/endocrine-disruptors-sperm.html>

## 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 during the second week of each month. Check [RocklandSierraClub.org](http://RocklandSierraClub.org) for dates and locations. For more information: [pkurtz9@gmail.com](mailto:pkurtz9@gmail.com) or [deby1012@gmail.com](mailto:deby1012@gmail.com). Or call 845-709-0802.

### VITAL NUMBERS LOWER HUDSON GROUP SIERRA CLUB

Local Sierra Club website: [SierraLowerHudson.org](http://SierraLowerHudson.org)

Rockland Sierra Club website: [RocklandSierraClub.org](http://RocklandSierraClub.org)

For contact info on our core activists,

please visit [SierraLowerHudson.org](http://SierraLowerHudson.org) > About Us

# HIGHLIGHTS OF LEGISLATION SUPPORTED BY SIERRA CLUB ATLANTIC CHAPTER

Last year the Sierra Club supported at least 37 bills introduced by the New York State Legislature about environmental concerns from energy, water and toxic chemicals, to transportation, environmental law and plastic pollution. 2021 is shaping up to be another busy session, with 29 bill memos of support already on the chapter website. Here are highlights of a few of the priority bills for this year:

**A ban on all new fossil fuel generating plants—The Clean Futures Act, S.5939 (Ramos)/A.6761 (Mamdani).** When the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act was passed in 2019, environmentalists thought the new law clearly prohibited the construction of new gas-fired power plants, since NYS needs to achieve a goal of a 70% renewable energy grid by 2030 and a 100% zero-emission grid by 2040 to avert the most catastrophic effects of climate change. “Peaker plants,” which only operate a few days a year such as Danskammer in Newburgh, are looking to “repower” by building much larger fracked gas plants which will operate almost all the time (see Danskammer story in this issue). However, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the Public Service Commission (PSC) do not feel that CLCPA gives them the authority to refuse to process applications for these new fossil fuel plants. In response, Sierra Club worked with the bill sponsors to draft a new bill that would make it clear that no new fossil fuel plants can be permitted. This will reduce wasted resources of the DEC and PSC having to review projects that might never be permitted and of environmentalists having to fight every application, and it will send a signal to fossil fuel companies that they should turn to renewable energy, storage and transmission projects instead.

**Election Reform bills:** Sierra Club supports election reform because we can't get good environmental laws passed if we don't have fair elections. **Single commissioner escalation of hand count: S.332 (Myrie)/A.913 (Paulin).** Currently when discrepancies are found in an election, both the Republican and the Democratic county election commissioners must agree to escalate the initial 3% hand count audit of the machine count. This doesn't happen because the party that is ahead in the

vote usually blocks it. This bill would allow one commissioner of either party to escalate the audit to ensure the vote count is accurate. **An urgent bill is Ban Hybrid Voting Machines: S.309 (Myrie)/A.1115 (Paulin).**

We currently mark our ballots by hand before casting them to be counted by the scanner. This bill bans hybrid voting machines that mark our ballots for us and then pass them through the printer again, with the possibility of altering our vote or adding disqualifying marks on our ballots. This bill also includes a ban on hybrid voting machines currently under consideration for New York that have touchscreens and count barcodes on ballot summary tapes instead of ballots that we have marked by hand. To help out on these 2 bills, call George Klein at 914-772-3916.



**Transportation bills: Green Transit Bill (A.3090 Dinowitz) and the Green Jobs Bill (A.2083 Dinowitz/S.3405 Kennedy):**

The first bill would require municipal bus fleets to purchase only electric buses by 2029. The starting date gives the transit agencies the time to build the charging infrastructure that would be necessary for an entirely electric fleet. This bill will improve the air quality in areas where these buses idle during the day, as well as phase out the use of fossil fuels. The companion bill would require fair labor standards for drivers and mechanics as they move into an all-electric economy. (See Transportation story on page 5.)

**Protect our pollinators: Birds and Bees Protection Act: S.699-A (Hoylman).** This bill would prohibit the sale and outdoor application of the class of pesticides called neonicotinoids or use of seeds coated with them for 5 years. It would also require the department of environmental conservation to review the latest scientific information concerning its active ingredients. (See Pollinator Pathway story on page 4.)

## HARVEST SQUARE DANCE

Given the status of the pandemic as we go to press, we are not sure yet whether we will be able to hold this year's Harvest Dance in person, or whether we will need to have a virtual event again as we did last year.

Please check our website at [SierraLowerHudson.org](http://SierraLowerHudson.org) starting in July to find out the date and whether we will be able to gather in person.

If we are able to have an in-person event, you may want to purchase your tickets early to save money with the early-bird discount and to make sure you get tickets. The last two in-person dances sold out a week before each event.



# POLLINATOR PATHWAYS

By Linda Brunner

On March 18, Lower Hudson Group held a general membership meeting at which the featured topic was pollinators and how we can help them in our yards and gardens. Here is a summary in case you missed it!

What is a Pollinator Pathway?

"A pesticide-free corridor of native plants that provide nutrition and habitat for pollinators. These protected corridors are created from a partnership of public and private properties. Even the smallest of available green spaces like flower boxes and curb strips can be part of the pathway."<sup>1</sup>



Why are Pollinator Pathways important?

"Pollinators are mostly insects, like bees and butterflies, that bring pollen from one plant to another. Pollinators facilitate the growth of fruit and seeds and enable propagation. Without pollinators we would have very little fruit and vegetables to harvest. Without pollinators we lose songbirds and other wildlife that depend on pollinators as their food source."<sup>2</sup> Birds are pollinators too!

"The drastic decrease of insects and pollinators should be a concern for everyone. The good news is that our yards can help pollinators, and it's easy, all we have to do is.....less."<sup>3</sup>

How can I help protect pollinators?

Changing your yard practices might be the easiest way to fight climate change and support your local ecosystem! Reduce the amount of lawn in your yard and replace it with drought tolerant plantings to conserve water, invite pollinators into your yard by providing habitat and native plants, and limit artificial light at night which can cause birds and insects to wander off course. "And, most important, don't use toxins. Whatever sales literature tells you, there is NO "safe" pesticide that targets a single species. Also make sure the plants you purchase aren't treated with systemic pesticides. Plants, and plants from seeds, that are treated with systemic pesticides like neonicotinoids, are highly toxic to insects, and remain so for many years."<sup>4</sup>

Where can I find information about creating or facilitating a Pollinator Pathway?

**<https://www.healthyyards.org>** Members of the Bedford2030 Water and Land Use Task Force recognized the important role residential back yard management can play in a region's ecology and biodiversity. Here you will learn: How to Invite Pollinators, avoid pesticides, reduce your lawn, mulch/mow leaves, conserve water, and plant natives.

**<https://www.pollinator-pathway.org>** Information on creating a pathway in your town, participating in advocacy, town resolutions, upcoming events.

**<http://www.propollinators.org/safe-pesticide-alternatives.html>** Physical and non-toxic methods are safest for pollinators. Find a list here.

- 1 <https://www.pollinator-pathway.org>
- 2 <https://www.healthyyards.org>
- 3 Ibid
- 4 Ibid

# TRANSPORTATION, CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

*By Katherine Schwarz, Chair, Population & Consumption Committee, Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter*

It used to be “You! Move to the Back of the Bus!” Now it’s “You! Get on that Bus!” Buses have historically had a stigma attached to them in this country. At the same time, we have had a love affair with cars. The American Dream of the 1950s was owning a suburban home with the car in the driveway, which defined my own childhood. “See the USA in your Chevrolet... ♪” Over time, those homes kept getting bigger and garages were added to house the growing number of cars. The long-term result? Transportation became the biggest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in the US (27%), NYS (36%) and locally (Westchester: 40%, Rockland: 52%, Putnam: 60%) - cars contributing about 82% of those emissions. The other result? A widening gap in income disparities. Those who couldn’t afford either the house or the car ended up renting near a bus stop, breathing in the exhaust from all the cars and trucks and being late for work when the bus service was unreliable. (I know people who have lost their jobs because of this!) Had bus riders chosen the bus over the car because of concern about the environment? Probably not. But they were, nevertheless, living more sustainably than others who were in their houses and driving their cars. (Buses use 8.7% less energy per passenger mile than a typical car.)

We, as environmentalists, are feeling the frustration of having lost four years in our attempt to turn around the environmental crises already upon us and the urgency to make up for time lost. We are at a critical moment where we could do a great deal to address our environmental, economic, and cultural crises together. But that would involve changing our behavior, which is always more difficult than buying our way out of our woes by consuming more.

Rather than ride the bus, we go out and buy an electric car. And, the rebates available make that an even more tempting proposition: \$2000 from NYS and \$7500 from the feds. And that is the solution the Biden Administration is proposing in its \$2 trillion infrastructure bill - \$85 billion to go to public transit and \$174 billion to go to electric vehicles and their charging stations. I fear that most of the money for public transit will go to the big cities, like NYC, where it is needed, for sure, but the needs in the suburbs will be shortchanged.

What doesn’t cost any money, but is not easy, is changing our habits and getting over the stigma of riding the bus. What would cost money in this case, is improving the bus systems (especially in Rockland which is very poor compared to Westchester’s system) and then marketing the improved service.

We should be encouraging electric buses, of course. And, if the feds would not be so anxious to help the car companies, helping the bus companies instead might create even more new jobs. Westchester is well on its way, having recently ordered 66 hybrid-electric buses for its fleet of 327 buses, 170 of which were already hybrid. And the county signed a contract for 52 more! Rockland is balking on installing the charging stations, so has bought none for its fleet of 71. Putnam has no electric buses either. Rockland’s Department of Transportation doesn’t think it’s a good investment because so few people take the buses. And they are right. If they don’t improve the service, rethink routes, improve signage and market the improvements, they will only have the same riders they have now – those who have no choice but to take the bus.



Decisions about these issues are being made right now and huge amounts of money will be spent on transit. We have a new President, Transportation Secretary, State Assembly and Senate about to act on these issues. Let them know what you think! And, while you’re at it, ask them the last time they took the bus themselves.

We need to get over the stigma of riding the bus. It will not be an easy task to change our car culture, but this is the most opportune moment to try. We should look upon the challenge of mitigating climate change as an opportunity to rethink our love affair with our cars. There are advantages to taking public transportation – when I do it, I can read and I connect with others in my community, rather than getting angry at them when I’m stuck in traffic in my car.

The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter is looking for members of its new Transportation Committee. Contact Jessica Enzmann, Jessica.enzmann@sierraclub.org.

# SPREADING CARBON LITERACY WITH THE CARBON TRACKER

by Patty Buchanan

In the May-August 2020 issue of *Terra Firma*, we reported on the early iterations of a tool to help individuals and communities achieve the carbon reductions necessary to keep climate change from getting worse. The following article describes the successful growth of this effort since then.

Sierra Club members now have an exciting opportunity to use a unique Carbon Tracker software application to advance greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction in their own lives plus educate and advocate for its use by organizations and municipalities. A New York Hudson Valley based all-volunteer group called CURE100 (Communities United to Reduce Emissions 100%) has been developing a Carbon Tracker (CCT) as a web-based application that helps a household estimate its annual carbon impact.

One of CURE100's goals is to develop widespread carbon literacy. It stands to reason that understanding the relative impacts of various GHG emissions can help guide people to the most effective solutions. CURE100 analogizes an understanding of GHG emissions to the guidance we gain by understanding calories and nutritional values in our diets. For example, if we know that our daily caloric intake should not exceed 1,200 calories, we can make informed decisions about which foods to eat, and which foods to forego because information about the number of calories in our food is easily accessible and, therefore, generally well-understood. Given the urgency in reducing GHG emissions, one of CURE100's mantras is, "If climate change is the compelling challenge of our times, how can we not know our own carbon impact?"

The CCT provides GHG emission quantification for each of the big emitting sectors: transportation, heating, electricity, diets and waste, goods and services, and a category for "zip code overhead" which accounts for public facilities (such as municipal operations, schools, businesses, etc.). The average household in its founding Chapter's community, Croton-on-Hudson, emits 52.6 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e annually, and the average household emits about 17.1 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e through transportation. (see graph at the right). The

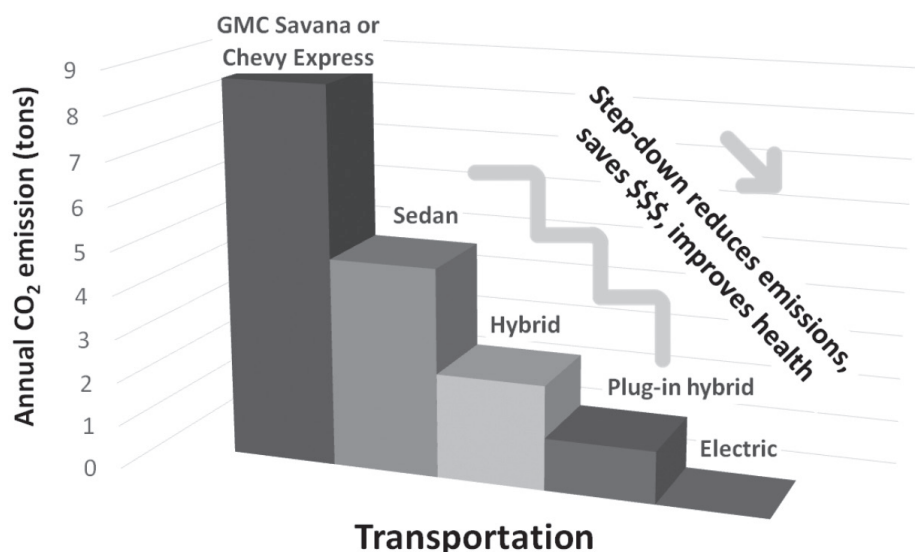
CCT can then show the actual GHG emissions of individual households, which helps them to understand the impact of the vehicles they drive, the flights they take, and reductions possible by use of mass transit or more efficient vehicles.

This new carbon tracking tool has been licensed for free to CURE100 chapters, municipalities and 501(c)(3) groups to use on their websites to provide citizens with an easy way to collaborate in understanding individual and community-wide GHG emissions and formulating data-driven campaigns around GHG literacy and reduction campaigns. In addition to Croton, CURE100 Chapters established in our Lower Hudson Group area include Ossining100, Phillipstown100 and Yorktown100.

Here's what you can do right now to advance GHG emission literacy in your home and community: Use the Carbon Tracker on CURE100's website (CURE100.org), read its FAQs, and learn more about CURE100 by reading its masterplan and its blogs. For further information for those who might want to introduce the Carbon Tracker to their community group, contact Sarah Wilson at sarahdwilson@optonline.net.

Getting to know our own carbon impact and helping our neighbors to understand theirs are important steps to address climate change that we all can take!

Here is a graph that will help you understand the carbon emissions of different vehicle types, based on 11,320 miles driven per year (national average).



# LOCAL ARTISAN SPOTLIGHT: MUSHROOMS

By Gail Dutan

Mushrooms are full of rich flavors and are so versatile with their potential to satisfy meat eaters and plant based diets. They also have many health benefits such as being high in vitamins B and D, anti-inflammatory properties and beta-glucans for immune support. Locally grown mushrooms are available at many of our farmers markets. See the local artisan spotlight box on this page with links to some local mushroom growers or check [localharvest.org](http://localharvest.org) for a farmers market near you.

## **MUSHROOM PIZZA WITH TRUFFLE HONEY**

You can easily substitute your own favorite pizza crust recipe instead of the one here.

### **QUICK AND EASY PALEO PIZZA CRUST**

(reprinted with permission from Michele Rosen, [paleorunningmomma.com](http://paleorunningmomma.com))

#### **Ingredients**

2/3 cup blanched almond flour  
3/4 cup tapioca flour or arrowroot starch,  
plus 2-3 tbsp more for spreading/kneading dough  
6 tbsp coconut flour divided into 3 (first) and  
3 (after adding the egg)  
1/2 tsp onion powder  
1/2 tsp garlic powder  
1 tsp Italian seasoning blend  
3/4 tsp fine grain sea salt  
1/3 cup water  
1/3 cup light flavored olive oil or avocado oil  
1 tbsp raw apple cider vinegar  
1 egg room temp, whisked

#### **Instructions**

1. Preheat your oven to 450° and line a baking sheet (round if you prefer) with parchment paper
2. In a large mixing bowl, combine the almond flour, tapioca or arrowroot, 3 tbsp of the coconut flour, onion and garlic powder, Italian seasoning, and salt. Stir well to fully combine.
3. In a measuring cup, combine the water, oil, and vinegar, then pour into the dry mixture and stir with a wooden spoon until a dough forms.
4. Now stir in the whisked egg to combine well. Once you have a sticky mixture, you will slowly add the remaining coconut flour.
5. Sprinkle extra tapioca or arrowroot on your parchment lined baking sheet, transfer the dough to the sheet and sprinkle with more tapioca/arrowroot. Work the dough into a 10 inch circle (12 for a very thin crust), then bake in the preheated oven for 10-15 minutes depending on how crisp you want the crust. Remove from oven and proceed with making mushroom topping to the right.



**HODGINS HARVEST, Rockland County, NY**  
[hodginsharvest.com](http://hodginsharvest.com)

**ROCK CITY MUSHROOMS, Old Chatham, NY**  
[rockcitymushrooms.com](http://rockcitymushrooms.com)

**TIVOLI MUSHROOMS, Hudson, NY**  
[tivolimushrooms.com](http://tivolimushrooms.com)

**FRUIT OF THE FUNGI, Lebanon, NY**  
[nymushrooms.com](http://nymushrooms.com)

**THE TRUFFLEIST, Long Island City, Queens**  
[truffleist.com](http://truffleist.com)

### **FOR THE MUSHROOM TOPPING**

2 cups cremini mushrooms, sliced  
1 tbsp avocado oil or coconut oil  
2 garlic cloves, chopped  
1 cup crumbled goat cheese  
2 ½ cups fontina cheese, shredded  
5 tbsp truffle honey (local brand The Truffleist)  
3 tbsp chives, finely chopped

1. In a sauté pan over high heat, add oil and add cremini mushrooms and allow to cook for about 7 minutes. Add garlic and allow to cook for another 3 minutes.
2. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Top cooked pizza dough with mushrooms, goat cheese, and fontina cheese.
4. Place pizza back in the oven at 500° and allow to cook for 7 minutes or until crust is golden brown. Top with chives and truffle honey.

## **LEDA'S MISO SOUP**

*submitted by Leda Blumberg, Faraway Farm, Yorktown Heights, NY*

*Steve and I enjoy growing shiitake mushrooms on oak logs. From April through October we have abundant fresh shiitakes, then in late fall we dehydrate mushrooms for winter soups. This recipe works equally well with fresh and dried mushrooms. Enjoy!*

Put 3 heaping tbsp of Miso paste in a bowl with warm water to dissolve. Set aside

#### **Saute:**

2 Leeks  
2 Carrots in small pieces  
Stems from bok choy

#### **After 5 minutes add:**

2 cloves minced garlic  
1 tsp minced ginger root  
½ pound Shiitake mushrooms

#### **In another 5 minutes, add:**

5 cups of soup stock. Bring to a boil, then simmer for 20 minutes.

#### **After 20 minutes add:**

Can of chickpeas, rinsed  
Chopped bok choy leaves (or another green such as spinach)  
(optional) small tofu cubes

In 5 minutes, turn off heat, let soup cool just slightly, then add dissolved Miso.





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c/o GAIL DUTAN  
16 Garrison Road  
Carmel, NY 10512

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LOWER HUDSON GROUP

# SIERRA CLUB

WESTCHESTER, PUTNAM & ROCKLAND COUNTIES

*"The right to vote is preservative of all other rights. It is not just another issue alongside other issues. It is foundational," Sen. Raphael Warnock*



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## *Inside*

.....

***Hundreds Turn Out For Danskammer Hearings ..... 1***

***Toxic PFAS Chemicals In Our Drinking Water..... 2***

***Highlights Of Legislation Supported By Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter..... 3***

***Pollinator Pathways ..... 4***

***Transportation, Climate Change and Environmental Justice ..... 5***

***Spreading Carbon Literacy With The Carbon Tracker ..... 6***

***Local Artisan Spotlight: Mushrooms..... 7***