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# TERRA FIRMA

MAY - AUGUST 2022

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## SUPPORT THE BIRDS AND BEES PROTECTION ACT!

ACT NOW TO PROTECT CRUCIAL POLLINATORS AND PROHIBIT DANGEROUS PESTICIDES

*By Martha Upton*

More than 75% of our most frequently eaten food crops would not grow without the help of pollinators. For the average individual, 35% of your diet comes from bird or insect pollinated plants. Anything that threatens the survival of pollinators also endangers all the species that depend on them, including humans.

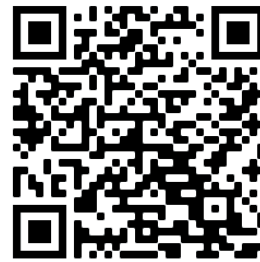
At this time New York's pollinators are threatened by a contamination crisis caused by neurotoxic pesticides. These chemicals, known as "neonics," are the world's most commonly used insecticides, and have been applied in New York State farming and lawn care since the mid-90's. In recent years a substantial body of scientific evidence has linked neonics with enormous losses in bee populations in New York and worldwide. The absence of bees not only destabilizes ecosystems, but also poses a serious threat to our state's important agricultural crops, which depend on them for pollination.

The wide-ranging damage caused by neonics results from the way they function. When these pesticides are applied to a plant, they turn the entire plant toxic, including nectar, pollen, and fruit. They can also be used to coat seeds, which absorb the chemicals as they grow, and which are frequently eaten by birds. Over the past half-century, we have experienced a 30% decline in North American birds, and research indicates that neonics have contributed to these losses. For plant or seed-eating birds, even small amounts of the neurotoxin can weaken birds' health and damage their physiology, making it harder for them to survive. In the case of a smaller bird, one neonic-treated seed can be lethal. For insectivores the situation is equally dire: as insect populations decline, these birds starve.

The harmful effects of neonics are not limited to birds and bees, though our small pollinators have borne the brunt of the damage. These pesticides persist for long periods in both soil and water and are often found in New York State groundwater testing samples, indicating likely health threats to a full range of wildlife and to humans.

In 2020 Cornell University released a report which found that safer choices are available and would be just as effective for New York's primary neonics applications. The Birds and Bees Protection Act, which grew out of this research, would prevent most neonics uses, including those that pose the highest risk to pollinators, and would keep the great majority of these pesticides out of our environment. Sierra Club asks that you join us in supporting this important bill.

Scan this QR Code to reach a digital petition that will be sent to state lawmakers:



You can also find the petition on the Sierra Club Lower Hudson Group website, [SierraLowerHudson.org](http://SierraLowerHudson.org).

Or contact your state senator and assembly member directly and ask them to support the Birds and Bees Protection Act: NY State Senate Bill S.699-B, NY State Assembly Bill A.7429-A.

### Membership Meeting Schedule

Visit [SierraLowerHudson.org](http://SierraLowerHudson.org) and select Events

Visit [RocklandSierraClub.org](http://RocklandSierraClub.org)

All meetings via Zoom, link on websites

# NYS BUDGET 2022-2023 CONTAINS HISTORIC WETLANDS PROTECTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL FUNDING

By Gale Pisha

On April 8, 2022, Governor Hochul and the NYS Legislature reached an agreement on a \$220 billion state budget that includes historic wetlands protection and funding for critical environmental programs. However, the agreement missed some important opportunities for enacting critical climate policies needed to achieve the goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), passed in 2019 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.

## Wetlands Finally Get Protected

The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter (SCAC) has been advocating for reforms to the NYS Freshwater Wetlands Act for over two decades. The budget legislation will now protect over 1,000,000 acres of critically important freshwater wetlands that are currently not mapped, plus tens of thousands of smaller wetlands of “unusual importance” to the environment. This protection “will make our communities more resilient to increasing floods, droughts and ecological disruption brought on by the climate crisis,” said Roger Downs, SCAC Conservation Director.

## Historic Funding for Clean Water, CLCPA Implementation and more...

The final budget also includes landmark investments in wetlands protection, clean energy, water infrastructure and climate resilience. The \$4.2 billion “Clean Water, Clean Air, and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act” that will go before voters in November will finance projects that protect critical habitats, restore wetlands, prevent floods and safeguard our drinking water. Environmental Protection Fund and Clean Water Infrastructure Improvement Act funding will help with farmland and open space protection, drinking water infrastructure, and waste reduction, while the Department of Environmental Conservation will hire 94 new staff to implement CLCPA after enduring years of staffing cuts. School bus fleets will be zero emissions by 2035 and a geothermal tax credit will help in the transition to electrified building heating.

## Missed Opportunities to Address Climate Change

Yet “the appropriations fall short of the funding and policy steps that are essential in order to stave off the worst impacts of the impending climate catastrophe,” said Downs. “Missed opportunities in the budget include establishing zero emissions building codes, appliance and equipment efficiency standards, abolishing the natural gas ‘100 ft. Rule’ to help transition the building sector away from fossil fuels, banning new gas hookups in all new construction, and banning new gas power plants.”

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/2022/04/04/ipcc-ar6-wgiii-pressrelease/>

## There’s More Work to Do!

The current legislative session ends June 2. Our work between then and now will focus on legislation to address these key issues as we look to transition away from fossil fuels. The need couldn’t be more urgent: on April 4, 2022, the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported that global temperature will stabilize when the world has achieved net zero carbon dioxide emissions; to keep global warming to 1.5°C, this must happen by the early 2050s.<sup>1</sup>

The transition mandated by CLCPA will save New Yorkers money, create over 189,000 jobs and protect our health from the air pollution that results from burning fossil fuels. As existing fossil fuel plants close, we need to support workers and communities affected by the transition to a clean energy economy. But transition we must, because there is no planet B.

## Take Action:

1. Watch your Inbox in May for action alerts from SCAC asking you to **send a message or call your legislators** in support of the urgent need to transition to an electrified future and away from fossil fuels.
2. Visit our website at [SierraLowerHudson.org](http://SierraLowerHudson.org) and click on the Issues tab to find information about **submitting a written comment to the Climate Action Council** by June 10 to improve the plan to decarbonize NY by 2050.

## 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](http://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](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.

# INDIAN POINT DECONSTRUCTION

By Marilyn Elie

Nuclear reactors are decommissioned. The rest of the clean-up is a massive deconstruction job, a lot of which involves low level or non-radioactive material. Items like laundry and workers' gear are considered low level. Some of the buildings on the property fall into the non-radioactive category.

Not that the site is benign. It is not. Forty years of radioactive use has left radioactive particles in the environment and on surfaces, which is why dust control is so important. Most spectacular of all is the pool of radioactive water underneath the reactor. Current plans call for capping it off and allowing the water to continue to make its way to the Hudson River. This is allowable under the regulations of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC).

## What Happens to the Radioactive Water in the Spent Fuel Pools?

Holtec, the company that now owns the closed reactors, is known for cutting corners. Their current plan for getting rid of the water in the fuel pools is to dump it into the Hudson. Depending on how much they dump at one time, this could also be allowed under NRC regulations. Seven towns draw their water from the Hudson River, however, since these towns are upriver from Indian Point, the NRC does not recognize them. The agency only regulates discharges downstream from the reactors and disregards the fact that the Hudson is a tidal estuary which flows both ways.

Keep in mind that nuclear reactors are allowed to dump liquid and gaseous radioactive waste into the water and air in specified amounts. These discharges are labeled "below regulatory concern." The same standards continue to apply even though the reactors are shut. In fact, since the amounts are cumulative for the year, the water in the spent fuel pools could be pumped out all at once as long as the concentrated radioactivity is below the annual permit. Needless to say, this is a great community concern and will be on the agenda of the Decommissioning Oversight Board (DOB).

## Are Gas Pipelines Near the Site a Safety Risk During Deconstruction?

Another major concern for the community is the 42" diameter, high-pressure AIM fracked gas pipeline that runs adjacent to the fuel pools and a nearby elementary school. The DOB heard testimony from

Rick Kuprewicz, a pipeline expert, that the science was known and he did not see any danger to the pipeline during deconstruction work as long as normal safety procedures were observed. This directly contradicted his earlier testimony to the NRC. People in the community have made it clear that they do not feel safe with the pipeline in operation while deconstruction is ongoing. They plan to continue their work to have the pipeline shut down.

## Ongoing Oversight of Deconstruction

The Decommissioning Oversight Board, which is composed of representatives from various state agencies, will play an important role in supervising Holtec and guaranteeing the final clean-up of the site. It has the regulatory power of the Public Service Commission behind it and to some extent the power of New York State; no other state has this arrangement.

Citizen oversight remains as important now as it was when the reactors were operating. As you can see, many things that are allowed under the regulations do not protect public health and safety.

We must all stay informed and active and working together to communicate with the DOB in shaping the important decisions they will be making. We are in this for the long haul and must pay attention.

Dates for the future meetings of the DOB are **May 19, July 27, Sept 21, Dec 7**. Add them to your calendar now! To keep in touch and for occasional clean energy updates, contact [eliewestcan@gmail.com](mailto:eliewestcan@gmail.com) to be added to the United 4 Clean Energy listserv.



# DEMOCRACY

*By Ed Berry*

It almost always starts with a concerned citizen. What is going on? Why is that happening? Can I do something about it? Who can help?

I got a sudden phone call from an unknown number. Luckily, I answered. There was this dam in Eastchester near the Hutchinson River Parkway. It was in bad repair. Was it dangerous? People were becoming very nervous. What to do?

I got the call because my number is listed on the Sierra Club website. As an Executive Board member and Political Chair, I have an asterisk next to my name. So an investigation began. I physically walked the area, seeing the entire situation. Ownership was also unclear at first. Expert assistance was needed and obtained.

Enter the expert guidance of Assemblywoman Amy Paulin. When I contacted her staff, I found they were already on the job. They were busy not only sorting out ownership and responsibility, they were strategically planning solutions. Most importantly, they were identifying funding sources to pay for the solutions.

George Latimer's county administration also stepped up to offer full assistance. By the end of March, plans

and pathways to solutions were in hand and moving forward. (See David McKay Wilson's LoHUD column of 4/15/22 at <https://www.lohud.com/story/news/local/westchester/2022/04/15/lake-isle-lowered-up-15-foot-inspection-dam/7321592001/>).

Folks were concerned about their neighborhoods and their neighbors. That's where it begins. But they need help. That is where our elected leaders come in. Instead of kicking the can down the road or saying there is no problem, they sprang into action.

I did not have to tell them there was a problem, they knew it. We did not have to start a petition or publicity campaign to pressure them to investigate the problem. They had already begun to plan how to deal with the situation.

We should be very thankful for the public servants we have in our community. Something that could have become a crisis is now a manageable situation. Why? Because the right people were in charge.

We should always remember that elections have consequences. Remember to vote. And remember to thank our elected leaders when they can bring resources to bear to solve problems.

# RECONNECTING WITH THE GREAT OUTDOORS

*By Gail Dutan and George Klein*

Had enough of COVID-19? Want to get outside, get some fresh air, and meet new friends?

Hikes and outings have started up again.

To find a good hike or outing, visit our group's website at [SierraLowerHudson.org](http://SierraLowerHudson.org) and click on Outings. You'll find a range of events from which to choose. Our outings programs hope to inspire you to help protect our natural spaces and give you an experience you will remember for a long time.

Ever thought of becoming an outings leader? The training is open to everyone. We recently attended an Outings Leader Training (OLT) on April 10, in Cold Spring, NY, and was informative, bracing and just plain fun. It was led by Sierra Club staffer Aaron Leonard, of the Military Outdoors Program, who we are blessed to have in the Lower Hudson Group's coverage area.

If you're interested in becoming an outings leader, take the Outings Leader Training. Contact Gail Dutan at [gail@move2lifeny.com](mailto:gail@move2lifeny.com) or 845-742-4544. The training really empowered us to want to plan outings so that all ages and abilities can enjoy the outdoors and learn about conservation.

Our next OLT is scheduled for June 5, 2022. For more information and to register go to this link

[https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?formcampaignid=7013q000002H3WrAAK&ga=2.196332972.1809441428.1650299575-1251366111.1595951172&gac=1.93956591.1647018665.CjwKCAiAg6yRBhBNEiwAeVyL0J5EP5pHSZwdEgshvIkW-CY9AyRaDtrizLrjMSfBmSzg14a4Q8aIXBoCAQcQAvD\\_BwE](https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?formcampaignid=7013q000002H3WrAAK&ga=2.196332972.1809441428.1650299575-1251366111.1595951172&gac=1.93956591.1647018665.CjwKCAiAg6yRBhBNEiwAeVyL0J5EP5pHSZwdEgshvIkW-CY9AyRaDtrizLrjMSfBmSzg14a4Q8aIXBoCAQcQAvD_BwE)

# MAKING THE SWITCH TO ZERO EMISSION LANDSCAPING EQUIPMENT

By Gale Pisha

The drone of a gas-powered leaf blower could be heard in the background even as members of the New York State Senate met with reporters in Sleepy Hollow to announce their bills to transition to cleaner, quieter electric lawn care equipment by 2027.

Last fall, Senator Pete Harkham introduced legislation which would require that 100% of sales in NYS of new lawn care equipment, including lawn mowers, leaf blowers and edgers, be zero emission by 2027. To help businesses and individuals make the transition, Senator Liz Krueger is sponsoring a bill which would establish a point-of-sale rebate that expires in 2030 for applicants purchasing or leasing battery powered electric lawn care equipment and the associated batteries and chargers.

## Gas Equipment is Noisy and Polluting

Many communities in the Lower Hudson area have already banned the use of leaf blowers during certain times of the year because of the noise and the air pollution from the pollen, fertilizers and herbicides they stir up. Residents became especially aware of these impacts when so many people were working from home during the pandemic.

Gas powered landscaping equipment also releases significant amounts of greenhouse gases and air polluting toxins, including nitrous oxides, carbon monoxide and particulate matter.

The California Air Resources Board states that “operating a commercial lawn mower for one hour emits as much smog-forming pollution as driving a new light-duty passenger car about 300 miles” and one hour of operating a commercial leaf blower “emits smog-forming pollution comparable to driving...about 1100 miles,”<sup>1</sup> about the distance from New York to Tampa, Florida.

## 800 Million Gallons of Gasoline Is Consumed by Landscaping Equipment Each Year

Besides the impact of all this noise and pollution on the health of landscaping workers and community members, the use of gas-powered lawn care equipment by American businesses and individuals consumes 800 million gallons of gasoline per year. Switching to zero emissions equipment will lower the carbon footprint of lawn care and help NYS reach the ambitious goals of the 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

## We Have Replacement Electric Equipment Now

The technology already exists to provide zero emissions alternatives to gas-powered landscaping equipment, and it is being steadily improved. Electric devices are measurably quieter and lighter, have low maintenance costs, and produce no emissions at the point of use. As the state’s electric grid incorporates increasing amounts of renewably generated energy, the electricity to operate this lawn care equipment will be cleaner, as well.

Senator Harkham’s bill, S.7462-A, would provide a five-year window for manufacturers and stores to transition to 100% zero emissions sales, which seems achievable given that electric lawn mowers, trimmers and leaf blowers are already available in stores. Senator Krueger’s bill, S.7453-A/A.8327-A, makes this transition more affordable by giving landscaping businesses and individuals rebates on the purchase or lease of new equipment. There is a cap of 70% of the purchase price with specific dollar limits depending on the item and a yearly limit on the total amount of rebates one can apply for.

Sierra Club supports these two bills to reduce New York’s carbon footprint, improve air quality and health for our communities and workers, and promote peace and quiet in our neighborhoods.

## How You Can Help:

The Harkham zero emissions sales bill, S.7462-A, is currently in the Senate Energy and Telecommunications Committee (Senator Kevin Parker, Chair), and cosponsors in our area include Senator Alessandra Biaggi. There is no Assembly version yet. Ask your Senator to cosponsor the bill. Ask your Assembly Member to considering sponsoring or cosponsoring the bill.

The Krueger rebate bill, S.7453-A/A.8327-A, is currently also in the Senate Energy and Telecommunications Committee, as well as in the Assembly Corporations, Authorities and Commissions Committee (Assembly Member Amy Paulin, Chair). Cosponsors in our area include Senators Shelley Mayer and Alessandra Biaggi, plus Assembly Members Burdick, Zebrowski, Otis and Paulin. Ask your legislator to cosponsor and support this bill, and ask Assembly Member Paulin to move the bill from the committee to the floor of the Assembly for a vote.

<sup>1</sup> <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12/2021%20SORE%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.peoplepoweredmachines.com/faq-environment.htm#pollutants>

# ZOOM INTO TOXIC PFAS CHEMICALS IN OUR WATER & CONSUMER PRODUCTS: LEARN MORE & TAKE ACTION

**Monday, May 16, 7 pm via Zoom**

Forum to include:

- Dr. Rassil Sayess, Water Resources Institute, Cornell University
- Rob Hayes, Director of Clean Water, Environmental Advocates NY
- Bobbi Wilding, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Clean and Healthy New York
- Loreen Hackett, Founder, PFOA Project NY, Hoosick Falls
- Kyle Conway, Vice President, Newburgh/Highland Falls Branch of the NYS NAACP

Since Rockland residents were informed in November, 2020, that the levels of perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) in some local wells exceeded the maximum contaminant level allowed in New York State, more and more communities are discovering this and other members of this class of toxic “forever chemicals” in their drinking water. Communities like Newburgh and Hoosick Falls have been particularly hard hit.

It’s becoming clear that these per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are present in thousands of widely used consumer products including non-stick cookware, electronics, food and textile production, plastic and rubber production, personal care products, and construction, stain repellents, polishes, paints and coatings.<sup>1</sup>

Health experts are warning that PFAS are associated with a wide range of dangerous health impacts. These persistent organic pollutants have been detected in humans and wildlife worldwide. From epidemiological studies of industrial workers and communities exposed to high levels of these chemicals, we know they accumulate in humans and have been linked to adverse health outcomes, including thyroid disease, high cholesterol levels, kidney cancer, testicular cancer, ulcerative colitis and developmental effects on unborn children. Evidence indicates PFAS affect the immune system, reducing the effectiveness of vaccines, particularly worrisome during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup> Some advocates say there are no safe levels of PFAS exposure.

There is a growing movement across the country to stop the proliferation of these chemicals. New York is considering several major actions, which could lead the nation. Come learn how we are exposed to PFAS chemicals in drinking water and in thousands of consumer products – and what you can do now to protect your community and move our state government to take action!

Learn more at [www.rocklandsierraclub.org](http://www.rocklandsierraclub.org) or email [rocklandclimate@gmail.com](mailto:rocklandclimate@gmail.com).

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1 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Per-\\_and\\_polyfluoroalkyl\\_substances](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Per-_and_polyfluoroalkyl_substances)

2 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/17/chemicals-found-in-everyday-products-could-hinder-covid-19-vaccine>

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**Rockland Sierra Club website: RocklandSierraClub.org**

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# SIERRA CLUB

WESTCHESTER, PUTNAM & ROCKLAND COUNTIES

*"I want you to act as if the house is on fire. Because it is."*  
-Greta Thunberg



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