



**SIERRA
CLUB**
FOUNDED 1892

TERRA FIRMA

SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER 2020

PUBLISHED BY VOLUNTEERS FROM THE LOWER HUDSON GROUP SIERRA CLUB

ELECTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES...

By Ed Berry

...and we are living through those consequences. Hundreds of thousands of Americans killed by a virus partly because our president rejects science and refuses to develop a plan guided by medical experts. We are on our own.

The virus that causes COVID-19, unchecked, has gone on to reveal all the cracks and inequities in our economic system. Environmental justice issues are ignored, as rules dealing with protecting clean air and water are rolled back or ignored. Regulations on food safety and worker safety are equally neutered. Meat packing plants are kept open at all cost.

A situation where we ignore science, known facts, where we accept pollution of our air, water, and food supply; this is not the future we want for our families. Congressman John Lewis, "Conscience of the Congress," once said, "I did not march across the bridge at Selma on March 7, 1965 and almost lose my life to become part of a political system so corrupt that it pollutes the very idea of what we marched for." I was privileged to meet Mr. Lewis once many years ago when we were very young. We were both studying religion, and how to change society. I immediately recognized an inspiring leader.

We must all become part of the political system so it does not remain corrupt. It will take all of us. No one can be on the sidelines.

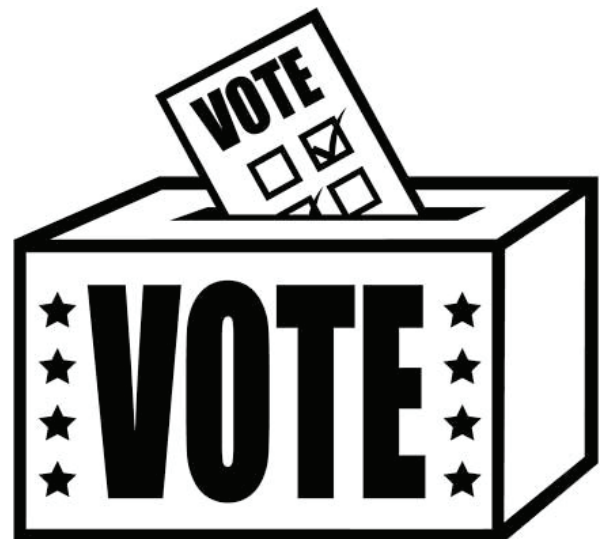
We can have a society with a renewed commitment to equality, justice and a sustainable, peaceful planet. But this all takes persistent effort. We need elected leaders on the local, state and national level. So, don't just vote, organize: Plan to vote, get your friends and family to vote. Volunteer

with a campaign. Many organizations are helping volunteers write, text or call voters in other states to boost turnout. (To join this effort, contact the Sierra Club Volunteer Support Team at answers.political@sierraclub.org)

On the Lower Hudson Group's website SierraLowerHudson.org you will find our Sierra Club-endorsed candidates, just two clicks away from the top of the home page. We take great effort and time researching and interviewing candidates before we endorse them.

Leaning once more on Congressman Lewis, we all have a voice and we all have work to do, and we all have a march left in us.

Let's make November an election with the kind of consequences we sorely need.



Membership Meeting Schedule

Visit SierraLowerHudson.org > Events

Visit RocklandSierraClub.org

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 such as Pilgrim crude oil pipelines, 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 first week of each month. Check RocklandSierraClub.org for dates and locations. For more information: pkurtz9@gmail.com or deby1012@gmail.com. Or call 845-709-0802.

Stay-at-Home Harvest Dance for Sierra Club Lower Hudson Group 2020 Thursday, September 17, at 8:00 pm

Donate online at SierraLowerHudson.org (see Stay-at-Home Harvest Dance on the home page) or send a check, made payable to "Sierra Club Lower Hudson Group", with "Harvest Dance" in the memo, and mail it to Sarah Wilson, Treasurer, Lower Hudson Group, 3478 Russell Place, Yorktown Heights, NY 10598.

For details about thank you gifts for your donation, see the enclosed insert or SierraLowerHudson.org. And if you donate by September 7, you'll also receive a special Sierra Club thank you gift!

We will mail the online video link to all donors on September 10, 2020. We hope you'll join us on September 17, but you need not be present to win!

SEE THE INSERT INCLUDED IN THIS ISSUE OF TERRA FIRMA FOR MORE INFORMATION.



VITAL NUMBERS LOWER HUDSON GROUP SIERRA CLUB

Local Sierra Club website: SierraLowerHudson.org

Rockland Sierra Club website: RocklandSierraClub.org

Vivian Bergenthal
Toxic Issues, Events Chair
vfbergen@aol.com
Tel. (914) 722-4864

Jo Anne Gorski
Wildlife Chair
jojogorski@aol.com
Tel. (914) 299-6006

Silvia Luzi
Membership Database Manager
silvialuzi@hotmail.com
Tel (845) 358-4254

Jerry Ravnitzky*
ravnitzky@gmail.com
Tel. (845) 628-6681

Edward Berry*
Political Chair
berryled3@gmail.com
Tel. (914) 393-6196

John Jurasek
Outings Chair
Tel (845) 365-3618

Bill Meyer*
Group Chair, Chapter Delegate
WTMiii@hotmail.com
Tel. (917) 806-5839

Karen Tam
New Member Coordinator
Facebook Manager
Tel. (508) 333-4199

Linda Brunner*
Publicity Chair
loki.lamb@gmail.com
Tel. (914) 476-5898

George Klein*
Group Vice Chair,
Newsletter Co-Editor
lowerhudson@gmail.com
Tel. (914) 772-3916

Erin Heaton Meyer
Conservation Co-Chair
ernieny@gmail.com
Tel. (914) 582-0481

Gail Dutan
Newsletter Design
printcraftmam@yahoo.com
Tel. (845) 742-4544

Laura Burkhardt*
Secretary
Election Coordinator
Chapter Alternate Delegate
lfburkhardt@optimum.net
Tel (845) 290-0874

Peggy Kurtz*
Rockland County Leader
pkurtz9@gmail.com
Tel (845) 709-0802

Patricia Peckham
Conservation Co-Chair
Advertising Coordinator
pattytypeckham13@gmail.com
Tel. (914) 645-9889

Sarah Wilson*
Treasurer
sadw@optonline.net
Tel. (914) 962-7279

Sr. Carol DeAngelo, SC
Faith Representative
caroldeangel@msn.com
Tel. (718) 549-9200 ext. 265

Susan Leifer
Conservation Co-Chair
esmesu@gmail.com
Tel. (914) 769-6656

Gale Pisha*
Assistant Treasurer
At-Large Chapter Delegate
Newsletter Co-Editor
soygale@verizon.net
Tel. (845) 623-4980

*Executive Committee member

HELP SAVE UPPER SCOUT FIELD PARK!

By Joan Marlow Golan

Upper Scout Field Park, a rare oasis in southern Westchester surrounded by woodlands and wetlands within the Bronx River Reservation, is currently under threat of development as a restricted-access regulation-size soccer field. The soccer field plan, which County Executive George Latimer has sole authority to approve or reject, includes the removal of 31 mature healthy trees as well as excavation of the field and disruption of its fragile ecosystem.

Owned by Westchester County, Scout Field Park was created from land donated for public parkland in 1888. Although its location is often mistaken as Bronxville, in fact only 0.29 acres lies in that municipality, with the remaining 22 acres divided between Mount Vernon (Lower Scout Field or LSF) and Yonkers (Upper Scout Field or USF), separated by the Bronx River.

Lower Scout Field, now a fenced-in sports complex comprising a baseball diamond and soccer field with only a narrow pedestrian path where once there was an open green expanse, ominously previews what Upper Scout Field could become. Beginning in the early 2000's, surreptitious efforts transformed Lower Scout Field into a sports complex, and in 2013 then County Executive Astorino signed an Inter Municipal Agreement (IMA) with neighboring Eastchester to manage LSF. In 2016, covert negotiations resulted in a second IMA giving Eastchester the management of USF.

When the plan to create yet another gated soccer field for the primary use of Eastchester schools and community groups became public, diverse Westchester residents raised concerns about environmental harm as well as curtailment of public use of parkland, all financed at taxpayer expense.

In 2018, newly elected County Executive George Latimer announced he would review the arguments for and against the soccer field proposal before deciding the park's fate. Some park advocates formed an *ad hoc* group, Friends of Scout Field, and have been lobbying County Executive Latimer and other elected officials. Friends of Scout Field is asking County Executive Latimer to exercise his authority terminate both IMAs immediately, restore Scout Field Park to County management, and revitalize Upper Scout Field as a model green park and environmental center for school and community groups.

Please help by signing the Friends of Scout Field Petition on change.org/savescoutfield, contacting County Executive Latimer by letter to 141 Martine Ave., White Plains, NY 10601, email to ce@Westchestergov.com or phone call to 914-995-2900. Learn more on Facebook and Instagram @FriendsofScoutField, Twitter at Foscoutfield.

Reach Joan Marlow Golan at joanmarlowgolan@gmail.com.



**Your membership in the national Sierra Club also makes you a member of
New York's Atlantic Chapter and the local Lower Hudson Group.**

**To find out more about the national organization,
visit <http://www.sierraclub.org>.**

For the Atlantic Chapter, visit <https://atlantic2.sierraclub.org/>

TWENTY CITIES AND TOWNS IN NEW YORK UNITE TO OPPOSE DANSKAMMER FRACKED GAS PLANT

GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGN POINTS TO CLIMATE LAW, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IMPACTS OF EXPANSION PLAN

With the recent passage of a resolution in the Town of Clinton, twenty municipalities in the Hudson Valley have now passed formal resolutions opposing the plan to build a new fracked gas power plant in Newburgh.

The Danskammer company's \$400 million plan involves building a new gas-fired power plant that would run year-round, adjacent to an existing plant in Newburgh. The new plant, located in a flood-prone area next to the Hudson River, would present serious dangers to local public health and air quality, in a community already dealing with air and water problems.

Since the company announced its expansion plans, a community-led campaign against the project has spread across the region, as residents in towns have pushed forward and passed strong resolutions against the power plant scheme.

New York's new climate law (the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act) calls for rapid, substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions - goals which would be completely undermined by the construction of a major new source of pollution.

"Communities up and down the Hudson River Valley know that environmental justice and climate action require us

to stop building new dirty power plants," said **Food & Water Action local leader Mark Sanchez-Potter**. "Fracked gas is not clean energy, and that is what New York must be building right now. Governor Cuomo supports the new climate law, proudly banned fracking in New York, and has rejected new fracking pipelines. He must say no to Danskammer."

"Communities throughout the Hudson Valley have spoken: We don't need a new fracked-gas plant that will harm our health and set us back in the fight against climate change," says **Scenic Hudson Environmental Outreach Organizer Nikki Chung**. "Cities like Newburgh and Poughkeepsie, both of which have passed resolutions opposing the plant, already suffer from high rates of asthma and other respiratory illnesses. Danskammer's owner admits the new plant would increase pollutants that contribute to these diseases by 25-fold, while also leading to a 40-fold rise in climate-warming greenhouse gas emissions, which runs counter to New York's nation-leading climate goals. Simply put, the plant is bad for our communities, our state and our planet."

"Community leaders and elected officials throughout the Hudson Valley are making tremendous progress in showing the state legislature that people are ready and excited to meet the goals of the Climate Leadership and Communi-

ty Protection Act (CLCPA)," said **Eric Wood, Hudson Valley Regional Coordinator for NYPIRG**. "This is a good sign that the public at large is in opposition to the expansion of fossil fuel plants. Now we must work together with the energy industry and our elected leaders to quickly transition to an energy future that relies on energy efficiency, renewable energy and storage for the energy that renewables produce."



Danskammer Power Plant (Photo: Jeff Anzevino)

"It would be folly of the worst kind to go ahead with a project that not only do we know will add a considerable amount of pollution to our beautiful valley, but is entirely unnecessary for our electrical needs," said **Amy Kletter of Ulster Activists (U-Act)**.

"It is urgent that we focus on climate solutions and move rapidly to a renewable energy economy with storage and efficiency, including providing a just transition for the workforce. Instead, this project would waste resources and exacerbate the climate crisis. It should not be permitted to proceed," said **Greg Williams, executive director of Hudson River Sloop Clearwater**.

"Hudson Valley communities oppose the Danskammer fracked gas power plant because they know that we can't afford more local air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions," said **Shay O'Reilly, Sierra Club Senior Organizing**

Representative. "Governor Cuomo must follow through on the bold climate action mandated by the state last year and reject this power plant."

"This plant, if built, will be obsolete and harmful upon construction. Orange RAPP opposes the plant to protect our local citizens," said **Sandra Kissam, chair of Orange Residents Against Pilgrim Pipelines and a resident of Newburgh**.

The municipalities that have opposed the Danskammer expansion include: Hudson, Suffern, City of Newburgh, City of Beacon, City of Kingston, City of Peekskill, Village of New Paltz, Village of Cold Spring, Poughkeepsie, Mount Vernon, Village of Hastings-on-Hudson, Town of Marletown, Town of Hurley, Town of Saugerties, Town of New Paltz, Town of Philipstown, Town of Rosendale, Town of Esopus and the Town of New Castle.

This article was published by Food & Water Watch on June 22, 2020.

Reprinted by permission.

<https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/news/twenty-cities-and-towns-new-york-unite-oppose-danskammer-fracked-gas-plant>

Since this article appeared in June, one additional town, the Town of Cornwall, has passed a resolution opposing the plant. As of the date when Terra Firma went to the printer, Danskammer Energy had submitted all requested supplements to its application but the Article 10 Siting Board had not yet declared the application complete.

What You Can Do -

- **CONTACT** your Rockland, Putnam or Westchester County Legislator and ask them to pass a resolution against the plant.
- **CONTACT** the New York State Board on Electric Generation Siting and the Environment to tell them that you oppose the Danskammer project at <https://on.ny.gov/2FiZDgn>
- **CALL** your state Senator and Assembly member and tell them why we don't need a new plant and urge them to speak out against it.

Here are a few talking points:

- The proposed plant is in direct opposition to the CLCPA mandate of achieving a carbon-free electric grid by 2040. In its filed documents, Danskammer Energy states that it complies with the mandates of the CLCPA because its new plant would be very efficient and would displace less efficient plants, thereby reducing the amount of CO2 emitted. However, the documents also state that CO2 emissions in New York would increase!
- In addition to increased CO2 emissions the plant would emit over 25 times more health-damaging particulate matter and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) than the current plant.
- The proposed plant would violate the Environmental Justice requirements of the CLCPA. Pollution from the plant would affect primarily the City of Newburgh (median income well below the NYS median, high poverty level, racial composition predominantly non-White). Further, the Marlboro School District, composed primarily of the Town of Marlborough (median income above the NYS median, low poverty level, racial composition very predominantly White) would receive generous Payments In Lieu of Taxes (PILOTs) from Danskammer, while the City of Newburgh would receive no such compensation.
- Unions are in favor of Danskammer because they think it means jobs for them. But the Memoranda Of Understanding that Danskammer has signed are not binding agreements – they only say "we'll try to use local workers". The construction of a power plant requires highly trained workers with special skills, and typically these workers are brought in from outside the state.
- We don't need Danskammer. The New York Independent Systems Operator has confirmed that there is no projected shortage of electricity to meet demand through the next decade. Indeed, Danskammer Energy states in its filed documents that about 1/3 of the electricity it produces will not be used to power New York but will go to the greater Northeast region.

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION RUBBER STAMPS MASSIVE SUEZ WATER RATE HIKE AND INEFFECTIVE CONSERVATION PLAN

By Peggy Kurtz

Many Rockland environmentalists are outraged by a recent decision by the Public Service Commission in the latest Suez Water rate case. Suez will tell you that ratepayers came out ahead because the rate increase was delayed. The truth is quite different.

Longtime readers of Terra Firma will remember the attempt by Suez Water New York (then United Water New York) to build a desalination plant to treat Hudson River water for Rockland's drinking water. Eight years of activism by the Rockland Water Coalition, of which Sierra Club is a founding member, resulted in a defeat for the company.

The energy-intensive desalination process would have locked Rockland County residents into increased greenhouse gas emissions. In addition to the energy use and enormous cost, the intake pipe would have been located in the plume from Indian Point in the Hudson River, resulting in trace amounts of radioactive byproducts in Rockland's drinking water.

In 2016, the PSC decision ordered Suez to abandon further planning for the desalination plant and instead to put together a water conservation plan, to avoid the need for a massively expensive water treatment plant for decades to come. In the last two rate cases, the PSC approved what several experts have called an ineffective water conservation plan, wasting money and precious time needed to build a sustainable water plan.

In a profoundly disappointing decision in July in the latter case, the PSC ignored input from experts hired by the Sierra Club to recommend important improvements to the conservation plan. The PSC also approved the merger of four Suez companies which include customers in Rockland, New Rochelle, Rye and other municipalities. The new decision affects both Rockland and Westchester ratepayers, in the newly merged entity.

Here's the truth about the outcome:

- **Rockland's water bills will increase by 34.5% over four years.** According to a 2017 report by NYS Comptroller Di Napoli, Rockland's Suez customers already pay the highest water rates in the state. Rockland is also paying off a \$54 million surcharge for Suez's failed desalination project.
- The rate increase was postponed to October because of the current economic crisis. However, ratepayers will pay back every penny owed to Suez. The payment was simply delayed.
- **Despite a severe economic crisis, the Commission gave the company four more years to prepare a low-income assistance plan.** In total, it will have taken the company **eight years** to prepare a plan, longer than it took to build the new Mario Cuomo Bridge.
- **The PSC rubber stamped Suez's ineffective conservation plan without a single modification, despite significant problems and solutions** identified by citizen advocates, professional watchdog groups, and experts. The failure of an ineffective conservation plan could lead in a few years to still more extraordinary expenses for desalination or wastewater reuse for Rockland customers and more expenses for Westchester customers. We should be drawing on best practices around the country in order to create a genuinely effective conservation plan.

It is difficult to understand why Suez would resist all improvements to its conservation plan and why the PSC decision barely even engaged with the substantive issues raised in the case. Rockland and Westchester ratepayers deserve better.

2020 ELECTION BALLOT

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, SIERRA CLUB LOWER HUDSON GROUP

VOTING DEADLINE DECEMBER 31, 2020

YOU CAN VOTE ONLINE!

Please check your email inbox toward the end of the year for your 2020 Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter and Lower Hudson Group ballots, 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 on our executive committee ("ExCom").

Candidate Statement of Edward Berry

Now more than ever our political process is essential to our survival as a democracy. We all must pay attention to who our political leaders are and what they stand for. This is why I volunteered to be the Political Chair for the Lower Hudson Group. Two years ago, through hard work by many like minded citizens, we changed the leadership in the House of Representatives. We also brought about key changes in NY State government. We have witnessed the effects of those positive changes already. Our state is leading the way on legislation dealing with climate change. This November we will be faced with a decisive battle for the future of our country. It is a fight we need to win. Together we can. Remember our shared valued and vote!

Candidate Statement of Peggy Kurtz

Fighting climate change is the urgent task of our generation. A lifelong environmental advocate, I've led Sierra Club in Rockland County since 2006. I led the effort to get Rockland and 3 towns to enlist in the NYS Climate Smart Communities program. I was also one of the leaders of the Rockland Water Coalition's successful fight to stop Suez's energy intensive desalination proposal. A member of the Rockland County Water Task Force, I also played a key role in lobbying successfully for NYS water and energy conserving standards for water fixtures. In the last 2 years, I led the successful campaign to establish a Rockland Community Choice renewable energy program, which will include almost half of Rockland's population. In the fall, we will also be campaigning in the most critical election of our time. I believe in the strength of Sierra Club's network of activists working for change and would welcome the opportunity to continue to serve on the excom of our group.

Candidate Statement of Gale Pisha

Over the past six years, I have served as Lower Hudson Group Treasurer Assistant, Secretary, member of the ExCom, and Alternate, then At-Large Delegate to the Atlantic Chapter ExCom, working to promote Sierra Club's environmental goals. These include helping NY State make the switch to a 100% renewable energy economy to help hold the line on climate change and protecting our precious water resources. To these ends, I have coordinated volunteer meetings with national, state, and local legislators about important bills and issues, participated in the political endorsement process to help elect good environmental candidates to public office, shared the responsibility for keeping our group website up to date, and written or edited articles for Terra Firma and Sierra Atlantic to keep our members informed. I would appreciate your support as I continue this work.

Candidate Statement of Jerry Ravnitzky

After retiring from school psychology in 1998, I started attending town board meetings and worked toward promoting honest and open government, becoming president of Concerned Residents of Carmel & Mahopac for the next 16 years, running successful food and toy drives as well as the highly successful CRCM Candidates Forums. I became a board member of Community Watersheds Clean Water Coalition (CWCWC), a founding member of Stop the Algonquin Pipeline Expansion (SAPE), an ExCom member of Sierra LHG, and a member of Unified for Clean Energy (U4CE) working to decommission Indian Point safely. My goal now is to do all I can to keep fossil fuels in the ground and Indian Point safe, knowing that we must leave a safer environment for future generations. I would be honored to be re-elected as an ExCom member.

Candidate Statement of Liam Robb O'Hagan

I was born and raised in New Zealand before moving to the US 20 years ago. I'm a life-long environmentalist with degrees in sociology and zoology, and I've worked as a trekking guide, journalist, website producer and most recently a lead parent. Now that my kids are able to fend for themselves, I'm looking for a new challenge. I want to do some good, rather than sell more stuff. When I was in Chicago, I helped with the campaign to close the city's coal-fired power plants, and I recently joined the Village of Mamaroneck Committee for the Environment and started helping the LHG with communications. My activist resume is thinner than most, but I am starting my journey and I believe I could offer a fresh perspective to the LHG ExCom.

Please vote for up to four candidates. If you vote by paper ballot, cut off this whole page and mail to Laura Burkhardt, 758 E. Crooked Hill Road, Pearl River, NY 10965 so that it is received no later than December 31, 2020. 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:

- Edward Berry
- Peggy Kurtz
- Gale Pisha
- Jerry Ravnitzky
- Liam Robb O'Hagan

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

- Edward Berry
- Peggy Kurtz
- Gale Pisha
- Jerry Ravnitzky
- Liam Robb O'Hagan

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

To help out with or be present at the vote counting in early January, 2021, please email sierralowerhudsonelection@gmail.com or call 845.290.0874 by 12/15/2020.



TERRA FIRMA

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

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
US POSTAGE
PAID
WHITE PLAINS, NY
PERMIT NO. 4304

LOWER HUDSON GROUP

SIERRA CLUB

WESTCHESTER, PUTNAM & ROCKLAND COUNTIES

*"Bad officials are elected by good citizens who don't vote."
- George Jean Nathan*



SIERRA
CLUB
FOUNDED 1892

TERRA FIRMA

MAY - AUGUST 2020

PUBLISHED BY VOLUNTEERS FROM THE LOWER HUDSON GROUP SIERRA CLUB

Inside

.....

Elections Have Consequences... .. 1

Help Save Upper Scout Field Park! 3

***Twenty Cities and Towns in New York Unite to Oppose
Danskammer Fracked Gas Plant Grassroots Campaign Points
to Climate Law, Environmental Justice Impacts of Expansion Plan 4-5***

***Public Service Commission Rubber Stamps Massive Suez Water
Rate Hike and Ineffective Conservation Plan 6***

***2020 Sierra Club Lower Hudson Group Executive Committee
Election Ballot..... 7***