



# The Trailblazer

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## Activism as Practice

By Sara Schultz, Niagara Group Chair

It's difficult to know what to say to everyone in this challenging time of the novel coronavirus. In normal times, I would have been reaching out to everyone to come to our annual awards dinner this spring. Alas, we will postpone our gathering for another day. I would have been bestowing much appreciation to our legislators and Governor Cuomo for making New York State an environmental leader for our country, virtual bookends of sustainability with California. Now I am appreciating the Governor's leadership on securing our commu-

nities and setting directives that will bring a quicker end to the spread of this deadly virus.

Yesterday, my husband and I were on our way for our daily "self-care" hike. For a little diversion, we decided to go to Hunters Creek County Park near East Aurora. It is a glorious place to find respite and relieve anxiety. On the radio, Dick Van Dyke started singing, "Put On a Happy Face". Bye Bye Birdie profound? Well, yesterday it was. As many of us turn to the amazing concerts that artists are sharing on YouTube, practice self-care with online yoga, daily walks, cooking our favorite comfort foods and keeping in touch with loved ones, the word that comes to mind is resilience. I would think that Sierra Clubbers have a bit of an edge. So many of us take more joy from our natural surroundings than shopping malls and fancy restaurants. A bird, a favorite tree or a babbling brook can bring the greatest

delight. Many of us are campers and backpackers where one can do so much with so little and be happy. Our activism gives us a connection to other volunteers, a family of people connected by what truly feeds the soul. The club's leaders have been extraordinarily compassionate in response to what is really important in dark times, concern for each other.

If you are working from home, with or without kids, probably the last thing you want to be doing is sitting at your computer more than necessary. However, there is a webinar opportunity to listen to one of the foremost experts on Solar Technology: Dr. Richard Perez from SUNY Albany. Two other experts, Lexie Hain and Lewis Fox, present on Agrivoltaics (grazing and beekeeping around solar installations). The information they provide is extremely comprehensive. NYUSES (NY United Solar Energy Supporters) provides a link to the recorded webinars on its website, [www.usesny.org](http://www.usesny.org). Surely the drastic reduction of air pollution in Italy and China during the period of economic shut down proves the necessity to move away from dirty fuels as quickly as possible. That is why we will continue to pursue a sustainable and healthy economy for all. An article in The NY Times noted that predictions were that tens of thousands of lives

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## What's Next for New York's Climate Goals?

By Ellen Cardone Banks, Atlantic Chapter Conservation Chair

In 2019, New York State enacted the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, requiring reduction in greenhouse gases to 40% below 1990 levels by 2030 and 85% by 2050, and reduction of carbon emissions in the electric power generating sector to 70% by 2030 and 100% by 2040.

Are we on track to meet these goals? Not yet. A major obstacle to de-carbonizing the electric power sector is the backlog of renewable energy projects waiting to clear the permitting process, known as Article 10, which was devised for permitting fossil fuel plants. More than 25 utility-scale wind and solar projects are stalled in the Article 10 process, with only about 5 having been approved in the past 10 years. Several of the delayed projects are in the Niagara Group's home base, spanning over eight WNY counties.

During the overnight session that ended the abbreviated legislative budget process on April 3, the Accelerated Renewable Energy Growth and Community Benefit Act was passed

by the legislature, signed by Governor Cuomo, and included in the 2021 budget. Creative voting methods were devised to protect the health of the Assembly and Senate members while they voted for the budget.

A new Office of Renewable Energy Siting will establish uniform standards for environmental impacts, require a net conservation benefit for endangered and threatened species, implement a species mitigation fund, and standardize procedures for community input, while still allowing for modified regulations as needed for local conditions.

Presently, many of these aspects have to be designed separately for each project and submitted to different agencies that do not communicate well among themselves. Contrary to some anti-renewable commentary, local input and regulations will be taken into account but cannot be "unduly burdensome," a provision that is already in the



## Community Solar

By Diana Strablow



Rooftop solar panels are a good investment for homeowners. Benefits include a return on investment by lowering or eliminating electricity cost and increasing property value.

However, for some individuals or families who wish to power-up from the sun, this might not be an option. Perhaps the upfront cost is prohibitive, your rooftop is shaded, or you are an apartment dweller. Community solar may be the perfect answer. This is an opportunity for renters and homeowners to become solar-powered without investing in their own rooftop panels. Community solar subscribers are assigned a portion of a particular solar array's production, based on an assessment of their electric usage. When a solar company builds an array that is designated for community solar, they line up subscriptions with homeowners and renters until the array's capacity is filled. There is no upfront cost to the subscriber and no investment needed. Community solar is a way to help the environment

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# Jim Antal Comes to Buffalo, and Buffalo Responds!

By Sue Tannehill

Jim Antal, the well-known climate justice advocate and the author of *Climate Church*, *Climate World* spent a day with over 175 interested and engaged Western New Yorkers on February 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at the Westminster Presbyterian Church. He came at the invitation of Reverend Dr. Tom Yorty, the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian church. While Jim Antal clearly spoke from a faith-based perspective, it is the moral and ethical imperative that comes across most strongly when he speaks. During his talk and in conversations afterwards he made three points clearly:

We do not “own” the earth. We share it with all beings on the planet and we need to care for it.

We need to anchor this moral stance in a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all life on the planet.

Churches and faith communities could and should become places where prophetic voices speak out on behalf of those affected by climate change, but whose voices are not being heard. In addition, Jim lifted up the idea that churches should consider civil disobedience when other methods fail.

Jim was invitational, engaging and precise in his presentation of facts, issues and actions to be taken. His message was sobering, but he also brought hopeful stories about actions that changed outcomes – such as the Water is Sacred campaign in the Dakotas.

In the evening, the Interfaith Climate and Justice Community (ICJC) hosted a simple meal for people of many faiths. We had representatives from the Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and Jewish Community along with members of the ICJC, which includes representatives of the United Church of Christ, Religious Society of Friends, Catholics, Episcopalians, Methodists and Presbyterians.

During the discussion that followed the dinner, it was clear that climate justice was an issue that united us. We developed ideas for jointly planting trees at our various houses of worship and creating a multi-faith ritual that would honor the Earth. In addition, we agreed to support the demonstrations scheduled at a local Chase bank by holding a “pray-in” a few days ahead of the demonstrations. Chase is one of the largest loan providers to the fossil fuel industry. While these plans are now on hold due to the Covid19 pandemic, the ICJC remain eager to work with other faith communities and environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club when the Covid19 crisis is over.

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by cutting your carbon footprint and you can save about 10% on your monthly electric bill at the same time. Community Solar is a good deal for you and the environment!

On our website you can find links to several companies with arrays here in Western NY that are open for subscriptions. There are also links to local solar installers if you are wishing to purchase your own solar system. Please visit our website for more details: [niagarasierclub.org/renewable-energy/solar/](http://niagarasierclub.org/renewable-energy/solar/)

# Are We Ready for a “Homegrown National Park”?

By Lynda Schneekloth

Americans love our national parks – 327.5 million visits in 2019 alone. We know that this is deep love by our willingness to fund national parks through public monies, that is, the money that all of us contribute to the well-being of our shared world. These parks are jewels on our land, protecting habitats across the range of our national biomes. For all their protection of habitat and species, we know that they are endangered today not only by too many visitors, but also by climate change and the biodiversity crisis. These pressures are exacerbated by the fact that these 598 parks are ‘green spots’ on the land: isolated islands in the midst of our human habitat, unable to provide their full potential of ecological function and endangered by invasive species.

We know that when European settlers arrived on these shores, that the land from ‘sea to shining sea’ was the equivalent of an enormous national park that we have been transforming ever since by building human habitat over the landscape. We have reached the point that today our infrastructure is so vast that there are at least 2000 tons of infrastructure of every human being (Britton-Purdy in *Sierra*, March/April 2020)! Given this condition, how might we repair the landscape so that it can provide good homes for those species, plants and animals that are forced to live in degraded homes and are now endangered?

Doug Tallamy in his new book, *Nature’s Best Hope* (2019), puts forward an idea that is nested in



our love of parks: A Homegrown National Park. This park crisscrosses the nation through lawns and corporate headquarters, municipal parks, shopping malls and farms. Yes, through your lawn and place of work! This Homegrown National Park provides food, shelter and reproduction opportunities for pollinators and other insects, helps manage our watersheds, builds soil, and sequesters carbon.

There are three requirements for becoming a part of the new Homegrown National Park: less lawn, more

plants in total that are planted in (mostly native) communities, and “more of those plants will be the powerhouse species that drive food webs and support pollinators” (Tallamy, p. 200). Imagine the monarch butterfly moving through our communities with thousands of places to stop and be refreshed and to deposit its eggs; birds with sufficient winter food; natural insect predators in our gardens so there is no need to apply toxic substances and poisons. Imagine how we could contribute to the wellbeing of the earth, and the delight in our children’s eyes when they experience the world of interactive nature in their neighborhood and at home. We can do this!

If you’re just beginning to think about gardening differently or thinking of joining the Homegrown National Park movement, we urge you to check in on “In the Garden,” Laurie Ousley’s blog at “in-the-garden.blog.”

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were saved in China alone from cleaner air. It is not the time to become complacent and forget that we all have a responsibility to recognize as we are physically separated from one another we are also intimately connected. When the pandemic gets under control let us remember the possibility of living a simpler, more loving and less destructive life. We look forward to another annual awards dinner and hope to announce that soon.

For now, you can participate in the WNY Youth Climate Council and Buffalo Climate Strike with the following steps:

CREATE - design your poster or sign for the BUFFALO CLIMATE STRIKE

Include - #DigitalStrike or #DeclareAclimateEmergency

SNAP IT - take a picture or selfie with your sign and include your family if you can!

POST - upload the image on the group page (<https://facebook.com/events/347347452873023>) Instagram or Twitter and don’t forget to tag the hashtags above!

We hope you are all taking care and staying safe during this challenging time. We look forward to staying connected and seeing you online! PLEASE continue to contact your legislators on important environmental issues and when the election comes, get out there and vote. Stay safe and stay healthy. We have lots of work to do!

“New York’s Climate Goals” continued from front page

Article 10 rules. Wildlife protections will be increased, not overturned. With vast numbers of wind and solar energy around the world, there is a growing body of evidence that utility-scale wind and solar energy projects are not harmful to human health or property values. Renewable energy has a vast net benefit to birds and other wildlife, as the toxic effects of mining and burning fossil fuel far outweigh any damage from construction and operation of wind and solar power. Community benefits will be required, including reduced utility rates for municipalities hosting projects.

The state will also prepare sites and fast-track permitting for renewable energy projects on brownfields and abandoned commercial properties. The new law provides for study and improvement in the power grid so that electricity production can be more evenly distributed throughout the state. Most importantly, decisions on applications will be required within one year for most applications and six months for repurposed industrial sites.

Releasing the stalled energy projects and incentivizing developers to plan more will go a long way to meeting decarbonizing goals, protecting our air, water, wildlife and human health, and creating good jobs, especially in rural areas that badly need them.

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