The Climate Movement is an Ecosystem – Find Your Niche

By John Zoplany

The 2021 NYS Legislative session had few environmental highlights. Lawmakers will point to approval of a constitutional amendment to guarantee environmental rights in New York (which will need approval by the voters this fall). We saw passage of a process to deconstruct older nuclear power stations and ban new coal-fired power. But the session was mostly a dud from an environmental perspective. There were 20 environmental bills that were passed in both houses and passed by the Governor, but none were ever voted on by the Assembly. Worse still, another nine bills passed by the Senate did not have a “same as” counterpart in the Assembly, making the bills impossibly to pass in this session.

Prior to 2019, the Senate was Republican-controlled, and change on humankind was Democratic-controlled. Watchers of Albany politics observed that many Assembly representatives were able to vote in favor of many bills without consequence as they knew that the Senate would kill those bills. From their perspective, they could appear environmentally favorable, and in the backrooms, still be able to get donations from fossil fuel interests. Those same Albany political observers warned that having both houses would not necessarily mean more bills would pass. We saw cleanup of some backlog. In 2019 and 2020, but 2021 saw the Assembly and Speaker Carl Heastie drag their heels. They could no longer have their cake and eat it too. Maybe 2021 was an anomaly because lobbyists from the Sierra Club and other groups could not meet with the Assembly members or staff members in person. After all, it is much easier to avoid a conversation when you’re playing phone tag. But maybe, it’s because they didn’t hear enough from the grass roots. “The Climate Movement Is an Ecosystem. Find Your Niche.” was the title of a recent Treehugger article (I've added the link on the Sierra Club Niagara Group Facebook page). I hope that at least the title will spur you on to action on one or more of the following bills that should be reintroduced in 2022.

Is Climate Justice your issue? There were four bills not voted on in the Assembly including A2103A, which would provide for a state-level Climate Justice Executive Committee, make similar statements are required to ensure equity of treatment for minority communities or economically distressed areas making sure that siting of new facilities will not cause or increase a disproportionate burden on such areas.

How about Zero Emission Vehicles? Again, there were four bills including A5732, which would establish a ride clean rebate program for e-bikes and electric scooters and A2578, which would increase rebates to municipalities to support infrastructure projects to support electric vehicles.

Have you signed all of the “Save the Bees” petitions online and are still concerned that nothing has been done yet? Then you should work on getting bill A7429 passed. The Birds and Bees Protection Act would place a five-year moratorium in the state on the application of most neonicotinoid pesticides.

Do you want to save wild areas in the state? A7850 would add an additional one million acres of wetlands that would be protected above and beyond federal protection and A5390B would set a goal for the state to conserve 30 percent of New York’s land by 2030.

Aad that New York isn’t doing enough to transition to a clean energy economy? Five energy-related bills died in the Assembly including A6251 which would transition out peak methane power plants with renewable energy systems.

Maybe the effects of chemicals on human health is your issue? Then check out A6150 which would direct the state to conduct research on the health effects of CFCs to review and create new air quality standards for emissions of toxic air contaminants. Continued on back page

RICHARD LIPPS

My background and accomplishments may be summarized by the following description: As an Environmental Lawyer, I have handled many noteworthy cases, including Love Canal and as special environmental counsel for the plaintiffs in Three Mile Island disaster. As one of the original Executive Committee members in the Niagara Group over the last 50 years, I have served twice as Chair for 6 years, a member of Atlantic Chapter Executive Committee several times, and Chairperson of Chapter Executive Committee in 1978 and 1982. In addition, I was former President of the Northeast Region, the Vice President of the Sierra Club Foundation, and Co-Founder of the Atlantic Clean Water Project.

While the Sierra Club has led the nation in making great progress on a number of environmental issues, we have never faced the existential threat to our very existence due to Climate Change. The Sierra Club must continue to provide the leadership necessary to assure that climate change will be a major priority on all levels of government, and in our daily lives.

LISA MERTZ

I live by Lake Chautauqua in the southwestern region of New York State. I founded one of the first Climate Reality Project Chapters in Chautauqua County in 2017. Since that time, my focus has been on advocating for supporters of renewable energy proposals, observing and reporting on anti-renewables activists. I have presented case studies on the Arkwright Wind Project and the (defeated) community wind proposal for Cortland, NY for an Atlantic for Clean Energy conference and a Climate Reality Project virtual retreat, which I co-organized. I have published letters to the editor in the local newspaper regarding renewables issues.

I serve on the board of the League of Women Voters of Chautauqua County for which I also chair the program committee, co-organizing educational presentations on various topics, including the proposed offshore wind project in Lake Erie.

I am a licensed massage therapist specializing in oncology massage therapy. And I hold a doctorate in cultural anthropology with current interest in health impacts of climate change such as the work of Sandra Steingraber on environmental carcinogens.

I would love to represent the Chautauqua County region for the Niagara Sierra Club and continue to share the activities in the Chautauqua area with the larger Western NY region as well as to work on issues that affect us all, such as grocery store single use plastics. I would be honored to serve on the Executive Committee.

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SEE IMPORTANT ELECTION BIOS BELOW AND BALLOTONS ON PAGE 2!

Elections 2021! Time to Vote

As a member of the Sierra Club, you are asked to participate in two elections this fall. The first is our Niagara Group election of members of the Executive Committee - see information this Trailblazer. The other election is for Members At Large for the Atlantic Chapter (New York State) of the Sierra Club. Information will be available in the next issue of Sierra Atlantic, and also on the website: http://atlantic2.sierraclub.org/. We ask for your considered participation!!!! Please read the following biographies of the candidates.

ROGER COOK

Roger has served on the SCNG Executive Committee for the last ten years and has chaired the Political Committee for over six years. This Committee makes recommendations for endorsements of local and state candidates who pledge to support the Sierra Club’s positions on key climate and other environmentally related issues. He serves on the Board of the Grand Economic Development Advisory where he has championed solar energy projects as “Solarize Grand Island” and appropriately-sited solar farm proposals. Previously he was the Executive Director of the non-profit NYS Environmental Fund where he oversaw the Environment Network, the NYS Labor-Environment Network, and the Love Canal Ecumenical Task Force. In 2015 he co-convoked the Interfaith Climate Justice Community of NYS, an effort that continues to engage and mobilize our region toward protecting as much as we can going forward.

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Pesticides Have No Place in Breakfast Cereals

By John Scalany

If you live in Bemus Point or Medina, you may have seen the T-shirts in Buffalo that read “My city small, my mission big” that celebrated the group of people who have not only had the T-shirt but have driven downtown and savored the aroma of toasted oats waiting for the General Mills cereal plant near the Buffalo RiverWorks. The company has made a commitment to use only organic and non-GMO ingredients in its product, including oats from small farms in the area. A book called “Grocery: How the West was海上” by2017’s doyen of food journalists, Mark Bittman, has already pushed the use of organic food as a way to support local farmers and reduce the environmental impact of food production. The book makes a strong case for the benefits of organic farming and encourages readers to support local food producers by shopping at farmers’ markets and buying from local farms. In this way, we can support sustainable agriculture and reduce our carbon footprint. It’s a win-win situation for both the environment and our health.

Elections 2021 Bios

SARA SCHULTZ

I have been active with Sierra Club since 2009 when I learned that the city of Buffalo has no anti-smog policy. I am passionate about the environment and working with elected officials to encourage reg...