



The Trailblazer

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The Climate Movement is an Ecosystem – Find Your Niche

By John Szalasny

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 decarbonize our vehicles and for safer drinking water. But the session was mostly a dud from an environmental view. There were 20 environmental bills that were in both houses and passed by the Senate that were never 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 impossible to pass in this session.

Prior to 2019, the Senate was Republican-controlled and the Assembly 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 vote it down. From our 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 backlogged bills 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 staffers 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 have ensured that environmental impact 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 protections and A5390B would set a goal for the state to conserve 30 percent of New York’s land by 2030.

Afraid 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’s Department of Environmental Conservation to review and create new air quality standards for emissions of toxic air contaminants. *Continued on back page*

Renewable Energy and Townships

By Bob Ciesielski

The State of New York doing a wonderful job in promoting renewable energy sources such as land-based and offshore wind power and solar arrays. The sources of electricity, along with energy efficiency, are needed to stop ever increasing weather and climate change.

The climate change catastrophe keeps boiling over. The most recent being 121°F in Canada, accompanied

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SEE IMPORTANT ELECTION BIOS BELOW AND BALLOTS ON PAGE 2!

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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 Town of Grand Economic Development Advisory where he has championed solar energy projects such as “Solarize Grand Island” and appropriately-sited solar farm proposals. Previously he was the Executive Director of the union-based WNY Council on Occupational Safety & Health. In that capacity, he helped form the OSHA-Environmental Network, the NYS Labor-Environment Network, and the Love Canal Ecumenical Task Force. In 2015, he co-convened the Interfaith Climate Justice Community of WNY, an organization that continues to engage the faith community in supporting the Sierra Club, NY Renew and Divest NY.

PAMELA HUGHES

My history with the Sierra Club began in 2010 where my interest in planting trees prompted my later nomination as Forestry Chair. In 2011, I was nominated to the Executive Committee, and later served as the Western New York Environmental Alliance delegate, Newsletter Editor (2012-2016, 2018-present), Vice-Chair (2013-2015), and Chair of SCNG (2016-2017). More recently, I have become more active and interested in the psychological impacts of climate change on humans.

There has never been more urgency to address environmental issues than in these politically and socially

tumultuous times. My passion for protecting the environment has paralleled our mounting collective needs to confront matters around loss of habitat, air and water pollution, and mass extinction of wildlife. Topping that urgency is the most important crusade of our generation ~ Climate Change! Our shared future is currently unknown and we have already surpassed many globally-driven tipping points. But our purpose is clear: To mobilize our region toward protecting as much as we can going forward.

RICHARD LIPPES

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 formerly the Northeast Region Vice President of the Sierra Club, Founder of National Club Hazardous Materials Committee, and have been retained as the Sierra Club Chapter legal advisor for the past 42 years. Other ongoing activities include retention as general counsel for many local environmental organizations, including Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper, and Atlantic States Legal Foundation and Co-Founder of the American Clean Water Project.

While the Sierra Club has led the nation in making great progress on a number of environmental issues, we never have faced the existential threat to our very existence due to Climate Change. The Sierra Club must con-

tinue 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 south western 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 activism. I have presented case studies on the Arkwright Wind Project and the (defeated) community wind proposal for Portland, NY for an Alliance 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 off-shore 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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Pesticides Have No Place in Breakfast Cereals

By John Szalasny

If you live in Bemus Point or Medina, you may not have seen the T-shirts in Buffalo that read “My city smells like Cheerios.” But many Trailblazer readers not only have the T-shirt but have driven downtown and savored the aroma of toasted oats wafting from the General Mills cereal plant near the Buffalo RiverWorks.

Their signature cereal has been a toddler’s first solid food since its introduction in 1941 and has become a breakfast staple for adults. That’s why it’s disturbing that the General Mills website needs to answer the question “Do your products contain Glyphosate?” Glyphosate is the key ingredient in many commercial weed killers including Roundup®. As General Mills points out “trace amounts of residue from pesticides, including the herbicide glyphosate, would likely be found in most food products.”

Trace amounts may be too much. In her recent book “Toxic Legacy: How the Weedkiller Glyphosate Is Destroying Our Health and the Environment”, Stephanie Seneff, PhD writes that glyphosate binds to minerals in the gut, making them unavailable to microbes that aid in food digestion and maintain a healthy immune system.

The EPA limit for glyphosate residues was changed in 1993 from 0.1 parts per million (ppm) to 30 ppm in response to lobbying from Monsanto (now Bayer). In their 2019 study of General Mills products, researchers

for the Environmental Working Group used a children’s health benchmark at 0.16 ppm. Original Cheerios was tested at 729 ppb!

This chemical has been singled out in 2015 by the World Health Organization as “possibly carcinogenic to humans.” California’s Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment classified glyphosate as a “known carcinogen” and in the past year, California juries have awarded more than \$2.2 billion in three separate verdicts against Bayer-Monsanto stating that Monsanto knew the risks for decades and covered it up.

The “Toxic Legacy” book notes that non-GMO crops like oats are sprayed with glyphosate right before harvest to speed the drying process which would imply that the “trace amounts” could be avoided. We need companies like General Mills to stop buying oats from farmers who use glyphosates right before harvest. And we need action by the EPA to reduce the allowable levels of pesticides in our foods.

“Climate Movement” continued from front page

One additional bill that I need to add is A7389A, which would have established a three-year moratorium on cryptocurrency mining in the state. These operations use an insane amount of electricity and companies are now starting to purchase old, mothballed fossil fuel fired power plants to power their operations.

This is just a sampling of bills that could have passed this year and doesn’t include major legislation not voted on in either chamber like the Climate and Community Investment Act. We will have another chance to pass legislation on these issues in 2022. The bill numbers will change. Hopefully the outlook of the Assembly leadership will be well in an effort to satisfy voters in an election year. That’s where we need your help. We need you to raise your voices on issues that you are passionate about. Leave a message on our website niagarasierraclub.org/about/contact-us/ and let us know you can help or how we can help you with your issue. [Link for the Treehugger article: \(treehugger.com\)](https://www.treehugger.com) [The Climate Movement Is an Ecosystem. Find Your Niche.](#)

Check out our new Member Center, My Account <https://myaccount.sierraclub.org/MyAccountLogin>

My Account is a platform where you can make changes to or update your physical address, change email preferences, view your past giving donations, view current and past issues of Sierra, sign petitions, and more! First time users will need to create an account with your member ID or simply tell us who you are, by providing your name, email address and zip code.

Elections 2021 Bios

SARA SCHULTZ

I have been active with Sierra Club since 2009 when I learned that the most important thing you can do for the environment is to engage with other activists. Together, with many volunteers, I have worked on the NYS Fracking Ban, getting solar panels on the Buffalo Public Schools, collaborating with the NFTA to transition to Battery Electric Buses (BEBs), supporting properly sited renewable energy projects, and endorsing political candidates that will build a cleaner economy for the future.

There are many roles that I play as I serve my 4th year as Chair of the Niagara Group. I must interface with the public as well as the media to promote the values and goals of both our local group as well as our state and national organizations. That includes testifying at public hearings, sending comments to entities that control our future energy structure and managing the administrative tasks that keep us a well-oiled, high functioning group.

Before the pandemic I spent many weekends tabling at events and sharing information to promote sustainability, educate the public about nuclear waste, pipeline infrastructure, renewable energy and more. As we move forward my goal is to engage more youth, and develop cooperative relationships with other groups with similar goals such as United Solar Energy Supporters of WNY.

In addition to my work with SCNG, I also serve on two committees for the Town of Amherst. We worked on getting multiple grants from NYSERDA to reduce our GHG emissions, move toward EVs, install EV chargers and promote solar throughout the town. The town is now transitioning our street lights to LEDS which will be a huge saving and reduce our electricity needs.

Personally, I try to live with a small carbon footprint. We have a near net-zero home, 100% EV and plant-based diets. My husband and I started bird watching last spring. This really heightens our love of the natural world and all there is to experience. Now it’s up to us to pass this passion on to our grandchildren and I enjoy every minute of the task!

DIANA STRABLOW

It has been a privilege to serve on the SCNG Executive Committee for the past several years with an incredible, deeply-committed group of colleagues, working to protect our world from further harm and move toward a more sustainable future.

I have collaborated on number of campaigns and projects, maintained our website and handled a portion of our communications and outreach.

Engagement with elected officials to encourage regulations and laws, especially to address the climate crisis, has been a part of our work and I will continue my participation in this endeavor. The passage of NY’s Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act in 2019 was exciting progress. Now we need *real* action, laws and regulations to implement the goals, get off fossil fuels and transition to renewable energy. Our leaders in Albany need to continue to hear our voices.

A major focus for me has been the necessity to transition from our reliance on ‘natural’ fracked gas in order to address the climate crisis, the protection of our waterways, health and safety. I have continued to monitor the proposed Northern Access Pipeline Project which has been kept at bay, but could rise again in the near future. Another project I have been working on is collaboration with Renewable Heat Now. RHN is a coalition of NYS groups including Sierra Club, working on solutions to transition NYS homes and buildings from fossil fuel heating and cooling systems to greenhouse gas emissions free, heat pump technology.

In these challenging times, I am so excited to be working alongside others on the SCNG board towards a more promising future and I would be honored to continue in my role with your support.

“Renewable Energy” continued from front page

by wildfires destroying towns in British Columbia. The United States has not been spared with 116°F in Portland, Oregon, which has caused numerous heat-related deaths.

New York Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES) requires that the best environmental and community health offices be included in the review of large-scale siting. ORES requires the review of the same 25 factors as did the older Article 10 power plant siting procedure.

Unfortunately, for many years, the oil, gas and coal industries have spread misinformation about climate change and have lobbied State and local governments to pass laws restricting renewable energy development. It is well known that the fossil fuel industry titans, such as the Koch Brothers, funded front organizations that have drafted legislation to prevent the development of solar and wind energy, electric vehicles and buses – all the while working to spread the world’s dependency on gas, oil and coal.

In our own Niagara Region, some of this anti-renewable misinformation has found its way to town boards. Opponents of renewable demand that wind and solar developers must pay full property tax assessment on their projects, ignores the fact that all power generation facilities, including coal, gas, and nuclear, pay Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILOTs) as no power generation facility can afford to stay in business with full tax assessments. The proponents of “do not let solar and wind developers cheat the taxpayers”, also completely ignore the fact that PILOTs paid by renewable energy developers often result in 20 to 30 times the amount of taxes collected on vacant land.

Another anti-renewable argument is “why should we provide renewable energy to rich downstate cities, when we have done enough to provide clean energy in Western New York with the Niagara Falls Power Authority hydro project?”. The idea behind the buildout of renewable energy in our state is that all sectors of our economy must be electrified in order to halt carbon dioxide and methane emissions emitted through human activity. We must not only transform our electric system

to renewable-sourced power generation, but must expand electrification of our transportation system (which contributes some 35% of our State’s greenhouse gases) and our heating and cooling system which contributes about the same amount of greenhouse gases. This transformation can only be accomplished by a buildout of renewable-sourced electricity. Our Upstate area is a large contributor of fossil fuel emissions, with its dependency on cars and trucks for personal transportation together with an extensive number of single-family homes.

There are many other bits of misinformation circulating about renewable energy, one which involves the claim that solar panels leak toxic chemicals which penetrate the ground and leak into water. Current solar panels use very little, if any, potentially harmful chemicals. The panels themselves are solidly encapsulated to prevent leakage. The State Department of Agriculture and Markets requires that topsoil be removed from land where solar arrays are placed, and that the soil be returned after the removal of the panels. The panels are regularly inspected by maintenance personnel, and the removal of the arrays is guaranteed by continuing bonding of the arrays required under State law.

The Sierra Club did much to secure a ban on fracked gas in our State. Fracking requires the use of carcinogenic chemicals in its process, and a recent report indicates that the fracking industry has been using chemicals which transform into carcinogenic PCBs over time. These PCBs are the same hazardous materials used in flame retardants which the State has recently banned.

Misinformation is slowing the delivery of the many benefits which would accrue from renewable energy: clean energy without emissions of carbon dioxide or methane; additional tax benefits to small towns, villages, counties and school districts: lease payments to farmers to permit them to maintain their land in agriculture instead of selling acreage to developers; jobs for renewable energy installers, maintenance people and system operators; and reduced electricity rates which are already being offered by community solar companies in our area.

Nominees for 2022-23 term on Niagara Group Executive Committee
IMPORTANT: Single Membership - Use one ballot. Joint Membership - Use both ballots. Ballots must be received by November 30, 2021

NIAGARA GROUP OFFICIAL BALLOTS

BALLOT 1

Board of Governance At-Large Delegates
Choose up to 6 board members

- ROGER COOK
- PAMELA HUGHES
- RICHARD LIPPES
- LISA MERTZ
- SARA SCHULTZ
- DIANA STRABLOW

BALLOT 2

Board of Governance At-Large Delegates
Choose up to 6 board members

- ROGER COOK
- PAMELA HUGHES
- RICHARD LIPPES
- LISA MERTZ
- SARA SCHULTZ
- DIANA STRABLOW

Election Instructions: To be eligible to vote, you must be a member in good standing with the Niagara Group as verified by a member’s mailing label. Please read all of the candidates’ statements on Pages 1 & 2. Indicate your choices by checking the box next to the candidates’ names on the ballot. Each member may complete one ballot. Joint members may complete two ballots. Please detach this page and mail your ballot(s) to the address below in an ordinary letter-size envelope with proper postage. **Send your ballots to:** Niagara Group Elections Committee • Sierra Club Niagara Group • P.O. Box 1127 • Williamsville, NY 14221-1127

Ballots must be received on or before 11/30/2021