

Another Voice: Voters should approve the 2022 environmental bond act

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New York State has a long history of supporting funding for environmental protection. Twenty-five years after the first state park in the nation was established (our Niagara Falls State Park), the first environmental bond act was approved by voters in 1910. This, as well as bonds approved by voters in 1916 and 1924, bought the land and established the foundation of the state park system.

The next wave of environmental bonds were passed between 1960 and 1972. During the same period of environmental awareness, New York voters approved five separate bonds that for the first time protected public health by addressing the impacts of pollution. The 1972 bond, in particular, funded upgrades to wastewater treatment systems across the state, including the Buffalo Sewer Authority.

The next environmental bond, passed in 1986, focused on hazardous wastes and funded the state's Superfund program. A 1990 proposal, which would have focused on protection of drinking water sources (including proper closure of landfills) was narrowly defeated due to the national recession at that time. This proposal was repackaged in 1996, adding funding for environmental restoration of brownfields, and was passed by voters.

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In November, voters will be asked to approve the Clean Water, Clean Air, and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act of 2022. There are four categories that this bond would fund.

The first, Restoration and Flood Risk Reduction, will assist shoreline resiliency projects along Lake Ontario, and will be a funding source to remove or repair aging dams for flood reduction and restore fish habitats.

Second, Water Quality Improvement and Resilient Infrastructure has huge implications for Buffalo, as it will fund municipal stormwater projects to separate an aging, combined sewer system. It also has funding for lead service line replacements, a huge issue in East Buffalo.

Third, Open Space Land Conservation and Recreation is something that the Friends of the Outer Harbor should embrace as they continue to work for a natural, climate resilient passive park.

Finally, Climate Change Mitigation will provide funds to public universities to add green infrastructure and renewable energy to their buildings. It also has provisions to provide relief from urban heat, and funding for

communities such as Buffalo to replace trees lost over the past 60 years.

The 2022 Environmental Bond Act has support from a coalition of environmental and labor groups. As with any statewide ballot proposal, the bond act will be on the back side of the ballot. So don't forget to turn it over and vote yes.

John S. Szalasny is a member of the Sierra Club Niagara Group's executive committee.