



# The Trailblazer

The Niagara Group of The Sierra Club • <https://niagarasierraclub.org> • Vol. 57 No.3 Summer 2022

## Small Victories in Fighting Waste in New York by John Szalasny

For those who have been working on curbing plastic waste, 2022 looked like the year that a packaging [Extended Producer Responsibility](#) (EPR) law would be passed in New York State. Proposed by Governor Kathy Hochul in her state budget, her EPR law failed to be voted on in either house at the end of this year's session. Ironically, it met the same fate as a similarly ballyhooed attempt by Governor Andrew Cuomo to pass an expansion to the [Bottle Bill](#) in his 2019 state budget.

It wasn't all bad news, as the Governor signed [A9279/S5027](#) which establishes a carpet collections program, an EPR program for one of the bulkiest items (mostly made of plastic filaments) currently going to landfills. Also, the Legislature passed [A7006/S4104](#) that requires manufacturers of electronic equipment to provide diagnostic and repair information to consumers and independent repair providers. Despite electronics collections programs, far too many repairable cell phones and other electronics devices are being thrown out. This should reduce that volume, removing both toxic and other scarce metals from our landfills.

With California passing their own EPR packaging law this year, 2023 looks like the year for both the EPR and Expanded Bottle Bill laws. EPR legislation introduced in May by Assemblymember Steven Engelbright ([A10185/S9493](#)) nearly passed this session despite its late introduction. He also has a Bottle Bill proposal ([A10184/S9164](#)) that would expand the types of beverage containers and increase the deposit on bottles to incentivize consumers to redeem the container. Both bills borrow heavily on provisions in the national [Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act](#) and are much stronger than the bills proposed by Hochul and Cuomo.

## Midterm Election Results Will Depend Upon Voter Turnout by Janet Lenichek

According to the latest [NY Times/Siena College survey](#). Democrats and Republicans are beginning the midterm campaign in a surprisingly close race for control of Congress. Once again, voter turnout in November will be critical in swing states such as Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

Consequently, the Sierra Club is asking members to volunteer to call other Sierra Club members and invite them to sign up for phone banking in the fall. If you have never done phone banking with the Sierra Club, you may want to give it a try - it has been proven very effective in getting voters to the polls. Several members of the Sierra Club Niagara Group Executive Committee participated in phone banking, texting and letter writing for the 2020 elections and those actions helped to elect President Biden, as well as Rev. Warnock and Jon Ossoff in Georgia. Here is a [link](#) to sign up for phone banking with Sierra Club.

If you have done phone banking before and decided it is "not your cup of tea", then please consider signing up for [writing postcards to infrequent voters](#) in swing states. I signed up and have been writing postcards all summer. These cards will be mailed in October (about 3 weeks before the election) to voters in swing states. Check the above-mentioned website for more information. You can also contact me at [niagarasierra@gmail.com](mailto:niagarasierra@gmail.com).

Please invest some time in the next 2-3 months encouraging infrequent swing state voters to turn out for the midterm elections. That is the only way to ensure there will be people elected who value the environment and pass legislation to protect the natural world we Sierra Club members treasure so dearly.

## Cryptocurrency May Define the Hochul Legacy

by John Szalasnay

Dresden, NY, a small community on Seneca Lake, has been the epicenter of the discussion of cryptocurrency mining. Earlier this month, the Greenidge Generating Station, the sole source of power for an expanding Bitcoin mining operation, was denied an air quality permit by the NYS DEC. If Governor Hochul thinks that passing the decision to an administrator will resolve the issue, former Buffalo Mayoral Candidate India Walton's [Another Voice](#) article calling on her to approve the moratorium on crypto mining hopefully serves as a wakeup call.

The Legislature passed the Cryptocurrency Mining Center Moratorium ([S.6486-D/A.7389-C](#)) in response to the threat of companies reopening inefficient fossil fuel powered electric plants to operate "behind the meter" to power "proof of work" cryptocurrency mining 24x7x365. Running all the time, mining for Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies is incredibly energy intensive. If currently announced plans for Bitcoin growth come to fruition in New York, the miners would use the same amount of energy as Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany, and Yonkers combined. And that is just one of close to 10,000 cryptocurrencies.

This is not one of those "somewhere else" problems. Bitcoin miner, Digihost, is waiting for a permit to reopen the [Fortistar power plant in North Tonawanda](#). The moratorium would require the state to do an environmental impact statement to determine if these operations are in compliance with state's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. Cities, like Plattsburgh and Niagara Falls already have a crypto moratorium in place. In Niagara Falls, the reviews done during the moratorium pointed out a need to restrict noise levels and to replace "grid energy with renewable energy."

The cryptocurrency moratorium may be the defining moment of the Hochul administration. If she signs the bill, she sides with the health of New York residents. If not, it's a sign that our current Governor has sided with corporate interests over our state's climate mandates.

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## News From the Chair

by Sara Schultz

Good news everyone! Sierra Club Niagara Group has the green light to table again at exciting festivals and events. As we move into August, we hope you will come say "hello" at our table.

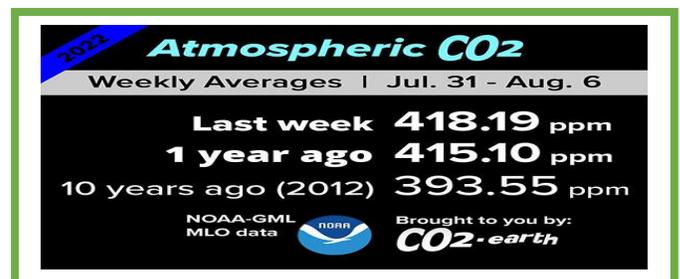
- We will be hanging out in Environmental Row at the [Elmwood Festival of the Arts](#), August 27th from 10am-6pm and August 28 from 10am-5pm. Enjoy this amazing festival and pick up some great info from us on how you can save energy, save money and help the planet!



Sierra Club Niagara Group tabling at the 2019 Elmwood Festival of the Arts

- We are really looking forward to the [Electrify 2.0 Festival](#) that is everything about "electric transportation" and more. Come and ride on a zero emission bus, check out all the cool EVs, see a clean electric school bus or heavy duty truck for the first time. We are planning a lineup of EV advocates to speak about their vision for WNY. This is a family friendly festival Saturday, September 24th, 11am-3pm on the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, 589 Ellicott Street. Save the date and look for more details as we get closer.

Until further notice, our monthly meetings will be held online through Zoom. If you would like notifications for these meetings, or would like to help us at our upcoming events, send us an email at [niagarasierra@gmail.com](mailto:niagarasierra@gmail.com).



### **Bruce Kershner Award**

Given in honor of was a local environmentalist, author and forest ecologist best known for his guidebook **The Secret Places of Western New York**.

The recipient is recognized for his or her individual contribution to the environment.

### **Blake Reeves Award**

Given in honor of the founding father and first Group Chair of the Sierra Club Niagara Group.

Recipients are recognized for an organizational effort to further environmental causes.

## SCNG Annual Awards Ceremony Held at Times Beach

by Larry Beahan and Roger Cook

The Sierra Club Niagara Group held its annual awards ceremony at Times Beach in July to recognize the efforts of those who have made significant contributions to environmental efforts. This year's recipients are **Jajeon Rose Burney**, who received the Bruce Kershner Award, and **Sister Jean Sliwinski**, who received the Blake Reeves Award.

Working through the **Western New York Land Conservancy**, where he is now Deputy Executive Director, Jajeon achieved four exceptionally important goals, any of which makes him worthy of the Bruce Kershner Award:

1. Jajeon was instrumental in the Western NY Land conservancy's acquiring the [College Lodge Forest](#) near Fredonia. It is one of the most exquisite natural areas remaining in Western New York. It is home to old-growth forests, native orchids, and carnivorous marsh plants and the forest's miles of trails are now open to the public.
2. Then he facilitated the purchase and protection of [Stella Niagara Nature Preserve](#). With its 29 acres and over a quarter mile of shoreline, Stella is the largest privately-owned, undeveloped tract of land along the entire length of the Niagara River and it is one of our region's most ecologically and historically important places.
3. Next, he piloted the ecological restoration of the Niagara Gorge.
4. Finally, in 2019, Jajeon obtained the designation of the Niagara River Corridor as a [Ramsar Wetland of International Importance](#), thus focusing the World's attention on the incomparable ecological values of this thundering spectacle in our backyard.

*A Ramsar site is a wetland site designated to be of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. The Ramsar Convention is an intergovernmental environmental treaty established in 1971 by UNESCO. The Convention is named after the city of Ramsar in Iran, where the convention was signed. It provides for national action and international cooperation regarding the conservation of wetlands, Ramsar identifies wetlands of international importance, especially those providing waterfowl habitat.*

Sister Jean is the provincial sustainability coordinator for the Felician Sisters of North America. She received the Blake Reeves Award in recognition of her work from Buffalo to save the largest blackwater wetland in North America. A company was seeking permits to mine near the Okefenokee Swamp and the proposed mining raised the possibility of disrupting the water flow in the swamp. Their involvement was a good fit for the Felician Sisters. As Sister Jean was quoted for a [local report](#), "Our advocacy focuses on three main issues: human rights, water, and climate change. So we heard that the Okefenokee holds thousands of tons of peat ... There's certainly a great climate change danger there."

The largest purchaser for the mined mineral (titanium dioxide) was expected to be Chemours, one of the spinoff companies from Dupont. The Felician Sisters are shareholders in Chemours and had a shareholder motion filed to assess the benefits and drawbacks to mining near the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Three months later, [Chemours pledged not to do business](#) with the mining company for at least the next five years.