

ELECTRONIC VERSION ONLY



Hudson-Mohawk Group

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"This is the American Earth",
photograph by Ansel Adams.
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Rep. Paul Tonko and Professor Eleanor Stein Will Lead Climate Change Conference at Five Rivers Environmental Center – On Hold

The Hudson Mohawk Group was looking forward to our special Conference on Climate Change . It was scheduled for May 7th but of course given the COVID-19 pandemic, the event is postponed. Congressman Paul Tonko, a longtime Sierra Club ally was to lead us off. A leading voice in the House of Representatives on the environment, is in his sixth term. Rep. Tonko is now leading a very ambitious effort as the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Energy and Climate Change. Earlier this year, he and his colleagues rolled out a more than 600-page draft bill, known as the "*Climate Leadership and Environmental Action for Our Nation's (CLEAN) Future Act*," which Rep. Tonko had a very important part in crafting. He will provide updates (eventually) on this effort as well as related environmental issues.

Our featured speaker will be (eventually) Eleanor Stein who is a former administrative law judge at the Public Service Commission where she was instrumental in creating and putting into place REV, (Reforming the Energy Vision) which recognizes the changing nature of the electrical grid which is transforming into a two way grid with the advent of renewable energy, especially solar PV. Currently, Prof. Stein is bringing a new perspective to students taking Law of Climate Change: Domestic & Transnational, her longtime course at Albany Law School. It focuses on living in a relatively stable climate as a human right. Climate change has created many weather-related immigrants and marginalized people around the world. Also, recently Prof. Stein earned an LL.M. in Climate Change Law and Policy from Strathclyde University in Glasgow, Scotland, having graduated with distinction. The Master of Laws program is the first in the world to focus exclusively on climate change law. We believe our members will find this discussion fasci-

nating! We will keep you updated the date and location of this event in the coming months. Please navigate to:

www.sierraclubhudsonmohawk.org for updates.

One Word—Plastics - by Monica Gray

Fifty years ago when the first Earth Day was celebrated in 1970, plastic pollution was not a concern. Plastics were still welcomed as a revolutionary new range of substances -- versatile, convenient, easily disposable. We have learnt a lot since then. With Earth Day 2020 approaching, it's an opportunity for reflection and a renewed call to action. We have a better understanding now of how plastics hang around in our environment or break down into toxic components that harm our environment and our health. In particular, we used to welcome the convenience of plastic packaging that seemed so sanitary and easily disposable, but now we're all realizing that the cost of convenience is too much to pay..

At the very least, plastic bags are an eyesore. We can see bags littering our neighborhoods, fluttering in trees, floating in waterways and harming wildlife. What can we do about it? Here are a few achievable ideas. New York State is tackling the problem by reducing the number of bags in circulation. As of March 1, 2020, a new bag waste reduction law took effect in New York State. In summary, businesses that collect New York State sales tax can no longer provide plastic carryout bags (other than an exempt bag), and cities and counties are authorized to adopt a five-cent paper bag fee. Do your part to prevent litter and waste and support the law by remembering to carry a reusable bag, and cut back on your plastic use. You can read the details on the DEC website: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/50034.html> (See page 2, "Plastics")

Plastics, (cont'd from pg. 1)

As a personal activity, how about organizing an Earth Day neighborhood cleanup? Maybe a local school or community group would like to get involved too. If you do organize an event, or even just get out there yourself, let us know or send a picture to the Hudson Mohawk Group Facebook page so we can celebrate the effort. Want to extend your action beyond plastic bags and litter? How about supporting the growing initiative to ban the sale of plastic water bottles at major transport hubs? As of August 2019, San Francisco Airport banned the sale of single-use plastic water bottles and installed hydration stations. Look at the Beyond Plastics website for draft letters: <https://beyondplastics.org/article/port-authority-plastic-water-bottle-ban/>

Albany County Legislature introduced a ban on plastic drinking straws to take effect this summer. Ask your locality to take action, or let your server know if you don't want a straw. What about our health? Tea drinkers may be alarmed to learn that the new style of "silky" teabags are actually made from nylon or polyethylene terephthalate (PET). When steeped in boiling water the bags release micro-plastics which the happy tea drinker then ingests. Take a look at 2019 McGill University study and consider writing to tea companies and letting them know you don't want a bellyful of contaminants along with your daily cuppa.

<https://www.mcgill.ca/newsroom/channels/news/some-plastic-your-tea-300919>

Finally, we are seeing action at a federal level. There is currently proposed legislation before Congress that could make a national difference. Senator Tom Udall of New Mexico has introduced the Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act. This is Senate Bill S. 3263 and House Bill H.R. 5845. Let your representatives know that you are in favor of national legislation and ask if they will support the bill in your name. You can read the text of the bill on the Congress website: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/3263/> text and go to the Sierra Club website to register your support with fellow club members: <https://addup.sierraclub.org/campaigns/support-break-free-from-plastic-pollution-act-of-2020-to-help-end-single-use-plastic-pollution>



Capital District Pollinator Allies - by Laura Davis

Pollinators are powerful tiny creatures because they sustain life on this planet; without them, there will be no fruit or vegetables, and fewer flowers or trees. Their populations have plummeted due to mistreatment by humans by destruction of natural habitat, use of pesticides, and now the planting of seeds treated with Neonicotinoids (an evil new level insecticide that remains in the plant and poisons the plant to pollinators). While it is easy to feel overwhelmed by all environmental devastation around us, saving pollinators is something we can all participate in and make our world more beautiful in the process.

How often do you see anyone walking on their front lawn, except to mow it? It is useless to pollinators if all that is growing is monoculture of grass that has no nutritional value; a grass lawn is a food desert as inviting as your paved driveway to a butterfly or bee! Too many flower beds are filled with exotic plants that are not attractive to supporting native pollinators. We can change that!

- 1) Join the Capital District Pollinator Allies on Facebook, which will offer you links to great educational resources, and a place to ask your community questions about to establish a pollinator friendly yard.
- 2) A very simple step you can take – blow those dandelion seeds! Among the first flowers to bloom, they are invaluable as a source of nutrition for hungry pollinators as they emerge in the spring.
- 3) Reduce the frequency which you mow and allow clover to flourish in your lawn. (There was a time when lawn seeds included clover for its value to soil, but that was before chemical companies decided they could label it a weed and sell more toxic "lawn care" products to eliminate it.)
- 4) Become aware of what is a native plant and how to recognize an invasive plant species; plant native plants that will feed a greater number of your local pollinators.
- 5) Talk to your neighbors about the need to have wildflower areas for pollinators; ask them to set aside a section of their lawns so that pollinators will not have to waste energy flying over lawn deserts in search of food. Imagine how pretty your neighborhood could be if every home had a corner of wildflowers?
- 6) Look for places to add native plants, or clover seeds – the edge of sidewalks, a corner of a library or park, the edge of a parking lot... see pg. 3



Arondack Park Environmental Lobby Day by
Virginia Boyle Traver and Roger Gray

Sierra Club members joined other environmental group activists on February 10 in the Legislative Office Building for Adirondack Park Environmental Lobby Day. Mention was made that environmental groups, while occasionally not completely in sync, gathered together on this day specifically to push for common goals. Those involved were The Adirondack Council, Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, Protect the Adirondacks!, Adirondack Mountain Club, and Adirondack Wild. Speakers from these groups included Willie Janeway, Michael Barrett, David Gibson, Scott Van Laer, and Peter Bauer. A robust crowd of activists was divided into 10 groups. Each group planned to meet with five legislators, designated in advance. The group leader ensured that lobbyists kept to the schedule finding the appropriate offices at the correct times. Sometimes this could be a challenge, given the distances between offices and the prearranged time between meetings.

The Adirondacks is a such a large and diverse park that many issues need to be discussed with legislators. Areas requiring increased funding include the Restore Mother Nature Bond Act, The New York State Environmental Protection Fund, and the Invasive Species account. In addition, concerned citizens are requesting money to hire more Forest Rangers, address overcrowding and overuse, and for State Land Stewardship. Finally, empty seats at the Adirondack Park Agency need to be filled.

One issue near and dear to the hearts of the Hudson-Mohawk Group is legislation to create an Adirondack Road Salt Task Force (A.8767 / S.6824). Our Group has long been concerned about the issue of road salt contaminating waterways and groundwater wells in the Adirondacks, which has adverse effects on aquatic wildlife and human health. The Task Force will investigate long-term alternatives to heavy winter salting of Adirondack highways.

Often a give-and-take dialogue arose between lobbyists and legislators. Those lawmakers with whom we spoke were interested in all of the park issues, and were well-informed and educated on Adirondack topics. We felt a shared learning which reinforced our sense that lobbying is an important area in which environmental activists can help make a difference.

**SIERRA CLUB HUDSON-MOHAWK GROUP
LEADERSHIP**

Chair: Monica Gray, monicafgray@hotmail.com

Vice Chair: Virginia Boyle Traver,
virginiabt28@hotmail.com

Secretary: John Nemer, jello@hotmail.com

Treasurer: Jim Dufresne: (518) 233-7957;
Jdufre1928@aol.com

Chapter Delegate: Virginia Boyle Traver,
virginiabt28@hotmail.com

Membership: Virginia Boyle Traver,
virginiabt28@hotmail.com

Volunteers/Education Chair: *Tina Lieberman
tlieberm1@gmail.com

Outings Chair: Don Pachner,
wildplaces@verizon.net

Political Chair: Steve Redler (518) 428-8993;
steveredler@yahoo.com

Environmental Justice: Aaron Mair,
aaronmair@yahoo.com

Green Calendar: Tina Lieberman

Newsletter Editor: Pete Sheehan (518) 210-5294
psheehan74@aim.com

Facebook/Webmaster: Jon Nemer
jello165@hotmail.com

Saratoga County Conservation: Bill Koebbeman,
wkebb2@nycap.rr.com

Conservation Chair: Susan Lawrence,
shlawr2@aol.com

(Pollinators (cont'd from pg. 3))

Albany County Legislature passed a resolution making the County a Pollinator Friendly Community; more counties are signing on! Talk to your town, and get momentum moving on helping sustain the pollinators who sustain our food chain. To learn more about this legislation, our friends at Save the Pine Bush have a write up here: http://www.savethepinebush.org/News/2019_06-07/Pollinator_Resolution.html

Sierra Club Hudson Mohawk Group
P.O. Box 8447
Albany, NY 12208

EARTH DAY 2020—HOPE AMID CRISES



Students march on the first Earth Day in 1970. | Photo: NYC Municipal Archives

In the middle of the Coronavirus pandemic and after three years of Donald Trump's attack on every sector of the environment, the Hudson Mohawk Group Executive Committee wishes our members health safety and offers optimism in the face of these multiple threats. Our hope is that a year from now, COVID-19 will be under control, Joe Biden will be President and that his administration will be well underway in restoring our environmental laws including the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act, both of which of course were the eventual product of that first Earth Day. There will be virtual gatherings on April 22nd and renewed hope that the spirit of that first Earth Day will buoy the American people to renew our commitment to a clean environment and have faith in government leaders to follow through on efforts to restore Mother Earth!