

# Our Shared Environment, Our DEC



# 2023

## Agency Highlights and Accomplishments



Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation

Governor Kathy Hochul  
Commissioner Basil Seggos



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The sun sets over Lake Ontario.





# Letter from the Commissioner

Scientists confirmed 2023 as **the warmest year on record**. Communities across the state experienced severe storms and record-breaking rainfall, which caused widespread flooding and damage to homes, businesses, and infrastructure. The unprecedented impacts of **smoke from wildland fires** across Canada led to a two-fold DEC response. DEC's Division of Air Resources closely monitored air quality conditions statewide and worked with the Department of Health to issue timely public health advisories that millions of New Yorkers depended on, while DEC Forest Rangers and wildland firefighters responded to multiple deployments to assist firefighters in Canada and western states with suppression efforts. These trends are sobering reminders of the catastrophic consequences of the climate crisis and the need for action.

Today, as New York and the world continue to **confront climate change**, DEC's mission to preserve, protect, and enhance the state's environment and natural resources is more critical and consequential than ever before. Thankfully, DEC's 3,300 dedicated professionals continue to rise to the challenge in communities across the state, delivering sustainable programs and solutions to protect the environment and improve the quality of life for future generations, while setting the pace for national action. The **unprecedented support for DEC priorities** by Governor Kathy Hochul and the State Legislature, particularly in the 2023-24 State Budget, is also instrumental in helping make this and our many achievements possible.

In the past year, DEC continued to implement the requirements of the **Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act** (Climate Act). Working with our partners at the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), we advanced **New York's Cap-and-Invest Program** (NYCI) to reduce climate-altering emissions from all economic sectors. The revenue generated from NYCI will be used to equitably invest in cleaner energy solutions, further reducing emissions. To close out the year, DEC and NYSERDA released two important documents: a Pre-Proposal Outline to advance the development of regulations to implement NYCI, and an Affordability

Study to help plan for the equitable distribution of NYCI revenue. Moving forward, these documents will drive critical conversations with stakeholders.

In 2023, DEC also oversaw the successful rollout of the **\$4.2 billion Clean Water, Clean Air and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act**—the largest environmental Bond Act in State history—as well as historic investments to support critical water infrastructure improvement projects across the state. And, thanks to Governor Hochul's continued strong support for clean water infrastructure funding and the State's **Environmental Protection Fund** (EPF) at \$400 million, DEC bolstered its efforts to enact critical watershed

protections, monitor and combat emerging contaminants and invasive species, and improve and expand access to natural resources.

To advance **environmental justice** in frontline communities that have historically borne the brunt of pollution and climate change impacts, DEC worked with the Climate Justice Working Group to finalize criteria for disadvantaged communities to

receive benefits of Climate Act investments. DEC also released a new draft policy for evaluating and averting disproportionate impacts of permitting actions on New York State's disadvantaged communities.

For more than a half century, DEC has been a national leader of the environmental movement. From Lake Erie and the Adirondacks to the tip of Long Island, DEC's work can be found in every corner of our great state. Decades of investments to **reduce pollution** is restoring water quality and dramatically improving the quality of the air we breathe. The pages that follow highlight many, but certainly not all, of the agency's significant achievements and sustained efforts to protect public health and the environment, and I am proud to present DEC's Annual Report for 2023. Please continue to follow our progress on DEC's social media (@NYSDEC) and at [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov).



Basil Seggos, Commissioner



A photograph of an offshore wind turbine and an oil rig in the ocean. The wind turbine is white with three blades, and the oil rig is a tall, lattice-structured tower. The ocean is a deep blue, and the sky is a lighter blue. A dark blue rectangular box is overlaid on the image, containing the text "Climate and Air".

# Climate and Air



## Community Air Monitoring Initiative

DEC's historic statewide air quality monitoring initiative completed the collection of data from 10 disadvantaged communities historically overburdened by environmental pollution and home to approximately five million New Yorkers—25 percent of the state's population. The effort to **measure local air pollution** burdens, including greenhouse gases, is the largest ever undertaken by DEC. Working in partnership with community-based organizations, DEC held more than 50 public meetings to support this initiative, which provided a forum to hear air quality concerns directly from local residents and provide preliminary monitoring results. Next steps include validating the measurements, analyzing the results, and reporting the findings to the communities. DEC contracted with Aclima and will utilize the findings to recommend pollutant reduction strategies in the study communities. This first-ever statewide mobile monitoring complements DEC's existing efforts to measure levels of outdoor air pollution at more than 50 stationary sites across New York. These efforts are part of the State's actions under the nation-leading Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (Climate Act).

To view a video about DEC's community air monitoring program, go to: <https://on.ny.gov/3SS8h9x>.



Aclima mobile air pollution monitoring car.

## New York Cap-and-Invest Program

New York State is undertaking one of the most ambitious efforts in the U.S. to address climate change by reducing climate-altering emissions from every sector of the economy. In January, Governor Hochul announced a Cap-and-Invest Program to fund a sustainable and affordable future for all New Yorkers as part of her 2023 State of the State address. New York's Cap-and-Invest Program (NYCI) will reduce harmful climate-altering greenhouse gas emissions, improve public health, and help combat climate change while advancing environmental justice and investing in disadvantaged communities statewide. DEC and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) undertook extensive stakeholder outreach to begin developing the regulatory framework to implement the proposal and in December, released two key documents and announced additional stakeholder meetings. The Pre-Proposal Outline and Climate Affordability Study provide a framework for the NYCI program design and distribution of benefits to help ensure the program achieves a **declining cap on greenhouse gas emissions**, limits energy costs to New Yorkers, invests proceeds in equitable programs that drive emissions reductions, and helps maintain the competitiveness of New York businesses and industries.



An offshore wind turbine under construction.



## Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative

The [Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative](#) (RGGI) is a multistate effort to cap and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Created in 2005, RGGI has helped spur additional programs that promote clean, renewable energy and curb harmful emissions. **RGGI is the nation's first emissions trading program and is resulting in significant reductions in power plant emissions.** To date, the investment of almost \$3.6 billion in RGGI proceeds is expected to reduce regional carbon dioxide emissions by 53.2 million tons and save consumers more than \$16.1 billion over the lifetime of those investments. Auctions raised more than \$293 million in 2023 to help support New York's emissions reduction efforts.



## DEC Files Draft Greenhouse Gas Regulations

DEC filed draft regulations to **reduce emissions of two potent greenhouse gases**, hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) and sulfur hexafluoride (SF<sub>6</sub>). HFCs are extremely potent greenhouse gases often used in refrigeration and cooling that have hundreds to thousands of times higher global warming potential than natural refrigerants. DEC filed the proposed amendments to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions from refrigerants, foams, and aerosol propellants. The draft HFC regulation includes prohibitions, reporting, and other requirements regarding the sale, use, and supply of HFCs and new products and systems that contain HFCs, to help achieve the required statewide greenhouse gas emission limits set forth in the Climate Act. SF<sub>6</sub> is the most potent greenhouse gas. In New York State, it is used in electric power transmission and distribution equipment. DEC also filed a new draft regulation designed to phase down the use of SF<sub>6</sub> in gas-insulated equipment (GIE) used by the electricity sector. The proposed regulation includes a phaseout of the installation of new SF<sub>6</sub> GIE, an emissions limit for GIE owners, limitations on the use of SF<sub>6</sub>, and reporting requirements for certain users and suppliers of SF<sub>6</sub> and other fluorinated greenhouse gases.

## Value of Carbon Guidance

In August 2023, [DEC updated the Value of Carbon guidance](#) to specifically add the social costs per ton of SF<sub>6</sub> and HFC-236fa, which have the highest values compared to other greenhouse gases per ton due to their long-lasting and high-impact nature. **The Value of Carbon guidance is a key tool for State actions to reduce climate-altering greenhouse gas emissions** and advance the ongoing implementation of the Climate Act. The guidance updates provide a current and accurate estimate of the cost of each additional ton of greenhouse gas emissions, and help estimate the benefit of actions taken to reduce emissions.

## DEC Issues Annual Statewide Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report

In December, DEC issued the [2023 Statewide Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report](#). The annual report describes statewide greenhouse gas emissions for 1990–2021 from all sources in the state. **The report tracks critical trends that inform programs and policies to implement New York State's historic Climate Act and reduce climate-altering pollution.** Total statewide gross greenhouse gas emissions in 2021 (the most recent data available) were nine percent below 1990 and 20 percent below 2005 levels. The report is foundational to the State's efforts under the Climate Act, as it measures annual progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and provides information regarding trends in greenhouse gas emissions across various economic sectors. It also provides more detailed information about sources of greenhouse gas emissions and emission factors associated with different types of fuels. The comprehensive report utilizes best available science and data to describe greenhouse gas statewide emissions, including those from electricity, industry, and agriculture. The 2023 report also describes the emission contributions of the state's forests and natural lands that will help the State reach its goal of net-zero emissions by 2050.





## Climate Smart Communities Program

In October 2023, [Governor Hochul announced 23 new certified Climate Smart Communities](#), bringing the total for 2023 to 42, **the highest-ever number of certified communities in a single year**. Overall, the Climate Smart Communities Program hit a milestone with more than 400 registered and certified communities across the state. The program supports local governments taking locally driven actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to a changing climate, offering grants, rebates for electric vehicles, and free technical assistance available through Climate Smart Communities Coordinators.

For a video discussing the Climate Smart Communities Program, see: <https://on.ny.gov/436VLYR>.

**CLIMATE SMART COMMUNITIES PROGRAM:**

**400+**

**REGISTERED AND CERTIFIED COMMUNITIES ACROSS NEW YORK STATE**



DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos joined several communities in Westchester County in Hastings-on-Hudson to announce newly certified Climate Smart Communities.

## Climate Pollution Reduction Planning Grant

In August 2023, DEC was awarded nearly \$3 million for climate planning through Phase I of EPA's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant program. Through this initiative, funded by President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, states and metropolitan areas across the country are tasked with establishing or strengthening their climate action plans. DEC is working closely with NYSERDA and the New York State Department of State on this program to **prioritize projects and programs that would benefit New Yorkers and result in the greatest greenhouse gas reductions.**

## Extreme Heat Action Plan


Governor Hochul's 2022 State of the State address included a directive that DEC and NYSERDA develop an [Extreme Heat Action Plan](#) to **help New Yorkers better understand and prepare for the impacts of extreme heat**. Nearly 30 State agencies are working together as part of the Extreme Heat Action Plan Work Group to address immediate and long-term actions to reduce the dangers of extreme heat driven by climate change.



## Well Plugging Projects

New York continues to reduce climate-altering greenhouse gas emissions by **addressing threats from unplugged oil and gas wells abandoned by their original owners or operators**. To locate orphaned oil and gas wells, DEC is successfully using new tools and techniques, including drones equipped with magnetometers. Once located, DEC inspectors evaluate the wells and give each a priority score for well plugging. Thousands of orphaned and abandoned wells are scattered across the landscape of central and western New York State. Proper plugging protects ground and surface waters, as well as public health and safety. In 2023, DEC directed the plugging of 40 orphaned and abandoned oil and gas wells. In addition to NY Works funding, DEC received more than \$33 million in federal grant funding for well plugging through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act.

To view a video about drones helping to locate abandoned wells, see: <https://on.ny.gov/49Owu7R>.

**DEC DIRECTED  
THE PLUGGING OF**  
**40**   
**ORPHANED AND  
ABANDONED  
OIL AND GAS WELLS**  
**IN 2023.**



Workers plugging an orphan well.





# Climate Change Resilience



## Resiliency and Economic Development Initiative (REDI)

In response to the extended pattern of flooding along the shores of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River, New York State established the Resiliency and Economic Development Initiative (REDI) in 2019 to **increase the resiliency of shoreline communities and bolster economic development in the region.** Through REDI, the State committed up to \$300 million to benefit communities and improve resiliency in flood prone regions along Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. Since its creation, 134 REDI-funded local and regional projects have been advanced and 84 projects completed. These projects include wastewater infrastructure improvements, and the addition of floating docks, shoreline stabilizations, and roadway improvements. Seventy-eight percent of REDI Projects are now in the construction phase or complete.



SINCE THE CREATION OF THE REDI PROGRAM,

# 134

PROJECTS UNDERWAY

# 84

COMPLETED.

## Piermont Marsh Pilot Shoreline Stabilization Project

In July, DEC, in partnership with the New York State Thruway Authority, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and the Hudson River Valley Greenway, completed a pilot project to **stabilize the shoreline to help protect against marsh loss and bolster the resilience of the adjacent village of Piermont.** Piermont Marsh is one of four sites within the Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve and is the largest brackish tidal marsh in the estuary, providing ecologically significant habitat that is uncommon in the region. However, the shoreline has significantly eroded over the past 75 years, resulting in an overall loss of marsh area and native low-marsh vegetation.



Staff and volunteers installed more than 8,000 oyster castles as part of the Piermont Marsh stabilization project.









# Land and Water Protection



## New York Awards \$30 Million in Septic System Replacement Grants

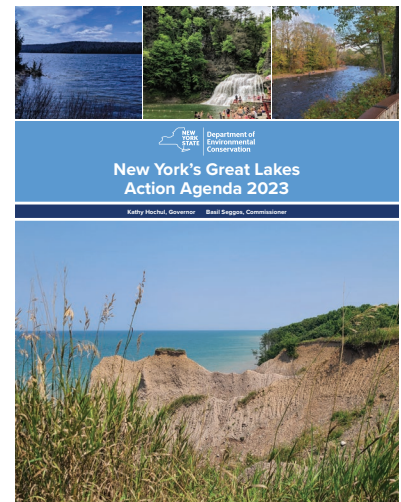
In December, Governor Hochul announced \$30 million for a critical water infrastructure grant program that **improves water quality by encouraging and incentivizing homeowners' replacement of cesspools and failing or inadequate septic systems** around waterbodies known to be impaired by septic system discharges. This funding builds upon a total of \$60 million in grants administered to date and adds up to 19 new counties eligible for septic replacement grants. DEC and the New York State Department of Health identified priority geographic areas where property owners are eligible to participate based on the presence of a sole-source aquifer used for drinking water, known water quality impairment linked to failing septic systems, and the ability for septic system upgrades to mitigate water quality impairments. Suffolk County will receive \$20 million of the funding to bolster the region's efforts to protect Long Island's sole-source aquifer.

### *Suffern Wastewater Treatment Plant*

In spring 2023, the village of Suffern completed significant wastewater plant upgrades required by DEC. The village has been consistently in compliance with all wastewater permitted effluent limits since the completion of the upgrade.

## Water Quality Criteria for in and around New York City

Through effective communication and public engagement, DEC negotiated **the adoption of new water quality standards that will have generational impacts on water quality in the state**. In October, DEC adopted regulations that set more stringent limitations on certain bacteria to further help protect public health when using marine waterways through recreational and shellfishing activities. The regulations will bring about additional water quality improvements and greater opportunities for safe swimming and boating in and around New York City, Long Island, and the Lower Hudson Valley.



## Release of Great Lakes Action Agenda 2023

In July, DEC's Great Lakes Program developed and finalized an updated Great Lakes Action Agenda, **a strategic action plan to advance New York's priorities for clean water, healthy ecosystems, and sustainable, resilient communities**. To date, DEC has engaged more than 350 organizations and individuals in regional stakeholder meetings to facilitate partnerships and collective action to implement the agenda. DEC hosted four stakeholder meetings in each of the four major sub-basins of the state's Great Lakes region. More than 200 attendees participated in person and virtually to learn about the Agenda, connect with organizational partners, and share project information to inform future watershed planning and restoration work.



## Great Lakes Shore Viewer

DEC's Great Lakes Program has launched the [New York Great Lakes Shore Viewer](#), an interactive map that allows users to explore approximately 850 miles of New York's Great Lakes shorelines, including Lake Erie, the Niagara River, Lake Ontario, the St. Lawrence River, and many of the larger embayments. The viewer includes coastal oblique aerial imagery—3D aerial views of ground objects from multiple perspectives—of the New York Great Lakes shorelines collected annually by citizen volunteers with the Civil Air Patrol, in partnership with DEC. Routinely updated and publicly accessible coastal oblique imagery is intended to support State resiliency programs, promote ecosystem-based shoreline management, and assist with shoreline change monitoring.

## State of the Ocean 2023

DEC released the State of the Ocean 2023 report, which provides an overview of actions taken to advance the New York Ocean Action Plan (OAP). The report highlights partnerships and achievements from the first five years of the OAP that include the four interconnected goals of enhancing ecological integrity, promoting sustainable growth, adapting to change, and empowering public stewardship. **The OAP is a coordinated and inclusive effort focused on improving the health of ocean ecosystems** and their capacity to provide sustainable benefits to New Yorkers.

## Water Quality Guidance to Regulate PFOA, PFOS, and 1,4-Dioxane

Working with the New York State Department of Health, DEC issued new [guidance](#) on emerging contaminants that **support the State's ongoing efforts to protect public health and the environment**, and prevent pollution from reaching drinking water sources. Final water quality guidance values to regulate perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS), and 1,4-dioxane in New York State waters were released in March 2023. These guidance values reinforce DOH's maximum contaminant levels for PFOA, PFOS, and 1,4-dioxane in finished drinking water, providing an extra margin of safety against potential contamination and provide protection for aquatic life. The guidance values will be incorporated into requirements for permitted industrial dischargers to reduce the potential contribution of emerging contaminants to the environment.




NYC DEP



Before (above) and after green infrastructure project in Queens.

## NYC Green Infrastructure Order Modification

DEC negotiated a new agreement with New York City that modifies the 2012 Combined Sewer Overflow Consent Order and helps **ensure the continued improvement of the health of New York City waterways for years to come**. As part of the agreement, New York City committed to investing \$3.5 billion to build green infrastructure in sewer areas across all five boroughs. This investment will help to better manage the more intense rainfall and severe weather that climate change is bringing to the region and improve water quality in New York Harbor. Additionally, this agreement will help reduce combined sewer overflows to New York City waterways by 1.67 billion gallons per year by 2040.

The Green Infrastructure agreement with New York City will help  
**REDUCE COMBINED SEWER OVERFLOWS TO NEW YORK CITY WATERS BY**  
**1.67 billion**   
**GALLONS PER YEAR BY 2040.**



## Progress on Restoring New York’s ‘Areas of Concern’

In 2023, two additional Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs)—Degradation of Benthos and Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat—were removed in the Buffalo River Area of Concern (AOC), designated due to extensive contamination from a legacy of heavy industrial activity in the region. To date, **five of nine BUIs have been removed in this AOC**, showing significant progress in restoring the waterway and the ecosystems that depend on it. For the Rochester Embayment Area of Concern, the final BUI (Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat) was removed in October 2023 and enables New York to now begin delisting this AOC.

## Finger Lakes Action Agenda

The Finger Lakes Watershed Hub is developing a Finger Lakes Watershed Action Agenda guided by a Steering Committee consisting of DEC, local and State agency partners, and watershed stakeholders. The committee will create a shared vision with targeted measurable actions **to improve and protect natural resources of the 11 Finger Lakes and their watersheds**. Action agendas are important tools that provide a unifying framework for key stakeholders and outline multifaceted and cross-cutting benefits that help achieve common goals. The Finger Lakes Watershed Action Agenda will closely align with the Great Lakes Action Agenda and will be released for public comment in 2024, providing an opportunity for stakeholders to submit feedback and aid in the finalization of this important document.

## Finger Lakes Grants Program

In 2023, DEC announced a new \$350,000 Finger Lakes Grants Program to help partners in the Finger Lakes watershed restore and protect water quality. Eight projects were funded to achieve the goals outlined in the Great Lakes Action Agenda and aid the implementation of clean water plans in the Finger Lakes region. The grants program complements private funding, federal grants, and other DEC funding sources. The grants will be used to **implement projects to restore and protect water quality** by supporting research to better understand and address the issues and vulnerabilities facing the Finger Lakes; to plan and implement best management practices; to educate and increase public understanding of Finger Lakes natural resources; to build community involvement; and to encourage stewardship of the resource. The program is supported by New York State’s Environmental Protection Fund.

## Resilient NY Stream Studies Program

The Resilient NY Stream Studies program is undertaking comprehensive analyses on 60 high-priority, flood-prone watersheds throughout New York State to reduce flooding and ice jam formations and improve riparian ecology. The program employs advanced hydrologic and hydraulic modeling techniques and field assessments **to identify priority projects to reduce flooding and ice jam risks**. The studies incorporate future climate change forecasts and will provide communities with a path forward to mitigate future flooding. In 2023, DEC completed Resilient NY Stream Studies on Blind Brook and Mamaroneck/Sheldrake Rivers (Westchester County), Catskill Creek (Greene County), and Main Street Brook (Ulster County). DEC also launched flood studies on the main stem of the Mohawk River, Salmon River (Franklin County), Beaver Swamp Brook, Hutchinson River and Bronx River (Westchester County), Shotwell Creek (Onondaga County), and the Upper Genesee River (Allegany County). To date, 38 flood studies have been completed.



### *Sandbar Park Wastewater Pump Station, Monroe County*

The Monroe County Department of Environmental Services sandbar wastewater pump station control building and standby generator were originally constructed at an elevation vulnerable to water intrusion from Irondequoit Bay during flooding. To mitigate future flooding, DEC oversaw construction of **a new masonry flood wall around the pump station to keep water from flowing into the building and damaging electrical and mechanical equipment**.



An aerial photograph of a large-scale construction or demolition site. The ground is heavily disturbed, with numerous tracks from heavy machinery. In the center, there is a large pile of debris and a partially demolished structure. Several pieces of heavy machinery, including excavators and trucks, are visible. The surrounding area appears to be a mix of cleared land and some remaining vegetation. The overall scene suggests a major earthmoving or construction project.

# Chemicals and Contaminants



## State Superfund

Under New York's State Superfund Program, the State identifies, investigates, and cleans up sites where significant amounts of hazardous waste may exist. DEC continues to make significant progress on the cleanup of State Superfund sites. To date, DEC has overseen the cleanup of 1,977 sites through the State Superfund program, with 927 registry sites currently in the program. In 2023, DEC oversaw 31 cleanups under the State Superfund Program.

In addition, DEC enforcement resulted in \$40.2 million in cost recovery revenue in 2023 to hold polluters accountable for contaminating communities.

## Reducing Toxic Chemicals in Products

New York continues to be at the forefront in keeping toxic chemicals out of consumer products, our homes, and the environment. In 2023, DEC implemented three laws, including a sales ban that restricts the presence of asbestos, benzene, and a toxic flame retardant in children's products. Additional laws that went into effect this year include a ban on the use of pavement sealers containing coal tar, and further reductions in the allowable amount of 1,4-dioxane in household cleaning and personal care products. Together, these laws will not only reduce consumers' exposure to toxic chemicals in the products we buy and use every day, but also **reduce the amount of toxic chemicals that make their way into the environment** at the end of a product's lifecycle.

## RCRA Facility Oversight

DEC is federally delegated to implement the RCRA program for New York State. As a delegated agency, DEC adopts and enforces regulations, issues permits, oversees remediation activities, conducts inspections, provides technical assistance, and gathers and processes data related to hazardous waste management. DEC promotes sound waste management and helps **minimize the generation of industrial hazardous wastes**, common by-products of commerce and industry.

During the past year, DEC:

- oversaw the operation, closure, and remediation of 46 regulated facilities;
- reviewed approximately 1,000 annual reports from RCRA facilities;
- conducted 326 RCRA compliance inspections;
- issued more than 153 notices of violation;
- made 15 determinations of significant non-compliance; and
- issued 12 final compliance orders.

## Brownfield Program

New York State's Brownfield Cleanup Program encourages the voluntary cleanup of contaminated properties so they can be reused and redeveloped, benefiting the community and region. In 2023, DEC accepted 68 new sites into the program and issued 58 Certificates of Completion.

To view a video about the Moyer Carriage brownfield cleanup project, see: <https://on.ny.gov/42SbOcP>.



## Radiation Control and Technical Assistance

DEC plays a key role in the regulation, inspection, and permitting of radioactive materials releases from manufacturing facilities, hospitals, and radiopharmacies (a.k.a., nuclear pharmacies). In 2023, DEC continued oversight of facilities under State jurisdiction and continued to **provide comprehensive technical support and oversight of sites with radioactive contaminants**, while supporting emergency services involving environmental threats from radioactive materials.



## Tanker Truck Rollover and Spill, Oneida County

In September 2023, DEC coordinated the containment and cleanup of thousands of gallons of asphalt emulsion at the site of a tanker truck rollover on a bridge over the West Branch of the Mohawk River in the town of Lewis. An estimated 5,000 gallons of emulsion were released into the East Branch of the Mohawk River. There were no impacts to public drinking water supplies, but a fish kill of approximately 15,500 fish was reported downstream. Within 48 hours of the spill, fish moved back into the area and it is anticipated that fish populations have returned to pre-spill levels. DEC's evaluation of environmental impacts related to this incident is ongoing as of publication, with DEC continuing to oversee site cleanup and restoration through spring 2024.



Tanker truck leaking emulsion into the East Branch of the Mohawk River.

## DEC Finalizes Regulation to Prevent Glyphosate Exposure on State Property

In May 2023, DEC finalized regulations **that prevent potential exposure to the herbicide active ingredient glyphosate**. The new regulations require New York State agencies and public benefit corporations to only apply glyphosate-containing pesticides on State property for essential purposes. Essential purposes include roadside safety, protection of critical infrastructure, and management of habitat to control invasive species. State entities must develop a human exposure assessment and a glyphosate alternative analysis to further protect public health and the environment. The regulation also requires State entities to report the application of glyphosate-containing pesticides to DEC, which will post the information annually to the DEC website.





# Waste and Recycling



## New York's Bottle Bill Celebrates 40 Years

New York's Bottle Bill was enacted in 1983 with the purpose of **reducing litter and facilitating recycling** by providing an incentive that encourages the return of empty beverage containers for recycling. The Bottle Bill has become one of New York's most successful recycling initiatives, with New Yorkers achieving an average recycling rate of 65 percent for covered containers, and redeeming and recycling more than 171 billion beverage containers, equaling more than 10 million tons of plastic, glass, and aluminum. DEC continues to investigate complaints and prevent and prosecute fraudulent activities. In October, DEC announced an effort that will bring together several State agencies to work to prevent illegal redemption schemes.



Crushed and baled cans ready for recycling.

## DEC Releases New York State Solid Waste Management Plan

In December, DEC issued the 2023-2032 New York State Solid Waste Management Plan, a **milestone in the State's ongoing efforts to ensure New York is at the forefront of rethinking waste.** The [New York State Solid Waste Management Plan: Building the Circular Economy through Sustainable Materials Management](#) is a 10-year plan that describes actions to reduce the climate impact of solid waste and provides direction for New York's waste reduction, reuse, recycling, collection, transportation, and disposal investments, policies, and practices over the next decade. The plan is a roadmap for advancing more sustainable solid waste management to reduce landfilled waste and address one of New York's largest contributors to climate-altering greenhouse gases. Diverting waste from landfills and renewing a resilient and recycled supply chain is integral to achieving the goals of the Climate Act. The plan sets forth six major focus areas: waste reduction and reuse; recycling and recycling market development and resiliency; product stewardship and extended producer responsibility; organics reduction and recycling; toxics reduction in products; and advanced design and operation of solid waste management facilities.

To view a video about DEC's Solid Waste Management Plan, see: <https://on.ny.gov/3OQGxkH>.

### SINCE THE ADOPTION OF THE BOTTLE BILL:

NEW YORKERS  
ACHIEVED AN AVERAGE  
RECYCLING RATE OF

**65%**

FOR COVERED  
CONTAINERS

REDEEMING  
AND RECYCLING

**171+**  
**billion**

BEVERAGE CONTAINERS

EQUALING 10+ MILLION TONS OF  
PLASTIC, GLASS, AND ALUMINUM.



## Five-Million-Pound Food Donation Milestone

The passage of the Food Donation and Food Scraps Recycling Law in 2019 marked a **major step in DEC's efforts to enhance food donation and increase the capture of food scraps for recycling**. The law, which took effect on January 1, 2022, requires large businesses and institutions that generate an annual average of two tons or more of wasted food per week to donate edible food to the maximum extent practicable, and to recycle remaining food scraps when there is an organics recycling facility with capacity within 25 miles. To assist with food donation, DEC has contracted with Feeding NYS statewide food bank network and has provided them with more than \$4 million to assist food donation in New York State.

The funding has provided food donation technical assistance for businesses required to comply with the law, drivers' salaries, vehicle expenses, cooling and transportation equipment, and staffing and outreach/education needs at the 10 regional food banks. In 2023, Feeding New York State achieved the milestone of five million pounds of food donated, keeping healthy food out of landfills and available to New Yorkers in need.



Commissioner Seggos announcing the five-million-pound milestone.





# Environmental Justice



## Indigenous Nations Consultations

In 2023, DEC met with Indigenous Nations to **further discussions about hunting, fishing, and gathering activities by Nation members**. These discussions are informing public policy in development. In May, DEC met with the Seneca Nation of Indians to learn about existing conservation efforts at the Seneca Nation walleye fish hatchery and learn about important species for subsistence harvesting by Nation members. In December, DEC met with the Shinnecock Nation to learn about the specific challenges and resource needs of coastal Indigenous communities. In June, DEC co-hosted the virtual Annual Indian Nations Leadership Meeting with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to discuss shared priorities for protecting human health and the natural environment. This meeting was followed up in November with the first in-person Indian Nation Leaders Meeting since 2019, reconvening our respective leadership to collaborate on issues of environmental justice, climate change resiliency, hazard mitigation planning, and emerging contaminants.



St. Regis Mohawk Tribe Forestry Technician (left) describes the effects of Emerald Ash Borer on black ash trees, a cultural keystone species for the Mohawk People.

## Finalizing Disadvantaged Communities Criteria

In March, the Climate Justice Working Group finalized the criteria by which **disadvantaged communities will be identified in accordance with the Climate Act**. The finalized criteria includes 45 indicators of population characteristics and environmental burdens and climate change risks that will be targeted for greenhouse gas and co-pollutant reduction. Additionally, a requirement of 35 percent of the benefits from State investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency spending must be realized in these communities. In addition to geographic disadvantaged communities identified by the census tract data, households with an annual income at or below 60 percent of the State median income, as well as 19 census tracts that contain federally designated reservation territories are treated as disadvantaged communities for the purposes of ensuring access to the State's energy affordability investments. While the disadvantaged communities criteria were borne out of the Climate Act, the criteria are now being adopted in other laws and policies, including the Clean Water, Clean Air and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act and Executive Order 22, to advance equity and justice statewide.

## DEC Releases Draft Policy to Avert Disproportionate Impacts of Permitting Actions on Disadvantaged Communities

In September, DEC released a new [draft policy](#) to implement environmental justice provisions of the Climate Act for public comment. The draft policy provides guidance on DEC's permitting processes for considering impacts and existing burdens on New York's most vulnerable communities. Under the Climate Act, all **State agencies must avoid actions that would disproportionately burden such disadvantaged communities** when issuing permits, licenses, and other administrative approvals and decisions, and shall prioritize reductions of greenhouse gas emissions and co-pollutants in disadvantaged communities. The draft policy describes the content of analyses required by DEC, the procedures DEC will follow when reviewing those analyses, and provides procedural guidance for enhanced public participation. DEC will evaluate all public comments and issue a final policy in 2024.





## Addressing Mount Vernon's Water Infrastructure Crisis

DEC, the State Department of Health, the city of Mount Vernon, and Westchester County made significant progress in implementing Governor Hochul's \$150 million initiative to address longstanding water infrastructure and related public health challenges that plagued Mount Vernon for decades, as well as advance environmental justice in the city. Aging sanitary and storm sewer systems in the city caused water quality violations in the Hutchinson and Bronx Rivers. The innovative State-county-city partnership initiated three separate construction programs to repair sewer and storm sewer infrastructure, fixed more than 20 storm-damaged homes, and is far along in completing the lead service line inventory that will set the stage for the comprehensive removal of all drinking water lead service lines in Mount Vernon.



An aerial photograph of a natural landscape. In the foreground, a dense forest of evergreen trees covers a hillside. A winding river flows through a marshy area in the middle ground. The background shows rolling hills under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. A large, semi-transparent blue rectangle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the title text.

# Protecting Natural Resources



## Long Island Shellfish Restoration Project

As part of the Shellfish Restoration Initiative, DEC worked with multiple Long Island municipalities, educational institutions, and the shellfish industry to complete **the largest shellfish restoration project in New York State**. In 2023, DEC completed shellfish stocking at the Hempstead Bay Sanctuary, one of five sanctuaries established to help restore critical shellfish populations and marine habitats, improve water quality, support the shellfish industry, and build stronger coastlines. Approximately 1.5 million clams were stocked in the Hempstead Bay Sanctuary with the assistance of Stony Brook University and shellfish dealers. The multiyear project stocked more than 167 million juvenile and adult shellfish in five shellfish sanctuaries in Nassau and Suffolk counties. Stony Brook University is monitoring the sanctuary sites to evaluate the success of the restoration project and help inform future shellfish restoration efforts.



Hard clams being stocked at Shinnecock Bay Sanctuary.

## Small Mammal Distribution Survey

As part of a statewide effort to increase understanding of the distribution and conservation status of small and cryptic mammal species, DEC and partners **surveyed more than 20 sites throughout the Hudson Valley using cameras and environmental genetic sampling**. This project was initiated in 2018 as a group effort between DEC, SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and the New York Natural Heritage Program. A revised methodology was implemented in 2023 to leverage the power of environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling, increasing the number of sites that can be surveyed. DEC surveyed 27 sites with 11 different habitat types using cameras and eDNA sampling, along with lethal pitfall traps at a few of the sites to enable the collection of voucher specimens. The photographs and samples will be analyzed to identify all the species detected. The results will help determine which species need protection or additional research.



Chris Evans

Northern cricket frog.

## Rare Amphibian and Reptile Monitoring

DEC conducted rare amphibian and reptile monitoring efforts on public and private lands for four New York State threatened or endangered reptile and amphibian species in the Hudson Valley. The four species (bog turtle, Blanding's turtle, timber rattlesnake, and northern cricket frog) are under constant pressure from habitat loss, environmental degradation, poaching, and persecution. DEC staff monitor these species and their habitats annually to detect population trends and identify management needs. All of these species have specialized habitat requirements, and frogs are particularly vulnerable to pollutants and changes in water quality. Turtles have naturally high juvenile mortality, so adult survival is the key to population persistence, and the loss of a single adult female can have devastating consequences for a small population. The bog turtle work is conducted in collaboration with other states and federal agencies. The northern cricket frog efforts are currently focused on developing a plan for restoring frogs to previously occupied sites where they have been extirpated.





# Sustainability





DEC  
SUSTAINABILITY GOAL:  
CARBON-NEUTRAL  
OPERATIONS BY  
**2050**

## DEC's First Sustainability Plan

In May, DEC announced the release of the **the agency's first-ever sustainability plan**. The [plan](#) guides DEC's Sustainability Program over the next five years and sets 25 ambitious goals in a wide range of impact areas, including greenhouse gas emission reductions, waste reduction, species and habitat protection, toxics reduction, water conservation, green procurement, and employee and public engagement. It also includes 70 actions that serve as a roadmap for how to achieve the goals and ensure that DEC is compliant with Governor Kathy Hochul's Executive Order 22, which directs State agencies to adopt a sustainability and decarbonization program. The plan was created through a collaborative effort with participation and input from all DEC divisions, regions, and offices. The plan also serves as a model for other entities to take action to lower the environmental impact of their own operations. DEC began plan implementation in 2023, carrying out projects such as training all of its employees on the role they play in achieving the plan's goals.

To view a video about DEC's sustainability plan, see: <https://on.ny.gov/3wAkrfL>.

## Backcountry Solar Installation

DEC installed solar projects at its Johns Brook and Raquette Falls outposts in the High Peaks Wilderness Area in the Adirondack Park. The outposts serve the critical function of providing a DEC staff presence in the backcountry that is able to conduct basic trail maintenance, assist adventurers, and triage emergencies. The solar systems provide power to the facilities for applications such as lighting, powering emergency radios, and refrigeration. The systems have battery backup and have **reduced the amount of propane necessary to operate the facilities by 80 percent**. The greenhouse gas emissions savings are even greater now that there are fewer helicopter resupply flights necessary to keep the outposts running.

To view a video demonstrating the solar installation, see: <https://on.ny.gov/48s70Mm>.



## Forest Rangers Deploy eBikes

DEC Forest Rangers deployed their first-ever eBikes in 2023. The eBikes give the Rangers a new tool to assist them in patrolling DEC campgrounds and parts of the backcountry. The eBikes offer Forest Rangers an emissions-free way to conduct their patrols and cover more ground. The deployment of the eBikes is a step forward in implementing DEC's Sustainability Plan, which calls for DEC to continuously evaluate and test new zero emissions equipment for use in law enforcement and forest protection operations as a way to continue to lead by example.

To view a video demonstrating the new bikes, see: <https://on.ny.gov/48tu25z>.





# Green and Sustainable Remediation and Climate Resiliency in Environmental Cleanups

In order to meet New York State’s ambitious climate and sustainability requirements, **DEC is integrating decarbonization and sustainability considerations into all of its environmental cleanups.** DEC assembled intra-agency and interagency work groups to develop more robust green and sustainable remediation and climate resiliency guidance, track greenhouse gas and renewable energy systems on remedial sites, and partner with the New York Power Authority on the beneficial reuse of navigable dredge materials during remedial restoration.



	Source Local Materials and Labor
	Minimize Waste Generation and Material Use
	Minimize Idling Vehicle Emissions
	Minimize Commuter Emissions
	Increase Energy Efficiency
	Recycle/Reuse Material
	Plant Native
	Remove Invasives
	Restore Natural Habitats
	Use Electric Vehicles and Equipment



An aerial view of the Irish Hills solar array.

## Irish Hills Mine Reclamation

DEC granted final reclamation approval for the 60-acre Irish Hills sand and gravel mine in Dutchess County in June 2023. The first permit for the mine was issued in 1981. The site was graded, and a five-megawatt solar panel array was constructed on most of the mine floor, with a meadow established on the remaining acreage. The solar project includes approximately 18,000 panels mounted on a fixed tilt racking system that is connected to the Central Hudson distribution system. The project is expected to have an operating life of at least 25 years, and at the end of the operating life the project will be decommissioned and the site restored to a meadow. The project is naturally screened from the public roadway and represents a passive, quiet, and low-impact use of land.





# Public Safety



## Canadian Wildfire Smoke Response

New York State experienced the impacts of the summer's historic Canadian wildfire smoke. DEC firefighters were part of interagency crews comprising wildland firefighters from Maine, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Vermont deployed to help battle wildfires raging in eastern Canada.

To view a video about New York firefighters helping to fight Canadian wildfires, see: <https://on.ny.gov/48yK8dX>.



New York State firefighting crew deployed to Quebec.

## Operation ECO-Quality Illegal Pesticides Campaign

In 2023, DEC undertook Operation ECO-Quality in the Washington Heights neighborhood in Manhattan, an information-forward initiative that includes community outreach, education, and enforcement. Staff worked with local elected officials and organizations to conduct outreach in the neighborhood, providing written information in both English and Spanish to inform the public about the harmful effects and health issues that illegal pesticides can cause. The unregistered and restricted-use products should not be available for purchase, possession, or use by the public and may represent a significant danger to communities due to their unknown toxicity levels. From July to November, **DEC's Law Enforcement and Pesticides staff orchestrated four pesticides seizures, confiscating more than 14,000 units of illegal pesticides.**



Law Enforcement Officers confiscating illegal pesticides offered for sale on the street.

## Rangers Conduct Life-Saving Searches

DEC Forest Rangers **conducted 370 search and rescue missions in 2023.** One of the more high profile assignments included leading the wildland search effort in response to a missing nine-year-old girl abducted from Moreau Lake State Park in Saratoga County. Rangers led the massive, 430-person ground effort and were joined by members of DEC's Division of Law Enforcement and Office of Emergency Management, along with numerous State, local, and federal entities.



A group of diverse people are gathered in a meeting room. In the foreground, a woman with glasses is looking at a laptop. Behind her, several other people are seated at a table, some looking towards the camera and others looking at documents. A woman is standing in the background, looking at a document. The scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. A dark green rectangular box is positioned in the center, containing the text "Communications and Outreach" in white, bold, sans-serif font.

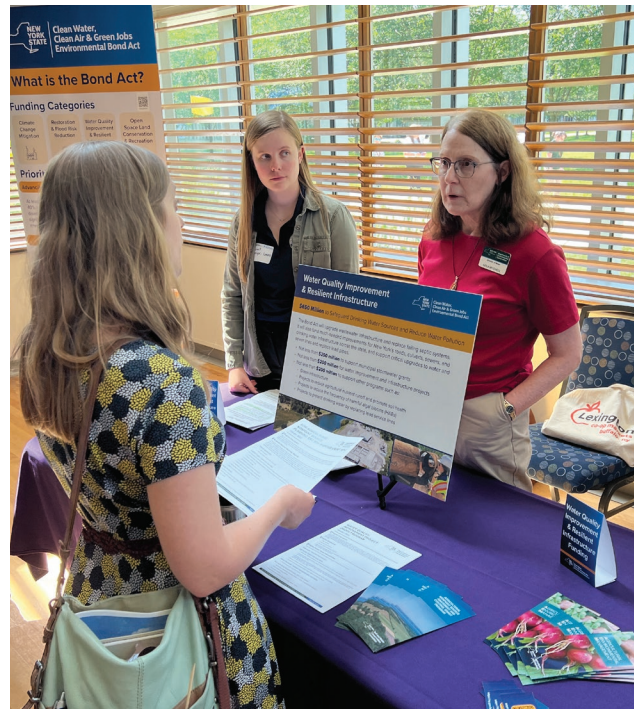
# Communications and Outreach



# Clean Water, Clean Air and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act Implementation

More than 30 DEC staff from across the state participated in the multiagency rollout of a 10-stop listening tour launched by Governor Hochul to help educate New Yorkers about the \$4.2 billion Clean Water, Clean Air and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act. Through eight in-person and two virtual session opportunities, DEC and other State agency program experts provided information to the public about the Bond Act's categories and how the funding will help **transform communities, particularly those most vulnerable to pollution and climate impacts**. More than 1,000 people attended the sessions to ask questions and provided valuable input on-site and through an online survey created specifically to collect project ideas from potential applicants, interested stakeholders, and the public. DEC and partnering agencies will continue to offer opportunities to provide input as draft guidelines for Bond Act program implementation continues. In December, Governor Hochul awarded the first \$200 million in investments from the Environmental Bond Act as part of a \$479 million announcement for water quality projects across the state.

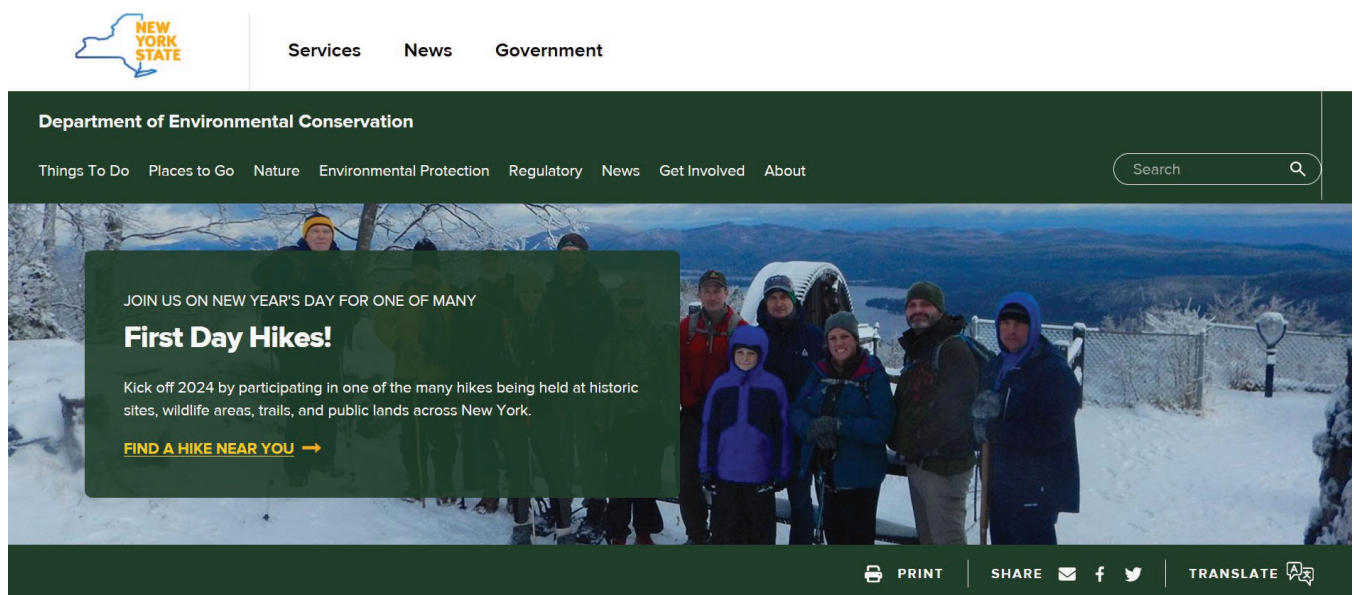
To view a video highlighting the bond act listening tour, see: <https://on.ny.gov/49OwzIH>.



Brentwood (Suffolk County) Bond Act listening session.

## Agency Website Redesign

In November, DEC launched a new public website optimized for mobile devices and featuring improved search and navigation features to keep New Yorkers engaged and informed. The new website expands task-focused navigation that **makes it easier for visitors to find regulatory, environmental protection, licensing, and environmental education content and resources quickly**. Larger call-to-action sections make it easy to purchase licenses, search for job openings, sign up for topic-specific newsletters through DEC Delivers, or subscribe to DEC's *Conservationist* magazine. Finding permit information and submitting requests for permit action is improved and the new website allows DEC to better use video content to share stories about the agency's efforts to protect and enhance the environment. Translation tools at the bottom of the website also help interpret DEC content into 13 languages.





# DEC Day at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry

The State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) in Syracuse welcomed DEC staff from across the state to speak with students about the agency's careers and how to apply for DEC jobs. DEC Commissioner Seggos kicked off the event with a Q&A opportunity for faculty, staff, and students. **Nearly 60 staff, more than half of whom are ESF alumni, represented 18 DEC programs at the event.**



Forest Rangers speaking with ESF students about career opportunities and the job duties of a Ranger.

## DEC WEBSITE



**29 million pageviews**

with ~80,000 pageviews each day

## SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS:



**177,305**



**85,535**



**38,950**



**18,456**

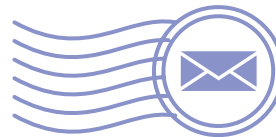


**1.1 MILLION TOTAL VIEWS AND 10,600 SUBSCRIBERS**

**200+ VIDEOS ACROSS PLATFORMS**

## DEC DELIVERS

DEC's email subscription platform had nearly



**775,000 subscribers**

## DECINFO LOCATOR INTERACTIVE WEBSITE MAP

Innovative platform to search for documents, public data, and outdoor recreation information had more than

**300,000 pageviews**

**WITH 93 DIFFERENT DATA SETS**





## World University Games

The 31st FISU World University Winter Games returned to North America in 2023 with Lake Placid hosting the event in January. More than 1,400 athletes from across the world participated in 85 medal events in 12 sports, and **DEC staff stepped up as a significant part of the multiagency detail** ensuring the security of participants at the various Adirondack venues. More than 80 Environmental Conservation Police Officers and Investigators were involved in the planning and operation of the detail. Assignments included providing uniformed members for security at various venues, including the Olympic Center in Lake Placid and Gore Mountain, conducting 59 drone flights, investigating suspicious activities, and using off-road vehicles to patrol a 30-mile linear stretch along the power lines between Lake Placid and Malone.



ECO patrolling at World University Games in Lake Placid.

## Spanish Newsletter

In honor of Hispanic Heritage Month, DEC launched its **first Spanish language newsletter** in October 2022. A direct translation of the agency's popular monthly newsletter, *Find Your Adventure*, *Encuentre Su Aventura* promotes outdoor events and recreational offerings happening across State lands, including information on popular activities such as camping, birding, hiking, and paddling. Through this newsletter, it is hoped that DEC may further its mission to expand diversity, equity, and inclusion in the outdoor recreation space, making New York's lands more welcoming and accessible. *Encuentre Su Aventura* now has more than 3,000 Spanish language subscribers.





## Five Rivers Welcome Governor Hochul for Earth Day 2023

On April 22, DEC welcomed Governor Hochul to Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Delmar (Albany County) to plant a tree in honor of Earth Day. The Governor, along with DEC Commissioner Seggos and members of Scout Troop 75 from Delmar, planted a sugar maple. As it grows, the sugar maple will be incorporated into the center's annual maple sugaring education programs. After planting the tree, the Governor chatted with the Scouts and lent a hand while they built birdhouses. She also took time to check out Five Rivers' Earth Day activities, including making recycled paper, and a project to spread native plant seeds to support pollinators.

Governor Hochul speaks with children at Earth Day tree planting.





# Outdoor Recreation and Access



## 30th Anniversary of Becoming an Outdoors-Woman

Since 1993, the New York Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program teaches women outdoor skills such as fishing, shooting, archery, hunting, trapping, map and compass, survival, camping, and canoeing. These programs **provide participants with information, encouragement, and hands-on instruction surrounded by supportive and enthusiastic instructors and students.** This year, the program celebrated its 30th anniversary at the September workshop in Old Forge. More than 120 people participated in almost 20 different courses during the three-day workshop, with many participants remarking that after completing the workshop they felt empowered to take on new challenges in the outdoors.

To watch a video of veterans discussing their experiences with the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program, see: <https://on.ny.gov/3I9JhWn>.



Workshop participants learning to paddle canoes.



Hunters afield wearing hunter orange.

## Helping New Hunters and Trappers Take the “Next Step”

DEC's Hunter Education Program began offering “[Next Step](#)” courses in 2023 in seven disciplines for those who completed a hunter education, bowhunter education, or trapper education certification course. After new hunters and trappers receive their safety certification, many are still looking for ways to get more hands-on experience, which is now available through the Next Step courses. Taught by certified DEC instructors, **each free four-hour course focuses on safety and techniques.** The seven different disciplines include rifle, shotgun, crossbow, or archery use and marksmanship, fur handling, land trapping, and water trapping. The new courses are an ideal way for new hunters and trappers to gain skills and confidence through additional education and hands-on experience even if they do not have a mentor to help them get started.



## Completion of Phase One of the Adirondack Rail Trail

Phase one of the 34-mile world-class Adirondack Rail Trail was completed in 2023. The first of three anticipated phases of construction began in November 2022, focusing on the 10-mile trail segment from Lake Placid to Saranac Lake and construction of a parking area in Tupper Lake. The second phase of construction from Saranac Lake to Santa Clara is underway. When complete, **the Adirondack Rail Trail will connect Lake Placid, Saranac Lake, and Tupper Lake**, allowing trail users to enjoy the unique charm and amenities of each community while providing access to miles of breathtaking trails, numerous campsites, and abundant waterways in the Forest Preserve adjacent to the travel corridor. The corridor will also feature interpretive signs to help visitors understand the history of the railway, the cultures of adjacent communities, and the natural resources of surrounding lands and waters, creating a linear museum.

To view the opening of phase one of the rail trail, see: <https://on.ny.gov/49s3raa>.



Grand opening of the first phase of the Adirondack Rail Trail.

## Barge Canal at Cove Road Boat Launch

In June, DEC and New York State Canals staff cut the ribbon on a new \$1.7 million boat launch and fishing pier on the Barge Canal at Cove Road in the town of Verona, Oneida County. The newly constructed launch, which **enhances fishing and boating recreation opportunities for all visitors, including people with disabilities**, connects to Oneida Lake and provides enhanced access to the lake's world-class fishing. The site now includes a two-lane, concrete launch ramp with floating docks, canoe/kayak launch, fishing pier, parking area with 24-car and 49-car/trailer parking spaces, including some accessible parking, and public restrooms. The project was funded with \$1.6 million from the Environmental Protection Fund and NYWorks.



New accessible fishing pier.



## Long Island Spring Turkey Hunt

May marked the first spring turkey hunt held on Long Island, representing **a success story for wildlife conservation**. After their translocation to Long Island in the 1990s, turkey numbers in Suffolk County increased to a level where these birds can now be responsibly and sustainably harvested through recreational hunting. Wild turkey were extirpated from Long Island in the late 19th Century due to a reduction in forested habitat caused by land clearing for farming and firewood. This new spring turkey hunt provided a huge opportunity for downstate hunters to spring turkey hunt locally. It also generated a lot of interest from out-of-state hunters looking to explore this new opportunity. The new season was well received, with hunters expressing their gratitude for the opportunity to hunt locally. The season concluded without any reported hunter-related shooting incidents.





## New York State Birding Trail

The New York State Birding Trail was completed in August 2022 to highlight world-class opportunities across the state and provide information on places anyone can go to find birds among a variety of outdoor locations. The Birding Trail inspires visitors to get a start in birding by highlighting the diverse and unique opportunities found in New York State. The trail is a network of promoted birding locations that can be accessed by car or public transportation and provide an inclusive experience for all. **In 2023, 25 new locations were added to the Birding Trail, bringing the total number of sites across the state to 350.**



NEW YORK STATE  
**BIRDING  
TRAIL**



Birders enjoying the New York State Birding Trail.

## I BIRD NY Challenge and Black Birders Week Events

I BIRD NY aims to make getting started with birding easier for people of all ages. **The annual birding challenge saw a 745 percent increase in participation,** with 1,226 birding enthusiasts completing this fun challenge. DEC also worked with partners to host guided birding programs as part of Black Birders Week. Events were held at Reinstein Woods Nature Preserve with Black Girls Hike Buffalo, Five Rivers Environmental Education Center with Outdoor Afro Albany and Upstate NY, and Prospect Park with Outdoor Afro New York City.



Environmental education staff leading a Black Birders Week bird walk at Reinstein Woods Nature Preserve in partnership with Black Girls Hike Buffalo.



## Catskills Fire Tower Challenge

The Catskills Fire Tower Challenge returned in January to encourage hikers to visit the six public fire towers in the Catskill Park. Hikers visited six towers to complete the challenge: Balsam Lake Mountain (Hardenburgh), Hunter Mountain (Hunter), Overlook Mountain (Woodstock), Red Hill Mountain (Denning), and Tremper Mountain (Shandaken), as well as the new Upper Esopus Fire Tower located at the Catskills Visitor Center. **Nearly 600 finishers completed the challenge in 2023 from 12 states, Canada, and the United Kingdom.**



Photo by Chase Porter



# DEC

## Working for You

**Basil Seggos**, Commissioner

**Sean Mahar**, Executive Deputy Commissioner

**Erica Ringewald**, Chief of Staff

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**Megan Allard**, Director, Office of Internal Investigations

**Tom Berkman**, Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel

**Jon Binder**, Deputy Commissioner, Climate Change, Air Resources, and Energy

**Mark Cadrette**, Director, Office of Employee Relations

**Laura DiBetta**, Director, Outdoor Recreation

**Catherine Dickert**, Director, Division of Mineral Resources

**Adriana Espinoza**, Deputy Commissioner, Equity and Justice

**Harold Evans**, Director, Division of Communication, Education, and Engagement

**Andrew Fischler**, Director, Office of Internal Audit

**Patrick Foster**, Deputy Commissioner, Environmental Remediation and Materials Management

**Kevin Frazier**, Director, Constituent Relations

**Martin Gary**, Director, Division of Marine Resources

**Andy Guglielmi**, Director, Division of Environmental Remediation

**Alanah Keddell-Tuckey**, Director, Office of Environmental Justice

**Christopher LaLone**, Director, Division of Air Resources

**Carol Lamb-Lafay**, Director, Division of Water

**Maureen Leddy**, Director, Office of Climate Change

**Corey Lehman**, Director, Office of Emergency Management

**Jacqueline Lendrum**, Director, Division of Fish and Wildlife

**Nancy Lussier**, Director, Division of Management and Budget

**Katie McNamara**, Director, Office of Legislative Affairs

**Carey Merrill**, Deputy Commissioner for Risk and Innovation

**Andy Niles**, Director, Division of Operations

**Katie Petronis**, Deputy Commissioner, Natural Resources

**Karen Przyklek**, Director, Division of Law Enforcement

**Suzanna Randall**, Chief Resiliency Officer

**Peter Reuben**, Director, Office of Indian Nation Affairs

**Steve Smith**, Deputy Commissioner, Public Protection

**Tom Snow**, Coordinator, New York City Watershed Program

**John Solan**, Director, Division of Forest Protection

**Jeffrey Stefanko**, Deputy Commissioner, Administration

**Michele Stefanucci**, Chief Administrative Law Judge, Office of Hearings and Mediation Services

**James Tierney**, Deputy Commissioner, Water Resources

**Vacant**, Deputy Commissioner, Hearings and Mediation Services

**David Vitale**, Director, Division of Materials Management

**Cecilia Walsh**, Director, Media Relations

**Fiona Watt**, Director, Division of Lands and Forests

**Daniel Whitehead**, Director, Division of Environmental Permits

**Brendan Woodruff**, Director, Office of Sustainability

**Maureen Wren**, Deputy Commissioner, Public Affairs

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**Cathy Haas**, Regional Director, Region 1

**Vacant**, Regional Director, Region 2

**Kelly Turturro**, Regional Director, Region 3

**Anthony Luisi**, Regional Director, Region 4

**Joe Zalewski**, Regional Director, Region 5

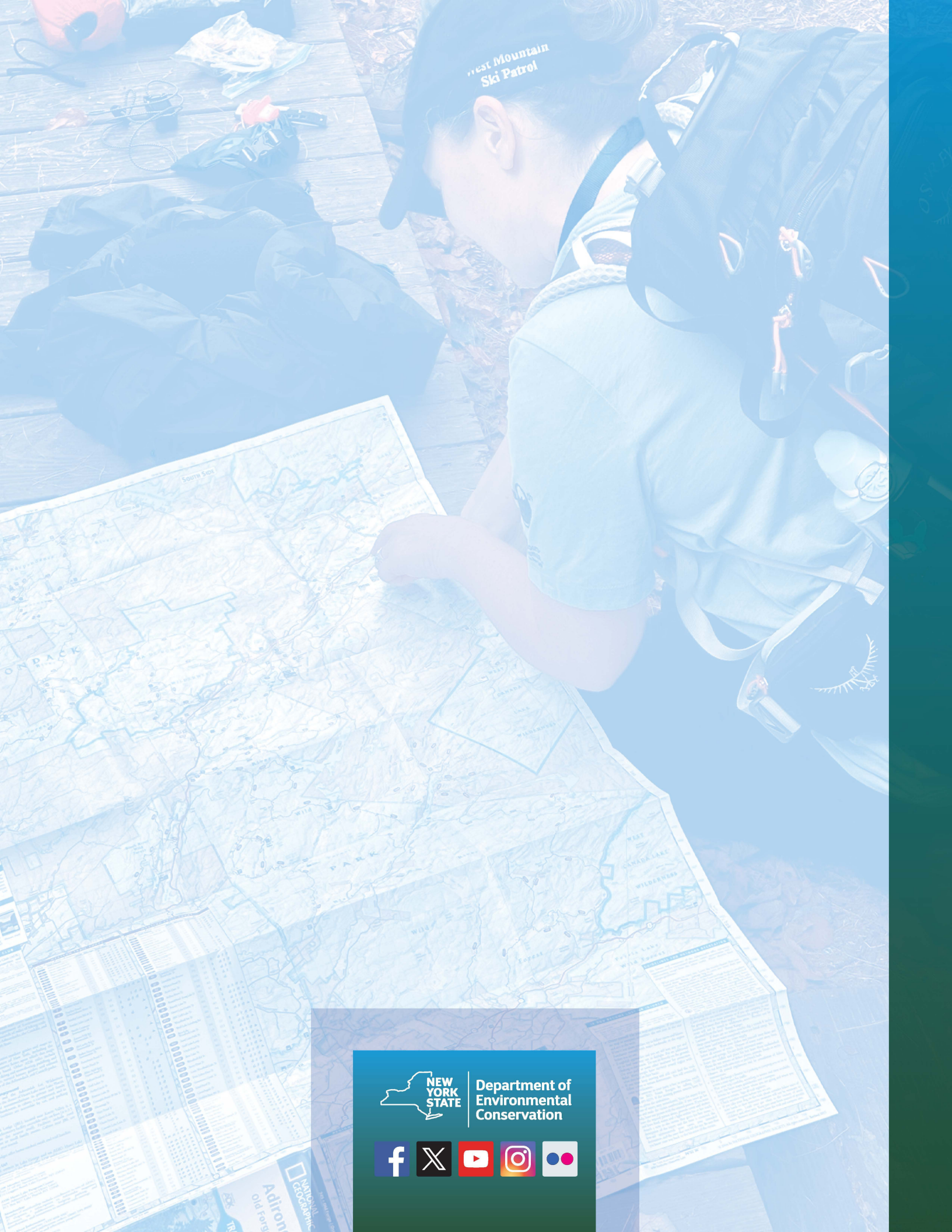
**Randall Young**, Regional Director, Region 6

**Dereh Glance**, Regional Director, Region 7

**Tim Walsh**, Regional Director, Region 8

**Julie Barrett-O'Neil**, Regional Director, Region 9





NEW YORK STATE

Department of Environmental Conservation



Adirondack Park  
National Park Service