



# ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE REPORT

FALL 2025

## A NOTE FROM OUR DIRECTOR, ALANAH KEDDELL-TUCKEY

It is hard to believe that, just over 10 years ago, I edited one of the first Environmental Justice Reports. I could not have imagined then, as I reformatted paragraphs and checked for spelling and grammar errors, that six years later, I would take on the role of program director. The last 10 years have seen new faces, new leaders, and the expansion of our office and offerings. What has not changed is our dedication to our work and to all of you. I am proud to have played a role in the growth of this newsletter and program, and I am proud of the team here in the Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ). It has been an incredible journey, and I am looking forward to the continued progress and New York State's ongoing commitment to environmental justice (EJ) for the next 10 years and beyond.

See you again next year.

## A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, PART 3

by Kiana Kerr and Oliver Riley

Hi everyone and welcome back to OEJ's "Environmental Justice for Beginners" series.

Last issue, we discussed the systemic processes and biases that create environmental injustices, prompting us to act in support of EJ. In this article, we examine climate

change and its impact on different EJ issues, including extreme heat, the urban heat island (UHI) effect, and flooding. We aim to portray how EJ is connected to all environmental issues and convey the necessity of considering EJ in establishing a sustainable future for all.

**Climate change** refers to long-term changes in the average weather patterns that define Earth's global, regional, and local climates. Some climate change occurs naturally, but today's climate is changing much more rapidly than ever before due to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from human activity. When energy from the sun enters our atmosphere, some of that heat is absorbed or reflected out into space. GHGs, such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide, occur naturally in our atmosphere and improve its ability to absorb heat. However, human activity—including burning fossil fuels and deforestation—has resulted in an excessive amount of GHGs being released into our atmosphere, which imbalances the rate at which it absorbs heat. This imbalance has resulted in an accelerating warming trend in recent decades, which drives climate change. This creates a variety of hazards, such as intensifying and disparate storm patterns, water scarcity, and reductions in crop yields. These changing conditions and hazards are impacting everyone on the planet, but are most dangerous to people and communities that have been historically burdened by pollution and environmental harms.



Rising temperatures globally result in extreme heat events which severely affect the health and well-being of New Yorkers and is the leading cause of death among hazardous weather events in the U.S. Extreme heat is most commonly defined as weather that is significantly hotter, and sometimes more humid, than average for a certain place and time. This poses health risks for humans, plants, and animals, both in the daytime and nighttime. Climate change is increasing the severity, frequency, and duration of extreme heat events. The impacts of climate change are worsened by socio-economic, environmental, and age- and health-related conditions, as well as by other factors that increase risks—especially for vulnerable groups.

In cities and other densely populated environments, extreme heat events are made worse by the **UHI effect**, which describes how features of the built environment (like dark pavement and roofing, lack of vegetation, and proximity to heat-generating facilities) cause cities to become significantly warmer than surrounding rural areas. Additionally, **urban canyons**, the narrow spaces between tall structures (such as skyscrapers), can block wind and trap heat, further contributing to the UHI effect. All of this has impact on cities, but those impacts are not distributed uniformly—some neighborhoods are closer to green spaces and cooling resources, while others are located near incinerators and other polluting facilities with no equitable access to green space. As a result, within the same city, there can be drastic differences in how the UHI effect occurs and impacts people. Research shows that disadvantaged communities (DACs) are more likely to live in proximity to these heat-generating facilities and are less likely to have equitable access to green spaces. Those at a greater risk of experiencing the negative effects of extreme heat include people who live in buildings without air conditioning, people of color, Indigenous peoples, unhoused people, people living in institutional settings, older adults, infants and children, pregnant people, people with disabilities, and people with chronic illnesses.

As the amount of heat increases in our atmosphere, so too does its capacity to hold water. This means that weather events and precipitation are becoming more intense, and flooding and sea-level rise are growing in severity. Flooding in both coastal and inland areas is increasing due to weather events intensified by climate change, increasing risk and damage to



coastal communities and ecosystems. Flooding events can not only cause severe damage and pose a risk to life directly through rising water, but they also damage water control infrastructure—like dams and embankments—leading to the rapid erosion of roads and structures. Flooding events and rising sea levels can result in entire areas becoming uninhabitable, displacing people from their homes and communities. The communities most vulnerable to flooding due to outdated or absent water control infrastructure or proximity to exposed coastlines are often historically disadvantaged and expected to face worsening inequities as climate change continues to accelerate.

There is a commonality among the issues created by climate change—the most vulnerable communities face the largest exposure and burden of harm. Extreme heat is most dangerous in under-resourced urban areas; flooding is most dangerous to communities near water with inadequate infrastructure; and climate-related pollution burdens are most harmful to disadvantaged urban communities. Climate change is a multiplier, taking existing conditions of disadvantage and exacerbating them to amplify the harm already endured by these communities. As such, it is critical that efforts to address and mitigate the effects of climate change prioritize DACs. Work is already underway to ensure that New York State (NYS) is addressing climate change in a way that emphasizes equity. Climate change risk is a major consideration for the DAC criteria, and NYS's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) prioritizes climate spending in DACs. EJ serves as a fundamental guiding principle in the state's response to climate change and will continue to do so as we work to adapt to a changing world and serve the people of NYS. You can find out more about the NYS CLCPA by referring to the [NYS CLCPA Fact Sheet](#) and visiting [climate.ny.gov](https://climate.ny.gov).

# COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: OAKDALE LAKE

## COMMUNITY EFFORT BRINGS NEW LIFE TO OAKDALE LAKE

by Tamar Adler, Friends of Oakdale Lake, and Peter Frank, Friends of Hudson Youth

*The following article is written by guest authors and does not reflect the position of the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) or the State of New York.*

Friends of Oakdale Lake, working with Columbia Land Conservancy, has led a multiyear effort to improve Oakdale Lake with two successive Community Impact Grants (CIG) from DEC's OEJ.

Oakdale Lake sits on 14 acres of city parkland in Hudson, Columbia County, a designated environmental justice area. It's a public, spring-fed swimming lake where local families gather, and hundreds of kids spend their summers at Oakdale Summer Camp, Columbia County's largest day camp. After years of neglect, Oakdale Lake experienced lower visitation, attendance, and investment. In 2018, Friends of Oakdale Lake mobilized volunteers and partnered with consultants from Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation to conduct a community needs assessment. Water quality emerged as one of residents' primary concerns.

In 2019, Friends of Oakdale Lake secured their first DEC grant to assess the lake's condition and determine what repairs were needed. Their partnership with Great Ecology, an environmental consulting firm, revealed that the lake was eutrophic—overly nutrient-rich, creating conditions that promoted excessive algae growth. In 2021, building on these findings, they received a second grant to implement solutions: installing solar aerators in the lake, using barley straw to prevent algae growth, and deploying professional equipment to remove invasive plants. Throughout the project, a robust volunteer citizen science program provided ongoing research support, while community education initiatives and youth workshops engaged residents of all ages.

The results speak for themselves. Residents report clearer water and fewer unpleasant smells. More families are using the lake than ever before, and trust in the water quality has soared. This summer, Friends of Oakdale Lake merged with Friends of Hudson Youth to continue stewarding the park and lake, ensuring this vital community resource continues to thrive for generations of local families and children.



Citizen science training at Oakdale Lake with Project Manager Cate Collinson.



Kids enrolled in the Oakdale Summer Camp cooling off in the lake.

## STAFF SPOTLIGHT

For this Staff Spotlight, we would like to introduce one of our newest team members of the OEJ family, Kiana Kerr, a climate policy analyst at the DEC Central Office.

### **Q. How did you get to EJ/DEC in general? What led you to be interested in EJ?**

**A.** While I've always had an interest in both nature and justice, EJ became of particular interest to me in college, at the University of Southern California. Attending a wealthy university in a marginalized community highlighted the sharp disparity in the dispersal of justice. If you went some miles away from my college, but still in the greater neighborhood, you would see brownfields and pollution-producing facilities in proximity to people's homes and schools. In those areas, there was limited green space in accessible proximity to the majority of the community and limited, equitable access to grocery stores with quality, non-packaged foods. Where my school was located, we had great access to gardens, multiple fresh grocery stores, an on-campus farmers market, and more. As is usually the case, the demographic makeup of this neighborhood was primarily immigrant, limited English proficiency, Black, Latine, and low income. Through my studies and recognizing the realities of this neighborhood were parallel to those myself and other family members grew up in, the pervasiveness of environmental inequalities in this country and across the globe was top of mind for me. This prompted my interest in pursuing EJ career-wise. At university, I worked on research that focused on EJ issues in Los Angeles County, then worked as a youth climate organizer, and now I work here at OEJ!

### **Q. What role do you play for the department?**

**A.** I work as a climate policy analyst for OEJ. My role encompasses writing, mapping, analyzation, and facilitation.

### **Q. What do you like about the position?**

**A.** I really enjoy how this position requires critical thinking and attention to detail in the pursuit of something I value so deeply: EJ. Analyzing what already exists and assessing how best to incorporate what works, as well as identifying what can be improved to best fit an applicable situation is something that allows me to learn, be challenged, and contribute to a more equitable NYS.

### **Q. What does it mean to you to push the values of EJ forward?**

**A.** For me, pushing the values of EJ forward means to encompass and pursue the virtue of equity and justice in all sectors of life. Our anthropogenic approach to life as a society has separated us from what we are and our role. Everything is connected and the pursuit of EJ visualizes this for us societally.



Kiana posing on a shoreline in San Juan, Puerto Rico.



Kiana and Marigold, aka Goldie, enjoying a nice, clear day at a park.

When you really learn about EJ, you see how it touches on every other kind of justice: disability justice, housing justice, language justice, gender justice, food justice, and many more. Doing all I can to bring every voice to the table so as equitable of a lens as possible can be applied is part of pushing EJ values forward.

**Q. Now let's switch gears to some fun questions. Where is the coolest place you have ever visited and why is it in NYS? (JK, coolest place in the world?)**

**A.** While NYS is always a top contender, I'll have to give this award to New Zealand. I studied abroad there for five months, specifically in Dunedin, but traveled up to Auckland as well. The pure beauty of nature, the range of ecosystems, and the ability to access nature in New Zealand has to make it the coolest place I've visited. From hiking a dormant volcano, to bungee jumping for the first time in the Adventure Capital of the World, New Zealand always had an adventure waiting for me. It's well worth the incredibly long flight across the globe.

**Q. And if you could have a conversation with any animal, which one would it be, and what would you talk about?**

**A.** Orcas! Humans have witnessed their profound intelligence that carries through generations and the new evolutionary behaviors they are making in response to a changing world. So, I would want to talk to them about a day in their life. That would give me insight into their thought processes, how they approach situations, and how they learn and adapt. I would be taking notes to apply to myself for sure.

## **BOOK REVIEW: SACRIFICE ZONES: THE FRONT LINES OF TOXIC CHEMICAL EXPOSURE IN THE UNITED STATES** by Steve Lerner | Review by Susan Hunter

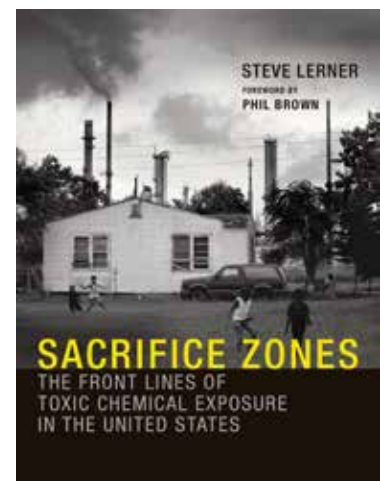
Sacrifice zones are geographic areas where communities endure environmental pollution and health hazards due to the presence of industrial facilities or other sources of ecological degradation. Residents in sacrifice zones often experience disproportionate health effects, including increased rates of respiratory illnesses, cancer, and other pollution-related diseases.

Even though I grew up in NYS, I believed Love Canal (featured in Keith O'Brien's highly rated book *Paradise Falls: The True Story of an Environmental Catastrophe*) was the exception, not the rule. I mistakenly thought sacrifice zones existed primarily in developing countries desperately seeking investment dollars. Thanks to reporters like Steve Lerner, I have learned that they can exist wherever regulation fails or is withdrawn.

In *Sacrifice Zones*, Lerner tells the stories of 12 communities, from Brooklyn to Pensacola, that rose up to fight the industries and military bases causing disproportionately high levels of chemical pollution in the pre-regulatory era. While residents took action when pollution from heavy industry contaminated their towns, Lerner believes they need additional regulatory protections.

*Sacrifice Zones* goes beyond disheartening statistics, offering portraits of accidental activists who became grassroots leaders in the fight for EJ and detailing the successful tactics they used on the fenceline with heavy industry. For example, Cancer Alley, an 85-mile stretch of land along the Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, is a notorious sacrifice zone with over 200 petrochemical plants, accounting for about 25% of U.S. petrochemical production. By the 1970s, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency noted severe water and air pollution, leading to cancer rates exceeding acceptable government limits. A similar, closer-to-home sacrifice zone is Newark, New Jersey's Ironbound neighborhood, which is marked by the largest garbage incinerator in the state, as well as significant contamination from a former Agent Orange factory, along with abandoned industrial sites and active transportation routes.

If you enjoy this book, you may want to read *Diamond: A Struggle for Environmental Justice in Louisiana's Chemical Corridor* by the same author. For a more recent take on the subject, try Ryan Juskus's March 2023 article "[Sacrifice Zones: A Genealogy and Analysis of an Environmental Justice Concept](#)" in *Environmental Humanities*.



## SUSTAINABILITY DURING THE HOLIDAYS | by Marissa D'Antoni

### TIPS TO REDUCE FOOD WASTE AT YOUR HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

The holidays are a time for family, friends, and delicious meals, but they can also result in a lot of wasted food. Let's make this year different by fully enjoying each meal and using up everything we have instead of letting leftovers go to waste. Here are some simple tips to help cut down on wasted food during the holidays:

- **Know Your Guests:** Confirm how many people you'll have over before you go shopping and start cooking. This way, you can prepare just the right amount of food.
- **Check What You Already Have:** Take inventory of what you already have in your pantry, fridge, and freezer before you go shopping to avoid duplicate purchases and save money in the long run.
- **Cook with Imperfect Produce:** Scarred and oddly shaped fruits and vegetables are perfectly fine for eating and cooking.
- **Love Your Peels:** Skip peeling vegetables like potatoes and carrots—cook them unpeeled instead.
- **Share Leftovers:** Ask your guests to bring containers so they can take home any extra food. This helps ensure nothing goes to waste.
- **Get Creative with Leftovers:** If you have leftover ingredients, think of new ways to use them. Creating new recipes can make old ingredients fun again!



### SUSTAINABLE WRAPPING PAPER AND NICE LIST APPROVED GIFT WRAP

Gift-giving is a joyful part of the holidays, but it often leads to a lot of wrapping paper that ends up in the trash. In the U.S., about 4.6 million pounds of wrapping paper are thrown away each year!

NYS residents should check local recycling guidelines to determine the recyclability of gift wrap in their area. Local recycling guidelines can be found at [Recycle Right New York](#).

To stay off of nature's naughty list this holiday season, try swapping out single-use wrapping paper for reusable or upcycled wrapping alternatives. Here are some eco-friendly, nice list approved alternatives to traditional wrapping paper:

- Scarves;
- Old newspapers, magazines, maps, or plain brown kraft paper;
- Tea towels;
- Reusable shopping bags; and
- Upcycled gift bags made from items you already have.

These options help reduce waste while adding a personal touch to your presents!



# SNAPSHOTS

Here are some events that OEJ staff participated in these past few months!

## GRANTEE SITE VISIT: FORT GREENE PARK CONSERVANCY | NYC

Marilyn Moore, an OEJ grants administrator, visited Fort Greene Park Conservancy in Brooklyn on July 17 to kick off a series of summer site visits. She was accompanied by DEC Region 2 representatives to tour Fort Greene Park to view the green space that is used by the community for a variety of programming, including Storytime in the Park, Movies on the Lawn, Poetry in the Park, Yoga, Volunteer Days, and more. The team also observed some of the Green Team youth cohort members working on their ongoing rain garden project to reduce erosion, which involved installing a drip irrigation system among the terraces, hosting native plantings, and building a birdhouse and insect hotel. The plants are now watered using a new on-site rain catchment system, installed and maintained by Green Team members. Green Team cohorts are supported by our CIG.



Kaieteur "Kai" Lawrence, an environmental programs manager and former Green Team cohort member, presenting the Green Team's rain garden.



Green Team members working in the rain garden.

## ANNUAL RELEAF CONFERENCE | OSWEGO

Oliver Riley, an OEJ climate policy analyst, attended the 2025 Annual ReLeaf Conference in Oswego from July 22 to 24. While the conference's main focus was on urban forestry, many sessions and discussions showed a strong connection between urban forestry and EJ. Despite rarely referencing EJ directly, conversations touched on topics like economic policy, education, public health, sustainability, climate change, and community building.

Out of all the topics at the conference, Oliver noted two of particular interest: keynote speaker Doug Still's talk, "Look Back to Move Forward: Storytelling in Urban Forestry," and a panel discussion on "Cemeteries as Green Spaces." Doug's talk emphasized how storytelling is a crucial aspect in making people listen and how it bypasses intellect and connects people emotionally to trees, places, and issues. Utilizing storytelling methods creates a sense of presence and connection to legacy, and it can make data-based processes more accessible. He emphasized how naming things creates communal value, and how people are yearning for stories about their communities and history. Doug's talk ties into the panel discussion on "Cemeteries as Green Spaces," which emphasized how cemeteries can be resources for community revitalization and public health improvements. It was interesting to learn how cemeteries can be tools for climate change mitigation in regard to surface runoff, air quality improvements, and mitigating the UHI effect, in addition to improving our understanding of our history, including historical injustices.



The Urban and Community Forestry Society (UCFS) outreach table at the Annual ReLeaf Conference.



Goose taking in all the information shared during the conference.

## GRANTEE SITE VISIT: ROCKAWAY INITIATIVE FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND EQUITY (RISE) | NYC

On July 30, part of OEJ's grants team, accompanied by two DEC Region 2 representatives, stopped by RISE (aka Rockaway Waterfront Alliance) in Queens for the second location of the summer site visits. During the tour, the team observed summer program students engaging in a peer-led group discussion and saw supplies for their farmer's market stand, which the students managed to keep open despite funding issues. Other projects they saw include a nature preserve, a fenced birding habitat along the beach, tree coves built to protect the community from ocean flooding and storms, and a native plant species restoration project.



DEC staff (in green) taking in some shade while learning about RISE's native planting project from Jeanne DuPont (in purple), the founder and executive director of RISE, and Erin Mulholland (right), RISE's native plant nursery manager.



Grants Administrator Alexis Jones in front of the Arverne East Nature Preserve.

From the visit, it was clear that RISE provided extremely thoughtful and well-rounded programming and resources. A key takeaway is that it's not about building a program for students to work for—it's about building a program that works for and serves the students and their community.

## NATIONAL NIGHT OUT | BUFFALO

DEC Region 9 EJ Coordinator Kayla Baker and EJ Intern Lilly Radel tabled at National Night Out in Buffalo's East Side on Aug. 5. The event took place at Mt. Olive Baptist Church on East Delavan Avenue and was hosted in partnership with the Northland Beltline Taxpayers Association. Attendees had the opportunity to speak with DEC staff about EJ concerns in their neighborhoods, learn about the next East Buffalo Environmental Forum, and get updates about the Community Air Monitoring Initiative and the CIG.

## GRANTEE SITE VISITS: OAKDALE LAKE AND OUTDOOR PROMISE | HUDSON—NEWBURGH



Peter Frank (in orange hat), president of Friends of Hudson Youth, and Cate Collinson from Great Ecology lead a walk through Oakdale Park's trails.

On Aug. 12, our grants administrators conducted two more site visits, this time in Region 3.

At Oakdale Park in Hudson, OEJ staff met up with Friends of Hudson Youth staff to view one of the projects that DEC funds through our CIG. The public park is a haven for those wanting to beat the heat or take in the beauty of nature at its delicately maintained lake fed by a natural spring—one of the only nearby places for swimming. Oakdale Lake is considered a eutrophic lake, meaning it's too rich in nutrients, leading to the dense growth of algae and other aquatic plants.



Grants administrators, Dana McClure (left) and Marilyn Moore (second from left) with Ronald Zorilla (second from right), executive director of Outdoor Promise, and Ashley Collazo (right), a board member of Outdoor Promise.



One of Oakdale Lake's environmental projects.

As a result, Great Ecology (Friends of Hudson Youth's partner in lake maintenance) aims to continue collecting water samples while recommending other treatments and management tools to ensure the lake is safe for wildlife and the public to enjoy for years to come. Our team was able to observe a group of youth campers conducting water tests and checking out frogs when they weren't participating in swim class or practicing their biking skills.

During the visit with Outdoor Promise in Newburgh, our grants team met with the executive director and a board member to learn more about the organization. Outdoor Promise was awarded CIG funding, which helps support their environmental stewardship and education programs, focusing on air and water quality and much more. The team had the chance to sit down and discuss the many ways that Outdoor Promise inspires their community to be EJ champions by helping them access and protect Newburgh's natural resources.

### GRANTEE SITE VISIT: BLUEPRINT GENEVA, INC. | GENEVA

Our grant administrators wrapped up their summer site visits with a trip to meet with BluePrint Geneva, Inc., accompanied by DEC Region 8 representatives. Executive Director Jackie Augustine gave a fantastic presentation about their community garden spaces via a driving tour, pointing out areas where they support green development and resources for the public. Highlighted initiatives include improvements to the local greenway, the farm stands they host around town, and their shared food incubator kitchen. Jackie also noted the concerns from the public, including flooding and air quality, and created the website [itstinks.org](http://itstinks.org) to support data transparency and public reporting of smells emanating from nearby industrial sources.



A Little Free Farm Stand that is supplied by BluePrint Geneva, Inc.'s community garden.



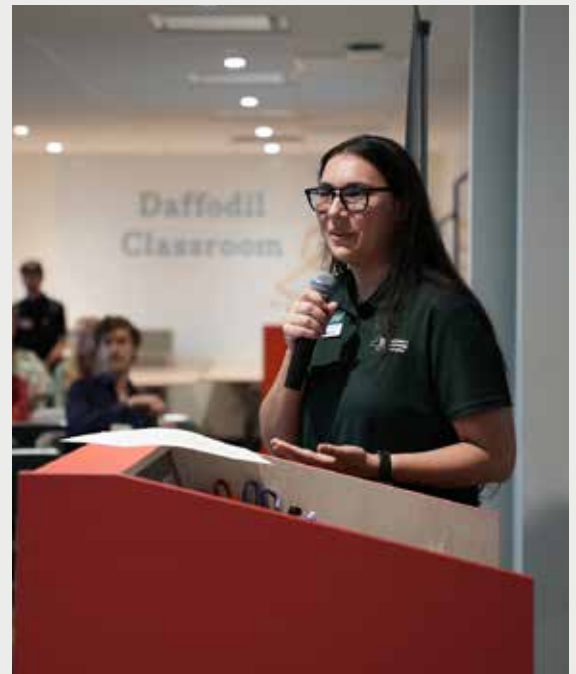
Executive Director Jackie Augustine giving a presentation showing the air monitors they installed at DACs across the Finger Lakes.

## CLIMATE WEEK | NYC

Alexis Jones and Marilyn Moore from OEJ's grants team were in Manhattan on Sept. 25 to attend the Creative Climate Forum: Fast Responses, Slow Revolutions, hosted by the Human Impacts Institute for Climate Week 2025. The free event was held at Pier 57 and hosted a full day of climate- and EJ-related events, including workshops, plenary talks, immersive art installations, performances, and a keynote that punctuated the evening celebration of conversation, learning, and music. People from all sectors of environmental work—and even those who simply share a love for Earth and an understanding that climate action is nonnegotiable and beneficial to all—gathered for the day. This event was part of the Human Impacts Institute's Creative Climate Communications Lab, an OEJ-sponsored program through the CIG.



Marilyn taking a photo at an art installation—a mirror placed in the center of a wall of plants beneath the phrase “Change Starts Here,” a message reminding us that individuals can initiate change to address the climate crisis.



Marilyn giving a short speech of support and thanks for the work that the Human Impacts Institute does through their grant programming and its positive impact on the community.



Afternoon panel titled “Slow Revolutions for Deep Transformation,” featuring panelists from The WNET Group, National Resources Defense Council, ClimArts, Decolonizing Wealth Project, and Shaolin Art Party, exploring how “creative communication can drive long-term societal change through trust, partnerships, and systems thinking, while highlighting community-driven solutions.”

## APPLY FOR FUNDING

Are you a community-based organization looking to fund a project? OEJ offers grants to not-for-profit organizations to address environmental harms in low-income and EJ communities. For additional information on OEJ grants and a complete list of previous project awardees, please visit our website:

<https://dec.ny.gov/get-involved/environmental-justice/grant-programs>.

## WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU

Do you have concerns about the environment where you live? Do you want to make your voice heard? Do you want to stay informed about the different environmental issues affecting New York State?



## JOIN OUR EJ LISTSERV

Go to <https://dec.ny.gov/news/dec-delivers> and sign up to receive regular updates from OEJ. Stay current on the issues that are important to you. As always, you can contact OEJ with any concerns by sending an e-mail to: [justice@dec.ny.gov](mailto:justice@dec.ny.gov).

Please include:

- Your location/address
- City, town, village, or borough
- The environmental concerns you wish to address
- List the potential source of pollution, if you know
- How or whether you wish to be contacted

### Contact us:

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