



# Environmental Justice Report

## SPRING 2026

### Twenty Years of Environmental Justice Grants

A NOTE FROM OUR DIRECTOR  
ALANAH KEDDELL-TUCKEY

There are many things in this life that are consistent and inevitable, but none more than time. Time stubbornly refuses to halt for anything, and it certainly does seem to fly. This year marks 20 years of the Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ)'s landmark Community Impact Grant. This means 20 years of funding small, not-for-profit organizations in their efforts to address historic environmental harms. Twenty years of public information campaigns, community gardens, and environmental reports. Most importantly, this means 20 years of partnerships and 20 years of serving all of you.

This spring, we kicked off this environmental justice (EJ) grant milestone with the release of the Community Impact Grant Round 13! We are immensely proud of our grants program and proud of all of you. Keep up the amazing work and we will keep working to fund you.

### Community Spotlight: Rochester Refugee Resettlement Services

#### Success Of a Community-Crafted Community Health Message Consuming Local Fish

BY GRACE LANE AND MIKE CONIFF, ROCHESTER REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT SERVICES, AND JEFF WYATT, UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

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

Rochester Refugee Resettlement Services (RRRS) completed a two-year, DEC-funded, community-collaborative, EJ research project designed to raise the refugee subsistence angling community's awareness about making healthy choices when consuming locally caught fish. RRRS, a small nonprofit organization in Rochester, provides services and opportunities to ensure assimilation of refugees into society as they strive to be self-sustaining neighbors while still maintaining their own cultural heritage.

Despite being delisted by the [US Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#) as an Area of Concern (AOC) in 2024, many of the Rochester Embayment's fish species contain concentrations of legacy pollutants (polychlorinated biphenyls [PCBs], dioxins/furans, mercury, mirex, etc.) warranting consumption advisories published by [NYS Department of Health](#). The adverse health effects, especially learning disabilities and cancer risks, caused by consuming chemically contaminated species of fish may be prevented simply by heightening "at risk" community awareness of fish species-specific health risks. Baseline surveys of 382 members of Rochester's refugee community, conducted by 12 high school and college students (research scholars paid \$20 per



OEJ 20 years logo

hour), identified 58% of those surveyed were unaware of health risks associated with consuming locally caught fish. Armed with survey data on demographics, ethnicities, popular fish species consumed, and reasons for eating local fish, the research scholars developed and subsequently delivered, over one and a half years, their unique outreach platforms to heighten community awareness of the health benefits and risks associated with eating select species of locally caught fish. A follow-up survey of 438 individuals from the same refugee community revealed an almost doubled awareness (80%) of the health risks in consuming local fish. Survey participants describing the health benefits of eating locally caught fish also increased almost two-fold, from 34% in 2023 to 67% in 2025.

This DEC-funded research project demonstrates the utility of engaging a marginalized community to design and deliver their own culturally relevant education platforms to convey a complex public health risk communication. The trust within a community of outreach agents and at-risk population with shared refugee experience proved effective at heightening awareness of the health benefits and risks associated with eating chemically contaminated fish sourced from a delisted EPA AOC.

For more information about this group, visit their website: <http://www.rochesterrefugeeservices.org>.

To complement the EJ work that RRRS is doing, the group was selected as one of 32 organizations to share \$6 million from the newest grant awards. They will be using the \$180,271.50 to improve air quality in multifamily, refugee-dwelling kitchens in Rochester's 14613 EJ neighborhoods.



Two research scholars training to perform the Fish Flash Card Survey.



Research scholars showing some of their educational materials (brochures & refrigerator magnets).



Research scholar sharing information at a community event

## Staff Spotlight: Marilyn Moore

In continuing with the theme of 20 years of OEJ grants, we would like to spotlight one of our grant administrators, Marilyn Moore. Marilyn joined our team in 2023 and eagerly jumped into her role, which includes reviewing applications, writing requests for applications (RFA), and managing contracts. She has been an integral part of our team and was recently promoted to an Environmental Program Specialist 2!

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

**A:** I am the program lead for DEC OEJ Grants at our Central Office in Albany. My primary role is ensuring OEJ's grant programs operate successfully, which involves a lot of moving parts!

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

**A:** That I get to work with such incredible colleagues that inspire me daily, and I feel very lucky to be here. Working in the EJ space is so fulfilling—it's intersectional in so many ways, and I'm constantly humbled to be on this life journey after finding EJ. Truth be told, being exposed to so many great efforts through our grantees definitely helps to mitigate my climate anxiety. It may sound cliché, but I really wouldn't be so successful if it wasn't for the people I work with because it truly takes a village. This goes for my DEC colleagues, those that I've worked with in my previous state service at NYS Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), State University of New York (SUNY) Schenectady, and SUNY Albany, and the community champions from groups that I've come to know and admire the work they do to bring EJ to their communities. I've learned so much about how to stay connected to people and the planet, and the best part is there's always more to learn.

I'm always thinking about EJ in some way, shape, or form, so when I go home for the day, I'm still pondering on the next thing to do when I get back to my desk. The connections I've made in this state and on Tribal lands through site visits and my own personal exploring of New York really help to inform my efforts. I dream of bringing a million tiny threads together in order to be a conduit for mutual empowerment. There are so many community groups doing incredible work across the state right now that I want to help bring together!

### **Q: What is something that you are working on?**

**A:** All the things, all the time. My official title is an Environmental Program Specialist, so I'll say that I'm working on EJ grant programs, but we do so much more than that. In just a few words: outreach, building connections, research, contract management, technical assistance for our grantees, internal and external working groups. ... The list goes on.

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

**A:** How much time do you have? All jokes aside, it means literally everything about living on this planet is better. That's how much I believe in EJ and what it can do for all of us if we understand what it is, how we can be involved, and put in the time and effort to lift up our friends, family, and neighbors with what we learn from practicing it.

### **Q: What is a good example of "Environmental Justice" being achieved/met?**

**A:** Just one? Many of our grantees foster all these things and more, so it's unfair to choose only one example!

- More abundant and equitable access to healthy green spaces
- Language barriers eliminated and third spaces for all to benefit
- Meaningful engagement and diverse representation in the social constructs of our lives



**Marilyn at NYS Association of Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislators 54th Annual Legislative Conference with her booth prize, an octopus.**

- Environmental literacy and a deference to Traditional Ecological Knowledge that incorporates an updated understanding of our modern world
- Addressing and eliminating pollution burdens and cumulative impacts on overburdened and frontline communities
- Basic human needs met while not compromising the health of our planet

**Q: What would you like the public to know about the work you do?**

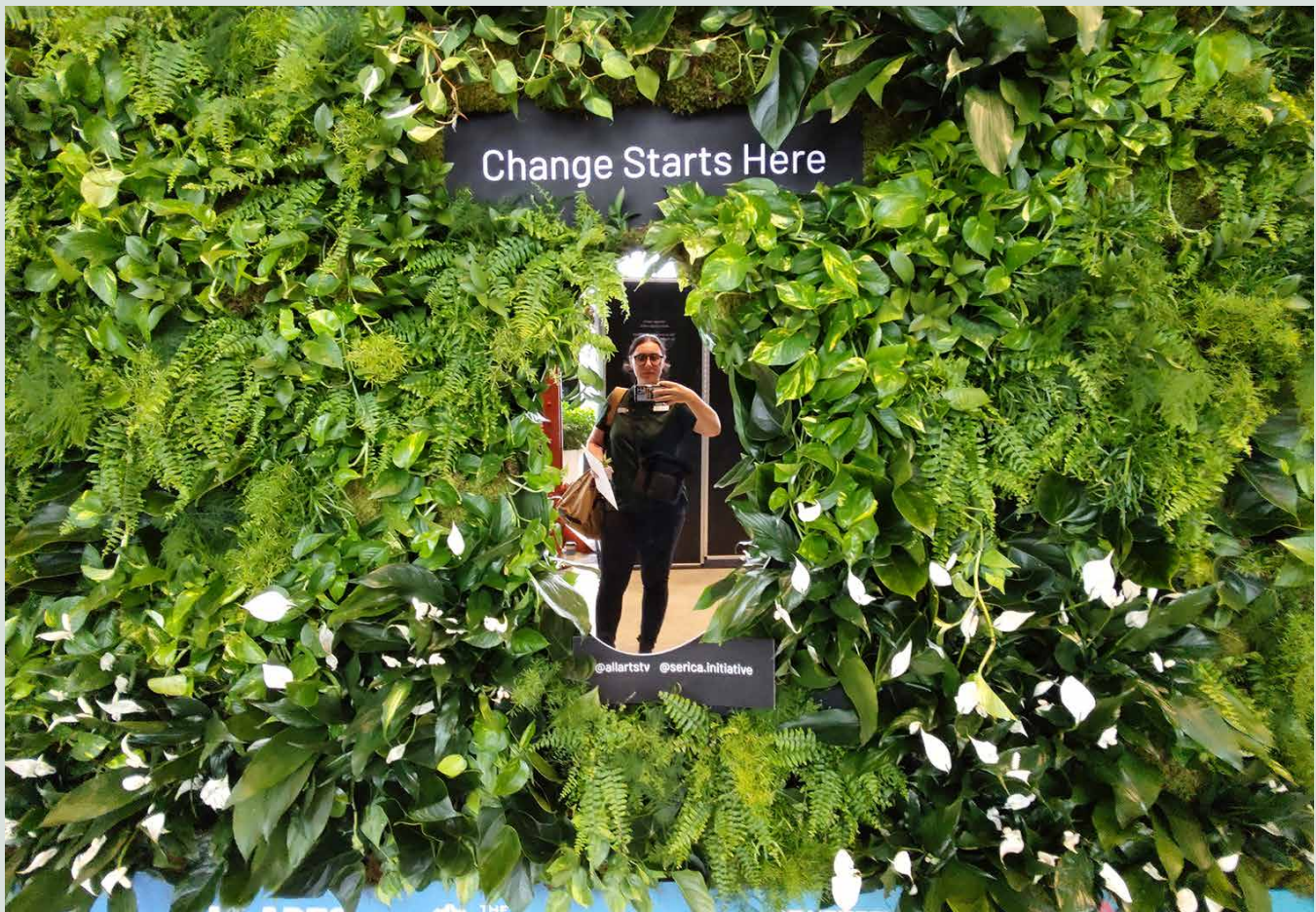
**A:** Our office will remain open to feedback on what investments communities need to address environmental harms and health hazards, and we will work diligently to ensure our grant programs reflect that feedback.

This position and field of work provide endless bounds of potential to be a positive phenomenon in people's lives. I live for and because of that.

If you're reading this, consider joining your local community environmental organizations to be the change you want and need. If there isn't a nearby community group, the community of change can start with you!

**Q: Now that we've learned about you through your work, here's a fun question. If you could have a conversation with any animal, which one would it be, and what would you talk about?**

**A:** I've had great "conversations" with birds and dogs all my life, but what's most intriguing to me is the thought of a conversation with an octopus. They have so many cool ways of communicating that involve body language, but I can't help but wonder what their voice would sound like if they had one, and what they dream about! I want to know what it feels like to be able to change their shapes and patterns on a whim, and what each pattern or shape means about their emotional state and thought process. Cephalopods are fascinating!



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."

## EJ Listening Tour: Plattsburgh and Elmira

DEC kicked off the 2026 leg of the EJ Listening Tour with sessions in Plattsburgh on March 11 and Elmira on March 17, in conjunction with the Elmira College Climate Teach-In the following day.

The goal of these listening sessions is to establish stronger relationships with communities and community leaders and promote more meaningful engagement between our agency and the New Yorkers we serve. Nurturing strong ties between the agency and communities allows us to better understand and address environmental disparities and ensure DEC's programs and initiatives are effective in reaching EJ communities.

The March 11 session was held at SUNY Plattsburgh and began with a resource fair, followed by a presentation from DEC on EJ and introducing OEJ to the community. The event ended with an opportunity for the public to ask questions and voice concerns. The attendees shared their concerns and feedback on DEC's role in the North Country where many live in rural communities. They also expressed their appreciation that our agency held an event that allowed a face-to-face meeting with executive-level staff.



DEC Commissioner Amanda Lefton speaking to the attendees.



Alanah presenting on OEJ.



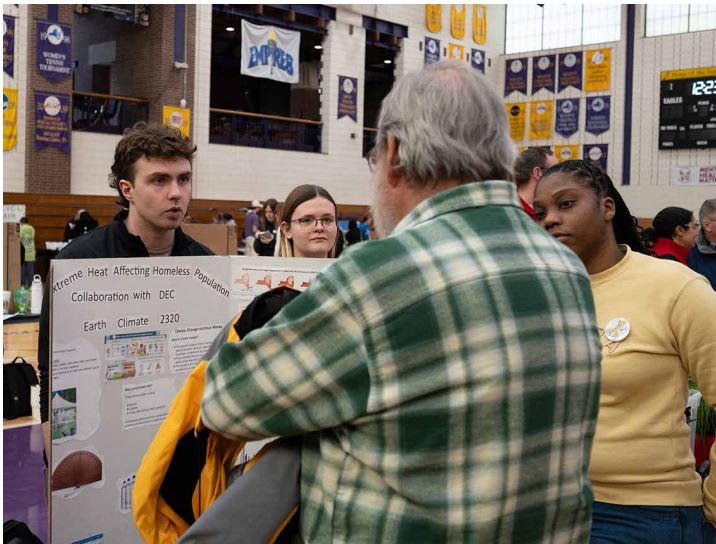
Region Director Tim Walsh (center) kicking off the EJ listening session in Elmira.



Attendees participating in roundtable discussions with DEC staff.

In Elmira, the public EJ listening session on March 17 began with a resource fair which allowed attendees to meet and engage with technical experts and local community groups. Afterward, attendees were able to participate in a climate summit through roundtable discussions at 20-minute intervals focused on topics, such as clean energy economy, climate adaptation, green and sustainable development, and access to public lands facilitated by DEC staff. At the conclusion of the discussions, a larger group conversation was had based on the main points from each topic before opening up the session for other questions. The following day allowed DEC staff to then focus on engaging students on campus. March 18 began with a keynote speech by the Director of Sustainability Brendan Woodruff, followed by a networking event for students to meet environmental professionals, an interactive fair for the public, and ended with a Student Climate Action panel attended by OEJ Director Alanah Keddell-Tuckey.

More stops will be announced throughout 2026.



Students presenting a project on how extreme heat affects the homeless population, which was done in collaboration with DEC during the interactive fair at Elmira College's 5th Annual Climate Week Teach-In.



Alanah participating in a Student Climate Action panel during the Teach-In.

## Snapshots

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

### Muslim Heritage Month Festival | Latham

On January 31, the DEC offices of EJ; Outdoor Recreation (OOR); and Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights (DICR) attended and engaged with the public at the Muslim American Heritage Festival at the Al-Hidaya Center in Latham. The festival was organized to mark the first time NYS officially celebrated Muslim American Heritage Month to honor and celebrate the values and cultural contributions made by Muslims. The event included panel discussions, exhibits, children's performances, and cultural information. Other State agencies in attendance were the NYS Department of State (DOS)'s Office for New Americans and the NYS Division of Human Rights. Staff shared information on DEC careers, EJ programs, and ways to get outside and try new outdoor activities.



(From left to right) Alanah, Trimelle Andrews, Haseena Din (DOS), Laura DiBetta, and Tiffany Yeung

### Black History Month Event | Albany

On February 11, DICR, OEJ, OOR, and the Bureau of Environmental Education (EE) joined together to attend the Black History Month outreach event at the Empire State Plaza. The event included music, food, vendors, and various organizations sharing information. DEC staff offered details on DEC careers, including summer camp positions, EJ programs, and different opportunities for outdoor activities.

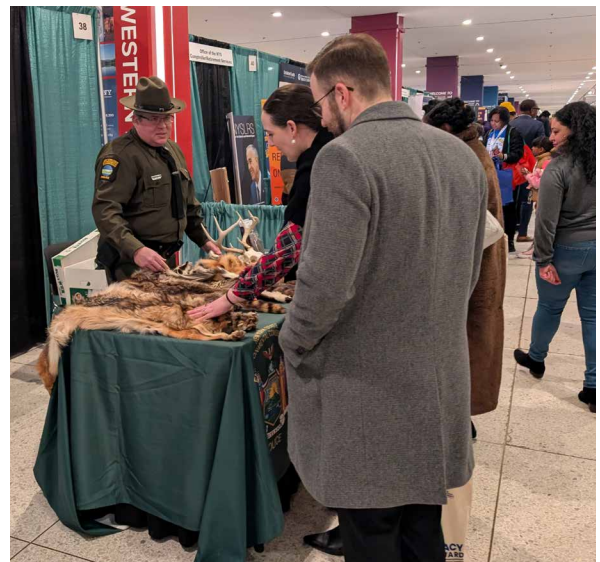
## NYS Association of Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislators 55th Annual Legislative Conference | Albany

For the third year in a row, OEJ was joined by staff from multiple programs including DICR, EE, Division of Law Enforcement (DLE), Division of Water (DOW), and the Division of Environmental Remediation in tabling at the NYS Association of Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislators 55th Annual Legislative Conference on February 14. Staff spoke to approximately 325 attendees about our various programs along with sharing information from OOR, Division of Lands and Forests, Division of Fish and Wildlife, and the Office of Climate Change.

This event annually convenes policymakers, leaders, advocates, and the public, with this year’s theme being “Legacy Forward: Transforming Tomorrow Together.”



Tiffany and Alanah at the booth showcasing DEC programs.



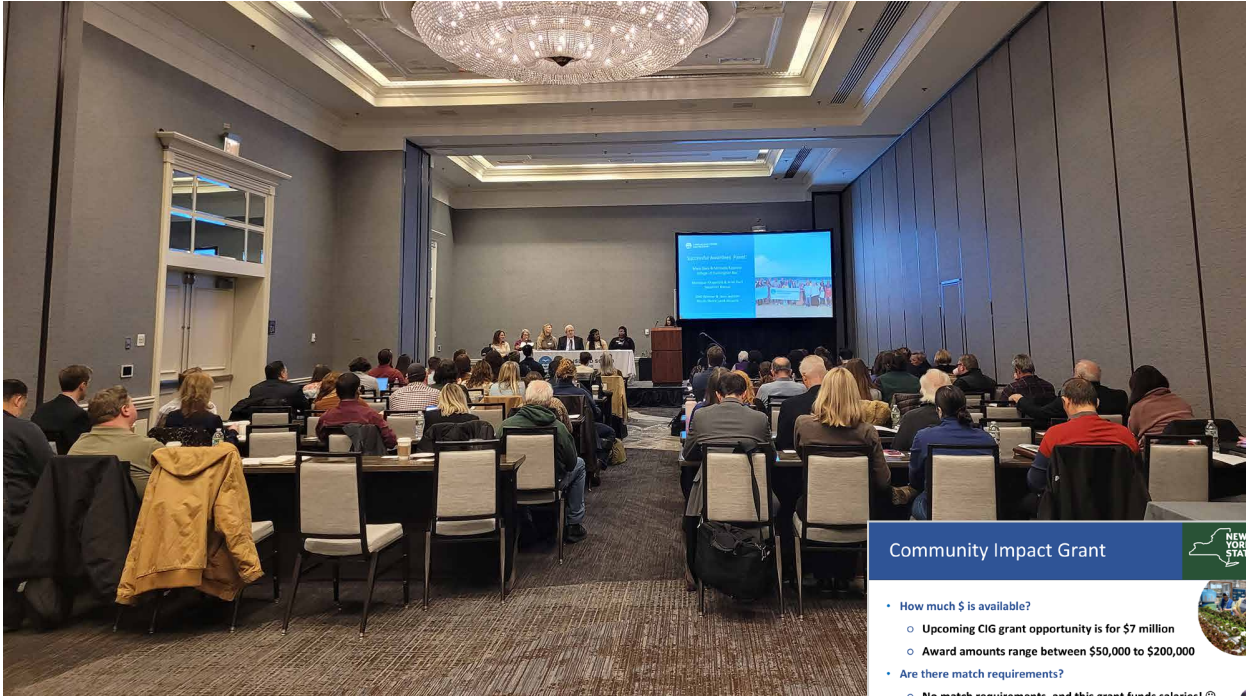
ECO Willson educating attendees about native wildlife with furs and skulls.



(From left to right) Mwaka Nachilongo (DOW), Alanah (OEJ), Sarah Conley (EE), Tiffany Yeung (OEJ), Emily Lenney (State Legislative Affairs [SLA]), Sylvie Sherlach (SLA), Marilyn (OEJ), DEC Commissioner Amanda Lefton, ECO Willson, and Fabio Iwashita (DER).

## Long Island Funding Workshop | Virtual/Hauppauge

OEJ was invited to virtually join the 3rd Annual Sustainable and Resilient Communities Funding Workshop in Hauppauge, Long Island, on March 18 and present on funding opportunities for the OEJ Grants programs, highlighting the Community Impact Grant. Over 100 attendees from across the state and Long Island Sound heard about 36 grant programs from State agencies, learned best practices in applying for funding from previous awardees, and had an opportunity to network after the presentations.



2026 Long Island Funding Workshop Credit: Sarah Schaefer-Brown



**Community Impact Grant**

- How much \$ is available?
  - Upcoming CIG grant opportunity is for \$7 million
  - Award amounts range between \$50,000 to \$200,000
- Are there match requirements?
  - No match requirements, and this grant funds salaries! ☺
- Who is eligible?
  - Community-based organizations that serve DACs and PEIAs
  - Must be a Tribal organization or 501(c)(3) not-for-profit

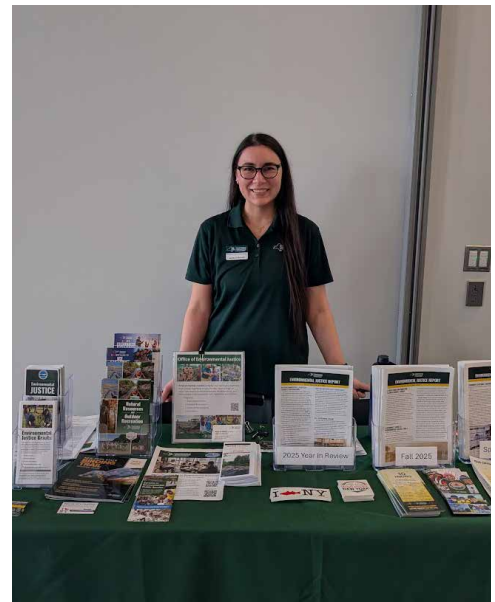
A slide from Marilyn's presentation on OEJ's Community Impact Grant.

## Native Plants Symposium | SUNY Adirondack

Marilyn Moore was invited to SUNY Adirondack to speak to a class about EJ and OEJ programs, table at the first annual Native Plants Symposium—a networking and community event that welcomed more than 150 attendees—and speak to the workforce development director about how we can continue to support them.



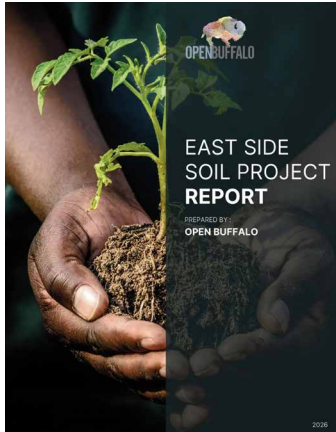
Symposium attendees listening to a presentation.



Marilyn representing DEC during the symposium.

## Open Buffalo Press Conference | Buffalo

On March 31, Alanah Keddell-Tuckey attended a press conference held by Open Buffalo to release their report and discuss findings from their “East Side Soil Project.” The project was a study on lead contamination in soil on Buffalo’s East Side residential properties and was supported by OEJ’s Community Impact Grant. Their results showed that nearly 70% of the properties tested more than three times the limit considered safe by the EPA. Based on initial findings and communications with the East Side Soil Project partners in June 2025, along with DEC becoming aware of an EPA Residential Lead Directive, DEC made an official referral to the EPA to perform an assessment of the lead levels in February 2026.



East Side Soil Project Report 2026



(From left to right) Director of Ecological Justice Dr. Jim Golden, Hamlin Park resident Deborah Fugate, Open Buffalo Deputy Director Max Anderson, and Open Buffalo Executive Director Franchelle Parker, Alanah.



Max and Alanah

## Class Presentation | Rensselaer

On April 14, Climate Policy Analyst Oliver Riley joined OCC’s Lia Heintjes at Rensselaer Polytechnical Institute (RPI) to speak to students as a part of their "Earth's Climate: Past, Present and Future" class. The students were made up of upper-level environmental science and engineering students. They are studying climate change as a part of their curriculum, and this was an opportunity to discuss climate change with professionals working in the field. Oliver presented on OEJ and led a discussion on EJ and climate justice. The students were active and excited about the conversation, asking questions about our Office's work across the state as well as activities occurring in and around Troy.



Oliver and Lia presenting on Climate Justice to RPI students.

## SOMOS Conference | Albany

On April 17 and 18, OEJ returned to the 2026 SOMOS, Inc. New York Conference in Albany. DICR, OOR, DOW, DLE, and the Division of Forest Protection joined our office in sharing information during the expo fair about our various programs, as well as DLF, DFW, and OCC. Over the two days of tabling, staff spoke to approximately 465 participants, a mix of leaders, advocates, and changemakers who gathered for this year's conference, themed "Del Memento al Movimiento - Lead, Unite, Transform."



(From left to right) ECO Hameline, Tiffany, Kiana Kerr, Oliver Riley, and Erin Sausville on day one of Somos.



(From left to right) Mwaka Nachilongo, Tiffany, Alanah, and Ranger Jackson on day two of Somos.

## 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

## 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>.



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