



2023–2024 Central and Western New York Region Chapter

POLICY AGENDA

**NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS
NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS EDUCATION FUND**

FOREWORD

After a relentless onslaught of extreme weather events, 2023 proved that we no longer have the luxury of biding our time. Climate change is not a problem we face in the future—it is here and we must take our foot off the brakes and act with a sense of urgency.

The impacts of a warming planet on the region have become clear. From Buffalo to Rochester to Syracuse and from the Great Lakes to the Finger Lakes, climate change has brought record heat, extreme flooding, droughts, and predictions of a lot more to come.

The New York League of Conservation Voters has put together a detailed agenda to help move the region forward in our collective efforts to protect our environment, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and shore up our resilience so we are better prepared for what is fast becoming the new normal.

In the renewable energy area, the region has something no one else in the world has: the Great Lakes, with its immense untapped potential in offshore wind. Also, we urge communities across the region to tap into the Climate Smart Community (CSC) program and for local and state leaders to prioritize decarbonizing buildings, hugely significant because greenhouse gas emissions from buildings account for almost one third of statewide emissions.

Modernizing water infrastructure and providing safe drinking water is also critical, as is reducing waste by increasing recycling and composting programs and modernizing waste-removal technologies.

The challenges are clear, and while we're proud of the progress we've made, there is still a long way to go. We look forward to working with town, county and state leaders, as well as other advocates and citizens all across the region in the coming months and years to support this green agenda.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Tighe".

JULIE TIGHE

President, NYLCV and NYLCVEF



ENERGY

Renewable energy will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution across the region, but it is challenging to site large-scale renewable energy projects and the transmission lines necessary to connect them to the grid. Even small-scale renewable technology like rooftop solar can be held up by red tape. We will work with municipal and county governments, and relevant state government entities, to establish guidelines on siting, taxes, and related policies that will protect the environment and encourage the expedited development of both large-scale and distributed renewable energy projects.

We will advocate for the responsible siting of renewable energy and storage projects across the region, including striking the right balance between meeting our renewable energy goals and protecting natural resources and open spaces, and opposing counterproductive policies like moratoriums.

The Great Lakes have immense untapped potential in the offshore wind space. The winds generated across the lakes account for nearly 20% of the nation's offshore wind potential, and if harnessed, could help New York State meet its goal of reaching 100 percent carbon-free Electricity by 2040.

- Educate stakeholders, including community groups, sportsman clubs and public and local elected officials, on the benefits of responsibly sited Great Lake wind, providing science and fact-based evidence to counter misinformation perpetuated about offshore wind.
- Engage with the state, county, and local governments as they explore the potential for offshore wind in the Great Lakes.

CLIMATE SMART COMMUNITIES

Western and Central New York communities have an amazing opportunity to tap into resources provided by the state through the Climate Smart Community (CSC) program. This is a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) program aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions by rewarding greenhouse gas reducing actions like transitioning to clean fleets, adopting NY Stretch Energy Codes, training governmental staff on Energy Code Enforcement, converting street lights to LED, and implementing Unified Solar Permitting. Becoming a DEC-certified Climate Smart Community shows a community's commitment of the community to a clean, environmentally friendly future.

- Support and collaborate with local organizations such as the University of Buffalo Regional institute to help municipalities navigate the Climate Smart Communities and NYSERDA's Clean Energy Communities programs
- Work to ensure that 100% of all Western and Central New York, counties, cities and towns are at the Bronze level or higher by the end of 2024 by taking actions like developing local greenhouse gas inventories, comprehensive sustainable plans, and climate adaptation plans.

BUILDINGS

Buildings are one of the leading sources of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and co-pollutants in New York State, accounting for nearly one-third of all emissions statewide. As such, we must aggressively decarbonize the buildings sector as we move to meet the emission reduction goals set under the State's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA). Western and Central New York are no exception to this, and as we must keep in mind the roadblocks that this transition will have to overcome.

- Advocate for the de-carbonization of state-owned buildings in the region including SUNY Campuses and Department of Corrections facilities, by replacing dated heating and cooling systems with geo-thermal ones, including thermal energy networks.
- Encourage the creation of incentives for energy-efficiency upgrades in existing residential and commercial buildings.
- Support the requirement of installation of solar panels on new commercial buildings and parking structures where feasible.
- Advocate for counties, localities and school districts to retrofit existing buildings to be zero emission.



Buffalo, NY

GREAT LAKES

The Great Lakes basin in New York, which covers 40% of the state's surface and provides drinking water for four million people is one of the most iconic parts of New York State. The diversity of landscapes from the Southern Tier to the Thousand Islands, from Buffalo to Rochester to Syracuse, represent the vast diversity of our state. However this region faces a number of unique challenges that must be addressed.

Flooding and extreme weather events due to climate change are a major natural threat to New Yorkers, especially New Yorkers who live on the banks of the Great Lakes. In 2017 and 2019 Lake Ontario reached disastrous levels flooding communities from Niagara to Jefferson County. This demonstrates that rising waters aren't just an issue for ocean coastal communities but also the communities on them. And despite progress to protect and restore the Great Lakes, New York's Great Lakes remain threatened by pollution, invasive species and habitat destruction.

- Advocate for state and federal funding to invest in more green infrastructure to protect these communities from future flood events.
- Advocate for implementation of New York's Great Lakes Action Agenda, which is the state's comprehensive plan to guide restoration and conservation, and foster sustainable, resilient communities in New York's Great Lakes region. The plan addresses clean up of the toxic areas of concern—including the Buffalo River, Niagara River, Eighteen mile Creek, and Rochester Embayment—the restoration of coastal habitat, the elimination of toxic discharges, and more.
- Advocate for funding for key state programs intended to support Great Lakes restoration and leverage federal funding, including the Ocean and Great Lakes, and Lake Erie Watershed Protection Alliance (LEWPA) lines within the Environmental Protection Fund.
- Advocate for mitigation efforts to address damage done by invasive species like water chestnut, sea lamprey and spiny water flea in the Great Lakes, and terrestrial invasive species like the spongy moth.



WASTE MANAGEMENT

Waste is an often overlooked part of our economy but it is the fourth-largest contributor to climate change in the state. New Yorkers produce 4.5 pounds of waste per person per day. 6 million tons of waste per year is landfilled here in New York, and we export another 6 million tons to other states. Much of our waste is generated from single-use products like cans, bottles, and bags. To reduce waste we must advocate for a package of policies to local municipalities and the state as a whole to reach a circular economy.

- Incentivize and expand regional recycling facilities, anaerobic digesters, compost sites, and other technologies that can process waste with a smaller impact on the environment.
- Explore curbside collection of residential food waste and commercial organic waste recycling programs, with the goal of establishing facilities and anaerobic digesters capable of processing organic waste into compost and/or renewable energies. Work with restaurants and organizations that are not covered by the state food waste law to participate in food recovery programs that donate excess untouched food to those in need.
- Adopt policies that ban single-use plastic straws, utensils, and containers in favor of reusable and compostable materials.
- Work with schools, restaurants, and municipalities to develop waste reduction plans, boost recycling rates, and provide education about recycling, composting, and waste diversion, with emphasis on reduction and reuse. Pass county ordinances that include a fee on paper bags to complement the state's plastic bag ban and encourage reusable bag use.
- Expand product stewardship programs in larger cities and counties in the region for items such as product packaging, mattresses, batteries and more.
- Encourage local governments to source materials for projects from their own waste stream where possible, including the use of recycled glass for concrete needs and compost for landscaping needs.
- Advocate for the recycling of household hazardous waste, such as electronics through drop offs or municipal programs, working with local governments, officials and business.



Project Renderings from Syracuse's Southwest Gateway Project as Part of \$10 Million Downtown Revitalization Initiative.

Source: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-announces-transformational-projects-syracuses-southwest-gateway-part-10>



Erie Canalway Trail Source: © 2024 Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor.

Source: <https://eriecanalway.org/explore/cycling>

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

Creating more accessible and walkable communities will help to reduce the impact of transportation pollution while connecting communities historically separated by thoroughfares.

- Advocate for expanding public transportation from within larger cities to more rural areas of the region, including buses and rail lines connecting Buffalo and Niagara Falls, and Syracuse to Auburn and Oswego.
- Support the expedited release of the \$10 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative awarded to the City of Syracuse's Southwest Gateway to help improve the communities walkability.

OPEN SPACE AND NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION

The Cities of Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse along with other cities in Western and Central New York are lucky to have access to some of the nation's largest bodies of freshwater: Lake Erie, Lake Ontario and the Finger Lakes. Protecting access to these and other natural spaces must be a priority.

- Clean up industrial and toxic lands. Western and Central New York have played a vital role in the development of industry and manufacturing in our country. However with that history comes the legacy of pollution and destruction of natural resources. We must help local municipalities to leverage available funding both from New York State and the federal government to clean up polluted areas.
- Support access to bike trails such as the Erie Canalway trail and many others.

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NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS

NYLCV is the only nonpartisan, statewide environmental organization in New York that fights for clean water, clean air, renewable energy, and open space through political action.

NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS EDUCATION FUND

NYLCVEF educates, engages and empowers New Yorkers to be effective advocates for the environment.

