



# ECOS NEWS

## *ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse*



The purpose of ECOS is to provide environmental experiences and education for youth and adults in order to develop an appreciation and understanding of the natural world and the impact of human activities upon it.

### **Celebrating Our 49th Year in Environmental Education**

Volume XLIX

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## Take the Frostbite Challenge

Let's get kids outside walking, snowshoeing, or skiing this winter! Complete four miles along the beautiful Towpath Trail that runs beside the Mohawk River, from the Whipple Bridge entrance to the Lock 7 Overlook. Both ends have small parking areas. There's an additional parking lot midway, at the end of Ferry Drive. The four-mile challenge can be done in either direction, on one day, or in sections on different days.

Vischer Ferry General Store (357 Riverview Rd Rexford, NY) will offer a free cookie to kids under 14 years of age who complete the four-mile walk between January 1st to March 31st.

First, send an email to [celikECOS@gmail.com](mailto:celikECOS@gmail.com) to let ECOS know that you might be taking the challenge.

Then, to document completion, the child (or parent) should email two digital photos of themselves on the path, one near each end of the walk, with the child's name and age to: [celikECOS@gmail.com](mailto:celikECOS@gmail.com). If parents give permission to publish the names and/or photos of finishers on the ECOS website, Facebook page or newsletter, please state so with those two photos.

Alice & Owen  
Poppy & Cosmos



Vischer Ferry General Store

Stop in with masks and tell Vischer Ferry General Store (check online for store hours) that your child completed the Frostbite Challenge to enjoy a cookie!

For the Whipple Bridge entrance: A small parking pull-off area is available directly across from the intersection of Riverview Road and VanVranken roads.

For the Lock 7 Overlook entrance: A parking area can be found by going down the hill toward the Mohawk at the intersection of Riverview and Sugar Hill roads. A blue sign, "Vischer Ferry Power Plant" leads to the parking lot from Riverview Road.

Note: The Vischer Ferry Parking Lot at the end of Ferry Drive makes a good midpoint location along the trail for parking and walking the trail in sections. This central parking lot is near Vischer Ferry General Store.

Trail Map link: [https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?](https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1eWQSDsaEz4cc2ZKxHdU22AxmXhga3oeZ&ll=42.80279888164605%2C-73.78720474999997&z=13)

[mid=1eWQSDsaEz4cc2ZKxHdU22AxmXhga3oeZ&ll=42.80279888164605%2C-73.78720474999997&z=13](https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1eWQSDsaEz4cc2ZKxHdU22AxmXhga3oeZ&ll=42.80279888164605%2C-73.78720474999997&z=13)

Clara, Harrison & Walter



**ECOS NEWS**

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**President's Piece**

**CHANGE AND CHALLENGE**

As recently as the mid-1760s the Pine Bush was a wild place. Travelers between Albany and Schenectady, because of reports of ambushes and scalping, were escorted by armed militiamen. Now, the area is largely developed, crossed by roads and fast-moving traffic, subject to pollution caused by traffic fumes. Pollution is harming the blue lupine, the Karner Blue caterpillar's only food, and is one of the factors contributing to their decline. In 250 years, a unique ecosystem, thousands of years in the making, has been decimated.

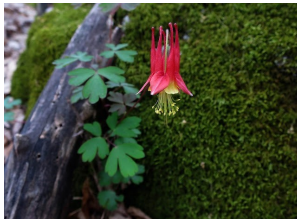
All around us we see change; changes which are called progress by some, environmental destruction by others. I drive to Saratoga often. But if I miss a month or two, the landscape has changed. Fields are now housing developments. A shopping plaza has appeared. The view I used to look forward to is obscured by a new building. Local farms are disappearing. Developers' dollars win.

Homo Sapiens has been on the planet for only 240,000 years. (Dinosaurs existed for 165 million years.) If you think of the 4.5 billion years that life has existed on this planet as 24 hours, then Man has existed for only 3 seconds. But we have had a huge impact in that relatively short time. Since Homo Sapiens first walked the earth, we have modified our environment. From early agriculture--burning to clear land, diversion of streams for irrigation, prioritizing certain (often non-native) plants—to factory farms, genetic modification, use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers—humans have acted upon the environment to better meet their needs. And humans have multiplied and thrived...and have populated and modified lands in all corners of the globe.

The changes we have wrought are now threatening the continued existence of life as we know it on Earth.

*Continued p.3*

**Spring Flower Self-guided Walks**



Watch for ECOS' virtual Spring Walks. The newer versions will be "phone friendly" and will come with directions to the site, maps, suggested times to view certain flowers, and commentary. The following members have submitted these sites:

Joralemon Park, Ruth Brook

Skidmore North Woods, Nancy Slack

Limestone Rise, Ed Kautz

Canal Park, Jackie Donnelly

Shenantaha Creek Path, Elizabeth Collins

We still have hope that we will be able to conduct in-person walks. Please check our website regularly.

Website: [ECOSNY.org](http://ECOSNY.org)

## Change and Challenge, continued

What can we do? We all know many small things we can do—recycle, reuse, compost, energy-efficient appliances, drive less, reduce red meat consumption, buy local, plant trees, reduce lawns, etc. But individual solutions alone are not enough. Community action, as Mark Lowery suggested in his talk on climate change, has a greater impact. National and global action is needed as well.

Ecosystem preservation and restoration is essential. On a global level, extensive restoration of lands degraded by human activity and protection of lands still undisturbed is widely seen as key to stabilizing the climate and preserving biodiversity. The Nature Conservancy is a leader in this work nationally and internationally, but concerted action on the part of nations is needed.

The new Biden administration realizes the threat of climate change. Rejoining the Paris Agreement is a significant first step. The creation of a new position, Special Presidential Envoy for Climate with a seat on the National Security Council, and the appointment of John Kerry, a seasoned diplomat to the position, signal an intent to make combating climate change central to US foreign policy. They are taking on the challenge.

## *ECOS is Zooming*

—Cindy Elsenbeck

Zoom presentations continue to be a success and optimal way to get together, even though we can't in person. We are grateful for everyone's participation and patience with technical issues as they arise.

Our annual **Holiday Program** was attended by over 30 people and enjoyed by all. The program started with a slide show and beautiful local pictures contributed by our members. The background music didn't work, but it allowed members to narrate the slides and was more interactive. There was also a presentation on making the holidays green and how to make a repurposed candle.

The winners of the Holiday Program's book raffle for the New York Times Bestseller "All We Can Save: Truth, Courage and Solutions for the Climate Crisis", which was generously donated by Open Door Bookstore, were:

Josh Bennett, Rosaline Horowitz, Jean Quattrocchi, Janet Hollocher, and Cindy Elsenbeck

The program concluded with sharing holiday wishes and a virtual mingle. This was a great opportunity for raising our glasses, celebrating 2020, even with its challenges, and welcoming in 2021.

ECOS' virtual speaker series continues the third Thursday at 7 p.m. The Zoom invitation for each program is emailed to all active members. The invitation is also available on the ECOS website the week before the event. The programs are open to the public. Following are the scheduled speakers until Spring, and then our hope is to be able to hold more live events:

**February 18<sup>th</sup>** – Student **Jacob Abbot** will demo his online StoryMap tool for navigating the history of dams in the Adirondacks. Student **Maryam Ramjohn** will present her interactive timeline in a platform called OMEKA, in which she traces the evolution of Native American life in the Adirondacks.

**March 18<sup>th</sup>** – **Jeff Leon**, Strawberry Fields – will illustrate his road to net zero, and layers of actions he's taken to mitigate environmental damage.

**April 15<sup>th</sup>** – **Cindy Elsenbeck**, beekeeper – will talk about the endangered and amazing honeybee and what we can do to protect them.

**May 20<sup>th</sup>** – **Tom Twente**, Grow Amsterdam – will speak on the benefit of composting as it gives your soil "muscles" by improving soil structure, water-holding capacity, and nutrient storage.

# Safe Streets

—Art Clayman

Back in September, when I saw a story in The Daily Gazette about the Schenectady United Neighborhoods (SUN) group being so concerned about speeding that they were forming a special Safe Streets Committee to address the problem, I knew it was something I wanted to be involved with. While they were concerned primarily about the danger that speeding cars pose to pedestrians, as founder and president of the bike advocacy group Cycle Schenectady I saw we had a common interest. So I suggested that our organizations form a coalition to work on this important issue: making Schenectady's streets safe and accessible to cyclists, pedestrians, everyone – not just cars.

Speeding has always been a problem in this city. It isn't just reckless drivers, or inconsistent police enforcement, but streets that are designed to encourage them to go fast (as streets are almost everywhere in our auto-dominant society). And during the pandemic, with fewer cars and even more open road, they are going faster than ever. It seems the city's 30 mph speed limit is not a ceiling, but a floor. Most drivers are well in excess of that! They need to slow down, and there's little to lose and everything to gain from having them do so. There's a direct correlation between driver speed and pedestrian and bicyclist safety. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, a pedestrian has a 10 percent chance of being killed or seriously injured by a car going 15 mph. At 31 mph, it jumps to 50 percent. That's why more and more cities are reducing their speed limit to 25 or even 20 mph. "20 Is Plenty" is their slogan.

Slowing down doesn't even cost drivers anything. In a city, it's not about how fast you go, it's about stoplights and stop signs, and Schenectady has plenty of both. Race 45 mph down some street and then wait behind the other cars stopped at the light. You get to your destination the same time as you would have if you'd taken it easy and driven safely. Less driving and more walking and biking are good for people's health. They are also good for the environment, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and pressure for sprawl development.

But there are other, less obvious benefits. Outdoor recreation is an important way to build community. And that, in turn, is a key to reducing crime, a problem in Schenectady and most cities. If a street is a "place" — one that people care and about and look out for, where they live, interact and enjoy themselves and one another — rather than just a "space" to be gotten through on the way to somewhere else, crime is much less likely to occur.

That's where equity comes in. The people who live in lower-income neighborhoods want and deserve safe neighborhoods, just like anyone else. Also, many of them are young, elderly or disabled and don't have cars. It isn't fair that their age or poverty should put them at greater risk of being injured or killed by a speeding car.

Fear of getting hit by a car is the No. 1 reason people give when asked why they don't bicycle. If they were made to feel safe — by slowing cars down with design changes, by giving them bike lanes and otherwise protecting them, many more would. The same is true when it comes to walking and pedestrian safety.

That is why Schenectady needs a Complete Streets ordinance, one of our coalition's goals. But it's not enough to just have legislation on the books. What's needed is a philosophy and mind-set through all the city's departments: from engineering to streets and signals to planning to police.

The danger of legislation without action can be seen with the city's bike infrastructure master plan. It contains many sound recommendations to make Schenectady more bicycle-friendly, but since its adoption in 2017, virtually nothing has been done. No bike lanes, no infrastructure, no signs — even on something like the Greenway that runs between Central Park through Vale Park to downtown. It was created nearly 10 years ago, and still, not a sign. Other local communities, including Albany, Saratoga Springs and Ballston Spa, are putting complete streets in the forefront of their planning efforts. Call them complete streets or safe streets, they are one and the same. And the city needs them.

*Art Clayman is a member of ECOS' board, which has voted to join the coalition and support this effort. You can show your support individually by signing the Safe Streets Schenectady petition on the ECOS Facebook page.*

## WHAT CAN WE DO AT THE LOCAL LEVEL ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE?

—Janet Hollocher

For ECOS' first on-line Rachel Carson Dinner, DEC Climate Policy Analyst Mark Lowery spoke about solutions to the climate crisis, and how we can participate at the state and local levels.

To avoid the most disastrous effects of human-induced global warming, we must make major, heroic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions [GHGs] in the next ten years, by 2030.

New York's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) of 2019 sets the stage for action. This law requires New Yorkers to:

- reduce greenhouse gas emissions to below 15% of 1990 levels by 2050
- achieve zero-emission electricity by 2040, with 70% of our electricity generated from renewable sources by 2030

To meet these goals, New York must electrify most of our economy -- including transportation, buildings, and industry. Although New York City's per capita emissions are among the lowest in the country, upstate transportation raises state emissions to the national average. Transportation is our state's largest source of emissions (about 35%), followed closely by building heat, hot water, and industrial processes from burning coal, oil, and natural gas (30%). Electricity generation is only about 14% of statewide emissions because of our large hydroelectric and nuclear capacity, but we must reduce emissions from this sector as well.

Under the CLCPA, the Climate Action Council will write an action plan ("scoping plan") by 2022 for meeting our climate goals. Input will come from six or more Advisory Councils, to which the public can contribute comments and questions.

Meetings of the Climate Action Council and Advisory Councils are shown live on the internet. For recordings, meeting materials, and CLCPA information, go to [climate.ny.gov](http://climate.ny.gov). You can sign up for e-mail updates at [climate.ny.gov/E-mail-List](http://climate.ny.gov/E-mail-List).

For the ECOS audience, Mr. Lowery had this advice:

"If you are sitting there wondering what you can do to address the climate crisis, the Climate Smart Communities program is an opportunity for you."

Climate Smart Communities (CSC) is an interagency program to encourage local governments to act on climate change through both mitigation and adaptation. Local residents can agitate for climate action and volunteer to serve on their local Climate Smart Communities task force to help their municipality achieve CSC certification.

To get certification, municipalities must take actions such as greenhouse gas inventories, climate action plans, a complete streets plan, a natural resources inventory, building energy audits, alternative fuel infrastructure, and planning for climate resiliency.

In Schenectady County, four municipalities have registered with the program: the County, the City, and the towns of Niskayuna and Glenville. So far, only the County has progressed to the first level of certification by committing to tangible and measurable actions. More local action is needed to get certification in the City of Schenectady and in Niskayuna and Glenville.

Local government actions also come under the state's climate law through the Land Use and Local Government Advisory Panel of the Climate Action Council. In addition to reducing GHG emissions and improving resiliency -- goals in common with the Climate Smart Communities program -- the panel aims to use smart growth planning to reduce vehicle miles traveled, reduce local barriers to solar and wind power, and increase carbon sequestration by means of land use policies.

Consider volunteering to help Climate Smart Communities find solutions to the climate crisis!

Climate Smart Communities: [climatesmart.ny.gov](http://climatesmart.ny.gov)

For more links, see Resources at [ecosny.org](http://ecosny.org).





## Ski and Snowshoe Outings 2021

*Photos and Narrative by Roy Keats*



Beautiful Vischer Preserve

### January 5, 2021

We had a successful first outing of the season today. Fourteen folks came and explored the Vischer Ferry Preserve from Ferry Drive. We divided into two groups—skiers and walkers. Our intrepid group enjoyed the roughly three inches of soft corn snow.



Those who continued skiing to Lock 19 of the old Erie Canal



Starting our Adventure



Our ski group near the Vischer Ferry power generating facility on the Mohawk River with Lock 7 in the distance and the new barge canal ice breaking tugboat at the dock



Group at Hang Glider



Hang Glider, looking over to High Point with Sandy and Harry



Gasoline Alley

### January 12, 2021

This Tuesday we went to Thacher Park North. We had 14 people in two groups. Don Orr volunteered to pick this week's location and checked it out ahead of time. We greatly appreciated his efforts.

One group of five skiers was led by Don Orr and Josh Bennett, and one group of nine walkers was led by Sue and Roy Keats. Our first official destination was the High Point Cliff on the Long Path. The walkers took a shorter route and got there first. From this cliff we had a nice view of the Hang Glider Cliff, which looked enticing. Once the skiers arrived, we unanimously decided to go to the Hang Glider Cliff, since the skiing and walking were both so good. This extended our trip beyond the original plan, but it was a beautiful day for our outing. In addition to taking in the great views of both cliffs, we found lots of evidence of deer hunting for acorns, with many areas containing leaves churned up in the snow. We also came across a long-rusted-out car next to a "Gasoline Alley" sign. Was there really a road on trail W5? It was a great outing. The walkers did a little under five miles, and the skiers did about six miles.



Group at High Point



Thacher High Point View

The locations of the outings are decided based on conditions Monday, the day before. To learn each week's outing location, call 518-370-4125 after 3 p.m. Monday. The leader's name and contact info will be on the message and you MUST make a reservation with the leader.

## 2021 CALENDAR

### February

—Tuesday Ski and Snowshoe Outings

—**18th**, 7PM, Speaker Series; Union College students will share their projects. **Jacob Abbott** will demonstrate his online StoryMap that navigates the history of dams, and **Maryam Ramjohn** will present OMEKA which tracks the evolution of Native Americans.

—Saturday (Date TBD), Josh Bennett will lead a ski outing.

### March

—**18th, 6 PM**, ECOS All-Member Annual Meeting with Speaker Series, **Jeff Leon**, *Strawberry Fields* at 7 PM

### April

—April/May Newsletter

—Virtual Spring Walks and (tentatively) in-person walks on Tuesdays

—**15th** Annual Dinner with Speaker Series, **Cindy Elsenbeck**, *Beekeeper*

—**15th** Annual Dinner with Speaker Series, **Cindy Elsenbeck**, *Beekeeper*

### May

—Virtual Spring Walks and (tentatively) in person walks on Tuesdays

—**20th, 7PM**, Speaker Series: **Tom Twente**, *Grow Amsterdam*, *Composting*

### June

—June/July Newsletter

**Check our website, [ECOSNY.org](http://ECOSNY.org), for details**



## MEMBERSHIP FORM

### ECOS Membership

### ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse

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\_\_\_ I would like to be a volunteer. Please send me more information.



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ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse is located in the Niskayuna Community Center, 2682 Aqueduct Rd. Niskayuna, NY.

## **UPDATE ON ECOS' ACTIVITIES DURING "PAUSE" 2021**



### **Seven Preserve Challenge**

Winter is on its way but don't let that stop you.... bundle up and get outside! Challenge yourself with the Seven Preserve Challenge! Or look through one of our Guides to Natural Areas...(you can buy them at the Open Door or on our website: [www.ecosny.org](http://www.ecosny.org))

Download the forms at [www.ecosny.org](http://www.ecosny.org) to participate in the Challenge and receive a patch.

*ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse is a non-political, not-for-profit organization. Our mission is to provide environmental information and educational opportunities that enhance appreciation of the natural world, build a community that is aware and knowledgeable about environmental issues, and advocate informed action to preserve our natural resources. ECOS is funded through the support of our members and the community.*



### **Frostbite Challenge**

If you are 14 or under, get your parents outside and take the Frostbite Challenge before March 31st.

Late winter is a great time to visit Vischer Ferry. It borders the Mohawk River and is teeming with activity. You may see the icebreaking tug boat in action or a pair of bald eagles looking for dinner.

Remember to take two photos and stop by the Vischer Ferry General Store for a cookie.