

# New York State Policy Agenda 2016



NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS

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NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS EDUCATION FUND

# INTRODUCTION

Each year, NYLCV works closely with New York's leading environmental, public health, conservation, energy, environmental justice, and transportation organizations to identify the state's most pressing priorities on climate change, public health and natural resources. The result of that effort is the document you have here. These items will drive our advocacy work throughout the legislative session and in April, NYLCV will determine which bills to push to the finish line. Finally, after session, NYLCV will release a progress report that grades the state legislature for its work on our coalition's priority bills.

Our 2016 agenda charges the legislative and executive branches with five distinct but interconnected directives: ensure adequate funding for the environment, address the causes and effects of climate change, conserve the health of New Yorkers and their communities, protect natural resources and invest in better, smarter infrastructure.

Making sure New York is resilient to the effects of climate change and reduces its carbon footprint has been and will continue to be a top focus. With the ongoing Reforming the Energy Vision initiative, the implementation of Governor Cuomo's bold climate proposals from this past fall, and ensuring New York is fully compliant with the US Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan, there will much to do in the coming months in this area.

The Paris Climate Agreement creates hope that we may prevent the worst impacts of climate change, but there are other imminent threats to the well-being of our lands and waters. We must halt and reverse human degradation to our natural areas, conserving them for future generations with adequate protections and



**Marcia Bystryn, President  
NYLCV and NYLCV Education Fund**

funding. From repairing our aging water infrastructure to funding our parks, this will be a constant theme throughout the year.

Finally, for far too long, low-income communities and communities of color have borne the brunt of the worst environmental hazards – both in terms of pollution and the devastating effects of climate change. This has resulted in troubling rates of asthma and other related public health issues. Protecting our environment isn't just about nature. It's also about people. Every single community must have clean air to breathe, well-maintained parks for recreation, access to fresh foods from local farms and protection from toxic chemicals.

We recognize that these challenges will not be easy to solve. Our leaders will need to be thoughtful, work across the aisle, and make tough compromises. But we fully expect them to do whatever it takes to create a greener, healthier and more prosperous New York.

## ENSURE ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

**New York State is a national leader on the environment. We have some of the best environmental legislation and programs in the country, and these must be supported with resources for effective implementation and enforcement. The agencies responsible for this important work need to be fully funded. New York State should:**

1. Fund the Environmental Protection Fund at \$300 million in the 2016-17 state budget to address significant environmental, land protection, infrastructure and conservation needs in urban areas and throughout the state without sweeps, raids or one-shot funds.
2. Significantly increase funding and resources to the agencies charged with protecting and preserving the environment and public health, such as the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation.
3. Fully fund the state's mass transit capital needs throughout the state and include new, reliable revenue sources. Ensure that dedicated transit funds are not diverted to the general fund for other purposes.
4. Support \$800 million in annual spending on clean water infrastructure, which not only helps the environment, but is essential to regional and local economies.

## ADDRESS CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

**Develop a statewide plan to address the root causes of climate change and adopt a long-term strategy to manage the effects of climate change.**

1. Ensure the final Reforming Energy Vision plan implements the 2030 state targets of 23% reduction in energy consumption for energy efficiency, 50% generation of renewable energy, and a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions as well as targets for each electricity service area.  
Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, energy efficiency, increased use of renewables and other programs.
2. Support large-scale renewables to reach the state energy goals.
3. Ensure the final Clean Energy Fund provides a clear roadmap and adequate financial support for new green energy projects and implementation of existing initiatives, including regional sustainability plans developed under the Cleaner, Greener Communities Program.
4. Support the US Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan (CPP) through a New York State compliance plan using the  
5. Ensure that CPP implementation includes plans to reduce CO<sub>2</sub>, SO<sub>2</sub>, and NO<sub>x</sub> emissions so that residents living near small-scale distributed power generators and large-scale fossil fuel plants—particularly environmental justice communities—do not experience adverse air quality.
6. Design and support programs that target affordable and low-income populations to ensure equitable delivery of reliable clean energy through microgrids and efficiency programs.
7. Expand the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative and use exclusively for clean energy projects.



The Environmental Protection Fund supports everything from forests, to municipal parks, to the waterfront revitalization project in Buffalo.

Programs like FreshConnect are helping to bring fresh, local produce to food deserts in communities statewide.

## PROTECT THE HEALTH OF NEW YORKERS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

Public health can be improved by improving air and water quality, cleaning up contaminated land and limiting the public's exposure to toxic substances.

### Toxics

1. Enact comprehensive legislation that protects children and the environment from a broad set of harmful chemicals in children's products.
2. Enact legislation to address toxic chemicals in consumer products, such as: triclosan in soap, flame retardants in upholstery, cadmium in jewelry and formaldehyde in children's personal care products.
3. Enact legislation that ensures that the state's definition of hazardous waste is applied consistently, and covers wastes from oil and natural gas drilling and extraction.
4. Strengthen the Pesticides Reporting Law and oppose efforts to reduce its funding.

### Air Quality

1. Reduce emissions from diesel engines by encouraging upgrades to new vehicles using clean diesel, propane and electric engines.
2. Encourage the continued adoption of ultra-low sulfur home heating oil, propane, or natural gas to replace #6 and #4 home heating oil.
3. Expand the use of sustainable biofuel blends in home heating oil, commercial buildings, and vehicles—particularly vehicles used in dense urban areas with high levels of childhood asthma.

### Food Quality and Security

1. Conserve the state's farmland and regional food sheds and facilitate the transportation options available for the movement of farm-fresh food.
2. Support initiatives to secure the productive capacity of the state's remaining farmland through sustainable agricultural practices.
3. Expand the FreshConnect program—especially the FreshConnect Checks program—to provide fresh, local produce to urban markets with little access to fresh produce.

## CONSERVE NATURAL RESOURCES

**New York's spectacular natural resources not only provide awe-inspiring views and recreational opportunities, they help keep our children and families healthy. Our parks, rivers, lakes and oceans should be protected so future generations can enjoy them.**

1. Promote clean water, encourage healthy and abundant wildlife populations, and support vibrant communities in the Adirondacks by protecting 35,000 acres of Adirondack forest in the MacIntyre East/ West and the Boreas ponds tracts with a wilderness classification.
2. Implement regional ecosystem programs including the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan for Long Island Sound, and other comprehensive estuary and Great Lakes management initiatives.
3. Strengthen the Hudson River Estuary Action Agenda and private regional land conservation initiatives in the Hudson Valley to better protect water quality, scenic areas, and recreational opportunities in the Hudson Valley while enhancing the vibrancy of local communities.
4. Incentivize habitat management and conservation goals on private land through state funding matching grants to landowners. Update the state's forest tax abatement program to recognize sustainable forestry on smaller parcels. Create a wildlife habitat tax credit with offsets to fiscal impacts to local governments.
5. Support Plan 2014 compact to restore more natural variations in the water levels of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River while ensuring that homeowners along these waterways are assisted in its implementation.
6. Adequately fund and implement robust programs to deal with the growing threat of invasive species.
7. Establish a more rigorous process for the alienation of parkland that holds government accountable, provides transparency and protects parks, playgrounds, and recreation areas from inequitable land swaps and sales.
8. Divert organic waste from landfills by increasing large-scale composting and biodigesters.

NYLCV is calling for the expansion of the protected site in Adirondack Park to 280,000 contiguous, motor free acres, which would make the park one of the largest natural parks in the country.



# PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCES

## Clean Water

1. Continue investment in wastewater treatment and stormwater management.
2. Fully enforce the Sewage Pollution Right to Know Law, including combined sewer overflow notifications.



Syracuse saw a record 372 water main breaks in 2015 due to aging pipes and a lack of funds to repair them.



Electric vehicle adoption is increasing, but a lack of charging infrastructure remains a significant barrier.

# INVESTING IN THE FUTURE: BETTER, SMARTER INFRASTRUCTURE

Investment in infrastructure lays the foundation for our communities' well-being. With each investment we make today, we have the opportunity to leave a legacy of equity, growth, prosperity and conservation for generations to come. Investment decisions should also be evaluated for their ability to build better, smarter and greener infrastructure.

## Transportation Infrastructure & Efficiency

1. Support multimodal transportation like bus rapid transit, rails-to-trails conversions of abandoned rail lines, ferries, connected regional bike lanes and trails, and community multi-use trails that promote bicycling, walking and safety.
2. Promote deployment of plug-in electric vehicles by significantly expanding recharging infrastructure. Encourage utility and private investment in recharging infrastructure in ways that benefit the grid and all electricity customers. Create incentives to accelerate electric vehicle adoption.
3. Support the expansion of car sharing services that meet high environmental standards throughout the state to reduce single occupancy vehicles and enable greater mobility in areas not served by mass transit.
4. Implement "transit-hardening" strategies in at-risk areas of the state to safeguard train and bus fleets, protect storage facilities, and prevent or minimize flooding in tunnels and other flood-prone infrastructure.

## Green Infrastructure and Resiliency

1. Develop and implement statewide, regional and local climate adaptation and resiliency plans.
2. Utilize the Environmental Protection Fund for conservation and land protection programs to reduce the risks from climate change and to enhance community resiliency.

## Smart Growth Development

1. Promote sustainable growth, equitable land use and community revitalization through investment in existing and next-generation infrastructure, low carbon transportation choices, and higher density mixed-use development.
2. Support the redesign and reconstruction of arterial streets as complete streets to make communities more walkable and bikeable. Support traffic calming projects, lower speed limits, electronic speed enforcement, increased penalties and enforcement for reckless and dangerous driving, and other initiatives focused on safety on all streets.
3. Require Regional Economic Development Council plans to develop sustainability benchmarks to evaluate projects, including those included in Regional Sustainability Planning Projects.

## Rail Transport of Crude Oil

1. Ensure that crude oil rail and barge transporters are insured to fully cover accident costs.
2. Ensure air quality and water protection laws and regulations relating to rail and barge transportation and trans-loading of crude oil are adequately protective of health, safety and the environment.
3. Ensure that Community and Spill Response Plans are robust, adequately funded and that local, state, and federal first responders are trained, funded and coordinated to implement them. Ensure that rail operators and oil companies, not local taxpayers, pay for them.

Bioswales are among the most basic but also the most effective forms of green infrastructure, keeping sewage overflows from getting into our waterways during heavy rainstorms.



Bus Rapid Transit offers communities without subway access a mode of transportation that is quick, affordable and has a low carbon footprint.





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## **NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS, INC.**

*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, INC.**

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

Cover photo by Mark Maxwell Abushady, taken in Watkins Glen.