



*Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day in New York State  
April 22, 2020*

## **NY Statewide event honors 50th anniversary of Earth Day**

### **Advocates release letter supporting NY's investment in the environment and public health infrastructure, bond act**

(Albany, NY - April 22, 2020) Today, over two dozen advocacy organizations representing a broad, diverse range of constituencies and areas of expertise hosted a virtual event commemorating Earth Day's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The event, which focused on New York State's environmental policies and role in safeguarding the environment, took place from 1:00 to 2:30pm. The program featured a statement from Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, discussions with the state's Environmental Conservation Committee Chairs, Basil Seggos, Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Conservation (which marks the 50th anniversary of its creation today as well), and more. Over 400 people registered to participate as of this morning. Several New York State lawmakers attended the event, including Assemblyman Steve Otis, Assemblywoman Linda Rosenthal, Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, Assemblyman Félix Ortiz, Assemblyman Harvey Epstein, and Senator Brad Hoylman.

The coalition released a joint letter recognizing environmental policy improvements since 1970 and New York's leadership ahead of federal requirements. 109 organizations and 100 individuals signed the letter as of this morning. The letter calls for maintaining support for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act, the Environmental Protection Fund, and to honor the 50th anniversary of Earth Day by ensuring the Restore Mother Nature Bond Act reaches voters in November.

In addition to the live event, advocates interviewed over 20 lawmakers and environmental leaders. **The letter, pre-recorded interviews, and a recording of the webinar are available online at [www.just-green.org/ed50](http://www.just-green.org/ed50).**

"This Earth Day we've seen what happens to the planet when people dramatically reduce their carbon footprint—air and water pollution fade and the Earth begins to heal," said **Senator Todd Kaminsky, Chair of the New York State Senate Environmental Conservation Committee**. "We can achieve these same results without having to stay at home and we can do it through smart energy policy that protects our planet and kick-starts our economy."

"Earth Day is, of course, a celebration of Mother Earth," said **Assemblyman Steve Englebright, Chair of the Assembly Committee on Environmental Conservation**. "With the advantage of hindsight, we now see that we have enormous tasks ahead of us. The most important bill that I've ever worked on was the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. It was a high water mark of my efforts over these years, and, looking ahead, following through on the promise and premise, the expectations and the needs of that piece of legislation will, to a large extent, define the future of everything I care about: my family, my community, my state, my nation, and the global ecosystem."

"As we reflect on 50 years of environmental progress on Earth Day 2020, it's heartening to see how unifying and human it is to crave nature and value clean and healthy air, water, and land. New York State has been a leader by running a robust, hazard-based State Green Procurement program, enacting the Child Safe Products Act, and taking action to restrict numerous chemicals of concern," noted **Kathy Curtis, Executive**

**Director of Clean and Healthy New York and Co-Leader of the JustGreen Partnership.** "It's also a sober time to urge government and corporate leaders to put people over profits by turning off the tap on toxic chemicals and making them an unthinkable part of our past. Let's continue to work together until all people and communities are equally healthy and able to reach their full human potential. We've come a long way, and still have a long way to go in building a just, sustainable, nontoxic circular economy."

"Today we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, and the vision and leadership shown by Governor Cuomo, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Heastie in passing a budget that includes an investment in environmental justice as part of New York State's \$300 million Environmental Protection Fund, and in last year's legislative session New York continued its national leadership on fighting climate by passing the Climate Leadership Community Protection Act," said **Cecil Corbin-Mark, the Deputy Director of WE ACT for Environmental Justice and Co-Leader of the JustGreen Partnership.** "But the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the many economic, racial, and social inequities in our society. For generations, environmental injustices have contributed to higher incidences of chronic diseases in communities of color, which are causing higher mortality rates among the black and brown people who are disproportionately infected by the virus. We will continue to work with State leaders to address these environmental inequities and ensure that we emerge from the ravages of this pandemic with a greener, more resilient economy and stronger environmental protections that safeguard the health and well-being of all, especially frontline communities throughout the state."

"For the past 50 years, Earth Day has been both a celebration of nature and a warning cry for its impending destruction. As we face the challenges of the COVID-19 virus, it is helpful to reflect upon how New York State reversed decades of chronically polluted waterways and smog choked skies, which at the time, also felt insurmountable," said **Roger Downs, Conservation Director for the Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter.** "With the climate crisis, and amidst a global pandemic, there are even more daunting challenges ahead of us to save our planet and ourselves. The Sierra Club commends Governor Cuomo and the legislature for their leadership in enacting the strongest climate laws in the country, which now include provisions to accelerate renewable energy production, fund climate resiliency projects through a \$3 billion bond act and \$300 million EPF, and place bans on persistent forms of pollution like fracking, plastic bags and disposable polystyrene products. NYS lawmakers continue to shine a light for national leaders to follow."

"Fifty years ago, our citizens and elected leaders recognized the importance of nature – not just for the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat – but as a cornerstone of our economy and a bellwether of healthy communities. Today, New York commemorates the 50th Earth Day while implementing the Climate Leadership and Protection Act, providing historic funding for the Environmental Protection Fund, and passing a \$3 billion Environmental Bond Act that will protect clean water, create jobs, and restart our economy. The Nature Conservancy thanks Governor Cuomo, Senator Kaminsky, and Assemblymember Englebright and our many environmental partner organizations for continuing New York's conservation leadership," said **Jessica Ottney Mahar, New York Director of Policy and Strategy, The Nature Conservancy.**

"New York has a legacy of environmental progress. From the fight to save Storm King Mountain which launched the modern environmental movement, to the recent passage of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act and proposed environmental bond act of 2020, our state has been on the forefront of addressing global challenges. This movement has demonstrated the commitment and resilience of New York communities, a trait that is serving us well in the current public health crisis, and will continue to serve us as we confront future challenges and work to create a better world for our children and grandchildren," said **Andy Bicking, Director of Public Policy for Scenic Hudson.**

"On the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, the country finds itself in dire need of strong environmental and public health protections," said **Liz Moran, Environmental Policy Director for NYPIRG.** "Poor air quality and environmental pollution has contributed to vulnerable populations being disproportionately harmed by COVID-19. But the federal government is instead siding with polluters by rolling back critical environmental regulations and ceasing enforcement, further jeopardizing the health of Americans. New York must combat this by maintaining crucial environmental funding and passing needed environmental legislation."

"As we commemorate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, we must honor those who came before us and continue to fight for clean water, clean air, and environmental justice for today and for the next generation," said **Riverkeeper's Legislative Advocacy Manager, Jeremy Cherson**. "Fifty years from now, I hope New Yorkers will look back to 2020 and remember those who pushed back against an all out assault on the environment from the federal government."

**Kate Kurera, Deputy Director of Environmental Advocates of New York** said, "50 years ago our rivers were on fire and our air wasn't safe to breathe and people rose up and demanded more from elected officials. Those actions led to the creation of critical environmental laws that form our bedrock of US environmental protection. Unfortunately, our current federal government has been relentless with their environmental rollbacks and denying the environmental crisis of our time, climate change. That's why today, on the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day, our voice and commitment is more important than ever, as we are not only on the frontlines of protecting 50 years of environmental safeguards, but fighting for action to protect our climate. This is a significant day to be a New Yorker, where our state is leading on climate change action, fighting back against the Trump environmental rollbacks at every turn, and prioritizing our health and environment."

"Amidst this pandemic, our 50th anniversary of Earth Day feels more like a day of reckoning. A day to step back and truly assess how far we've come since 1970 when a tenth of all Americans took to the streets to protest our environmental destruction and to call for a more sustainable future," said **Bob Rossi, New York Sustainable Business Council**. "While we've made significant progress, there is clearly much more to be done and the sense that time is running short. NYSBC will continue to work with business leaders across the state and our policy makers to address the environmental injustices and to use this moment to pivot to a more sustainable economy. New York State can be a leader and model in this urgent action."

"On the 50th anniversary of Earth Day the nation is embroiled in two simultaneous crises' - the current health crisis and the environmental crisis. Neither of these are mutually exclusive and both require our immediate action and attention. We are proud to partner with such a committed array of organizations seeking to make New York safer, healthier, and more sustainable for generations to come," said **Tim Guinee, New York State Legislative Action Coordinator for the New York Climate Reality Chapters Coalition**.

"More than anything else, today is a celebration of vision. The vision that Americans had 50 years ago, and the one we're creating together right now. Earth Day 50 is a reminder of what we can achieve together: life returning to Long Island Sound, air that's safer to breathe, beautiful landscapes protected for wildlife and people alike. But it's also a reminder of how fragile that progress is. Even as we celebrate environmental victories and leadership in New York, the laws that have made them possible are under attack. Today we commemorate what we've accomplished, and recommit ourselves to stand strong in the face of rollbacks and keep pushing forward until all our waters are swimmable and fishable, until our climate is stable and healthy, and until we again see abundant birds and fish thriving across our region," said **Tracy Brown, Director, Save the Sound**.

"Earth Day is a celebration not just of the value of protecting our environment, but of the impact made possible by citizen action and by communities working together," said **Robin Dropkin, Executive Director of Parks & Trails New York**. "Our parks and open space are enhanced by that collective action every day, and we rely on the spirit of Earth Day to leave a cleaner, healthier world for generations to come."

"Fifty years ago, New York jump-started its work to protect the planet, and the results have been impressive: cleaner air and water, more than four and a half million acres preserved by DEC alone. Those of us that love New York know that more than ever, we need a Green New Deal that shows the world how to fight climate change, preserve nature, green our economy, and continue to thrive," said **Anne Reynolds, Executive Director of the Alliance for Clean Energy New York**. "Clean and pollution-free energy is one of the keys to that future, and the renewable energy industry is proud to invest in New York."

**Christine Appah, Senior Staff Attorney, Environmental Justice Program, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest** said, "As we commemorate the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day, let us be guided by history

and inspired by the possibility of a greener future. We need to focus our energies on building a more constructive, inclusive and deliberate approach to preserving our shared environment through our daily actions. Everyone has a role in this. The connection between our environment and our health could not be clearer and the necessity to act could not be more apparent than it is today."

"Over the past 50 years, the Adirondack Park's water and air have grown cleaner and the name Adirondack has become synonymous with wilderness protection," said **Adirondack Council Executive Director William C. Janeway**. "Today, new threats to the environment and public health require us to make new capital investments, starting with a fully funded \$300-million Environmental Protection Fund and a \$3-billion Protect Mother Nature Bond Act. Both would help prevent overuse of popular wilderness trails and destinations. Both would protect drinking water, while preventing pollution in lakes and rivers. Both would prevent the spread of invasive species and protect public health for generations to come. As we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day, we recommit ourselves to the preservation of the Adirondack Park, for everyone, forever."

The event was sponsored by Adirondack Council, Alliance for Clean Energy New York, Audubon Society, Arbor Hill Development Corporation, Catskill Mountainkeeper, Children's Defense Fund, Clean and Healthy New York, Climate Reality Project, Earthjustice, Environmental Advocates of New York, Great Neck Breast Cancer Coalition, Green Inside and Out, Huntington Breast Cancer Action Coalition, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, New York League of Conservation Voters, The Nature Conservancy, New York Climate Reality Chapters Coalition, New York Public Interest Research Group, New York Sustainable Business Council, Parks & Trails New York, PUSH Buffalo, Riverkeeper, Save the Sound, Scenic Hudson, Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, and WE ACT for Environmental Justice.