



ECOS NEWS



ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse

Celebrating Our 48th Year in Environmental Education

Volume XLVIII

Number 3

June/July 2020

An Idea That Grew

ECOS, once only an idea, was made a reality by a small group of women. Now, almost 50 years later, ECOS is an active organization which impacts hundreds of people. "How did ECOS begin?" I asked Margie Schadler who was one of the original founders of ECOS. In response, she wrote this.

*My favorite quote is from Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can **change the world**; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." This story is an example.*

—Ruth Bonn

A LOOK BACK AT ECOS' BEGINNINGS

In the 1960's the nation began mobilizing to address many long-standing issues. The decline of the environment became one of the top concerns of many people. In response to this concern, the Association of Junior Leagues organized a national conference in 1970 to discuss and advance the national effort to "clean up" the environment. Betty Kay Cullen and Margaret Schadler attended as delegates from the Schenectady League.

One proposal supported by many delegates was to form an organization to monitor the activities of local environmental groups. Thus the Environmental Clearinghouse of Schenectady began.

Local members liked the idea and agreed to finance the new organization for three years. The following women played a key role in planning formation of the new project: Peg Lordi, Nancy Lange, Eleanor Brown, Ann Walraven and Margaret Schadler. In the beginning the hardest job was to find and copyright a name. They wanted to call it the Environmental Clearinghouse Organization, "ECHO". But that name was already spoken for and in the end they agreed on Environmental Clearinghouse of Schenectady, "ECOS".

The First Reformed Church of Schenectady agreed to give them office space free of charge except for house cleaning expenses. Georgia Worth was hired as administrative secretary/executive director. She was the perfect choice and ECOS got off to a good start. In the beginning ECOS worked on coordinating local environmental groups but as time progressed it found its real role as an educational institution.

End of part one. After Georgia left, Claire Schmitt followed as manager. Claire worked for several years as an unpaid employee. ECOS moved to a house in Niskayuna along the Mohawk River where it remained until its move to the old American Locomotive Club (now Niskayuna Recreation and Senior Center) where they are still located.

Margie is still active in ECOS, and is a major supporter.

Claire Schmitt was a major contributor to the ECOS Natural Areas guides —Margaret Schadler

ECOS NEWS

Published six times per year by

ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse, Inc.

P.O. Box 9118, Niskayuna, NY 12309

Office phone: 518-370-4125

E-mail: info@ecosny.org

Web: www.ecosny.org

Editor: Maureen Gebert

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ruth Bonn, President

Art Clayman, Vice President for Outreach

Vacant, Vice President for Programs

Janet Hollocher, Secretary

Mike Howard, Treasurer

BOARD MEMBERS

Margie Amodeo

Josh Bennett

Sarah Celik

Cindy Eisenbeck

Rebekka Henriksen

Andrew Kulmatiski

Darwin Roosa

Connie Young

Outstanding Volunteer Award presented to Roy and Sue Keats

All non-profit organizations, even those with a substantial paid staff, rely on volunteers to perform many essential functions. ECOS has always relied heavily on volunteers during its 40+ year history, and volunteers have never been more important than during the last few years when we have lacked a full-time Executive Director.

In 2019 ECOS established the Will Seyse Outstanding Volunteer Award to honor Will's many contributions to ECOS. The award is intended to be awarded annually and presented at the annual dinner. This year, in anticipate of the cancellation of the annual dinner due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the award was presented at the March 11 annual meeting.

Roy and Sue Keats are the recipients of the 2020 award, which recognizes their leadership in organizing the ski and snowshoe outings in 2018, 2019, and 2020, a job they took on following the resignation of Executive Director Patrick Clear. They have worked tirelessly to line up trip leaders, publicize the trips, take photos for our Facebook page, update the participant liability waiver form, and so much more. Given the vagaries of weather the past several years, some trips have been walks instead of ski or snowshoe events, but they have still been well attended and enjoyable.

Many thanks to Roy and Sue for a job well done!

Steve's Tour

bees

President's Piece

REFLECTIONS DURING A PANDEMIC

“A global pandemic is as good a time as any to reflect on where we as humans went wrong.”*

This statement piqued my curiosity...how, I wondered, have we gone wrong?

Like the proverbial frog placed in water being gradually heated from cold to boiling, we humans often ignore changes in our environment which are not abrupt....climate change being one, and the growing risk of infectious disease spread another. Scientists and public health leaders have been warning of the increased risk of pandemic for years, but governments have largely ignored their warnings.

Why the increased risk?

Zoonotic diseases (diseases which originate in wild animals) are becoming more prevalent. Of the roughly 400 diseases that have emerged since 1940, almost two-thirds are zoonotic. The largest number of zoonotic diseases are viral but zoonotic diseases caused by bacteria, fungi or parasites occur. A vector (e.g. a mosquito, tick, or flea) is instrumental in transmission of some zoonotic diseases.

Pandemic frequency has increased. All recent pandemics (e.g. Ebola, SARS, MERS, swine flu and now Covid -19) are of wildlife origin, as was the 1918 flu pandemic. Virus originating in wild animals may mutate in domestic animals before becoming contagious to humans (e.g. swine flu's avian origin).

As human population increases and more and more people search for places to live or farm, they move out to formerly wild areas, degrading and destroying wildlife habitat. The increased proximity of humans and wild animals inevitably leads to virus spillover and emergence of zoonotic diseases. Mammals which have adapted to human environments, (and have even thrived and increased) such as bats, rodents, and primates, share the most viruses with humans, but species threatened by habitat loss also carry a significant viral load. Areas with high biodiversity, growing population and increasing pressure on the natural world such as tropical Africa, Latin America and Asia are hotspots of disease emergence.

Increasing international travel, trade, migration, and human displacement facilitate the movement of contagious disease across the globe. Within borders, disease spread is rapid in densely populated cities, in areas of crowded housing, poverty and poor sanitation. Infectious disease spread and the resulting human toll can be considered a “hidden cost” of human economic development.

Where have we humans gone wrong? By rejecting science and ignoring informed advice; by pussy-footing around the population issue; by heedlessly invading and degrading wildlife habitat.

In 1918 world population was 1.8 billion. As of May 2020, there were 7.8 billion people are living on Earth. The planet is not getting bigger. More people means more pressure on the natural world. Which means more disease emergence...and more epidemics, more pandemics. For the last 200,000 years or so, humans have been the ascendant species. Going forward it appears that viruses will be giving us a run for our money... unless...

**Our Exploitation of Wildlife Is Directly Causing More Viruses to Spread to Humans, Study Shows: Carly Cassella; sciencealert.com. May 2020*

Most of us are ECOS members because we love to be outdoors. While the coronavirus pandemic has restricted or made impossible so many of our regular activities, fortunately it hasn't taken away that. We can still go out and get some fresh air and exercise, as long as we keep a safe (six feet) distance from others. And we should — for both our physical and mental health.

Walking — around the neighborhood, on the bike path, in a park or nature preserve — is one thing we can safely do. Riding a bicycle, my own favorite activity, is another. Cycling is what I'd like to discuss here — the why, how, and where of it.

Why? Because it's fun and feels good. President John F. Kennedy said it best: "Nothing compares to the simple pleasure of a bike ride." One can also cover more ground than on foot, and experience more nature than from inside a car.

How? By getting your old bike out of the basement or garage. Or, if you don't have one, buying one from a bike shop (they are open because they're considered essential). You could also contact the good volunteers at the Electric City Bike Rescue (electriccitybikerescue@gmail.com) and adopt a donated one.

For safety's sake, wear a helmet and bright-colored clothing. Ride solo, unless you're riding with someone you live with, to minimize the risk of getting or spreading the disease (you may have it, but be asymptomatic). For the same reasons, wear a mask when around other people.

Where to pedal? The bike path is accessible, but it's often so crowded these days that it's hard to keep a safe distance. If you do go there, be prepared to stop, get off the path, and let others pass if necessary. If you're the one doing the passing, give other users as much room as possible, as well as a warning "on your left."

Because the bike path is so crowded, I prefer riding other places. Central Park is one. The streets of Old Niskayuna are also pleasant and smooth, and there's little traffic these days. The same with the GE Plot. The Mohawk Harbor casino site, with bike paths running through it and a nice, elevated view of the river, is another good place to ride.

If you're more ambitious, you can put your bike in or on the car and head out to rural areas such as Vischer Ferry, West Glenville or Charlton, where the roads are in good shape, the scenery beautiful, and the cars few.

For ride ideas, visit the Mohawk Hudson Cycling Club's website, which has cue sheets; or Map My Ride, which shows rides that others have

Covid-19 and Sewage

Union College professor, John Garver, our speaker at the Rachel Carson dinner last fall, publishes a blog "Notes from a Watershed" (<https://mohawk.substack.com/>). His most recent article is "Covid-19 in Sewage of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers."

Studies worldwide show that the Covid-19 virus is found in untreated wastewater and to a lesser extent in treated water. Since the sewage treatment plants of older cities on the Mohawk are over-burdened, and testing of the water is on pause due to New York's "Pause", caution should be exercised in river recreation.

Interestingly, the quantity of virus found in wastewater appears to be a leading indicator of infection in the general population. Studies found that viral load in wastewater rose before a significant number of Covid-19 cases were reported by health authorities.

Of special interest to those of us who live in the Mohawk watershed:

In the Mohawk watershed there is concern about human pathogens in surface waters at several levels. One is the nature of the discharge from wastewater treatment plants, and another is impaired surface waters affected by raw sewage by either leaking pipes or combined sewer outfalls. The latter issue has now become even more critical. *Our work on a small urban stream in Schenectady shows that raw sewage enters the stream - undoubtedly due to leaking sewage pipes - at both high- and low-flow conditions. Thus there is the possibility that impaired streams like this one in urban settings may have a hazardous viral load and thus contact with these waters should proceed only with caution (and PPE).* Certainly it seems prudent that these waters should be avoided for recreational contact. (italics added)

Preserving Farms by Buying Local Foods

—Janet Hollocher

"Sprawl without growth" ¹ describes land use changes in upstate New York in the 1980s and '90s, as farms, forests and natural areas were lost to suburban development. Urbanized land expanded by 30%, with less than 3% growth in population. The Capital District lost 21,357 acres of farmland, an 8% loss, just in the 15 years from 1987 to 2002, because of the expansion of suburban-style housing, roads, shopping centers, and office parks.

As suburbs expand, tax revenues are drained from cities, where they're needed to pay for services and infrastructure that everyone uses, and to educate the next generation of children.

In 2020, farms are still being lost, and with them woodlands, wildlife, and environmentally sensitive areas. Lost farms also mean the loss of food supplies, farm skills and traditions, and the chance for young farmers to enter the profession.

The good news is that we can help preserve farmland and the future of farming when we buy local foods and support farm programs for young people.

Here are a few examples of how to buy local foods:
Grocery Stores: large and small grocery stores buy local foods and produce, but you have to check signs and labels. In Menands, New York, Farmers' Market Home Delivery is a family-run business that specializes in local foods and delivers to customers.

Farmers' Markets: The Schenectady Green Market, City Hall plaza, Sundays 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. offers fresh fruits, vegetables, eggs, meats, and other local foods in season.

Farm Stands: Lansing Farm in Colonie, Buhrmaster Farms in Scotia, and Burger's Market Garden in Niskayuna are among the local farms that have active farmstands.

Farm Delivery Services: Field Goods does home deliveries of produce and products from farms throughout the region. You can order on line or get their pre-selected produce in season.

Community-Supported Agriculture (CSAs): Many CSAs are sold out for the season, but some still have shares available. Roxbury Farm, Fox Creek Farm, Known Source Farm, Lansing's, Buhrmaster, and Vale Urban Farm and others operate CSAs.

Farm and Garden Programs for young people:
Urban Farms: Vale Urban Farm in Schenectady offers memberships and volunteer opportunities. Capital Roots trains young people in farm skills.

Zoller School Garden: A Schenectady elementary school offers children the chance to learn about plants and gardening through on-site gardening.

Go to 'Local Farms and Foods' on the ECOS website for details about these and other options. And when you visit farms and markets, be sure to bring your own bags, have a mask to wear, and be ready to keep a respectful social distance from others.

¹ Rolf Pendall (2003) *Sprawl Without Growth: the Upstate Paradox*

² Capital District Regional Planning Commission

Mohawk River State Park- a Gem Hidden in Plain Sight

Nestled between the town of Niskayuna and the Mohawk River lies 220 acres of park land, comprised of the Mohawk River State Park and adjoining land owned by the Town of Niskayuna. The state park was designated 2016 and is home to the John Brown trail system, named in honor of the late GE chemist who dedicated over 50 years of service building and maintaining the trails. The Friends of Niskayuna Trails (FONT)/ Niskayuna Trails Subcommittee maintain the trails, improving drainage and keeping them dry.

The trail system winds through a number of varied ecosystems. Shady hemlock groves are found atop the ridges at the north end, adjacent to Blatnick Park. Large oaks dominate the oxbowed sections of Lock Creek. The trails near the Whitmyer road cut through a grassy meadow. Deer are commonly seen throughout the park, as well as turkeys and the occasional coyote. On the riverside loops, beavers seem to take pleasure in dropping trees right across the trail.

Hikers and mountain bikers frequent the trails in the summer months, and skiers and snowshoers in the winter. One rare treat in winter is to follow the frozen Lock Creek canyon carved through the shale. The steep walls make this area inaccessible for the remainder of the year.

The primary trailhead is located at the end of Whitmyer Road, near the wastewater treatment plant. Trailheads at the south end of the park near Lock 7 road, at the north end behind the Blatnick Park dog park, and at the Lock 7 boat launch all permit vehicle parking.

The south end trailhead opposite Agostino Road allows an easy connection to the Lisha Kill Preserve. Trail maps are available at the Town of Niskayuna website, or by scanning the QR code on trail signs near the Whitmyer trailhead.

The trails are marked with two different blazes. Trails marked in blue run primarily north and south, and red run east and west. Yellow markings indicate loop trails, and white indicate cutoffs between trails. Separately, black-on-orange arrows indicate a 7.5 mile circuit through the entire trail system. These arrows mark a continuous loop that can start and finish from any point in the system.

For those looking for a shorter hike, two loops are recommended:

From the south trailhead off of the bike path near Lock 7 road, climb the bluff for a great view of the lock and Vischer Ferry preserve. Follow the trail that parallels the bike path. Follow turn numbers 1-4, 11, 30, 31, 28, 29, 50, 51 on the map, approximately 2 miles.

From the Blatnick dog park, walk south to the rim of the grassy canyon. Follow the rim to the right to the point where the trail enters the woods. This trail follows the ridge along the western edge of the gorge. Pass the first left fork on the trail, but take the second. You'll know you've gone about 100 feet too far if you come to a paved driveway. From this turn, follow the black and orange arrows until you reach the bike path. Then turn left and walk to the second trailhead on the right side of the stream. Follow that trail up the hill and back to Blatnick Park. Follow turn numbers 37, 36, 35, 41-44, 38 on the map, approximately 3.5 miles

ECOS NEWS

Abiding by the By-laws

—Janet Hollocher

What happens when it's neither safe nor legal for an organization to hold official meetings under its by-laws? That's the problem that ECOS faces during the coronavirus shutdown.

By not mentioning videoconferencing or even telephone conference calls as acceptable ways to meet, the ECOS by-laws (revised 2013), in effect require official Board meetings to be held in person and not "electronically". Yet, with the coronavirus in our midst, in-person meetings of any kind are not only inadvisable for health, but against New York State law, as well.

To compound the irony of the situation, revised ECOS by-laws that permit "electronic meetings" have been in the works since 2018. These proposed new by-laws received a final update on March 1st, 2020, but had not yet been voted by the Board when the COVID-19 shutdown took effect.

The ECOS by-laws require four official Board meetings in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021. ECOS can keep legal if the Board meets once in person to vote the new by-laws no later than December 2020. After that vote, the Board will be able to use Zoom videoconferencing for official meetings. Until that happens, the Board will meet via Zoom to plan programs and guide the organization.

The ECOS Annual Meeting on March 11th was the last gathering held at the Niskayuna Community Center before the shutdown, and the last in-person meeting that ECOS held. To meet again in person, the Board may have to wait 'til summer, socially distanced, wearing masks, and -- in keeping with the ECOS ethos -- happily meeting outdoors.



IF YOU HAVE NOT RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP PLEASE USE THIS FORM

ECOS Membership

ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse

Please check your membership contribution level.

<input type="checkbox"/> \$40 Individual	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75 Donor/Organization	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150 Sustainer
<input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Family	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Supporter	<input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Benefactor
		<input type="checkbox"/> \$500 Patron

Please make your check payable to ECOS.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Email _____

☐ As a GE employee my contribution is eligible for GE Foundation Matching Funds. I have registered with GE for the matching gift by computer at www.gefoundation.com. If you do not have computer access, call customer service at 1-800-305-0669.

☐ My employer will match my contribution. I've enclosed my matching gift form.

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



ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse
P.O. Box 9118
Niskayuna, NY 12309

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
Paid
Permit #20
Rexford, NY

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

DATES AND EVENTS TO REMEMBER 2020

September—Nature Walks

November—Rachel Carson Dinner

December—Holiday Party



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.