# ECOS NEWS

*ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse*

ECOS provides environmental experiences and education for youth and adults to develop enjoyment and understanding of the natural world and foster action to preserve it.

**Celebrating Our 50th Year in Environmental Education**

*Volume* L *Number 2* *April / May 2022*


## *Golden Anniversary and Annual Dinner*

Celebrating Our 50th Anniversary

Wednesday, June 8, 2022

River Stone Manor

Guest Speaker: Judith Enck, President Beyond Plastics

See insert for more details

Judith Enck is passionate about protecting public health and the environment and has spent her career working for their protection. She has held top influential positions in state and federal government as well as in the non-profit sector.

Locally, she may be best known for her weekly appearances on WAMC's Roundtable public affairs show.

She is a Senior Fellow and visiting faculty member at Bennington College where she teaches classes on plastic pollution. In 2019 she founded Beyond Plastics, an initiative that works on plastic pollution issues.

Appointed by President Obama in November 2009, she served as the Regional Administer of the EPA, overseeing environment protection for New York and New Jersey as well as eight Indian Nations, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. She was the longest-serving EPA Region 2 Regional Administrator.

Previously, in Albany, she served as Deputy Secretary for the Environment in the New York Governor's office and Policy Advisor to the NYS Attorney General.

Judith was a senior Environmental Associate with NYPIRG (New York Public Interest Research Group), Executive Director for Environmental Advocates of New York, and is also a past president of Hudson River Sloop Clearwater.

Judith lives in upstate New York with her husband, where they built their passive solar home with their own hands with lots of support from friends and family.

**ECOS NEWS**

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**We need your photos!**

During our annual dinner we will have a slideshow of ECOS events from the last 50 years. Please send your photos digitally (in jpeg or pdf format) to Cindy Elsenbeck, rickandcindy@gmail.com.

Include **name**, **date**, and **event** for each photo submitted.

Please send them by **May 26, 2022**.

**If you need help putting your photos into a digital format please send an email to

Sarah Celik, sarahcelik@gmail.com.

# Director's Note

*—Catherine Gilbert*

Snowshoeing up an alpine race trail on a 65-degree day … so many potential topics to unpack in that lead.

As is often the case on winter weekends, my daughter and I found ourselves trekking to the finish line to cheer on our favorite alpine ski racer. As we made our way uphill, we encountered innumerable bits of plastic - RFID cards, bottles, caps and ChapSticks once buried in the snow now laid bare in the unseasonable melt. As only a child can do, she asked why? Why is this all here? Why didn't they throw it in the bin? Why would you bring all those bottles skiing? We made a game of gathering up as much of the litter as we could carry on our descent, which in turn led to others stooping over and picking up items as they hiked down.

Our little foray led to an insightful conversation about how we might reduce our environmental footprint by employing a "one less" strategy. On the whole, our family was an early adopter of the 3R's - reducing, reusing, and recycling - but it seems that we continue to bump into the challenge of single-use plastics. As Earth Day approaches and we prepare to launch ECOS's 50th anniversary celebration I thought I would share a few of my favorite conversation starters to engage children in eco solution-finding.

- Head to the library to check out - *Harry Saves The Ocean!: Teaching children about plastic pollution and recycling* by N. G. K. with Sylva Fae; *The Last Straw: Kids vs. Plastics* by Susan Hood; *What A Waste: Rubbish, Recycling, and Protecting our Planet* by Jess French; or *Ducks Overboard!: A True Story of Plastic in Our Oceans* by Markus Motum
- Join an Earth Day activity
- Hit the trail and have a clean-up party

If you're keen on walking the talk of the anti-plastics movement, then you are going to love our 2022 Annual Dinner featuring Judith Enck, President of Beyond Plastics, as our keynote speaker!

# The ECOS Year in Review—2021-22

*—Ruth Bonn, Past President*

ECOS is 50 this year! We find ourselves in a strong position as we look ahead. The past year, in spite of Covid restrictions, has been a good one for ECOS.

Getting people outside into nature is a big part of what ECOS does. Outdoor activities were resumed at the beginning of the year. The traditional winter and spring activities resumed with Covid precautions. New outings were added-- Fall Foliage walks, guided Seven Preserve walks on Tuesdays, as well as weekend walks and outings. Two successful bike/walk and talk events to learn about environmental infrastructure were organized and led by our environmental intern, Matt Tate. Walks were held with Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy-- a pollinator walk at Strawberry Fields, and a geology walk in Wolf Hollow. Trails in the Reist Preserve were cleaned up with Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club. Featherstonhaugh State Forest trails were made ready for skiing. Our No Octane Bike and Boat sale in the spring not only got bikes into the hands of over 100 people, but was also financially a huge success.

In addition to guided events, ECOS promotes getting out into nature in other ways. The Seven Preserve Challenge continues to motivate people to get outside with close to 200 people earning badges. ECOS publications continue to sell and encourage people to explore nature close to home. A significant accomplishment this year was the completion and publication, on our website, of the Saratoga section of Trails for All. Formerly called "Accessible Trails," this project, dormant for years, was re-energized by Carole Fraser, who worked on accessibility issues with the DEC.

Another ECOS goal is environmental education and sharing of information. Our Zoom Winter Speaker Series provides a vehicle for information sharing. A wide range of speakers, seven this year, covered topics ranging from honeybees to composting, hiking the Appalachian Trail to climate change in Iceland, grassland birds to conservation corridors. Our publications and newsletter articles also support this goal.

Educating youth about the environment is another important activity. ECOS volunteers have led classes in the Schenectady School District's summer enrichment program in Central Park for a number of years; in 2020 the program wasn't held due to Covid. This summer ECOS, again, provided a variety of nature experiences for 3rd and 4th graders. For five weeks in July and August, twice a week, ECOS volunteers led students in explorations of honeybees, streams, planting, bird migration, acids and bases, and trees. In addition, two nature workshops designed for families--children and their parents-- were held in the fall.

The Board undertook an organizational self-assessment process in the fall. Strengths and weaknesses were identified; needs and goals were discussed. An obvious weakness was our lack of an executive director. Identifying our needs and goals enabled us to clearly describe the role we needed an executive director to play. We started our search in November, and before Christmas, Catherine Gilbert was welcomed as our new director. She officially began work on January 10. She was immediately thrown into the middle of an ongoing process of working with several other community organizations on a proposal to the City of Schenectady which would provide a new home for ECOS in in the old "Casino" in Central Park. No decisions will be made by the City for several months, but conversations are ongoing. A Central Park location would give us easy access to natural areas and more visibility and accessibility. We are hopeful. It would be an exciting start for our next 50 years!

ECOS was founded 50 years ago, at the dawn of the environmental movement. Now, fifty years later, we are facing the threatening reality of a rapidly changing climate. What can ECOS do? We can raise awareness and understanding of the issues; we can get more people in touch with the natural world; we can foster more action—individual, community, state, national and global—to preserve our planet and the life it supports. ECOS' mission, to raise awareness and understanding of our environment, is still critically important as we move ahead into our next 50 years.

## The Environment: A Student's Perspective

*—Zinnia KarDi,*

*Niskayuna H.S. Student & ECOS Intern*

It is often said that the younger generation is the hope for the future. We are pointed to as trailblazers, forging our way towards a fairer and cleaner world. However, it seems as if we are never able to fully step out of our forefathers' footsteps. We continue to progress, but also end up stumbling in the same problematic pitfalls as they once did. A prime example of this is the use of fossil fuels which essentially run our country. Although we have made a great amount of progress to protect ourselves and the world since the thick clouds of industrial fumes in the 1940's, fossil fuels still make up more than 75% of energy consumed in the United States in 2020*. If we want to protect the environment, more changes on a larger scale will have to be made. One question remains: is the younger generation prepared to do this?

These past few months I interviewed high school students from various schools in Schenectady County about what they think the biggest threat to our environment is. As expected, the most popular responses to this question were "climate change" and "pollution." The most common solutions that were suggested to fix these problems included investing in renewable energy, taxing wasteful corporations, and recycling. Although these are all valid responses, many of these topics are learned about in middle school and are extremely broad. When I asked about a current environmental issue, whether fracking[1] was mostly positive or negative the majority of the students were unable to define what the word meant, let alone whether it was beneficial or not. This surprised me since fracking has been a big issue in New York State during recent years affecting many people. Responses to other lesser-known environmental topics like microfiber pollution and e-waste were similar. Many people did not know what it was or about solutions to minimize it.

It seems evident to me that the biggest threat to our environment is human ignorance. After all, you can't fix something if you don't understand it's a problem. In many of these students' schools, including my own, environmental issues aren't taught throughout their education. Although these topics are mentioned from time to time in science classes, there are no units focused solely on these problems outside of optional environmental classes. If students want to learn more about current environmental issues they have to decide to take another class or research in their spare time. This is detrimental since the lives of students are very busy and there are many things that can take priority including extracurricular activities, familial obligations, and relaxation time. As a result, many people stay ignorant about important environmental topics such as fracking[1], energy sectors[2], and riparian zones[3]; believing environmental science to be all about fossil fuels and renewable energy. Fixing this gap in students' knowledge could be as simple as adding an environmental science unit in a preexisting science class.

With the pressure being put on the younger generation to change the world for the better, it is important that older generations take some responsibility for these problems by sharing their knowledge and experiences so history doesn't repeat itself and new milestones can be made. Although the controversy continues over whether humans caused global warming, it is clear that the world is changing and the environment is deteriorating right before our eyes. In turn, the educational system should adapt to include environmental studies as a mandatory part of curriculum, helping students identify problems so they can heal the world throughout their careers.

* For more information please visit the United States Energy Information Administration's 2021 Annual Energy Review at eia.gov.

**Learn more:**

Fracking[1]
https://www.nrdc.org/stories/fracking-101

Energy Sectors[2]
https://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/energy_sector.asp

Riparian Zones[3]
https://extension.usu.edu/waterquality/learnaboutsurfacewater/watersheds/riversandstreams/riparianzones

## MAKING IT EASIER TO BE GREEN

A friend was sharing his excitement about his new electric mower last fall…not something I'd normally get very excited about…but I'd been reading about the 'ecological disaster' of lawns. Although I'd known that the use of lawn chemicals, the amount of public water used for lawns, and the loss of habitat for pollinators and other animals and plants in our monoculture lawns were environmentally damaging, I hadn't thought about the environmental cost of emissions from our gas -powered lawn machines--our lawnmowers and leaf blowers. It turns out they are high…

Running a gas-powered mower produces, hour for hour, 11 times as much pollution as a new car according to EPA estimates. Compared to electric mowers, gasoline-powered lawn mowers emit eight times more nitrogen oxides, 3,300 times more hydrocarbons (methane being the primary one), and more than twice the CO2 per hour of operation. Leaf blowers are even worse.

Both nitrous oxide and methane are potent greenhouse gases. Methane is 80 times more effective at blocking radiation back into the atmosphere than CO2 over a 20-year period. Nitrous oxide is 300 times as effective as CO2 over a 100-year period. Methane dissipates in the atmosphere more quickly than CO2. Nitrous oxides are long lasting.

*—Ruth Bonn*

## Not Your Father's Electric Mower

*—Jeff Asher, ECOS member and former Consumer Reports Technical Director*

I have been slow to embrace anything that is battery- or electric-powered due to prejudice built over the years. These devices--circular saws, hedge trimmers or mowers--were woefully underpowered and had short battery life. I just kept buying gas-powered devices. That was until my 25-year-old gas mower finally died last summer.

My inspiration to buy a battery-powered, self-propelled mower came from lawn mowing at our Galway Lake cottage where there are no power boats. Just quiet. Why add noise from a gas-powered beast to this serenity?

So I did my Consumer Reports research and quickly realized these mowers are expensive. The top-rated one made by EGO was just too expensive for me. Fortunately, there were comparably performing, less expensive mowers to choose from even though they were not top-rated.

My research highlighted the 21-inch, 40-volt, Ryobi Model RY401015, usually selling for $649 at Home Depot. This model has the performance advantage of having two cutting blades. While I do not have direct experience, customer reviews indicate two blades improve the smoothness of the cut and improved effectiveness for mowing in deeper grass. (Tip: If you do not need two blades, the Ryobi Model RY401014 for $549 may be a good buy.)

Last summer, I had the opportunity to use this mower. And I have been delighted with my purchase.

**Do they get the job done?** You bet! To my surprise, I am able to mow a half-acre with the two batteries with some reserve charge remaining. At a touch of the push button, you have hassle free starting. Life is made easy with the self-propelled, rear wheel drive.

The controls take a bit to get used to, but the self-propelled speed is well-controlled by a slider switch from very slow to speedy. You can push the Turbo button to get you through the toughest grass. (Turbo accelerates the battery's discharge.) And the noise is only a fraction of the sound level from a gas powered lawnmower.

My own findings are consistent with Ryobi's projection that you will have up to 70 minutes of run time which is ideal for 3/4 acre or less.

**Designed to make mowing fun:** There are two, 6 Ah batteries that ride inside the mower's housing. Once the first battery becomes discharged and the mower stops, you simply rotate the "start key" inside the housing to go to the second battery. The charger only takes one battery at a time. It takes about 70 minutes to go from total discharge to fully charged. Each battery has a small charge meter on it, but these are difficult to view during mower operation. This mower folds up into a neat, small package for easy storage. A real plus.

There is a 7 position, single lever for easy control of mower height from 1.5 to 4 inches.

*Continued p.6*

**Mower**

A clever design allows for 3-in-1 mowing functions--mulching, bagging and side discharge.

And there are even LED lights for mowing when at dusk.

**What you should look for:**

Lithium batteries are expensive to replace, and their longevity is still an open question in my mind. I am satisfied with Ryobi's three-year guarantee on the battery.

**Think Battery:**

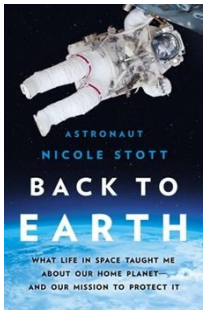
Once you have bought a battery-powered lawnmower, your world opens up to other house and garden tools. Ryobi has over 75 products that are powered by their 40 -volt batteries. Since the most expensive component are the batteries, now you can buy all sorts of tools--hedge trimmers, leaf blowers, string trimmers chainsaws, etc.

Tip: Often these other devices are bundled together to save money so you do not need to buy additional batteries. The 40-volt, 6 Ah battery that comes with the mower can be heavy when used in their leaf blower and other tools. You might want to buy a shoulder strap. Amazon has some excellent, low-cost models.

Footnote: I have become so bullish about battery-powered lawnmowers that I bought a second one during Amazon's last Black Friday Sale. It is the Greenworks 48-Volt, 20-inch, Self-Propelled Lawn Mower with a sale price of $314. Normally, it sells for $500 on Amazon. They even threw in a battery powered drill!

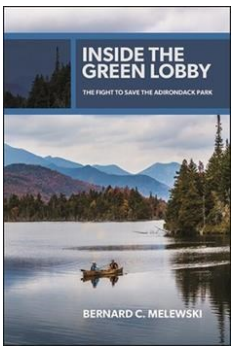
Clearly, with two, 5 Ah batteries (versus the 6 Ah Ryobi batteries), this model is less powerful. But for small lawns it is powerful enough. It also folds like the Ryobi for storage, has a single lever for height adjustment and even LED lights. You can charge both batteries at the same time in the charger that they supply. With only one cutting blade, it is not as efficient as the Ryobi. To make up for this, the mower goes into Turbo mode automatically when the load is high. I expect less from this Greenworks model compared to the Ryobi, but the sale price made it worth the purchase for my Galway Lake cottage. The Ryobi is now staying at home in Pawling.

**Back to Earth: What Life in Space Taught Me About Our Own Planet—and Our Mission to Protect It —Nicole Scott**




Ms. Scott spent over 100 days in space spanning two missions. Her experiences on the International Space Station gave her insight into the planet and how we can work together to protect it.

She will have a book signing at Open Door Book Store on Sunday, April 3rd from 12 noon—1:30 pm.

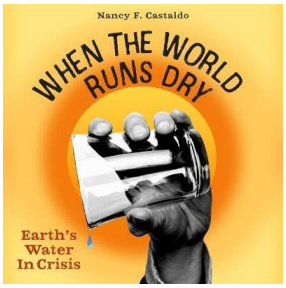



**Inside the Green Lobby—Bernard Melewski**

Environmental lobbyist Bernard Melewski gives a behind the scenes look at lobbying efforts to preserve the Adirondack Park as he recounts meetings at the State Capitol in Albany and the halls of Congress.

He will be signing copies of his book on Saturday, April 9th from 1-2:30 pm at the Open Door.

**When the World Runs Dry, Earth's Water in Crisis—Nancy Castaldo**




Ms. Castaldo traveled across the United States and to other countries to research communities having a water crisis. It is appropriate reading for young adults.

A book signing is being held Saturday, April 23rd from 1-2:30 pm at the Open Door

## 2022 CALENDAR

**April**

Sun, April 3—Open Door Book Signing

Sat, April 9—Open Door Book Signing

Sat, April 23—Earth Day Bike Ride

Sat, April 23—Canal Sweep

Sat, April 23—March for Climate

Sat, April 23—Connecting Children to Nature

Sat, April 23—Open Door Book Signing

Tues, April 26—Spring Walk

**May**

Tues, May 3— Spring Walk

Sat, May 7—7 Preserve Challenge

Tues, May 10—Spring Walk

Sat May 14—7 Preserve Challenge

Tues, May 17—Spring Walk

Sat, May 21—7 Preserve Challenge

Sat, May 21—Connecting Children to Nature

Rues, May 24— Spring Walk

Sat, May 28—7 Preserve Challenge

Tues, May 31—Spring Walk

**June**

Sat, June 4—7 Preserve Challenge

Sat, June 4—National Trails Day, Schoharie Crossing

Tues, June 7—Spring Walk

Weds, June 8—**Annual Dinner**

Sat, June 11—7 Preserve Challenge

Sat, June 18—7 Preserve Challenge

For addresses and additional details on walks or other events
visit Upcoming Events on our website: www.ecosny.org

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

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**ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse**

Please check your membership contribution level.

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____As a current 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**

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

**A message from David Behm, Curious by Nature:**

Given your interest in my past presentations and wildflower walks and a growing hope that we may all be moving toward a greater degree of normalcy in our lives, I wanted to let you know that I have announced my upcoming series of events for 2022. Topics will include wildflowers and foraging for wild edibles. Of the 10 scheduled events, nine of them will be in-person walks.

To see the full slate of my upcoming events, please view the Events page of my Curious By Nature blog at www.cyriousbynature@mysite.com.

I hope you will join me.

"Connecting Children to Nature" is scheduled for **Saturday, April 23,** from **10:00 am to 12:00 pm** and **Saturday May 21**, from **1:00 pm to 3:00** pm in Central Park, Schenectady. This program is for children ages 6-12 (with children under 10 accompanied by a caregiver), and is led by Rebekka Henriksen. Each gathering features a hike where we will look for and explore native plants, insects and animals, a nature-based craft/activity, and outdoor play.

Program Director Rebekka Henriksen is a long-time nature educator who has taught a variety of programs for children in the Capital District over the past 12 years. She currently works for the Schenectady City School District as their Farm to School Program Coordinator and is an ECOS Board Member since 2020.

To register, please go to: ecosny.org and register online or call: 518-370-4125 **FREE**

*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.*