



The Environmental Justice Report

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Department of
Environmental
Conservation



Bice mine

DEC OVERSEES MINING TO PROTECT COMMUNITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

There are 1,883 active mines in New York, representing a \$1.5 billion industry that extracts products such as salt, sand and gravel, limestone, clay, wollastonite, and even garnet, the official gem of New York State. New York ranks second in the nation in the production of industrial garnet, third in salt, and sixth in construction sand and gravel, and common clays. New York is also the sole domestic producer of wollastonite, a diverse mineral used in plastics, paints and ceramics, and as a substitute for asbestos.

DEC's Division of Mineral Resources oversees mining operations to minimize environmental impacts from mine operations — including air and water quality — and return the lands to productive use when the mine is no longer active. That process, known as mine reclamation, protects the health and safety of local residents, as well as the natural beauty and public use of the land.

DEC imposes conditions in mining permits for impacts such as dust control, noise, blasting, and erosion, as well as berms, buffers and setbacks, and mine reclamation. DEC also requires all mining permit applicants to submit

a Mined Land Use Plan (MLUP) in both narrative and graphic form. The MLUP is divided into two sections: the Mining Plan, which describes the mining method, and the Reclamation Plan, which describes the proposed land-use objective and the method of reclaiming land affected by mining activities. Additionally, DEC requires a financial security, such as a surety bond, to ensure that the land will be reclaimed to meet the proposed objective. If a mine operator fails to reclaim the land and abandons a site, DEC will seize the financial security and use these funds to perform necessary reclamation of the site.

Since the enactment of the Mined Land Reclamation Law in 1975, mine operators have reclaimed over 2,517 mines; DEC has only had to seize and reclaim a small number of abandoned mines. Many former mines have been returned to productive use as wetlands, wildlife habitats, public recreation areas, agricultural production, and residential and commercial development.

For more information on mining in New York, please visit: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/5020.html>.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Hudson is a small city in Columbia County, home to a diverse community of residents, and a popular food and antique destination for tourists. Despite Hudson's charm and abundant restaurants, many residents live below the poverty line and struggle every day to feed their families. Kite's Nest, a center for liberatory, or liberating education, is working to transform Hudson from a food desert, where access to affordable, healthy foods is limited, to a vibrant hub for sustainable agriculture and community food security.

In 2014, Kite's Nest launched the River City Garden, a community garden and sustainability education site at 59 N. Front Street. As the only community garden in Hudson, City Garden has become a vital resource and green space in the neighborhood. In addition to hosting 25 local families on community plots, and offering a weekly drop-in garden program for youth, Kite's Nest hosts the Social Justice Leadership Academy, a five-week, youth leadership development training workshop.

Kite's Nest recently received a DEC Environmental Justice Community Impact Grant award to support its North



Teens working in the River City Garden

Kite's Nest

Bay ReGeneration Project, a community-based, youth-centered approach to equitable and sustainable neighborhood development. Kaya Weidman, co-founder and executive director of Kite's Nest said, "We are thrilled to launch the North Bay ReGeneration project, which we believe will be a catalyst for neighborhood development that builds on the strengths and assets of the neighborhood, and grows out of strong partnerships with youth, families, and local organizations."

The North Bay ReGeneration Project will expand sustainable agriculture at the River City Garden, including the installation of a large greenhouse and a renewable, radiant heating system. The project will also engage local youth in the development of a year-round greenhouse micro-enterprise, and provide meaningful, educational employment to local youth as food justice advocates, garden educators, and community leaders.

For more information on DEC's Environmental Justice Community Impact Grants, please visit us at www.dec.ny.gov/public/31226.html.

COMBATTING HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS

Although most algae are harmless, and even play an important role by providing food for aquatic ecosystems, harmful algal blooms (HABs) can be dangerous to aquatic life and human health. HABs, sometimes called blue-green algae, can release toxins and other harmful



compounds that cause skin irritation or health effects if they are touched, ingested or inhaled. HABs generally occur in freshwater lakes, ponds and reservoirs, and a large number of blooms have been reported in urban areas, especially in New York City.

Rebecca Gorney, a Research Scientist with DEC's Division of Water, tracks and documents the presence of HABs, and also educates the public on how to recognize and avoid HABs. As the coordinator for DEC's Harmful Algal Bloom program, Rebecca coordinates monitoring waterbodies for HABs with existing State monitoring programs and site-specific partnerships with municipal parks, the Department of Health, and the State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historical Preservation.

Growing up in the Bronx, Rebecca had a desire to get out and experience nature. Attending Girl Scout camps ingrained a love for the outdoors and a passion for science. "This job is, hands down, the most fulfilling job I have ever had," she says. "I'm so much a people

person, but I also really love science and teaching, and the research part of it. In this position, I get to do all of them."

Rebecca encourages people to take action to reduce the likelihood of algae blooms by preventing or reducing the addition of nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen) into waterbodies. The amount of nutrients released can be decreased by:

- Limiting lawn fertilization
- Maintaining septic tanks
- Installing and maintaining shoreline buffers
- Reducing erosion and stormwater runoff, and
- Improving water movement

The best defense against exposure to HABs is to avoid them. DEC established a HAB Notifications Page on its website that is updated weekly from May through October. If you plan to swim, boat or enjoy other water activities, you should check this site before heading out to see if the waterbody has an algal bloom. Stay out of any waters where they are present. If you think you've encountered a HAB and are experiencing symptoms, contact your physician or, in the case of severe reactions, seek immediate medical attention.

To learn more about HABs and how they affect our waters, check out www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/77145.html.

Do you want to learn more about our dedicated staff? Check out "On the Front Lines", a new series of video profiles celebrating the stories of DEC staff throughout the state and the important work they do to protect the environment, conserve New York's vast natural resources and serve the public. Catch "On the Front Lines" monthly on DEC's website, Facebook and Twitter pages



PROTECT OUR WATERWAYS: BE SMART ABOUT STORMWATER

Stormwater is water from rain or melting snow that is not absorbed into the ground; instead, it runs off into rivers, lakes, streams and other waterways. Stormwater flows over impermeable surfaces like roofs, paved areas and bare soil, and down sloped lawns, picking up debris from residential, commercial, and industrial properties or construction sites along the way. The debris can include trash, nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus), oils, and sediments that



can degrade the quality of our drinking water and damage the habitats of plants and animals that depend on clean water for survival.

To protect our clean water resources, DEC promotes programs that use best management practices to regulate stormwater discharges and control pollutants. One such program is the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) program. MS4s are small municipal stormwater sewer systems, which are regulated in designated urbanized areas by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Under an EPA rule, MS4s must develop a stormwater management program that will reduce—to the “maximum extent practicable”—the amount of pollutants carried by stormwater that ends up in waterbodies.

The MS4 program is designed to prevent discharges that negatively affect water quality, with the goal of preventing pollution from flowing down sewer drains. There are 544 regulated MS4s in New York State. In addition to municipalities like Albany, Schenectady and Troy, the program also pertains to colleges, hospitals, state agencies, prisons, and publicly owned buildings, and requires annual reports, periodic inspections by DEC and EPA, and routine maintenance by municipalities.

You don’t have to be a scientist or engineer to protect our waterways from stormwater runoff. Organize community cleanups to collect trash and prevent it from entering our sewer systems. Make sure you clean up after your pets. Animal waste and other organic material can lead to excessive nutrients in our waterways.

Most importantly: Don’t put anything down the storm drain! Even natural or “organic” materials can clog sewers and catch basins, and contaminate water. Just because it flows away, doesn’t mean it is gone. The quick release of nutrients can be harmful; excessive nutrients can cause Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs), which can make lakes and water bodies unsafe for swimming, and will also impact water quality and affect fish species and other resources in the community.

Managing stormwater is the responsibility of all New Yorkers. To learn more about MS4s and water quality, please visit www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/290.html.

SUSTAINABILITY TIPS FOR YOUR HOLIDAY PARTY

This holiday season add a few sustainable shopping and cooking practices to your holiday routine. Every holiday season the amount of waste we produce increases. A little extra planning and a few changes to shopping habits can help us all be more sustainable this year while spreading holiday cheer.

PLANNING YOUR HOLIDAY MEALS

In the United States, we waste about 25 percent of the food we purchase. Most of this wasted food ends up in landfills where methane gas is generated from decomposition. Methane is a greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change. Tips to reduce wasted food include planning your menu ahead of time so you purchase exactly how much food you will need. If you do end up with more leftovers than you can eat consider donating food to local food banks and composting your food that cannot be donated. Many community gardens will accept donated food compost.

BUY LOCAL

Many of the foods we purchase from supermarkets are flown, shipped, or trucked to our stores. The more miles your food travels to reach your supermarket, the more carbon emissions are generated. Buying locally grown foods from farmers’ markets or local stores is another way to reduce carbon emissions and have a sustainable holiday.



SHOPPING TIPS

The packaging of your food and drinks is another opportunity to reduce your environmental impact. Individually wrapped items use more resources than bulk packaged goods. Avoiding buying individually packaged drinks or foods is another way to make your shopping more sustainable. Another tip is to bring your own reusable bag when shopping. Also, shopping with a prepared list will encourage you to only buy what you need and save a few dollars as well.

HOLIDAY PARTY

A few new party tricks will also help you have a sustainable holiday party. First, serve your guests using reusable plates, cups, silverware, and utensils instead of paper, plastic, or Styrofoam. Use recyclable aluminum foil instead of plastic wrap to store your leftover food. Turn down your thermostat for the party and let your guests be the heat source.

GET YOUR GUESTS INVOLVED

Have a fun party contest for your guests to make the event as sustainable as possible. Challenge your guests to bring their own reusable plates and cups and see who can be the most sustainable.

Happy Holidays!

APPLY FOR FUNDING

Are you a community-based organization looking to fund a project? OEJ offers grants to not-for-profit organizations to address environmental harms in low income and environmental justice communities. For additional information on OEJ grants and a complete list of previous project awardees, please visit our website: www.dec.ny.gov/public/31226.html.

WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU

Do you have concerns about the environment where you live? Do you want to make your voice heard? Do you want to stay informed about the different environmental issues affecting the state of New York?

JOIN OUR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE LISTSERVE

Go to: www.dec.ny.gov/public/65855.html and sign up to receive regular updates from the Office of Environmental Justice. Stay current on the issues that are important to you. As always, you can contact the Office of Environmental Justice with any concerns by sending an e-mail to: justice@dec.ny.gov.

Please include:

Your Location/Address

City, town, village or borough

The environmental concerns you wish to address

List the potential source if you know

How or whether you wish to be contacted

HELP US SERVE YOU

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Contact us:

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