

WESTERN NEW YORK ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCE

2026 CONGRESS PROGRAM

April 15, 2026, Tifft Nature Preserve



Program Schedule:

- 4:30 Lights Out Buffalo press conference
- 5:00 Welcome to the Congress
- 5:05 Jay Burney: Building Resiliency Together
- 5:15 Lightning talks (4 minute) from members and friends (see below). *If you are speaking, please be standing "on deck" midway through the speaker before you.*
- 6:50 Final Thoughts, Thanks and Congratulations
- 7:00 Adjourn to Buffalo River Works for Cocktail Hour

Lightning Speakers:

Org:	Massachusetts Avenue Project	Notes:
Name:	Avalon Gupta VerWiebe	
Title:	Development Director	
Contact:	development@mass-ave.org	
Mission:	<p>The Massachusetts Avenue Project is a nonprofit food hub and urban farm located on Buffalo's West Side.</p> <p>Our goal is to nurture the growth of a diverse, accessible, and equitable local food system as well as empower youth through social change education and paid, meaningful employment.</p>	
Projects:	<p>MAP runs multiple programs, from our Urban Farm, to our Kitchen, to our Mobile Markets, all threaded through by our Growing Green youth program. We are currently running our annual farming classes, launching a small business support pilot program, and starting work on a free soil testing program. These are just a few of the programs we run which are grounded in the goal of connecting our food system.</p>	
Collabs:	NA	
Timeline:	NA	

Org:	DeeplyRooted Community Garden	Notes:
Name:	Alexandra Zirkle	
Title:	Board Member	
Contact:	firouzanfoodforest@gmail.com	
Mission:	Come visit the DeeplyRooted Community Garden, open to anyone interested in growing, gathering, relaxing, or harvesting in this public space. Established in 2022, DeeplyRooted offers traditional raised bed annual gardens alongside regenerative food forests and a medicinal garden that feed soil, wildlife, and humans longterm.	
Projects:	Highlights include our medicinal garden, water catchment system, neighborhood-built composting bay, and edible native plant food forest.	
Collabs:	Yes! Volunteers in the garden and people willing to learn and practice sustainable food production.	
Timeline:	On-going	

Org:	Lexington Co-op Markets	Notes:
Name:	Jenny Bruce	
Title:	Sustainability Coordinator.	
Contact:	jenny.bruce@lex.coop	
Mission:	We are woking on creating a no-plastics campaign, and after seeing the film Ripples of Plastic decided to reach out to WNYEA for potential partnership. Met with Jay Burney and we would like to work together including helping to create programming.	
Projects:	current- reducing plastics including providing metal cutlery instead of plastics and looking at other products.	
Collabs:	yes, develop working group, and deliver community engagement programming including community meetings and work on potential policy initiatives for City and County	
Timeline:	indefinite	

Org:	Rights of Nature WNY and Climate Psychology Alliance - North America.	Notes:
Name:	Jennifer Fendya	
Title:	Psychologist	
Contact:	rightsofnaturewny@gmail.com	
Mission:	Rights of Nature WNY advocates for policies and practices that honor the sovereignty of our natural world and our interdependence with the web of life. We host gatherings and events aimed at supporting a cultural shift to one that affirms all life, both human and more-than-human, including climate conversations where we aim to increase psychosocial resilience and healthy community-level response to ongoing climate-related change and loss through facilitated group discussion(s)	
Projects:	We have created two working groups, one that focuses on community rights to a healthy environment and citizen democracies, where we discuss and learn different	

	ways of organizing and governing ourselves. The other focuses on contemplative practices, facilitated discussions, and developing a relationship with place and the natural world. Both working groups host discussions with other groups and public events, with the goal of spreading awareness and bringing more people into conversations around this topic.	
Collabs:	Yes! We would love to connect with people who are interested in holding dialogues on this topic in groups they are already involved in.	
Timeline:	We are flexible with timelines.	

Org:	BRRAlliance, Inc.	Notes:
Name:	Anne McCooey	
Title:	Executive Director	
Contact:	phone - 716-202-9070 - brralliance2@outlook.com	
Mission:	Work to improve the quality of life for all in the North District of the City of Buffalo by attracting investment for economic development and by fostering environmental stewardship	
Projects:	Our environmental goals are to improve the environment in one of the most environmentally significant areas in the City that is also one of the most environmentally vulnerable. From grassroots efforts to provide habitats for wildlife in and migrating through our community, to identifying areas of poor air quality and residential air quality concerns, to beautification programs and stewarding community gardens in food desert neighborhoods, to partnering with other NPOs for collaboration on significant projects supporting our mission and goals, the BRRAlliance has been working for over 15 years to ensure the voice of the community is at the table and community revitalization happens.	
Collabs:	We work collaboratively on just about every project we undertake, so partners are always welcome and we would be happy to discuss opportunities with any interested.	
Timeline:	We have annual projects, ongoing special projects and are always coming up with more projects for the future, so timeline is open.	

Org:	Neto.../ Native American culture	Notes:
Name:	Allan Jamieson Sr.	
Title:	Elder	
Contact:	allanjamieson87@yahoo.com	
Mission:	Promote and support Native American culture in the WNY region	
Projects:	Land based healing, ongoing and access to native plants for healing.	
Collabs:	yes, capacity building	
Timeline:	can be one time or on going	

Org:	Friends of Reinstein Woods	Notes:
Name:	Robert Fetter	
Title:	Vice President, Board of Directors	
Contact:	robfetter75@gmail.com	
Mission:	<p>The Mission of Friends of Reinstein Woods is to cultivate a lifelong appreciation of nature through education, stewardship, and shared experiences within and beyond the unique ecology of Reinstein Woods.</p> <p>Our work is centered on ensuring that Reinstein Woods is an inclusive and equitable sanctuary where diverse communities share in nature’s harmony, empowering individuals to be environmental stewards of our world.</p>	
Projects:	<p>Central to the mission of Friends of Reinstein Woods is education and stewardship. This past year, we had our first successful year’s class in Pathways to Environmental Learning, a program supported by a generous grant from the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The program connects Cheektowaga High School students with their local environment and with leaders in the environmental community, to expose them to job opportunities and empower them to act as environmental leaders and as mentors to younger students.</p> <p>The past year also marked significant development of our Woodland Garden thanks to a grant from Parks & Trails New York and the support of members, donors, and volunteers like you. Even after this short time, this area of the woods has had significant increases in plant species richness (with 300x more saplings, 120x more herbaceous plants, and a 5% increase in canopy cover!).</p>	
Collabs:	In our work towards ensuring that Reinstein Woods is an inclusive and equitable sanctuary where diverse communities share in nature, we are hoping to expand our DEI work to include new committee members, community partnerships, and collaboration with diverse organizations and agencies supporting all members of the WNY community.	
Timeline:	6 months to year.	

Org:	Western New York Environmental Alliance	Notes:
Name:	John Whitney	
Title:	Director	
Contact:	whitneyjohnr@gmail.com; text 716-796-3204	
Mission:	<p>Coordination & Collaboration</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. WNY Environmental and Social Justice Directory 2. Environmental and Social Justice / DEC Listening Sessions 	
Projects:	The WNYEA is working with Region 9 DEC staff to establish and run a regular, quarterly, on-going series of topical listening sessions with regional environmental and social justice organizations. Planning is underway with DEC suggesting these sessions start in 2027. We are still hoping for a 2026 start. On a related collaboration and coordination theme, the WNYEA is working to establish an on-line, searchable and maintainable data	

	base and directory of environmental and social justice organizations and contacts.	
Collabs:	Get directory and contact information to the WNYEA in various forms.	
Timeline:	On-going	

Org:	Eastern Monarch Butterfly and Native Plant Farm	Notes:
Name:	David O'Donnell	
Title:	Owner, Eastern Monarch Butterfly Farm	
Contact:	Easternmonarch@gmail.com	
Mission:	Our goal is environmental awareness and education. We are self-funded through native plant sales, donations and paid presentations.	
Projects:	Pilot pollinator project for GM plant, Big Picture project for Kenmore schools, pollinator meadow at Cayuga Overlook Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge also at Iroquois headquarters, all continuing.	
Collabs:	Not at this time	
Timeline:	Na	

Org:	ADK-Niagara Frontier Chapter	Notes:
Name:	Pam Sander	
Title:	Program Director Chair	
Contact:	sanderpamela88@gmail.com	
Mission:	ADK (Adirondack Mountain Club) works to protect New York State wild lands and waters by promoting responsible outdoor recreation and building a statewide constituency of land stewardship advocates.	
Projects:	Support of parks, woodlands and natural areas.	
Collabs:	yes	
Timeline:	Open	

Org:	NY Naturalists through Cornell U	Notes:
Name:	Kathleen Contrino	
Title:	Master Natualist Trainee	
Contact:	Cwnativeplantfarm@gmail.com	
Mission:	Convince people to plant native plants for environmental sustainability.	
Projects:	Spoke as board member and educator via WO WNY on native plants	
Collabs:	No need but can help	
Timeline:	None	

Org:	Niagara Beautification Commission	Notes:
Name:	Laura Chenault	
Title:	Chair	
Contact:	lauraachenault@gmail.com	

Mission:	The Niagara Beautification Commission (NBC) is formed for the purpose of promoting the beautification of the Niagara Falls area by mobilizing the volunteer resources of the community's private and public sectors to implement visual enhancements, educate and promote public awareness, and inspire pride in our community. We serve the residents of Niagara Falls and our international visitors.
Projects:	<p>A Greener Niagara creates and supports eight community gardens, plants trees, provides and plants bulbs, works directly with our city planners and council members, assists Oakwood Cemetery in obtaining Arboretum Status, encourages the Clean Air Coalition to include Niagara Falls in their efforts, and is planning a walk with WNY Prism to identify invasive species in the State Park.</p> <p>Beautify Niagara is our annual city wide clean-up. For 19 years we have united the community to clean up. These teams evolve into Clean Mobs that clean up their neighborhoods.</p> <p>4th of July Parade is returning to Niagara Falls! We are partnering with the Citizens and Friends of Niagara Falls to celebrate America's 250th birthday. We have commitments from the Police Department, including their Women Mounted Patrol; The Niagara Falls Band; Public Schools; Fire Department; Air Force Drill Team, Scouts, and LaSalle Educational Club.</p> <p>Volunteer Gardening shows our true dedication to keeping our city pretty. We are restoring the historic Hyde Park Rose Garden, and installed new trellises and rose bushes in 2025. Flower planting, clean up, weeding and flower bed maintenance occur within the city's small parks: Gluk Park; Statue of Liberty Park; Empower Rose Garden; Love Canal Memorial, and the planters on Third Street and at the entrance to Hyde Park.</p> <p>Public Art Programs add color to our lives! Our projects include sidewalk games at Bloneva Bond Primary School and Cataract Elementary School, oversized Marilyn Monroe stickers, and the "You're Changing" mural on vacant Main Street storefronts.</p>
Collabs:	We need volunteers, community partners that will amplify our work, funding resources.
Timeline:	We need help next week and over the next ten years!

Org:	WNYEA	Notes:
Name:	Terrence Robinson	
Title:	WNYEA Board Member	
Contact:	trob14208@yahoo.com - (716) 220-1087	
Mission:	Restoration of Humboldt Parkway	
Projects:	litigation to restore the Parkway and restore SEQRA	
Collabs:	Yes - everyone with an interest	
Timeline:	N/A	

Org:	WNYEA	Notes:
Name:	Margaret Wooster	
Title:	wnyea board member	
Contact:	miwooster@gmail.com	
Mission:	Rethink STAMP	
Projects:	wnyea campaigns	
Collabs:	yes	
Timeline:	spring 2026 onward	

Org:	Buffalo Niagara River Land Trust	Notes:
Name:	Laurie Ousley & Tracy Fletcher	
Title:	Development Director & Executive Director	
Contact:	laurie@bnrlandtrust.org	
Mission:	The Buffalo Niagara Land Trust's mission is to acquire, remediate, and steward lands along Western New York's waterfronts, prioritizing public access, and our vision is to create a truly connected system of public waterfront sites, by acquiring additional waterfront lands to link existing public sites, providing new passive and active public sites in underserved areas, and undertaking environmental remediation and ecological restoration projects. We look to educate and inspire current and future generations to become nature's stewards.	
Projects:	The BNRLT will be hosting a Spruce Up and planting event on May 2 at our Houghton Conservation Area followed by a Nature Inspiration Day family festival on June 6, both at our Houghton Conservation Area in Kaisertown in Buffalo. We will host a series of Eco Expeditions and Spruce Ups at each of the properties we manage throughout the late spring-early winter. We end our season with Fall Fest, a fundraiser, at Duende at Silo City, taking place on October 8. Our Conservation Conversations, a winter speaker series, will begin again in November.	
Collabs:	Yes! We are always looking for folks to work with and would be very happy to have volunteers for our Spruce Ups and planting days. Please also come to our speaker events!	
Timeline:	Give us a call!	

Org:	Open Buffalo	Notes:
Name:	Jim Golden	
Title:	Director of Ecological Justice	
Contact:	jim@openbuffalo.org	
Mission:	We would like to share the findings from our recently completed East Side Soil Project, including recommendations and future steps.	
Projects:	Open Buffalo recently submitted a report to the NYS DEC with the findings from our East Side Soil Project in which we tested 138 residential properties (249 separate samples) and found that more than 90% of the properties were above EPA action levels for lead contamination	

	(200ppm). Mean lead levels for the 249 samples was 642ppm. We are advocating for state and federal support for continued testing and remediation.	
Collabs:	We're always looking to partner with advocates and organizations to help with community engagement and education regarding environmental racism and ecological justice.	
Timeline:	We are planning in 12-month increments.	

Org:	University at Buffalo's Center for Climate Change and Health Equity, Project Coordinator	Notes:
Name:	Ellie Madson	
Title:	Miss	
Contact:	elliemad@buffalo.edu	
Mission:	The Center for Climate Change and Health Equity (CCCHE) brings together researchers, advocates, and community leaders to address the pressing challenges of climate change and health disparities. The center is actively seeking collaborators to join the mission of advancing justice-centered solutions that protect human, animal, and ecosystem health locally and globally.	
Projects:	We have 5 faculty and 2 staff that work for the Center, so there are many projects ongoing and being proposed -- globally and domestically. Some recent proposals are surrounding disaster preparedness and mitigation (one in NY state and another specifically in WNY). Most of our current projects are globally centered at the moment.	
Collabs:	Yes, always! We are looking for community partners, fellow academics, and youth educators. We are looking for people that are in the climate and health space, or people who are simply passionate about the future of sustainable and equitable initiatives. We are always looking for implementation partners, or anyone who is interested in team science. We believe in bridging any and all gaps. Even if it may seem like a leap, we promise you there is a way to integrate science and health research in every approach.	
Timeline:	Long-term or short term. We have held single day workshops, monthly focus groups, or projects that take years to implement. It truly depends on scope and mission.	

Org:	Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE)	Notes:
Name:	Brian Smith	
Title:	Associate Executive Director	
Contact:	bsmith@citizenscampaign.org	
Mission:	CCE is advocating for local, state and federal policies that provide significant benefits to our environment and public health in Western New York, including policies to restore the Great Lakes, advance climate action, reduce solid waste, reduce toxics, and more.	

Projects:	CCE is currently advocating for state policies in the 2026 legislative session that runs through early June of 2026, and federal policies in the 119th Congress that runs until January of 2027. These include state policies to address the state’s solid waste crisis, reduce exposure to PFAS chemicals in our environment and drinking water, and expand distributed solar power. Federal policies would extend a program to protect and restore the health of our Great Lakes and extend investments in resilient clean water infrastructure.	
Collabs:	We're always looking for WNY organizations to join our advocacy efforts and support key policies to protect our environment and public health by contacting and expressing their support to key elected officials in WNY.	
Timeline:	During the 2026 New York State legislative session, as well as the 119th Congress.	

Org:	The Center for Climate Change Education at PRI	Notes:
Name:	Don Haas	
Title:	Director of Teacher Programming	
Contact:	dugganhaas@museumoftheearth.org	
Mission:	We provide high-quality resources and programs for teachers, students, and the general public for teaching and learning about climate change and energy. Our programs include teacher professional development workshops and in-person activities at the Museum of the Earth and the Cayuga Nature Center in Ithaca, NY. Our resources include The Teacher-Friendly Guide to Climate Change, YouTube videos, exhibits at our public venues, online resources on Earth@Home, and more.	
Projects:	With The Climate and Resilience Education Task Force, we have worked to have climate change education required across the curriculum and across the grade span in New York State schools. The Board of Regents approved the regulation at their March 2026 meeting.	
Collabs:	Always! We are particularly interested in working with teachers, schools, and professional development providers.	
Timeline:	This is dependent upon the nature of the collaborator.	