



**SAW KILL WATERSHED
COMMUNITY**

NEWSLETTER

Issue 12: Nov 18th, 2020

*Protecting the Saw Kill watershed and its ecological, recreational,
and historic resources through hands-on science, education, and advocacy.*



A NOTE FROM: SKWC LEADERSHIP TEAM

In this difficult and challenging year we are grateful to have the support of our community in the work that we do. As the holiday season approaches and we reflect on the year that wasn't, it is important to remember that we are all in this together. We encourage you all to stay engaged and active in your community in whatever capacity you can.

Part of our mission is to keep you engaged and up to date with ongoing watershed issues and community concerns. Please feel free to reach out to us with questions or suggestions on ways we can improve on this. Email sawkillwatershedcommunity@gmail.com with any questions or feedback.

BRAIDING SWEETGRASS AND A THANKSGIVING MESSAGE

Karen Schneller-McDonald, Saw Kill Watershed Community Chair

Recently I had the pleasure of reading *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, by Robin Wall Kimmerer, published in 2015 by Milkweed Press. Robin Wall Kimmerer, mother, scientist, member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, is a SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor of Environmental Biology, and the founder and director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment.

Braiding Sweetgrass invites us to look at our lives and the world around us from a different perspective, through stories that parallel the native significance of sweetgrass—planting, tending, picking, braiding (for basket-making), and burning. These perspectives about the world we live in are illustrated through stories, ancient and modern: the creation of the earth, salamander migrations, growing food, dealing with polluted land and water. In Kimmerer's words:

I offer a braid of stories meant to heal our relationship with the world. This braid is woven from three strands: indigenous ways of knowing, scientific knowledge, and the story of an Anishinabekwe scientist trying to bring them together in service to what matters most. It is an intertwining of science, spirit, and story—old stories and new ones that can be medicine for our broken relationship with earth, a pharmacopoeia of healing stories that allow us to imagine a different relationship, in which people and land are good medicine for each other.

Near the beginning of the book Kimmerer gives us The Thanksgiving Address. In these chaotic times we look forward to a different sort of Thanksgiving. The season comes, ready or not, inviting us to give thanks. The Address, a traditional protocol that in the Onondaga language means “The Words that Come Before All Else” is from the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (known as the Iroquois Confederacy by the French and the League of Five Nations by the English), meaning People of the Long House. The Thanksgiving Address sets gratitude as the highest priority—specifically, gratitude expressed to all members of the natural world, and invites us to begin our thanks with this beginning:

Today we have gathered and when we look upon the faces around us we see that the cycles of life continue. We have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things. So now let us bring our minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as People. Now our minds are one.

In the book, the Address is given by a room of third graders; in turn, each person offers special thanks to: our Mother the Earth; the Waters of the World; the Fish; Plant Life (food plants; medicine herbs; trees); Animal Life; Birds; the Four Winds; the Sun; the Moon; the Stars; Our Teachers; Our Creator.

Here is the address to the Waters of the World:

We give thanks to all the waters of the world for quenching our thirst, for providing strength and nurturing life for all beings. We know its power in many forms—waterfalls and rain, mists and streams, rivers and oceans, snow and ice. We are grateful that the waters are still here and meeting their responsibility to the rest of creation. Can we agree that water is important to our lives and bring our minds together as one to send greetings and thanks to the Water? Now our minds are one.

For the full address, see *Braiding Sweetgrass*, pages 107 to 117.

WATER AND GREEN ENERGY: RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS IN NYS CAN DAMAGE WATERSHEDS UNLESS REGULATED PROPERLY

Karen Schneller-McDonald, Saw Kill Watershed Community Chair

New York State is fast-tracking large-scale renewable energy projects such as wind and solar farms to meet ambitious and commendable state goals. To expedite project approvals, the Office of Renewable Energy Siting is proposing regulations for public comment. These regulations will spell out the details of required environmental reviews and streamline these processes so that projects can be approved faster.

Streamlining is a good idea--depending on how it's done. The problem is that the proposed regulations translate "streamlining" into significantly less protection for water, wetlands, streams, and wildlife.

The public comment period for these regulations presents us with a choice about how wind and solar projects are developed and whether we require them to avoid or minimize negative effects on other critical natural resources. This protection will not happen unless it is required by the state. Unfortunately, the proposed regulations offer less protection than existing regulations. By failing to adequately protect our water resources while we build more renewable energy projects, we risk damage to the natural infrastructure that enables our communities to withstand the effects of climate change.

Like other industrial land use, the construction and operation of large wind and solar projects can have significant effects on surrounding land and water. All of these projects involve extensive vegetation clearing, grading, and fill. Impacts from wind and solar farms are largely due to the scale of these projects and the details of their siting, operation, and maintenance. For example, one wind farm in western New York has a project area of 106 square miles; access roads that cross more than 400 acres of wetlands and streams; supporting infrastructure such as transmission lines and equipment staging areas; 120 turbines (each at 165 to 300 tons, resting on a concrete pad that measures 30 to 50 feet across, is 6 to 30 feet thick, and weighs over 2 million pounds, or 1,000 tons.

Solar farms are smaller in terms of acreage, but land and water impacts within that area are more concentrated. Most of the trees are removed, for example. One project on 3,800 acres included approximately 600,000 solar panels, plus access roads and the electrical collection system.

The proposed regulations fail to require energy companies to adequately protect natural resources from the effects of these project activities. For example, the regulations:

- Require identification of only a fraction of the wetlands, streams, and at-risk wildlife affected by the project, leaving the remainder, including vernal pools, unprotected.
- Do not require identification of all project impacts.
- Accept minimal evaluation and mitigation for selected impacts that affect this group.
- Ignore impacts to watershed functions, including flood mitigation, water quality, and water supply.
- Require little or no guidance/oversight by wetland and wildlife experts.

In many cases the proposed regulations have requirements that conflict with the recommendations of ecological science, wetland science, stream/watershed best management practices, and the role of interconnected small streams and wetlands in climate resiliency. This leaves our communities' resources vulnerable to impacts.

Some of the resources at risk from project impacts may not be recoverable. Wind projects can reduce or degrade habitat for at-risk species such as grassland birds, and kill bald eagles and migratory birds. Wind turbines kill a significant number of bats. Though wildlife experts have recommended bat protection protocols that dramatically reduce the number of bats killed, energy companies resist the necessary measures—and the proposed regulations do not require them.

We can streamline energy project reviews and at the same time require adequate protection of land, water, and wildlife, through responsible siting of turbines, roads, and infrastructure, and changes in turbine operation. But energy companies want to minimize or avoid these measures, resulting in proposed regulations that lower requirements for mitigation.

This does not serve the best interests of the people of New York.

As the federal government has decreased its oversight of wetlands and streams, New York has initiated efforts to step up state protection of water resources via proposed legislation and encouragement of local protection initiatives. In the Hudson Valley, local watershed groups have proliferated. But the proposed regulations allow the state to waive local regulations if they are found to be “unreasonably burdensome” for energy companies. The right of municipalities to develop their own water protection ordinances or regulations must be protected.

Long after wind and solar farms are decommissioned or replaced with more efficient alternatives, we will be stuck with the impacts from these projects on water and wildlife. New York needs to safeguard these resources during project review, siting, construction, and operation. We can have both renewable energy and healthy water and wildlife only if the state substantially improves the proposed regulations so that they truly ensure protection.

To access the draft regulations, submit public comments (due by December 7, 2020), and obtain a schedule of upcoming public hearings and more information: [Regulations](#)

For more information about the regulations, contact the Save Ontario Shores website <http://lakeontarioturbines.com>

Guide to proposed regulations and standards (policy):

Water

1. Chapter XVIII, Title 19 of NYCRR Part 900 Office of Renewable Energy Siting

§900-1.3 Pre-application procedures

(e) Wetland delineation. (

f) Water Resources and Aquatic Ecology

§900-2.14 Exhibit 13: Water Resources and Aquatic Ecology

§900-2.15 Exhibit 14: Wetlands

2. Subpart 900-6 Uniform Standards and Conditions

§900-6.4 Facility Construction and Maintenance

(p) Wetlands, Waterbodies, and Streams.

(q) Wetlands.

(r) Work in NYS-protected waters.

Wildlife

1. Chapter XVIII, Title 19 of NYCRR Part 900 Office of Renewable Energy Siting

§900-1.3 Pre-application procedures

(g) NYS threatened or endangered species.

§900-2.12 Exhibit 11: Terrestrial Ecology

§900-2.13 Exhibit 12: NYS Threatened or Endangered Species

2. Subpart 900-6 Uniform Standards and Conditions

§900-6.4 Facility Construction and Maintenance

(o) Threatened and Endangered Species.

IN MEMORIAM



We deeply regret sharing the passing of Sheryl Griffith. Sheryl was one of the founding members and original samplers of the Saw Kill Monitoring Program back in the late 1970s. Sheryl has been an active member of the Saw Kill Watershed Community, and held many roles in the Town of Red Hook, including serving on the Conservation Advisory Council and helping to found the Town of Red Hook Recycling Center.

A lover of history and ecology, Sheryl spent much of her time observing and protecting the natural environment. Sheryl will be remembered for her kindness, warmth, and generosity. She was never afraid to speak her mind or ask the important questions. She will be greatly missed.