

# green watch

FALL 2020



**At the Crossroads of  
Environmental Justice  
& Democracy**

**Defining Your "And"**

**Building the Next  
Generation of Leaders**



Ohio Environmental Council



## IN LOVING MEMORY OF MJ ECKHOUSE

This issue of GreenWatch is dedicated in loving memory of MJ Eckhouse, our talented colleague, dear friend, creative force, and fierce warrior for equity and justice. Many of the words you read and images you see in this publication were masterfully crafted by MJ. We honor his immense contributions to the OEC and to our movement, today and everyday.

*As I write this, it's hard to predict what will happen as people make their voices heard in the run up to Election Day or what the election results will mean for environmental leadership across our state or our nation. But we will continue to show up with you and because of you.*

As we contemplate the gravity of the challenges we currently face—an ongoing pandemic, racial unrest, a renewed battle against Statehouse corruption, and the most important election of our lifetimes—I am propelled by a deep sense of gratitude for everyone who has been a part of the Ohio Environmental Council's journey.

Turning challenges into opportunities is difficult work. But, as my time with Ohio's environmental champions always reminds me, when we come together to act collectively, we build our power and we rise to the challenge. Shouldering the burden together makes the work sustainable and fulfilling. It breeds compassion and camaraderie. And it gives us the strength to take on the root causes of the systemic challenges plaguing our communities.

As we continue advocating for Ohio's environment, we continue to learn and grow together. One lesson 2020 has reinforced is that our fight for a healthy environment is often linked to the fight for social justice. While everyone deserves clean air to breathe, safe water to drink, and nearby nature to explore without fear or threat of violence—not all Ohioans have access to these critical components of a healthy environment.

In this issue of GreenWatch, we seek to illustrate how our environmental advocacy work intersects with economic, racial, and environmental justice: how “clean water for all” isn't just a slogan, but a commitment to ensuring water flows from your tap at a price you can afford; how preserving Ohio's beautiful parks and forests can support local economies; how our democracy shines brightest when every Ohio voter has equitable access to the ballot box; how investment in renewable energy policies means healthier air for all to breathe.

We also hope to demonstrate how guaranteeing a healthy environment for all Ohioans also means ensuring stronger public health outcomes, a prosperous economy, and equal rights and respect for everyone, regardless of race, income, zip code, or background.

The good news is that since our beginnings as the Ohio Environmental Council, we have proudly worked with partners, leaders, and communities across the state to achieve a healthier environment for all. As we take on the challenges of 2020 and beyond, we are committed to broadening that Council and to building a more “leaderfull” movement. We are committed to intentionally lifting up the unique passions and perspectives of many diverse individuals and organizations and working collaboratively together.

This mission has never been more important. And it's all thanks to supporters like you. We are ready as ever to keep growing as we fight for a healthy environment for all. As news changes daily, please know that you can stay up-to-date on how OEC is working to protect our environment and the sanctity of our democracy by going to [www.theoec.org](http://www.theoec.org).

Stay safe, be well, and thank you for all you do.



**HEATHER TAYLOR-MIESELE**  
Executive Director

# ACHIEVING CLIMATE JUSTICE ACROSS OHIO

From the idyllic countryside to the lively bustling of cities, Ohio is home to a remarkable amount of diversity — ecological, political, and personal. Despite our differences, we all share the need for a healthy, thriving environment, with the safe water, clean air, and vital public lands we rely on.

Climate change is a threat to everyone. But it does not threaten everyone equally — just as the impacts of climate change look different between Florida and California, the impacts of climate change are intensified by widespread problems such as societal-level racism and income inequality. That’s why we are committed to achieving and supporting climate action all across Ohio, in every community, regardless of income, race, or zip code.



## Northwest Ohio: Solar Neighborhood Future

Imagine an Ohio community taking full advantage of solar energy: what if that vacant lot from the old Kmart or the brownfield left by an old factory were converted into

spaces for solar arrays to produce clean energy for the local community? Community solar expands access to solar for all. Local solar facilities are shared by multiple community subscribers—including homeowners, renters, and businesses— who in turn reap the economic and environmental benefits of solar energy generation. We continue to advocate for local and state-level policies to make community solar projects a reality, including projects in Toledo led by organizations like Glass City Community Solar. Visit our blog to learn more about the success of Glass City Community Solar: [theoec.org/blog](http://theoec.org/blog)



## Southwest Ohio: Growing Ohio’s Clean Energy Future

Since 2008, Cincinnati has reduced its carbon emissions by two percent annually, making it a leader on the national stage. The nearby village of Silverton

has made big progress as well. They’ve implemented changes like the use of 100% renewable electric aggregation, efficiency upgrades, solar installations, and LED streetlight conversions. Silverton is showing that small communities can act in big ways to create cost-savings, reduce pollution, and provide cleaner air for all. Now, many other local Ohio leaders are stepping up, with the help of Power a Clean Future Ohio, a statewide coalition which supports Ohio communities in building a climate plan that’s right for them. Learn more at [poweracleanfuture.org](http://poweracleanfuture.org)

## Northeast Ohio: Supporting Ohio Clinicians for Climate Action

Northeast Ohio is famous for its world-class hospital systems and commitment to healthcare. And the OEC is proud to be part of a statewide program that brings together public health and climate action. Ohio Clinicians for Climate Action (OCCA) is a coalition of Ohio healthcare professionals who advocate for climate change solutions that protect the health of our patients and communities. As we head toward the election, OCCA is educating physicians on climate and health through the Cleveland Clinic Health and Climate Symposium and providing patients with voter information to help every eligible Ohioan show up to vote! Learn more at [www.ohcliniciansforclimateaction.org](http://www.ohcliniciansforclimateaction.org)



## Southeast Ohio: Appalachian Clean Transportation

The need for electric vehicle infrastructure is great across the Buckeye State, but investment is especially needed in Southeast Ohio. Rural Action, Clean Fuels Ohio, and the OEC have teamed up to specifically meet the need in Appalachian Ohio. We’re working together to bring clean transportation infrastructure and development to the region, to advocate to bridge the gap in services, and to accelerate demand for clean transportation in Appalachia. Check out our recent conversation on this: [bit.ly/OEC\\_ACT](https://bit.ly/OEC_ACT)



# THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME



**LISA BROOKS**

Coalition on Homelessness & Housing in Ohio  
Youth Housing Initiative Coordinator

Throughout the pandemic, my home—nestled in the heart of Athens County—has provided a sense of safety and security for my family. But I know that's not the case for many Southeast Ohio families.

As a long-time advocate for those experiencing homelessness, I have worked to meet the crisis needs of vulnerable youth and families in our rural community. While providing shelter meets a basic human need, there are many complex needs to be met—including access to clean, safe, and affordable water in one's home.

Water insecurity has plagued Southeast Ohio for decades. Our water infrastructure is crumbling in many places and water quality issues continue to negatively impact many of our water systems, especially private well systems.

The threats of water insecurity have grown more apparent each and every day during the pandemic. As our neighbors spend more time at home due to job loss and lack of child care, home water use has increased and driven up water bills for those receiving municipal water. Given rising unemployment and few community resources, paying for water has become more difficult for too many Southeast Ohio residents. Nonpayments further threaten the viability of our local water utilities who provide services on tight operating budgets.

We experienced some temporary relief: at the end of March 2020, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a temporary order forbidding any public water system from disconnecting a customer because of nonpayment and reconnecting households that had been recently disconnected at no cost. However, the Ohio EPA lifted the statewide moratorium on water shutoffs just a few short months later in July.

Around the time the moratorium was lifted, Hocking, Athens, Perry Community Action (HAPCAP) a nonprofit, community-based organization and the Columbus Dispatch reported<sup>1</sup> that there were at least 1,000 households at risk



**"As the saying goes, there's no place like home. But home isn't much without life-sustaining utilities—including clean, safe, running water—one needs to survive."**

- Lisa Brooks

of water shutoffs in Hocking, Athens and Perry counties alone and that the number is likely mirrored in other counties across Appalachia.

The lifting of the water shutoff moratorium unsettled my colleagues around the state—from the hills of Appalachia, to suburban main streets, to the densely-populated neighborhood blocks of Ohio's major cities. In our advocacy work, we have seen time and time again: it is extremely hard to take care of your children without running water in your home. If you can't pay your water bill, there's a good chance you can't pay your electric bill. If you can't pay those utility bills, there's a good chance you can't pay your rent. And if you can't pay your rent, there's a good chance that you will face eviction and homelessness.

No person should ever be put in that desperate situation.

While the pandemic has shone a bright light on the issue of water insecurity, it is clear that we need a comprehensive, long-term solution to ensure water security for all. I am proud to work alongside our partners in Southeast Ohio and at the Ohio Environmental Council to ensure families continue to advocate for policy solutions to have access to clean, safe, affordable water in their homes.



To learn more about OEC's efforts on water security, please visit: [theoec.org/blog](https://theoec.org/blog)

<sup>1</sup>: Columbus Dispatch, July 9, 2020: *End of halt to water shut-offs has Appalachian counties worried*

# OUR RENEWED FIGHT AGAINST HOUSE BILL 6



**MIRANDA LEPLA**  
OEC Vice President of Energy Policy

Last year, House Bill 6 (HB 6)—widely condemned as the “worst energy bill of the 21st century”—was signed into law. Now we know just how bad this bill really was.

From the start, this was a bad bill for Ohioans. It saddled Ohioans with monthly charges to provide a \$1.3 billion bailout for outdated coal and nuclear plants. At the same time, HB 6 gutted Ohio’s renewable energy and energy efficiency standards, risking over 114,000 Ohio jobs. After months of delays, closed-door dealings, and loud opposition from Ohioans, HB 6 passed in July 2019.

Immediately after its passage, opponents, including the OEC Action Fund, sprang into action to give Ohio voters a choice on this bill. This referendum effort faced unprecedented attacks. Waves of false and racist ads, threats to signature gatherers, and even more shady closed-door dealings made it impossible to gather the needed signatures. It became even more clear something was wrong with how this bill was passed.

Our suspicions were recently confirmed. On July 21, 2020, criminal charges were announced against former House Speaker Larry Householder, who was subsequently removed as Speaker, in what has been called the biggest public corruption scandal in Ohio history. According to the complaint, FirstEnergy allegedly funneled more than \$60 million dollars in dark money bribes to Householder and his cronies to secure the \$1.3 billion bailout of FirstEnergy’s two antiquated nuclear plants.

This unprecedented corruption cannot go unchecked. While HB 6 must be fully and immediately repealed, we cannot stop there.

Ohio’s energy future is at a crossroads. Ohioans overwhelmingly support moving to renewable energy and ditching dirty, outdated energy sources. Ohioans support investing in the good paying careers of the renewable energy and efficiency industries. Ohioans support clean air and climate action, especially as climate change threatens the health and safety of Ohioans, with the biggest risks falling on communities of color and low income communities across the state.

It is time for a change. It is up to us to create a healthier future for our state. With your support, the OEC’s clean energy team is working to make this a reality. Across Ohio, we continue to educate and support cities as they make the switch to renewable energy and invest in energy waste reduction strategies which lower emissions and all of our electric bills. At the Statehouse, we continue to provide legislators with the information they need to make the right call on Ohio’s energy future. Supporters like you continue to make all of this happen by contacting your legislators, writing letters to the editor, educating your friends, donating, speaking out, and more.

Together, we will stand up against corruption in our state. We will tackle climate change. And we will build the renewable energy future Ohioans deserve.



At the time of printing, the OEC Action Fund continues to call on lawmakers to immediately repeal HB 6. For up to date information please visit: [www.theoecactionfund.org/take-action](http://www.theoecactionfund.org/take-action)



# AT THE CROSSROADS OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND DEMOCRACY



**CHRIS TAVENOR**  
OEC Staff Attorney

What does it look like for a government to work for everyone—and in turn, our environment?

We explored that very question at the OEC’s third annual Ohio Public Interest Environmental Law Conference. Held virtually in late September, it offered nearly 200 attendees from across the state—and across the world—the opportunity to learn and network together. Together, we explored the important theme, At the Crossroads of Environmental Justice and Democracy.

We learned about the historic implications of redlining. We dove deep into the inner workings of our upcoming redistricting process. We explored ways in which we can expand safe, secure, and equitable access to the ballot. We discussed the impact of corruption at the Statehouse in the wake of House Bill 6 and heard about the power of local policy and ballot initiatives, where direct democracy often shines brightest.

Our plenary session was *The 2020 Fight for Democracy: Looking Back & Moving Forward*. Organized with the help of the ACLU of Ohio, it explored how all of these issues intersect with the ongoing fight against systemic and structural racism, economic injustice, and the many other conflicts facing us everyday.

This year’s conference challenged how we view the intersection of environmental justice and our democratic processes. And it firmly underscored a fundamental truth about our work: in order to ensure a healthy environment for all, we must guarantee a healthy and equitable democracy.

While it is clear there is much work to do, I am grateful for the opportunity to learn and grow with supporters like you in the fight for Ohio’s healthy environment and just democracy. I hope you’re looking forward to next year’s conference as much as I am!

**"For many, the American experience starkly differs depending on your zip code. Your zip code can determine whether you have the ability to live in a healthy and clean environment with cleans streets, adequate lighting, safety, healthy homes, clean and safe parks, clean water, clean air, and even if you have the ability to have your vote counted in an election."**

- Devontá Dickey, Cleveland VOTES  
*Redlining & the Power of Democracy*



**"We need to increase public engagement around the redistricting process to advocate for fair maps that don't harm the political voice of key communities and to build transparency into the map drawing process."**

- Katy Shanahan, All on the Line Ohio  
*The Path to Fair Maps Starts in 2020*



**"2020 is a conflict filled time on multiple fronts. As people have been forced into their homes or transformed into essential workers, the very concept of our "environment" has shifted. What does it mean to protect your environment when we don't have equal access to the polls during a pandemic? What does it mean to protect your environment when people experience police brutality in their communities?"**

- Jocelyn Rosnick, ACLU of Ohio  
*The 2020 Fight for Democracy: Looking Back & Moving Forward*



Interested in watching the informative and thought-provoking 2020 Ohio Public Interest Environmental Law Conference sessions?  
Visit: [theoec.org/opielc/speakers/](https://theoec.org/opielc/speakers/)



## DEFINING YOUR “AND”



**KARLTON LASTER**  
OEC Cleveland Metro Director

This past summer, I had the opportunity to speak with a group of high school students about the work of the OEC at the statewide and local levels. When asked about my academic and professional background, I defined my “and” — I spoke of my environmental work being intersectional and how I viewed my work through an environmental lens, as well as a lens of racial justice and community engagement.

Throughout this year, I’ve seen an important “and” in action at the OEC: the intersection of our work to protect our environment and our democracy. It is clear that in order to ensure a healthy environment for all, we must also guarantee a healthy and equitable democracy.

Over the past year, the OEC has collaborated with a number of organizations to engage communities across Ohio in democracy work: completing their census forms, participating in both the primary and general elections, and encouraging others to do the same. As OEC’s Cleveland Metro Director, I have had the opportunity to collaborate

with a strong cohort of democracy advocates on this work including Cleveland VOTES, All Voting is Local, League of Women Voters-Cleveland, NAACP-Cleveland Branch, and other community organizations.

The ongoing pandemic has challenged each of our organizations to think creatively about engaging our communities around democracy work at this critical time. It is my hope and expectation that we will continue to collaborate in meaningful and innovative ways following the 2020 Census and 2020 election cycles to advocate for increased focus and investment in environmental and environmental justice policies at the federal, state, and local levels.

*To see Karlton’s “and” in action, check out his OEC Cleveland Kitchen Table Talk series, a monthly conversation on environmental and environmental justice topics that are meant to educate, engage, and expand community engagement. From democracy to gardening and land use to water affordability, each of these events prompted intersectional conversations.*



To view the OEC Cleveland Kitchen Table Talk series, visit: [theoec.org/blog/oec-cleveland-kitchen-table-talks/](https://theoec.org/blog/oec-cleveland-kitchen-table-talks/)



## SEEKING BACKCOUNTRY DESIGNATION TO SUPPORT A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT AND STRONG ECONOMY



**CAROL DAVEY**  
OEC Southeast Ohio Regional Director

In Southeast Ohio, our natural resources are our most crucial assets.

For generations, companies have descended upon our communities to take advantage of these resources. Afterward, they packed up. They left behind pollution and left our towns without their primary economic driver. Now, we have an opportunity to create a new, just, locally-driven economy. And at the same time, we can protect one of region’s most crucial assets—the Wayne National Forest—for generations to come.

As the OEC’s Southeast Ohio Regional Director, I am working with my colleagues to build new economic opportunities for my region while preserving Southeast Ohio’s defining natural wonder through a new campaign to secure a Backcountry Area designation for the Wayne.

Achieving a Backcountry designation here would protect some 30,000 acres of public forest from logging, fracking, mining, and road construction. The area could be a destination for activities like hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, and camping.

The benefits of a named Backcountry Area are not just for the forest. Declaring a Backcountry Area will help make the Wayne a nationally recognized tourism destination where visitors will support small businesses and help revitalize local economies. Studies have shown this could have a major impact on the communities near the Wayne: rural counties with protected federal lands have above average rates

of job growth, higher incomes per capita, and higher property values. Former coal towns, like Shawnee and Glouster, could see an influx of people seeking a backcountry vacation.

These major benefits for the Wayne and nearby towns are hard to ignore. To date, more than 35 cities, counties, businesses, and nonprofit organizations have signed on to a petition calling for the creation of the Backcountry Area. We are proud to partner with organizations like Rural Action, the Buckeye Trail Association, and Winding Road on this campaign. If approved, the Backcountry Area would be designated in the next forest plan revision that could govern the Wayne for the next 20 to 30 years.

This project reflects the value of deep community organizing combined with state and federal advocacy. Protecting the Wayne requires listening to the needs of our communities. It requires strong, trusting relationships. And it requires a bold vision for a future that strengthens communities across Southeast Ohio.

By supporting the OEC, you are helping make that vision a reality. We can create a future that no longer relegates dangerous jobs from destructive industries to my friends and neighbors and instead supports a healthy, safe environment. Supporters like you are standing by my side as we work to create a new future for the Wayne and for Southeast Ohio.



# BUILDING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERS



**AMBER SWIGART**  
2020 OEC Outreach Intern

*The Ohio Environmental Council was fortunate to virtually host eight outstanding interns over the summer. For them, centering the environment lies at the heart of their advocacy and their futures.*

Despite majoring in a range of different fields, from English to theater and environmental studies to firefighting, this year’s Ohio Environmental Council Summer Intern Cohort demonstrated a deep understanding of how protecting our air, land, and water impacts every area of our lives.

We wholeheartedly agree that centering community voices, countering polluting corporate interests, and combating climate change takes a wide range of perspectives and skill sets. Since the consequences of climate change are imminent, joining the environmental movement is urgently necessary, no matter our background, field of study, or career path.

As Energy Intern Prince Kwarteng-Crooklynn put it, “The environment is at the center of everything we do.”

Many of the interns shared a passion for local advocacy and cite the OEC’s coalition-building approach—working with local leaders to find solutions, partnering with on-the-ground activists — and the OEC’s work to strengthen our democracy as reasons they became involved in the organization’s work. For example, Justice, Equity,

**“We are proud of our 2020 intern cohort and grateful for all their hard work. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, racial injustice and civil unrest, and social distancing requirements, these talented young people stayed calm, centered, and focused on the work at hand for Ohio’s environment. We look forward to seeing all that these interns accomplish in their workplaces and in their own communities, tomorrow and into the future.”**

- Melanie Houston, OEC Drinking Water Director & 2020 Intern Coordinator

Diversity, and Inclusion Intern Andrea Edland has a passion for using policy to increase fairness and access to opportunity, and found that the OEC’s values and justice and equity goals resonated with her professional goals. Water Intern Amy Wang was able to advance her interest and studies of societal sustainable principles and their impact on our day-to-day lives through the internship program’s fireside chats with board members and staff.

*continued next page...*



**Political Intern Leah Ackerman**  
(Denison University)



**OEC Action Fund Intern Juliana Discher**  
(The Ohio State University)



**Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Intern Andrea Edland** (The Ohio State University)



**Energy Intern Prince Kwarteng-Crooklynn** (Ohio University)



Legal Intern John Lee (The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law)



Legal Intern Gwen Short (The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law)



Outreach Intern Amber Swigart (The Ohio State University)



Water Intern Amy Wang (Oberlin College)

The OEC’s values, justice and equity goals, and focus on local strategies drew four international students, composing half of our intern cohort, to the OEC. The cultural diversity within the cohort helped interns and staff learn about each other’s backgrounds, find common ground, and examine OEC’s work with an international lens. OEC Action Fund Intern Juliana Discher was able to build upon her understanding of international environmental issues having traveled to Puerto Rico to provide natural disaster relief. Legal Intern John Youngjo Lee built upon his understanding of U.S. environmental issues as a former U.S. Bureau Correspondent for Korea Energy Agency’s New & Renewable Energy Center.

Another essential part of this cohort’s interest is community advocacy and a passion for environmental

education, both for the younger generation and the general population. Legal Intern Gwen Short has worked in environmental education efforts across the country in order to, in her own words, “inspire kids to be better stewards of nature.” And Political Intern Leah Ackerman, is considering careers related to education and media coverage of environmental issues.

We are at a pivotal moment in history, one that calls for bold leadership and innovative, community-based solutions. In order to overcome this pandemic, address the looming climate crisis and face centuries of racial injustice, we need all kinds of skill sets and the voices of our youngest generations. The 2020 Intern Cohort is grateful for the opportunity to learn and grow these skill sets with the OEC this summer.



## JOIN US FOR THE 2020 OEC ANNUAL MEETING: ROOTED IN RESILIENCE

**November 13, 2020      12 - 1 p.m.      Online**

Over the past year, against all odds, we have seen major environmental accomplishments. Join us virtually for our Annual Meeting to **hear from the OEC team about our recent success and the impact of the 2020 General Election on our future work.**

In addition to hearing from the OEC, we are pleased to host **Ohio House Democratic Leader Emilia Strong Sykes as our keynote** for this year’s meeting. With a strong sense of responsibility for the well-being of those that she serves, Sykes has tackled the challenges of her hometown district of Akron (OH-34) with unmatched passion and dedication. Sykes comes from a long line of leaders who are unafraid of doing what is right in the face of adversity.

The meeting is **free and open** to all OEC members and the public.

**Register today: [theoec.org/event/2020-annual-meeting/](https://theoec.org/event/2020-annual-meeting/)**

*Please note that we have postponed OEC’s Green Gala, normally occurring after our Annual Meeting, to the Spring of 2021.*



## WHY I GIVE

The OEC's donors are champions for Ohio's environment. Our donors are inspired by the OEC's mission to protect Ohio's air, land, and water. In turn, you inspire our team as we work each day to tackle tough challenges facing our state. We recently asked Julie to share why she decided to support the OEC. Here's what she had to say:

**“I was distressed when HB6 passed, and I was even more appalled to later learn of the corruption and bribery that went into its passage. I donated to support the Ohio Environmental Council's efforts to repeal this corrupt bill which is also a disaster for Ohio's clean energy future.”**

- Julie Lonneman

Would you like to share why you're inspired to give? Email us at [oecc@theoec.org](mailto:oecc@theoec.org) and you might see your story here in a future issue!



## GREEN GIVING CLUB MEMBERS SUSTAIN OEC'S MISSION

Do you have a monthly subscription to a favorite magazine or video streaming service? Consider supporting the OEC through a monthly gift!

Our Green Giving Club Members support the OEC's mission through automatic monthly or quarterly donations. These donations provide ongoing, reliable support for the OEC, ensuring we're ready to fight for Ohio's air, land, water, and democracy. Plus, we're happy to provide you easy monthly processing, an end-of-year donation summary to assist you in tax preparation, and dedicated OEC staff members to answer your questions. With the OEC's Green Giving Club, it's easy being green!

**Make your first monthly gift today at: [theoec.org/give-monthly/](https://theoec.org/give-monthly/)**

*The OEC restricts contributions from individual businesses to less than 5% of our total operating budget and limits total business donations to less than 15%. The OEC requires all business donors to acknowledge that acceptance of a gift does not hinder or place limits on the OEC's ability to comment on, litigate, or participate in processes related to any permit, legislation, policy, or related decision.*

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