

Dutchess County Environmental Management Council

2025 Annual Report

JANUARY 2026

Date: 19 January 2026

Throughout 2025, the Dutchess County Environmental Management Council (DCEMC) functioned as an advisory body, advocating for environmental studies, legislative reviews, and community outreach. The Council's membership, which grew from nine to its full capacity of eleven at-large members by mid-year, focused on several long-term initiatives, most notably the completion of the 2025 State of the Environment report and provided comment at the launch of a comprehensive county-wide solid waste study.

Project Summaries:

· **Solid Waste Management and the Resource Recycling Systems (RRS) Study:** Waste reduction remained a primary concern, culminating in the county engaging Resource Recycling Systems, Inc. to conduct a Waste Reduction and Diversion Study. The study, funded by a \$75,000 allocation, aims to provide recommendations for waste diversion and the management of non-divertible materials.

The DCEMC formed a dedicated subcommittee to highlight particular areas of interest for RRS to consider. These were:

- Reducing waste volume through composting, better recycling, and reducing the use of single use plastics
- Developing "Pay as you Throw" (PAYT), options and guidelines for local municipalities
- Investigating the remaining lifespan, transition alternatives, and potential upgrades for the Waste to Energy plant
- Increasing the reuse and recycling of Household Hazardous Waste.

Community members from Mothers Out Front raised concerns at an EMC meeting regarding the need for robust engagement, funding additional work, and the consideration of human health impacts within the RRS study. It is expected to conclude in late 2026.

Road Salt Reduction: Member Vicky Kelly conducted significant research into road salt usage across various municipalities. Data collection revealed that salt use per lane mile varies widely throughout the county. For instance, while the Wassaic substation decreased its use over 30 years, the Clinton substation's use remained the same or increased.

To address this, the Council identified Washington County (Lake George) as the gold standard for salt savings for the successful implementation of brine-based strategies that drastically reduced salt application. The DCEMC will develop a road salt toolkit to assist local advocates and officials in exploring salt reduction strategies. Furthermore, a joint Conservation Advisory Council (CAC)/EMC Roundtable held in November 2025 focused specifically on water resources and salt mitigation, drawing a large audience and positive feedback. Both Vicky Kelly and Dan Shapley (Riverkeeper) presented their work on this topic. Other EMC members attended.

- **Fishkill Creek Watershed Alliance (FCWA):** FCWA, supported by members of the EMC, maintained a rigorous water sampling schedule throughout the year. Sampling at seven points along the creek tested for E.Coli, fecal matter and heavy metals with results showing some areas of concern. The alliance also pursued legislation to designate the watershed as an "inland waterway" to unlock further protections.

- **Peach Hill Green Infrastructure Project:** Member Lora Schilling is exploring grants and new funding to continue projects similar to the highly successful Peach Hill Park rain garden. She has been in contact with Environmental Facilities Corporation and several local schools for interest, including Vassar, Marist, and Dutchess Community College.

- **State of Environment Report:** A cornerstone of the Council's work in 2025 was the production and publication of the State of the Environment report for Dutchess County. Early in the year, the Council assigned chapters to various experts and members, covering the following topics:

Wildlife Management and Conservation

Invasive Species

Land Conservation

Land Use Change

Climate Change and Alternative Energy

Environmental Cleanup, Brownfield, and Superfund Sites

Waste Disposal, Composting and Recycling

Plastics & Forever Chemicals

Air Quality

Water: Droughts, Floods and Water Quality

Lyme Disease and other Zoonotic Diseases

The Council officially voted to accept the report in June 2025. Following its completion, the DCEMC hopes to expand its reach by public dissemination, presenting the findings to the County legislature and planning subsequent presentations for local public libraries. The report is now hosted on the DCEMC website under the “Projects and Reports” section for public access.

Climate Smart Communities (CSC): The Council maintained their link with the Climate Smart Communities task force with Nancy Severns serving as liaison. In 2025, the task force focused on a carbon emissions review of employee commuting and finalized contracts for electric vehicle charging stations for the county fleet. Outreach efforts included planning a “green jobs” fair and engaging youth in climate initiatives. A future meeting will focus on the direction of the advisory committee.

· **Communication and Collaboration:** DCEMC actively engaged with other organizations, including Cornell Cooperative Extension Dutchess County, New York State Association of Conservation Councils (NYSACC), Scenic Hudson, and local advocacy groups.

Jim Fredrickson presented at the March 2025 Roundtable for local Conservation Advisory Councils held by CCEDC. Vicky Kelly presented at the November Roundtable coordinated by Dutchess County Planning and Development. **Two members attended and reported on NYSACC’s Conference on the Environment.** EMC members also participated in the County’s Earth Day Event on April 26th, 2025 at the Vassar Barn.

As a part of the on-going work of the EMC, advocates for Mothers Out Front attended one of our meetings in order to comment on the RRS study.

Communication with the Legislature: There was ongoing discussion about improving communication with the County Legislature, particularly regarding legislative actions and opportunities for input. Legislator Lisa Kaul was instrumental in this regard and regularly attended EMC meetings.

Legislator Kaul worked closely with the DCEMC to pursue initiatives reducing single use plastics. While a formal county wide ban lacked sufficient support, the strategy shifted toward educational campaigns and voluntary business participation.

The Council approved the use of its logo on posters designed to encourage patrons to “Please Ask” for utensils and condiments rather than receiving them automatically. Additionally, the Chamber of Commerce designed plaques for restaurant owners to prompt this behavior.

Next Steps:

- Continue to review and monitor progress on key initiatives, including CSC implementation, solid waste management strategies, and inland waterway designation for Fishkill Creek watershed.
- Advocate for increased involvement in legislative processes and improved communication with the County Legislature. One step is to update the enabling legislation for the EMC from the County. More needs to be done in terms of our advice to the legislature in the legislative process.
- Explore expansion of the Peach Hill Green Infrastructure Project model to other communities. Lora Schilling will look to extend this work to other projects in the county.

Extend awareness of the State of the Environment report to both the County Legislature and the public. Strive for greater involvement in the County legislative process on environmental issues.

- Now fully staffed, work to ensure continued effectiveness toward our goals throughout the County

Funding and Resources:

There are two different accounts supporting the EMC. \$1000 is from the DC Legislature. Another is an account funded by IBM in recognition of the time spent on our committee by Peter Berasi.

EMC at large members donate their time throughout the year. There are currently 11 members who donate their time and expertise. Another community member supports

our website. In addition to the 11 available at large seats, a total of 35 members are authorized to a seat on the Council. Five are ex-officio members, one is a liaison member of the DC Legislature and four are County Government seats. Twenty-one seats are assigned, one each, to the 21 Conservation Advisory Councils within Dutchess County.

The current at large members are:

Jefferson Akins

Pete Berasi

James Fredrickson (Chair)

Vicky Kelly (Secretary)

Elizabeth Kucinich

Constance Kustas

Dave Mergendahl

John Paraskeva

Nancy Severns

Lora Schilling

Kate Susman

EMC meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the fourth Wednesday of the month. Our website is [Dutchess County Environmental Management Council \(EMC\) | Working to Protect Dutchess County's Natural Resources](#)

Foundation of report generated at <https://notebooklm.google/> which was then tailored by Nancy Severns and reviewed by all committee members.