



2021 Environmental Congress -Speaker Bios

Keynote Address: Surili Sutaria Patel

Surili Sutaria Patel, spatel@metgroup.com

Surili is a trusted voice in public health who champions diversity and works to advance health equity and environmental justice. She approaches health and the environment through thoughtful coalition building and innovative strategies that work to advance equity and improve access. With a profound public health and biomedical research background, she has led the climate and health discussion out of environmental circles and into the broader public health realm.

Surili is a Vice President at the Metropolitan Group – a full-service strategy and creative agency that works exclusively with public agencies, nonprofits, foundations and socially responsible businesses to build a just and sustainable world. At the Metropolitan Group, a certified B Corp, Surili works at the intersection of public health, environment and sustainability and social justice.

Previously, Surili held a visionary leadership position at the American Public Health Association, where she drove strategic development to bridge the gap between public health practice and sound policies. As the architect and director of the Center for Climate, Health and Equity, she inspired action by public health professionals and advanced policy agendas that address health at the nexus of climate and equity. As deputy director for the Center for Public Health Policy, she elevated the association’s environmental health program to the national stage. Surili also has deep issue-based knowledge in environmental health priorities including water safety and



security, children’s environmental health, Tribal public and environmental health, transportation and health, and healthy community design.

Surili is the co-founder of Aawaz for Climate, a new network that addresses climate change and health equity through elevating voices represented in a gender and ethnically diverse community.

Environmental Justice Advancement in NJ Session:



Kandyce Perry, Director, Office of Environmental Justice, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
As Director, Kandyce is responsible for the management and oversight of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection’s Office of Environmental Justice, which informs, advises, and develops guidance on how all state departments and agencies can incorporate environmental justice into the implementation of their statutory and regulatory responsibilities, policies, programs, and various core functions. Kandyce also oversees the convening of the State's Environmental Justice Interagency Council and Environmental Justice Advisory Council and represents the Department as a key point of contact for overburdened communities.
Prior to joining the Department, Kandyce worked at a Trenton-based nonprofit where she directed the organization’s policies and programs to reduce flooding, improve water quality, and equitably pay for

infrastructure upgrades in New Jersey. She also worked on brownfield redevelopment at the City of Camden Redevelopment Agency.

Kandyce holds a master’s degree in Environmental Studies from the University of Pennsylvania and a B.S. in Environmental Science from Spelman College. Kandyce Perry, Kandyce.Perry@dep.nj.gov

L. Renata Barnes, Outdoor Equity Alliance Coordinator
Renata Barnes is the Coordinator for the Outdoor Equity Alliance. She has successfully implemented programs designed to create educational, recreational, and career opportunities for underserved community members to enjoy nature and become stewards of the outdoors. The most recent program was an FoHVOS Avian Internship that paid intern salaries through a NJCF Parker Grant. Renata led OEA efforts to partner with Legislative District 15 and the Trenton African American Cultural Collaborative to bring the first Juneteenth weekend festival to Trenton and coordinated events throughout Mercer County.
Renata Barnes, rbarnes@outdoorequityalliance.org



Stormwater Management-Challenges & Solutions Session:



Christopher C. Obropta, Ph.D., P.E. is the Extension Specialist in Water Resources with Rutgers Cooperative Extension, and he is a Professor with the Department of Environmental Sciences at the School of Environmental & Biological Sciences, Rutgers University. He has a doctorate in Civil Engineering from Stevens Institute of Technology, an M.S. in Civil Engineering from New Jersey Institute of Technology, and a B.S. in Civil Engineering from New Jersey Institute of Technology. Prior to joining Rutgers, Dr. Obropta was an environmental consultant for 12 years at Omni Environmental Corporation. Dr. Obropta has a background in watershed management, water quality modeling, hydrologic and hydraulic modeling, and coastal engineering. His specific experience includes watershed restoration, onsite wastewater treatment system design and management, wasteload allocations and TMDL studies, stormwater management, wetland design, effluent dilution analyses, longshore sediment transport, computer-aided design, and geographic information systems (GIS). He teaches Bioresource Engineering Design I & II, where he directs student design teams to develop solutions to complex real-life engineering problems. With his extensive and impressive background Dr. Obropta leads his highly specialized team of professional staff who are determined to create innovative solutions to water quality issues in New Jersey. Chris Obropta, obropta@envsci.rutgers.edu.



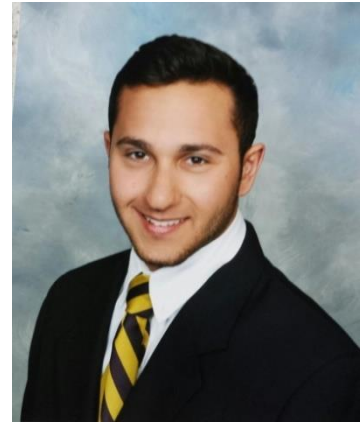
Brianne Callahan, Stormwater Manager, NJ Future

As Stormwater Manager, Bree works to help local governments and utilities create stormwater utilities more affordably and effectively to reduce flooding and improve water quality. She is responsible for creating a web-based resource center, organizing training sessions, and facilitating a peer-to-peer network of local officials. Prior to joining New Jersey Future, Bree served as Executive Director and Baykeeper for Massachusetts Baykeeper, and worked as a legal and environmental consultant in both Philadelphia and Boston. Bree earned her JD from the Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law, and holds a BA in architecture and environmental studies from the University of Pennsylvania.

Bree Callahan, bcallahan@njfuture.org.

Legislative Update Session:

Henry Gajda is the Public Policy Director for the New Jersey League of Conservation Voters. Before joining the NJLCV team, Henry served as a Campaign Finance Fellow on the 2018 Congressional Campaign of Andy Kim, who is running in NJ-03 district.



Henry received his Master's of Science in Environmental Policy and Sustainability Management from The New School in Manhattan and wrote his thesis on "Ensuring Distributed Energy Resource Investment within Community Choice Aggregations in New York State." While in graduate school, Henry served as a teaching assistant for multiple urban environmental policy and design courses, and has conducted extensive policy research for several organizations - at home and abroad - regarding climate change, land use, mitigating risk, and community resilience. He also attended Rutgers University and received his Bachelor's of Science in Environmental Policy and Ecology.

Henry is from the coastal town Brick, New Jersey, and now lives in Philadelphia. He loves spending his time traveling, listening to live music, and relaxing on the beach. Henry Gajda
henry.gajda@njlcv.org

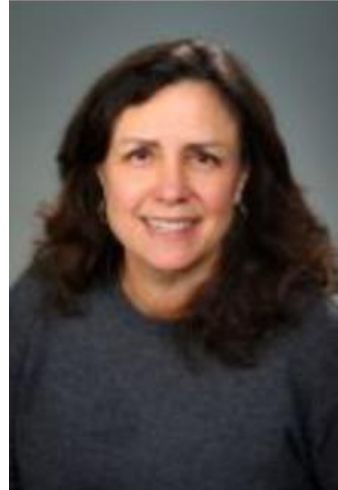


Alex Ambrose has served as Policy Associate at the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) since 2019. She works on the Delaware River Watershed Initiative in the New Jersey Highlands region as well as on statewide policy issues including plastic reduction, stormwater, and clean energy. Most recently, she worked to draft language and strengthen provisions in the statewide Plastic Reduction Act. Before coming to ANJEC, Alex was at New Jersey League of Conservation Voters, where she worked on statewide legislation such as the Flood Defense Act, the Preserve New Jersey Act, and the Clean Energy Act.

Alex graduated from Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences with a B.S. in Ecology, Evolution, and Natural Resources with a minor in Environmental Geomatics. Currently, she is a graduate student at Rutgers Camden in the Executive MPA program, and is a member of the Clinton Township Environmental Commission. She is an award-winning visual artist and loves to go birding, read, and cuddle with her cats. Alex Ambrose,
aambrose@anjec.org

Tools for Local Climate Action Session:

Jeanne Herb, Jeanne Herb is Executive Director of the Environmental Analysis and Communications Group, a center of service, research and practice at the Rutgers University Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy where she leads initiatives at the intersection of social and environmental determinants of health, health equity, environmental sustainability, state and local public policy, and inclusive, participatory decision-making. Jeanne Co-Directs the state's Climate Change Resource Center, a statutorily established and academically housed service center providing support to communities, state and local decision-makers and the private sector to advance equitable and science-informed climate change solutions. She also co-facilitates the New Jersey Climate Change Alliance, a collaboration of diverse New Jersey thought leaders that, for ten years, has advanced science-informed climate action in New Jersey. Prior to joining Rutgers in 2010, Jeanne spent more than two decades at the state Department of Environmental Protection, most recently as the Assistant Commissioner of Policy, Planning and Science where she oversaw multidisciplinary programs related to environmental health, sustainable planning and development Environmental Justice, climate change and coastal management. She is an alumnus of Rutgers and New York Universities.



Lucas Marxen - Associate Director, Office of Research Analytics; Rutgers University. Lucas Marxen is the Associate Director of the Office of Research Analytics at Rutgers University where he provides leadership and direction on the development of analytical capabilities and services to meet the ongoing demand of stakeholders both within and outside the university. Lucas has expertise in developing geographic information systems (GIS), enabling spatial analysis and modeling for research initiatives in a variety of disciplines. In addition, he leads a team that specializes in developing data informatics systems that combine computer science and data visualization techniques into platforms that bring research and data to a broad set of stakeholders. He has also established in-house capacity for developing custom software, database and website solutions for a variety of research and extension initiatives.

Lucas earned a Master in City and Regional Planning from the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, a Master of Science in Computer Science from Rutgers University, and is currently pursuing a PhD in Planning and Public Policy from the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy.

Carolina Ramos - Sustainability Program Manager, Jersey City Office of Sustainability
Carolina Ramos is the Sustainability Program Manager at the Jersey City Office of



Sustainability, where she coordinates and oversees the implementation of various internal and external sustainability initiatives. Raised by Latin American parents in Hudson County, her passion for climate action stems from both historical and present-day environmental and climate justice issues that low-income, minority communities face. Prior to her current position, Carolina served as an AmeriCorps VISTA in Jersey City, working with community-based organizations. She graduated from the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences at Rutgers University, where she majored in environmental studies.
Carolina Ramos, cramos@icnj.org

Gary Sondermeyer – VP of Operations, Bayshore Recycling Corporation

Gary Sondermeyer is Vice President of Operations for the Bayshore Family of Companies of Woodbridge Township, NJ. Bayshore is one of NJ's largest recyclers, managing 9 separate recycling operations on its 58 acre campus. Gary assists in the management of facility-wide operations toward the corporate vision of running 100% green businesses powered 100% by renewable energy. Gary joined Bayshore following 30 years of service at the NJDEP. He served as the agency's Chief of Staff for 10 years under 6 New Jersey Governors. Gary also serves as Vice Chair of Sustainable Jersey, Co-Chair of the New Jersey Climate Change Alliance, Co-Chair of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority's Resilient Task Force and helps lead the Legislative Committee of the Association of New Jersey Recyclers. Gary has undergraduate and Masters' Degrees in Environmental Planning from Rutgers University. Gary Sondermeyer, GSondermeyer@bayshorerecycling.com



Moving Forward with Electric Vehicles Session



Andrea Friedman is approaching her 20th anniversary at the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, where she supervises electric vehicle programs in the Division of Air Quality. Andrea focuses on policy and program development, implementation of new initiatives, public charging infrastructure, and electrification of the state fleet. Previously, Andrea was a founding member of the DEP Office of Climate and Energy, working at the intersection of climate change, clean energy and clean transportation. She is a graduate of Bryn Mawr College.

Andrea Friedman, andrea.friedman@dep.nj.gov

Cathleen Lewis serves as the Manager of E-Mobility Programs for the Office of Clean Energy at the NJ Board of Public Utilities. In this role, Cathleen oversees all EV related programs at NJBPU including the Charge Up New Jersey EV Incentive Program, the framework for utilities' role in EV charging and furthering of the EV goals included in the 2019 Energy Master Plan. Cathleen utilizes her experience in transportation and changing driver behavior to increase EV adoption in all sectors. Prior to joining the BPU, Cathleen created and implemented policies that invested in infrastructure, encouraged safe, sustainable and multi-modal transportation and invested in Economic Development. Cathleen is a graduate of Douglass College-Rutgers University. Cathleen is also a councilperson and former mayor of Lawrence township. Cathleen Lewis, cathleen.lewis@bpu.nj.gov



Katharina (Kate) Miguel serves as the Clean Energy Advocate at Isles, a community development and environmental nonprofit that works to foster self-reliant families and sustainable communities. She manages their clean energy initiatives through policy, project management, and community organizing with a focus on expanding access to clean transportation and addressing energy insecurity. Prior to joining Isles, Ms. Miguel served as Project Coordinator of the Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed as well as an intern for NJLCV. She received her B.A. in Political Science with a minor in Psychology from Rutgers University.

Clean Energy in New Jersey Session



Tom Gilbert -Tom has served since June 2015 as Campaign Director for Energy, Climate and Natural Resources. Prior to joining NJ Conservation Foundation, he served as Senior Conservation Finance Director with the Trust for Public Land. He also served as Chairman of the NJ Keep It Green Coalition and led successful campaigns to secure approval of a \$400 million bond measure in 2009 and constitutional amendment in 2014 that will provide a stable source of land preservation

funding. Tom also co-directed national field efforts of the Land & Water Conservation Fund Coalition in 2010 which secured House passage of comprehensive LWCF legislation. Previously, Tom served as Director of Eastern Forest Conservation for the Wilderness Society, and Executive Director of the NY/NJ/PA/CT Highlands Coalition, where he led successful campaigns to pass both federal and New Jersey state legislation to protect critical lands and waters in the Highlands region. Tom earned his M.S. in Natural Resources Planning from the University of Vermont. He was a founding board member of the New Jersey League of Conservation Voters. Tom Gilbert, tom@njconservation.org

Featured Speaker: NJDEP Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette



Appointed by Governor Philip D. Murphy, Shawn M. LaTourette became New Jersey's Commissioner of Environmental Protection on June 14, 2021. He had served as Acting Commissioner since January 16, 2021. Commissioner LaTourette is responsible for formulating statewide environmental policy while directing programs that protect public health and ensure the quality of New Jersey's air, land, water, and natural and historic resources.

A lawyer and policymaker with more than 20 years of experience in environmental protection, Commissioner LaTourette began his career defending victims of toxic exposure, including organizing and advocating for the needs of vulnerable New Jersey communities whose drinking water was contaminated by petrochemicals. Throughout a career shaping environmental law and policy, he has served in executive roles and as a trusted adviser to governments, community and non-profit organizations, and leaders in industry and infrastructure, while also litigating high-stakes lawsuits involving environmental, energy and public health concerns.

Commissioner LaTourette first joined the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) as the chief legal and regulatory policy adviser to then-Commissioner Catherine R. McCabe in 2018. He was elevated to DEP Chief of Staff in 2019 and to Deputy Commissioner in 2020. Since 2019, he has been responsible for running DEP's operations while formulating policy and regulatory reforms to advance Governor Murphy's environmental, climate change and clean energy priorities. Commissioner LaTourette has developed and led initiatives that prioritize environmental justice while facilitating greenhouse gas emissions reductions, climate change resilience and adaptation, renewable energy deployment, water infrastructure enhancement, brownfields redevelopment, community renewal, and natural resource conservation and restoration.

Guided by a deep commitment to equity and a professional philosophy that uniting economic development and environmental improvement promotes the public good, Commissioner LaTourette has been regarded as a consensus builder adept at achieving balance among competing priorities. His diverse background — in protecting vulnerable communities, facilitating the development of infrastructure and public works, managing business risk, promoting conservationist policies and advocating for equity — has made him a leading force in policy, program and project development, especially those at the complex juncture of economic development, energy and environmental protection.

Born and raised in New Jersey, Commissioner LaTourette graduated magna cum laude from Rutgers University and earned his law degree summa cum laude from Rutgers Law School, where he was the class salutatorian and the recipient of multiple environmental and governance awards, and published scholarship on environmental law, natural resource damage and climate issues.

Social Media Tools Session:



Samantha Adamo is the Social Media Assistant at New Jersey League of Conservation Voters and Conservation Voters of PA. She also volunteers as the Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook Platform Development Intern at Plastic Tides, a non-profit that aims to empower others to live a plastic-free lifestyle. Samantha is currently pursuing her Masters of Sustainability Leadership degree at Arizona State University. She graduated from the University of Connecticut School of Business in 2019, where she majored in Marketing with a concentration in Digital Marketing and Analytics, and minored in Psychology. In her free time, Samantha also manages the social media and blog content for the Making a Mark Foundation, a charitable foundation based near her hometown at the Jersey Shore, which focuses on environmental change. She especially loves the beach and partaking in outdoor activities.

Samantha Adamo, Samantha.adamo@njlcv.org

Musical Celebration and Closing Session

SANKOFA AFRICAN DRUM AND DANCE ENSEMBLE

Sankofa meaning –‘ going back to the roots’ in the Twi language from Ghana, West Africa is very symbolic in promoting personal and community awareness of the positive role of the arts in the villages in West Africa demonstrated through our rich cultural values passed on to us by our great ancestors ‘Nananom’.. This group was originally formed in the summer of 1997 from my community drum circles in Allentown and Stroudsburg Pa.



This group teaches togetherness in diversity and empowerment of the individual self image as well as the community building/teamwork through African drumming and dance. Sankofa is made of four drummers and three dancers led by Kofi (an Asante prince from Ghana) and Yacin (a Wolof princess from Senegal). We teach authentic drumming and dance techniques with their history and cultural origins. The latter become the basis for the staff/students of the schools and organizations in also developing their own. Our performances, assemblies, and workshops generate the same community spirit of sharing, oneness, joy and love where everyone gets involved; both audience and performers.

Sankofa’s performance is electrifying in terms of the spiritual release in our drum, dance and songs (Chants). Sankofa has successfully completed over 800 residencies in schools as well as the community; from conferences to festivals. Notable amongst them are the 2006 UN Water Conference in Mexico City, Mexico; Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Folk Festival in Allentown, Pa; Indian summer Festival, Netcong, NJ; Jazz Festival, at the Delaware Water Gap, PA; International Festival and First Night at the Paramount Theatre in Middletown, NY; Sussex County Farm and International Shows, in Newton, NJ and eight World Trade Center Benefits in NJ, NY and PA for the Red Cross and other non- profit organizations. Sankofa also uses drumming as therapy for the youth at risk and also self-awareness/ self- esteem programs for the youth. We conduct from one day to 30 day residencies with an effective planning with our host.

For bookings contact his Orange County office at 31Owen Drive, Monroe, NY 10950. He can be also reached at tel./fax: (862) 266-0136/ (646) 630-9242; kofinesankofa@gmail.com or visit his website at www.bak2roots.com .