

Pragmatic Environmentalist of New York Summary Update September 14 – September 27, 2026

This is a summary update of posts at [Pragmatic Environmentalist of New York](#) for the last two weeks. The intent of this report is to summarize my articles and include links if you want to get into the details. I have been writing about the pragmatic balance of the risks and benefits of environmental initiatives in New York since 2017 with a [recent emphasis](#) on New York's [Climate Leadership & Community Protection Act](#) (Climate Act). If you do not want to be on this mailing list, then let me know. A pdf copy of the following information and [previous summaries](#) are also available. The opinions expressed in these articles do not reflect the position of any of my previous employers or any other organization I have been associated with, these comments are mine alone.

I used [Perplexity](#) AI to generate draft summaries of the descriptions in this document. I asked Perplexity to provide a summary of the following posts and edited the output for consistency and accuracy.

[Acadia Center's RGGI Fact Sheet Doesn't Set the Record Straight — It Rewrites It](#)

The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative ([RGGI](#)) is a market-based program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) ([Factsheet](#)) from electric generating units in the NE. Proponents have been touting the benefits of the cap-and-invest program all the while ignoring its problems and costs. This topic matters because New York State is making claims and plans based on a policy that I think is failing.

I reviewed Acadia Center's new [fact sheet](#) claiming that RGGI is a 4-to-1 winner for New England ratepayers. Acadia compares \$445 million in 2025 auction proceeds with a projected \$1.3 billion in lifetime energy-bill savings, while citing ISO New England's estimate that RGGI added \$815 million to 2025 wholesale-electricity costs. I argue that this framing repeats the same accounting problem used by NY Department of Environmental Conservation and New York State Energy Research & Development Authority to promote New York's claimed "nearly 6-to-1" RGGI savings ratio.

The principal flaw is comparing projected, multi-year, participant-side benefits against one year of narrowly defined cost. Acadia's \$1.3 billion is not a measured 2025 result; it applies historical savings multipliers to current auction proceeds. The alleged savings accrue over 15 to 20 years, while the cost figure represents a single year. This is not a genuine return-on-investment calculation. It also obscures the difference between households that qualify for program benefits and all ratepayers, who pay the embedded wholesale-market cost.

The timing is especially poor. RGGI Auction 73 cleared at a record \$37.65 per allowance, following the previous auction's \$35 record. The Cost Containment Reserve price suppression mechanism had already been exhausted for 2026, and the top bid was \$190. The allowance-price trajectory and banking behavior warrant much more concern than Acadia's fact sheet acknowledges.

I also explain that carbon allowance costs raise wholesale market-clearing prices paid to all dispatched resources, not only to covered fossil generators. Finally, I question Acadia's attribution of a 37% New England power-sector CO2 reduction since 2001 to RGGI when the program began in 2009 and much of the historical reduction reflects coal- and oil-to-gas switching. Policymakers should report verified savings, full market costs, and RGGI-specific emission reductions before claiming a clear net benefit.

[Renewable-Energy Advocates Worried About Influencers and “Misinformation” Misinform Themselves](#)

I published a long analysis of a New Yorkers for Clean Power webinar, [The Rise of Influencers and Misinformation](#), which focused on [Alexandra Fasulo](#) and her opposition to large renewable-energy projects in rural New York. The webinar portrayed her as part of an increasingly organized and influential opposition movement that could delay renewable development and complicate achievement of Climate Act targets. I agree that Fasulo has become an effective communicator, but I contend that renewable-energy advocates apply a double standard when they accuse opponents of misinformation while making questionable claims themselves.

I document seven examples. The most straightforward is an erroneous claim that New York’s June 3 solar-generation record saved ratepayers \$200 million in one day. NYSERDA actually reported that solar helped save an estimated \$90 million over the previous summer and separately noted a \$200 million NY-Sun appropriation. Other problematic claims include the assertion that New York had no renewable-permitting process before ORES; the implication that distributed wind and solar are automatically more climate-resilient; and the treatment of rapidly constructed renewable nameplate capacity as equivalent to dispatchable generation.

I also address claims about the ability of solar leases to protect farming, the supposed reversibility of solar development on farmland, and the amount of farmland lost to solar. Lease income may assist individual landowners, but it does not eliminate the loss of productive acreage, effects on tenants and neighbors, or construction-related soil and drainage risks. The central issue is that ORES lacks clear, enforceable limits defining acceptable impacts. Environmental organizations should demand the same farmland, wildlife, and local-community protections that they claim to support, rather than dismissing the concerns that make Fasulo’s message persuasive.

[New York Nuclear Reliability Backbone: Potential and Probability](#)

I reviewed Governor Hochul’s proposed 5-GW advanced-nuclear “Reliability Backbone” and the Independent Intervenors’ comments in Case 26-E-0335. The proposal properly acknowledges that a zero-emission system dominated by wind, solar, and short-duration batteries still needs firm, dispatchable generation when weather-dependent output is low, demand is high, or transmission is constrained. However, I argue that the proposal remains a planning concept until New York makes durable financial, regulatory, and political commitments sufficient to get nuclear projects built.

The essential point in our comments is that new nuclear should be evaluated as an alternative to portions of the renewable-heavy Climate Act buildout, not simply added to wind, solar, battery storage, hydrogen, backup generation, and transmission. One Coordinated Grid Planning Process scenario suggests that 5.5 GW of nuclear-like firm capacity could meet load with roughly 100 GW of installed capacity, compared with approximately 130 GW in the State Scenario. The proper comparison must include full-system costs: transmission, storage, backup, land conversion, curtailment, fuel security, winter performance, and customer-bill impacts—not just generator-level levelized costs.

I support advanced nuclear because it is the only demonstrated large-scale, dispatchable, long-duration, dispatchable zero-emission resource available today that could be expanded as needed. But customers

should not receive an open-ended obligation to finance nuclear construction risk. Projects should have a demonstrated reliability need, feasible site and transmission arrangements, mature technology, independent cost and schedule review, enforceable performance obligations, hard cost and bill-impact caps, private first-loss responsibility, and reductions in redundant renewable infrastructure.

New York's history—especially Shoreham and Indian Point—creates a credibility problem for investors. The State must choose openly between meaningful public participation, heavily supported private development, or continued studies without construction.

New York is at a critical energy future crossroads. A zero-emission system dominated by wind, solar, and short-duration batteries still needs firm, dispatchable generation. The only proven zero-emission dispatchable generation resource is nuclear power. I believe that new nuclear generation should be evaluated as an alternative to—not merely an additional layer on top of—the State's planned renewable dominated buildout. The Public Service Commission should compare resource portfolios based on all-in system costs, reliability, land use, transmission requirements, and customer-bill impacts to inform New Yorkers of the choices for our electric energy future.

[Climate Action Concerns Require More Than Attribution Headlines](#)

I discussed Roger Pielke Jr.'s [criticism](#) of the increasingly common narrative that climate change causes individual bad-weather events and that aggressive climate policies can prevent them. His analysis is relevant to New York because the Climate Act presumes a sweeping and costly transformation of electricity, buildings, transportation, and industry while advocates often imply that this transition will reduce local weather disasters.

I emphasize that two questions are frequently conflated: whether human activity affects the climate system, and whether that fact justifies a specific energy-policy program, timetable, and cost. Carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas and human activities affect atmospheric composition and weather. However, climate outcomes also depend on water vapor, clouds, ocean circulation, natural oscillations, aerosols, volcanism, solar variability, atmospheric circulation, and feedbacks. Any claims that we can definitively discern which of the factors and how much it affects an individual heat wave, flood, drought, wildfire, or storm is simply misinformation.

I use Pielke's examples to explain concerns with rapid extreme-event attribution studies. A statistical association between global temperature and an extreme event, or a model-derived comparison with a reconstructed earlier climate, is not by itself a complete causal demonstration. Credible assessments should explain event definition, local observations, model performance, natural variability, counterfactual assumptions, uncertainty ranges, and the reasoning used to translate meteorology into damage estimates or policy conclusions.

My conclusion is not that climate never changes or that emissions reductions are necessarily pointless. Rather, New York should distinguish weather from climate, evidence from assertion, and sensible risk management from technological wishful thinking. The State should emphasize adaptation and

resilience—reliable power, hardened infrastructure, flood management, drainage, forecasting, and emergency preparedness—while pursuing demonstrably cost-effective emissions reductions without sacrificing affordability, reliability, or environmental protection.

[Guest Post: Ellenbogen - BESS is Currently a Science Project](#)

I published a guest post by Richard Ellenbogen arguing that utility-scale lithium-ion battery energy storage systems remain a “science project,” particularly on the downstate New York and Con Edison systems. The immediate trigger was [another fire](#) at Vistra’s [Moss Landing](#) facility in California on September 18. Ellenbogen’s principal concern is that New York is treating batteries as a reliability solution before resolving the generation and grid-performance problems that can prevent them from operating when they are most needed.

His argument has three parts. First, lithium-ion systems can experience thermal runaway, with fires that are difficult to extinguish and may require long-duration emergency response. Second, fire suppression and post-fire cleanup can create contamination risks, particularly where facilities are close to waterways, porous soils, shallow aquifers, or densely populated communities. He cites Long Island concerns following battery fires, including groundwater-contamination allegations and local restrictions on lithium-based BESS facilities. Third, he argues that the downstate grid’s voltage and frequency problems could cause battery inverters to shut down during grid stress.

Ellenbogen points to his [measurements during the July 1–4 heat event](#), when low voltage and unusual frequency variation persisted on the Con Edison system. After an initial battery discharge, he argues, an eight-hour system could be unable to recharge; inverter protection settings could also remove the BESS from service. He compares the concern to inverter-related problems highlighted by the 2025 Iberian blackout.

His conclusion is not that storage has no possible role. It is that New York must first ensure adequate dependable downstate generation, grid strength, public-safety protections, emergency-response capacity, and environmentally suitable siting. Batteries charged largely with fossil generation also do not make the energy clean and impose charging-and-discharging losses.

[Explaining the Grid Does Not Acknowledge the Need for DEFR](#)

In this post I respond to a recent *Explaining the Grid* Substack [article](#) that correctly objects to an overly absolute claim that wind and solar always fail when electricity is needed most. Existing wind and solar generation can provide useful energy, reduce fuel use and emissions, and sometimes reduce system stress. However, I argue that this response misses New York’s central reliability problem under the Climate Act: wind and solar do not need to fail all the time to create an unacceptable risk. They need only produce little energy simultaneously, for a sufficiently long period during high demand, to deplete storage and overwhelm remaining dispatchable resources.

I distinguish failures of conventional generating resources, such as those during Winter Storm Uri in Texas, from the inherent weather dependence of wind and solar. Equipment failures, inadequate winterization, fuel-supply interruptions, and market-design problems in conventional generators can be

addressed through established engineering, fuel-security, regulatory, and capacity-market measures. In contrast, no comparable remedy can make the sun shine at night or make the wind blow during an extended regional high-pressure system.

This issue becomes more serious as New York electrifies heating and other end uses. The critical future peaks are likely to occur during severe winter weather, when temperatures are coldest and loads highest while at the same time solar output is limited and low-wind conditions can persist across a broad region. Short-duration batteries are valuable, but they are energy-limited: a 1,000 MW four-hour battery provides 4,000 MWh, not several days of dependable supply.

I conclude that New York and any solar and wind advocates must specify the technology, fuel, duration, cost, and financing of its proposed dispatchable emissions-free resources (DEFR). Until it does, claims that wind, solar, storage, and unspecified DEFR can provide an affordable, reliable all-electric system remain premature. I believe nuclear power is the proven zero-emission, fuel-secure resource that should be seriously considered as New York's reliability backbone.