



GROW Ecological Commission

Newsletter Outline Submission

June 2026

Title: Juneteenth, Freedom, and Environmental Justice

A Short Reflection

Juneteenth celebrates freedom, progress, resilience, and justice. It marks the end of African's being in the dark about slavery's end in the United States. It reminds us of the importance of opportunity, dignity, and community.

Today, conversations about justice continue in many forms, including environmental justice.

Environmental justice is the idea that all communities deserve:

- clean air
- clean water
- healthy neighborhoods
- safe parks
- healthy food
- and protection from environmental harm

Freedom is not only physical. Healthy and thriving communities are also part of long-term opportunity and quality of life.

What Is Environmental Justice?

Environmental justice means:

- all communities deserve healthy environments
- no community should carry unfair environmental burdens
- every child deserves safe places to grow and play
- communities deserve clean air, water, and green spaces
- people should have a voice in decisions affecting their neighborhoods

Examples may include:

- pollution
- flooding
- food deserts
- unsafe water
- poor air quality
- lack of green space or trees

Why This Matters

Environmental issues affect everyday life.

Health and environment are connected, and sustainability is not only about nature — it is also about people, families, and communities.

Environmental challenges can contribute to:

- asthma
- heat exposure in urban neighborhoods
- limited access to healthy food
- lack of green space
- stress on families and communities

The Economic Impact

Environmental issues do not only affect health — they can also affect financial stability and economic opportunity.

Communities impacted by environmental challenges may experience:

- increased medical expenses
- missed workdays
- lost wages
- reduced productivity
- long-term health complications
- higher stress on families

When people are sick more often because of environmental conditions, the economic impact can affect entire households and communities.

Environmental justice is also connected to creating healthier, stronger, and more economically stable communities.

The Connection to Juneteenth

Juneteenth reminds us that freedom and justice matter.

Environmental justice asks an important question:

Do all communities have equal access to healthy environments and opportunity?

Building stronger communities requires:

- awareness
- collaboration
- education
- investment
- and long-term commitment to future generations

What Can We Do?

Individuals

- plant trees and gardens
- support community clean-up efforts
- teach children environmental responsibility
- support local sustainability programs

Communities

- improve parks and green spaces
- encourage beautification and recycling
- support environmental education
- create healthier public spaces

Businesses

- think about sustainability
- reduce waste
- support community partnerships
- invest responsibly

Two Things To Remember

1. Environmental justice is about people as much as the environment.
2. Healthy communities help create stronger futures for everyone.

Final Thought

Juneteenth reminds us that progress matters. Environmental justice challenges us to continue building communities where every family has the opportunity to live, grow, and thrive in healthy environments.

Green Recipe of the Month:

This recipe is an easy and quick meat-free and dairy-free meal, works great for lunch or a side dish, and is easy to customize with your favorite veggies and herbs. Enjoy!

Black Bean and Couscous Salad

Ingredients

- 1 ¼ cups vegetable broth
- 1 cup uncooked couscous
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 1 teaspoon red wine vinegar
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- 2 (15 ounce) cans black beans, drained
- 8 green onions, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and chopped
- 1 cup frozen corn kernels, thawed
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
- salt and pepper to taste

Instructions

- Bring broth to a boil in a 2-quart or larger saucepan. Stir in couscous, cover the pot, and remove from heat. Let stand for 5 minutes.
- Whisk together olive oil, lime juice, vinegar, and cumin in a large bowl. Add beans, green onions, red bell pepper, corn, and cilantro; toss to coat.
- Fluff couscous well, breaking up any chunks. Add to vegetables in the bowl and mix well. Season with salt and pepper. Serve at once or refrigerate until ready to serve.

Source: www.allrecipes.com

Have a plant-based recipe you'd like to share with the community? Send it to GROW@westchester-il.gov for consideration for future newsletters.

Green Fact of the Month:

Did you know? According to the [Natural Resources Defense Council \(NRDC\)](#), environmental justice is based on the idea that all people and communities have a right to equal protection and equal enforcement of environmental laws and regulations. It's a reminder that healthy environments benefit everyone.