

# SUSTAINABILITY HERO

## September 2018



**Dr. Diane C. Bates**  
Professor of Sociology  
The College of New Jersey

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Dr. Diane Bates is a professor of sociology at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ). For over 18 years, she has shared her insights into environmental sociology through her teaching, research and writing. She serves on the Sustainable Jersey Race and Equity Task Force and leads the school green team at her children’s school—Antheil Elementary School in Ewing.

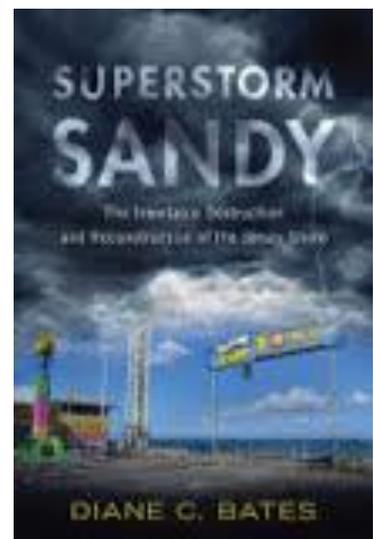
Astute and articulate, Diane is a true thought-leader and sustainability champion. Her primary research interests are in environmental sociology with dual research projects centered on development in Latin America and in New Jersey. She has published multiple articles that document the social impacts of environmental change in the Ecuadorian Amazon and on environmental controversies in New Jersey. She received the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) Champion Award and was an inaugural inductee to TCNJ Bonner Hall of Fame.

### **Sustainable Jersey Diversity and Equity Task Force**

Diane serves on the Sustainable Jersey Diversity and Equity Task Force that plays a key role in implementing the Sustainable Jersey Equity Initiative. This effort is important because sustainability involves addressing questions of fairness and equity in two ways: first, it raises the issue of the fair distribution of the environmental “goods” (products and health) and “bads” (pollution and resource depletion) among various people and groups in the present while balancing our interests today with the interests of future generations; second, equity is not just about slicing up the pie fairly—it involves procedural fairness and full participation in setting sustainability goals and deciding among trade-offs. Diane noted that this task force has developed a conceptual ‘equity framework’ and is now working on an operational ‘equity screen’ that will be used to review the Sustainable Jersey action suite. She explained, “This is an impressive effort. The process has taken time because Sustainable Jersey is making sure to include and gather input from a variety of experts and stakeholders. I’m proud of the work that has been done so far.”

### **Superstorm Sandy: The Inevitable Destruction and Reconstruction of the Jersey Shore**

In 2016, Diane wrote the engaging book, [\*Superstorm Sandy: The Inevitable Destruction and Reconstruction of the Jersey Shore\*](#), drawing on insights from environmental sociology. She provides a look at the Jersey Shore both before and after Sandy, examining the many factors—such as cultural attachment, tourism revenues and governmental regulation—that combined to create a highly vulnerable coastal region.



Diane shared, “I often feel like Cassandra from Greek mythology. I have insight into the future and point out the obvious, but I can’t do anything to stop it.” In the book, she analyzes post-Sandy narratives about the Jersey Shore that broadcast the dominance of human ingenuity over nature such as the state’s “Stronger than the Storm” advertising campaign or the “Jersey Strong” narratives rooted in emotion and iconography, waylating much thought of the near-certainty of future storms. As someone who loves the Jersey Shore, Diane knows this is a challenging subject. She said, “Jersey wouldn’t be Jersey without the Shore. But the biggest issue for me is the concept of building the same exact way and expecting different results. This storm is not an isolated case. We must be realistic. When a natural disaster like Sandy occurs, maybe we should see it as a good time to consider retreating from those places, despite economic incentives, that were never supposed to be developed in the first place.”



### **Environmental Refugees, Deforestation and More**

From 2000 to 2003, Diane taught at Sam Houston State University. In this position, she researched and wrote about a now-timely topic: the challenges faced by environmental refugees. She wrote a journal article entitled [Environmental Refugees? Classifying Human Migrations Caused by Environmental Change](#) that looked at the factors that distinguish environmental refugees from other refugees—or other migrants. She developed a classification that was used to facilitate policies and research on environmental refugees. Her more recent research publications include *Population, Demography and the Environment, Deforestation in Ecuador* and many more articles of this theme. She is presently collaborating with a group of scholars from Freiburg University’s Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS) on environmental migration for a new book.



### **Antheil Elementary School Green Team, Ewing Township School District**

Diane is a member of the Executive Board of the Antheil Elementary School Parent Teacher Organization. When Sustainable Jersey for Schools was launched, she introduced the program to the school and suggested they form a green team to encourage sustainable thought and practice. Diane helped get the green team started and the group applied for, and received, a \$2,000 Sustainable Jersey for Schools Capacity Building Grant funded by the New Jersey Education Association. This grant helped the school ‘green’ the school’s four largest festivals by reducing the use of single-use items and promoting healthy activities like the now-popular Fun Runs. Thanks to the hard work of the green team and the grant, the number of families attending the events went from about 35 families to over 100 families.



### **Trenton Metropolitan Area: Building Relationships and Sharing Data**

Diane is a strong advocate of community-engaged learning and has worked for many years to establish programs that engage students in the Trenton metropolitan area such as the [Community and Environmental Transitions program](#) funded by the National Council for Undergraduate Research (NCUR) and the [Bonner](#)

Summer Fellows Program. Diane is beginning with historian Robert McGreevey, also of TCNJ, on a new book about the social history of the Trenton metropolitan area. She makes sure to incorporate her research into the classroom at TCNJ; the students review the real data such as demographic change in Trenton. Diane said, “The work in Trenton allows us and other members of the college community to conduct applied research while building stronger relationships off campus. Our faculty and student researchers are engaged in a thorough investigation of real-world issues that can be of immediate use to Trenton, Ewing and other neighboring communities.”

Student teams have done research relating to topics such as affordable housing, redevelopment of former industrial sites, contamination of the Delaware River as well as local concerns about gang violence, immigrants’ rights and healthcare. Diane has served as a writer and academic consultant for the Trenton Prevention Policy Board since 2009, an organization that seeks community-based solutions to curb juvenile delinquency and promote positive youth development.

### **Environmental Studies Minor at The College of New Jersey**

Diane served as the first coordinator for the [Environmental Studies Minor](#) at TCNJ and was an academic fellow for the TCNJ Center for Community Engaged Learning and Research. The Environmental Studies minor requires students to take courses in the natural sciences, as well as selecting options in social science and humanities. Diane teaches some interesting classes including: 1) *The Vanishing Amazon*, 2) *New Jersey’s Urban Environment* and 3) *Inequality, Pollution and Environment*. She said, “My research work with the TCNJ students has focused on local environmental issues, including how the state’s communities and organizations are recovering from Superstorm Sandy in addition to community development around Trenton.”

### **From Humboldt U. to Rutgers U.**

Diane graduated with a B.A. in Sociology from Humboldt State University located in California. She credits ‘time and place’ as a factor in the development of her interest and expertise in environmental sociology. Living on the beautiful campus of Humboldt State University in the ancient redwood forest, she said it was hard not to focus on the environment. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, was taking place at this time as well. She left California for New Jersey after being recruited by her soon-to-be mentor, Professor Thomas K. Rudel of the Departments of Human Ecology and Sociology at Rutgers University. At Rutgers University, Diane achieved a M.A. and a Ph.D. in Sociology. She was awarded the Anne Foner Prize for Best Dissertation from the Sociology Department at Rutgers University in 2000.

### **What You May Not Know About Diane**

Diane grew up in St. Cloud, Minnesota, which she says may explain her Midwest determination to be nice and avoid conflicts. She was raised in a family that values volunteering and expects community service to be a part of everyday life. Diane is great at facilitating group processes and her sense of humor makes finding common ground easy. In her free time, Diane likes to spend time with family; she has two children in elementary school. For fun, she is often in the audience of her husband Ralph’s concerts, with his band [Stuyvesant](#). Diane loves science fiction; she just finished, and recommends, [The Grace of Kings](#) by Ken Liu.

### **Words of Advice**

Diane said, “We have to be realistic and not put our heads in the sand about the what the data is telling us. It’s usually obvious to see the probable outcomes. There are often things we can be doing now to work toward the goal of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” She added, with a laugh, “However, I’m saving my money to visit Alaska now, and you should too. The glaciers are definitely going to melt.”