It's been a tumultuous and often grim year in terms of environmental protection. The Trump Administration continued its onslaught against environmental protection, completing major regulatory rollbacks. Nevertheless, there were some rays of sun through the darkening clouds.

State Initiatives. Progress as the state level continued, as it has throughout the Trump Administration. New York State adopted ambitious climate targets, including 100% carbon-free electricity by 2040 and economy-wide, net-zero emissions by 2050. Neighboring New Jersey adopted a target of cutting carbon emissions by 80% in 2050. Washington State adopted a mandate that all electricity be carbon free by 2045. Minnesota and New Mexico adopted California's stringent standards for vehicle carbon emissions.

The Private Sector. The Trump Administration was dismayed to find that none of the major car companies was willing to support its rollback of national fuel efficiency standards. Although it was able to muscle other companies into supporting its effort to kill California's car program, three companies entered into a voluntary agreement to follow California's more rigorous standards regardless of what the federal government did. There have been a host of corporate actions embracing clean energy. For instance, in September, Google announced that deals that would increase its portfolio of wind and solar by more than 40%, to 5.5 Gigawatts—equivalent to a million solar roofs. Amazon has placed an order for 100,000 electric delivery vans to be delivered by 2024. Utilities are continuing to close coal plants, and the use of renewable energy continues to rise.

Climate Politics. Climate change has generally been seen as a low priority political issue. But there's been an important shift in the past year. Polls show an increasing number of people who recognize the existence, causes, and seriousness. Introduction of the Green New Deal in Congress brought the issue into the media spotlight, and Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg catalyzed major public demonstrations. Jay Inslee's presidential campaign failed to take off but succeeded in escalating climate change as in issue for Democratic presidential candidates, all of whom ultimately announced aggressive climate policies. In short, climate change is finally beginning to gets its due in the political process.

GOP Shifts. The Republicans are starting to respond to shifting public opinion. Earlier this month, GOP members of the House energy committee put on a fair to showcase clean-energy innovations. Back in June, top officials from Trump's Agriculture Department met behind closed doors with a hundred farmers, where

ideas like paying farmers to sequester carbon were discussed. What's behind this change of heart? The Washington Post reports the 60% of Republicans now believe that climate change is caused by humans, and 23% of Republicans disapprove of Trump's approach to climate change.

Litigation. We won't start seeing court rulings on major rollback efforts until next year. But there were some encouraging signs this year. In a case involving ozone pollution, the D.C. Circuit upheld Obama-era EPA rules against industry attacks but ruled that one aspect of the rule weren't stringent enough. Court decisions also put roadblocks in front of several natural gas pipeline projects and Trump efforts to expand coal mining on public lands.

As we near the end of 2019, let's hope for even more positive developments next year.