



The Trailblazer

The Niagara Group of The Sierra Club • <http://newyork.sierraclub.org/niagara/> • Vol. 46 No. 2 Apr 2011

Let's Increase Fuel Economy Rather Than Go Nuclear

by Walter Simpson

I strongly agree with The News editorial ("Time to go nuclear") that we must cut reliance on oil from countries that support jihadists hostile to us. But building nuclear power plants isn't the answer to this problem for many reasons, the first and foremost being that nuclear plants generate electricity that is not a liquid fuel that can power the current fleet of cars and trucks.

Yes, eventually the widespread use of electric cars may call for new sources of electricity, but even for that, nuclear power may not be a good choice.

The most effective way to reduce gasoline consumption is by mandating a doubling of vehicle fuel economy within the next few years while implementing a gasoline tax that incrementally doubles or triples the price over the same period. The gas tax would not be popular but, unlike nuclear power, it actually would reduce gasoline consumption and lessen our dependence on foreign oil. Fuel economy improvements would ease

the cost impact of the tax. Improved public transit is another important part of the solution.

The editorial laments the fact that nuclear plants can be built less expensively in China. But do we really want to adopt China's dangerously lax environmental regulations? Do we want reactor pressure vessels to be welded by workers making 75 cents an hour?

Besides high costs, accident risk and waste disposal issues, nuclear power is highly problematic because it facilitates nuclear weapons proliferation by providing nuclear plant recipients with the know-how and the materials for making atomic bombs. Think of Iran, North Korea and Pakistan. Nuclear power plants also make tempting targets for terrorists.

Until nuclear power's serious problems are solved, our energy efforts should be focused on conservation, efficiency and renewables-proven, safe, cost-effective strategies that would accomplish much more if we made them a priority.

Meet Our New DEC Commissioner

The New York League of Conservation Voters, which works to elect environmental leaders to public office across New York State, today applauded Gov. Cuomo's nomination of Joseph Martens as Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner.

Gov. Cuomo has nominated Joe Martens to be the next Department of Environmental Conservation commissioner. "Joe Martens has a rare combination of government, management and environmental experience that makes him uniquely qualified to lead the Department of Environmental Conservation," said NYLCV President Marcia Bystryn, who is a member of Gov. Cuomo's Environment and Energy Transition Team.

Bystryn added: "New York is facing some of the most complex sustainability challenges in a generation, particularly in the areas of natural gas drilling and reductions in environmental staff and programs. Having worked closely with Joe Martens over the years, we are convinced that he will be up to the challenge of strengthening DEC's ability to protect New York's air, water and land even in these difficult economic times. We applaud Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Mr. Martens, and we look forward to working with both to ensure that New York reassumes its rightful place as a national environmental leader."

Since 1998, Mr. Martens has served as President of the Open Space Institute, directing and overseeing land acquisition, sustainable development, historic preservation and farmland protection. Previously, Mr. Martens served as Deputy Secretary to the Governor for Energy and the Environment from 1992-94 and before that Assistant Secretary from 1990-92.

He is the Chair of the Olympic Regional Development Authority, which operates the 1932 and 1980 winter Olympic venues in Lake Placid and Wilmington, NY and Gore Mountain Ski Area in Johnsbury, NY. He also chairs the Adirondack Lake Survey Corporation, which continuously monitors Adirondack lakes and streams to determine the extent and magnitude of acidification in the Adirondack region.

Mr. Martens studied Resource Economics at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and received an M.S. in Resource Management from the State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse University.

Information About the WNY Environmental Alliance

by Larry Beahan

The following information is based on a conversation with Rebekah Williams of the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo and a search of their environmental website Grow WNY.

The Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo, CFGB, received a grant to run three WNY Environmental Congresses to which they invited all the local organizations that are concerned with the environment. Individuals from 150 organizations showed up at one or more of the Congresses. Sixty four organizations are now members.

The Congresses provided an opportunity to share information and adopt a "Shared Agenda." A standing committee was selected to guide the organization and a series of Task Groups were organized to address various aspects of the shared agenda. These Task Groups have begun collaborative projects. For example the Educational Task Force is running a college student environmental project contest with three awards of \$3000 each to fund the winning project.

In the meantime to enhance communication between environmental groups CFGB has obtained a \$180,000 grant from the Knight Foundation to develop the GrowWNY website <http://www.growwny.org/> and to employ Rebekah Williams to operate it and develop list serves for the Task Groups.

Sierra Club Niagara Group has joined the Alliance and as members we can use that website to advertise ourselves and our activities to those

other member organizations and anyone else who drops in on GrowWNY.

There is no fee for membership. But members are expected to be involved in decision making and to use the website. Individuals may participate in the Meetings and Task Forces on their own or as representatives of member organizations.

The Standing Committee that guides the Alliance is aware that member organizations may have differing opinions about issues and the Committee is working on ways to handle that situation so that no organization would be put in the position of seeming to back something that it opposes.

The alliance is a work-in-progress.

Annual Dinner

The Niagara Group Annual Awards Dinner is scheduled for Wednesday, May 11, 2011 at the Eagle House Restaurant, 5578 Main Street, Williamsville, New York 14221. Food is Dutch treat. The function will commence 5:45pm. Dinner will be served at 6:30pm. This is always a fun event where you are able to meet fellow Sierrans, Executive Committee members and award recipients. All are invited.

Call Bob Ciesielski at (office) 716-895-3367 or (home) 716-839-0180 if you plan to attend.

VISIT OUR WEB PAGE!

www.newyork.sierraclub.org/niagara



Buffalo Bans Fracking in Groundbreaking Vote

On February 8, 2011, the City of Buffalo Common Council unanimously passed an Ordinance banning hydrofracking for natural gas.

At the press conference following the vote a video was shown of five members of the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania City Council reading a proclamation expressing their solidarity with the Buffalo Council.

Our last issue mentioned Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania as the first city to ban hydrofracking for natural gas outright. Philadelphia also banned the practice in January. We must congratulate FrackActionBuffalo for their important work in securing the City of Buffalo ban. Despite industry efforts to claim the ban was only symbolic, testimony before the Common Council revealed that drilling applications had previously been made to drill along Fuhmann Boulevard. And Buffalo does sit atop the Utica shale, the next industry target after the Marcellus Shale. Moreover, the hearing brought to light the fact that early this year the Buffalo Sewer Authority signed contracts to accept hydrofracking waste water for disposal in the City treatment facilities. For more on the toxic and radioactive contents of this fracking waste, check out the New York Times articles and the study by The Endocrine Disruption Exchange on our website www.newyork.sierraclub.org/niagara.

The Sierra Club opposes hydrofracking unless it can be proven safe. To date, there are many questions concerning the public safety aspects of hydrofracking and horizontal drilling.

Niagara Group website at www.newyork.sierraclub.org/niagara has considerable information concerning the fracking issue and the health crisis it presents to New York. Two New York Times articles outline the health problems caused by the industry in Pennsylvania, and the industry's bogus claims of "recycling", where hydrofracturing chemicals are used as road salt, and dumped partially treated into waste-water plants. A Times interactive map shows radium, benzene, etc. hotspots in Pennsylvania's rivers. The presentation given by Chris Burger of the Chapter Gas Task Force in Buffalo is outlined in depth. The report of The Endocrine Disruption Exchange lists the known chemicals used in hydrofracturing nationwide. A graph at page 27 shows the health possible effects of the soluble and airborne chemicals used by the industry, including carcinogens and endocrine disruptors. The industry's fluff of an economic panacea is challenged by the study by Dr. Susan Christophersen of Cornell University.

Hydrofracturing and horizontal drilling has been labeled the environmental crisis of New York in the 21st Century. Please go to our website and contact your State Senator, Assemblyperson, and Governor Cuomo and demand that the horizontal drilling moratorium be continued. We must protect our public health, the future of our children, and New York's waterways and environment.

**For more news, archives,
and upcoming events,
visit our website**

<http://newyork.sierraclub.org/niagara/>

TREES

by Joyce Kilmer

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the sweet earth's flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.



Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman Takes Some Stands

Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman has been in the news lately.

He leads a five state coalition against attempts by the U. S. House of Representatives to rescind regulations intended to reduce mercury and other toxic emissions from cement plants.

He also heads a coalition of attorneys general in a suit against the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for its decision to allow nuclear power facilities to store radioactive waste for up to 60 days after their closure.

In a letter received by Charles Lamb, Mr. Schneiderman says "My administration has zero tolerance for environmental threats against our state and our families..."

Another Notable Sierran!

Last month we featured Larry Beahan as a Sierran to be commended. This month let's honor Arthur Klein. Art, known as Happy, spent his career with the Army Corps of Engineers, so he is well informed not only about environmental issues but also about how governmental agencies operate. You'll see articles by Art frequently in the Buffalo News under "Another Voice" on the editorial page, plus you'll also find he often writes letters to the editor. Currently he is vice president of the Niagara Group of the Sierra Club.

Atlantic Chapter Sets Priorities

Below is a summary of our recent Chapter-wide conservation survey prepared by Jessica Helm, Atlantic Chapter Conservation Chair.

by Larry Beahan

2010 Atlantic Chapter Conservation Priorities

Priorities are based on ballots returned from 9 of 11 groups. No ballot was returned from Hudson Mohawk or Finger Lakes Group. If a category was in a close tie, the nearest category was also included.

1. Climate and Energy (46%)
2. Natural Habitats (28%)
3. Sustainable Living (26%)

Climate and Energy

1. Efficiency and Conservation (36%)
2. Renewable Energy (30%)
3. Opposing Fossil Fuels (14%)
4. Climate Science Education and Outreach (13%)

Promoting Green Jobs
Transportation

Natural Habitats

1. Clean Water/Watersheds (44%)
2. Open Space/Sprawl (20%)
3. Natural Heritage (20%)

Forests

Wetlands

Wildlife and Wilderness

Sustainable Living

1. Environmental Health (35%)
2. Zero Waste (27%)
3. Farm and Food (17%)

Population

Environmental Education

Environmental Justice

Conclusions:

Our groups' top priority is Climate and Energy, and top areas of focus within Climate and Energy are Efficiency and Conservation followed closely by Renewable Energy. Opposing Fossil Fuels (perhaps our strongest area of activity) and Climate Education together have only half as much support as efficiency and renewables.

Natural Habitats and Sustainable Living are closely tied for our secondary priority. Clean Water and Watersheds lead other Habitat priorities by a substantial margin. Environmental Health tops the list of Sustainable Living priorities, but Zero Waste is also a significant concern.

Recommendations:

Many of these areas are intertwined, so if an issue with volunteer support doesn't appear in a top priority, we should focus volunteer efforts on those aspects of the issue which impact our top priorities.

For example, Forests do not appear in the top priorities, but forests are an integral part of many of our special places in New York, our Natural Heritage. They are also important to keeping soil intact and dissolved solids out of our Watersheds.

Resource allocations (financial, legal, and staff support) should mirror our top priorities. We should actively seek projects, issues, and legislative priorities in efficiency, conservation, renewable energy, clean water, and environmental health. New opportunities should be evaluated with these priorities in mind.