

The Trailblazer

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Lake Erie: Our Greatest and Most Threatened Legacy

By Art Klein

Lake Erie is a special attribute of the Niagara Frontier; the lake warrants the moderation of our seasons and often encourages a very white Christmas season. But we seem to take it for granted. For most of us it is just something to our west that provides a great sunset, fills the Niagara River, delivers electricity, and affords us recreational swimming and fishing.

The lake began millions of years ago as a basin of Ancient River that was gouged and defined by glaciers into its current configuration about 12,000 years ago. The retreating glacier also deposited incredibly rich soils around it, creating some of the most bountiful agricultural land on earth.

Lake Erie is the most shallow of the Great Lakes, which causes very quick storms of incredible intensity to develop. The quick and stealthy nature of the storms is one reason the Native Americans called the lake "The Cat."

Threatened Lake Erie

Industrial pollution, unregulated dumping

and overflow of sewage, and fertilizer and farming practices have created a synergistic effect, causing the decline of this lake. Using it as a cesspool for sewage and an industrial dumpsite has definitely challenged the water body. Long after the factories stopped pumping poison into the water, we continue to use phosphorous to fertilize thousands of acres of farmland and countless lawns. Its shallowness and low volume creates some fragility of its ecosystem. Phosphorus, fertilizers, and manure all run-off into the aqua furs, eventually draining into the lake. For over 5 years, contaminants in the water have caused large sections of the western end of the lake to develop algae blooms or mats that form "Dead Zones," totally devoid of marine life and aquatic plants. The mats of algae are the result of many anthropogenic effects, creating unsustainable phosphorous loads, especially in the Western Basin. In addition, El Nino formations in the Pacific Ocean leading to atmospheric increases in temperatures also encourages algae growth.

As if some of these human caused factors were not enough contributions to the rise of algae blooms, we can also add the increasing prevalence of invasive aquatic species to the mix. Listing all invasive species is beyond the scope of this article, however, both Zebra and Quagga mussels were introduced by ship ballasting. These mussels increase the clarity of the water, but contrary to popular thought, they do not clean the waterways of contaminants nor do they reduce the phosphorus levels in the water. In fact, these mussels push their indigenous cousins out of the competition for "good" plankton that previously abounded. Another new threat this year is the Asian Carp and one variety of the Grass Carp, already disrupting the ecosystem of many waterways.

As a result of these algae blooms, two municipalities in Ohio were unable to drink their water due to high toxins in the lake. We have been careless with our legacy and allowed a combination of factors threaten the

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RECYCLING CORNER - Prescription and Over-the-Counter Medication Disposal

By Ron Missel

Improper disposal of unused medications are a threat to human and environmental health. If tossed into the trash or flushed down a toilet, they can find their way into natural and man-made water systems (i.e., our drinking water) with adverse effects on underwater ecosystems and our overall health. Many municipal water treatment plants are ill-equipped to properly filter out these medications. The FDA has approved a few drugs for disposal in the toilet, but unless you know what they are, the safest method is to deliver ALL medications to sanctioned drop-off sites.

The New York State Department of Health provided a grant to the Erie County Sheriff's Department to establish drop-off sites throughout the county. The service is free. Since program inception November/2013, 2,300 lbs of medications have been collected, along with 4,300 lbs of syringes and related paraphernalia. Locations are below. Other information may be found on the web-site: <http://www2.erie.gov/sheriff/index.php?q=drug-dropoff-box-info>

ESAP-EXPANDED SYRINGE ACCESS PROGRAM (Maintained by Erie City Sheriff's Dept.)

PUBLIC LOCATIONS

Erie County Sheriff's Office
(Lobby)
10 Delaware Ave.
Buffalo, NY 14202 • 716-858-6305

Grand Island Town Hall
(Lobby)
2255 Baseline Road
Grand Island, NY 14072 • 716-773-9600

Colden Town Hall
(Town Hall Lobby)
8812 State Rd.
Colden, NY 14033 • 716-941-5012

Clarence Town Hall
1 Town Place (Town Hall Lobby)
Clarence, NY 14031 • 716-741-8938

Elma Town Hall
(Town Hall Lobby)
116 Bowen Rd.
Elma, NY 14059 • 716-652-3260

Springville Town Hall
65 Franklin St. (Sheriff's Substation)
Springville, NY 14141 • 716-592-4936

DROP-OFF FOR: Un-needed medication, medical
waste & syringes

COLLEGE CAMPUSES
ECC South Campus (Lobby- Student Loans)
4041 Southwestern Boulevard
Orchard Park, NY 14127 • 716-858-2903

ECC City Campus
121 Ellicott St.
Buffalo, NY 14203 • 716-858-2903

ECC North Campus
(Lobby- Public Safety Bldg.)
6205 Main Street
Williamsville, NY 14221 • 716-858 2903

SUNY Buffalo
Bissell Hall- North Campus
Buffalo, NY 14260 • 716-645-2229

Medaille College
(Lobby of Public Safety Bldg.)
18 Agassiz Circle
Buffalo, NY 14214 • 716-880-2237

Canisius College
(Bosch Bldg.-Lobby of Public Security Bldg.)
2001 Main St.
Buffalo, NY 14208 • 716-888-3197

Join your fellow Sierrans for “Spring Into Nature” at the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge

This event sponsored by the Friends of the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge welcomes spring back to the swamp will be held on Saturday April 26th from 9 am to 4 pm. There will be activities throughout the day for the entire family including nature related exhibits, hands-on activities for the kids, and live birds of prey. Come and meet

Puddles, a blue goose that is the refuge mascot. Speakers will be addressing such topics as water level management, and invasive species and mussels. Purchase food from vendors or bring a picnic lunch. Come for part of the day, or the whole day, but join us at the Sierra Club table for a picnic lunch at noon. All activities are FREE. For more

information and to RSVP please contact Vicky Southall at linjed2003@yahoo.com (subject line – Iroquois) or 585-704-6307. The Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge is located at 1101 Casey Road, Basom, NY 14013, (585) 948-5445 or visit their website www.fws.gov/refuge/Iroquois/about.html.

For more news, archives, and upcoming events, visit - newyork.sierraclub.org/niagara/

The New York “Energy Plan” and You

By Robert Cieseilski

New York has issued a proposed “Energy Plan” to help chart the future of power production and usage in this state for the next several years. Sierra Club members from the Niagara Group commented on the Plan before at a Public Service Commission (PSC) hearing on February 20 at UB, along with some 80 participants. Written comments on the Plan are being accepted until April 30, 2014. Please watch for a CONVIO e-mail from the Atlantic Chapter if you would like to join the Sierra Club’s participation.

The Energy Plan is a wide-ranging document. While mentioning renewable energy at times, the document seems biased towards the development of fracked methane gas, discussing its continued growth as a fuel source through 2035. Also, while setting a goal of 80% reduction of all greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050, the Plan’s interim 2035 goal only calls for a reduction of carbon dioxide (CO₂), and not methane. This is a serious concern as methane is at least 72 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than CO₂ in the first 20 years of its release into the atmosphere.

The Sierra Club sees continued investments in fossil fuels as incompatible with achieving New York’s climate change goals. We see the rapid development of renewable energy, coupled with energy conservation and efficiency, as the best means of extracting ourselves from a climate change disaster.

Several of the major points made by our members included:

1) New York must immediately begin to phase out dirty fossil fuels such as coal, oil, methane gas, and nuclear power. Interim targets for reducing all fossil fuel greenhouse gases, including methane, should be established with a final goal of 80% reduction of all GHG by 2050.

2) The State should suspend its support for investments in a gas energy infrastructure and increase financing in renewable energy sources.

3) The energy plan should define clean energy as that obtained from the renewable energy sources of wind, solar, water and geothermal.

4) The potential for renewable energy in NYS is enormous. We already have the technical ability to create jobs in renewable energy installation and manufacturing. The proposed

solar manufacturing facilities at Riverbend in Buffalo, recently announced by Governor Cuomo, gives a glimpse of the potential for job growth and investments in New York.

5) Development of clean, renewable energy sources such as solar, wind and water must be prioritized. The State’s Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) which measures renewable energy must be extended and expanded to require that 50% of all the State’s electricity be provided from renewables by 2025.

6) The Energy Plan should call for an immediate commitment to double New York’s land-based wind power capacity and invest in offshore wind, located off Long Island, this year.

7) Through administrative or executive action, mandate the purchase of renewable energy by private utilities, instead of the current Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) reliance on strong encouragement by the State. California’s mandate to its three large utility companies to purchase 33% of their power from renewable sources by 2020 is working. Each California utility company currently provides approximately 20% of their electricity from renewable sources.

8) A Feed-In-Tariff (FIT) for renewable energy sources should be adopted. A successful trial program exists on Long Island. Long-term 20-year contracts between energy producers and utilities provide the financial stability to encourage construction of renewable energy facilities and permit private investors to fund renewables. Contract rates are based upon the cost of constructing the energy production unit, together with a fair 5-10% profit to the renewable energy provider. In some instances, the contract rates are set by a bidding process. The Feed-In-Tariff has been used worldwide to rapidly develop renewable energy, manufacturing and installation jobs, and investments.

9) Support charging stations for electric vehicles and programs to develop a state fleet of electric vehicles and school buses.

Please look for the CONVIO from the Atlantic Chapter and help us send a message to Governor Cuomo that we want to support a sustainable, renewable energy economy in New York.

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health and life of our precious Lake Erie. It is of the utmost importance for our Federal and State government to stop the flow of phosphorus and sewage, and focus on the resuscitation of a very threatened specimen, Lake Erie, our lake.

SC Niagara Group’s Annual Awards Dinner

It’s that time of year again! It’s time for our annual festivities and awards for our region’s most notable environmentalists at the Niagara Group Awards Dinner, scheduled for Thursday, May 8, 2014 at My Tomato Pie Restaurant, 3085 Sheridan Drive, Amherst. This is always a fun event where you are able to meet fellow Sierrans, Executive Committee members and this year’s award recipients. All are invited! This function will begin at 5:45pm and dinner will be served at 6:30pm. Dinner is Dutch treat. If you plan to attend, please make a reservation by April 25th. You can either e-mail sierraclubangela@gmail.com or call Larry at 716-634-8715. Hope to see you there!