

# The Trailblazer

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## Annual Awards Dinner 2015

By Lynda Schneekloth

The Sierra Club Niagara Group is holding its Annual Awards Dinner on Thursday, April 30<sup>th</sup> 2015. Each year, the Sierra Club Niagara Group holds an annual dinner to celebrate the work that has been accomplished that year, presenting awards to those individuals and organizations that have made a significant contribution to environmental efforts, and listening to invited guests who can expand our understanding of the work we are collectively doing.

This year we will hear from Erin Heaney, Executive Director of the Clean Air Coalition, an organization that builds power by developing grassroots leaders who organize their communities to run and win environmental justice and public health campaigns. Erin will talk about the imperative of “Just Transitions”. We know we must move off fossil fuels to address climate change, but this move can impact workers and communities unfairly. Whose responsibility is it to address this?

The Niagara Group will also present awards to one individual and one organization for outstanding contributions to our shared goals of environmental protection and ecological/social justice. The Blake Reeves Award, given in honor of the founder of the Niagara Group of the Sierra Club, recognizes an organizational effort to further environmental causes. This year we are

delighted to give this award to the Buffalo Public Schools for the Solar Schools Program. We particularly recognize Paul McDonnell, Director of Facilities Planning Design and Construction, Jason McCarthy of the School Board, and Rick Steinberg, the Sierra Club Member who has worked for over four years to get this program designed and contracted.

The Bruce Krushner Award for individual contribution to the environment is being given to Charley Bowman, Chair of the Energy Task Force, WNY Peace Center. Charley has been consistently involved in many climate change issues from anti-fracking to bomb trains to solar proposals, and his concerns for justice and peace are central to the mission of climate justice. His recording of so many important activities has generated an archive of community power on behalf of all of us, and his in-depth and thorough research in support of environmental positions have been invaluable.

This year’s meeting will be at “My Tomato Pie Restaurant” located at 3085 Sheridan Drive, Amherst, NY 14226 in the Northtown Plaza. We gather at 5:45 and the buffet dinner that includes vegetarian options will be served at 6:30. The cost is \$25/person that includes tax and gratuity. Please RSVP by April 27 by email to [sierraclubangela@gmail.com](mailto:sierraclubangela@gmail.com) or call Larry at 716-634-8715. We look forward to seeing you!

## Niagara County’s CWM Siting Board Meeting Announcement

By Charles Lamb

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Siting Board will hold issues conference meetings with presiding Law Judge James T. McClymonds to hear expert testimony regarding the permit application to build a new Chemical Waste Management landfill in Niagara County. The DEC has stated that another hazardous waste landfill is not necessary, but a permit could be granted if it is shown that this would be in the public interest. Gary Abraham, representing Town of Lewiston and Niagara County Legislature, Nils Olsen, representing Residents for Responsible Government, and Amy Witryol, Lewiston resident will offer evidence in opposition to this expansion. Beginning April 28 through May 1, (with the option of meeting the May 5 through 8 if necessary), the meetings will be held from 8 am to 6 pm at Youngstown First Presbyterian Church (100 Church Street, Youngstown) in the Fellowship Hall. The public may attend and is encouraged to support public disapproval to this application. The Siting Board may make a decision on this issue later this year.

See more stories like this at [NiagaraSierraClub.com](http://NiagaraSierraClub.com)

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## RECYCLING CORNER - METALS: *How it works and why you need to know!*

By Ron Missel

Simply put, recycling is a process to turn useful waste materials into new products. But it also has a big impact on the environment. For one, keeping items out of the waste stream reduces the pollution from both landfill run-off and airborne incinerator residue, which are major delivery systems for solid waste disposal. Further, the amount of raw materials needed to produce new products is also reduced, as is the additional energy expended to harvest them. Lastly, the overall reduction in energy consumption resulting from recycling lowers greenhouse gas emissions and the corresponding impact on climate change.

The number of items and materials that can be recycled is constantly growing due to improved collection, sorting, production, and remanufacturing processes. This is great news for the environment, not to mention our health. However, it requires all of us to be more diligent when loading up the recycle tote to prevent recyclable items from ending up in the trash – and that will happen if we violate some of the basic rules.

**Here’s what we need to know:** Today, ‘Single Stream’ recycling is predominant. All paper, cardboard, cans, bottles, and containers are placed into the same curbside recycle tote, picked up by your waste hauler, and dumped at a sorting facility. Not too long ago, ‘Source Separation’ (or ‘Dual Stream’) was the main collection method. We “layered” our items in the box and the crew separated them into bins on the recycle truck. Single Stream is considered easier because no separation is required, and it typically improves the municipal recycle rate. However, we need to abide by a few simple rules to ensure that recyclable items don’t end up in the trash.

**Here’s how it works:** Once the recycle load is dumped at the sorting facility, the contents are moved to a massive conveyor system. Along the way, materials are separated by star screens, weight, infrared lasers, optical readers, normal and reverse magnets, forced air, and always a bevy of humans plucking items off the line that shouldn’t be there. When sorting is completed, items are baled by category – plastics, cardboard, paper, metal – and then sold as a commodity on the open market. (To fully understand this process, take a look at the *SINGLE STREAM processing video on the Modern Corporation website*. It’s an amazing process! <http://www.moderncorporation.com>)

**What happens if a recycle tote is contaminated or improperly loaded?** For one, the entire tote can be left behind at your home to be picked up later by the trash truck. Or, the tote contents may be placed on the recycle truck, but certain items plucked off the conveyor at the sorting facility and disposed of. Both trash and recycle collection is a business with responsibilities spelled out in lengthy contracts between the hauler and the municipality. In Single Stream contracts, the crew is generally not obligated to sort items curbside. Tagging the tote for a *violation* is more likely to occur, but only if written into the signed contract. Remember, too, that baled recyclables are sold as a commodity. Revenue generated ultimately reduces the municipal expenditures required for trash pick-up. The onus is on each of us to get it right!

**What do we need to pay attention to when placing items in the recycle tote?** Tying newspaper with string or placing newspapers and other items in plastic shopping bags is a major violation. Both string and bags jam up and shut down the conveyor systems. Placing

newspaper in brown paper bags would seem a better option but brown paper bags are baled with cardboard, not paper. Newspapers, then, should be placed loose in the tote. Cardboard boxes need to be flattened, staples removed, and then cut into 2ft or 3ft square sections to ensure proper separation at the sorting facility. Food and drink containers must be emptied and rinsed to avoid eventual contamination at the remanufacturing facility. (Place the plastic caps back on the drink containers. Otherwise, they’re too small to pass through the conveyor systems and will be discarded.) The worst thing that can happen is to recycle with all good intentions only to discover that many items are being disposed of in the trash.

Not everything can be recycled curbside. Styrofoam cannot be recycled, although packing peanuts can be dropped off at most shipping stores. Gift and credit cards, single use batteries, holiday lights, chemical containers, and electronic waste are but a few of many more items that cannot be picked up curbside. If you’re unsure about a particular item, contact your municipality or hauler by phone or web-site, or try the “finder” at [www.earth911.com](http://www.earth911.com) or the BRA document: “How to Recycle in Buffalo-Niagara” at <http://www.ppgbuffalo.org/buffalo-recycling-alliance>.

Complicated? Maybe a little, but it’s not so bad when you know what to ask and where to look, and begin to better understand the process. Just remember that the ground rules keep changing – ultimately for the better. Recycling has a huge impact on the environment, and it is one way we can all make a big difference on a daily basis.

(Many thanks to Katy Duggan-Haas from Modern Corporation for her assistance.)

## Although it's cold here, the planet is still warming

By David Kowalski

(Republished Buffalo News Letter to the Editor)

Have you heard of the "REV"? It is a revolution in the supply and regulation of New York's energy. It is a dramatic and fundamental change and it is a dirty shame that most New Yorkers have never heard of it. REV stands for the NY Public Service Commission's initiative, Reforming the Energy Vision.

When my mother was 5 in 1911, a man came to the front door. "Do you folks want electricity?" he asked. She said "no," and shut the door. Grandma overheard and rushed after him to have gas lights replaced with Edison bulbs. Tesla and Westinghouse had built an electric power plant at Niagara Falls and formed a company that shipped power by wire all over the region.

That basic model for electric power is still with us. Investor-owned utilities produce electricity in large central plants with hydro, coal, natural gas and nuclear energy and transmit it to consumers over a complex grid. Doing an affordable and reliable job of it is an increasingly complex puzzle.

Power plants and their transmission systems are aging and energy demands are rising. Unusual weather creates demand peaks. Plants are prime terrorist targets, and fossil fuels have filled the air with pollution and the skies with global warming gasses.

In response, we have shifted away from central sources of power and moved to windmills, solar panels and geothermal installations that are widely distributed and close to consumers. These renewable energy sources don't pollute or cause global warming. But they raise questions. Who will own them? How will they be paid for? How will they be integrated into a mutually supportive system?

Last April, the Public Service Commission issued orders for the REV initiative. The commission staff went to work chiefly with utility company executives to answer these and many related questions. It has come up with a "straw proposal," a complex technical document that needs an engineer with training in linguistics to understand.

On the insistence of environmental organizations, the PSC has agreed to hold six forums across the state where the REV will be explained and the rest of us will have two minutes before a microphone to make our contributions.

This scanty opportunity to be involved in a titanic change in the power supply to our civilization is a travesty. Tesla's salesman offered my poor mother as much in 1911.

New Yorkers deserve to thoroughly understand what is being proposed and how it will affect our lives. We deserve an opportunity to have our own experts contribute to the design of a distributive power system for the 21st century. NOAA's map can be viewed at [www.1.usa.gov/1LyVEXt](http://www.1.usa.gov/1LyVEXt).

## Volunteer Opportunities for SC Niagara Group Members

HELP WITH TABLING NEEDED: The SC Niagara Group has the opportunity to participate at varied events this year and is looking for volunteers to help "people the tables". Tabling is a wonderful form of "grassroots" communication; a way to meet the public and let them know that we have a group right here in WNY. It may involve such activities as handing out SC national and/or local information and getting petitions signed. Short training sessions are available. Please send an email to [sierraclubangela@gmail.com](mailto:sierraclubangela@gmail.com) if you are interested in helping out. UP-Coming Tabling Events: May 16th (Saturday 11am-2pm) - Village of Williamsville Earth Day/Arbor Day; June 27th (Saturday) - "Party for the Planet" at the Buffalo Zoo; July 11th (Saturday) - Elmwood- Bidwell Community Farmer's Market; August 8th (Saturday) - Elmwood-Bidwell Community Farmer's Market; August 29th and 30th (Saturday and Sunday) - Elmwood Avenue Festival of the Arts. Come and join us for fun-filled spring and summer days to help protect our environment!

## The Solar Home Companion show came to Buffalo!

By Joan Hyman

On March 1, the Sierra Club Niagara Group was proud to co-sponsor the Solutions Grassroots tour, "Solar Home Companion" on a snowy Sunday evening at the Buffalo History Museum. Josh Fox (Oscar-nominated and Emmy winning film maker and activist), Zephyr Teachout (Forham Law School professor and former gubernatorial candidate) and their team presented an informative, motivating and entertaining program. While offering information about climate change, the program was interwoven with musical entertainment. Presiding with his banjo, Josh invoked the spirit of Pete Seeger with a story of meeting him in person in recent years. He reminded us of Pete's numerous successful campaigns and how, fueled by his irrepressible energy, he invited ordinary people to join him in standing up to causes of justice and protection of the earth. Josh's accomplished banjo playing echoed Pete's eloquent message that facing opponents of seemingly intractable power is not a reason to be defeatist or grim. We can all enjoy the songs, and sing along when invited; we can all find action to take.

The urgency of the current environmental crises requires many forms of communication if there is any hope of successful response to the climate crisis. People need to be informed of the facts and of the possibility of being part of urgent and essential change. People need to understand that mainstream media frequently does not truthfully communicate the most relevant facts. Most of all, people need to embrace the power of communication to increase the potential of grassroots action.

Zephyr Teachout spoke eloquently about the history of people power and celebrated New York's impressive success in securing Governor Cuomo's ban on

fracking. She reminded us of the power of persistence, pointed out the part "bird-dogging" played, and of the need to continue.

The Solar Home Companion used many forms of communication — the fabulous songs performed by Dustin Hamman, a preview of some beautiful and moving parts of Josh's new film on pressing climate change issues, energizing comments by Lee Ziesche, an experienced grassroots organizer, and the presentation of Tim Woodcock, who shared concrete, technical information on the current (and growing) place of renewables in our energy consumption. The Solutions Tour focused on one simple step that all electricity users can make: instructing our electric service to provide us with 100% renewable energy as your energy supplier. The Solutions Grassroots Tour has partnered with Ethical Electric, which provides 100% renewable power. Anyone with an electric bill can sign up at [Ethicalelectric.com](http://Ethicalelectric.com) or by phone at 1-800-460-4900. Alternatively, you can purchase renewable energy from Energy Cooperative of America 1-800-422-1475 or (716) 580-3506.

Sierra Club Niagara Group ([Niagarasierraclub.com](http://Niagarasierraclub.com)) has many projects addressing many facets of the climate crisis. You are invited to continue the momentum of change by joining us in the WNY Energy Salon Initiative — sponsoring or attending house parties to spread the word about how everyone can be a part of the People's Climate March, learning about many other ways to be part of the change.

## PSC offers only a weak opportunity to influence big change in power systems

By Larry Beahan (Republished from Another Voice)

The front-page illustration titled "The big chill" in the Buffalo News on February 20th was an eye-catching reminder of the extremely cold temperatures we experienced at the beginning of 2015. January's high temperatures of all but seven of the days were below the long-term average, as were all but two of the 20 days in February thus far. Some may interpret such extended cold spells as evidence against global warming. However, that view is incorrect.

Global warming is assessed by measuring temperatures at numerous locations on land around the world, as well as in the oceans that make up more than 70 percent of Earth's surface. Measurements are made over time and the global average temperature is determined.

The Buffalo area comprises only a tiny fraction of the surface of the globe, and so local temperatures make only a small contribution to the global average temperature. Despite the local "big chill," the planet continued to warm in January. In fact, the global average temperature was the second-highest since records began in 1880, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. This finding follows in the wake of 2014 as the hottest year on record and the 38th consecutive year of above-average global temperatures.

NOAA displayed its global analysis of January temperatures on a world map showing that the New York State region, including Buffalo, was "cooler than average." In contrast, however, the Western United States and even parts of Alaska showed above-average warming, as did most other regions on land and in oceans around the globe.

## National Fuel's Gas storage lease in Allegany State Park

By Larry Beahan

The 60,000 acres that is now Allegany State Park was once riddled by over 200 gas and oil wells and almost cleared of its forests. In fact on the old back road from the park into the Village of Limestone there is a monument where Jobe Mose drilled the first commercial oil well in New York State. Most of those wells have been closed and the forests have had one hundred years to cover its scars.

Allegany sits on top of the Marcellus shale. Not long ago, gas exploration companies threatened to tap the shale using the destructive high volume, horizontal-fracturing process. The New York Legislature blocked that threat with a law that "sunsetting" any park mineral rights that were not claimed within two years. No claims were made in that timeframe.

Six years ago, a new master plan for the Allegany Park permanently outlawed any gas or oil exploration within its boundaries. But Allegany was left with 9000 of its acres, north of France Brook Road, still marred by fourteen-gas storage wells leased to National Fuel. This fifty-year lease will expire this June 2015.

The Sierra Club Niagara Group has campaigned to persuade Rose Harvey, (Commissioner of New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation), to deny National Fuel's application to renew the lease. Though the expansion of this gas storage facility was not granted, the lease was extended by one year "to allow public input". Since the public was given one week's notice of the hearing this last winter that took place in Salamanca, we sent a letter to the Commissioner expressing our disappointment in arrangements and preclusions to public input. The Sierra Club had no real opportunity for our representatives to express our concerns. The hearing amounted to National Fuel's presentation of the terms and benefits of an extended lease without public feedback. Our apprehension continues to be the designation of this public park for industrial use and the absence of a definitive date of departure for National Fuel. The presence of National Fuel roads and well-heads cutting up what could have been a 100-year-old contiguous forest is a shame. The leasing of half of Allegany's 350-year-old growth forest is a travesty. This lease must end!