



# The Trailblazer

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## The Niagara River Corridor Globally Significant Important Bird Area

By Jay Burney, conservation advocate and the 2014 Sierra Club "Bruce Kershner Conservation Award" winner

Two decades ago, in 1996, the Niagara River Corridor was designated by a coalition of conservation groups and government agencies on both sides of the border as a Globally Significant Important Bird Area. The Important Bird Area (IBA) designation, initiated across the planet by Birdlife International, is a widely recognized conservation tool that has helped to focus the eyes of the world on a network of valuable natural resources. These resources are recognized because they support both birds and biodiversity, and are threatened by things such as habitat loss, inappropriate development, and contamination.

The Niagara River Globally Significant IBA (NRIBA), which extends from Buffalo's Outer Harbor to Lake Ontario and includes an approximately 3 km boundary on either side, is used by over 300 bird species including many that are threatened, rare, or endangered. It also is the first internationally sponsored Globally Significant IBA, recognized by stakeholders in both Canada and the U.S. The primary sponsors for this IBA are Bird Studies Canada/ Canada Nature Federation, and Audubon with support by other conservation organizations and government agencies at all levels.

Migrating and breeding neo-tropical songbirds, shorebirds, hawks, eagles, ospreys, owls, herons, and a wide variety of waterfowl depend upon this corridor for

their survival. Some of these birds are migrating to and from the Amazon, some go to or come from the arctic.

Late autumn and winter brings us spectacular migrations of gulls and overwintering waterfowl including Tundra swans and as many as 35 species of ducks. The numbers of species and



individual birds depending on the Niagara River corridor is astounding.

19 species of gulls can be found here with concentrations of some globally important species such as the Bonaparte's gull reaching upwards of 100,000 per day. Bonaparte's gulls breed in the boreal forests of the north and west coasts of North America. Watching these gulls is an amazing spectacle. The open waters of the Niagara during harsh winter months creates critical habitat for near arctic breeding ducks, swans, and geese.

Birds using this corridor impact our local ecosystem health. They also profoundly impact the biodiversity of South America, Central America, and all regions in North America. If you want to help protect the Amazon and these other global regions, you can act locally by helping

protect the NRIBA and the birds that depend upon it.

According to Audubon and other conservation organizations, most bird species in our area are in a steep decline. While some of this decline can be directly attributed to climate change, the fundamental reason for vanishing biodiversity is economic exploitation and associated destruction of habitat. Urbanization and sprawl, mining, industrial scale energy production, deforestation, and the evisceration across the board of native species of plants and pollinators are deliberate human strategies exploiting natural resources to grow the economy. The negative impacts of this political strategy on biodiversity and birds is devastation at a level that impacts our ability to have clean air and water. Human health and wellbeing are directly impacted and mirrored by habitat destruction and the vanishing of biodiversity.

The Niagara River is recognized around the world as one of the most important and threatened bird habitats on earth.

The people of this region have a special conservation and stewardship obligation to the birds that use this corridor. Birds do not have alternative habitats. The sad truth is that increasingly fragmented habitat across the ranges of these birds is vanishing the biodiversity that they and we depend upon. Sierra Club members can play an important role in recognizing the conservation needs of, and by acting to protect, the corridor.

For more on the NRIBA go to: [goo.gl/pMkHww](http://goo.gl/pMkHww)



Sierra Club Niagara Group  
P.O. Box 1127  
Williamsville, NY 14221-1127



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## Grand Island Local Solar Law may be Model for Other Communities

By Alice E. Gerard, Edited from Island Dispatch, February 17, 2017 (Grand Island, NY)

Grand Island's new solar law, the first local law to be passed in 2017, could be seen as a model for other communities looking to draft solar laws, "Not too many towns had a solar law when we started working on ours. They were all working on it." said Town Board member Beverly Kinney.

Kinney described the solar law as an initiative that she took. "Last February, I saw an article in the Lockport Union-Sun and Journal about the town struggling with a solar law. I thought that, since we didn't have any regulations, it was important that we address it. I started looking for other towns that might have drafted regulations. I pulled up as many drafts for as many towns to see what they were doing. I went to classes for renewable energy to get a better idea. I talked to people at Pace University in New York City, at one of the renewable energy classes that I took. The training I took was given by New York State Energy Research and Development Authority. It was titled 'Municipal Solar Policy: Zoning for Solar.' They said that we were ahead of the game. I already had a draft of the law."

Kinney said, "We went through seven to eight drafts. We took a lot of people's opinions into consideration, and we made changes to make it the best we could. It is easier to try to do it right the first time than to try to amend it. It took 11 months and we got input from the Conservation Advisory Board, the Economic

Development Advisory Board, and from the Planning Board." Grand Island Town Supervisor Nathan McMurray stated, "Today, solar employs more people than coal and gas combined. This is a substantial, growing, and real business."

Kinney explained that the new law would allow for special use permits, not rezoning, for solar farms. "We don't like to spot zone. This allows town officials to discuss each proposal on a case-by-case basis. If we don't have a process, it is harder for businesses (planning solar farms) to get through," said Kinney. "This gives the Planning Board a guide and it gives the Town Board a guide. Every law is up for interpretation. We have one solar farm that is sitting on the sidelines, and they chose to wait until we did a law. They waited several months while we were putting together the solar farm."

"This is a good step for Grand Island in clean energy," Kinney said. "I was really pleased to be a part of this. You have to look to the future, not just to what's going on right now. I think that, when we look at what's going on in terms of our environment, we need to protect it, and I think that this was a good step forward to doing that. From the very beginning, my goal and the goal of a lot of people is to encourage solar and clean energy, yet protect our residential areas. That's why regulations were important."

## Recent Vote Will Allow Barbaric Wildlife Hunting Methods in Alaska

Edited from article by Heather Moyer, senior content producer for the Sierra Club

On March 22, the Senate passed a resolution that literally allows people to kill baby wild animals. The Senate voted 52 - 47 to overturn the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Alaska National Wildlife Refuges Rule, which will now cede control of wildlife management on national public lands to a narrow set of extreme hunting interests. Now hunters can kill grizzlies and wolves on Alaska's wildlife refuges, including mother grizzlies with their cubs, and wolves with their pups in their dens. State wildlife officials can even shoot at grizzly bears from helicopters

"Targeting cubs with mothers, baiting, and other extreme hunting measures promoted by this resolution have no place on our public lands," said Alli Harvey, Alaska representative with the Sierra Club's Our Wild America campaign. Harvey cited Senator Martin Heinrich, who argued that this resolution would put "the federal stamp of approval on methods of take that the public views as unethical."

The supporters of the resolution claim that these so-called "predator control" activities will increase

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## Loss of a Legend

I have been witness to much over the years. Countless animals have used me as their home. I have fed many others at times with my abundant fall crop. I provide comfort and shade under my spreading branches, as well as safety from the elements.

I saw the birth of a nation, I stood proudly for every U.S. President, and I have seen countless wars and times of peace. I have been a spectator to many changes, first as horses and wagons were parked under me, then as the trail gave rise to a road and a nearly uncountable number of autos have passed by me, their occupants, some marveling at my size, others oblivious to my ever-present stance. I have seen many seasons come and go, and with each passing year comes another reality that my time on this planet is finite. David Mitchell wrote that "Oaks live for six hundred years. Two hundred to grow, two hundred to live, two hundred to die." I tried to live up to that standard but my time on this planet was cut short. My broad branches have withstood many insults and yet I still stood tall and proud. But Mother Nature has had other ideas, I have been struck by lightning a couple of times, pests and disease have taken hold in me and yet I remained, steadfast and resolute. My size may have been the reason for my downfall, over 75 feet tall and much wider; my mass far exceeded that of a half dozen cars and it would take several mere humans to reach around me. And therein was my problem. The individuals who have gained so much because of my presence were not good stewards of my livelihood. My lifelines were compromised as roots were cut or damaged by digging and branches improperly ripped from me, baring parts of me that caused additional damage



and yet I held on. I was considered a nuisance, a hazard, an inconvenience, a liability, all for merely being what I had been for the past several hundred years; funny how times and opinions had changed.

A warm, grey winter day came, much like many others that I have witnessed. But this one was different. Men arrived with an assortment of vehicles, intent on one outcome – my removal. There were boom trucks and telehandlers and ones with large robotic arms to gather my limbs, there was a long line of dump trucks too, waiting to be filled with my parts. I was unceremoniously dropped and chopped, all the smaller branches were fed into chipper and the larger pieces were cut up and loaded onto trucks to be sold in the future to someone for firewood. Twelve men working eight hours eliminated me, all that remained was a stump, providing awe and wonder to passersby about my age.

White oaks are unusual in that their acorns are ready to begin to grow as soon as they hit the ground, no scarification is necessary as is noted in so many other seeds. They cannot compete with many other species and need a fair amount of sunshine to become robust seedlings. And as luck would have it a few have begun to grow and someday they may fill the void that was created by the removal of me. I can only hope that individuals practice good stewardship and value life forms that can achieve incredible size and age and protect my children so that many generations of people will recognize their beauty and do what they can to preserve and protect them.

*Chronicled by Mark Gallo, Ph.D., Professor of Biology at Niagara University*

## Upcoming Activities and Actions

Go to the Sierra Niagara web site for event details.  
NiagaraSierraClub.com

**April 17-23** - Earth Week

**April 22** - March for Science

**April 27** - Writers Group Session: The Transition to Clean Energy in Germany, with Richard Lipsitz, President WNY Area Labor Federation. Crane Branch Library, 633 Elmwood at Highland, Buffalo, 6:00 pm

**April 29** - Climate March on Washington - Sierra Club will be sponsoring buses from Buffalo NY to Washington, DC for the March

**May 4** - Interfaith Climate Justice Community Gathering - All faith-based organizations are invited to attend this meeting to discuss how people of faith can address climate justice. Working groups include: divestment/investment; energy policy and lobbying; greening your facilities; and living simply/creation spirituality. St. Joseph Church, 3269 Main Street, Buffalo, 14214 at 7:00pm

**Sierra Club Monthly Meetings** – All Welcome!  
Fourth Tuesday of each month, 7:00pm, Daemen College (229 Dun Scotus Hall), 4380 Main Street, Amherst 14226

## Albany Rally Against Northern Access Fracked-Gas Export Pipeline

Concerned residents, members from Delaware Riverkeepers, Sierra Club and Energy Justice Network, and landowners facing eminent domain all rallied in Albany on March 27 for a march from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to the Capitol Building in opposition to the proposed Northern Access fracked-gas pipeline. The group delivered a letter opposing the Northern Access Pipeline (NAPL) to Governor Cuomo and the DEC which was signed by more than 140 businesses, organizations and faith communities.

The DEC will make a decision on NAPL on April 7 and will either grant or deny critical permits for National Fuel's proposed Northern Access Pipeline. This pipeline would move half a billion cubic feet of Pennsylvania fracked gas each day through Western New York, with most of the gas going to Canada. Approximately 40 landowners are facing eminent domain for this export project. If built, NAPL would cross more water bodies than the Constitution Pipeline, which the DEC had already denied a key water-quality certificate in April 2016.

## Sierra Club Amends Rule Regarding Civil Disobedience

Historically, Sierra Club has rejected civil disobedience as a strategy for addressing environmental degradation. In fact, the mission statement promotes that members should only "use all lawful means" to achieve goals.

Sierra Club representatives—acting on behalf of the organization—have been arrested twice in the 120-year history of the organization. In April 2016, Aaron Mair and members of the Virginia Sierra Club were arrested as part of the mobilization referred to as Democracy Awakening, a convergence of environmental, labor, civil rights, and other activist groups on Capitol Hill calling for actions for a stronger democracy. Three years earlier, executive director Michael Brune, Sierra Club president Allison Chin, and Sierra Club director Jim Dougherty handcuffed themselves to the White House fence, protesting the then-proposed, then-rejected, now-restored Keystone XL tar sands pipeline project.

Given recent changes to environmental law and protection, the National Sierra Club's Board of Directors has taken a new stand on non-violent civil disobedience. At the recent Council of Club Leaders meeting, the Board voted to amend the Club's standing rule regarding civil disobedience, and it will now be a tool available to the organization. There will

be a mechanism, yet to be defined, to allow Chapters to apply to participate in civil disobedience activities.

Visit [NiagaraSierraClub.com](http://NiagaraSierraClub.com) or go to [niagarasierraclub.com/writers-group/](http://niagarasierraclub.com/writers-group/) for editorials and articles from the Writers Group

## Teaching Science in an Age of Denial

*Mary Jo Graham is an Assistant Professor in Erie Community College's Environment Science program and founding director of Oakmoss Education, devoted to sharing the lessons of Nature to benefit the planet and all her inhabitants*

The old saying "history repeats itself" rings quite true, particularly in terms of science. Numerous examples exist - Earth revolves around the Sun, Darwin and Wallace's evolutionary theory, and climate change. Beginning in January of this year, it seems any scientific theory with which one might disagree, regardless of evidence, is a target.

While teaching science in an adversarial atmosphere is not new, the challenge today is the sheer volume of invalid information and the ease of access to it. Complicating matters is a tendency even in legitimate media outlets to forsake traditional journalist ethics (confirming facts, impartiality, etc.) in an effort to be competitive in a far more profit-based industry. Fake news is a reality, as is inaccurate or incomplete news.

How do educators confront such obstacles? Most obvious is the need to tease out good, reliable and scientifically tested findings upon which to base curriculum. This not only serves to provide students good foundational facts, it is essential in "disproving" the questionable material that abounds outside the classroom. This can take time and dedication in an age where even textbooks are sometimes influenced by political and/or ideological forces.

But that is only part of the battle. The other is in the delivery of content. My personal tendency, as usual, is to look at Nature for guidance while remaining aware of human fallibility. When you come down to it, all human knowledge emanates from the natural world - we've nowhere else from which to learn. The human brain, however, tends toward the linear, providing its own challenges. It likes beginnings and endings with a logical path between, preferring to compartmentalize and avoid the unknown. It's all about survival - the brain's

ultimate function. This is the world of the Micro. But there is much more than what is immediately around us. We also need to become familiar with the Macro - the big picture - and that the natural condition of life is cyclical, not linear.

Newton's Third Law of Motion tells us that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. And it is this concept, learned from Nature, which guides my educational philosophy. This "expansive" approach creates a deeper understanding of the topic and makes it far more relevant to the student. For example, each semester the first class of Environmental Science starts with a "puzzle". A piece of bark with holes, dried leaves, a jar of soil, photos of Woodpeckers, a bone with gnaw marks, and an insect exoskeleton are placed on a table. The students are instructed to find the relationship between each individual item and then identify the larger natural process represented in that relationship - micro to macro, Newton's Third Law. At the end we've defined ecosystem services and learned that such natural processes are essential to our own survival as a species. This sets the stage for the course where we continue to expand from micro to macro and cycle back around - the natural progression of life.

The ultimate goal is to make the science personal so students become invested in not only the learning but also in the condition of the planet at large. Most importantly, as an instructor, one must be passionate about the topic at hand. When we acknowledge that basic principle proposed by Newton, we provide more than just knowledge, we share the innate wisdom continually apparent in Nature - our source of everything.

*"Barbaric Wildlife Hunting" continued from front page*

elk, moose, and caribou populations. But there's just one problem: No scientific evidence backs up that claim. "This resolution undermines science-based wildlife management and the basic premise of public lands as places for wildlife conservation," said Harvey. "It overrides fundamental national environmental safeguards in the name of narrow special interests."

To make matters worse, Sierra Club activists and many other wildlife protection groups see this as the start of more attacks on the public lands and Alaska wildlife that need permanent protection. "Parks and wild places are under relentless attack. Alaska's wildlife refuges are some of country's most amazing landscapes and home to our most iconic wildlife like wolves and grizzly bears," said Dan Ritzman, director of Sierra Club's Alaska program.

This vote against Alaska's wildlife and public lands has the potential to influence what happens on public lands and wildlife refuges across the nation. Let your politicians know how you feel and that the American people, and the wildlife, rely on them to protect public lands.