



The Trailblazer

The Niagara Group of The Sierra Club • <http://NiagaraSierraClub.com> • Vol. 52 No. 1 Jan 2017

A Note From the Co-Editors

Co-editing the Trailblazer newsletter is an opportunity to communicate and reinforce the agenda of people working tirelessly for environmental justice. This task is enormously important in a political climate characterized by science denial, deference to profit, and the interests of big business that dominate in spite of increasingly irreversible harmful effects on our planet and all its species.

In the coming months, the changes that you will see in the Trailblazer reflect that the fight for the environment involves the following necessary components: edu-

cating, fact-finding and reliance on immutable scientific analysis, intersectionality, coalition-building, multiple complementary strategies of facilitating change, and taking responsibility and immediate action to engage in green practices. There will be reports on the efforts of teachers to educate – especially our youth – on critical strategies for sustainability, preserving wilderness, coexisting with wildlife, and reducing carbon footprints. You will find articles and discussions on what the experts know about climate change, biodiversity, and

ecosystems. There will be attention to connections between environmental activism and social justice, and the newsletter will highlight the organizations that Sierra Club has partnered with and the campaigns members have contributed to in creating a more humane, just, and sustainable world. Authors will identify a variety of tools that members can employ to take political and community action, and to effectively legislate, lobby, inform, demonstrate, protect, and engage in the interest of the environment. And the Trailblazer will reflect a commitment to green practices – in future it will be printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper with soy-based rather than petroleum-based inks, and we will encourage members to download an electronic version rather than a paper-based newsletter.

The hope is that the Trailblazer will inform and facilitate meaningful environmental action. As the co-editors, we are committed to providing a venue for communication, collaboration, education, and engagement. We recognize the urgency and ecological necessity of, and aspire to contribute to, implementing the Sierra Club's mission:

*To explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth;
To practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources;
To educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out these objectives.*

For compassionate coexistence,
Nicole and Dave

David Alicea, Organizing Representative for the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign, Sets Priorities for the Nation and for New York State

For the Nation:

1) **Resisting the Trump-Polluter Agenda.** There is no denying it: Donald Trump's election is a threat to the future of our planet, the safety of our communities, and the health of our families. If the policies he proposed on the campaign trail are implemented, they will destroy our climate, decimate our jobs and livelihoods, and undermine the civil rights and liberties won in many hard fought battles. Sierra Club will be standing up to oppose any efforts to undermine the EPA, the Paris Climate Agreement, and our transition to renewable energy.

2) **Standing with workers, people of color, and other allies.** Donald Trump's campaign was fueled by racism, xenophobia, sexism, bigotry and hate. Sierra

Club will be standing up with our allies to ensure that those campaign promises remain just that.

3) **Supporting the People's Climate Mobilization in DC on April 29th.** This mobilization is the chance for environmental activists, workers, communities of color, and many more to come together to reject Donald Trump's attack on our communities and climate and push forward with a vision of a renewable energy economy that works for all.

For New York State:

1) **Ensuring a fair and just transition for workers as we transition off of coal.** In 2016, Governor Cuomo made a bold commitment to get New York off of coal by 2020.

Continued on back page

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



Explore, Enjoy, and Protect the Planet

For more news, archives,
and upcoming events, visit
NiagaraSierraClub.com

Non-profit org.
U.S. Postage
Paid
Buffalo, NY
Permit No. 868

Update and Call to Action on Proposed Northern Access Pipeline

By Diana Strablow, Sierra Club Niagara Executive Committee Member

The Sierra Club Niagara Group has been working to build awareness regarding National Fuel's proposal to build 97 miles of new pipeline to carry gas from the fracking fields of PA, for export, under the Niagara River to Canada. This Northern Access 2016 Pipeline Project would include a compressor station in Pendleton, expansion of the Porterville Compressor Station in Elma and a dehydration facility in Wheatfield less than half a mile from the Niagara River. The pipeline would cross 180 streams and 270 wetlands along its route.

If granted a permit from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, National Fuel would be allowed to begin eminent domain proceedings to gain right of way from landowners who do not want a high pressure 24-inch pipeline cutting through their land in Allegany, Cattaraugus, Erie and Niagara Counties.

We have been engaging with The Pendleton and Wheatfield Action Teams, WECAP (a landowner and water protection group in Sardinia), the Seneca Nation, Concerned Citizens of Allegany County, and others to call on Governor Cuomo to complete the ban on fracking in New York State by saying "NO!" to the Northern Access 2016 Project which would make money for National Fuel while endangering the health and safety of NY communities, waterways and environment.

As evidence mounts on the serious dangers of methane's potent heat trapping contribution to climate change, we call on the Governor to stop the build-up of fracked gas infrastructure and instead to make NY a leader in the transition to renewable energy.

We are requesting that the NY Department of Environmental Conservation deny the required 401 Water and Air Certification needed to allow this project. Please attend and comment at the DEC Hearings on February 7, 8, 9. And members are also asked to call, send postcards, and write letters – all information and details can be found at niagarasierraclub.com.

Speaking to Lawmakers can Make a Difference

Calling legislators about issues that concern you has a greater impact than just emailing. Elected officials want to hear from individuals and admit that personal accounts and requests have a greater influence on their consideration of issues and laws. Callers may speak to

Continued on back page

Freshman Evan Haeick Asks You to Join Him in Protecting the Earth

Humans are an extraordinary species. We have times of peace and we have times of war. We have disagreements and we have controversies. But we also cooperate and come together in times of need. In today's world, a major conflict is in place. Does global warming and climate change truly exist? Who can the people believe? Some say that there is not enough evidence to prove its true. Others hold true to their beliefs and know that Earth's climate is changing, and not in a good way. Most of you reading this have the same opinion as I do. Global warming is a real threat to humanity and its entire existence. But for those who don't, I offer this word of advice to you: if global warming didn't exist and it was made up, some mainstream media panic deployed for some alternative motive, then why have millions of men and women devoted their entire lives to solving it and convincing others that it is real?

Intelligent, well-rounded people, who don't get tricked easily, and would know if it was just a hoax. These people look at the data, and study the patterns, to confirm the existence of this real threat. The future of our kind rests in these people's hands. But, sadly, how can we move on to solve this problem, if others still don't believe it's real. We are and will be held back in our tracks by others who intend to stop progress towards a solution. We can't move on without the full support of all the people. This is now the time where humanity needs to put aside all our differences, and cooperate and come together in this desperate time of need.

Evan Haeick is a Kenmore East High School freshman, President of the Sustainable Earth Solutions Club, and an organizer of school environmental awareness activities

To view Evan's presentation "The Future," visit NiagaraSierraClub.com

Why We Must Say NO to GMO Chestnuts

by Anne Petermann

While many people across the US are rejecting Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO)s, a new untested and not-yet-approved GMO food/tree is being promoted: the genetically engineered American chestnut.

The American Chestnut once ranged widely throughout the forests of the eastern US and was an important source of food for people and wildlife, but in the first half of the 20th Century most of these trees were killed off by a fungal pathogen introduced from Asia. Scientists at SUNY Syracuse are now attempting to genetically engineer the American chestnut to resist this deadly fungus.

But many American chestnuts still exist throughout eastern forests. Stumps from dead trees have re-sprouted and some are old enough to produce chestnuts. Active work by other scientists is being undertaken to use these chestnuts to breed blight resistant wild American chestnuts—not engineered facsimiles. The scientists developing the Genetically Engineered (GE) chestnuts, however, argue that this is the only way we can restore the glory of the American chestnut to the eastern forests.

This plan is inherently dangerous—to forests, communities and wildlife. Science has shown that forcing foreign genes into an organism's genome causes damage and mutations. This, in turn, causes the engineered organism to do highly unpredictable things that have unanticipated consequences.

A look at the partners and funders of the GE American chestnut program at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) over the years reveals some very disturbing bedfellows. They include both Monsanto and ArborGen. ArborGen is a GE tree research and development company based in South Carolina that is jointly owned by timber multinationals International Paper and MeadWestvaco (now WestRock). We know who Monsanto is.

The real reason ArborGen supports SUNY Syracuse's GE chestnut research is not altruism but self interest. The GE American chestnut tree is being used to try to convince the public that GE trees can be beneficial. They want to change the extremely powerful public opposition to GE trees and open the door for other GE trees being developed for timber and biomass companies. It is solely about profits.

And what will be the impact on forests of GE American chestnut trees? The plan is to plant these GE trees in forests in a fully fertile state so they will spread their pollen and seeds freely, and contaminate any wild American chestnuts in their path.

Additionally, American chestnut trees can grow for 250 years or more. How will GE chestnut trees react to environmental stresses over time? How would drought, extreme cold, or floods, impact them? Trees have genes that "turn on and off" in response to these environmental stresses. What if the gene for fungus resistance starts killing beneficial fungi in the soils? What if their pollen or nuts suddenly become toxic? What if they outcompete native trees like oaks and drive them out of the forests?

There is no possible way to know what the long-term impact of these trees will be in a highly complex forest ecosystem. These ecosystems are so complex that science doesn't even know the questions to ask to do an assessment of the risks posed by these trees. And doing a thorough risk assessment of GE American chestnuts over their entire 250-year lifespan is not possible.

Genetically engineering American chestnuts is too dangerous with the potential to cause impacts significantly more serious than the chestnut blight itself. GE American chestnuts must be rejected. You can sign the petition against GE trees by going to stopgetrees.org.

Anne Petermann is the Executive Director of Buffalo-based [Global Justice Ecology Project](http://GlobalJusticeEcologyProject.org) and the International Coordinator of the [Campaign to STOP GE Trees](http://CampaignToSTOPGETrees.org).

Committee Updates

The Energy Committee worked on opposition to the Northern Access Pipeline with other local groups and participated in demonstrations, letter writing campaigns, and public appeals to post opposition messages to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Committee members studied the issue of Electric Vehicles (EVs) and advocated the introduction of electric buses for the Niagara Frontier Transit Authority (NFTA). The committee participated in power mapping and preliminary discussions on how to convince the City of Buffalo and suburban towns to join the 100% pledge to renewable energy. Look for upcoming details on a new Gas is Not Green campaign that will oppose new natural gas infrastructure, extraction, and transmission. Volunteers can contribute to these goals by acquiring and sharing science-based knowledge about fossil fuels and climate change, and participating in events to inform the public and to counteract corporate misinformation about fossil fuels.

The Writer's Group just completed its 3rd year in November, and once again offered dozens of excellent presentations in its monthly workshop meetings. Collectively, they have published more than a hundred articles, opinion editorials, and letters to the editor. You will find examples on the Sierra Club Niagara Group's website at: niagarasierraclub.com/writers-group/.

The Tabling Sub-Committee educates and disseminates information at local events. Members explain our campaigns, circulate petitions, recruit volunteers, and network with individuals and other organizations. This is a wonderful opportunity to inform about the Sierra Club organization and our work in the community for the environment and environmental justice.

The Conservation Committee has written letters about, testified on, investigated and reported on a variety of issues including the Green Code, the Outer Harbor, wind energy, trapping on Grand Island, wild animal rehabilitation, Oak Wilt, Hemlock Woolly Adelgis, Northern Access Pipeline, Boreas Ponds, Canadian Wetlands, Nuclear waste, NYS Clean Energy Plan and Amherst Nature View Park. Work includes representing the Sierra Club Niagara Group at the Niagara River Greenway Commission and for other campaigns involving habitat concerns.

NYS Environmental Actions

NYS Governor Cuomo set a goal of ensuring 50% of New York State's energy comes from renewable sources by 2030: <https://atlantic2.sierraclub.org/content/successful-programs-support-renewable-energy>

Call Governor Cuomo at (518) 474-8390 to thank him for protecting our lands and to tell him to complete the ban on fracking by denying the NYSDEC 401 Water Permit for the Northern Access Pipeline Project.

Sierra Club Niagara Group Working to Make a Difference

Help your local Sierra Niagara - we are involved in many activities and would love to have your support!

Contact us at: niagarasierra@gmail.com

- Climate Change and Climate Justice
- NY Renewables and NY Clean Energy
- Just Transition
- Renewable Energy
- Northern Access Pipeline
- Hydrofracking
- Political Outreach and Actions
- Bakken Crude Oil Trains
- Hazardous Waste Issues
- West Valley Nuclear Waste Site
- Environmental Protection
- Habitat and Wildlife Protection and Preservation



"David Alicea" continued from front page

We have seen key step forwards including funds for communities with retiring coal plants and Sierra Club will continue ensuring that workers and communities are protected.

2) **Making 100% renewable energy a reality.** Last year Governor Cuomo set in stone a policy that will mandate 50% renewable electricity by 2030. This is an important step forward and Sierra Club will continue pushing to ensure that we not only meet this target, but also surpass it. That means supporting properly sited wind and solar projects and ensuring that New York continues advancing supportive policies.

3) **Ensuring an equitable and just transition to renewable energy.** Reaching 100% renewable energy is an important goal – but not the only one. Sierra Club will continue advocating that renewable energy projects benefit low-income communities, workers, and others that have been left out of the fossil fuel based economy. By supporting legislation like the *Climate and Community Protection Act* and working with allies, we can make a 100% renewable energy economy that works for everyone.

"Speaking to Lawmakers" continued from front page

staff members but even having staff pass along a phone message to legislators establishes a personal connection more than just an email. As the start of the year has brought new lawmakers to jurisdictions and government levels across the country, start phoning your elected officials, and have your family and friends do the same, in order to create the positive change you wish to see for the environment.

From "Here's Why You Should Call, Not Email, Your Legislators", Daniel Victor, The NY Times, 11/22/16, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/22/us/politics/heres-why-you-should-call-not-email-your-legislators.html?_r=0 (Full article available at NiagaraSierraClub.com).

Let's Not Forget

by Jeff Green, Environmental Educator, Instructor of Environmental Science, Field Ecology, and Wildlife Management

Climate change, pipelines, deforestation, agriculture, air pollution, water pollution, environmental laws, elections, energy — these are environmental issues that we all have thought about and need our attention. As we fight these battles, one is going on in the background that often slips our minds: the extinction of species.

In the past 500 million years species have gone extinct, eliminated by natural forces that govern ecosystems. This is completely normal. It is what we call the background extinction rate. On our planet, the average background extinction rate for all species is 0.1-1.0 extinctions per million species per year. That means if there are 100 million species on the planet, 10-100 will go extinct every year. This number can vary depending on the source, but it is substantial. Our planet is, by nature, very destructive towards life without our help.

When extinction rates have exceeded the background extinction rate we have used the term "mass extinction" to describe this occurrence. Fossil evidence suggests that there have been five previous mass extinctions. Current evidence suggests that we are in a sixth mass extinction. Some sources put the current extinction rate at over 1,000 times greater than the background rate of extinction. Many have used the terms Holocene extinction, Anthropocene extinction, or the Sixth extinction to describe this latest event.

This is a main reason to voice opposition to the forces that seek to pollute and disrupt the environment. We need to speak for the organisms that cannot. Has our society progressed so much that we no longer can see that we are symbionts with nature? Are the people of Earth satisfied with letting our planet slip into a state it cannot recover from?

Often we get tied up in the minutia of many small events, understandably so, but it is important not to forget the big picture. Biodiversity must be preserved to keep stability on our planet.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES AND ACTIONS!

February 21 - 6:30pm-8:00pm, Showing of the film "Containment" which addresses the dangers of nuclear waste. Film is followed by a panel discussion of activists working to clean up the West Valley Nuclear Waste Facility. Daemen College, 4380 Main Street in Amherst, Room 107 Schenck Hall

April 22 - Earth Day **April 28 - Arbor Day**

April 29 - People's Climate Mobilization - major march in Washington, D.C.

"... we need to understand the interaction between our two worlds: the natural ecosystem, the thin global skin of air, water, and soil and the plants and animals that live in it, and the man-made technosphere – powerful enough to deserve so grandiose a term."

- Barry Commoner, "Making Peace with the Planet"