
By Lynda Schuelkloth

Each year the Chair has the privilege of sharing with you the work of the Sierra Club in our Western New York region. Our primary focus continues to be climate change and we were privileged to participate in the People’s Climate March in NYC on Sept. 21, 2014. SCNG sent three full buses of students and old folks to the city to join the 400,000 marchers in the climate justice movement. We walked with advocates for climate change, economic justice, bike advocates, LGBT, environmentalist, unions, artists, child advocates, vegetarians and many others.

Our work has been to advance the agenda of climate change and climate justice in many ways:

Stopping destructive actions: working toward a fracking ban and AGAINST investments in gas infrastructure and coal/gas generation plants, keeping contaminated fracking waste out of our communities and landfills, attempting to control the ‘bomb trains.’

Working to transform our energy system with conservation and renewables such as the proposed placement of solar panels on the roof of 20 Buffalo public schools. We work toward sane public policies such as PACE financing, a Feed in Tariff policy, and advancement of geothermal heating and cooling.

This year we have increased our public presence through the redesign of our website, Facebook and Twitter, advanced our radio presence and TV opportunities; given lectures and tabling, testified and demonstrated, and we even had a flash mob. We’ve been consistently working with elected officials; our Writer’s Group has been incredibly successful with Buffalo News editorials, letters to the editor, and other local news articles; and we’ve worked with students in area colleges.

We continue to partner with other organizations such as the Western New York Environmental Alliance, Clean Air Coalition, and Niagara River Environmental Coalition to increase the level of our voice that speaks to protect the Earth and all of her creations.

The Buffalo Outer Harbor is a work in progress. We’ve invested significant energy in the preservation of Buffalo Lake Erie Waterfront. In some ways, this effort seems different and maybe less urgent. But actually, the different visions of this piece of land reflect a defining conflict in our time.

Over a year ago, the Niagara Group passed a resolution for the preservation and expansion of its outstanding natural resources in terms of birds and fish and increasing habitat, against the development of housing on the Outer Harbor, and suggested that any new building happen in existing footprints. This remains our agenda and it is shared across the coalition that has emerged in opposition to the planning of ECHDC.

We are accused of being a special interest group. But we argue the opposite. We, and the Coalition work with, stand for the Public Commons as outlined in the Public Trust Doctrine. This common law says that some things, like water and its land, belong to all of us and cannot be privatized, or alienated. [This idea originated in Roman law, was confirmed in the Magna Carta in 1214, and is a part of US Common Law in 1787.]

The Sierra Club often refers to the fact that we are the oldest environmental organization in the US.

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RECYCLING CORNER: Electronics & Small Devices

By Ron M isset

Remember when your computer took up half the space on your desk? Then someone realized it could be flipped sideways and set on the floor. Progress! About the same time, laptops began to proliferate. They provided a smaller foot print and were more convenient for travel and schlepping back and forth to work, and essentially displaced the PC and MAC as the computer of choice for most of us.

Somewhere along that electronic evolution, cell phones became more intelligent (smart phones?). They featured larger and more resolution displays, access to the internet, doubled as cameras, and, of course, provided the platform for texting – almost instant communication without the inconvenience of leaving a voice mail. Like the other devices, they were a computer, too, but one that could be held in your hand and stored in your pocket or purse.

The problem? For many of us, one was too large and the other too small for general use. Enter yet another computing platform - iPads and Windows-based tablets. Now you could hand your device to grandma to view the kid’s photos and still get some serious computing and communicating out of the way during the visit.

Much has been written about general computer recycling – PCs, CRTs, printers, fax machines and so on – and most of us know about municipal e-waste “drop-off days”.

Likewise, electronic “big box” stores, like Best Buy, Buy Staples, and dedicated electronic recyclers like New York-based SunnKing Electronics Recycling, will also take these items, and generally at little or no charge.

But what about all the small electronic devices? Did you know there are over 330 million cell phones and 182 million smart phones currently in service in the US? How many more are lying in a desk drawer gathering dust, not to mention those palm pilots and other organizers that made a splash for a while. A recent Pew Research study indicated that in early 2015, 50% of American adults (over 18) now own a tablet, with 1 billion in use worldwide. Add it all up and that’s a huge number of small devices currently in use or buried away in our homes.

Certainly, these devices can be recycled. Computing products, both small and large, yield numerous valuable metals like steel, gold, copper, silver, and aluminum. (100 million cell phones will gross about $2,000,000 dollars from gold and $370,000 from silver.) Perhaps more importantly, responsible recycle businesses will ensure that unhealthy and hazardous materials found in circuit boards, processors and batteries - such as bromide, chlorine, mercury and cadmium - are disposed of properly and kept out of the waste stream. Use the same e-waste drop off locations and “big box” stores mentioned previously.

The best option, however, is to extend the useful life of these devices. Since many people fulfill technological fixes by frequently upgrading to the latest and greatest, these devices turn over quickly yet remain functional and useful. Those folks living in remote or 3rd world countries can benefit for sure, as well as many in the US with little or no disposable income.

Operation Gratitude (www.operationrecycl ing.com) sends a range of these small computing devices to American and allied soldiers stationed overseas. Eco-Cell (www.eco-cell.com) is an “umbrella group” that’s aligned with and distributes to churches, schools, thrift shops, and a range of other charities nationally and internationally. As you might guess, there are many other groups engaged in the same activities. Use your browser to find them as new collection opportunities pop up all the time.

Lastly, before mailing out or dropping off any personal computing device, large or small, make sure you erase personal stored data, such as photos, phone numbers and addresses, and be sure to remove your SIM card.

Recycling electronic materials can help our society and environment in so many ways!
On June 18, 2015 Pope Francis released his encyclical Laudato Si (Praise Be to You) labeling global climate change a grave issue which must be addressed by the whole Earthly community. Several of Sierra Club members have joined others in an interfaith committee to support the Pope and spread his message.

The encyclical notes that climate is a common good and that “a very solid scientific consensus” has testified to a disturbing warming of the climatic system due to great concentrations of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane, being released into the atmosphere “mainly as a result of human activity”. Pope Francis says there is an urgent need to develop policies so that, “in the next few years”, emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, by substituting fossil fuels with renewable energy and efficiency. “Worldwide there is minimal access to clean and renewable energy.”

Our slow response to replacing the current fossil fuel system may label this era “as one of the most irresponsible in history”. However, “there is reason to hope that humanity at the dawn of the twenty-first century will be remembered as having generously shouldered its grave responsibilities”.

The encyclical touches many themes. The document shows the notable reorientation of the church’s understanding of the human person from a being that dominates to one that is responsible to serve creation. God is reflected in all creation and humans have a responsibility to properly live within creation. There are responsibilities to the poor, and to maintaining the earth for future generations. The Pope calls for a partnership between science and religion, to cooperatively address the health of the planet.

A market system based on consumerism cannot provide for many of the needs of humanity and the Earth. The encyclical calls for the protection of the commons and states that private property is subject to the common good and a social mortgage.

While the document recognizes the need for dialogue, it favorably supports many concepts including: international agreements to control the emission of greenhouse gases; the imposition of penalties; support by governments of energy cooperatives and small producers who have the connection with their local area and concern for their families; the redirection of production from consumerism to development sympathetic to protecting the common good. Besides renewable energy development, the document also mentions the need to develop public transportation, energy efficient and habitable cities.

Poor developing nations should be recipients of subsidies and technological transfers and assistance in establishing renewable energy such as solar. “To promote a sustainable use of natural resources are not a waste of money, but rather an investment capable of providing other economic benefits in the medium term. If you look at the larger picture, we can see that more diversified and innovative forms of production, which impact less on the environment, can prove very profitable. It is a matter of openness to different possibilities which do not involve stifling human creativity and its ideals of progress, but rather directing that energy along new channels”.

“Reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility, above all on the part of those countries which are more powerful and pollute the most”. If we are unable to control greenhouse gas emissions, “those who will have to suffer the consequences of what we are trying to hide will not forget this failure of conscience and responsibility.”