

# The Trailblazer

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## CLIMATE CRISIS: Increasing Evidence of Global Warming

By David Kowalski

Excess greenhouse gas in the atmosphere caused by burning fossil fuels - coal, oil, or natural gas - is now resulting in dangerous global warm-

ing. Fifteen of the sixteen warmest years have occurred since the year 2000. 2014 set a new record and 2015 topped it. 2016 is on track for even

more extreme warming, with January through May showing record-breaking global temperatures.

Burning fossil fuels emits carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that traps heat and is raising Earth's temperature. Human-caused carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere are now about 40% greater than the highest natural levels detected in the past 800,000 years. We are now in uncharted territory and this is certainly cause for alarm.

Human activity is defying Nature, and the climate is changing now. Nowhere is the fingerprint of climate change more evident than with extreme heat. This year, summer got its hottest start ever in three states: California, New Mexico and Arizona. Over 30 million people were under heat warnings or advisories. Record-shattering temperatures of 109° occurred in Los Angeles and 122° in Palm Springs. Tragically, on June 20th, six people died outdoors in 118° heat in Arizona.

Heat waves last for days and are deadly. Severe heat waves in Europe in 2003 and Russia in 2010 resulted in tens of thousands of deaths. A Chicago heat wave with temperatures up to 104° killed nearly 750 people in 1995. A California heat wave with temperatures as high as 119° caused up to 450 deaths in 2006.

A combination of heat and humidity (the heat index) that makes it feel like it's 105° or hotter is termed a 'danger day'. Warming temperatures are about to push U.S. cities into a new mode where

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### Special Event! Talk by Aaron Mair, President, National Sierra Club at the Sierra Club Niagara Group Annual Awards Dinner

The Niagara Group's 2016 Annual Award's Dinner will be the first of its kind in our WNY region. We are very excited to have Aaron Mair, 2016-2017 National Sierra Club President, as the guest speaker. Aaron Mair of Schenectady, New York, is the president of the Sierra Club's board of directors. His occupation is an epidemiological-spatial analyst with the New York State Department of Health. His background and experience includes more than three decades of environmental activism and over 25 years as a Sierra Club volunteer leader where he has worked diligently for environmental justice.



Aaron Mair

Award Recipients for 2016:

The **Bruce Kershner Award for Conservation** is being awarded to the following recipients for their work on the removal of the Robert Moses Parkway:

*Paul Dyster*, Mayor, City of Niagara Falls; *Thomas DeSantis*, Senior Planner, City of Niagara Falls; *Bob Baxter*, Niagara Heritage Partnership

The **Blake Reeves Award for Environmental Leadership** is being awarded to the following union leaders for their participation and work to protect Seneca Lake and mobilize the WNY region to sign our Climate Pledge: *Todd Hobler*, Vice President of 1199 SEIU Healthcare Workers United East; *Deborah Hayes*, Area Director of the Communication Workers of America WNY District office.

The dinner will be held on Saturday October 15, 2016 at Temple Beth Zion, 805 Delaware Avenue Buffalo at 6 PM. Dinner tickets will be available to purchase in September. For more information, please see our monthly email, our website at [www.niagarasierraclub.com](http://www.niagarasierraclub.com) or contact [sierraclubangela@gmail.com](mailto:sierraclubangela@gmail.com).

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## The Niagara River Greenway and the Robert Moses Pkwy

By Larry Beahan

In 1877 Jacob Schoellkopf purchased a hydraulic canal at Niagara Falls that transmitted power through belts and drive shafts. Schoellkopf harnessed that power with a hydroelectric power plant, and by the time of his death in 1903, it had illuminated the city of Buffalo and was supplying electricity to a third of New York State.

In 1956 a tremendous rockslide threw the Schoellkopf Power Station into the Niagara Gorge and threw New York State's economy into frenzy.

Urgent federal legislation and the organizational skills of Robert Moses built the New York Power Project to replace the Schoellkopf Station in just three years. This new hydroelectric power plant was, then, the largest in the western world. This giant saved thousands of at-risk New York manufacturing jobs and through the sale of its electric power became a tremendous financial success.

There were costs to this success: The Tuscarora Nation was forced to give up 500 acres of beloved land. The nightly fluctuations of river-flow played havoc with flora and fauna of the River and its gorge. The scenic spectacle of the Falls itself was diminished. The Robert Moses highway paralleling the River cut the residents of Niagara Falls off from access to their scenic gorge. Vast stretches of real-estate dwindled in value or was occupied by the project and no longer generated tax revenue. River frontage was lined with industry drawn there by cheap power. By polluting air, water and soil, that industry made much of the river corridor barely habitable. The Power Plant flourished but the River and the Communities along the River did not.

Federal law requires power plants to be licensed. The 1957 fifty-year Niagara Power Project license was up for renewal in 2007. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, FERC, identified the "stakeholders" who had suffered these ill effects of the Power Project and required the New York Power Authority, its owner, to come to terms with them in a Relicensing Settlement Agreement. Before this mighty hydroelectric plant could continue to operate, its owners had to make amends for the damages the Plant would continue to cause over the next 50 years.

The Niagara Power Project Relicensing Settlement negotiations were hard fought. They lasted two years and resulted in an agreement to supply close to a half billion dollars over the 50 years of the license span to satisfy the stakeholders' demands: \$9 million a year for 50 years for projects consistent with the Niagara River Greenway Plan. This plan entailed \$3 million for Niagara County Host Communities, \$3 million for State Parks in Niagara and Erie counties, \$2 million for communities in Erie County and \$1 million for ecological projects in Niagara and Erie counties.

A New York State law was enacted that envisioned a Niagara River Greenway as a collection of Parks and Natural Green Spaces linked by trails lining the River. Unfortunately the law did not have the teeth to insure that the money generated by the settlement would be spent in this way. To date about half of it went for the envisioned Greenway and the other half went to a variety of laudable, but not "Greenway" projects.

An exceptionally hard-fought and disappointing aspect of the "Settlement" was denial of the removal of the Niagara Moses Parkway. The Parkway was a concrete barrier between the City of Niagara Falls and its most precious asset, the Niagara Gorge. Persistent lobbying and labor by a few dedicated and uncompromising citizens has finally, in 2016, persuaded the New York Power Authority to fund this missing link in the rehabilitation of the Niagara River, the removal of the Robert Moses Parkway.

### The Trailblazer is Going Green!

Help us get the process started.

The Niagara Group will be offering an electronic version of this quarterly newsletter. We hope to have it in place later this year and are looking to our members for some feedback. Please answer a short survey found in the Newsletter tab on our Group website: <http://niagarasierraclub.com/newsletter/>



Break Free from Fossil Fuels" Albany NY, May 2016

## How Labor Unions and our Climate Justice Campaign have Mutual Interests

By Roger Cook

In organizing our climate justice campaign, the Sierra Club Niagara Group has realized the wisdom in joining forces with the labor unions. This development may be surprising as unions are often viewed as protecting the jobs of their members in dirty industries like mining, petroleum refining, and coal and nuclear-fueled power plants, as well as the manufacturing of products that contribute to environmental pollution. There's truth to that claim—the AFL-CIO, acting in the short-term interests of the United Mine Workers and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, for example, opposed the Kyoto Agreement. Still today, many of our union brothers and sisters remain skeptical of setting firm fossil fuel phase out benchmarks out of fear of massive job losses.

However, it's also true that unions have been at the forefront of the environmental movement. Denis Hayes, the national coordinator of the first Earth Day held April 22, 1970, stated that "Without the United Auto Workers, the first Earth Day would likely have flopped." The UAW was the biggest financial contributor to the event, printed and mailed out all the Earth Day materials at its own expense, turned out workers at every large city and endorsed the Clean Air Act that the big auto manufacturers were trying to kill or gut. Walter Reuther, the UAW president at the time, said, "The labor movement is about the problem we face tomorrow morning. But to make that the sole purpose of the labor movement is to miss the main target. I mean, what good is a dollar an hour more in wages if your neighborhood is burning down? What good is another week's vacation if the lake you used to go to is polluted and you can't swim in it and the kids can't play in it? What good is another \$100 pension if the world goes up in atomic smoke?"

Today, there's a growing consensus among labor unions that we can and must replace a fossil fuel-based economy with a renewable energy economy while creating millions of good "green jobs". The Sierra Club and other environmental organizations have become increasingly aware of the economic devastation that can occur to workers and their families when fossil fuels are phased out and joined with organized labor in calling for "Just Transition" policies. These policies include government-supported safety nets and job retraining for displaced workers and economic assistance to affected communities.

In Western NY and across the state, many unions have joined the Climate Justice Campaign. Here are just a few examples:

- Health care unions such as the Communication Workers and NYS Nurses Association actively spoke out at rallies in support of banning fracking in NYS; NYSNA has also been outspoken at rallies in opposition to "Bomb Trains."
- 1199SEIU (Service Employees International Union) passed a resolution in opposition to the proposed Seneca Lake gas storage facility. The 1199SEIU Vice-President engaged in civil disobedience at the site.
- Area unions including the 1199SEIU, BTF, CWA, and the Public Employees Federation helped fund Sierra Club buses traveling to Washington DC and to the People's Climate March in NYC. CWA also provided funding for the "Rise Up for Climate Justice" campaign initiated by the Sierra Club Niagara Group.
- Sixteen labor unions and affiliated labor organizations signed the "Rise Up for Climate Justice Pledge" calling on the president to take the lead at the Paris climate talks; these organizations were represented at the September 24, 2015 rally in Niagara Square.
- The Sierra Club Niagara Group has met with unions directly involved the construction of solar and wind facilities (Operating Engineers, Ironworkers and Electrical Workers) and agreed to promote projects such as Apex's proposed wind farm in Niagara County.
- Twelve labor unions across NYS have joined the NY Renewables coalition. These unions represent workers in health care, communications, transportation, auto manufacturing, electrical construction, and education. The 55 organizational member coalition which includes the Sierra Club, the Climate Justice Coalition of WNY and the Interfaith Climate Justice Coalition of WNY, is dedicated to passing the "Climate and Community Protection Act" to ensure the NYS has 50% renewable energy by 2030 and 100% by 2050.

The common interests of Labor Unions and our Climate Justice Campaign have successfully launched a new and mutually beneficial relationship amongst all parties involved. We look forward to continuing our work together to protect the environment, waterways, and mitigate the effects of climate change.

"Climate Crisis" continued from front page

danger days happen regularly. By 2030, 85 cities with nearly one-third of the U.S. population are projected to deal with at least 20 danger days annually if carbon emissions continue unabated.

In Buffalo, 6 danger days are projected. Also projected are 38 'extreme caution' days, when the heat index tops 90°. The latter days are the greatest threat to children and the elderly, who are more sensitive to the heat, and to those in residences without air conditioning. In the South, Miami is predicted to have 132 danger days and 235 extreme caution days. Cutting carbon emissions worldwide is necessary to reduce the projected number of danger days.

Higher temperatures increase the amount of moisture that evaporates from land and water, and have contributed to drought in some areas. At the same time, increased water vapor in the atmosphere caused by the elevated warming has resulted in heavy downpours in other areas.

Extreme events linked to global warming and predicted earlier by climate scientists are in fact occurring now around the world and here at home: unprecedented drought in California, historic flooding in Texas and West Virginia, more intense hurricanes like Sandy in New York, and raging wildfires in the Southwest U.S. and in Canada.

Drought, flooding and excess heat threaten human health and safety. Additionally, such events can cause crop destruction, food insecurity and social unrest.

Oceans are absorbing over 93% of the excess heat of global warming. Hot ocean waters are bleaching and killing coral reefs, disrupting ecosystems that harbor fish. Continued warming of oceans will increase melting of polar ice sheets, cause extensive sea level rise and flood coastal cities, including New York City and Miami. This would be catastrophic — displacing large populations, causing unrest and costing trillions of dollars. Low-lying island nations face the threat of being swallowed by rising seas.

There is no doubt that the climate is warming. It is essential that governments at national, state and local levels take action in earnest to prevent the worst impacts of climate change. Bold energy policies with mandates and timelines are urgently needed to shift to clean, renewable energy, increase energy efficiency, and cut carbon emissions that cause global warming.

## Volunteer Connection

Volunteer Connection is an effort by the Sierra Club's Leader Recruitment Committee. The mission of Volunteer Connection is to connect individuals with Sierra Club volunteer positions, and to encourage and support recruitment, growth, and sustainability of volunteer leadership in the Sierra Club.

Volunteers play an incredibly important role in the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club is essentially a volunteer-run organization whose members currently take on many assignments and positions within the organization - all in their spare time. SC volunteers work on national, regional and local issues and campaigns.

### How to find volunteer opportunities:

1. Go to our NYS Chapter's (Atlantic Chapter) website: <http://atlantic2.sierraclub.org/>
2. On the Home Page - Go to the left hand column and click on "Volunteer with the Atlantic Chapter today!" This will take you to the Volunteer Connection "Find Opportunities" page.
3. Enter your zip code to find local opportunities. National and regional SC opportunities are also listed if you are interested in any of these.
4. There is an optional skills/interest checklist available.

Please contact [sierraclubangela@gmail.com](mailto:sierraclubangela@gmail.com) if you have any questions or need assistance.

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