



The Trailblazer

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The Echoes of Rachel Carson – Our Dilemma

By Art Klein

About fifty years ago my mother changed my life with a Book of the Month Club selection, *The Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson. Mom didn't care for it, but she knew it had something to do with water, and thought I might like it.

I began reading reluctantly, and then could not put it down as I learned that chemicals such as DDT were not the great benefits my generation had been educated to believe. In fact, human made chemicals were permeating the earth, altering our soil and water with contamination. I learned that these chemicals had invaded, affected and even multiplied in the tissues of our bodies. Rachel Carson, with carefully documented research and observations, reported that DDT not only eliminated insects, but seriously effected bird life and seashore organisms, threatening life on earth.

Unfortunately, like most, I was soon comforted from my initial alarm by the national reaction that followed. I witnessed the birth of the modern environmental movement and like most of America, relaxed. We were soothed with congressional hearings, full and frequent newspaper coverage that challenged Carson, and even passed new federal environmental regulations. With flair of bugles, the cavalry arrived and we were safe!

But not quite! The chemical industry and the beginning of its huge Washington lobbying ensured the delay of the implementation of these federal environmental protections. Federal laws such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) that set up the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) took years to be formed, and even though statutes affecting chemical contamination passed and DDT was virtually banned, it was with many exemptions, conditions and loopholes.

Even Ms. Carson, our first environmental heroine, first consulted by the Congress and a brief media star, was vilified as a phony alarmist by the industry. Her professional credentials and research were denigrated with a well-executed campaign to cast doubt over the validity of her warnings.

'Big Chem' destroyed this person's sanctity. She died broken hearted in 1964, honored by fellow scientists, but isolated from most of us by the propaganda. Sadly, even after her death, Rachel Carson's warnings of the impacts of chemicals, especially arsenic, in our food chain were smothered by the chemical industry. Many of her investigations and the rules and regulations that followed were diluted and ignored by the end of the 1960's. But many people continued to believe in her message and Rachel Carson was notably honored on the first Earth Day in 1970.

But at the end of the 1970s, Love Canal, right here

in Niagara County, resurrected the threat of chemical contamination on our health and developed new rounds of federal and state statutes to protect human health including Superfund Legislation. Rachel Carson's warnings were heard again, but again, there was a campaign to cast doubt on the legitimacy of her insights on the role of chemical toxicity on health.

The 1980's era of 'Government is the Enemy' undermined and shelved much environmental progress and regulation. The Chemo-Petro Industries influenced Congress to dilute protective laws or just de-fund them altogether. Even today the business and industrial communities are the first to complain that any regulation stifles all development and seek to undermine them.

But here we are again at the beginning of the 21st century with a potentially new chemical horror. The horizontal drilling of shale rock, called Fracking, can produce natural gas as a new incredible supply of fuel. But it also brings new and much greater threats of chemical contamination. New York State is currently weighing the pros and cons of whether to allow it here.

Our state and its citizens are right to be wary. Many areas of the nation already used for fracking are reeling from its effects without careful deliberation over the benefits from the detriments. Over 650 chemicals are mixed with millions of gallons of water to facilitate the drilling, known in the industry as fluid fracking or specifically, High Volume Water Fracking (HVWF). All that fluid and all those chemicals will impact the quality and quantity of water in any location.

New York must rely on our Department of Environmental Conservation to protect our lands and waters as there is little Federal protection from the possible harm of fracking. Thanks to a waiver developed by former Vice President Dick Cheney, HVWF is currently exempt from the Federal Protection of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), a statute intended to keep American water from ever being chemically infected. This waiver alone should frighten the nation. We also have no federal protection from fracking pollution covered in the Clean Water Act (CWA) and most tenets of the Clean Air Act (CAA). The industry is off the hook on the Superfund Act if some spectacularly bad things are discovered after the companies have departed or disbanded.

Consider also, that we may never know what chemicals the drillers employ and those they discard since fracking is free from the reporting requirements of any Federal Toxic Release Inventory Report, a statute that was developed to protect us from some of the very chemicals that are common in fracking. In the

draft Environmental Impact Statement submitted from DEC to the State, the watersheds of New York City and Syracuse watersheds are exempted from fracking. However, areas in the Finger Lakes and Southern Tier, some of the better agricultural areas of the state, would be open for fracking if the current moratorium is lifted, endangering both the tourism and agricultural sectors of our economy.

Another special concern of the lack of Federal protection in Western New York is that any fracking upstream from New York in Pennsylvania or Ohio could contaminate Lake Erie, the Niagara River, Lake Ontario, and our WNY water supply. While each of our upstream neighbors have their own approaches to handling the chemicals resulting from fracking, there is no uniform standard for the Great Lakes Basin. And each day we hear more about the levels of contamination in our food and their effect on children. All of this echoes Rachel Carson's warning fifty years ago!

Our Sierra challenges are two-fold, and not light. First, we must ensure our own state does not threaten the future of our water by permitting hydrofracking in New York. Second, we must work to ensure our Great Lakes do not become contaminated. Our tasks are mighty and noble, and our resolve cannot be weak. It may not be stylish to urge greater Federal Regulation, but obviously bereft of reasonable and rational controls, we are headed for perilous times. If we fail, how can we justify our greedy exploitation of temporary fuel in exchange for poisoned water wells? What will happen to our fragile water system of the future? What will we tell our children and grandchildren? After fifty years of an inadequate effort to protect the environment and human health, will WE, in this generation, be the ones to create a Silent Spring?

Hello from the new Trailblazer editor

By Pamela Hughes

When I first realized that last year's Sierra Excom voted to appoint me as the new editor, following in the footsteps of Charles Lamb, I was exhilarated at occupying such an honorable post. My commitment to raising awareness of critically relevant environmental issues in our community has never been stronger during such fast-changing times. Thanks to all for this opportunity.

A Special Thank You to Paul Maine and Liz Kaszubski

Thanks to Paul Maine for being our loyal secretary for many years. While still an active Executive Committee member, he now gets to come to the meetings and participate without having to get everything down on paper! Paul started showing up at the meetings and found them to be pleurably enlightening, and says he wouldn't have missed them for all the world. At one of these meetings, Larry Beahan suggested he become more active and get a computer so that he could follow the issues of the SC better. (Thanks, Larry). Although he doesn't remember exactly when he became the Niagara Group secretary, it must have been after the group started meeting at Daeman. Taking his job seriously, he carefully read Robert's Rules of Order, but quickly realized that they needed to be adapted a little to our particular meeting

situation, especially with regard to the question of incorporating the various reports into the minutes. Paul refused to let us be sloppy and insisted on getting resolutions, names and dates correct by stopping the meeting and being sure that not only he, but the rest of us were clear about what we were proposing. Recently, at a discussion on "Clean Water and WNY's Future" held at the Burchfield Penny, it appeared that we were, again, "preaching to the choir." Why do people reject knowledge and information about serious environmental issues and even become hostile toward the findings. Paul challenges all of us: How do we reach out to those hostile masses, whether they are located around us locally or in Albany or in Washington – or Western New York?

Also, thank you to Liz Kaszubski, former Sierra

Club Niagara Group Executive Committee, but remains the Atlantic Chapter Wetland Chair. Liz Kaszubski has been involved with wetland issues since 1997 when Benderson proposed a Tops International to be built in the state and federally regulated Klydel Wetland in North Tonawanda. The Klydel Wetland has been the location of many 'dumb' development proposals, all of them stopped by the efforts of Sierra Club, Buffalo Audubon, the WNYLC, and local students and neighborhood organizations. Liz describes her work as being focused on the protection of NYS wetlands and since the late 1990s, she and Joe Gardella have been involved in efforts to improve state wetland maps that are woefully inadequate in many areas of New York, especially WNY, and also helping others protect wetlands in their towns.

Emerald Ash Borer in New York

By Mark Whitmore, PhD, Cornell University

The Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), *Agrilus planipennis*, is a small metallic green beetle that feeds on the inner bark of ash trees, killing them in a few years. EAB, a native of eastern Asia, was likely established near Detroit, MI, in the 1990's but was not identified until the early 2000's. Since that time it has spread to 15 states and 2 provinces. This is one of the most important forest pests to hit North America since the Chestnut Blight and Dutch Elm Disease. If you don't know anything about it you should be paying close attention because the EAB will impact us all. It will be causing untold millions of dollars in damages to rural and urban forests and utility infrastructure throughout the state in the upcoming years and everyone will benefit by being prepared for an EAB arrival.

EAB adults are about 1/2 inch in length and emerge from under the bark of ash trees in late May and June leaving behind their classic "D" shaped emergence hole. Evidence from infestations indicates EAB is a strong flier and quickly moves across the landscape. Eggs are laid through July on the bark of live ash trees. Larvae bore into and feed on the inner bark through summer and early fall making a characteristic "S" shaped feeding gallery. It is this feeding activity that eventually kills the tree by girdling it, or cutting off the tissue conducting food to the roots. The larvae embed themselves about one-half inch into the wood. This is important to remember because though you can peel the bark off a tree, there may still be EAB present in the wood. They will emerge as adults on average in late May.

EAB feed only on ash trees, the "Genus Fraxinus". There are 16 species of ash in North America and all appear to be susceptible. In New York we have more ash trees than any other state. The three species we have are White, Green, and Black ash. They are important economically for timber and shade trees, ecologically in early successional areas and in wetlands, and culturally for Native American basketry.

It is important to remember that currently less than 1% of New York's forests are infested. Now is the time when our management efforts will have an impact. There have been 13 locations where EAB has been detected in NY, and all but 5 are still very small. The largest is in Ulster County covering an area of about 120 square miles. Infestations in Chili (Monroe County), Lancaster (Erie County), Randolph (Cattaraugus County), and Bath (Steuben County) are all relatively small at about 10 to 15 square miles. Other infestations in the state are so small that we are counting individually infested trees, but this will change. Maps of the infestations can be found at www.nyis.info/eab.

So what can we do? The state's strategy is to slow the spread so individuals and communities have time to plan ahead. The key to this strategy is early detection, and that is something anyone can do. The most common tool used to detect EAB is the sticky Purple Prism Trap (PPT). PPT's are about three feet tall, a foot in width, and hung from the branches of ash trees. They are easily seen from a distance and are frankly one of the best EAB outreach tools we have; people always want to know what the heck those purple contraptions are. However, PPT's are currently unavailable to the public and are somewhat ineffective so we must use the signs and symptoms of EAB infestation on ash trees.

Recognizing signs and symptoms of EAB infestation is an interesting way to view nature. It requires being able to identify ash trees and then looking for different indications that EAB might be infesting a tree. The key to understanding these signs and symptoms is to understand the concept of pest pressure. Quite simply put, pest pressure is the number of bugs in an area at one point in time attacking a tree. If pest pressure is high there are lots of bugs out there and the trees will die quickly, exhibiting quite different symptoms from those at low pest pressure when it

will take years for EAB to kill a tree.

The biggest problem we have had managing EAB is that at the very earliest stages of an infestation, it is extremely difficult to detect their presence. A few EAB can attack a tree and it will remain looking perfectly healthy. There are multiple ways of detecting signs of EAB infestation. For more information, relevant web-pages have been provided following this article.

The formation of local EAB Task Forces is an important step for minimizing the economic impact of EAB. Their goal is to enhance planning, inter-municipal cooperation, the efficient use of local resources, be a reliable source of information, and an organized place for volunteers to go. There are many important issues that need to be considered such as liability issues with dead and dying ash trees demanding the fast removal of infested trees before they are a threat to public health. Ash fall down quickly after dying so tree removal or treatment costs can be significant and occur over a short time period. Planning is the key to mitigating these costs and it is important that all communities in the northeast, infested or not, begin the planning process now because EAB will be at your doorstep soon. There are four EAB Task Forces set up in the state now; in the Buffalo area, in Monroe County, and in Greene and Ulster Counties. Contact information for the Task Forces can be found at: www.nyis.info/eab.

Finally, everyone needs to minimize the movement of firewood

so the spread of EAB can be slowed down. The movement of firewood is the reason EAB has spread so rapidly. We must take ownership of this issue and help our neighbors understand that the movement of untreated firewood threatens the health of our forests from not only EAB, but any new invaders that may appear. In New York it is now the law that no untreated firewood can enter the state and firewood produced within the state cannot be moved more than 50 miles. As NYS-DEC Commissioner Grannis has stated "We understand that people aren't being intentionally reckless when they use wood from their own lot or bring it with them across the state to go camping, but everyone needs to understand the potentially devastating effects on our forests and our communities from the bugs that infest untreated firewood."

Remember that over time EAB will affect us all. We need to take ownership and help others in our community understand the issues, the profound economic impacts, and the need to plan ahead. To report EAB or for more information on the EAB and issues concerning its impact on communities contact your local Cornell Cooperative Extension or NYSDEC office or visit the following web pages:

<http://nyis.info/eab>

<http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7253.html>

Sierra Club Niagara Group Annual Dinner

The Niagara Group Annual Awards Dinner is scheduled for Wednesday, May 2 at Milo's Restaurant 5877 Main Street, Williamsville, New York 14221. The function will commence 5:45 pm and dinner will be served at 6:30 pm. This is always a fun event where you are able to meet fellow Sierrans, Executive Committee members and award recipients. All of our members are invited. Please call or e-mail Larry Snider to confirm your attendance and make dinner reservations. Contact Larry at: (716) 634-8715 or sniderlarry50@yahoo.com.

Environmental Science Competition

by Vicki Southall

The Sierra Club/Niagara Group is pleased to announce the winners of our first Environmental Science Competition. The goals of the competition are to bring Environmental Science to high school classrooms and encourage students to learn about the natural environment and how to protect it. Teachers in grades 9 – 12 in Western New York were invited to participate.

We were pleased to award first place to Doug Hollinger of Pavilion Central School in Genesee County. Mr. Hollinger founded a Global Youth Service Team in 2006. His teams of students have built solar energy and water purification systems along the Thailand-Burma border. Their work is ongoing.

Second place goes to Dr. Manju Prakash from Archbishop Walsh Academy in Olean NY. Dr. Prakash's project promotes energy conservation programs in the school, family and community and creates awareness of renewable and non-renewable sources of energy.

Mr. Mark Ricupito from Sweet Home High School in Amherst NY is our third place recipient. Mr. Ricupito and his students are addressing the key issues of sustainable living, environmental health and zero waste. They will be designing a rain barrel, which will provide water for herbs and vegetables in their sustainable garden.

We were fortunate to have Barry Boyer, Julie O'Neill and Richard Lippes, three distinguished members of the environmental community as our judges and we thank them for their time and effort. Our award winners and a student of their choice will be our guests at the Sierra/Niagara Annual Dinner in May. At that time they will give a brief update on the status of their projects.

Congratulations to all on a job well done.

The Sierra Club Tells Natural Gas Company to Pay Up

Joint PA Atlantic Chapter Sierra Club Press Release on US Energy

Today, Sierra Club's Pennsylvania and Atlantic Chapters supported the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (NYDEC) decision to fine U.S. Energy Development Corp. for its pollution of a creek in New York's Allegany State Park. NYDEC is seeking \$187,500 for the company's polluting of a trout stream.

"We thank the New York DEC for standing up and making U.S. Energy Development Corp. pay for the damages it is causing," said Jeff Schmidt, Director of Sierra Club's Pennsylvania Chapter. "Pennsylvania's waters deserve as much protection as the waters in New York. The Corbett Administration and Secretary Krancer need to start protecting Pennsylvania's waters instead of passing the work off on other environmental protection agencies. As happened in Dimock, PA another regulator again has had to step in after DEP failed to execute its responsibilities."

"U.S. Energy Corp. is not new to drilling violations," said Larry Beahan, Conservation Chair of Sierra Club's Atlantic Chapter Niagara Group. "We've reviewed 181 instances where this company committed violations while putting its profits ahead of the people. New York DEC's decision clearly demonstrates that Pennsylvania's oil and gas regulation system is tragically inept and if its DEP can't get a handle on the drilling, the NY DEC has to do it." The excessive sediment pollution was caused by improper and inadequate erosion and sedimentation controls at a drilling site in the Allegheny National Forest in northern Pennsylvania. Large amounts of soil-laden runoff entered Yeager Brook. Yeager Brook runs north, from its headwaters in Pennsylvania into the park in New York.

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