



# The Trailblazer

The Niagara Group of The Sierra Club • <http://NiagaraSierraClub.com> • Vol. 52 No. 3 July 2017

## The People's Climate March

The People's Climate March on April 29, 2017 drew more than 200,000 people to the nation's capital, and tens of thousands more to 370 sister marches across the country. The march in Washington D.C. extended for over 20 blocks down Pennsylvania Avenue, as participants stood up for "climate, jobs and justice." Students, workers, faith communities, Indigenous Nations, community organizations, and environmental groups joined together to defend our communities. The Sierra Club Niagara was a proud sponsor and sent two buses with more than one hundred people to the march. The following is one account of the experience.

### The People's Climate March, by John S. Szalasny, Executive Committee member

April 29, 2017 marked the 100<sup>th</sup> day of the Trump administration and my first protest march in Washington DC. As I was walking past the Trump Hotel during the People's Climate March, the irony struck me. The President left the nation's capital to hold a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, while citizens of the United States came to march down Pennsylvania Avenue raising their voices in support of the environment.

Buffalo was well represented at the rally. As our buses drove through the night, I reflected on things that happened along the way. We started by missing the on-ramp to the 290. Was this a sign that we all have gone off course? Why is the country fighting the same environmental battles that our parents dealt with in the 60's and 70's? It was a Republican President who created a cabinet level post for the environment (later to become the EPA), signed legislation for the Clean Air Act as well as billions of dollars for clean water projects. Why is a Republican President

threatening to throw away these accomplishments?

While we were on the highway, we drove through overcast skies. Were the hidden stars symbolic of the lack of a guiding light? Consensus of opinion ranks this administration as the least effective in its first 100 days. We also drove through storms, much like the storm clouds around the administration's dealings with Russia prior to the election.

As we drove over the Susquehanna River into Harrisburg, fog obscured our view. Could my inability to see downriver be a mirror the administration's unclear environmental path? After all, the head of the EPA has sued the EPA 18 times, but our Secretary of State, a former CEO of ExxonMobil, wanted us to uphold the US commitments from the Paris Climate Agreement. And how does one gauge the head of the Department of Energy? He wanted to abolish the Department as a Presidential candidate, but was the Governor of Texas, the largest wind power electric producer in the nation.

Arriving in Washington, the impact of marching with 200,000 people struck home. Riding the subway



to the rally had me asking: What can our politicians do to the planet while I am kept in the dark? What deals can be made in the shadows that favor the few over the masses? Stop musing – which stop was the closest to our organizing area?

Once off the subway, I could see the need for organization in the nation's capital in the midst of chaos. Not knowing exactly where we were, my friends and I were swept on by the crowds. Gathering the hundred people from our buses together proved to be impossible. Some marched behind Al Gore. I started alongside Wonder Woman (with Lady Liberty as backup) on a bicycle cart singing "This Land Is Your Land". I wanted to ask, "Where's the anthem for our age?" but she got swept back by the fluid crowds.

The march had an unexpected detour, as our route past the White House was blocked off. They did not, however block off the route past the Trump International Hotel. As I passed, I thought, what a fitting symbol of the current administration. Something that should be illegal (the President is profiting from a building owned by the government) but the Domestic Emoluments Clause of the US Constitution will likely never be enforced under this administration.

On the way back to Buffalo, the same nagging question kept coming to me. Did our march (as well as sister marches like the one in Buffalo) help save the earth? The answer finally came to me. We don't need to save the earth. It will be here even with climate change. The focus of the People's Climate March was to point out the risk of our ability to live on our changing planet. Hopefully, our political leaders got the message.

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## Executive Committee Member Candidacy Nominations – Fall Election 2017

By Pamela Hughes, Chairperson

The Sierra Club Niagara Group is currently accepting nominations for election to our Executive Committee. There are six open positions that require a commitment of a two-year term in office if elected. Only Sierra Club members in good standing may be nominated; members may self-nominate for candidacy to the Executive Committee.

The Executive Committee governs the local execution of the Sierra Club's mission of environmental protection and conservation. Board members are encouraged to initiate and implement their own campaigns that range from protecting habitat, water systems, and wildlife; to educating local municipalities on nuclear waste transport; and much more. Please

review our website ([niagarasierraclub.com](http://niagarasierraclub.com)) for more information on our campaigns and mission.

We have been very fortunate to have extremely devoted and creative volunteers, who demonstrate abundant dedication to our natural world, to serve on the Executive Committee. Board positions require a time and energy commitment that should not be underestimated. Candidates are urged to consider personal priorities when applying.

To accept a nomination, or to self-nominate for election, please submit your resume/CV, including all contact information. You should also provide, in no more than one page, answers to the three numbered items below. Nominations must be received by

September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017.

Describe your academic and professional background, and/or other relevant experience with environmental justice.

Explain why you are seeking a position on the Sierra Club Niagara Group (SCNG) Board. Outline the specific skills you bring, or contributions you hope to make, to the SCNG Board.

Nominations should be sent to: **Sierra Club Niagara Group, P.O. Box 1127, Williamsville, NY 14221**. For any questions, please use our website contact email with "Nominations Committee" in the subject line. Thank you in advance for your interest in serving for and protecting our natural world.

## Everyone's Help is Needed to Save the ESA!

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) is a critical wildlife protection law. Over 90% of American voters support the ESA, which has protected 99% of listed species from extinction. The current government is looking to undermine wildlife preservation by removing the legal protection that the ESA offers to all animals, and most especially to the vulnerable wolves.

A recent anti-wildlife act – misleadingly named "HELP for Wildlife Act (S.1514) – was advanced in the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. Within this Act is an anti-wolf amendment, where the

legislation would permanently remove the ESA protection for gray wolves in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and Wyoming and allow trophy hunters to go after wolves.

Please call your Senator and urge them to oppose anti-ESA legislation! We need our Senators to oppose any legislative attempts to change the ESA and they need to hear that the majority want federal wildlife protections maintained. The full Senate will be voting next on this anti-wildlife bill, so thank you for reaching out to your elected officials to ask them to oppose S.1514.

## Volunteer Opportunities for SC Niagara Group Members – Help with Tabling!

The SC Niagara Group is looking for volunteers to help "people the tables" at varied events this year. Tabling is a wonderful form of grassroots communication – a way to meet the public and let them know that we have a group right here in WNY. It may involve such activities as handing out SC national and/or local information and getting petitions signed. Short training sessions are available. If interested in volunteering, please email: <https://niagarasierraclub.com/about/contact-us/>

## Zero Emission Buses (ZEBs) on the Roll!

Sierra Club Niagara's Energy Committee has been leading an exciting campaign, spearheaded by member Rick Steinberg, to encourage and support the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority's (NFTA) purchase of ten Zero Emission Buses (ZEBs).

### Why electric and why now?

- Across New York State, communities are transitioning to ZEBs as they realize that we must stop using dirty fossil fuels as soon as possible.
- NYC, Albany and Rochester already have them on order for their fleets. And as the second largest city in the state, Buffalo is overdue to make this transition.
- There is money available from the Volkswagen settlement, in addition to other state and federal grant opportunities.
- While diesel buses get 2.9 – 4 miles per gallon, hybrids get 6 mpg, and compressed natural gas buses get 3 mpg while still emitting carbon dioxide (and potentially leaking methane), the ZEB gets 26 mpg! It also has regenerative braking to charge the battery throughout the ride.
- The ZEB has minimal danger associated with storage, unlike compressed natural gas busses which can leak and explode.
- ZEBs are economical, having 30% fewer moving parts than conventional engines resulting in fewer breakdowns, and they have no fumes or oil clogging up the system.

As NY State moves from 25 to 50% dependence on renewable sources of electricity by 2030, these buses will translate to cleaner air, land and water.

Over the past two months, Sierra Club Niagara has hosted beautiful electric *Protterra* (Latin meaning "for the earth") buses to show the NFTA and our community how quietly and cleanly it will run through our neighborhoods. We canvassed businesses and tabled at events to garner over one thousand signatures of support for this renewable transportation, and continue to promote this smarter, cleaner transportation alternative. Show your support by adding your signature to our ZEB petition at [niagarasierraclub.com](http://niagarasierraclub.com)!

- Sara Schultz, *Executive Committee and Energy Committee member*

### Ways to keep updated on Sierra Club Niagara Group News:

- \* Group website - [niagarasierraclub.com](http://niagarasierraclub.com)
- \* Facebook - [sierra club niagara group](https://www.facebook.com/sierraclubniagara)
- \* Twitter - [@sierraniagara](https://twitter.com/sierraniagara)
- \* We are on MeetUp

*The remaining days of summer are a perfect time to catch up on environmental reading. We offer the following list of contemporary titles and classics that will raise your awareness and inspire you to celebrate and protect nature!*

Kolbert, Elizabeth. *The Sixth Extinction: an Unnatural History*. New York :Henry Holt and Company, 2014.

- Stanford University's Three Books summer reading series includes this title. Dr. Noah Diffenbaugh, a climate scientist, provides this summary: "Kolbert traces the intellectual history of how scientists came to understand extinction and woke up to the impact we are having on the planet's ecosystems. That prospect is decidedly bad news - and bad news fascinates readers, says Kolbert... She brings the morbid subject to life with fascinating descriptions of creatures and places across the globe - and with a good dose of humor."

Abbey, Edward. *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1975.

- Not sure how to respond to the current assault on the environment and the agencies and regulations established to protect it? Neither was society in the early 1970s as expansion and "modernization" compromised wilderness in the American west. Abbey's book set a tone for eco-resistance that spawned EarthFirst!, the Earth Liberation Front, and a series of activist responses.

Bekoff, Marc. *Rewilding our Hearts: Building Pathways of Compassion and Coexistence*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2014.

- This book begins by explaining "rewilding" as the restoration of habitats and creation of corridors between preserved lands to allow declining populations to rebound. But it expands the discussion of benefits to include human attitudes and the reestablishment of connections between humans and nature. Bekoff's work encourages us to rediscover respect and awe for all that is wild.

Egan, Daniel. *The Death and Life of the Great Lakes*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2017.

- This is the story of the Great Lakes' "radical ecological mutations" which have been ongoing since the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825. The book details the "parade of evermore villainous invaders" from the lamprey eel, to the alewife fish, to the modern problem of zebra and quagga mussels, each of which has adversely affected the health and native biodiversity of the riparian ecosystem. Although the past has involved a devastatingly destructive history, the author provides a cautiously optimistic account that includes concrete and achievable solutions to future threats.

Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1949.

- Leopold's words are beautiful, passionate, and as relevant today as they were in the middle of last century: "There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot. These essays are the delights and dilemmas of one who cannot. Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face

### Upcoming Activities and Actions

Go to for [NiagaraSierraClub.com](http://NiagaraSierraClub.com) event details.

- The Interfaith Climate Justice Community of WNY will hold its general meeting on August 16, 2017, 6 pm at St. Joseph's University Church. The groups will formulate plans for programs on Creation Spirituality, greening houses of worship/homes, and advocacy for the NYS Climate and Community Protection Act and the NYS Public Pension Fund Divestment Act.

- The Adirondack Mountain Club - Niagara Frontier Chapter Conservation Committee is presenting a "Conservation Conversation" on September 16, 2017. This year's topic is Mitigating Climate Change. The conversation will involve methods to decrease the effect of climate change on people, communities and aquatic ecosystems. This program is offered at no charge as part of an educational outreach to individuals, policy makers and community activists about climate change and how each of us can participate in decreasing the effect it has on the planet. Please visit the ADK - NFC web page for more information: <http://bit.ly/2017-Conservation-Conversation>

- The 2017 Buffalo Humanities Festival is based on the theme "Environments" and takes place from September 28-30 at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery and Buffalo State College's Rockwell Hall. The festival includes talks, music, performances, community debates, and other activities, and will feature environmentalist author and social activist Bill McKibben. More information on the conference can be found at: [buffalohumanities.org/2017-festival/](http://buffalohumanities.org/2017-festival/).

the question of whether a still higher 'standard of living' is worth its cost in things natural, wild, and free. For us of the minority, the opportunity to see geese is more important than television, and the chance to find a pasque-flower is a right as inalienable as free speech."

Marshall, George. *Don't Even Think About It: Why Our Brains are Wired to Ignore Climate Change*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014.

- A psychological and cultural study of why climate change and environmental degradation don't seem to matter to most Americans. Worse yet, efforts to raise consciousness and individual responsibility are more likely, according to Marshall, to result in resentment and unproductive guilt. The explanation is eye-opening and useful for thinking about strategies of engagement and empowerment to protect the planet.

Wulf, Andrea. *The Invention of Nature: The Adventures of Alexander von Humboldt, the Lost Hero of Science*. New York: Knopf, 2015.

- A biographical account of the Prussian naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, a polymath, author and explorer. His work involved identifying universal rules for the cosmos and transformed our understanding of physical geography, meteorology, and nature itself.

## End Disposable Bag Pollution in Erie County

By Brian Smith, *Citizens Campaign for the Environment*

to do their part to help end single-use bag pollution. Now we need you to get involved:

- **Call on elected leaders to take action.** CCE has a web page dedicated to the issue and includes an easy link to contact Erie County Legislators: [www.citizenscampaign.org/campaigns/plastic-bags.asp](http://www.citizenscampaign.org/campaigns/plastic-bags.asp).
- **Spread the word on social media.** Snap a picture the next time you see a bag littered in your community and share with #ErieBYOBAG. The Buffalo Zoo also has selfie-station in its Arctic Edge exhibit, which encourages visitors to take a picture with Terra (a polar bear sculpture made of single-use bags) and share on social media with #ErieBYOBAG.
- **Learn more about the bag issue on a new County website.** [www.erie.gov/byobag](http://www.erie.gov/byobag) has lots of valuable information, including recently aired radio ads (sponsored by the Erie County Environmental Management Council).

Erie County stood as a national environmental leader in 2015 when it unanimously passed a local law that banned the sale of personal care products that contain plastic microbeads, due to the damage that this form of plastic pollution causes to the health of our

Great Lakes. Ending single-use bag pollution is a logical next step.

The County Executive's call to address this pervasive problem makes this a critical time for the community to come together in Western New York and work to reduce this persistent source of pollution and waste.

**"Backyard habitats are part of the network that sustains biodiversity in urban and urbanizing landscapes by providing refuges and connectivity between green spaces."**

- *Migratory Dragonfly Partnership*,  
[www.migratorydragonflypartnership.org](http://www.migratorydragonflypartnership.org)

Like many communities across the nation and the globe, concern is growing in Western New York about the pollution caused by single-use plastic and paper bags, which are environmentally harmful and completely unnecessary. Single-use bags may only be used for a short time, but can have an impact that can last for many, many years.

Reducing single-use plastic and paper bags in Erie County will reduce litter in our parks, open spaces, roads, and shorelines; save valuable natural resources; protect wildlife and the Great Lakes; and promote the cost-effective and environmentally friendly alternative, reusable bags. According to Wegmans, if each of its customers used just one reusable shopping bag for each shopping trip, it would result in the reduction of 330 million single-use bags per year!

The Sierra Club is working to end bag pollution with a coalition of partners, including Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE), Erie County, the Buffalo Zoo, the Erie County Environmental Management Council, Alliance for the Great Lakes, Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper, the Partnership for the Public Good, and others. The coalition is working to raise awareness about how the public can reduce pollution by choosing to bring reusable bags to the store, and calling on elected leaders