



The Trailblazer

The Niagara Group of The Sierra Club • <http://NiagaraSierraClub.com> • Vol. 53 No. 1 January 2018

Letter from the Chair

On behalf of Sierra Club Niagara I want to wish all of our members and supporters a very healthy and hopeful 2018! This year our Chair, Pamela Hughes, stepped down after leading us for 2 years. Chairing our Niagara Group, with over 3,700 members in seven counties, is no small task. We are all so grateful for her dedication and commitment. She has been at the front lines through many of our toughest campaigns, such as fighting the Northern Access Pipeline and the National Grid rate hike. Pamela took on the huge responsibility of editing our Trailblazer and arranged a Solar PV training for Niagara County municipalities. From her first involvement with the protection of old growth trees in the Erie County Forest to this difficult time of national environmental assault, her love for the natural world has driven her to make our community cleaner and safer for the next generation. Thank you Pamela, from all of us!

This has been a difficult year for all of us who care about the environment and worry about global warming. We are grateful to Governor Cuomo for stepping up with very serious initiatives to reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions and lower New York's carbon footprint. He has committed to phase out coal power plants and to reduce pollutants from peaking units by 2020. We applaud his efforts to promote Electric Vehicles with new charging stations around the state and his support of Zero Emission Buses. It is exciting that he set up a task force with the intention of reducing the proliferation of plastic bags from our land-

scape, waterways and landfills. He has committed to 800 MW of offshore wind projects in 2018-2019 and \$200 million in energy storage. Zero Cost Solar for All Program will provide PV energy for 10,000 low-income New Yorkers. It is very important to continue to push him toward renewable and sustainable energy initiatives. He needs to know that New Yorkers want assurance that our drinking water is protected and that our food and air are not toxic. He needs to know that we do not want expansion of natural gas infrastructure which would be contrary to his clean energy goals. All of your legislators need to know that this is what you value and you expect them to represent those values. They do count the calls, emails, petitions and letters that come from their constituents. Every comment is important. Be an armchair warrior! Our future depends on each of us.

If sitting is not your thing, please come out to one of our events, programs or meetings. We are working on different local campaigns: to promote renewables, environmental justice in front line communities, to support the Governor's move toward divestment of the NY State Common Retirement Fund from fossil fuels, to educate our communities about habitat and wildlife, and to promote Outer Harbor appropriate development. We have also organized anti-"bomb train" and anti-nuclear waste transport actions, and advocate for West Valley clean up, along with much more. It is overwhelming for us to do this all without your participation. Please check our website or join Sierra Club

Niagara Meetup and make a plan to join this challenging but fulfilling mission. "To change everything, we need everyone" – Naomi Klein's words are more true and more important than ever for this new year!

- Sara Schultz, Sierra Club Niagara Group Chair

Sierra Club Niagara Board of Directors

All six nominations for board membership as published in the last Trailblazer newsletter have been elected to the Sierra Club Niagara Group Board of Directors for 2018 and 2019 calendar period:

- Diana Strablow
- Pamela Hughes
- Lynda Schneekloth
- Richard Lippez
- Roger Cook
- Sara Schultz

Congratulations to all!

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Nicole Gerber & Dave Reilly, Trailblazer Co-Editors

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Sierra Club Niagara Divests!

In a letter dated December 30, 2017, and signed by Board Member Charley Bowman and Chair Pamela Hughes, the Sierra Club Niagara Group informed M&T Bank of the Executive Committee's decision to close our bank account and move the funds to a local credit union. The reason was the discovery of filings with the US Securities and Exchange Commission that indicate M&T Bank is a member of a consortium of financial institutions that is lending \$1.25 billion to National Fuel Gas Company.

The following banks are included in the consortium: Citizens Bank, KeyBank, First Niagara, JP Morgan Chase,

Bank of America, HSBC, Wells Fargo, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, U.S. Bank, PNC Bank, Bank of New York Mellon, Comerica, and Branch Banking and Trust.

The consortium money would be used, in part, to fund the Northern Access Pipeline, a project that has been postponed due to local organizing and activism and subsequent DEC rulings. The proposed 97-mile pipeline would carry fracked gas from Pennsylvania to the Canadian Border near Niagara Falls, NY.

The letter identifies two primary concerns with this project: waterbody disturbances and atmospheric greenhouse gases.

- The pipeline could cross 180 streams, 270 wetlands and 7 ponds
- The Northern Access Pipeline could carry 124.2 billion cubic feet of methane annually, equivalent to 26% of the volume of methane burned annually in NY State to generate electricity. Its combustion could add 7.4 million metric tons (MMT) of CO2 annually to the atmosphere. Those CO2 emissions are equivalent to:
- the yearly emissions of 1.565 million passenger cars
- the annual emissions from 16.5% of NY State's registered passenger cars
- 3.4% of NY State's 2014 total greenhouse gas emissions

The concern of the Sierra Club Niagara Executive Committee is that "On any scale, the Northern Access Pipeline could have a huge impact on greenhouse gas inventories." At a time when the world is transitioning to renewable sources of energy, the group is resolute in its conclusion that the era of making money from new and existing fossil fuel infrastructure is drawing to a close. Not only is Niagara Sierra Club not willing to be a party to funding this infrastructure, it has actively worked to block this project.

The letter offers recommendations to M & T Bank:

- Divest from the Northern Access Pipeline.
- Facilitate the unstoppable transition to electric vehicle, hybrid vehicle, solar array, energy efficiency, and geothermal heating/cooling ownership by offering loans at reduced interest rates. And shout about this!
- In loan agreements, make a general statement that M & T Bank will not condone their borrowers damaging the environment even if such damage is

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HELPING WILDLIFE



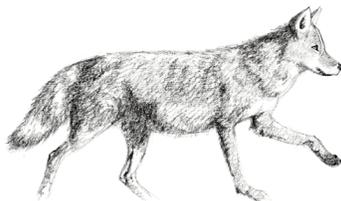
With an ever-increasing loss of natural environment and wildlife habitats through land development and human influences, wild animals are losing their homes and their food sources. Species endangerment and extinction is occurring at an alarming rate. This loss of critical biodiversity calls for a collective effort to preserve and protect the habitats and the wildlife - from your backyard to your municipality, within your state, and throughout the country and across the globe. When local and state

topics and issues arise that will have a harmful impact on wildlife, take action and do what you can to protect all the animals that share the environment with us.

"All around the world there is an awakening of understanding and compassion, an understanding that reaches out to help the suffering animals in their vanishing homelands."

- Jane Goodall

You can support local efforts to help wildlife! Come to the Erie County SPCA "Wildlife Baby Shower" on Saturday, March 10, 300 Harlem Road, West Seneca from 10am-2pm. With spring approaching, the SPCA will soon see an influx of orphaned and injured baby wild animals. This event will celebrate all things wild with visits with live animals and wildlife ambassadors, tours of the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, and raffles and kids' activities. Come learn and help support local wildlife and because it is a "baby shower" you can help by bringing gifts! Go to "YourSPCA.org" or call 716-875-7360 (ext. 220) for gift ideas and more information.



Political Committee: Work Has Just Begun!

In our October newsletter we listed the sixteen candidates for local offices who were endorsed by the Sierra Club Niagara. Of those, nine won their elections:

Patrick Burke (Erie Co. Legislature)
Kevin Hardwick (Erie Co. Legislature)
Tom Loughran (Erie Co. Legislature)
Brian Kulpa (Amherst Supervisor)
Jacqui Berger (Amherst Town Council)
James Rogowski (Cheektowaga Town Council)
Brian Nowak (Cheektowaga Town Council)
Lisa Chimera (Tonawanda Town Council)
William Conrad (Tonawanda Town Council)
Andrew Touma (Niagara Falls Town Council)

Although there were unsuccessful campaigns supported in Grand Island, Lockport, Concord, and Hamburg, our work to engage all of the candidates through survey questions has yielded valuable information. Many of the candidates we did not endorse have pro-environment stances on specific issues. We now have the opportunity to work with these officials in developing policies that advance the Sierra Club's mission and goals.

For those endorsed candidates that were successful, now is the time to hold them accountable to the positions that resulted in support from the Sierra Club, and to encourage the choices they can make to promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources.

The next step for Sierra Club Niagara Group's Executive Committee is to review the questionnaires filled out by elected officials and create a list of policies that each politician can be encouraged and pressured to enact. We will then convene meetings in each district to educate and enlist constituents to advocate for the protection and restoration of the quality of the natural and human environment. Elected officials will be invited to share their vision of environmental protection with their constituents, and we will facilitate discussions to improve the quality of environmental policies.

We are looking for Sierra Club members interested in working on this issues at a local level: planning political education events, reaching out to your elected officials, and organizing community discussions. If you would like to help us promote beneficial environmental policy choices within your district, please contact us at TrailblazerNiagara@gmail.com!

Benefits of a Plant Based Diet

by Linda DeStefano, Chair of the Biodiversity/Vegetarian Outreach Committee of the Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter

How does a woman raised on meat, potatoes and a side of veggies decide to change to a plant-based (vegan) diet? For me, it was reading *Animal Liberation* by Peter Singer and learning the cruel conditions that animals endure when raised for their flesh, milk or eggs. Even small animal agriculture operations typically deprive animals of a fulfilling life with such common practices as separating cows from their calves almost immediately after birth. This allows humans to drink the milk which was meant for the calf. I have witnessed this practice and heard the mother and baby calling to each other - to no avail.

Later, I learned how damaging animal agriculture is to our planet - causing air and water pollution, gobbling up vast amounts of water, and displacing wild animals and their habitat (including endangered species, such as monarch butterflies). Our taxes pay the federal Wildlife Services to kill prairie dogs, coyotes, mountain lions and other animals by poisoning, shooting and other methods in order to protect cattle and sheep grazed on public land at below market rates by ranchers (which are sometimes wealthy corporations).

Animal agriculture adds to global warming due to the significant amount of methane produced by ruminant animals (cows, goats, sheep and bison) in their normal digestive processes. On June 2, 2010, the United Nations Environment Programme released "Assessing the Environmental Impacts of Production and Consumption: Priority Products and Materials." It includes a section on the severe environmental problems caused by animal agriculture. It advises that the worst impacts of climate change from animal agriculture can only be averted by a worldwide shift toward a plant-based diet - no animal flesh and no animal products (particularly dairy); the report is available at atlantic2.sierraclub.org/conservation/biodiversity.

Plant-based eating helps reduce world hunger because you can feed more people on a given amount of arable land than growing corn or other crops fed to animals, who are then eaten by humans. The animal must use some of the food calories for her/his own functions and growth, making this an inefficient way for people to get food calories. Amazingly, 64% of U.S. cropland produces feed for "food" animals. Compare the **pounds of edible product** that can be produced on an acre of prime land:

- * Apples 20,000
- * Carrots 30,000
- * Potatoes 40,000
- * Tomatoes 50,000
- * Beef 250

A well-balanced vegan diet not only helps the environment, but helps you as you are less likely to die from heart disease, diabetes, some forms of cancer, and many other prevalent diseases.

There are many resources available to understand how a plant based diet is life-saving for all. Check out the Sierra Club link (atlantic2.sierraclub.org/conservation/biodiversity), the online resources below, and you can contact me with questions or assistance:

LDESTEFANO3@twcny.rr.com
 5031 Onondaga Rd., Syracuse, NY 13215-1403
 315-488-2140 (8 a.m. - 10 p.m.)

Earthsave "Food Choices and the Planet"
www.earthsave.org/environment.htm

"The Plant-Based Diet: a healthier way to eat" by Kaiser Permanente (a large health maintenance organization), 17 pages, <http://www.kphealthyme.com/Healthy-Eating-Active-Living-Programs/Education-libraries/Plant-Based-Diet.aspx> (Can request a physical copy from Linda)

How Not to Die: Discover the foods scientifically proven to prevent and reverse disease, by Michael Greger, M.D. 2015, *NYTimes* bestseller [NutritionFacts.org](http://www.nutritionfacts.org)

"Give a Wolf (and the World) a Break Today: Go Veggie!" and "Don't Eat a Cow, Man! How Animal Agriculture Adds to Global Warming", available in English and Spanish (Can request a physical copy from Linda)

Receive personalized help with a vegan diet by contacting VeganOutreach.org/VMP (Mentoring available in English and Spanish)



"Divests" continued from front page

within the law and does not affect their ability to pay back the loan. We draw your attention to Section 3.11 'Environmental Matters' of the consortium's loan agreement with National Fuel Gas. While the consortium requires National Fuel Gas to have all pertinent environmental permits and follow environmental laws, the consortium may void the loan if National Fuel Gas fails to have the necessary permits, or breaks environmental laws, but only if such lawbreaking affects the borrower's ability to pay back the loan.

- Following the lead of our nation's 4th largest bank, Citigroup, M & T Bank should develop a plan to source 100% of its energy needs from renewable sources by 2020.

For the full text of the letter, and the associated press release, please go to niagasierclub.com.

When Jack Kanack, Sierra Club Niagara member, announced at a meeting last year that M&T was supporting the production of the Northern Access Pipeline, the Executive Committee recognized an opportunity.

As the press release for this divestment decision announces, "Divesting from financial institutions and fossil fuel companies sends a loud and clear message 'We need to stop!' to those financing the burning of fossil fuels. We urge everyone to consider divesting from fossil fuels."

Students at local institutions of higher education (in particular, Canisius College and SUNY-Buffalo) have been leading the charge for divesting university funds from fossil fuel industries, and for supporting companies that demonstrate ethical values and socially-minded actions related to environmental, social and governance factors.

To our knowledge, no other local New York Sierra Club group has divested from the fossil fuel industry. Niagara Sierra Club is proud to be leading by example, and demonstrating that we can create a clean energy future based on renewable resources and a commitment to acting as stewards for our environment!

Upcoming Events

Sierra Club Niagara Group Climate and Energy Committee will meet on Monday, February 12th at 6:30 PM at the Tri-Main Building Conference Room, 2495 Main St., Buffalo, Second Floor conference Room. Topics include: Further work on handouts for Sierra Club members on our initiatives and action opportunities, planning to meet with elected officials on pending state legislation and local climate initiatives, plan for opposition to fracked gas infrastructure, and an update on Zero Emission Bus project. All are welcome!

Science Demands Action's Buffalo March for Science - The Sierra Club was a proud supporter of last year's event, which included three thousand marchers and thirty contributing organizations in Delaware Park. The 2018 march, which will once more raise awareness to protect health, education and safety at a time when "science is under attack," is being planned for April. Go to www.sciencedemandsaction.org for more details or to get involved!

Check out our website for more events...NiagaraSierraClub.com

Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz Announces "Paris Program"

On January 25, 2018, Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz held a press conference "Erie County Commits to Paris". After the President's misguided announcement that the United States would withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement, County Executive Poloncarz and numerous other Mayors and County Executives recommitted to the Agreement.

A highlight of the County Executive's announcement is that Erie County will make a pledge to join the Sierra Club's *Ready for 100* program - to have 100% of the electricity in County buildings provided from renewable sources by 2025. Another initiative includes transforming 20% of the County's fleet of vehicles to electric.

The County will also continue to work with the commu-

nity to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; advance Community Solar projects for County residents who are unable to install solar on their homes; and advance legislation and policies that will allow for the purchasing of renewables through a utility aggregation. This could result in a Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) initiative, allowing town boards to contract directly with utility companies to purchase renewable energy for their residents. The County Executive also announced creation of a "Paris Fund" to use energy savings to fund new renewable energy projects.

The Sierra Club applauds County Executive Mark Poloncarz and the County environmental staff and workforce for their foresight in protecting Erie County for our children and future generations.