



# The Trailblazer

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## Helping Sierra Club Help the Environment

by Sara Schultz, Sierra Club Niagara, Chair

Do you get emotional with frustration when reading the News or watching the pundits carry on? Do you have days when you can't bear to think about the environmental protections that are being stripped away day after day by this regressive administration? Do you become immobilized with fear or maybe hopelessness thinking of the future of the natural world and how we will adapt? I know I do. I struggle every day to stay positive, focused and visionary. How do I do this? Honestly, it ain't easy!

Most helpful is being part of a community of dedicated activists who inspire me to be my best self and stay in the game (not really a game). A text, an email, a phone call from my fellow Sierra Club members lifts me to a place where, because I am not alone, I can keep working for a healthier environment and more equitable society.

The reality is that we are a powerful but very small group of "doers" and we need help! Below I have listed some of the areas that we are hoping you will share some of your precious time on. This can be a "one off" helping with something you are passionate about or an ongoing commitment. Some actions are more fun than others but

they are all important. You can make a difference! Please get in touch and let us know you are ready to step up. What's stopping you? You will feel better and collectively we will accomplish more. There is no time to waste and no recognizable future without everyone doing something to protect the sacred air, water and land that sustains us.

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR (LTE):** Our writers group is a monthly action group that meets for presentations and discussions for the purpose of getting letters into various local publications. Newcomers welcomed! Information is in our monthly e-letter, on our website, and announced on Sierra Niagara Meetup

**POSTCARDS:** We have get-togethers to write postcards on various issues and campaigns. This action helps get our message out to our legislators and to the voters.

**SOCIAL MEDIA/TECH HELP:** We always need extra sm/tech help!

**TABLING ASSISTANCE:** We go to lots of events to share our actions and activities - it's a great way to know our community!

**CAMPAIGN LIAISON:** We partner and support many local non-profits with their important campaigns - Ban the Plastic Bag, Good Food Purchasing Plan, Outer Harbor, Transportation.

**FUNDRAISING:** Help initiate ideas and organize ways to help raise funds for our local group!

### *Interested in attending a Wilderness First Aid Class in the Buffalo area?*

The class is September 28-30 and sponsored by ADK-Niagara Frontier Chapter. The class will be taught by an ER doctor who is a Wilderness Medicine Fellow and Winter Mountaineering Instructor. Go to the Facebook page ADK-Niagara Frontier Chapter to sign up!

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## The Dying Tree Nature's Legacy

by Gillian Martin

Our eyes dismiss a dying tree. Our fears tell us to cut it down and haul it away quickly. How often do we ask, "Does the tree need to be removed completely?"



Downy Woodpecker by Peggy Honda

A dying tree has a commendable destiny—-to benefit wildlife and enrich habitats. Imagine a time-share that is used by different species, for different purposes, in every stage of its demise. Did you know about 80 birds in North America nest in tree cavities? Over time some cavities form naturally, often as a result of wounds. The larger ones may accommodate bear, fox, raccoon and other mammals. However, forest occupants have a good neighbor in the woodpecker. It makes many cavities in dead trees. When vacated, these nesting sites are inherited by about 40 other cavity-nesting birds that would otherwise be without homes in which to raise their families.

*Continued on back page*

## Defend Ohi:yo'

Diana Strablow, Sierra Club Niagara Executive Committee

The Allegheny River is known as Ohi:yo' or beautiful river in the Seneca language. When word came that a startup company named Epiphany Allegheny, LLC was proposing to build a frack waste treatment facility at the Coudersport Area Municipal Authority (CAMA) with plans to discharge treated waste water directly into the Allegheny River, opposition quickly formed. An amazing coalition led by the Senecas and known as Defend Ohi:yo' brought together many groups and individuals including residents of Coudersport, PA who have already suffered the consequences of contaminated water wells due to the fracking process. We now all owe a debt of gratitude to this group of allies for their persistent, strategic and passionate water protection and successful campaign to stop this ill-conceived plan. JKLM, Terry Pegula's fracking company who would have been

the facility's primary supplier of frack waste pulled out of the deal on Friday April 6, 2018. The following Monday evening the CAMA board held a special meeting to withdraw permits and leases for the project. Members of the Seneca Nation and allies were present to cheer and thank the board for making the right decision. Among the thank yous, the CAMA board was presented with a flag of the Seneca Nation and offers of continued friendship between communities. Images, video and press can be seen at Defend Ohi:yo' on Facebook.

Along with the protection of water, much awareness was raised around the tremendous problem of contaminating huge volumes of fresh water through the fracking process with no proven technology to remove frack chemicals and radon, showing again, the need to turn to renewable energy sources and stop fracked gas.



Seneca Nation Press Conference - Govt to Govt Ohi:yo' Watershed Meeting

## Wind Facts

by Ellen Banks, Sierra Club Niagara Executive Committee

The Sierra Club has a national goal of 100% clean renewable energy in all sectors— electric generation, transportation, and heating buildings. It's a challenging goal, but one that can be reached and can help us avoid the worst effects of climate change. Meeting this goal will take big thinking and big projects, including large scale wind and solar, along with household-level solar panels, geothermal heating and cooling, and electric vehicles.

The wind that chills our Great Lakes region has sometimes been considered a menace but now we know it is an important energy resource. The ridges in Wyoming County have more than 200 turbines catching the Lake Erie winds, and now two projects are in planning stages south of the Lake Ontario shores. But as wind power is gaining on fossil fuel based energy generation, it is facing fierce opposition that is based on opinions and deliberate distortions, rather than by facts.

First, the birds: our lakeshores are important migration flyways, so it might be assumed that wind towers would be dangerous for them. In fact, scores of scientific studies throughout the USA and in Europe—where wind power is much more developed— find that wind turbines have a very minimal impact on birds, no more than two birds per megawatt (about 3-4 per tower) per year, compared to hundred of times more mortality from buildings (window glass is transparent but birds can see a solid tower), outdoor cats—they kill an average of 14 birds a year, collisions with vehicles, fossil fuel mining and pollution, and climate change itself, as it disrupts migration and feeding patterns. Early in the days of wind farms, one in California was badly designed and harmed many hawks. Since then, technology has improved and very thorough wildlife studies are required before a wind farm can be constructed.

Another fear being spread by anti-wind groups (some of them supported by the fossil fuel industry), is that wind towers might interfere with flights or radar from military bases and lead to base closings. Bills have been introduced by elected officials to prohibit, or economically penalize, wind projects within 40 miles of military installations. These laws would threaten almost all the existing and planned wind energy in our state and make our climate goals impossible to meet. They are unnecessary. Wind projects already must pass rigorous screening by the Department of Defense; sometimes changes in site plans have been required but no projects have failed to pass the DOD process. The DOD is a major supporter of renewable energy, because it saves tax dollars, makes the environment cleaner, and fights climate change—which is a national security issue, as desert expansion, floods and famines exacerbate world conflict. We have to question the motivation of those who spread misinformation and push fossil fuels when renewables win on costs, health, jobs, and the future of life on our planet.

## HABITAT CORNER

When planting this spring, consider these trees and plants that help wildlife:

- *Quercus* oaks
- *Salix* willows
- *Betula* birches
- *Carya* hickories
- *Pinus* pines
- Ninebark
- *Viburnum*
- Red-osier dogwood
- *Helianthus* sunflowers
- Wild bergamot
- New England aster



## What To Do with the West Valley Nuclear Waste facility?

by Lynda Schneekloth, Sierra Club Niagara Group and Pat Townsend, Interfaith Climate Justice Community

In the 1960s Western New York became the home of the only commercial nuclear fuel reprocessing effort in the United States. While intended by the federal and state governments to be one solution to the problem of the wastes building up at nuclear plants, it wound up accepting more military than commercial waste.

Built before the serious business of environmental regulation of the 1970s, the West Valley plant was constructed on eroding glacial till entirely unsuited to the purpose. The abandonment of the project after only 6 years of operation left behind vast quantities of toxic and radioactive waste. Accidental releases of radioactive material are known to have traveled through the watershed, reaching as far as the sediments of Lake Ontario, by way of the creek flowing through Cattaraugus Seneca lands and the Lake Erie and Niagara River sources of our metropolitan water supply. At West Valley, a plume of strontium continues to leak into groundwater.

The West Valley nuclear site has been undergoing a long, slow process of cleanup by the US Department of Energy and NYSEERDA as ordered by Congress in the West Valley Demonstration Project Act of 1982. The term "Demonstration Project" referred to the pilot project of combining the liquid wastes from underground tanks with glass to form huge "logs" stabilized so that they could be safely shipped to an underground storage site in the West. That site was not developed; therefore, the glass logs remain on site, above ground and safe for the time being.

After that step was complete, planning began for the remaining dangers, mostly consisting of contaminated buildings and leaking buried wastes. This draft plan was released, opened to public comment, and adopted in -2010 as the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). However, "Final" was not quite final, as the alternative chosen was a process of phased implementation that delayed major decisions

for 10 years. DOE/NYSEERDA have now started the "Supplemental EIS" for final disposition of the underground nuclear and toxic contamination.

We have not changed our minds. We still demand FULL CLEANUP of the site. The prospect of climate disruption and severe weather events makes the West Valley cleanup a matter of renewed urgency, and interim actions must be taken to reduce the risk of accidental release of radioactive materials due to erosion.

The message: **DIG IT UP! Store in safely above ground, monitor it, make sure it is retrievable, and eventually moved it to a much safer location.** YOU can add your voice by making comment to the public record before April 23, 2018. There are three ways to make comments:

LETTER: Write a letter and mail to Mr. Martin Krentz, West Valley Demonstration Project, DOE, 10282 Rock Springs Road, AC-DOE, West Valley, New York 14171-9799.

EMAIL: Or send an email with your concern to [SEISWestValleySite@emcbc.doe.gov](mailto:SEISWestValleySite@emcbc.doe.gov)

COMMENT ON LINE: You can open [www.SEISWestValleySite.com](http://www.SEISWestValleySite.com), go to the section on "Public Participation," hit "Getting Involved" and go the *Comment Form* that will take you to the appropriate website. Identify yourself and make your comment.

The Sierra Club Niagara group strongly encourages all of the people of the seven counties of WNY to demand that DOE and NYSEERDA study HOW they will conduct a full clean-up. We are not willing to live with this nuclear waste in our backyard and certainly, not in our water. For additional Talking Points, please visit the [niagarasierraclub.com](http://niagarasierraclub.com) website.



Please go to [www.SierraClub.org](http://www.SierraClub.org) to learn about national campaigns to stop drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, encourage leaders across the U.S. to commit to 100% clean and renewable energy for all, block government from attacking public lands, cut food waste, and more!

"Dying Tree" continued from front page

Stress cracks and spaces behind loose bark become pantries for nuts, berries, insects, and vegetation. This can tip the scale as to who makes it through a bitter winter. Such crannies provide shelter for small organisms as well. Look nose-close and you may discover bees, a roosting bat, or a lizard regulating its body temperature, escaping a predator or dining on insects breeding there. That is, if the probing woodpecker didn't beat him to it! Insects in dead trees are a vital food source for wildlife.

Views overlooking the landscape are valued by wildlife, so dead tree-tops and limbs serve as perches for hunting, territorial defense and courtship.

Over time fungi and other decomposers will ultimately convert the tree to duff and return its nutrients to the soil. But in the process, fungal fruit-

ing bodies (think mushrooms) house insects which raise their families within their close, moist, fleshy corridors or under their leathery canopies. Furthermore, fungi become food for countless foragers, which in turn become vectors of fungal spores.

There are overriding safety reasons to remove a dead tree, and not all locations are suitable for wildlife. If you ever want to consider retaining one, a licensed tree risk assessor should always be consulted. But next time, before you spray that red X on the tree, please ask, "Does it have to be removed completely?"

Gillian Martin is the Program Director of the Cavity Conservation Initiative.

To learn more: [cavityconservation.com](http://cavityconservation.com)