

The Trailblazer

The Niagara Group of The Sierra Club • <http://NiagaraSierraClub.com> • Vol. 51 No. 2 Apr 2016

Fossil Foolishness: Explosive Bakken Oil by Rail

By Charlie Bowman

Our extensive pipeline infrastructure, connecting coastal refineries to the users of the various flavors of fossil fuels, mostly missed North Dakota where today new oil is found in shale formations deep underground. So how does an oil company ship their North Dakota shale oil to a coastal refinery? Building a new pipeline is the slow approach to shipping oil because it takes years of planning and review by various federal and state authorities. But if the oil company calls up the railroad and asks them to ship the oil, the railroad has to accept it – by law. The new item railroads are carrying is Bakken crude oil from hydrofracked shale formations in North Dakota. Rail shipments out of North Dakota began in earnest about 2012. Such trains come eastbound daily through Western NY along the CSX tracks along Lake Erie, through Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and into the Port of Albany.

The dangers posed by rail shipment of Bakken crude oil include both explosive gases and high risk of environmental contamination. Unlike other crude oil, Bakken shale crude oil contains high levels of explosive gases. The world discovered this on July 6, 2013 when an unattended Bakken oil train rolled down a hill and derailed at high speed in the quiet downtown section of Lac Megantic, Quebec. Forty-seven people lost their lives and the downtown area was destroyed. Bakken oil also poses a risk to the environment, especially to our rivers and underground sources of drinking water. As

the Lac Megantic rail disaster unfolded, one tanker's worth of Bakken crude oil reached the neighboring Chaudière River and settled out, coating about 6 miles of river bottom. Earlier this year researchers reported an "unprecedented" number of fish deformations and a steep drop in the river's biomass.

And Bakken crude likely poses a risk to supplies of drinking water: a recent study of over 4,000 oil/gasoline spill sites in California indicates the vast majority of them remain polluted many decades later. And in Leroy NY in December 1970, two tanker cars derailed spilling 35,000 gallons of trichloroethylene that entered the groundwater. Forty-five years later, the EPA and DEC are still working to control, or clean up the mess. Only two tanker cars devastated an entire aquifer. In a 24 hour period in December 2015, WNY Drilling Defense volunteers counted 533 tanker cars carrying Bakken crude oil traveling through eastbound near Hamburg NY.

This year in New York State there have been 3 derailments on tracks used to carry Bakken crude oil. Fortunately there was no loss of life and the accidents did not involve Bakken crude oil, but our luck will turn at some point. One of the derailments occurred directly over the Great Flats Aquifer that supplies water for 150,000 residents in and around Schenectady NY. Please attend the monthly meetings of WNY Drilling Defense, 6 PM the first Thursday of each month at the Crane Library, 633 Elmwood Ave in Buffalo. We need

Building the Climate Justice Movement in Western New York

By Lynda Schneekloth

The Climate Justice Coalition of Western New York seeks to work with others in the community to build a climate justice movement. Our goal is to immediately move from dirty fossil fuel energy systems to renewables in order to ameliorate the negative impacts of global climate change. And we seek to do this in a way that democratizes energy production and its benefits.

We are inspired by the momentum generated by the Rise up for Climate Justice Campaign that raised awareness of the 2015 Paris Climate talks, pushed our leaders to advocate for climate justice, and instituted a series of climate actions in 2015. The coalition we are building includes support from faith-based, environmental, labor, social and economic justice communities as represented by the Crossroads Collaborative. We see Climate Justice WNY as a resource and catalyst for collec-

Continued on back page

to tell Governor Cuomo to recognize the threat and stop rail shipment of Bakken crude oil in New York State. Let's work for strict regulation of these pipelines on rails as we work to go beyond all fossil fuels.

Sierra Club Niagara Group
P.O. Box 1127
Williamsville, NY 14221-1127



SIERRA
CLUB
FOUNDED 1892

For more news, archives,
and upcoming events, visit...
NiagaraSierraClub.com

Non-profit org.
U.S. Postage
Paid
Buffalo, NY
Permit No. 868

THE TRUTH BEHIND CLIMATE CHANGE AND POLITICS

By Jack Kanack

Skiing, snowmobiling, ice skating and ice fishing will be a thing of the past in the next 30 years in Western New York; climate models are showing skiing at local resorts where snow making capabilities are used will not be viable by the year 2039. Sure, we will still have snow, however warmth of the ground and temperatures after the snow will make it extremely cost prohibitive to keep that sort of business profitable.

When I was a lad growing up in the 1970's, the winters in Western New York were a virtual snow globe from Thanksgiving through St. Patrick's Day. Sadly, this is not the case today. The culprit is

increasing levels of greenhouse gasses trapping in more heat from radiating out into space and causing the Earth to have a fever.

Despite overwhelming scientific evidence, some politicians continue to deny that climate change really exists. These politicians use the temperature spike from the last super El Nino year of 1997-1998 and compare it with a cool month before this current El Nino and the line is flat – showing no temperature increase - I guess that is the new math.

The Paris Climate Talks that ended in December 2015 set a goal for warming no more than 2.0°C and would try to hold Global Warming to 1.5°C. The world is already at 1.35°C which is over two-thirds the way toward the 2.0°C goal and 90% of the 1.5°C goal. Also disturbing is that the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) cli-

mate scientists have estimated an additional 0.5°C temperature rise built into the climate system if we stopped fossil fuel use today and that would already exceed our 1.5°C goal (1.85°C) and be within striking distance of reaching our 2.0°C goal.

Climate Change is the number one issue facing society today. Think about it as your first issue when you vote in this year's primary and general election. Vote for candidates that will support an environmental solution to a problem as the best solution.

Jack W. Kanack is a member of The Niagara Group of The Sierra Club, Vice President of The Western New York Chapter of The American Meteorological Society, has a summer weekly weather show "WeatherBuff" on 91.3 FM WBNY Buffalo and is the owner of a Weather Consulting Company, The Weather Medic Inc.

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/>

See more stories like this
NiagaraSierraClub.com

Wind Power in Western New York

By Ellen Banks

Through the Beyond Coal Campaign, the Sierra Club has helped to speed the retirement of 200 coal-fired electric plants nationwide as of 2015, greatly reducing carbon pollution and other harmful effects of burning coal. The US Environmental Protection Agency Clean Power Plan calls for a 32% reduction (from 2005 levels) in carbon emissions by 2030, while Governor Cuomo has called for 50% renewable power by 2030 and eliminating all coal for electric

power by 2020. These goals go beyond the Governor's previous stands, and may well have been influenced by the Beyond Coal Campaign.

How do we get to "50 by 30"? Energy conservation, solar, and battery technology are all essential components; the goal cannot be reached without expanding wind power. The US Department of Energy estimates that 20% electricity in the US can

Continued on back page



CLIMATE JUSTICE COALITION OF WNY

Spring 2016 Events as of 4/15/16

4/17 Sunday Stewardship of the Natural World: Life Depends on Nature, Climate and Humans, David Kowalski, Case Library at Westminster Presbyterian Church, 724 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo at 9:30.

4/19 Tuesday "Did you know climate change can have a negative impact on your physical health?" Alan H. Lockwood. Bogal Hall at Hilbert College, 5200 South Park Avenue, Hamburg, NY 7:00 (info 648-3340)

4/19-20 Tuesday/Wednesday, Dr. David Whaley, *Business As Usual in a Time of Growing Environmental Catastrophe* and *Hope for Future Survival with Local Restoration Communities*. Holistic Lecture Series, Audubon Library, 350 John James Audubon Parkway, Amherst. Register at 716-689-4922.

4/15-24 Faith Climate Action Week sponsored by Interfaith Power and Light (IPL) <http://www.newyorkipl.org/>

4/29 Earth Day Gatherings Honoring Mother Earth and Sister Water: sponsored by Sisters of St. Francis Friday at Stella Niagara Preserve, Lower River Rd. Lewiston at 10 am. sgoodremote@fssj.org

4/30 It's Local! A Conference on Buffalo and Area Weather & Climate, Buff State Geography & Planning, <http://weather.buffalostate.edu/sites/weather.buffalostate.edu/files/uploads/photos/PDF/Registration%20Page.pdf>

5/3 Showing of new film by Josh Fox How to Let Go of the World and Love All the Things Climate Can't Change at 6:30 at Starpoint Central School District, HS Auditorium. 4363 Mapleton Rd., Pendleton, NY 14094.

5/10 Tuesday Rebuilding Nature's Relationships at Home by Doug Tallamy. UB Center for the Arts Reception at 6pm, presentation at 7pm. Tickets \$20 per person. wnylc.org/tallamy or (716) 687-1225.

5/14 Keep It In the Ground Rally in Albany as a part of Break Free Northeast! The goal: to stop these crude oil shipments in their tracks, and keep fossil fuels in the ground. For more info contact Charley Bowman at RenewableEnergy@wnypeace.org or #Albany2016 #KeepItInTheGround

6/1 NY RENEWS Rally in Albany
(details on website niagarasierraclub.com)

7/8-10 COMMONBOUND Conference on the economy as envisioned by Pope Francis. In Buffalo, details to come.

[facebook.com/RiseUpforClimateJustice](https://www.facebook.com/RiseUpforClimateJustice)
[Twitter.com/RU4CJBuffalo](https://twitter.com/RU4CJBuffalo) niagarasierraclub.com

Funded in part by grant from the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo and the Sierra Club Niagara Group

Buffalo's Outer Harbor Again Endangered with Housing and Over-Development

By Lynda Schneekloth

The City of Buffalo has just completed a rewriting of its zoning to replace the 1953 Code. This new code is called 'The Green Code' and includes a land use plan and an ordinance. The general idea of the Green Code is to bring more order to the building of the city, and to create walking, sustainable neighborhoods by enabling mixed use communities. All good ideas.

However, the code designations for the Outer Harbor are not OK from the perspective of the Sierra Club Niagara Group. The category assigned to the land directly across the Buffalo River from Canalside (N-3E) would allow the development of an Elmwood Avenue community – private homes and shops. If you remember, there was a huge response to the last proposal from ECHDC against housing on the Outer Harbor — but we are faced with it again. Also of concern is the category assigned to the large area along Lake Erie that most people think of as the Outer Harbor (south of Times Beach to the Terminal Buildings). The D-OG code allows up to 25% building/parking cover which is equal to seven large Walmart stores! And it has a list of uses that are not appropriate.

The Sierra Club Niagara Group holds the position that the **Outer Harbor is a public trust and should not be privatized nor sold**. This position is explicitly in keeping with the State's Policy 20 of the Coastal Policies that serve as the basis of the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program. We are arguing that these areas be 'downzoned' to protect the natural resources, and that the time period for making comments be extended.

This beautiful corner of Lake Erie, the Outer Harbor, belongs to all, not a few. Moreover, our waterfront is an international jewel with five "Significant Coastal Habitats" and a globally recognized "Important Bird Area." We argue that full public access and enhancement of natural ecological systems of the entire area can bring value to the city the way Olmsted's parks did 150 years ago.

Therefore, **we do not accept the Green Code assignments** that permit private housing (N3E), nor the broad use categories permitted along the Lake Erie Shoreline (D-OG). We argue that such designations, **if passed as currently proposed, will result in irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources to re-developing rather than supporting the natural regeneration of an area poised to become one of Buffalo's greatest public assets.**

The Buffalo Common Council has held two public meetings on the Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement about the Green Code where Sierra Club and the Western New York Environmental Alliance has spoken out. Now we need your help. (See niagarasierraclub.com for more information.)

We are asking all Sierra Club member to make their concerns known ASAP as the comment period closes on April 22, 2016. PLEASE SEND COMMENT to Dinash Lal, Common Council Chief of Staff, Common Council Central Office, 1413 City Hall, Buffalo, NY 14202, or digitally to dlal@city-buffalo.com. Insist that the Outer Harbor is the People's Waterfront!

SIGN THE PETITION AT <https://goo.gl/cp1tQD> and www.change.org/p/buffalo-common-council-save-buffalo-s-outer-harbor-forever-free-and-open?recruiter=522593243&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=share_email_responsive asking that the Buffalo Common Council delay a decision on the Green Code, to protect this waterfront as a public trust, and conduct scientific studies to assess the ecological value of the area before taking any action.

"Wind Power" continued from front page

be wind powered by 2030. The Sierra Club supports wind power projects that are carefully designed to minimize impacts on wildlife.

In Western New York, Sheldon, Bliss and Wethersfield wind farms in Wyoming County and Steel Winds on the Buffalo/Lackawanna waterfront, have contributed to New York State's ranking 11th in the US for wind power. Our state is ranked 13th in potential wind power. A new wind farm will likely be added soon in Chautauqua County. The costs of wind power are dropping, making it competitive or better than fossil fueled power. In Texas, the nation's leader in wind power, some local utilities have offered free electricity in the evening hours. Ironically, Texas is also the highest emitter of greenhouse gases!

Meanwhile, Lighthouse Wind, a proposed wind project on a ridge near Lake Ontario in the towns of Somerset and Yates, is in the Article 10 stage, a NYS process that examines large-scale energy plans. While many landowners have signed leases for wind turbines on their property, there has been vigorous opposition from an "SOS—Save Ontario Shores" group. (Many groups with the SOS acronym—Save Our Sound, Save Skyline, etc. — have been opposing wind projects throughout North America, using identical anti-wind and fake science printed material, raising speculation that the fossil fuel industry may be funding them.)

Sierra Club members are among the strongest voices for protecting wild places and wildlife, so one of the first questions members ask when thinking about wind farms is, "Are they harmful to birds and bats"? An early wind farm in California was poorly sited and led to many hawk collisions, a result much used in anti-wind writings. Since then, site selection and design has been improved, and bird collisions with wind turbines are very rare, less than one per turbine in some studies. Wind turbines cause less than one-tenth of one percent of bird deaths compared to much higher levels from cats (1.4 to 3.7 billion), buildings, oil spills, power lines and vehicles. In addition, climate change has dire consequences for birds with habitat loss and disruption of migratory and feeding patterns. Bat collisions have also been a concern but the main species of bats in our state are non-migratory, and bat-warning sounds can be built in to wind turbines. Every stage of the fossil fuel industry is a threat to wildlife, including mountain top removal coal mining, fracking fields and associated chemical contamination, spill-prone rail transport, underwater oil spills, methane leaks like the recent one in California, and products of combustion.

Anti-wind publicity also suggests that wind turbines threaten human health, alleging "wind turbine syndrome" and seizure-inducing flicker effects. These allegations are based on publications that do not meet any standards of biomedical research; a review of peer-reviewed scientific studies finds no health effects of living near wind projects. Flicker effects from looking directly at wind turbines in certain lighting conditions occur a few minutes every day and can be controlled by curtains or simply not looking at them during such times.

Offshore wind in the Atlantic Ocean is another part of New York's move to clean energy. The Long Island Power Authority has proposed a wind projects starting at 500 MW, which has cleared a first step with the designation of a "Wind Energy Area" by the Department of Interior Bureau of Ocean Energy Management on March 17, 2016. With wind development in many parts of our state, New York is on track to a clean energy future.

**Visit NiagaraSierraClub.com
for More Informative Stories Like These**

"Climate Justice Movement" continued from front page

tive and individual climate actions in Western New York. We aspire to serve diverse populations by providing information on energy democracy, creating connections, educating, and advocating for policies such as NY Renew's to ensure a sustainable and just world for now and in the future.

But mostly we are working to connect with people in a way that listens to their concerns about their future and the future of their children on this planet so that climate justice becomes personal to individual lives and communities. Our vision is a sustainable economy without fossil fuels and a quality of

life with benefits for all citizens of the world. We are choosing to build a healthy community striving for justice and concern for all forms of life knowing that we are all one.

Upcoming events are available on [facebook.com/RiseUpforClimateJustice](https://www.facebook.com/RiseUpforClimateJustice); twitter.com/RU4CJBuffalo or niagarasierra.com. If you want to be involved, contact us at ClimateJusticeBuffalo@gmail.com or (716) 249-0966. Project funded in part by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo and the Sierra Club Niagara Group.