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 quaint 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 spills in California indicates the vast majority of them remain polluted many decades later. And in Lerry 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 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.
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.

But mostly we are working to connect with people in a way that lists 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 sustain-

ative 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 to ensure a sustainable and just world for now and in the future.

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 against. Now we need you.

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“Climate Justice Movement” continued from front page

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“Climate Justice Movement” continued from front page

CLIMATE JUSTICE COALITION OF WNY

Climate change is happening, and we must act now to stop it.

The Backpage

The Backpage

April 2016

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

By Lynda Schneekloth

tect the Outer Harbor, public trust, and conduct sci-
entific 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 Westfield 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 fuel powered. In Texas, the nation’s leader in wind power, over eight years the industry has offered free electricity in the evening hours. Ironically, Texas is also the highest emitter of greenhouse gases!

The Sierra Club Niagara Group holds the position that the Outer Harbor is a public trust and should not be privatized or 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 time periods be extended. Meanwhile we continue to work.

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 recog-
nized ‘Important Bird Area.’ We argue that full pub-
lic access and enhancement of natural ecological sys-
tems 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-O). We argue that such designa-
tions, if passed as currently proposed, will result in irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources to undesirable 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 against. Now we need your support. (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 COM-
MENT to Dinah Lal, Common Council Chief of Staff, Common Council Central Office, 1413 City Hall, Buffalo, NY 14202, or digitally to dlah@city-
buffalo.com. Instruct that the Outer Harbor is the People’s Waterfront!

Don’t miss this opportunity to take a stand for our world!

Climate change is happening, and we must act now to stop it.

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