



The Trailblazer

The Niagara Group of The Sierra Club • <http://NiagaraSierraClub.com> • Vol. 53 No. 4 October 2018

Atlantic Chapter Endorses WNY Candidates, National Sierra Club Endorses Nathan McMurray in NY-27 Congressional Race

By Roger Cook, Sierra Club Niagara Group Political Committee

On November 6th, voters will choose who will represent them in the NYS Assembly and Senate and in the US Congress. To help our members understand where the candidates stand on environmental policies and legislation, the Sierra Club Niagara Group Political Committee emailed questionnaires to all Western NY candidates with the exception of incumbents we have endorsed in the past. In light of their high environmental scores, the SCNG Executive Committee recommended support for NYS Assembly Members **Crystal Peoples-Stokes and Sean Ryan** and NYS Senator **Tim Kennedy**. The Atlantic Chapter endorsed all three.

NY-27 Congressional District US Representative Chris Collins did not return his questionnaire. The challenger in NY-27, Nathan McMurray, returned his questionnaire citing his environmental record as Grand Island supervisor (including working with NYS Parks to close the West River automobile traffic, turning it into an 8-mile extension of the Greenway walking and trail system) and pledged vigorous support for the Clean Water and Air Acts, full funding and enforcement powers for the EPA, the Superfund program, and a just transition from a fossil fuel economy to a renewable energy economy. The National Sierra Club, based on the SCNG's and Atlantic Chapter's support, endorsed **Nathan McMurray** as its candidate for the NY-27 Congressional District.

None of the Republicans running for NYS Senate—Chris Jacobs and Michael Ranzenhofer—asked for our sup-

port. Their challengers did. Based on their pledges of support for policies such as phasing out fossil fuels, the Climate and Community Protection Act, a fee on corporate polluters; and plans for a just transition from fossil fuels to renewables such as electric vehicles and wind, solar, geothermal and hydro energy; and greater funding, staffing and environmental protection and enforcement; the SCNG Executive Committee recommended that the Atlantic Chapter endorse **Joan Seamans** and **Carima El-Behairy** for NYS Senate.

None of the Assembly Republican incumbents (Erik Bohlen, Ray Walter, David DiPietro) who have challengers sought our support. Their challengers did and based on their support the Sierra Club's policies and legislation, the SCNG Executive Committee recommended support for the challengers and the Atlantic Chapter endorsed **Patrick Burke, Karen McMahon, and Luke Wochensky** for NYS Assembly.

Due to the resignation of the City of Lockport mayor, a special election will be held on November 6th. One of the contenders, Michelle Roman, who has been a strong advocate for the clean-up of Eighteen Mile Creek, returned her questionnaire and pledged support for the Sierra Club's position on issues such as habitat protection and NYSEDA renewable energy programs. Based on the SCNG's recommendation of support, the Atlantic Chapter endorsed **Michelle Roman**.

Megan Racinowski Tribute

The Niagara Group is sad to announce the sudden passing of our summer 2018 intern, Megan Racinowski, on September 16, 2018. Megan, at 19 years of age, was a rising junior at Daemen College, having accelerated both her high school and college programs. She worked on several projects for the Niagara Group, including conducting interviews with elected officials in the Town of Amherst for the Municipal Toolkit. The Toolkit, a set of stories of renewable energy, energy conservation, and other climate protection initiatives by cities and towns across New York State, is designed to give other municipalities ideas and advice for similar projects.

Megan assisted in several tabling events through the summer, and helped with Buffalo's Rise Up for Climate Justice Day on September 8, one of many international events on that day. She was diligent in compiling data from petitions, taking minutes at meetings, and whatever else needed to be done, and was always willing to learn new skills and to reach out to people at events. Meanwhile, Megan was also interning for Rep. Brian Higgins (NY-26) and had interned last year in a US Senator's office in DC. A History and Political Science major at Daemen, she was active in several service and social organizations at the College and won awards and scholarships. We are mourning the loss of this talented and kindhearted young woman who cared deeply about the environment and planned a career in law and public service.

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



Explore, Enjoy, and Protect the Planet

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

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

SEE IMPORTANT ELECTION BIOS AND BALLOTS ON PAGE 2!

A Note From the Sierra Club Niagara Chair

By Sara Schultz

This year was one of great accomplishment but also of great sadness. Sierra Club Niagara was very blessed this summer to have an outstanding intern, Megan Racinowski. She was kind and thoughtful with incredible enthusiasm for environmental education and political advocacy. Megan excelled in all of the tasks she took on and never failed to accomplish what we asked her to do. Megan passed away this September. We already miss her ready smile and "get to it" attitude. We would like to dedicate this issue to her because of her passion for Sierra Club and the blessing of her memory.

Before I joyously revel in all of the accomplishments of our Niagara group over the past year, I want to begin with a short tale of fear, empowerment and inspiration. My husband, Steve, encouraged me to join him last August on an 11 day backpacking trip in Wyoming's Wind River Range of the Rockies. I agreed with reservations. Was I scared of elusive mountain lions, attacking bears, tics that might leave me with Rocky Mountain Fever or that I would freeze to death sleeping at 10,000 feet? You bet! But as the days went by and we dealt with the ice covering our tent in the morning, hail storms, boulder climbing and altitude, my fears melted away like thoughts after a long session of mediation. The beauty of this remote and utterly pristine environment, so rare these days, led me to a different perspective on being in the wilderness. We respected the dangers but were mindfully aware of our surroundings. That became our home and I was a part of it. Fear and discomfort transformed into presence and acceptance. One of the naturalists we were with said he always tells the youth, it's o.k. to be uncomfortable. It became more than o.k.

As for the empowerment, I was one of 6, but the only woman on the trip. We each had to carry all of our gear, food, a fishing rod, tackle and water. We climbed many days with day packs up to 12,500 ft. Happily I kept pace, no complaints (except too cold in the morning), and no tears (almost, once). Let me say I am also in my 60's and not very big. The richness of this trip for me was being a child again on an adventure. There was wonderment for all of us, at the wildflowers, the picas and marmots, the endless mountains, crystal clear lakes with delicious cut-throat trout and the geology of this vast expanse. This inspiration reinforced why we work so hard in Sierra Club. We want to preserve this beauty and protect this unmolested land for generations to come. We want to be in beautiful places and breathe in clean air. We want to ensure that our country isn't savaged by dirty energy extraction sea to sea but is using the genius and technology already available to move us into a sustainable future.

This year we were very busy trying to do just that. Our biggest goal is to implement the National and local Sierra Club's Ready for 100% or Clean Energy For All campaign right here in WNY. How do we do that? We have amazing leaders who have taken on various campaigns. We also form collaborations with other entities and NPOs that give more power and greater depth to what we do. These includes but is not limited to PUSH Buffalo, Erie County Green Team, Citizens for Regional Transit, Coalition for Economic Justice, the Interfaith Climate Justice Community and WNY Peace Center. We are working closely with the NFTA to transition to Zero Emission Buses. We are pushing for more solar on the Buffalo Public Schools. We are fighting anti-

solar campaigns that have been spreading misinformation. We also have been going to rural meetings in support of Land Based Wind Projects. There is a concerted effort by outside money that is trying to stop this important source of renewable energy. We have advocated for a safer NY State Railway system, against liquid nuclear waste traveling through WNY, against the Northern Access Pipeline (we are at it again), a full clean up of West Valley and for the VW settlement money to be invested here in WNY for clean transportation for all. We have members that are engaged in the future of the Outer Harbor, Niagara Greenway Commission and protecting wildlife.

Finally, we are deeply committed to democracy and environmental justice. We have a lobbying team that visited legislators to educate on important environmental issues. Our members have spent hours getting to know the candidates in the coming election. We have sent over 300 postcards, made phone calls and held a Meet and Greet for our endorsed challenger candidates event. Many of our members have walked the neighborhoods and will continue to campaign until the very last minute for candidates who have committed to protecting our precious resources, preserving beautiful places, fighting for a sustainable economy and ensuring environmental justice for all. Please get out and vote "like your life depends on it, because it does!"

See more stories like this at
NiagaraSierraClub.com

Elections 2018: Time to Vote!

As a member of the Sierra Club, you are asked to participate in two elections this fall. The first is our Niagara Group election of members of the Executive Committee – see information in this Trailblazer. The other election is for members At Large for the Atlantic Chapter (New York State) of the Sierra Club. Information will be available in the next issue of Sierra Atlantic, and also on the website: <http://atlantic2.sierraclub.org/>. We ask for your considered participation!!! Please read the following biographies of the candidates.

Ellen Cardone Banks – I have been concerned about environmental protection since my childhood and teen years in Schenectady, where General Electric and other industries had dumped so much toxic waste into the Mohawk river that it became unsafe for recreational boating. As a freshman at UB in 1963 I went to my first demonstration, against a House Un-American Activities Committee hearing, and became involved in both student journalism and student government at UB. We ran on a student rights and antiwar platform, though our demand to end the Vietnam War was shockingly ignored by the Johnson administration!

After completing a doctoral degree in developmental psychology, I taught at Daemen College for 41 years, where my research included child rearing in Malaysia, young adult cognitive development, and effects of low-level lead exposure on children's cognitive skills. I was active in representing the faculty in elected positions and advocating for just policies, to the extent possible on a non-collective bargaining campus.

I have served as the Climate and Energy chair of the Niagara Group for several years. To avoid redundant and excessive meetings, we stopped meeting as a separate group in 2018, but I am one of several members who remain involved in our current initiatives such as Electric Vehicles, support for wind and solar power, stopping fossil fuel infrastructure, and climate justice for those impacted by past policies. With the Sierra Writers' Group, I've published many letters to editors, op-eds, and a feature article on wind power in the Buffalo News.

My statewide Sierra Club involvement began with my appointment to the NYS Beyond Coal Campaign (BCC) in 2016. BCC coordinates policy to end coal-fired power plants in our state and to transition to renewable energy in all sectors — electric power, transportation and energy use in buildings. In December 2018 I was elected to the Atlantic Chapter Executive Committee (the Atlantic chapter covers NY State) and was then elected as Secretary and Conservation Chair of the Chapter.

As climate change becomes apparent all around us, and even more intensely in coastal areas, it is imperative to build coalitions to leave all fossil fuels in the ground and to develop renewable energy.

Laurence Beahan – In the past term, as Conservation Chair, I have worked on and written about: The location of a new Maritime Academy on the waterfront rather than crowded into a residential neighborhood, Keeping the Outer Harbor a natural park and in public ownership, The value and safety of wind turbines in protecting our climate, The control of Lake Ontario Water levels, and The importance of wetland protection under the law.

Several urgent matters came before the Executive Committee during this time that required balloting outside regular meetings. At the group's request I devised a system of voting, via the internet, which was speedy and mirrored the operation in a face-to-face meeting. It works.

As an Alternate Delegate to the State-level Executive Committee, I have stayed in touch with state wide Sierra issues. On the State Nominating Committee I sought out candidates for election to the State Executive Committee.

I continue representing Sierra Club at the Niagara Relicensing Environmental Coalition. This group has a voice in spending the half-billion dollar Niagara Greenway reparations for environmental costs imposed on the Niagara River by the construction of the Niagara Power Project. We funded the purchase of the Stella Niagara Property and restoration of the flora of the Niagara Gorge, among many projects. Thanks for the privilege of serving.

Charley Bowman – I'm proud to be a candidate for the Sierra Niagara Group's Executive Committee. The Sierra Niagara Group (SNG) is arguably the most active of the 11 other Sierra Club groups in NY State, under the umbrella of the Sierra Atlantic Chapter. That activity includes lobbying on environmental issues, op-ed and letter writing to WNY news organizations, hosting talks by environmental experts, and supporting legal challenges against fossil fuel companies' build-out of new fossil fuel infrastructure.

I came to environmental work from my work in anti-war movement as a longtime member of the WNY Peace Center. Our 17 year war in Afghanistan, and more recently our wars in Yemen and Syria, are driven by our addiction to fossil fuels. As we make war in other countries we also make war on the Earth's environment through the DOD's carbon footprint and use of depleted uranium weapons, both of which damage the environment on vast time scales: 1,000 years and beyond. Our addiction to fossil fuels must soon be overcome if the quality of life for human beings, as we now experience it, is to be maintained for future generations. Concomitantly, this also means stopping our wars and redirecting the bulk of our war-money, now 60% of each tax dollar, towards the transition to renewable energy.

Locally, we need to act in New York State to promote its rapid transition to renewable sources of energy in all sectors: home heating, transportation and generation of electrical energy. Everything needs to be electrified ASAP.

Climate change is one of two existential threats humans now face (the other is nuclear war). Dr. Michael Mann, inventor of the "hockey-stick" temperature diagram in 1998 – wonderfully used by Al Gore in his first "Inconvenient Truth" film – makes the point that our current energy policy

is the equivalent to walking blind-folded in a mine field. There are many mines, and each represents an irreversible climate change tipping point. Stepping on just one mine will put us beyond point of being able to do anything about climate change. New York State must do its part in lifting the blind fold and inactivating the climate change minefield.

On September 10, 2018, UN Secretary General António Guterres wrote "If we do not change course by 2020, we risk missing the point where we can avoid runaway climate change, with disastrous consequences for people and all the natural systems that sustain us...There is no more time to waste".

New York State must begin doing its fair share...immediately.

Bob Ciesielski – My experience serving on the Executive Committee dates back to 2004. My roles in the Sierra Club have varied over time, including my service as SCNG Chair for 5 years. I am now serving as Delegate-at-large to the NYS Atlantic Chapter, comprised of more than 50,000 members. In 2012 I was appointed as Energy Committee Chair for the Chapter and am also serving this year as Chapter Vice-Chair. I have been actively involved in energy work during my time with the Club, initially opposing high volume fracking for gas as an environmental threat. Currently I am actively involved in the development of renewable energy sourced from wind, solar and geothermal, and in energy efficiency in all sectors - electricity, heating and cooling, transportation and manufacturing. This new, sustainable energy economy can help curtail climate change and protect the environment - all the while creating a vibrant economy and jobs. Please vote for me in the upcoming Group election. Thank you.

Nicole Gerber – The Sierra Club Niagara Group works extensively and tirelessly to educate and advocate on environmental issues locally and across the state and country. I am proud to have served on the Niagara Group Executive Committee with my recent two-year term, and look forward to serving again as an Executive Committee member. Recent activities that I participated with include serving as Co-Editor of the Niagara Group's Trailblazer newsletter and leading the Wildlife and Habitat Committee.

With the increasing negative changes occurring to our environment, critical habitats are being destroyed and lost at an alarming rate. This highlights the important need to increase education and understanding of wildlife and the habitats they need and why it is imperative that we work collectively to protect and preserve species and healthy ecosystems. To this end, I have become a licensed wildlife rehabilitator and wildlife control officer in order to increase my knowledge and ability to directly help wildlife. I also recently completed the New York State Master Naturalist trainee program in order to further my ability to educate and advance environmental topics.

My fiancé and I have worked personally to preserve and protect habitats through ecological gardening practices on our property. We have created permaculture gardens and butterfly, pollinator and bird gardens. We have fields abundant in native milkweed, designated as a Monarch Way Station with Monarch Watch. Our natural gardens have been featured in the Grand Island Garden Walks where we work to educate on how native plants and companion planting can create sustainable gardens and landscapes that protect the land and natural species. I co-founded the Citizen Coalition for Wildlife and Environment, which works to educate on habitat protection and compassionate coexistence with wildlife.

I am excited to continue assisting the Sierra Club Niagara Group to advance and implement the organization's wildlife, habitat and native plants mission, with a primary focus on pre-

serving and protecting wildlife and habitats. Thank you for sharing your compassion and efforts for the wild!

Janet Lenicsek – I am submitting my name for consideration/election as an Executive Committee member for a 2-year term beginning in January of 2019. I have always loved nature and been interested in the environment. My first career was in aquatic/marine science. I worked with the EPA doing water quality analysis on Lake Erie from 1978 to 1980. From 1981 through 1982, I worked with the University of Miami doing basic marine biology research and teaching marine biology at a summer camp for girls. In 1985 I completed my M.S. in Human Nutrition and Food Science at the University of Florida and worked in the field of clinical nutrition for 13 years. I then worked in sales until I retired from full-time work in 2014. I am currently working as a part-time dietitian for The Arc of Erie County. I provide nutritional care and staff training in group homes for people with mental and physical disabilities.

With my experience as a dietitian/nutritionist, I was encouraged to be a representative of the Sierra Club as part of the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) Coalition in Buffalo, NY. I began attending the GFPP meetings in spring of this year and have been a regular monthly attendee. The work we are doing involves lots of planning with a large number of coalition partners. We are assisting the Buffalo Public Schools (BPS) in becoming certified/credentialed by the national GFPP organization. My role has been to promote policies and standards which will move the BPS towards purchasing more foods from local and regional farmers which will help reduce greenhouse gases and improve the health of students.

I am also interested in supporting Erie County and NY State government in reducing the use of plastic bags in order to reduce litter which can harm animals and destroys the beauty of the natural environment. I recently tabled at the Elmwood Arts Festival to educate the public about bringing their own bags (BYOB) to the store instead of accepting plastic bags for every purchase.

This fall, I am actively involved in the promotion of state and national candidates who have been endorsed by the Sierra Club Niagara Group.

John Szlasny – I became involved with environmental causes through the push to ban hydrofracking in New York. In addition, I was on the Amherst Against Fracking group which saw the passage by the Amherst Town Board of a local fracking ban which also prohibits the use and processing of fracking wastes within the town. I have been on the Amherst Energy Conservation Citizens Advisory committee for the past two years which worked on getting the town to the Clean Energy Community designation it received in 2017.

It has been an honor serving on the board the past two terms. With the new year, I would like to work on outreach projects with our membership to make our group more active and visible in the community. I have done tabling events at events like the Elmwood Festival of the Arts. I proposed the picnic we had in 2017 for the Sierra Club 125th Anniversary. I'm thinking something like park/shoreline cleanups (either with or separate from other organizations) to get people off the sidelines.

I have worked to be active in getting our message out to the public. Health issues kept me from getting involved in the meet & greets earlier this year, but I have maintained my activities as a writer, both under my name as a private citizen for Letters to the Editor, but also in several Another Voice articles as a Sierra Club Niagara Group ExCom member.

Nominees for 2019-20 term on Niagara Group Executive Committee

IMPORTANT: Single Membership - Use one ballot. Joint Membership - Use both ballots. Ballots must be received by December 25, 2018

NIAGARA GROUP OFFICIAL BALLOTS

BALLOT 1

Board of Governance At-Large Delegates
Choose up to 6 board members

- ELLEN CARDONE BANKS
- LAURENCE BEAHAN
- CHARLEY BOWMAN
- BOB CIESIELSKI
- NICOLE GERBER
- JANET LENICSEK
- JOHN SZLASNY

BALLOT 2

Board of Governance At-Large Delegates
Choose up to 6 board members

- ELLEN CARDONE BANKS
- LAURENCE BEAHAN
- CHARLEY BOWMAN
- BOB CIESIELSKI
- NICOLE GERBER
- JANET LENICSEK
- JOHN SZLASNY

Election Instructions: To be eligible to vote, you must be a member in good standing with the Niagara Group as verified by a member's mailing label. Please read all of the candidates' statements on Page 2. Indicate your choices by checking the box next to the candidates' names on the ballot. Each member may complete one ballot. Joint members may complete two ballots. Please detach this page and mail your ballot(s) to the address below in an ordinary letter-size envelope with proper postage. Send your ballots to:

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

Ballots must be received on or before 12/25/2018