



# The Trailblazer

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## Break Free from Plastic Pollution Act

By John Szalasny

I was recently on a Zoom meeting with Rep. Alan Lowenthal regarding H.R. 5845/S.3263, the Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act, which is the most comprehensive bill to date designed to tackle the explosion of single-use plastics.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is a key component of this bill. It makes producers of packaging and single use plastics fiscally responsible for collecting, managing and recycling or composting the product after consumer use. EPR is used in New York State for tire and car battery recycling. It establishes minimum percentages of these packages that must be reused, recycled or composted and sets standards for recycled content in beverage containers. In addition, the law would mandate a national bottle deposit system. It would ban Styrofoam containers and plastic utensils and place a user tax on carryout bags. It would also ban the export of plastic waste to other countries.

We cannot afford to ignore the plastic pollution crisis. It is no longer hidden from public view after China's National Sword policy banned the imports of the world's recyclable waste. Since 2017, municipal recycling programs have gone from a small profit maker to a huge cost burden to the taxpayer. Manufacturers are happy to pass on the costs of its packaging waste to the public. It allows them to hide the true cost of their product.

Recent reports have noted that half of all plastic ever produced was created in the last 12 years. This trend is expected to accelerate as petrochemical com-

panies in the United States look to use their large surplus of fracked natural gas in the production of more and more virgin plastic. This is alarming news when you consider that a 2017 study estimated that mankind has produced over 9 billion tons of plastic and 80 percent of that total ends up in a landfill. Remember, plastic made from fossil fuels does not biodegrade, meaning that the plastic that goes to the landfill will still be plastic 500 years from now.

There have been several excellent documentaries in the past year on plastic pollution that are available for viewing. PBS Newshour's The Plastic Problem (<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/series/the-plastic-problem>), PBS Frontline's Plastic Wars (<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/plastic-wars/>), and The Story of Plastic (which is available on demand through the Discovery Channel). Each will give you a global perspective on the man-made crisis of plastic pollution.

New York has taken positive steps in combating plastic pollution with its plastic bag ban (now in effect) and its ban on Styrofoam containers (which goes into effect in 2022). But the issues go beyond the borders of the Empire State and that is why legislation like the Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act is important, not only for the management of waste and pollution that it would bring, but also to reduce the need for fossil fuels, the key component in today's plastic production. Plastics are the "Silent Spring" issue of the 21st century - an environmental, public health and climate change issue all rolled into one.

## Act NOW to win in November

By Janet Lenichek and Roger Cook

Since the upholding of Citizens United by the US Supreme Court, it should come as no surprise that the majority of elected federal officials have turned their backs on the environment over the past 10-20 years. As Jane Mayer outlined in her 2016 best seller, Dark Money, the Koch Brothers network has wielded enormous power against both Republicans and Democrats who want to change public policy in order to quickly expand the use of renewable energy sources and decrease the use of fossil fuels. Through the financing of political action committees (PACs), foundations and other highly conservative/libertarian non-profits, the fossil fuel industry has purposely confused the public about the dangers of global warming, and gained significant influence over our elected representatives.

*Continued on back page*

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as if your life  
depends on it!

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## National Fuel Moving Forward AGAIN with Northern Access Pipeline Project

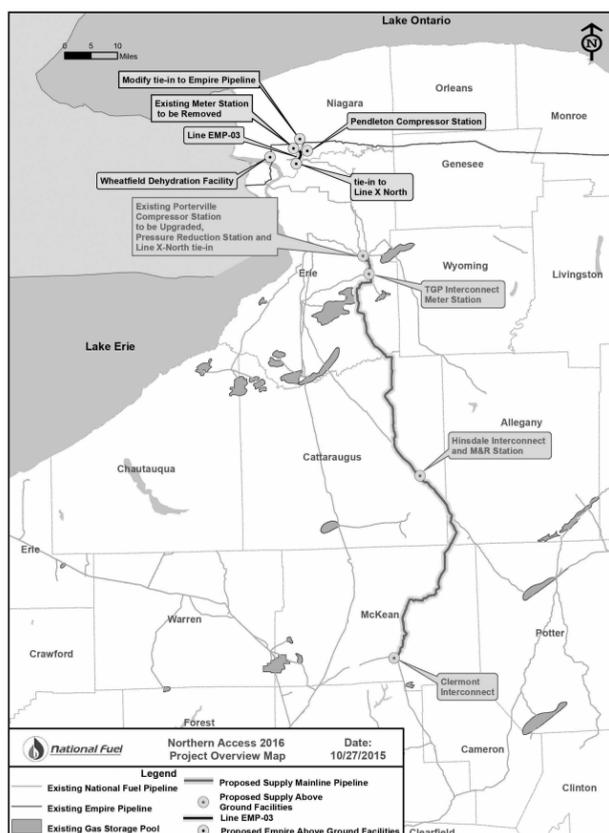
By Diana Strablow

For quite some time, no news seemed to be good news for the Northern Access Pipeline Project, but once again, National Fuel seems to be moving forward. With gas prices tanked, it seems crazy to move ahead with a major pipeline investment, but two recent losses tell us that it is time to take action once again.

On June 25th, New York Court of Appeals decided in favor of National Fuel in Theresa Schueckler's eminent domain case. This was sad news for Theresa, who along with her deceased husband Joe, fought a long hard battle to protect the water and land that they spent over 50 years caring for and lovingly planting 1000's of trees. These fights are so stacked against landowners. The U.S. Supreme Court would be the next step. Where does a landowner find the resources to take a case to the Supreme Court? We owe much gratitude to Theresa and Joe for standing up to National Fuel through years of threat to their home.

Additional bad news came for the Town of Pendleton that has been battling for years to keep National Fuel's 22,000 HP compressor station out their community. On July 14, U.S. District Court of WNY decided against the Town's ability to block the compressor through zoning laws that were never intended to allow a toxic spewing compressor station.

All this means that National Fuel is continuing to clear the way should they choose to begin construction despite low gas prices and lack of need



for the gas. This could happen even as NYSDEC's defense of denial of the 401 Water Quality

Certification is continuing its way through the court system.

In light of the climate emergency we now face, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) determination that there is a need and necessity for this project is false and needs to be reassessed. As FERC Commissioner, Richard Glick has stated in his dissenting opinion, "I do not believe that the Project is in the public interest without determining the significance of the Project's contribution to climate change."

NY State has passed the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act which mandates a 40% reduction of GHG emissions by 2030 and 85% reduction by 2050. NY State does not want or need National Fuel's increased fracked gas capacity. This project runs directly contrary to the GHG reductions that are now NY State law.

NYSDEC determined that the Northern Access Pipeline Project would have a significant detrimental impact on streams and wetlands throughout Western NY. National Fuel's proposed steam crossings were determined to be unacceptable with a high potential to degrade quality streams that support trout and other threatened and endangered species including hellbender salamanders.

Despite calls to do so, FERC has not prepared an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Especially in light of NYSDEC's findings of

*Continued on back page*

# Volunteers Needed for the Sierra Club Niagara Group

By Sara Schultz, Niagara Group Chair

When a baby is born his or her parents have hopes and dreams for that child. For me, it was love beyond anything I have ever experienced before. What I didn't have to think about when my children were born was that factories could be spouting particulates in my neighborhood, diesel buses might be running in an already smog-filled community and that my water could be tainted by neglect, greed or incompetence. As a mother and grandmother, I can only pray that no child be compromised in health and wellbeing. Poverty and the color of our skin should not be a factor in who gets to live in a safe and healthy environment and who must grow up with air not fit to breathe and water not safe to drink.

As a white and very privileged American, I cannot speak for the experience of those who have lived a life of injustice. I can, however, ask myself, "what am I doing to bring change?" When have I dismissed the issue of environmental justice because it is just too hard a struggle? When have I been too lazy or distracted to show up and stand up for racial equity? When have I made assumptions about people who have a different culture than me? Now is the time for great self-reflection. And now is the time, hopefully, for change.

The Sierra Club has been fighting for environmental justice for many years and now, with the energized "anti-racism" movement, I am even more certain that Sierra Club is committed to protecting and defending everyone's community! The support we give to campaigns for clean public transportation, renewable energy for public schools and buildings, electric school buses and green space within our towns and cities is entirely connected to environmental justice. When we give our time and donations to those running for public office who believe that children everywhere deserve to be healthy and safe, this is work toward environmental justice. When we write to our legislators and let them know what policies will protect the lives of our black and brown sisters and brothers, that is work toward environmental justice. The efforts we make to reduce plastics and Styrofoam, creates a safer and more beautiful home for everyone and reduces the extraction of fossil fuels; these are all things we can do to work toward environmental justice.



Please join Sierra Club Niagara in working toward healing our country and keeping every child and family safe from harm.

- Email us at [niagarasierra@gmail.com](mailto:niagarasierra@gmail.com)
- Go on our website [niagarasierraclub.org](http://niagarasierraclub.org)
- Drop us a note at:  
Sierra Club Niagara Group  
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Williamsville, NY 14231.

To succeed we need your help. Our small Executive Committee simply cannot do all the work that needs to get done. Stay safe, enjoy our glorious summer and hope to meet you soon!

If you are interested in volunteering with Sierra Club Niagara Group, please send us your name and what area you are interested in and email it to: [Niagarasierra@gmail.com](mailto:Niagarasierra@gmail.com).

## So What Do We Do Now?

By Lynda Schneekloth

We are standing at a defining moment in human history and indeed, in the life of earth. Those of us alive today are faced with climate change as CO2 has passed 417 ppm and a biodiversity crises that threatens to destroy the richness of life on this fragile planet, including our own. We are in the midst of a global pandemic that has rearranged all of our practices and living patterns regardless of how much some insist we return to 'normal.' And we have risen up and marched for racial justice – a global movement revealing the gross injustices of our 'normal', even to some of those who work hard to suppress and control the narratives on race, the economy, and social relations.

Although these various crises may seem unrelated, they share a cause: it is we humans who are responsible for the construction and breakdown of the human systems. But we are also the cause of the climate and biodiversity crises, and even the pandemic by our exploitive and extractive practices toward the earth. This human harm is both a source of deep despair and even shame, but also a beacon of hope. If these crises are human caused, they can be human changed.

Yes, we have not been good ancestors, those of us from the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. We leave a severely damaged earth to our children and their children. But we can also be good ancestors if we engage in a transition that bends the universe toward justice, that chooses to work with the earth's processes of regeneration in our human energy, food, settlement, production, and transportation systems. And we can re-establish right relationships with our non-human kin by healing and restoring the earth.

Since agricultural revolution and the establishment of cities, but especially in modern times, we have used up nearly 75% of the earth's land for our purposes and 33% of the seas. We have believed a story and therefore operated from that belief, that we are different from the rest of creation, that we are separate, superior, smarter and wiser, even naming ourselves Homo sapiens. But this story turns out to be 'fake news' and

the consequences of our cultural/economic practices are now blatantly uncovered.

Sierra Club members know all this, and daily step out as life warriors in the struggle to transform our practices and our narratives. This is critical and urgent work. Every day there is more real news about heat waves, fires in Siberia, Australia and the Amazon, violent storms, acidification of the oceans and rising seas. We try our best, but still we feel it is not enough. And we're right.

So what do we do now? First, let's always be honest with ourselves and others. Tell the truth as we know it, gently if required, fiercely when appropriate. Let's remind ourselves that it is love that motivates us – love of the earth and her wonders, love for our people, gratitude to our ancestors for their gifts, love for our children. When connected to the earth and each other, we are able to send out hope and energy into the world to combat the negativity and despair that we feel all around us. We will not succumb to the messages to 'give up.'

Yes, we need to organize, participate in electoral politics, march and chant, write letters and postcards, testify, attend meetings (lots of meetings, mostly virtual now), and be strategic. We need to be attentive to the struggle of organizations like the Sierra Club seeking responsible action by adopting protocols such as the Jemez Principles. (<https://www.sierraclub.org/planet/2017/10/sierra-club-and-jemez-principles>). We need to listen more deeply to our neighbors who stand with us, to those who are afraid, and to those most vulnerable in our communities and across the globe. We also must listen to ourselves so that we attend to how we show up for our work, letting ourselves being vulnerable enough to bring our whole self with hopes and fears and intentions. It can be scary, but really, what do we have to lose? We are a part of a great movement for justice and love and healing at this moment on planet Earth; we have so much to give and so much to gain.

*"Act NOW" continued from front page*

What can the average Sierra Club member do that will help change public policy? What can we do to decrease carbon emissions, pollution of air, water and soil? To restore natural environments and protect endangered forests, plants and animals? Without a doubt, the biggest impact the average SC member can make right now is to work towards the election of individuals who value these same things and will implement public policies that the Sierra Club supports.

You have probably read or heard about the national Sierra Club campaign to defeat Donald Trump in November. The name of the campaign is "Plan to Win". It is a strategic plan to get infrequent voters in four swing states (AZ, FL, MI, PA) to vote for Joe Biden, as well as other candi-

dates who are concerned about the climate crisis and want the US to transition quickly to a renewable energy economy. These infrequent voters value natural environments and have supported our campaigns in the past. You can help get them to vote in November by recruiting as many of your friends, colleagues and family to be part of this "Plan to Win". It is easy to get involved. Here are the steps for what you need to do.

- Step 1: Go to the "Plan to Win" website to learn about the strategy.  
([sierraclubindependentaction.org/2020-plan-to-win](http://sierraclubindependentaction.org/2020-plan-to-win))
- Step 2: Decide which team(s) you would like to join. There are 3 teams to choose from.
  - Letter Writing
  - Texting
  - Phone Calls

- Step 3: Sign on to the team(s) you want to be a part of.

- Step 4: Follow directions that will be provided by Sierra Club team leaders.

- Step 5: Invite your like-minded friends, family and colleagues to join you on the team.

Several members of the Sierra Club Niagara Group Executive Committee have already joined the Letter Writing team. It is very easy to do and takes very little time, since the letters are already typed up and all you do is add a sentence or two explaining why you are voting this November.

If you'd like more information, please check out the website listed above or e-mail us at [niagarasierra@gmail.com](mailto:niagarasierra@gmail.com).

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significant environmental impacts, an EIS is necessary. Recently, a federal court ordered the Dakota Access Pipeline shut down and called on the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct a full EIS. We call on the Army Corps to not issue a permit for the Northern Access without a valid NYSDEC Water Quality Certification in place and again call for a full EIS to be conducted.

To learn what you can do to take action please visit [niagarasierraclub.org](http://niagarasierraclub.org)

