Who’s Protecting Us from Nuclear Radiation?

Nuclear Waste and Western New York

By Lynda Schneekloth

As many Sierra Club members know, we live in the shadow of a major nuclear waste site – the West Valley Nuclear Waste Facility located about 30 miles SW of Buffalo near Ashford Hollow and the proposed Northern Access Pipeline (NAPL). This site has been dangerous since the 1960s and there are many people in our region who know about and care about the processes occurring at West Valley.

The West Valley Action Network with whom the Niagara Group of The Sierra Club is working, is sounding an alarm because of the planned spring demolition of the on-site Main Process Plant Building, probably one of the hottest hotspots on earth. The demolition is needed – that is not the alarm. What is causing deep concern is the demolition process they appear to have selected and the lack of information to the public about how people in the region will be protected from an accidental release of radioactive material that will be deadly for millions of years. The possibility of release is real as it happened at the Hanford site in Washington State where people were exposed. Accidents do happen and we insist that DOE inform the public of the risks they are exposing us to as they are taking any potential accidents.

There are also best practices that could be deployed that would offer additional protections such as an enclosure over the structure during demolition, essentially ‘putting a mask on West Valley.’ And there can be thorough (real time publicly accessible) monitoring of water and air in the surrounding community that would alert residents if there were a release. We are asking for these actions or minimally for a science-based precautionary approach about why it would be safe to do an open-air demolition, backed up by research into past accidents. The DOE promised to do a report that compares enclosure vs. open air demolition, but has not.

Given that we have not had satisfying conversations with DOE, we are turning to the state of NY and asking those agencies involved and our own elected officials to step in. We need the state to stand up for the people and environment of our home here in WNY. We are asking that the elected officials and agencies provide more oversight of DOE: about process, procedure and potential for release; why they have selected open air demolition in the absence of the promised report; how people will be informed in the event of a release; and what emergency procedures are in place, among other questions.

The West Valley Action Network has contacted our elected officials such as Majority Leader Crystal Peoples Stokes and Senator Sean Ryan, and also the Lt. Governor Kathy Hochul and Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

To reinforce that request WE ARE ASKING YOU, to sign a petition that will demonstrate to NYS officials that there are many people in our region who know about and care about the processes occurring at West Valley. Upon signing, your request will be sent to Majority Leader Peoples Stokes and Senator Sean Ryan, and also the Lt. Governor Kathy Hochul and Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

PLEASE OPEN AND SIGN THIS PETITION To protect WNY’s people, land, water and air from any release of plutonium or other nuclear material by using an enclosure during demolition and doing real-time publicly available air and water monitoring in the surrounding area. https://nirs.salalab.com/ny-west-valley-action-2020

This action about the proposed spring demolition doesn’t resolve the problems at West Valley and we will still have to fight for full clean-up of the site. But this action will a major step forward in protecting our health, lands, air and water from deadly nuclear waste.


Climate Contemplations

By Richard Stockton

Perhaps the most important lesson to come out of this past year is to be reminded of our pressing need for humility; how we are an inescapably small part of nature. How a virus, which may have existed in another species for longer than human beings have existed, can take over our lives because of our own ignorance and inegitude. How politics and policy can have no answers for this problem. That is why the only way forward is a deeper understanding of the natural world around us and how we must become more attuned to its lessons.

This will not be the last time that humanity will be shocked by nature; climate change is already upon us and is an existential threat to our human society? Are we ready?
Climate warming has plunged environmentalists deep into a Charlie Brown–Linus drought cycle of fossil fuels to wind, sun and geothermal. If, in this way, we slow the flow of CO2 into the atmosphere, we may mitigate the droughts, storms and deluges of our changing climate. But we cannot slip away from the slow stagnating rate of change, an issue that affects all regions of the state.

If the EBA is placed on the 2021 ballot, it could be one of two state initiatives on the ballot. The second is the Green Amendment, which would amend the NY State Constitution and guarantee that “each person shall have the right to clean air and water, and a healthful environment.” This passed in the Legislature in 2019, but the State Constitution must pass in two successive legislative sessions and then be passed by a statewide voter referendum. In 2019, the amendment was supported by 90 organizations, including the Sierra Club of New York. The purpose of this initiative is to provide a buffer against some of the basic environmental protections on the federal level and with society’s increased focus on environmental justice.

Let’s start with a bill recently vetoed by Governor Cuomo. The A-B-Cs of Stream Protection was sponsored by our local Assemblymember Sean Ryan. This bill would have, through the imposition of coal ash disposal fees, provided additional funding to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to improve the quality of our state’s streams and to protect Class C waterways that (those that support fisheries and non-contact recreation) under State law. In 2019, the Federal Government rolled back protection on thousands of miles of streams, of which is the Class C waterway classification in New York. Protection of the quality of these waterways were key to successful conservation efforts in the region. The Conservation decision to reject permits for the Northern Access and Constitution methane pipelines.

Another thing taken off the table by the Governor was the Bond Act which was supposed to go to the voters for the November election. This was taken off the ballot siting an “unstable financial situation.” This may have been short sighted as the $3 Billion Bond Act looks to be huge jobs creator, funding environmental protection, natural restoration, resiliency, and clean energy projects. Like the们的 Niagara Water/Credit Act (CWCB), it focuses on the big issue of the day. Unlike the Superfund-like focus of the CWCA, the EBA focuses on today’s need to build and protect wetlands, to combat the issue that affects all regions of the state.

The Niagara River Greenway has, for nearly 50 years, provided an excellent example of this wetland restoration work (abridged): Ellicott Creek, Hyde Park Lake, Tifft Nature Preserve (Lonicera spp.), and glossy buckthorn (Frangula alnus.)

The objectives of the “Mosquito Junction Swamp Restoration Project” at Tiff Nature Preserve, as cited in the application for Greenway funds, provides an excellent example of this wetland restoration work (abridged):

- Clear, cut, and stump-treat 100% of woody vegetation from 5 acres, to less than 10% of its current size.
- Eliminate invasive species that require annual herbicide treatments.
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The wetlands of the Niagara River Greenway have suffered badly at the hands of recreation, industry and commerce. Fletillas of motorboats plow through and chew them up. The rise and fall of the Niagara River caused by varying amounts of water drawn off to generate electric power has played havoc with wetland vegetation. Climate change electric power generation is turning our once-lush flora into a massive source of pollution and choking them.

The Niagara River Greenway Authority has recognized the plight of the Niagara river wetlands within its boroughs and has since 1967 used the funds from its Niagara Power Project relicensing money to preserve and expand the savaged natural gifts. The Niagara River Greenway Authority has recognized the plight of the Niagara river wetlands within its boroughs and has since 1967 used the funds from its Niagara Power Project relicensing money to preserve and expand the savaged natural gifts. The Niagara River Greenway Authority has recognized the plight of the Niagara river wetlands within its boroughs and has since 1967 used the funds from its Niagara Power Project relicensing money to preserve and expand the savaged natural gifts.

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