



The TRAILBLAZER

January 2009

Niagara Group of the Sierra Club

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Blue Green Alliance

by Robert Ciesielski

The Niagara Group chaired a panel on the Blue Green Alliance between the Sierra Club and the United Steelworkers of America in October 2008. The Alliance continues to educate and support the development of green jobs and a low-carbon economy.

Panelists included: Bill Pienta, Director of District 4 of the Steelworkers union, who represents 61,000 workers in nine northeastern states and Puerto Rico; Frank Hotchkiss, District organizer and promoter of the Blue Green Alliance in District 4; Colleen Sarna from Chicago, working with the National Sierra Club's "Cool Cities" program; and Bob Knoer, Esq., environmental attorney with the Knoer Group and expert on carbon caps and carbon taxes.

The panelists spoke of the many ways unions and environmental groups have come to recognize their common goals. It is to everyone's benefit to control global climate change. This common goal can be furthered by creation of a sustainable economy, based on low-carbon energy sources. The development of this economy will require good paying jobs which cannot be outsourced. An economy based on alternative energy sources will reduce the need for foreign oil, and move us away from the temptation to become involved in oil wars. Alternative energy sources will also reduce our dependence on coal, which results in enormous greenhouse gases and mountaintop removal. Hopefully it will also prevent the use of other environmental unhealthy fossil fuel sources such as tar sands, gas drilling in Marcellus Shale, and the corn ethanol morass. Bob Knoer also gave a power-point presentation on the option of carbon caps as one incentive to drive the development of clean energy sources and jobs.

The economic possibilities are endless with green job development: solar, wind and geothermal industries; hybrid and electric cars; clean buses and rail development; green building construction of commercial and residential buildings; development and architectural planning in accordance with sustainable land use; weatherization and energy saving appliances, and multiple other green jobs.

Chemical Waste Management Fined for Repeated Violations

Chemical Waste Management has agreed to pay \$175,000 in fines for a series of violations.

The Department of Environmental Conservation says that there have been dozens of violations including improper labeling, leaking drums, disposal of wastes without DEC approval, process tank overflows, waste transporter conditions, compliance failures, and others.

DEC Regional Director Abby Snyder was quoted in the Niagara Gazette as saying that the "DEC will continue to hold CWM accountable and closely monitor this facility to help ensure compliance with the state's permit and hazardous waste laws, as well as the corrective actions required as part of this agreement in order to protect the environment and public health."

Army Corps of Engineers Shamefully Unresponsive

The Restoration Advisory Board for the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works, chaired by Joe Gardella, has been trying unsuccessfully for over two years to get some answers from the Army Corps of Engineers.

The Board has members who have scientific backgrounds and former health professionals. They are trying in behalf of the community to learn about the dangers posed by the radiological and chemical contamination that has been in the site for over 70 years.

State Attorney General Andrew Cuomo has told the Army Corps that their attempt to dissolve the advisory board was "illegal and misguided." Representative Louise Slaughter suggested that an arbitrator be used to restore a relationship between the Restoration Advisory Board and the Corps of Engineers. Senator Charles Schumer also favored that suggestion. The Buffalo News has tried to contact the Corps about their absence from a recent meeting, but a Corps spokesman said they had no comment.

Local citizens and the public at large deserve better. When a governmental agency that is supposed to serve the public refuses to enter into dialogue or provide information, something is seriously wrong. Is there any serious interest in providing answers or working to find solutions to the dangers of toxic pollution in Niagara County?

HELEN System Up and Running

The Niagara Group is using the Sierra Club's national on-line database system "HELEN" to help communicate with our members. We are able to e-mail you limited and brief messages/updates that pertain to our Group. Approximately twenty-five percent of our Group membership has an e-mail address filed in the Club's national database.

If you would like to receive e-mail from the Niagara Group (or are not sure if the Club has your e-mail information) you can send your e-mail address to: sierra-clubangela@gmail.com. It will then be entered into the HELEN system. You can also use this address to opt-out of receiving our e-mail.

Sierra Club Asks for DEC Siting Plan Re-Write

The Department of Environmental Conservation held 10 hearings across New York State concerning their proposed siting plan for toxic waste landfills. The last two were in Niagara Falls and in Lewiston. About 80 people attended the Niagara Falls one and 200 the final one.

Several members of our Niagara Group attended. Many thoughtful statements were made showing the inadequacies and dangers of the proposed plan.

Chemical Waste Management is attempting to expand, and they can not proceed with their permit application for the expansion until a siting plan is approved. That is why opposition to the proposed siting plan is so necessary.

The DEC plan itself lists a hierarchy in which land-filling is the least desirable of all means of disposing of toxic wastes. Producing less comes first, then recycling, and thirdly detoxification. The plan also admits that the Environmental Protection Agency says there is no need for additional landfills for toxic wastes for the foreseeable future. Despite all of that, the proposed siting plan still does not take a strong stand against future landfills in New York State. It does not comply with a court order that any siting plan be geographically equitable. It calls the danger of transporting toxics here negligible, despite the fact that many trucks have leaked en route, and at least one has overturned. It does not take note of the unusually high cancer rates in the area near CWM. These are only a few of the defects in the plan pointed out by speakers at the hearings.

At the Lewiston Porter hearing, approximately 27 people spoke. All opposed elements of the plan except for three. The three who favored the plan work for Chemical Waste Management or for companies that do business with CWM.

The DEC is supposed to respond to all the comments and produce a revised plan. DEC spokespersons estimated this will be done by the summer of 2009.

Bob Ciesielski, our Niagara Group president, made an eloquent statement in our behalf in opposition to the plan as it is presently written.

General Membership Meeting Scheduled for January 22, 2009 Viewing of the film "Flow"

The Niagara Group invites you to its next general membership meeting to be held on Thursday, January 22, 2009 at 7:00 pm at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Amherst, 6320 Main Street, Williamsville, New York (between Youngs and Transit).

Our executive committee member, Lynda Schneckloth, will give a presentation on the Year of the Our Shared Waters, the international celebration of the 100th anniversary of the joint US-Canadian Agreement concerning the Great Lakes. There will be a number of other events scheduled throughout 2009 on Great Lakes issues in the Buffalo area.

"Flow: For Love of Water", by Irena Salina, a powerful documentary on the growing importance of fresh water in the drier, industrialized world of the 21st Century, will be shown.

What's the Future for West Valley?

The U. S. Department of Energy has issued a Draft Environmental Impact Statement concerning West Valley.

The report lists several possible ways of dealing with the radioactive waste there. One plan calls for complete removal of the wastes but says this would take 64 years. Besides that, there is no national disposal facility available.

A second proposal, to do nothing but leave the waste where it is, is certainly not acceptable to many people of the area and to all concerned citizens.

Burying it where it is now is also unacceptable because of the fear of its leaching into creeks, Lake Erie, and the Niagara River.

A fourth proposal calls for a 30 year "phased decision-making" plan which is the proposal favored by the Department of Energy and the New York State Energy and Research Authority. In that plan, major facilities in the site would be removed and therefore some of the sources for groundwater contamination would be eliminated.

The plan continues to refuse for the U. S. Government to accept 100% responsibility for solving the problem.

PUBLIC HEARINGS are being called for the following dates and places:

March 31, Seneca Nation of Indians, William Seneca Building, 12837 Route 438, Irving

April 1, Ashford Office Complex, 9030 Route 219, West Valley

April 2, Clarion Hotel, McKinley Banquet and Conference Center, S3950 McKinley Parkway, Blasdell

Times for the hearings will be announced, and a comment period will continue until June.

2009 YEAR OF OUR SHARED WATERS

by Lynda Schmeekloth

This year of 2009 has been declared The Year of Our Shared Waters by the municipalities that border the Niagara River in the United States and Canada. There will be festivities, lectures, conferences, films, exhibitions, performances and educational efforts to mark the year and to offer education about, and celebration of, the abundant waters we share.

The Niagara Group of the Sierra Club is sponsoring programs about water. The first is the film entitled *Flow: For Love of Water*. Commentary will be provided as well as some time for discussion. This program will be on Thursday, January 22, 2009 at 7PM at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Amherst, 6320 Main Street, Williamsville, New York (between Youngs and Transit).

The year 2009 is punctuated by the 100th Anniversary of the Boundary Waters Treaty that will be celebrated at the cross border Niagara Falls on June 13, 2009. The Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 created the independent International Joint Commission (IJC) to prevent and resolve boundary waters disputes between Canada and the United States. The IJC makes decisions on applications for projects such as dams in boundary waters and regulates the operations of many of those projects. The IJC also has a permanent reference under the 1972 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement to help the two national governments restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of those waters. Over 40% of the boundary the divides and connects Canada and the United States is water.

In Niagara, the lakes and rivers have always been important. The history and livelihood of the many peoples

who have lived in this region have depended on these waters for food, transport, energy, recreation and joy. The Niagara River, a 37 mile connecting channel in the center of this cross-border region carries nearly 20% of the world's fresh surface water. Over 90% of the water resources of the United States are found in the Great Lakes. It has been the lifeblood of this place for thousands of years.

The year, 2009, is a significant year in the life of the Niagara region not only because of the Boundary Waters Treaty. This is also a year of regional water anniversaries with the 20th Anniversary of the Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper and the 50th Anniversary of the Canadian Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority.

Sierra Club is joining with others in the region to make 2009 truly a year of our shared waters. We hope to expand the scientific, environmental, economic and political sectors who are now attending to the waters to a much broader community through education, art and culture. The goal is to involve the people of this region in learning more about their precious waters and what they might do to protect them now and for their children.

It is significant that the IJC has selected the Niagara Region to host this very important anniversary. As Paul Dyster, Mayor of Niagara Falls reminds us, "The Falls are a magnificent symbol of these shared waters and our shared responsibility to protect their beauty and majesty for the next 100 years and beyond." Join us in our many events! Information will be provided on our website <http://newyork.sierraclub.org/Niagara/> and also <http://www.oursharedwaters.com>.

Church Groups Oppose Expansion by Chemical Waste Management

The Presbytery of Western New York has passed a resolution and sent it to Governor Paterson, urging that CWM not be granted a permit to expand. A letter to the Department of Environmental Conservation opposing the siting plan for toxic wastes has also been sent by the Synod, which represents the northeastern states.

The New York Conference of the United Church of Christ has taken similar action. This state wide group was the first denomination to vote in its annual meeting to inform the governor that they oppose a new toxic landfill here.

Now the Episcopal Diocese of Western New York has joined the chorus, adding their voice against a permit for CWM expansion.

We hope the Governor and the Department of Environmental Conservation listen to these voices of conscience that are calling for the protection of our environment and people.

American Chestnut Foundation Reports Finding Mature Trees

The American Chestnut tree, as many know, used to be the glory of eastern forests. Perhaps as many as one in four trees were American Chestnuts. There were noted for their beauty, their shade, their excellent wood, and their nuts. Squirrels wouldn't bother with acorns if they had chestnuts.

The American Chestnut is not to be confused with the Horse Chestnut or other types of Chestnut. Most people today have never seen an American Chestnut. A blight took them away in the early 1900s. Ever since, the American Chestnut Foundation has been working to develop a hybrid that would be disease resistant.

Members and friends of the American Chestnut Society plant saplings from time to time, and sometimes they grow for a number of years, encouraging hope, only to become sickly and die later. Sometimes they would survive 5 years and grow to 12 feet before becoming infected.

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The Need for Night

The November 2008 issue of National Geographic features as its cover story "The End of Night: Why We Need Darkness." This is must reading for those concerned about "light pollution."

This type of pollution is perhaps the least discussed environmental problem, but one that could most easily be corrected.

There is no need for so many bright lights. Safety lights at night can be aimed toward the ground, or shielded in such a way so as not to project long distances.

How many of our children have never seen the Milky Way? How many have never had the experience of awe that comes from looking at a sky filled with millions of stars?

Not only for beauty, but for health, darkness is needed. Humans have altered their environment for the worse. Too much light can confuse birds in migration and natural bodily rhythms.

Read the article! If you don't subscribe to National Geographic, your local library has a copy. Also recom-

mended: read the webpage of the International Dark Sky Association, at www.darksky.org/mc/page.do.

(By the way, someone said that eventually the earth will not be destroyed by flood or fire, but by sinking under the weight of accumulated National Geographics since nobody ever throws one away!)

American Chestnut continued from p.3

However, there is good news now. John Stoneman, founder of the Allegheny Outdoor Adventures, reports that the American Chestnut Foundation has analyzed twigs, burrs, and seed sample collected at Rimrock, in Pennsylvania, and confirmed that they are 100% American chestnut trees without blight.

Thirty one trees have been found in the area. Some were up to 70 feet tall and 40 years of age. This is a startling development.

For more information about the American Chestnut Foundation and its work, go to www.acf.org.


If you have information you wish to share or copy for use in the Trailblazer, please send it to Charles Lamb at 335 Walnut Lane, Youngstown, NY 14174 or clamb9@roadrunner.com or call 716-745-7037. Deadlines for the year are as follows: March 1, June 1, September 1, and January 1.

The Niagara Group of the Sierra Club meets on the 4th Tuesday of every month at 7p.m. at Daemen College, Dunn Scotus Hall, room 222. All Sierrans are invited!

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Sierra Club
Niagara Group
P. O. Box 371
Williamsville, NY 14231-0371

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SIERRA CLUB



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