



The TRAILBLAZER

April 2003

Niagara Group of the Sierra Club

Vol. XXXV, No.1

Major Issues Chosen for Action

As the Niagara Group moves into 2003, three issues were chosen for major emphasis. The Sierra Club remains open to hear other issues and help in all environmental concerns to the best of our ability, but we will focus on the following:

Toxics • Wetlands • Sprawl

Each member of the Executive Committee will work in one of these areas. More people are needed and invited to the meetings and to deeper involvement in local endeavors.

Niagara Group Reports Membership and Elects New Leaders

There are now 2,220 members of the Niagara Group of the Sierra Club.

At the January 28 meeting of the Group, Ms Jane Jontz was elected president. Frank Mendel will be vice president. Art Klein will continue to serve as secretary and Steve Burns will continue as treasurer. Thanks to Mike Kukla, the outgoing president, for a job well done and thanks to those who will serve in the days ahead.

Next Meeting of Buffalo Group Set

The next meeting of our Buffalo Group of the Sierra Club will happen, as usual, on the fourth Tuesday of the month, March 25. *We will meet at 7:00 at the United Methodist Church of Williamsville, 5681 Main Street, until future notice.* The cost of meeting in the Harlem Road Community Center made the Executive Committee decide to accept the offer of a free meeting place at the Methodist Church, where our President Jane Jontz is a member. We met there on Feb. 25 and found the room to be very inviting and suitable for our gatherings.

Hufnagel Appointed to Two Committees

Ken Baer, President of the Atlantic Chapter of the Sierra Club, has appointed Jim Hufnagel to two committees: the International Population Committee and the Political Committee. We congratulate our Niagara Group member on these key appointments.

Welcome to New Members, from Gen Robins, Membership Chair:

To all new members of the Niagara Group of the Atlantic Chapter: I and my co-chairs for membership extend a hearty welcome. I can only assume that the reason we have not received the ordered welcome cards from San Francisco is because membership has sky-rocketed out of sight and they cannot keep ahead of the need. We all wish you a very productive journey with us with excellent results in the next year's (2004) elections.

An Appeal from Genevieve Robins

Genevieve Robins, a long-standing member of the Sierra Club, returned from a recent visit to North Carolina. While there, she learned that the U.S. Navy wants to build a practice landing field in the middle of a nesting ground for snow geese.

This led her to think how important it is for young people to learn to care for the environment and to become actively involved in working to save our planet. She urges all who read this paper to provide a membership for some young graduate. Why not give a Sierra Club membership as a graduation gift this year? Start that person on a new way of commitment and life?

BIRDS TO BEETHOVEN: A Welcome to Spring

Orchestrated and presented by Mike Clack,
award winning bird photographer

Wine and Cheese Reception

Saturday, March 29, 7:00 PM
Youngstown Presbyterian Church Hall

Fund raiser sponsored by
Residents for Responsible Government
Call 791-4562 for details and discounts

Tickets : \$10 at door \$9 if ordered in advance

Enlist Your Church or Synagogue

an editorial by co-editor Charles Lamb

If churches, synagogues, and other religious bodies would accept the fact that care of the environment is a religious duty, thousands more people could join with us in the struggle to protect our earth and its creatures.

I hope that every Sierra Club member who belongs to a religious organization will urge their minister, priest, or rabbi to address these issues. They could preach on these issues, or guest speakers, from the Sierra Club or elsewhere, would come upon request. Or, those of you who read this column could offer to lead a discussion yourselves!

If you want to get involved, here are some Scripture passages that merit discussion.

Almost everyone knows the story of Noah and the Ark, found in Genesis chapters 6 through 8. Consider these points from that ancient story:

1. Human sin caused environmental destruction.

The evil of people brought about the flood.

Can we say today that human greed and selfishness has brought about degradation of our environment?

2. Every type of animal was to be brought onto the ark so as to be preserved. This was the first endangered species act. God evidently wanted all of his creatures to be saved from extinction.

Read Psalm 104 This psalm mentions many types of wildlife and points out that God provides for them, not just for humans. Grass grows for the cattle (verse 14). High mountains are for the wild goats (vs. 15) etc.

In the New Testament, in Matthew 10:29 we are told that not even a sparrow falls without God's notice.

Deuteronomy 20:19 instructs warriors who besiege a town not to destroy the trees.

There are others. Basic to them all, the theological principle that God is creator, that the earth and all that is within it is God's, and that humans are to care for it responsibly under girds environmental actions.

Most scholars today consider the verse 28 in Genesis 1, which tells people to subdue the earth and have dominion over its creatures, to have been wrongly interpreted for generations. The point of the command is that people are to exert responsible care and stewardship over the creation. As someone wrote in a letter to the Sierra Magazine, if I put someone in charge of my home I hardly mean that I am inviting them to wreck it if they wish!

Religious people should be willing to engage in discussion of all of these passages, and consider their deeper meanings. Then, in that discussion, current issues can be raised concerning what we need to do today to honor creation, preserve life, and care for the environment.

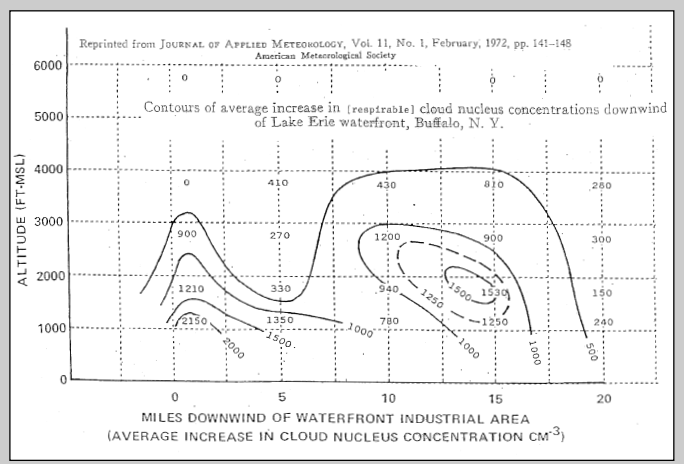
It will be worth your time to bring these issues into your religious community and challenge them to join you in working for a healthy environment.

Is there a second downwind Peace Bridge particle plume?

by Bob Baier

Local investigators associated with the new NYSTAR (New York Science, Technology and Academic Research) Agency-supported Environmental Quality Systems Center are seeking evidence for a suspected association between Buffalo-waterfront-spawned pollutants and health effects between Buffalo and Rochester. As part of the Syracuse-headquartered 12-institution research consortium, the University at Buffalo (UB)-based team is leading an effort to determine the urban/border influences on indoor air quality—with special attention to the issues raised by Dr. Jamson Lwebuga-Mukasa regarding respiratory illness risks from Peace Bridge traffic pollution (“West Side asthma rate is 35.7% of homes”, by Sandra Tan, Buffalo News, 20 OCT 2002).

Based on studies originally done 30 years ago by Cheektowaga-based Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory (since renamed Calspan, and now Veridian), an even more concentrated secondary plume of respirable-sized particulates—also identified as Cloud Condensation Nuclei—appears about 15 miles downwind of the Buffalo/waterfront generating sources! The accompanying diagram, based on work published by the Cornell Lab group in 1972, shows a prevailing downwind particle depot in the sparsely populated reservation areas between Buffalo and Batavia. These breathable bits are almost certainly created by photocatalytic gas-to-particle transitions from raw materials generated near the Canada/US border, and probably include the more mutagenic and toxic “aged” diesel particulates identified over many years by the CUBRC (Calspan UB Research Center) team led by Tom Albrechcinski (“Effects of Photochemical Aging and Exposure of Diesel Exhaust, and the Toxicity of Diesel Particulate”, Fifth Annual Buffalo Environmental Health Science Conference, 17 APR 2000).



Suspected Causes for Amherst's Sinking Homes

by Liz Kaszubski and Chuck Guzzetta

Amherst homeowners have escalating concerns regarding foundation settlement problems. Local governments have difficulty with funding required to address such disasters that may involve the condemnation of homes and relocation of residents. Most homeowners' insurance policies do not cover subsidence-related problems.

Amherst is not alone. In the hot, dry weather of 1999, other communities experienced similar problems, i.e., Jefferson City, MO and Philadelphia, PA. The US Army Corps of Engineers will conduct a study in Amherst to determine the causes of the "sinking homes" as the Corps did in the Philadelphia area. Amherst citizens should wait, if at all possible, for completed studies before making costly decisions.

The Niagara Group invited Charles Guzzetta, a geotechnical/environmental specialist with SJB Services, Inc., to speak at our February meeting. The following is some of the information Mr. Guzzetta provided:

Several possible causes of foundation settlement include: abnormal soil moisture at the time the foundation was poured; undercompaction of the subgrade beneath the foundation; overcompaction of the subgrade causing swelling of the soil prior to placement of foundation; placing foundations over organic materials which over time decay; loss of soil moisture of expansive clays causing settlement; and marginal bearing capacity of the soils beneath the foundation.

Concrete foundations can crack due to alkali-silica reactions, freeze-thaw, and other reasons including stresses created by the motion of the soil. Poor construction techniques and inadequate designs may contribute to problems.

In some areas of Amherst, "soft", wet or very moist silty clay soils exist directly beneath or within a few feet of the building foundations. The Erie County Soil Survey maps the first 5 feet of soil and would not be as useful for buildings with foundations extending from 8 to 12 feet below the ground surface. Subsurface explorations provide reliable, detailed data as to soils and groundwater conditions.

SJB has drilled across Amherst and has the largest database of deep soil deposit information regarding Amherst soils that may impact building foundations. Much of Amherst north of the escarpment contains glacial-lake silty clay deposits, glacial till deposits, and sandy beach sediments. The upper 6-8 feet of silty clay soils located in portions of Amherst are relatively "medium-stiff" to "hard" and are capable of supporting commercial building structures on shallow foundation systems. These soils have dried over thousands of years and have experienced shrinkage causing their "stiffer" consistency.

At depths varying from 6 to over 20 feet, however, "soft" and wet silty clay soils have been encountered in some areas of Amherst, whereas in other areas relatively "hard"

con't on pg. 4.

Peace Bridge Replacement Project by Art Klein

In the 1990's the Peace Bridge Authority believed that the increasing traffic caused by NAFTA would require increased maintenance on the aging bridge. They perceived that shutting down the bridge for extended periods of time would lead to serious loss of service and revenue.

The Authority determined that it could simply replicate the current bridge and side step environmental reviews. This mistake led to what we are into, a full Environmental Impact Statement. For the full story I recommend two web sites: Bruce Jackson's: <http://buffaloreport.com/allbridge.html> and <http://www.peacebridgex.com/home.shtml> which tracks the project. Currently two bridge sites are considered: one at Tonawanda, favored by some elected officials and the other at the current site, which is more practical.

The Tonawanda site aroused NIMBY anger by many Tonawanda folk. At its last meeting the Tonawanda Town Board was besieged with negative comments from their constituents. This and cost plus environmental impacts put this site in doubt.

What frustrates folk like me is that this effort represents a lot of New York money spent to build a highway for parts and products traveling between mostly the south-

ern states and Metro Toronto. But I think the single most important aspect that emerges from this study is an independent study of asthma levels in the West Side that was done by SUNYAB'S Doctor Lwebuga-Mukasa. Larry Beahan met with the Doctor and provided me with these facts: Doctor Jamson Lwebuga-Mukasa published articles on asthma and Peace Bridge traffic in the Journal of Asthma, Journal of School Health, Journal of Urban Health, Environmental Health Perspectives and American Journal of Public health. Some conclusions:

- Asthma is aggravated by diesel exhaust.
- Since NAFTA, truck traffic has rapidly escalated across the Peace Bridge, (23.8% from 1993 to 1996.)
- Asthma admissions and Emergency Room visits in Buffalo have gone up parallel to this truck traffic, (Zip code 14201, near the bridge 70 %.)
- In one Buffalo-Westside neighborhood 23% of school children have asthma. The national average for kids of that age is 6.9%.
- After the 9/11 disasters, truck traffic on the Peace Bridge dropped precipitously; so did asthma near the bridge.
- Asthma medical costs in Western New York are about \$6 million per year.

con't on pg. 4.

Amherst's Sinking Homes con't.

soils have been encountered. The "soft" soils are highly susceptible to shrinkage if they dry out. There does not appear to be an obvious geographical pattern from where "soft" soils exist and "hard" soils exist, other than at the glacial till deposits and areas where bedrock is near the surface, the soils tend to be "stiffer". SJB provided potential factors as to why soils may be drying and shrinking, however further investigations are needed for confirmation.

NYS building codes adopted in 2003 state that in areas likely to have expansive, shifting or other unknown soil characteristics, a soil test shall be performed to determine characteristics at a particular location.

The information provided to Sierra Club was to assist in the understanding of the situation in Amherst. It was based on Empire Geo-Services, Inc.'s understanding of the general subsurface conditions in Amherst based on generally accepted soil and foundation engineering principles. No other warranties, expressed or implied are made. If you have questions, please contact SJB Services, Inc.

Peace Bridge Replacement Project con't.

Health consequences and costs are incurred when excessive truck traffic is located in a populated area. It is unfair to let these costs and consequences fall too heavily on any one community. The Westside of Buffalo has had more than its share of them. Dr. Lwebuga-Mukasa's suggests:

- Re-locate the truck parking and inspections
- Develop a system to collect and clean the exhaust before release
- Reduce traffic delays at customs
- Increase use of trains to transport goods

Thank You Doctors. Now dear reader you now have a reason to clamor for some unique outcomes to the EIS process.

I suggest we work on our legislators to act on something that is within their expertise and capability rather than bridge design. Why not ensure that any bridge does not create a negative impact on the health of our Human Community either Buffalo or Tonawanda? Its been 30 years since NEPA and SEQR were developed. Perhaps it is time to focus first, the human health impacts in any EIS, then consider other important aspects.

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 clamb0@prodigy.net or at 716-745-7037. Deadlines for the year are as follows: March 10, June 10, September 10, and December 10.
The Niagara Group of the Sierra Club meets on the fourth Tuesday of every month at 7:00 p.m. We will meet at the United Methodist Church of Williamsville, 5681 Main Street, on March 25 and until future notice. All Sierrans are invited!

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