Pipeline would have New Yorkers cooking with (radioactive) gas

With the advent of fracking, the gas supply is starting to come from nearby areas of high radioactivity, such as the Marcellus shale.

In its draft environmental impact statement submitted with its FERC application, the Spectra pipeline developers do not include radon in the review of issues.

The disaster at Fukushima came as a wakeup call of all. Last September, I watched films on nuclear issues, read endlessly on the subject, and delivered a petition to the Japanese Consulate in New York to stop burning radioactive rubble and to shut down nuclear power plants permanently in Japan.

Meeting with Fukushima activists in person was the most powerful wakeup call of all last September. I listened to the green activist Aileen Mioko Smith, and the organic farmer Sachiko Sako and her children at the Ethical Culture Society. They and other activists spoke about the situtation in Fukushima and their concerns about the dangers of nuclear power in general and at Indian Point.

Night after night, day after day, over the past year, I have scoured the Internet for information about Japan. I made online friendships with folks in Japan and anti-nuclear activists worldwide. I joined in marches in New York, attended lectures, watched films on nuclear issues, read endlessly on the subject, and delivered a petition to the Japanese Consulate in New York to stop burning radioactive rubble and to shut down nuclear power plants permanently in Japan.

Why we must shut down Indian Point — now

Feeling lucky?

Rachel Carson raised a red flag of warning a half-century ago. Why did her words go unheeded?

Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, and now — Fukushima.

When will we ever learn? I say, now.

If we weren’t focused on it before, if we had any doubts about the perils of nuclear power plants and the grave threats they pose, if we hadn’t taken the time to read the studies about the millions killed and sickened by Chernobyl, then Fukushima, melting down before our eyes, should now bring it all into clear and alarming focus.

Indian Point is right in our own backyard, looming with potential catastrophe for the entire Greater New York region. Yet we have a Governor who sees the wisdom of shutting it down. We must support him. Now. Now is the time for us all to rally and join the effort to shut it down.

I dreamt we were trying to get out — quickly. Sirens. I packed the car quickly — bottled water, cans of food, a few dishes. A few last things. Would we ever come back? My daughter opened the birdcage in the back yard and set our parrots free. Their unclipped wings allowed them to fly high, but where would they go?

Right before Fukushima blew last March, I was at work on a cultural memoir about my mother’s anti-nuclear activism and U.S. nuclear history. The more I read and learned about the dangers of nuclear power and weapons, the more I was haunted by the thought of nuclear meltdown. I was at a loss for words.

The disaster at Fukushima came as no surprise to me.

America likes reality shows, supervillains, monster trucks, singing contests, nannies teaching kids how to drive, celebrity chefs cooking with gas, and weapons, the more I scratched my head and agreed with Daniel Janal’s memoir about my mother’s anti-nuclear activism and U.S. nuclear history.

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I joined the Sierra Club over 25 years ago, and recently attended a Susquehanna Group meeting where I met old friends and fellow volunteers, some of whom I consider as close as family. What keeps the Sierra Club strong is this involvement of its members and the friendships we make. At the local and the state levels, we see our joint efforts produce environmental victories.

And, if we are so inclined, we can participate at the national level, where one person can also make a difference.

So, in the Sierra Club, the rubber meets the road at the grassroots level. As I’m not padded by the recent news that the national Club’s former CEO violated our trust by secretly accepting inappropriate compensation, I want to thank those in support of the Beyond Coal Campaign. (For details, read both articles on page 3.)

No corporate money

Let me assure you that the Club understands—but does not indulge—the impulse to take the slippery corporate route to fund-raising. Of course, we know how difficult it is to achieve significant victories on a shoestring. For example, we have only two staffers in Albany but it is imperative that we block the frackers from polluting our water and air; and prepping our move to conserve natural resources and transition to renewables.

Meanwhile, the industry has a slick phalanx of tailored lobbyists touting a campaign re-election war chest around the Capitol Yet, despite being outnumbered for nearly four years, we’ve prevented the frackers from closing the deal in Albany. How? A large, militant grassroots opposition has sprouted all over the state. It gives voice to the kind of irresistible outrage that scares politicians. You, as a member of the Atlantic Chapter, are part of the opposition, and we’re apparently winning the debate—so far.

Now is good time to reflect on how the Chapter is different from other grassroots allies and why it’s important to remain united and focused.

• Each year, the Chapter prioritizes the issues and focuses on a limited number of fronts. The Groups, however, can still pursue more localized issues that Means Sierrans aren’t focused exclusively on one happening in Albany or New York City. For example, this issue of the Sierra Atlantic reports that our members are battling “spread” on in support of the Beyond Coal Campaign. (For details, read both articles on page 3.)

No corporate money
The Sierra Club and natural gas

by Michael Brune

It’s time to stop thinking of natural gas as a “kinder, gentler” energy source. What’s more, we do not have an effective regulatory system to address the risks to our health and our communities.

Fracking: Is National catching up with the grassroots?

by Chris Burger

Fracking cannot be made safe, it would postpone the move away from fossil fuels and toward energy efficiency, conservation and renewables. So the Chapter called for a ban on fracking—the first major environmental group in Albany to do so.

National’s position

At this time National was in the midst of a highly successful ‘Beyond Coal’ campaign. Part of its strategy was to promote natural gas as a ‘bridge’ fuel until renewables could take their place. The Atlantic Chapter was told that its resolution was “not consistent with existing Club policy.” Thus, we began the Atlantic Chapter’s long, arduous task of educating National.

Members of the Atlantic Chapter and several Sierra Club activists in the Southern Tier met with then-Vice President for Conservation, Robin Mann, along with several National staff. We were appalled at their lack of detailed knowledge on the issue. As a meeting was ongoing, we expressed our concerns but were told not to speak publicly of the Chapter’s ban resolution.

In November, 2009, the Chapter sent a delegation of members to Fracking 2.0 to meet with members of the national Board of Directors. Our representations discovered that most board members knew very little about fracking.

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SIERRA CLUB

Your financial contribution means a lot to us. By supporting our Chapter, you support Sierra Club’s work across the nation. This makes you an essential part of our work to protect wilderness and wildlife, to improve the quality of our air, water, and to promote the enjoyment of nature. Thank you.

Explore, enjoy and protect the planet

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Fracking: Is National catching up with the grassroots?

by Chris Burger

Beginning in 2008, the Atlantic Chapter began hearing from its grassroots activists about hydrofracking. We formed a Gas Drilling Task Force to address the matter and it quickly became our most active project. Thus began a frantic effort to get on top of what was to become a major environmental issue and the most important one confronting our state.

The gas industry had a huge head start in New York, quietly signing leases with unsuspecting landowners in the Southern Tier, while lobbying key state legislators and DEC officials. During this period, a seemingly innocuous bill slipped through the legislature and was signed by Governor Paterson’s desk waiting to be signed.

This legislation would have allowed innocuous bill slipped through the officials. During this period, a seemingly innocuous bill slipped through the legislature and was signed by Governor Paterson’s desk waiting to be signed.

By October, 2009, the Chapter was convinced that fracking represented a major threat to our environment and public health, and that no amount of regulation could change that. The Chapter further determined that even if hydrofracking could be made safe, it represented a big distraction from what should be our major goals: moving away from fossil fuels and toward energy efficiency, conservation and renewables.

The Chapter determined that the 1992 GEIS did not address the high volume hydraulic fracturing that would have taken place. Quick action was taken to impress upon the Governor that a supplemental GEIS was needed. The Governor, responding to our request, instituted a review that created the de facto moratorium that currently exists.

The Chapter participated in the scoping process, commented on drafts and gave testimony at numerous hearings. By June 2010, the Chapter was convinced that fracking represented a major threat to our environment and public health, and that no amount of regulation could change that.
Public's repudiation of fracking puts Cuomo in a bind

When it comes to hydrofracking, Governor Cuomo is in trouble, and he knows it. In January, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) received more than 66,700 public comments on the environmental review (SGEIS) and proposed regulations for the controversial natural gas extraction technique, high-volume horizontal hydraulic fracturing (HVHIF). This record-breaking public rebuke largely panned the entire process—by a margin of 110 to 1—an incomplete, improper, and unwise. Aside from having to wade through tens of thousands of comments, some of which are lengthy and technical, the DEC has a long list of obligations it must attend to before it can finalize the new regulations. Among the outstanding deficiencies, the DEC must still:

• conduct a cumulative impact analysis of the 65,000 projected gas wells in a full build out scenario,

• redraft its socioeconomic analysis to reflect the true costs of drilling borne by host communities,

• initiate a health risk assessment for public exposure to fracking operations, and

• devise a comprehensive plan for disposal of the projected billions of gallons of wastewater and drill cuttings.

And it’s not just the public asking this of the Cuomo administration — the federal Environmental Protection Agency, in its own comments to the DEC, requested the same cumulative analysis before any further steps toward permitting are taken.

How does the governor respond?

His office has expressed a firm commitment to finalize the entire process in the spring of 2012, which is only a few weeks away. While it seems inconceivable that any substantive progress can be made on any of these issues with this impossible deadline, the governor is driven by commitments to his original goal of establishing a robust HVHIF program in New York—which is consistent with his narrative as a bipartisian, economic leader and presidential candidate in 2016.

Cuomo’s political identity on hydrofracking hinges on finding a timely compromise between advancing drilling and protecting the environment, even though he now fully realizes that there is an irreconcilable conflict between these two goals. In this context, what makes this rush forward even more galling is that the current glut of natural gas on the market will make drilling uneconomical in New York for years to come. In the height of the 2007–2008 leasing craze, gas was worth $10.79 per thousand cubic feet at the wellhead. Today the price has plummeted to $5.35 and may take several years to recover in value as shale gas states with even weaker environmental standards continue to drill. Gas prices have to be in the neighborhood of $5.6 per thousand cubic feet for a gas well in New York to break even on the projected drilling costs. So why advance a half-baked regulatory program now, if market forces will keep drilling to a minimum anyway? Why not take this time to conduct the necessary studies?

The cynical explanation is that many of the gas leases signed in 2007 are expiring, and in order for the gas companies to force extension of agreements they have to demonstrate some significant action — such as the acquisition of a permit to drill or the clearing of a well pad. It is these early leases that have the most value to the drillers because they come with low royalty rates and per acre bonuses. An accelerated finalization of the SGEIS and issuance of permits could cause the drillers to realize that they can get what many have deemed as a mass scam of thousands of landowners who signed away their mineral rights for very little in return.

Industry pressure on the Cuomo administration may be driving the train on the expedited schedule, but the fallout from advancing a regulatory program will substantially harm New York’s environment and shift its apparent beneficaries. As a governor who values his image as a progressive, that must be giving Cuomo some political heartburn.

The conventional wisdom is that the governor must now approve some form of drilling in New York or fail to advance on the national stage, where “drill baby drill” is still the mantra.

But Cuomo still could emerge as one of the rare politicians who realizes that the tenuous future of our fragile planet relies on our ability to embrace recontinued on page 9

Atlantic Chapter’s legislative priorities for 2012

Hydraulic Fracturing Prohibiting Bill (A.7218-A Colton/S.4220-A Avella): This bill prohibits the use of hydraulic fracturing in the extraction of oil and gas in NYS until the Legislature determines the practice can be conducted safely. This bill also prohibits the disposal of drilling wastes in publicly owned treatment works.

One Year Moratorium on Hydrofracking (A.7400-A Sweeney/S.6261 Ball): While the DEC is currently studying the environmental impacts associated with fracking, there is no guarantee that the Division of Mineral Resources will not press ahead with permitting by the end of 2012. This bill will suspend all permitting until June 1, giving one legislative session for lawmakers to review the final findings of the SGEIS.

Classifying Fracking Wastes as Hazardous (A.7013 Sweeney/S.4616 Avella): Even though fracking chemicals arrive at the drilling site as regulated hazardous waste, federal and state exemptions allow drillers to treat the same drilling wastes leaving the site as standard industrial waste. This bill will update current regulations so that all waste from natural gas drilling that meets the definition of hazardous waste in New York law will be subject to all generation, transportation, treatment, storage and disposal laws and regulations. This bill has been especially pressing as an increasing waste stream from Pennsylvania is already coming into New York.

Affirming Local Protections Over Natural Gas Development (A.3245 Litin/S.5850 Seward) (not same as): This bill clarifies that local governments retain the right to enact and enforce zoning laws of general applicability with respect to land use within their jurisdiction when confronted with the negative impacts from oil and gas development. The burden of oil and gas development is an unmet mandate on upstate communities if they are not allowed to use the most basic land-use planning tools to protect unique local assets.

New York Solar Industry Development and Jobs Bill of 2012 (A.5713-C Englebright/S.4178-A Maziarz) (not same as): This bill will enable the rapid and sustainable development of a robust solar power industry, creating a scalable, diverse and competitive solar energy market. The program includes targets to achieve at least 5,000 megawatts (MW) of solar PV capacity in the state by 2025, with interim targets of at least 500 MW by 2015 and 1,500 MW by 2020.

Global Warming Pollution Control Act (S.2742-A Avella/S.4534 Sweeney): This bill requires an 80% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from all sources by 2050, as recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. If enacted, it will be the strongest legislative effort in the country.

Clean Water Protection/Flood Protection Act (A.3374 Sweeney/S.4617 Avella) (not same as): Hundreds of wetlands are at risk of destruction in New York because they are not protected under state or federal laws. This bill would close any unfunded mandate on upstate governments retain the right to enact and enforce zoning laws of general applicability with respect to land use within their jurisdiction when confronted with the negative impacts from oil and gas development. The burden of oil and gas development is an unmet mandate on upstate communities if they are not allowed to use the most basic land-use planning tools to protect unique local assets.
Chapter makes energy its top priority

Our Chapter’s top conservation priority is energy. Here in New York, that means we work on a number of distinct but related issues which come down to promoting renewable energy and efficiency and stopping dirty energy such as hydraulic fracturing and the Spectra PipelineNew York City, aging nuclear power plants such as Indian Point, and coal plants such as the Samuel J. Carlson plant in Jamestown.

Hydrofracking

Our Gas Drilling Task Force mobilized members and the public to submit many written comments to the DEC for the recently ended dDEIS comment period, and are responsible for numerous visits, letters, and calls to legislators. We are changing the status quo on fracking in New York for the better. Our Spectra Pipeline Task Force oversees our involvement in the Spectra Pipeline FERC proceedings—working with the national gas campaign and the New Jersey chapter we filed a motion to intervene and submitted comments on the draft environmental impact statement.

Nuclear

The Chapter’s longtime legal efforts to make Indian Point comply with federal safety standards yielded results recently when the NRC reversed itself and denied multiple safety exemptions granted to Entergy for Indian Point. Represented pro bono by former Assemblyman Richard Brodsky and joined by the Westchester Citizens Awareness Network, the Chapter has been involved in an administrative appeal and multiple lawsuits and appeals against the NRC over these exemptions. The Indian Point Task Force promotes awareness of the risks of continued operation of the Indian Point nuclear reactors through education and activism such as rallies, hearings and the upcoming “Fukushima Week.” Following January hearings in New York City, the State Assembly Committee on Energy found that Indian Point could be shut down “without overburdening ratepayers or threatening reliability standards.”

Coal

The Chapter has continued to support efforts by local organizations to close the Samuel J. Carlson coal burning power plant in Jamestown. Additional efforts to shut this and other coal/burning plants in the state is being coordinated by the Beyond Coal Committee in conjunction with the national Beyond Coal campaign, and has begun on a staff position for this purpose in western New York.

Renewable energy and efficiency

The Chapter recently completed a white paper on the role of a CLEAN program or feed-in tariff for New York, see the article on page 9.

Following close behind energy is our second Chapter priority, water. Most of our efforts on water in New York are focused on protecting wetlands, because surface water is a major source of drinking water and necessary for ecologic health. Below are some of our activities.

Water testing

Water Sentinels teams have begun testing surface water in New York as previously reported. Some donations have arrived in response to my earlier appeal, bringing us closer to being able to hire a full time trainer/coordinator, essential to expanding our efforts (limited training capacity has proven to be a bottleneck). Additional support is needed.

Haverstraw Bay desalination plant

The Chapter is supporting the Lower Hudson Group and local partners in opposing a desalination plant in Haverstraw Bay. This bay is designated as significant habitat and is critical to fish spawning. The ongoing dredging required would mobilize toxins buried in the mud, and the plant would be a significant power drain at a time when we are trying to shut down Indian Point and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Bellayre

Longstanding efforts continue to stop new developments from being constructed on Bellayre mountain, with next steps awaiting the release of an environmental impact statement. Development on Bellayre would negatively impact the New York City watershed and set a bad precedent for future development.

Population

Our third conservation priority is population. The burden of a growing human population underlies most of our global environmental problems, and our Population Committee is working to educate New York residents on this connection. The committee plans to offer class presentations and an essay contest on the population/environment problem to high school students around the state.
Why we must shut down Indian Point — now

Victory! Under fire, NRC backs down on Indian Point safety exemptions

On thousands of occasions, operators of nuclear reactors have been granted secret exemptions from fire safety rules intended to prevent a reactor meltdown.

When I spoke to Aleem Miyoko Smith directly after the lecture, I told her that her talk was narrowly framed—less than 40 miles from Indian Point. Aileen and her co-authors exchanged looks of pity. She took a breath of air and asked, “Is that the actual distance?...”

“...we have been granted secret exemptions of the NRC,” said Ulrich Witte, a nuclear safety consultant with 30 years of experience in the industry. “...NRC’s decision permitting sub-...”

What can you do

A number of marches, protests and talks are taking place throughout the NYC area to commemorate the Fukushima disaster and to shut Down Indian Point. Join in. Learn what’s happening and take action.

How can we breathe life back into the anti-nuclear movement before it’s too late?

For New Yorkers, the time is now. Indian Point is up for relicensing in 2012. We must stand up and tell our government and president to shut down Indian Point once and for all.

We are in precarious times—we cannot allow the lust for a “nuclear renaissance” to take hold. The licensing, last month, by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) of the first two nuclear plants since 1975 is shameful. How can we do this less than 12 months after the Fukushima disaster? Even the chair of the NRC opposed this decision, saying the disaster of Fukushima needed to be studied first.

Will we allow the nuclear industry to relicense these old plants and invest scarce taxpayer dollars in building new ones, or will we stand up to corporate interests and demand the safety of our children and the future generations?

Sierra Club members need to rally behind this cause to shut down Indian Point. Government Cuomo wants to shut the plant down. Let’s stand by him, make our voices heard and stop the nuclear madness.

Get involved. Talk to your friends. Spread the word.

I dreamed we held bands, bound in a human and biotic circle. A vast and abundant ocean rocked gently before us. The fish swam freely, unfettered by barbed and razor sharp. The air was clean. The children played and laughed. The green seas swayed under my right foot. My left hand was wrapped around the hand of the person standing next to me. The sun was shining. The breeze was soft.

Heidi Hutner is associate professor of English, Sustainability and Women’s Studies at Stony Brook University. Her book, Polluting Mama: An Ecofeminist Cultural Memoir forthcoming in the fall. She is the environmental editor at Terrapapers, and blogs at http://ecofeminism-mothering.blogspot.com/.

continue from page 1

in particular, I have three people’s words. They were calling. At this event, speakers such as Harvey Wasserman, Karl Grossman, Greg Palast, Vandana Shiva, and Kevin Kamps explained that for New York City and its environs, Indian Point is an accident waiting to happen. Here are ten important reasons why we must shut down Indian Point:

• Indian Points sits on two active seismic zones and is the most vulnerable plant in U.S. to earthquakes.

• Columbia University believes the location is vulnerable to a 7.0 earthquake on the Richter scale—which the plant is not designed to withstand.

• 20 million people live within a 50-mile radius of the plant.

• New York does not need Indian Point to meet its energy needs and electricity rates would not increase as a result of a shut down. There are plenty of safe renewable energy alternatives.

• Indian Point’s highly radioactive storage pools are full and there is nowhere to store the materials.

• Indian Point’s spent fuel currently leaks into the ground and the Hudson River.

• The negative effects of a core meltdown at Indian Point could far exceed that of the Fukushima disaster.

• Indian Point threatens the safety of the drinking water of nine million people.

• Nuclear radiation—much of it—remains poisonous for tens of thousands of years. Plutonium ingested even in the tiniest of particles can be lethal. Strontium and cesium cause cancer and genetic mutations in present and future generations.

The most startling thing I took away from this list: NO EVACUATION PLAN.
Upstate politicians seem OK with four unsafe nuclear plants

by Linda A. DeSefano

How many more lives must be sacrificed before the world moves urgently away from nuclear energy? In New York, there are some hopeful developments in that Gov. Andrew Cuomo and many other government leaders want to shut down the Indian Point nuclear facility near New York City.

Upstate New York hasn’t seen such leadership from politicians. Of the six nuclear reactors in the state, two are at Indian Point and four are upstate. All four are next to Lake Ontario. There is Ginna near Sudus Point in Wayne County. The closest large city, Syracuse, is 36 miles away. More than 900,000 people live within 50 miles of the nuclear facilities at Scriba. When a fourth nuclear plant was proposed for Scriba, the politicians from Oswego County and the state representatives from that area rolled out the red carpet. This proposal is now on hold.

Problems with the upstate reactors are many. As recently as Jan. 26, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) cited U.S. Rep. FitzPatrick, for willingly exposing workers to radiation and then covering it up. But the violations have been going on for years.

Ginna and Nine Mile 1 are two of the nation’s oldest reactors. The NRC re-licensed them, meaning they are operating many years beyond the capacity for which they were designed. In 2011, the Associated Press, after investigating the nuclear industry for a year, reported widespread degradation of old nuclear facilities. Problems included cracking of tubes, concrete and nozzles; failed cables; and leaky valves. Some years ago, Nine Mile 1 had a severe crack in its core shroud, which could have led to a meltdown. FitzPatrick is operating with 50% of its control rods (which control nuclear reaction) defective and in danger of fragmenting.

Nine Mile 1 and FitzPatrick have the Mark I design, the same as Fukushima. The nuclear industry and the NRC have known for years about the fragility of this design but have done little about it. For example, in 1972, Dr. Stephen Hanauer, an Atomic Energy Commission safety official, recommended that the suppression system be discontinued and any further design not be accepted for construction permits. Shortly thereafter, three General Electric nuclear engineers publicly resigned their prestigious positions citing dangerous shortcomings in the GE design.

In 1986, Harold Denton, then the NRC’s top safety official, told an industry trade group that the ‘Mark I containment … you’ll find something like a 90% probability of that containment failing.’ Ignoring these warnings, the NRC allows these reactors to stay open. A severe ice and snow storm in Oswego County could cut off electricity to Nine Mile 1 and FitzPatrick, leading to a disaster similar to Fukushima.

Another dilemma related to the deceptiveness of the reactors is that spent nuclear fuel rods have been stored onsite so long that they pose a monumental danger. Spent fuel remains highly radioactive and continues to generate heat even after it’s removed from the reactor.

The pools of water which keep the rods from overheating rely on electricity to pump water, but have just a short-lived backup system of generators and batteries. The larger the number of rods stored, the greater the amount of radioactivity released if the rods meltdown.

Th. Atlantic Chapter has been active in working for the shutdown of Indian Point. Hopefully, the Chapter will broaden that concern by campaigning for the accelerated closure of the Upstate nuclear facilities as well. A coalition working for this is Alliance for a Green Economy (AGREE). Here’s its mission statement:

‘AGREE works for safe, affordable energy and the development of a green economy in New York State. Our goal is a Prosperous, safe, and healthy New York: fulfilling the promise of conservation, energy efficiency, and safe, clean renewable energy sources to end our state’s reliance on waste-disposal and environmentally destructive forms of energy.’

AGREE is seeking funding for a study to show how this nuclear-free, carbon-free transition could take place by 2050 in New York.


If you prefer hard copy, contact me at 5031 Onondaga Road, Syracuse 13215-1403, or 315-488-2140 or LDESTEFANO3@twcny.rr.com.

Linda DeSefano is a member of the Iroquois Group and works on the Chapter’s Energy Committee.

Support chapter’s work in NYS

We need your help to fight fracking, maintain the Chapter’s other critical conservation efforts and continue print publication of the Sierra Atlantic. Your membership dues primarily support the Club’s national priorities. Your additional support is needed to strengthen the environment of New York state. I am enclosing my gift of:

❑ $500 ❑ $250 ❑ $100 ❑ $60 ❑ $35 ❑ Other $____

❑ Check made payable to Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter.

❑ Check, money order or credit card:

❑ Check made payable to Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter.

❑ Credit card:

❑ Visa ❑ Mastercard ❑ American Express

❑ Exp. date __________

Yes, I want to help the Atlantic Chapter preserve and protect the environment of New York state. I am enclosing my gift of: $____ quarterly credit card donation.

Bill to: ❑ Mastercard ❑ Visa

❑ Acc. no. __________

❑ Exp. date __________

Signature __________

Name __________

Sierra Club membership no. __________

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Mail this completed form with your check or credit card information to:

Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, PO Box 886, Syosset, NY 11791-0886

A copy of our latest financial report can be obtained by writing to Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, PO Box 886, Syosset, NY 11791-0886, or the NYS Attorney General,

Tidal power turbines on trial in NYC

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has issued its first pilot project license for a tidal energy project located in New York City’s East River.

The project, owned by Verdant Power and known as the Roosevelt Island Tidal Energy Project, is rated at 1,050 kilowatts and uses the East River’s natural tidal currents to generate electricity. Turbine generator units are mounted on the riverbed and capture energy from the tidal flow. The pilot license issued to Verdant Power is for 10 years.

Underwater turbines generate clean energy from the currents of tides, rivers and manmade channels. The systems are invisible from shore and do not require dams, impoundments or major civil works. As the East River site demonstrates, underwater turbines can be sited directly within population centers with minimal public and environmental impact.

The systems operate silently and automatically, fully underwater and out of sight from shore. This aspect of the technology reduces the visual disruption, including transmission lines, and NIMBY issues related to other sources of renewable energy, especially wind farms. According to Verdant Power, the turbines currently provide a predictable, if constant, source of renewable energy. This creates an advantage over wind and solar systems, which offer intermittent power more subject to daily changes in weather and blackout scenarios. Verdant Power claims its river-based systems will achieve 80-90% capacity factors, approximately double those of wind and solar power systems.
Newly discovered undersea Arctic methane seeps are expected to accelerate emissions, soon creating an immense feedback action which no human effort may be able to stop.

Arctic methane seeps alarm scientists

When Robert E. Perry sloshed toward the North Pole in 1909, every breath caused intense pain. The harsh Arctic wind made it difficult to travel even a few miles a day. Shifting waterways and moving ice made the journey more treacherous.

Under these extreme conditions, he could not possibly imagine that, only 100 years later, the potential for fire would be bubbling up in the permafrost over much of the Arctic.

Today, lighting a match in the frozen North can ignite clathrates—methane trapped in what looks like dirty ice in the permafrost.

Arctic research scientists are astonished at the rapid increase in the scale and force of methane release in the Arctic seas and subsea. Russian researchers have found continuous, powerful and impressive seeping structures, more than 1,000 kilometers in diameter, a ten-fold increase since their last expedition, when they were usually 100 meters in diameter. They believe there are thousands of these seeps over a wider area, according to findings they presented at the December meeting of the American Geophysical Union.

The emissions are going directly into the atmosphere without the normal time for microbes to turn them into less damaging carbon dioxide.

These structures are called gas hydrates, or clathrates. They exist when the water is relatively shallow and the gas is kept inactive by colder surrounding ice. They are essentially nature’s waste dumps, not to be touched, and are effectively nature's waste dumps, not to be touched, and are made out of former plant life. The methane is made out of former plant life. The methane is generated as a result of anaerobic decay of organic matter, and has been present for millennia.

The Arctic is made by anaerobic decay of organic matter, and has been present for millennia. This has been going on for millions of years. The earth is 4.5 billion years old. The carbon control system on Earth is key to survival.

When released into the atmosphere, methane is 70 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than CO₂ for the first 20 years of its residence there. It diminishes in power after that, but remains 25% more powerful for the next 100 years. Methane in the Earth’s atmosphere has increased by 150% since 1750. It accounts for 20% of the radiative forcing (i.e., more than would naturally occur) from all the gases mixed. Methane in the atmosphere does not occur evenly over the planet, but is primarily found over the northern hemisphere.

Methane is the most abundant compound on Earth. It is estimated that hundreds of millions of tons of methane gas are locked away under permafrost and on the deep ocean floor. As the climate warms, methane gas hydrates will continue to release methane into the atmosphere.

As methane releases increase average temperatures, more Arctic ice melts, and methane emissions are ongoing—and accelerating, independent of human activity. This is an immense feedback action and it is possible that, soon, no human effort may be able to stop it.

While New York is experiencing big changes in climate change and much more dramatic in the Arctic. Average temperatures have increased by 4°F where the methane hydrates are concentrated. The Arctic is now a landscape of rapidly rotting ice. After 4.5 billion years of planetary metamorphoses, the Earth had an atmosphere that sustained life as we know it. The Earth arrived at radiative balance, where it retained just the right amount of solar energy, and sent the rest back into space. The balance is controlled by the proportions of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, especially methane—carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane (CH₄). The wild card is that life is largely carbon-based. Through photosynthesis, life is always producing more carbon. This has been going on for millennia.

While coal, oil, and gas, methane is made out of former plant life. The methane at shallow levels in the Arctic is made by anaerobic decay of organic matter, and has been present in place for many years. Farmers cowered as agribusiness and the U.S. legal system did not repair as expected. The balance is controlled by the proportions of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, especially methane—carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane (CH₄). The wild card is that life is largely carbon-based. Through photosynthesis, life is always producing more carbon. This has been going on for millennia.

In a warming world, the loss of ice is a sure recipe for ongoing methane release. The fact that we see this happening now, and at a warming rate, is proof that today’s 394 parts per million of CO₂ in the atmosphere will inevitably lead to that number rising out of control. The idea that humanity can stop temperature increase at 2°C, a goal set by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change, is wishful thinking. We are looking at catastrophic levels of GHGs in the atmosphere now, at less than 1 degree C increase. The 1 degree C movement was created to communicate the necessity to not just stop increasing the CO₂ in the atmosphere, but to reduce the carbon in the atmosphere in order to reestablish radiative balance and keep the ice. But a reduction to 350 ppm is probably not enough. It is likely we need to return to near what the earth itself had established as a working proportion: 280 ppm of CO₂. Carbon bursars are effectively nature’s waste dumps, not to be touched, and methane is the biggest waste dump of all. In the Arctic, the methane dump is shallow and kept inactive by cold. This is why this cap is key to survival.

Methane is a serious problem in many ways. Methane affects degrading the ozone layer. This may already have begun since the ozone is not repairing as expected. The ozone layer is the Earth’s ultraviolet shield.

One quarter of all CO₂ emissions are absorbed by the oceans at the rate of more than 20 million tons each day. When CO₂ dissolves in water, it forms a weak acid called carbonic acid. Atmospheric CO₂ has already changed the pH of ocean water to a level unsatisfactory to most marine animals. The release of methane from clathrates to the ocean floor infuses more acid in to the oceans. This means the oceans are getting acid from both above and below. Methane is an asymptotic eating up oxygen, thus creating oxygen holes in the sea, especially in proximity to the methane releases.

Scientists at the Arctic Methane Energy Group (www.arctic-methane-emergency-group.org) believe we face an impending global emergency of catastrophic proportions. We need to mobilize all of our resources to keep the Arctic ice cap from disappearing. It is essential to survival. It is the first order of security and everything else is trivial by comparison.

Moischa Blechman chairs the Chapter’s Publicity Committee and is a member of the Global Warming Coordinating Committee.
Double whammy: frackers lose two home rule decisions in one week

In one week, the natural gas industry decisively lost the first rounds in two separate court cases affirming the right of communities to exclude gas drilling from their towns.

Late in February, a New York State Supreme Court ruled in favor of Dryden, a suburb of Ithaca in Tompkins County, against Anschutz Exploration Corp., a Denver-based conglomerate that develops gas fields in six states, three of them in the Marcellus Shale fairway.

The court held that Dryden’s zoning law, which prohibits natural gas drilling, is not preempted by the state’s oil and gas law, which limits the rights of municipalities to regulate gas drilling.

Within a few days, the industry lost a similar case in which a dairy farmer in Middlefield, about 70 miles west of Albany, claimed the town’s ban on gas drilling contravened state law, which the farmer claimed was designed to create a uniform regulatory scheme for the oil and gas industry. The judge disagreed, and said there is nothing in the legislative history of the law to suggest lawmakers intended to prevent towns from banning heavy industry.

Lawyers representing industry in both cases have said, prior to the rulings, that a verdict favoring home rule could drive drilling companies from the state.

Public interest attorney Helen Holden Sotjié, who with her attorney husband, David, have been advising towns on home rule laws, noted that after the Dryden decision industry lawyers would “began questioning the qualifications of the Cortland County judge that decided the Dryden case and predicted that surely the Middlefield case would be decided ‘correctly’ and industry would prevail.”

But in the Middlefield decision the judge in that case rejected the industry’s arguments as strongly and emphatically as the judge in the Dryden case, she said. Prior to the decisions, Sotjié said, industry supporters became increasingly adamant that towns could not zone out drilling. Landowner coalition members went so far as to threaten local legislators with personal liability for enacting such a law that they insisted was so clearly illegal that the absolute legislative immunity that all state local legislators enjoy no longer applied.

“Industry has, and surely will, continue to engage in bullying, intimidation and scare tactics,” Sotjié said. “But local elected officials across the state have stood strong and stood together with the un-flinching backing of so many of their constituents in the face of these strong-arm threats. We now have definitive answers from two separate courts that clearly support local community rights.”

Hal Smith

New Chapter study shows NY the CLEAN way to finance renewables

The Atlantic Chapter has recently produced a white paper on the renewable energy production program called the Feed in Tariff (FIT).

Some organizations in the U.S. and Canada refer to the program as the Clean Local Energy Accessible Now (CLEAN) program. The program requires utilities to enter into standard contracts with renewable energy producers.

Energy producers can include individuals, small businesses, and farmers, as well as larger suppliers. Contract rates are determined by the cost of installation of the renewable project (solar panels, wind power generators, etc.) plus a reasonable profit of usually 5 to 10 percent per year. These are long-term supply contracts, generally 20 years in length, which insures a fair return to the renewable energy producer. These contracts spur project loans from banks and investors who know they will be guaranteed a return. New contract rates are adjusted annually depending on costs and energy needs.

By early 2011, 61 countries and 21 states, provinces and local jurisdictions had established feed in tariffs. Germany, for example, has had remarkable results: $700,000 jobs in renewable energy; including many good manufacturing and construction jobs. Billions of Euros per year in investments, 20% of its electricity being produced from renewables with a goal over 55% by the year 2020, a substantial reduction in greenhouse gases and better health for the citizens and environment.

Ontario, Canada, began a CLEAN program in 2009, and currently has 20,000 jobs in renewables. The province is predicting 50,000 clean energy jobs by the end of 2012 as project placements ramp up.

To find the white paper, please go to our Chapter website at www.newyorksierraclub.org and click on the Energy Committee on the home page. The paper is titled “CLEAN-FIT; A Program to Unleash Renewable Energy and Create Jobs in New York State.”

Bob Ciesielski, a member of the Niagara Group, chairs the Chapter’s Energy Committee.

Public’s repudiation of frackimg puts Cuomo in a bind

Continued from page 4...

ewable and efficient technologies leave behind our extractive past.

The Sierra Club is asking the Legislature to reject this transfer authority and work with the SAGE Commission recommendations—within the budget process—to achieve transparent government efficiency without compromising basic democratic principles.
**Park agency greenlights ‘sprawl on steroids’ in Adirondacks**

by David Gibson

The Adirondack Park Agency recently issued a permit for the Adirondack Club and Resort (ACR), the worst kind of development for any conservation area: 706 residential units, 532 buildings, 39 Great Camps, 15 miles of new roads, sewer water and electrical lines spread all over 6,235 acres near Tupper Lake. There is no conservation easement anywhere on the property; the project is expected to take 15 years to complete.

The permit

The ACR permit establishes a dangerous precedent. Three-quarters of the project site lies within a resource management area—under the law, the park’s most protected private land zone. The legislative purpose of these zones is to “protect the delicate physical and biological resources and preserve the open spaces that are essential and basic to the unique character of the park.” Yet, the ACR’s permit allows many large second homes with major impacts on sensitive habitats and wildlife, and essentially replacing local hunters and foresters with private drive ways and “No Trespassing” signs.

As a result of the APAs actions, two million acres of private land classified resource management and rural use are now at risk from more sprawl development (lands not protected by a conservation easement). The Agency ignored its own precedent between 1973-2007, which protected large contiguous tracts of forest while clustering housing development on only small portions near roadways, and basing permits upon wildlife and habitat assessments. Many alternative ways to concentrate housing around Mt. Morris would be far less degrading of resources and require fewer sewer, water, fire, police services.

Conservation biologist Michael Clemens testified at the permit hearing that “the club and resort is classic sprawl on steroids. It spreads negative ecological impacts out across the landscape. It is a train wreck resulting from a process that does not allow for understanding natural systems in the first place.”

Unfortunately, his testimony and that of respected Adirondack ecologists Michale Glennon and Heidi Kretzer (both of the Wildlife Conservation Society) were not given their deserved weight by Agency commissioners.

The APA permit is conditioned to prevent further subdivision, and requires monitoring of each residential area by so-called independent environmental monitors. It also requires after-the-fact studies of amphibian migrationary pathways on parts of the property. Unfortunately, any modification resulting from those studies will only represent “best practices” and may do little to protect these sensitive habitats. The permit requires that infrastructure be bonded or built before housing construction. Whether the Big Tupper Ski Area will actually be rebuilt for public skiing remains a big question.

(Editors Note: The Sierra Club Adirondack Committee supported phase one of the developer’s original proposal to renovate the historic Big Tupper Ski Area on the outskirts of the Village of Tupper Lake. The developer’s proposal created 1853 acres in the first phase of the project, and the project was expected to take 15 years to complete.)

A resort sprawling across 6,235 acres, mostly within a protected area near Tupper Lake, won’t have a single conservation easement.

National Club election coming this spring

The annual election for the Club’s Board of Directors is now under way. Those eligible to vote in the national Sierra Club election will receive in the mail (or by Internet if you chose the electronic delivery option) you will receive an off-line ballot. This will include information on the candidates and where you can find additional information on the Club’s website.

The Sierra Club is a democratically structured organization at all levels. The Club requires the regular flow of views on policy and priorities from its grassroots membership in order to function well. Yearly participation in elections at all Club levels is a major membership obligation. Your Board of Directors is required to stagger election by the membership. This Board sets Club policy and budgets at the national level and works closely with the Executive Director and staff to operate the Club Voting for candidates who express your views on how the Club should grow and change is both a privilege and responsibility of membership.

Members frequently state that they don’t know the candidates and find it difficult to vote without learning more. You can learn more by asking questions of your group and chapter leadership and other experienced members you know. Visit the Club’s website: [http://www.sierrclub.org/bod/2012election/default.aspx](http://www.sierrclub.org/bod/2012election/default.aspx) This site provides links to additional information about candidates, and their views on a variety of issues facing the Club and the environment.

You should use your own judgment by taking several minutes to read the ballot statement of each candidate. Then make your choice and cast your vote. Even if you receive your election materials in the mail, please go to the user-friendly Internet voting site to save time and postage. If necessary, you will find the off-line ballot is quite straightforward and easy to mark and mail.

The Atlantic Chapter recommends a vote for Katherine Pendleton in the upcoming election for the Sierra Club’s Board of Directors.

Katherine Pendleton

The Atlantic Chapter starts anti-fracking legal fund

The Chapter is seeking funds to pay legal fees in its fight against fracking for natural gas.

Send a check payable to the Sierra Club Foundation. On the memo of the check, write “Atlantic Chapter Fracking Project,” or “FC4356.” Mail the check to:

Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter

PO Box 886

Syracuse, NY 13201-0886

Your gift is tax-deductible.

There is still time to STOP THE ADIRONDACK CLUB AND RESORT!

Help with legal costs today:

Send a check payable to “PROTECT ACR Legal Fund”

Mail to: Protect the Adirondacks!

P.O. Box 4124

Schenectady, NY 12304
Ducks can take the cold, but still need a place to land

Nutrient-rich teff beats wheat for protein

by Betsy Novelli

T

uek is a wonderful, useful and versatile grain we all tend to overlook. Unlike Toast, bagels or muffins for breakfast, sandwiches for lunch, crackers and pretzels for snacking and pasta with bread at dinner. Even if you are not gluten intolerant or gluten sensitive, it is good to introduce some of the other grains—which tend to have a higher nutrient profile, to boot—into your diet.

Teff is one of those ancient grains that has so much to offer. Teff is native to Ethiopia where it accounts for one quarter of total cereal production. Not a newcomer, it is believed that teff originated in Ethiopia between 4000 BC and 1000 BC. Although it has been used in Northeast Africa for centuries, teff only became known in other parts of the world in the late 20th century when farmers began to cultivate it in Australia and the Central United States.

Packed with nutrition; it is higher in protein than wheat and has a high concentration of a wide variety of nutrients, including calcium, thiamine and iron. The iron from teff is easily absorbed by the body. Since the grains are so small, the bulk of the grain is germ and bran. It is very high in fiber and is thought to benefit people with diabetes, as it helps control blood sugar levels. Teff contains no gluten, which makes it a suitable grain for celiacs or people with wheat sensitivities. Due to its nutritional content and energy enhancing properties, it has also gained favor with athletes.

A cup cooked teff contains 387 mg of calcium, which is 40% of the U.S. recommended daily allowance.

The recipe below use teff flour I keep the injera batter in the refrigerator and just make the flatbreads as I want them. They are fantastic filled with steamed or roasted seasonal vegetables and a gravy; either the one I am giving you here, or one of your own favorites. I think teff has a chocolate-y flavor, so I also use these as dessert crepes with fruit fillings and cashew cream.

Gluten-Free Injera

By Rick Marsi

Dissolve the miso in 1/2 cup of the vegetable stock. Add the remaining stock and simmer with the miso to the saucepan. Add the remaining stock and simmer with the miso to the saucepan.

Heat the oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add two cups of the stock and the vegetables. Cover and simmer until the vegetables are tender. Add two cups of the stock and the vegetables. Cover and simmer until the vegetables are tender.

Add the sauce, thyme and pepper and sauté two minutes. Add two cups of the stock and the sauce, thyme and pepper and sauté two minutes.

Heat the oil in a medium saucepan and add the onion and a pinch of salt. Sauté over medium heat until translucent about 2 minutes. Add the sauce, thyme and pepper and sauté two minutes. Add two cups of the stock and the sauce, thyme and pepper and sauté two minutes.

Nutrient-rich teff beats wheat for protein

by Betsy Novelli

Teff has twice as much iron as both wheat and barley.

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Iroquois
Martin Sage, Lifetime Club member and founder of Group, dies
Martin Sage, lifetime member of the Sierra Club, died suddenly on February 3. He and his brother Samuel were founders of the Iroquois Group in 1972. Members remember the first meetings of the Iroquois Group in Gloria’s and Martin’s living room. Before moving to Syracuse, Martin was the first chair of the Eugene, Oregon, Group. In 1970 Martin and Samuel organized the first Earth Day celebration for Central New York.
Martin served as co-political chair of the Iroquois Group and was on the Political Committee of the Atlantic Chapter. He was active in many community and environmental groups and enjoyed the outdoors as much as he worked to better the environment.
In 2008, Martin and Gloria encouraged solar energy by installing 24 solar panels that paid the full electrical bill for their home. They welcomed visitors interested in learning about the sun, because they hoped people would learn that solar is practical, even in cloudy Syracuse.
Martin was a great friend and tireless worker for the environment and his community. He will be greatly missed.

Susquehanna
Members volunteer to monitor water for early detection of contamination
The Chapter is participating with the Alliance of Aquatic Resource Monitoring (ALLARM) out of Dickinson College to monitor streams and waterways in state regions impacted by hydrofracking. Since we are within miles of hydrofracking in Pennsylvania, and share the Susquehanna watershed with northern Pennsylvania, there is a critical need to both establish a baseline for water quality and monitor for occurrences of fracking chemicals in our watershed.
ALLARM will provide a day of training and tools so that we are equipped to follow a scientific protocol in collecting and analyzing data. Barium and strontium are the two signature chemicals that will be checked for when total dissolved solid (TDS) indicators are high. We will notify the DEC when contamination is discovered.

Niagara
Group promoting woodland protection, renewable energy
The Sierra Club’s Niagara Group has had a very exciting and winter-ter, even with Lake Erie unfrozen and practically no snow in our region! We have found ourselves again responding to an assault on our wooded landscape, this time a part of Chestnut Ridge called the Eternal Flame.
Without following any legally mandated procedures, permission was given to build a disc golf course in the fragile shale woodland. We have documented the damage already done and insisted that a SEQRA process be instituted, while gathering support across the environmental community through the

Western New York Environmental Alliance. We are also involved in developing a plan for the emergal ash borer that has, unfortunately, reached our region.
The primary focus of our Group’s work has been on energy. We have a very strong Energy Committee that has been working on developing a proposal for a feed in tariff as a pricing strategy to level the field for renewables. We have reached out to labor and just released a ‘green paper’ on the subject. (See page 9.)
If we have been meeting with the Buffalo public schools and sponsored presentations to them on various renewable energy strategies relevant to their situation. They are interested, given the Buffalo School’s Construct Program that is rehabilitating many of our ancient schools. And lastly, we have continued to partner and be actively involved in the anti-fracking movement, attending lobbying sessions locally and in Albany, and sponsoring Chris Burger to come and lecture on the topic.

Fracking: Is National catching up with grassroots?
continued from page 3
hydrofracking, The few officers who were acquainted with the process insisted that ‘best practices’ and ‘tough regulations’ could address the problem. This was usually followed by the mantra ‘We need natural gas as a bridge fuel.’ We felt strongly that this should not be the Sierra Club’s vision.

The latest from San Francisco
We suspected that something was amiss. Why would the Club hold back on an issue that was already devastating Pennsylvania, Texas and over 30 other states and now threatening New York?
This resistance was exposed on February 2, 2012, when Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune revealed that the Club had accepted $26 million in donations from gas industry representatives. Many of us who had suspected this was occurring were actually relieved that the Club had finally ‘come clean.’ We were aware of former Execu-