Brune visits ruined water wells, is moved by PA families' plight
by Michael Brune

(Editor’s note: Michael Brune, appointed executive director of the national Sierra Club earlier this year, recently visited Dimock, a small Pennsylvania town on the New York border. It is a notorious example of how natural gas drilling can contaminate drinking water despite efforts by state regulators. Deeply moved by what he saw, Brune wrote the statement below, which is his first public commentary on the issue. However, the Atlantic Chapter’s Natural Gas Task Force does not share Brune’s view that natural gas is necessary as a “transitional fuel,” in the way to a clean energy future.)

I’ve been in New York and Pennsylvania in recent days, and I know how important ‘fracking’ is to people in those states and others that sit on what’s known as the Marcellus Shale — a geological formation that stretches north from West Virginia. In total, this shale contains what may be the biggest natural gas deposit in the world.

To extract the gas, companies first drill deep wells and then use a technique called hydraulic fracturing — ‘fracking’ for short. It’s a process that injects, under high pressure, huge amounts of water laced with sand and more than a hundred chemicals into rock formations deep under the ground.

Chemicals and water — that’s your first clue why people are alarmed. A report released by the Pennsylvania Land Trust recently showed that there have been 1,435 violations of the state oil and gas laws in the past 2 years — at least 952 of which affect the environment. That’s more than one a day.

The tiny town of Dimock, Pennsylvania, has more than 60 wells in a nine-square-mile area. Fourteen families have had their drinking water contaminated with methane gas after drilling on or near their property. They’ll probably never be able to drink the water from their wells again. Methane in your tap water is both creepy and dangerous YouTube clips of people lighting the water from their faucets on fire are bad enough.

The gas companies are operating with the arrogance of pre-Gulf BP.

by Bill McKibben

Try to fit these facts together:
• According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the planet has just come through the warmest decade, the warmest 12 months, the warmest six months, and the warmest April, May, and June on record.
• A ‘staggering’ new study from Canadian researchers has shown that warmer seawater has reduced phytoplankton, the base of the marine food chain, by 40% since 1950.
• Nine nations have so far set their all-time temperature records in 2010, including Russia (111°), Niger (118°), Sudan (121°), Saudi Arabia and Iraq (126°) apiece), and Pakistan, which also set the new all-time Asia record in May: a hair under 130°.
• I can turn my oven to 130°.

• And then, in late July, the U.S. Senate decided to do exactly nothing about climate change. They didn’t do less than they could have — they did nothing, preserving a perfect two-decade bipartisan record of no action. Senate majority leader Harry Reid decided not even to schedule a vote on legislation that would have capped carbon emissions. I wrote the first book for a general audience on global warming back in 1989, and I’ve spent the subsequent 21 years working on the issue. I’m a mild-mannered guy, a Methodist Sunday School teacher. Not quick to anger So what I want to say is: this is f-ked up. The time has come to get mad, and then to get busy.

For many years, the lobbying fight for climate legislation on Capitol Hill has been led by a collection of the most corporate and moderate environmental groups, outfits like the Environmental Defense Fund. We owe them a great debt, and not just for their hard work. We owe them a debt because they did everything the way you’re supposed to they were nice clothes, lobbied tirelessly, and compromised at every turn.

By the time they were done, they had a bill that only capped carbon emissions from electric utilities (not factories or cars) and was so laden with gifts for industry that if you listened closely you could actually hear the oinking. They bent over backwards like Soviet gymnasts. Senator John Kerry, the senator they worked most closely with, issued this rallying cry as the final negotiations began. ‘We believe we have compromised significantly, and we’re prepared to compromise further.’

And even that was not enough. They were left out to dry by everyone — not just Reid, not just the Republicans. Even President Obama wouldn’t lend a hand, investing not a penny of his political capital in the fight.

The result: total defeat, no moral victories.

Now what?

So now we know what we didn’t before: making nice doesn’t work. It was worth a try, and I’m completely serious when I say I’m grateful they made the effort, but it didn’t even come close to working. So we better try something else.

Step one involves actually talking about global warming. For years now, the accepted wisdom in the best green circles was talk about anything else — energy independence; oil security; beating the Chinese to renewable technology. I was those focus-group favorites are sec-ondary. The task at hand is keeping the planet from melting. We need everyone — beginning with the president — to start explaining that basic fact at every turn.

It is the heat, and also the humid-ity. Since warm air holds more water...
Focusing on our Atlantic Chapter priorities

With this fall’s elections at the state and federal levels, we have many opportunities to support candidates who will act to protect our environment—candidates who will say no to the crisis mentality used to justify devastating cuts to environmental programs and inaction on critical legislation due to the slow economy and government deficits.

In the state Senate, we need many more senators to vote on a nonpartisan basis for the environment. Instead, year after year the Assembly, alone, passes essential legislation to protect our greenhouses, gas emissions, foster renewable energy and accomplish other high-priority conservation goals. Only rarely does the Senate break its partisan gridlock to vote for progressive legislation such as green jobs through housing retrofits and a moratorium on new gas drilling permitting for hydrofracking.

For this fall’s elections, please take an active role. Make phone calls, leaflet neighborhoods, speak at public forums, donate to campaigns, and vote. Don’t let the naysaying do-nothing candidates win. Recognize and support those candidates who will fight for our environment and ask others to do so.

Strategic planning for victory

Our Atlantic Chapter activists and staff work hard to educate, public officials, other stakeholders and the public about our positions on conservation issues, legislation, regulations, and permitting. We need to persevere to achieve key outcomes, such as the closure of dirty coal-fired power plants.

This means that our Sierra Club leaders—both at the Chapter and Group level—need to use the tools of strategic planning on a regular basis. The national Club’s board of directors has approved a priority framework, the Climate Recovery Partnership campaigns, focused on curbing greenhouse gas emissions and coping with associated change, while protecting our precious natural resources. (Go to http://Clubhouse.SierraClub.org for information.)

Since we are a non-profit organization with hundreds of activists, there is a tendency at the Atlantic Chapter and Group levels for each of us to do our “own thing” without always seeing the big picture and getting the most “bang for the buck.” Strategic planning can enable us to more wisely use our resources and accomplish our objectives. We will gain strength through more opportunities for meaningful engagement of our members.

As grassroots activists, we not only need to look way ahead to identify major issues and strategize about how to work on them, but we also need to be ready to hit the ground running when quick action is needed.

One of our major initiatives over the last few years is to protect our natural resources from “fracking” tens of thousands of natural gas wells. Thanks to the power of our grassroots activism, the natural gas rush has been slowed, allowing debate and a regulatory review to take place. A year ago, who would have predicted that the state Senate would overwhelmingly vote for a moratorium on drilling? Our Gas Drilling Task Force, chaired by Rachel Trechler (working with staffer Roger Downs and about 50 members), has been a major force for making a difference on this issue.

Donating for Chapter victories

Your generous donations directly serve within the next few years, the Atlantic Chapter needs to raise about $100,000 more a year than we do now with our March Appeal letter to all members and our year-end appeal letter to generous past donors.

Your donations to the Atlantic Chapter at any time of the year are most welcome. If you donate directly to the “Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter,” this gives the Chapter the flexibility to use any funds for staff and activist lobbying, administrative costs, and efforts to elect pro-environmental public officials. You can also make a tax-deductible donation to the Sierra Club Foundation specifying “Atlantic Chapter” on the memo line, which will direct your donation to our conservation and litigation work.

I have been writing columns emphasizing the Chapter’s need for greatly increased donations. I wish that this was not necessary. But to accomplish our many priorities—including protecting natural resources from gas drilling, enacting legislation to place caps on greenhouse gas emissions, fostering renewable energy and energy conservation and efficiency, greatly reducing our hazardous and solid waste, and protecting critical habitat areas—we sorely need generous donations. Thank you for any amount you can donate to enable our dedicated volunteers and staff to accomplish our environmental victories.
Chapter endorsements for U.S., state seats

The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter was in the final stages of its endorsement process at press time. There are more to come. Please look to your local Group newsletter or the Chapter’s website (http://newyork.sierraclub.org/) for a complete list of candidates in your area. Candidates have been carefully screened. The Atlantic Chapter believes these endorsees will best represent the environment. We encourage you to vote for them on November 2.

U.S. Senate
Kirsten Gillibrand
Charles Schumer

U.S. Congress
CD-1 Tim Bishop
CD-2 Steve Israel
CD-4 Carolyn McCarthy
CD-5 Gary Ackerman
CD-6 Gregory W. Meeks
CD-7 Joseph Crowley
CD-8 Jerold Nadler
CD-11 Vvete D. Clarke
CD-12 Nydia Velazquez
CD-13 Michael McMahon
CD-14 Carolyn B. Maloney
CD-16 Jose Serrano
CD-17 Eliot L. Engel
CD-18 Nita Lowey
CD-19 John Hall
CD-20 Scott Murphy
CD-21 Paul Tonko
CD-22 Maurice Hinchey
CD-23 Bill Owens
CD-24 Michael Arcuri
CD-25 Dan Maffei
CD-27 Brian Higgins
CD-28 Louise M. Slaughter

NYS Senate
SD-1 Kenneth LaValle
SD-3 Brian X. Foley
SD-10 Shirley Huntley
SD-13 Joseph Per harmon
SD-15 Joseph Addabbo, Jr.
SD-16 Tony Abbavissi
SD-17 Martin Malave Dilan
SD-18 Velmanette Montgomery
SD-20 Eric Adams
SD-21 Kevin Parker
SD-23 Diane Savino
SD-25 Daniel Squadron
SD-26 Liz Krueger
SD-28 Jose M. Serrano
SD-29 Thomas Duane
SD-30 Bill Perkins
SD-34 Jeffrey Klein
SD-35 Andrea Stewart-Cousins
SD-36 Ruth Hassell-Thompson
SD-37 Suzi Oppenheimer
SD-39 Mike Kaplowitz
SD-46 Neil Enslin
SD-49 David Valesky
SD-50 Kathleen Joy
SD-55 Pam Mackey
SD-60 Antoine Thompson

NYS Assembly
AD-2 Fred Thiele
AD-4 Steven Engelbright
AD-9 Robert Sweeney
AD-14 Michelle or theとい
AD-22 Grace Meng
AD-25 Audey Pheffer
AD-29 Rory Lancman
AD-27 Nettie Wills
AD-22 William Scarborough
AD-30 Margaret Markey
AD-31 Michele Titus
AD-32 Vivian Cook
AD-35 Barbara Clark
AD-34 Michael DenDeker
AD-37 Catherine Nolan
AD-40 Inez Barron
AD-41 Helene Weinsten
AD-42 Rhoda Jacobs
AD-45 Karim Camara
AD-44 James F Brennan
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Support Chapter’s Work in NYS

W e need your help to maintain the Atlantic Chapter’s most critical conservation efforts. Your membership dues primarily support the Club’s national priorities. Your additional support is needed to strengthen the Chapter’s work in the state Legislature and throughout the state. Please use the coupon below to send us your donation. Contributions and dues to the Sierra Club and con) about the project. We ask

Oswego factory farm fight heating up

by Karen Hall

[Editor’s note: In the spring issue, the Sierra Atlantic reported on a plan by Bion Environmental Technologies to build a factory farm that would raise as many as 72,000 animals on one or several sites in Os- wesgo County. Since then, Citizens for Family Farms, an opposition group, has stepped up its work.]
Take this quiz and see if your energy use nosedives

The overwhelming emphasis to day on new energy is 'crowd- ing out' meaningful national dia- logue and progress on achieving greater energy efficiency in an economy that is struggling today at a level of just 15 percent efficiency in terms of energy use, meaning that 87% of the energy we use is wasted. That’s the conclusion of a study by the American Council for an En- ergy-Efficient Economy. As Earth-conscious Sierra Club members, we know how to save en- ergy; right? Maybe not. Our under- standing of how to save energy comes out to be pretty skewed, according to a study published this summer in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science. Surprisingly, people who reported doing the most to reduce energy were as clueless as people who reported doing the most. 87% of the energy we use is wasted. “As Earth-conscious Sierra Club members, we know how to save energy; right? Maybe not. Our understanding of how to save energy comes out to be pretty skewed, according to a study published this summer in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science. Surprisingly, people who reported doing the most to reduce energy were as clueless as people who reported doing the most. 87% of the energy we use is wasted.”

Energy consumed by a household

The big picture: About 90 percent of the total energy consumed by a household comes from home energy use, transportation, and food produc- tion. What percentage is used in the home? Used by transportation? Used by food production?

Perception of home use

Given that a 100-watt incandes- cent light bulb uses 100 units of en- ergy (watts) in one hour, how many units of energy do you think each of the following uses in one hour? CFL as bright as a 100-watt incandescent bulb

desktop computer

laptop computer

stereo

electric clothes dryer

portable heater

room air-conditioner

central air conditioner

dishwasher

Packaging

How many British thermal units (BTU’s) are used to make single-use drink containers?

aluminum can (recycled)

glass bottle (new material)

glass bottle (recycled)

plastic bottle (new material)

plastic bottle (recycled)

CFL as bright as a 100-watt incandescent bulb

Desktop computer

Laptop computer

Stereo

Electric clothes dryer

Portable heater

Room air-conditioner

Central air conditioner

Dishwasher

BTU per ton per mile

A ship uses about 400 BTUs to move one ton of freight one mile in distance. How much energy do you think a train, plane, or truck uses to do the same job?

Rank 1 - most to least efficient

Ship

Train

Airplane

Truck

Check on page 9 to see how close you came to the average numbers. Prepare for some surprises, and don’t forget to help reduce energy use.

Per Moberg, Adirondack champion, celebrates 90th birthday

Per Moberg turned 90 on July 14. Bottle Day, which is an appro- priate birth date for a revolution- ary environmental activist like Per. During decades of service to the Chapter, he has been a member of the Executive Committee, including a stint as chair, and was the Council delegate to the national Sierra Club, not long after the Atlantic Chapter was formed to include everything east of the Mississippi. During this period in the ’60s and ’70s, re- nowned photographer Ansel Adams was a member of the board, and David Brower was executive director.

Per’s first interest has always been protection of the Adirondacks. While David Brower was fighting to protect the Grand Canyon, Per fought a pro- posal to build the Gooley Dam on the Upper Hudson in 1969. At that time, Per established ad hoc committees which eventually morphed into the Chapter’s Adiron- dack Committee. Per’s committees were instrumental in creating the Adirondack Park Agency. Per was a leader in the fight to prevent the Constitutional Conven- tion of 1967 from stripping out the famed Article 14, the ‘forever wild’ clause, which protects the Adirondack Forest Preserve. Per appeared on the speaking platform on the first Earth Day, 1970, with Henry Diamond, the first com- missioner of the newly formed NYS Department of Environmental Con- servation (DEC). As a result of the acquaintance struck up that day, Per was invited to join the DEC.

Per remained active with the Sierra Club during his tenure with the DEC. His abiding passion was to create a “Grand Canoe Route” in the Adirondacks (in the area the Adirondack Committee now pro- poses as the Great (Wedgehille Ca- noe) Wilderness). Per and his wife bought their first kayaks in 1999, when he was 78.

In 1990 the Chapter awarded Per the “Bob Marshall Award” for his years of in support of the Adirondacks. Congratulations on his 90th birth- day may be sent to Per/c/o the Sierra Club, 353 Hamilton Street, Albany, NY 12210.

Roger Gray chairs the Chapter’s Adirondack Committee.

Cuomo for governor

continued from page 1

cleaning water in the Great Lakes without adequate invasive species controls. Cuomo has worked to pro- tect the water supplies of New York City and other communities. As secretary of the U.S. Depart- ment Housing & Urban Development, Cuomo initiated environmental pro- tection in its operations. He made brownfields redevelopment a top prior- ity and emphasized "smart com- munity planning" with community input. Cuomo developed and ran President Clinton’s campaign to clean up hazardous lead.

He recently issued a "Power NY" energy policy that emphasizes en- ergy efficiency and clean energy. He supports closing the gap in wetlands protection created by the Supreme Court in 2001. Cuomo advocates comprehensive energy management, creating green jobs and minimizing greenhouse gas emissions.

DiNapoli for Comptroller

Tom DiNapoli has been an out- standing protector of the environ- ment as state comptroller starting in 2005 and before that as chair of the NYS Assembly Environmental Conser- vation Committee. As chair, Assem- blyman DiNapoli was instrumental in enacting the original groundbreaking Bottle Bill and a major brownfields clean up and redevelopment reform law. He fought hard for wetlands protection, curbing sprawl and in- vesting in urban areas, and many other critical environmental laws that passed the Assembly but lan- guished in the Senate until a few were passed after the Democrats took control of the Senate in 2009. As comptroller, DiNapoli has un- dertaken many important green initia- tives. His office began auditing the environmental and energy perfor- mances of state and local govern- ment. As sole manager of the state and local government pension fund, he has invested these funds in clean tech and renewable energy, and pressed companies to operate sustainably and disclose their impact on greenhouse gases.

Schneiderman for AG

Throughout his 12 years as a state senator, Eric Schneiderman has been a leading reformer in the Legislature and a strong proponent of environ- mental justice, sustainable develop- ment and climate change solutions. In spite of Albany’s chronic dysfunc- tion, Senator Schneiderman has con- tinued to push for reform, speak- ing out against governmental fraud and for transparency.

As a member of the Senate Envi- ronmental Conservation Committee, he has been a powerful advocate for the moratorium on gas drilling, the Bigger Better Bottle Bill, expanded wetlands protection, SEQRA standing and green jobs.

The environmental community has relied on his eloquence for years to clearly explain threats and an often indifferent legislature. His pres- ence on the floor of the Senate will be missed, but the Chapter is excited by the reform agenda he will bring to the Office of the Attorney General.
Bittersweet mix of victories and severe DEC cuts

This has been a bittersweet year for New York’s environment. The Democrats controlling their slim majority in the Senate have demonstrated that they can advance meaningful environmental initiatives through their chamber, but no one in state government could protect our interests in the budget. Vital programs for open space protection, recycling, and remediation were slashed to historic lows while the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) was eviscerated of staff and funding, reducing its work force to 1983 levels. We maintain hope that the Environmental Protection Fund will rebound to the nearly 850 jobs lost since 2008.

This 22 percent reduction to an already gutted agency means even fewer inspectors to monitor pollution and enforce violations — and now, with such a small operating budget, the remaining staff will be restricted from travel and necessary testing equipment. If that is not bad enough, a significant portion of those cuts will come through early retirements that will drain the agency of its institutional knowledge, with an average of 31 years of service for each departing DEC staffer. It is hard not to place the blame for this crisis squarely on the shoulders of the outgoing governor. The Legislature has decreed the dismantling of the DEC, but it has little control over the outcome. Even if the Senate and Assembly were to force full funding of the agency through the budget process, they couldn’t make the governor actually allocate funds to the agency he controls. Ultimately, this may be a matter of law and, if we want to restore our environmental agencies, we may have to fight them.

The federal government has delegated much of its authority to the state to regulate seminal environmental statutes like the Clean Air and Clean Water acts. New York cannot simply shirk its legal responsibility because administering these programs is suddenly too expensive. Crippling the DEC’s ability to protect our natural resources and enforce violations is itself a violation of law.

While the assault on environmental spending is tragic, 2010 could have been a lot worse. I am gratified to have worked along side dozens of Sierra Club volunteers who pounded the floors of the Capitol, and hundreds more who sent letters and made phone calls. Here’s a short list of what we achieved:

Electronic waste recycling

After years of struggling to find a responsible way to deal with the mounting pile of obsolete computers and TVs in our landfills and incinerators (and the toxic byproducts in our water and air), New York finally has comprehensive electronic waste recycling. The new law requires manufacturers to take back electronic waste (e-waste) and ensure that it is properly handled and recycled. The bill establishes a state-wide electronic equipment reuse and recycling program, bans e-waste from landfills and incinerators, and requires responsibility for proper disposal from the consumer to the manufacturer.

Cleaner home heating oil

This new law will limit the sulfur content of home heating oil sold in New York and reduce overall sulfur dioxide emissions. New York’s home heating oil is burned. This will reduce exhaust particles that can trigger allergies and asthma, decrease lung function, cause heart attacks — and reduce green house gas emissions.

Phosphorous reduction

The everyday use of phosphorus in dishwasher detergents and lawn fertilizers is profoundly altering aquatic ecosystems and deteriorating drinking water. This new law prohibits phosphorus in dishwasher detergents and limits its use in lawn fertilizers, hopefully reducing phosphorus runoff into New York waters.

Smart growth infrastructure

Over the past 40 years New York has witnessed a profound migration of people and businesses from our urban centers into sprawling development — fragmenting our rural landscape with suburban roadways, strip malls and tract housing. Unchecked sprawl has siphoned off significant public dollars desperately needed in corroding cities. This monumental new law re-prioritizes state infrastructure expenditures. By focusing on consistent smart growth principles and placing priorities on existing infrastructure, New York can re-channelize economic growth in a way that protects the environment.

“Time out” on hydrofracking?

In August’s extra session, the Senate voted 49–9 to halt all drilling that employs hydrofracking, the controversial natural gas extraction technique, until May 15, 2011. The bi-partisan vote rocked the oil and gas lobby and made global headlines as other states and nations facing shale gas development considered moratoriums of their own. While this is a much shorter moratorium than we had hoped for it gives the next governor breathing room to decide how to handle this highly charged issue.

The Division of Mineral Resources continues to plug away at the new guidelines governing hydrofracking and still insists that the state can start issuing permits by the end of 2010. The governor, however, is showing signs of indecision after witnessing Pennsylvania’s summer of calamity and seems willing to force a delay. The measure still needs to pass the Assembly. While we are assured that there is ample support for the bill, that vote may not happen until after the elections.

EPA begins fracturing study

In mid-September more than 400 speakers, including more than a dozen Sierra Club volunteers, testified in Binghamton before the EPA on the dangers and challenges of hydrofracking. The EPA is gathering data and case studies to support its investigation of fracking’s effect on water resources and public health. The study will take a ‘life cycle’ approach and investigate every possible route to contamination of water. The EPA is confident that a scientific analysis of drilling will show that fracting, as it is currently practiced, is unsafe.

Drilling on state land

This past August, the DEC released the draft Strategic Plan for State Forest Management. It is the first time New York has ever attempted to comprehensively look at all the uses of state forest lands. The plan stresses biodiversity, enhances ecosystem function, and prepares our forests for the worst consequences of climate change.

But the plan still includes the likely continuation of oil and gas development on state property. This contradiction invalidates an otherwise cohesive plan. If the state indeed is successful in advancing drilling, we will need every last acre of state land to mitigate the mass fragmentation and degradation of private owned forests. Drilling in state forests will violate our fragile ecosystem’s last refuges. To read and comment on the plan, go to http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/64567.html.

Caitlin Pixley joins Albany staff

The Atlantic Chapter has hired Caitlin Pixley to work in our Albany office as the conservation associate. She is working with Roger Downs, conservation manager, on legislation, regulations, and conservation projects. She will also provide support for many volunteer activities.

Caitlin recently interned with Environmental Advocates of New York, where she lobbied on state legislation. While attending the College of St. Rose, she co-founded its Environmental Club and motivated the college president to sign onto the College Presidents’ Climate Commitment. Her communication skills, based on degrees in English and her teaching experience, will strengthen the Chapter’s communication efforts. We look forward to a productive year with Caitlin and Roger in Albany.
McKibben: It’s getting hot as hell and we’re not going to take it any more

From page 1

The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter ExCom held its quarterly in-person meeting in Boston on October 10-10 — with a Global Work Party. All around the country and the world people put up solar panels and dug community gardens and laid out bike paths. Not because we can stop climate change one bike path at a time, but because we need to make a sharp political point to our leaders: we’re getting to work, what about you? We need to shame them, starting now. And we need everyone working together.

The big environmental groups are starting to wake up, too. The Sierra Club has a dynamic new leader, Mike Brune, who’s working hard with stalwarts like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth (Note to enviro groups: working together is fun and useful). Churches are getting involved, as well as mosques and synagogues.

Kids are leading the fight, all over the world — they have to live on this planet for another 70 years or so, and they have every right to be pissed off. But no one will come out to fight for watered down and weak legislation. That’s not how it works. You don’t get a movement unless you tackle the other two steps I’ve described.

And in any event it won’t work overnight. We’re not going to get the Senate to act next week, or maybe even next year. It took a decade after the Montgomery bus boycott to get the Voting Rights Act. But if there hadn’t been a movement, then the Voting Rights Act would have passed in... never. We may need to get arrested. We definitely need art, and music, and disciplined, nonviolent, blockades. Mostly, we need to tell the truth, resolutely and constantly. Fossil fuel is wrecking the one earth we’ve got. It’s not going to go away because we ask politely if we want a world that works, we’re going to have to raise our voices.

**Prepare a 10 minute speech:**

*Title:* Why aren’t we doing it sooner?

*Subtitle:* Our movements need to be bigger, longer, and more organized.

*Date:* October 2010

**To Whom It May Concern:**

We’re not even close to winning this battle, and the battle is not the same as the war. We’ve asked for investment in the wind and solar industries, and they’ve given us nothing: they’ve given us more of our tax dollars on research into new drone aircraft and Mars orbits. When we actually paid for it, as in the Vietnam war, it was a very different story. The whole operation was underwritten by a massive amount of money. It’s not going to go away because we ask politely if we want a world that works, we’re going to have to raise our voices.

**Join the Action Alert listserve**

You can sign up for Atlantic Chapter ‘action alerts’ to take action on legislation and other key issues. Send an e-mail to listserve@lists.sierrclub.org with the message

*Subscribe ATL-ACTION ALERTS@LISTSERV.SIERRCLUB.ORG*

Include your first and last name. You can make a difference from your home by taking action via phone, e-mail, or letter.

**Movement time**

As Tom Friedman put it in a strong column the day after the Senate punt, the problem was that the public ‘never got mobilized.’ Is it possible to set up our streets demanding action about climate change? Last year with almost no money, our snail little outfit, 350.org, managed to organize what Foreign Policy called the ‘largest ever coordinated global rally of any kind’ on any issue — 5,200 demonstrations in 181 countries, 2,000 of them in the U.S.A. People were rallying not just about climate change, but around a remarkably wonky scientific data point, .56 parts per million carbon dioxide, which NASA’s James Hansen and his colleagues have demonstrated is the most we can have in the atmosphere if we want a planet ‘similar to the one on which civilization developed and to which life on earth is adapted.’ Whew, come to think of it, we do. And the ‘we,’ in this case, was not rich white folks. If you look at the 25,000 pictures in our Flickr account, you’ll see that most of them were poor, black, brown, Asian, and young — because that’s what most of the world is. No need for vice-presidents of big conservation groups to patronize them: 350.org convinced local shrimpers in Louisiana and women in burqas and priests in Orthodox churches and标头mudshakers in Mombasa turned out to be completely capable of understanding the threat to the future.

Those demonstrations were just a start, and one we should have made long ago. We followed up in October — on 10-10-10 — with a Global Work Party. All around the country and the world people put up solar panels and dug community gardens and laid out bike paths. Not because we can stop climate change one bike path at a time, but because we need to make a sharp political point to our leaders: we’re getting to work, what about you? We need to shame them, starting now. And we need everyone working together.

The big environmental groups are starting to wake up, too. The Sierra Club has a dynamic new leader, Mike Brune, who’s working hard with stalwarts like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth (Note to enviro groups: working together is fun and useful). Churches are getting involved, as well as mosques and synagogues.

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And in any event it won’t work overnight. We’re not going to get the Senate to act next week, or maybe even next year. It took a decade after the Montgomery bus boycott to get the Voting Rights Act. But if there hadn’t been a movement, then the Voting Rights Act would have passed in... never. We may need to get arrested. We definitely need art, and music, and disciplined, nonviolent, blockades. Mostly, we need to tell the truth, resolutely and constantly. Fossil fuel is wrecking the one earth we’ve got. It’s not going to go away because we ask politely if we want a world that works, we’re going to have to raise our voices.

**2010 Bill McKibben**

Bill McKibben is founder of 350.org and the author most recently, of Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet. Earlier this year the Boston Globe called him ‘probably the country’s leading environmentalist’ and Time described him as ‘the planet’s best green journalist.’ He’s a scholar in residence at Middlebury College in Vermont.

The Atlantic Chapter ExCom held its quarterly in-person meeting in Trumanburg, New York, in June. Both it and the Steering Committee held subsequent meetings by telephone conference call. Administrative matters addressed included the Chapter’s continuing financial strain, the development of the Chapter website, and the election for at-large members of the ExCom. (See Ballots on page 12.)

The ExCom also considered the status of the hydrofracking issue and the legislative prospects in Albany and Washington. The Chapter completed the approval process for several political endorsements (see page 3), and moved ahead with the hiring of a new conservation assistant to improve the staffing in the Albany office.
Natural gas is as dirty as coal, Cornell researcher says

Natural gas is marketed as a clean fuel, but a Cornell researcher says that's misleading. "Natural gas is as dirty as coal," said Robert Howarth, a professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at Cornell University. "Natural gas is mostly methane, a greenhouse gas with a global warming potential 25 times that of carbon dioxide." He said that burning natural gas produces more greenhouse gases than burning coal or oil, and that it is not a cleaner fuel than coal.

Howarth's team, led by post-doctoral researcher David Siebel, estimated that the extraction, transport and combustion of natural gas releases more greenhouse gases than the extraction, transport and combustion of coal or oil. "Natural gas is marketed as a clean fuel, but we estimate that extraction, transport and combustion of natural gas releases more greenhouse gases than the extraction, transport and combustion of coal or oil," Howarth said. "We estimate that extraction, transport and combustion of natural gas releases more greenhouse gases than the extraction, transport and combustion of coal or oil." He said that the team's calculations were based on data from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection.

The Natural Gas Partnership, a coalition of environmental groups, has been working to bring attention to the greenhouse gas emissions from natural gas. "We are concerned about the greenhouse gas emissions from natural gas," said Ken Kizer, executive director of the Natural Gas Partnership. "We are concerned about the greenhouse gas emissions from natural gas." He said that the coalition is working to bring attention to the greenhouse gas emissions from natural gas and to encourage the use of cleaner fuels.

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EPA’s Enck discusses issues with Upstate environmental groups

By Larry Beahan

President Obama’s stimulus package has brought $570 million to New York, primarily for green projects, said Judith Enck, regional administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in her meeting with 11 Buffalo-area environmental leaders in July.

Enck expressed the EPA’s general concerns about global warming, water quality in the Great Lakes and invasive species there (see article, page 9). She expressed her intention to promote renewable energy: wind, sun and certain hydro projects. Then she joked, “Anyone here interested in the Marcellus shale?”

I led a chorus of enthusiastic, amused response. She stepped in with an exhaustive recital of the usual pro and con arguments, indicating even the recent preliminary study at Cornell [see Howarth article, page 8] which indicates that, when whole-life cycles are considered, gas is about as polluting as coal. She mentioned the upcoming EPA hearings in Binghamton on the study of hydrofracking effect on drinking water.

Enck responded in a spirited and exceptionally knowledgeable way to each of the comments presented by those in attendance. Here are some of the points she made:

• Regard global warming. EPA is developing a system to require carbon producers — particularly power plants — to report the quantity of carbon they release into the atmosphere. The EPA supports federal legislation. It welcomes state initiatives such as Senator Thompson’s bill.

• EPA does not remediate brownfields directly but will provide information about special funds that may apply where railroads are involved, as in the rehabilitation of Buffalo’s NY Central Terminal.

• She has been to the West Valley nuclear waste storage site and is particularly concerned about the plume of radioactivity developing beneath a processing building. “I’m working behind the scenes; keep up the public pressure.” Regarding the standoff between the federal government and state over who is financially responsible for the cleanup, she asked, “Isn’t it time for congressional hearings?”

• The Peace Bridge Authority is responsible for introducing major quantities of pollution into one of Buffalo’s poorest communities and inducing high levels of asthma there. The authority claims it is free to ignore Buffalo laws because the authority is chartered by a treaty between the U.S. and Canada. Enck cited a similar case she handled in the state Attorney General’s Office in which a sanitation district claimed it was an authority and therefore not subject to state law. That stand was overruled in court. She added that air pollution is primarily handled by the DEC, but she would check what is required to trigger EPA involvement.

• She was critical of those who say they favor wind turbines but oppose them at particular locations. “Global warming is here. We can’t waste time. We have to do SIFOR quickly and then ‘Suck it up.’”

• She listened to detailed presentations on the complex issue of toxic waste and the expansion of Chemical Waste Management (CWM) waste storage site near Niagara Falls. Enck’s comments indicated detailed knowledge of the problem, but no solution. She did, however, agree to look into the appropriateness of a local EPA executive said to have the CWM logo displayed on his blog. • One of Enck’s major points was her effort to make EPA data available on the Internet as easily as possible. She mentioned an EPA site that allowed her to type in her old Rensselaer zip code and her present Brooklyn zip code to discover that she now lives with three times the risk of lung cancer.

• Enck’s saying, “The recession is going to go on at least a couple of more years. People want a clean environment but don’t want to pay taxes to support it. The DEC is starved for personnel and can’t do the necessary enforcement. Why not tax industry for pollution?”

In addition to the Atlantic Chapter of the Sierra Club, these other groups were represented: Citizens Campaign for the Environment; Wind Action Group, Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Waste, Sea Grant; Central Terminal Restoration, Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper, SUNY at Buffalo; Clean Air Coalition. Residents for Responsible Government (opposing CWM Chemical Services) and a representative of Senator Antoine Thompson.

Brune visits polluted Dimock sites

continued from page 1

But a couple of weeks ago, a man in Pennsylvania was severely burned after his well exploded while he was setting up a waterslide in his yard for his kids.

There’s a drilling boom sweeping across the Marcellus Shale region, and the gas companies are out of control. If we can’t protect our communities and treasured landscapes, then we should not drill for natural gas.

I am cautiously hopeful, however, that strong regulation and government oversight will make drilling safe. Because we sure could use the help of natural gas as we push quickly and aggressively toward a truly clean energy future powered by wind, solar, and other renewable resources.

In 2005, the Sierra Club’s staff and volunteer leaders agreed climate change should be our highest priority. And stopping climate change requires that we transition from the dirtiest energy sources (coal and oil) to the cleanest. Natural gas, while decidedly imperfect, Burnt more cleanly than other fossil fuels and, thanks in part to the Marcellus Shale, it’s abundant.

But when I said that the gas companies are “out of control,” I meant it literally. If there’s one lesson we all learned from what happened in the Gulf of Mexico this year, it’s that energy companies have to be regulated.

There’s just too much money at stake for them to be trusted to do the right thing on their own. Thanks to the Bush/Cheney Energy Task Force, however, fracking is specifically exempt from federal regulation under the Safe Drinking Water Act — what’s known as “the Halliburton loophole.” Oh, and by the way, Halliburton is one of three biggest suppliers of hydraulic fracturing technology. Some moves in the right direction are already being made. The New York State Senate has passed a moratorium on natural-gas drilling until next May to give the Department of Environmental Conservation time to finish new permitting guidelines. And the EPA has begun a two-year, $1.9 million safety review of hydraulic fracturing that could ultimately result in a reversal of the federal government’s abdication of oversight over one of our most important energy resources.

But it’s not enough. The gas companies are operating with the arrogance of the pre-Gulf BP. They won’t disclose the names and concentrations of the chemicals they’re injecting into the water table. And they flat out refuse to admit that fracking is dangerous or that drilling should be regulated.

The Sierra Club won’t stand for reckless drilling anywhere. Whether it’s the Marcellus Shale or the Gulf of Mexico. Already, the hydraulic fracturing team is one of the most active on the Club’s activist network. I encourage you to check out the work they’re doing, along with the Pennsylvania Chapter and the Atlantic Chapter.

We need to reach a clean-energy future, but let’s do it without destroying communities and ecosystems along the way.

Michael Brune
‘Monster’ Asian carp threatening Great Lakes  by Emily Green

Monster fish devastating local rivers and lakes.” That is a headline that none of us in the Great Lakes region wants to see, but it is what may be in store if Asian carp establish breeding populations in the Great Lakes ecosystem. They are currently on the doorstep of the Great Lakes, and their entry could cause significant ecological damage and forever change our use and enjoyment of the Great Lakes ecosystem.

A live Asian carp was recently found 6 miles from Lake Michigan in the Chicago Ship and Sanitary Canal, beyond the electronic barriers that were intended to be the last line of defense. These invasive fish are very close to the Great Lakes. It is critical that we move as quickly as possible to stop the spread of these tributaries between the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes and permanently separate these two ecosystems.

Asian carp were imported to the U.S. decades ago for aquaculture purposes, but escaped into the lower Mississippi River during floods and are now established in the Mississippi, Illinois, and Ohio river systems. They are highly efficient filter feeders, capable of eating 20 percent of their body weight in plankton feeders, capable of eating 20 percent of their body weight in plankton/day. They are highly efficient filter feeders, capable of eating 20 percent of their body weight in plankton/day. They can grow to be more than 100 pounds and, once established in the Great Lakes, their entry could cause significant ecological damage and forever change our use and enjoyment of the Great Lakes ecosystem. They can grow to be more than 100 pounds and, once established in the Great Lakes, their entry could cause significant ecological damage and forever change our use and enjoyment of the Great Lakes ecosystem.

We have provided the town board members to go with us. in Cayuga County, inviting town forts by arranging a tour of a CAFO meetings, some town board meetings called confined animal feeding operations, or CAFOs, so they can speak with them directly. We are also looking at organizing a public forum soon. A Syracuse University graduate student would like to film our efforts for a documentary. She will be filming all Citizen for Family Farms meetings, some town board meetings and doing individual interviews.

We recently stepped up our ef forts by arranging a tour of a CAFO in Cayuga County, inviting town board members to go with us. Connie Mather (featured in the re port, The Wishing of Rural New York State Factory Farms and Public Health), Joyce Lovelace and Barbara Abbitt-King were there awaiting our arrival. The Mathers had been forced to close the home down, and felt it was essential to let the public know what could happen if the project is allowed to proceed.

We flew above the area in the morning to witness environmental damage from the air, we then had a ground tour to see the farms and the many streams and brooks that have completely vanished. At Connie’s home (as many large trucks continuously roared by), the three panelists discussed what it is like to live in the belly of a CAFO, the biologist who has left Genoa, and what it is like to work a sustainable farm while living and competing with CAFOs. We were joined by Paul Casler, Schoeppepel supervisor and Lynett Greco, deputy town supervisor.

The tour was preceded just five days earlier or December 12, by our presentation of the petition calling for the Town Board of Schoeppepel to rescind the resolution, not only to the Town Board, but to the Oswego County Legislature as well. While there was much support from the legislators—some extremely positive— we felt it was essential for the county know how the community feels about the issue.

Oswego factory farm fight heating up continued from page 3

How you can help
If you would like to do more, please consider joining our Asian carp action team! Sign up on our website (www.sierrachтолr.org/greatlakes) by clicking on the ‘Volunteer’ tab and putting Asian Carp Action Team in the comment box. Please help us protect the Great Lakes from this threat.

Asian carp have devastated the Mississippi River ecosystem, harming people, local economies, property, and native fish and wildlife. We cannot afford to let history repeat itself in our vast, yet very vulnerable Great Lakes.

ANSWERs to energy quiz on page 4

For budgetary reasons, the Chapter’s Executive Committee has passed a resolution asking members to provide their e-mail addresses in anticipation of the possibility of partial electronic distribution of the Sierra Atlantic. If you look forward to each issue of the Sierra Atlantic to learn about critical environmental is sues in New York, please make sure your e-mail address is regis tered visit our website publications.html and select “Sub scribe me to the Sierra Atlantic online.” Your e-mail information will remain confidential. Your e-mail ad dress will be added solely to a Sierra Atlantic distribution list. You will not be subscribed to other Sierra Club e-mail lists.

Which saves more energy?
Switching from hot water to cold water for the wash cycle: about 100 watts/hour.
Using the window air conditioners: 1,000 watts/hour.
Using the window air conditioners: 1,000 watts/hour.

Perception of home energy use Percentage used in household operations: 30%
Used by transportation: 50%
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Energy used by a train, plane, or truck to move 1 ton of freight 1 mile in distance: Rank 1 - 4, most efficient to least efficient:

Transportation: 50%

What you can do
To help with the Atlantic Chapter’s work on this proposal or other CAFOs, contact Erin Riddle, chair Farm & Food Com mittee, (607) 372-5503, erinnriddle@verizon.net) and Linda DeStefano, chair, Biodiversity/Urban Out reach Committee (515 488-2140, Ldestefano3@twcnyrr.com).

Digital delivery of Sierra Atlantic? Chapter needs reader e-mail addresses
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www.newyork.sierrachtolr.org  •  www.sierrachtolr.org

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Two species of Asian carp, the bighead and the silver, jump out of the Illinois River near Havana, Illinois.

The editors, and to local, state and federal officials, and connected with knowledgeable people across the country to educate ourselves.

We have provided the town board members to go with us. in Cayuga County, inviting town forts by arranging a tour of a CAFO meetings, some town board meetings called confined animal feeding operations, or CAFOs, so they can speak with them directly. We are also looking at organizing a public forum soon. A Syracuse University graduate student would like to film our efforts for a documentary. She will be filming all Citizen for Family Farms meetings, some town board meetings and doing individual interviews.

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Karen Hall is a founder of Citizens for Family Farms. Her family runs a horse farm just below the Oswego County bor der. She can be reached at khal@7218 windstream.net or 315-456-1059. For updates, visit www.pbseninstitute.com.

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ostringstream Update one hour

Units of energy used in one hour

Water for the wash cycle: about 100 watts/hour.

Glass bottle, recycled: 2,400 BTU

Portable heater: 900 BTU

Stereo: 100 BTU

Desktop computer: 100 BTU

Incandescent bulb: 30 BTU

Room air-conditioner: 1,000 BTU

Plastic bottle, recycled: Not available

Aluminum can, new material: 2,200 BTU

Water for the wash cycle: about 100 watts/hour.

Glass bottle, recycled: 2,400 BTU

Portable heater: 900 BTU

Stereo: 100 BTU

Desktop computer: 100 BTU

Incandescent bulb: 30 BTU

Room air-conditioner: 1,000 BTU

Plastic bottle, recycled: Not available

Aluminum can, new material: 2,200 BTU

Water for the wash cycle: about 100 watts/hour.
Candidates for at-large seats to the Chapter Executive Committee

Following are the unedited statements received from candidates for at-large seats to the Chapter’s Executive Committee. See ballot on page 12.

Stuart Aiuinchloss

Over the years I have lived or worked in many parts of New York State, including the Hudson Valley (where I live now), Rochester, Tonawanda, Horseheads and Watertown. And I was born in New York City. If you elect me to represent you at large on the Chapter Executive Committee, you can be sure I will support conservation all across the state.

My personal passion, and the campaign on which I spend most of my time, is persuading Wall Street and the financial system to value the natural environment. We have learned to describe the problems in terms financial people understand like risk and profit. We have organized public pension funds with a total of nearly ten trillion dollars to start using shareholder clout to press for climate risk management.

During the 1990s through 2002 and since 2004 I have served at-large on the Atlantic Chapter Executive Committee, serving two years as chair. Through the Club I campaign for good environmental candidates for local, state and national office.

I am retired from both the practices of law and civil engineering, which I did in California. I am married with two children and five grandchildren. I have an advanced degree in environmental law, so I understand the issues pretty well. I would like your vote. If you have any questions or comments about any aspect of the Chapter or my service, please do not hesitate to call me at (845) 679-7002 or send me e-mail to saiuinchloss@gmail.com.

Ken Baer

As a Sierra Club activist for many years, it has always been an exhilarating experience to lobby elected officials on environmental issues. During this period, I have engaged over 250 legislators on such issues as solid waste, incineration, drinking water, piping pollutants, indoor air pollution, lead poisoning, and development issues.

As a Sierra Club leader, I have recruited many new activists, who then had the opportunity to continue public officials on environmental issues. The most thrilling aspect of this is witnessing the empowerment of members.

Over the years I have been involved with the following Sierra Club efforts:
- Educating people about CAFOs’
- Fighting to stop the Jets Stadium in Manhattan, Ratner’s use of eminent domain in Brooklyn and luxury condos from being constructed in Brooklyn Bridges
- Closing the Indian Point nuclear power plant
- Working to enact the Bigger, Better Bottle Bill
- Demonstrating against the use of pesticides

My vision for the chapter is to have a greater public presence, attract new members, and recruit additional activists.

As always, I remain an advocate for animals, an avid recycler, a user of mass transit, and a vegetarian.

My Email address is HUNGRYHIKER@AOL.COM.

Jessica Helm

This is my 6th year volunteerning with the Sierra Club, and my 3rd year with the chapter executive committee. I have been secretary, media chair, and communication chair for my local group (the Long Island Group), and am currently conservation chair and online media chair for the chapter. Previously I have become involved in national Sierra Club activities as the leader of the national Hydrofracking Team, which brings volunteers and staff together in the fight against fossil fuel exploitation in shale gas and tight sand formations across the country, including our New York shale.

Our volunteers are the Sierra Club’s greatest strength. A serious commitment to environmental activism can be taxing – the phrase “no good deed goes unpunished” is often invoked. The flip side of that commitment is the joy of finding others who share your passion, and combining efforts to accomplish amazing things.

The chapter executive committee and its delegates exist to support and catalyze these interactions.

Energy and Global Warming committees have many hardworking activists. I hope to develop a bridge between their work and entry-level activists. I will continue to work to expand volunteer water monitoring to new corners of the state with the Water Sentinels.

It would be an honor to return to the chapter executive committee for a term as your at-large delegate.

Art Klein

My life is just about parallel to the development of the modern environmental movement. From 1957 to 1990 I worked on the Great Lakes, in construction, sea- man and finally a clean Water Act Investigator for the Corps of Engineers. Especially early I witnessed the degradation and pollution of our Great Lakes and later the feeble responses to this.

I was a waterways Investigator in the Corps of Engineers from 1973 to 1990 and learned about the possibilities and limitations of Government in regulating the waterways and wetlands.

I am a bicycle and pedestrian advocate and active in outdoor recreation and advocacy. I focus on education and knowledge that actively involves stakeholders, government, and society to act in an appropriate way to deal with environmental problems.

My Sierra activities and interests include but are not restricted to Great Lakes water quality, the Niagara Greenway effort, wetlands, urban sprawl, open space and forest and park policies, and transportation issues.

My career in Government has allowed me special insight to the limitations of government and the importance of understanding the policy and regulations that determine these limitations. I write at least one letter a month to one or all my representatives and nearly a letter a month to the editor.

I have been married to Lyn for forty years, have a great Brieri dog, fantastic cat, Mervyn, six Kos and a yard seething with life and now filled with birds and butterflies.

Annie Wilson

Greed and ignorance are the root causes of our global crisis. We must fight government policies and regulations that support and promote the corporate and military abuses of our environmental, social and spiritual health. Most environmental organizations compromise rational and scientific strategies in order to receive financial contributions. What is legal is not necessarily ethical.

The Sierra Club is a unique paradigm and it is often promoted as the largest grassroots organization in the United States. We must restore the potential for our organization as a more effective and efficient tool for grassroots. The development of campaigns, projects and priorities initiated within our communities must be supported and nurtured.

There are many issues that we are neglecting due to insufficient financial and human resources. Chapter fundraising has always been very difficult and we must find a method without compromising our integrity.

During the past 20 years I have been working to help advance energy policy campaigns within the environmental justice movement. I have been active within the Club since 2002. Currently I Chair the Atlantic Chapter Energy Committee and represent the New York City Group at the Chapter Executive Committee. Please consider this candidacy as a synergy of activist and life experiences that will continue to support wise decision making for the Executive Committee for the Atlantic Chapter. For more information contact me via awilson.scny@gmail.com. Thank You.

Martha Loew

As a thirty-two year member of Sierra Club and a 10 year Chair of the Iroquois Group, I have actively participated in many environmental issues both at the Chapter and Group level. I have just completed my second two year term as an at-large delegate to the Atlantic Chapter.

My term may be over but there is so much ongoing in state-level conservation issues that I am asking for your vote so you may continue with these important efforts, and hopefully to successful conclusions.

As you all know, the out all effort to pass a moratorium on Hydrofracking at the state level is at a crucial stage and as part of the team that is working with the Conservation Chair it is important to keep those on that team on the Chapter Executive Committee. Particularly the at-large level as we are responsible to the whole Chapter, not just our Groups.

As an at-large member I have, and will, advocate for inclusion of all Groups in the location of meetings and the recognition of special concerns that exist in each of the eleven groups. As a Chair we must learn about and reach out to all parts of the Chapter. As your delegate I will do this.

My thanks to the nominating committee for this opportunity. I ask for your vote to continue the important work of an at-large delegate as we face probably the most serious New York State environmental challenge in recent years.

To discuss issues, please write mloew@twnysr.com

Group Chairs

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FALL 2010
A s a birdwatching implement, the bicycle may be unused if passed. A bicycle rolls smoothly, stealthily. It never sounds like human footsteps, which send birds packing. It permits a rider to cover miles of road silently, listening for tell-tale songs and indicative rustlings in grass. It allows for landscape scrutiny. Cathbirds scratch in a roadside ditch; warblings whisper overhead about the excellence of this year’s berry crop — you can hear these things while riding a bike. This revelation came slowly. Prior notions needed dispelling. One buys a bike to go fast, doesn’t one? All those racers bent like pretzels over handlebars, dashing from here to there in stretchy shorts — isn’t that biking?

Birding by bicycle yields bountiful sightings

Let fall’s harvest put a spring in your step

If you made any of the herbal sea salts from my last column, this is a great opportunity to use some.

**To roast peppers place whole peppers on a gas burner or grill, or under a broiler. Roast until skin is blackened, turning peppers as necessary. Immediately place peppers in a paper bag. When cool, the charred skin will easily peel off. Don’t rinse! That will remove a lot of flavor; a few bits of blackened peel won’t ruin the soup.**

Sweet Potato, Kale and Black Bean Soup

Place cashews and 1/2 cup hot water in a blender until smooth, then add to a large pot with the vegetable broth and whisk until smooth. Blend until smooth (add a bit of the broth if necessary). In the blender, blend until smooth. Add oil and blend just to incorporate. Serve sprinkled with coarse sea salt and finely chopped tomatoes.

“Creamy” Roasted Red Pepper Soup

In a large pot, saute garlic and onion in oil until soft and translucent. Add celery and stir, cook for another minute. Add kale and cover, stirring occasionally, until kale is softened. Add sweet potatoes and cook, covered, until almost tender, then add broth and blend to a boil. Add beans. Cook until heated through. Add nutmeg and salt and pepper.

Raw “Creme” of Spinach Soup

I’ve made this soup all summer long, as a cold soup but, now that the days are shorter and cooler, I’ll be making it with hot water instead of cold. Don’t use boiling water, but don’t use hot tap water. You don’t want to drink water that’s been sitting in your hot water heater! You could also add a dash of cayenne pepper to this to heat it up a little more.

1/2 C. of raw cashews, soaked 2 hours and drained
about 3 C. baby spinach, or 1 bunch spinach
1/2 avocado
2 C. hot water, divided
2 T. olive oil
1 tomato, finely chopped, for garnish
course salt*
Place cashews and 1/2 cup hot water in blender until smooth, adding more water if necessary. Add spinach, avocado and remaining water and blend until smooth. Add oil and blend until incorporated. Serve sprinkled with coarse sea salt and finely chopped tomatoes.

One buys a bike to ride on city streets, doesn’t one? All those humans and machines making noise to blot out birds; buses belching; car horns screeching — isn’t that biking, too?

It is in certain circles. But what of the citizen who was born to ogle flycatchers, not win the Tour de France? What of those born to feel better on dirt roads than paved ones? What about the humble bird-watcher?

Ther is nothing available for such a person, not a single bicycle-related thrill.

That’s what I used to think before I found knobby tires. They grow on bicycles with numerous gears that allow middle-aged riders to ascend steep hills without scaring pain. They roll along quietly on country roads, preventing punctures and allowing birders to glance about for tanagers. A male scarlet-tanager from the bike has been my best bird so far. Before that it was a wild turkey, before that an indigo bunting. The tanager had a caterpillar in its mouth and didn’t hear me coming. I coasted by, drinking in that blast of brilliant red. Then I circled and coasted by again. The bird was still there.

The turkey haunted a deep wooded hollow. Standing in the middle of the road, it stared at three bikers descending, waited until we were 25 yards away, then trotted into roadside shadows. We rolled forward slowly, not talking. The turkey lay 15 feet from us, flattened on the ground amongst friends of sensitive fern. We stopped and stared. The bird stood up, tiptoed nervously for several steps, ran swiftly for several more, then took off through the trees in a flurry of beating wings. For three seconds or so, the bird’s tail flashed open like a partially spread fan. Feathers exploded in a burst of bronze iridescence. It was the closest, most revealing, look I’ve had at a wild turkey in motion.

There have been other bicycle moments. The male indigo bunting was perched in sunlight, on a fence post by a field filled with Indian paintbrush. It reflected deep blue all over, incomparable on an early morning ride. There have been old friends, too: cardinals by the dozenth, song sparrows by the gross and a broad-winged hawk that didn’t know I was there until it looked straight down and saw me. The bird glided silently from one side of the road to the other, disappearing in dense oak trees. I counted black and white birds on its tail. There were eight.

A recipe, then, for birding success: Take two knobby tires, add one birder and stir in a narrow dirt road. Allow to settle on a cool autumn morning. Enjoy.

Naturalist Rick Marsi, a member of the Susquehanna Group, is a journalist, public speaker and leader of eco-tours. His book of favorite nature columns is Wheel of Seasons, available at www.rickmarsi.com. ©2010 Rick Marsi
Iroquois

Group to EPA: we’re ready when you are

After we paused to catch our breath following our GasLand showing and Josh Fox visit, the scheduled date for the EPA hearing in Binghamton on Marcellus Shale drilling approached. We were prepared, as the lead time was good. Many were signed up to attend and/or speak, and transportation to Binghamton had been arranged. Details of sign messages, speaker topics, and even costumes had been discussed and planned. We were ready! We even had a concurrent rally ready in Syracuse for those who could not go to Binghamton.

Three days before the big day, rumbles began, and two days before, we heard that Binghamton would not be the location, but Syracuse would. What a scramble. A flood of calls and e-mails ensued, and we were ready — but then the meeting site was switched back to Binghamton with no new date or location. Sort of like they moved the altar, then kidnapped the minister. Our “drawing board” is going to need a facelift before this is over.

On the plus side: the power of the industry was revealed and the press coverage on the issue was awesome.

While hydrofracking will continue to be our main focus, we have additional plans for our Group. Programs and planning will include our ongoing talks to make calls supporting Senator Antoine Thompson’s bill to establish a moratorium on hydrofracking in the Marcellus Shale. The Group has stayed in close contact with Senator Thompson and with the group that is voicing Sierrans’ concerns that the $9 million per year the Niagara Power Authority is allocated to Western New York over the next 50 years to compensate for the relicensing of the Niagara Power Project is being frittered away on projects unlikely to build the promised Niagara River Greenway. A major problem is that the Greenway Commission, which might guide this spending, has been given virtually no power. The NREC is writing letters critical of inappropriate projects, testifying at Greenway meetings and writing letters to editors publicizing this wasteful spending. They are looking into legislative remedies as well.

This spring the Niagara Group established a phone tree of volunteers willing to make calls to legislators. Chair Bob Ciesielski activated these volunteers to make calls supporting Senator Antoine Thompson’s bill to establish a moratorium on hydrofracking in the Marcellus Shale. The Group has stayed in close touch with Senator Thompson on this and other issues through his aide, Bill (and the Niagara Greenway discussions.

Niagara

Niagara Greenway, Marcellus Shale, wetlands preservation keep Group busy

Beautiful summer weather and a chance to enjoy a vista of the Niagara River took our last outing to Tonawanda’s Aqua Park. The setting facilitated our Niagara River Greenway discussions.

Sierrans Larry Beahan and Art Klein sit on the Niagara Environmental Relicensing Coalition (NREC). That group is voicing Sierrans’ concerns that the $9 million per year the Niagara Power Authority is allocated to Western New York over the next 50 years to compensate for the relicensing of the Niagara Power Project is being frittered away on projects unlikely to build the promised Niagara River Greenway. A major problem is that the Greenway Commission, which might guide this spending, has been given virtually no power. The NREC is writing letters critical of inappropriate projects, testifying at Greenway meetings and writing letters to editors publicizing this wasteful spending. They are looking into legislative remedies as well.

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Detox is the title shown on the cover). Check it out! National Sierra Club has an Inner City Outings program. This very educational workshop should eventually help in reviving our Group’s outings program.