Flawed natural gas leases raise risk of new mortgage meltdown

by Jurgen Wekerle and Andrew Lawrence

Natural gas leases throughout the New York Marcellus shale region, especially on properties with mortgages, are fatally flawed and may conceal reprehensible public and private risks.

The latest threat to real estate recovery across the country is the tens of thousands of mortgaged properties with defective gas leases. That’s because a lease without bank/third-party consent is subject to default, and the property may be precluded from resale, according to Elizabeth Radow, a New York attorney who has written a cover story about the topic for the New York State Bar Journal.

Further, each of these properties could be “fracked” and converted into a mini-Super Fund site affecting homes throughout the surrounding community. This is an unimaginable toxic time bomb which could blow up the national housing market and drown the banking system yet again.

The fear that fracking may someday be allowed in the Catskills is already undermining the second-home real estate market there, according to a recent article in The New York Times.

Dependent on fracking, gas leases are being signed without the required approval of banks holding the property mortgages. Anti-fracking stipulations in mortgages prohibit landowners from polluting or compromising the collateral value of the property, which guarantees the mortgage loan.

Deed recording is often shoddy, and contamination, health and financial liability risks are not disclosed. Moreover, lease sellers are being misled. The home community and public officials have not considered the consequences of property devaluation.

Gas drilling promoters promise astonishing wealth to landowners and often pay lease signing bonuses that are worth more per acre than what the outright sale of that property could bring on the open market — land that could be contaminated and become an unmarketable public burden if ever abandoned. And, windfall tax revenue is promised to prop up government budgets staggered by the exploding real estate bubble and mortgage foreclosure meltdown.

Rather than halt the slide in property prices, drilling would accelerate the downward spiral of property assessments and tax revenue upon which municipalities and school districts depend.

News reports reveal that a growing number of lenders — most notably, Wells Fargo, the largest mortgage lender in the U.S. — have stopped issuing mortgages for refinancing or for the new purchase of homes with gas leases. Lenders are becoming skittish about the risk of losses caused by contamination and by the lease mechanism itself.

Not only must mortgage holders consent to the gas lease, too must the home insurance companies who are obligated to evaluate new liability risks and adjust the terms and premium costs of policy coverage. Nationwide, one of the nation’s largest insurers, recently decided that it will no longer insure properties leased for gas drilling.

Home insurance is also required for a mortgage, and insurance policies routinely do not cover gas drilling or secondary risks related to fracking. Cancellation of a policy or lack of coverage also could trigger a mortgage default and a bank’s demand for instant repayment or foreclosure.

Gas leases have legal consequences like aboveground subdivisions, which alter ownership relationships and property values. Significant changes require the written consent of all mortgage owners listed on the deed/title, such as the originating bank and all other parties with a financial interest, including a home equity loan or second mortgage, a mortgage derivative, or a lien or easement. That is why the lease must also be recorded with the deed in the office of the county clerk to satisfy title search and title insurance requirements upon which the transfer and sale of real estate depend.

The value of a home’s assessment and mortgage is predicated on the value of the entire deeded property, including subsurface mineral assets, water resources, septic system performance, and aboveground buildings, which collectively become the collateral. The value of a home is also related to the value of neighborhood properties and to the community as a whole.

The gas lease, however, splits off the gas asset as part of the mortgage collateral. The lease further diminishes the value of the property, whether or not any pollution occurs, because it also controls the aboveground use of the property, including: • construction of well pads, access roads, and collection pipes, • gas compressors and processing facilities, • surface or underground storage facilities for gas and/or frack waste.

In fact, the potential for gas production makes the underground gas lease exponentially more valuable than the surface land and structures, which become a shell to which the mortgage remains attached. Paradoxically...

In late August, New Yorkers from all over the state streamed into Albany to tell Governor Cuomo: don’t frack our communities.

Inside
• Upsate reporter Tom Wilber lets the frack story speak for itself in Beneath the Surface: a good read about the gaslands along the Pennsylvania/New York border. Book review by Hal Smith, page 6.
• Governor Cuomo kicks the can down the road. Report from Albany by Roger Downs, page 4.
Why the Sierra Club Endorses Barack Obama

The Sierra Club has endorsed President Obama for reelection. Since most Americans—including many Sierra Club members—may not be fully aware of the President’s environmental record, here is a partial list of what he has achieved despite unrelenting opposition from a Tea Party–Republican–controlled House of Representatives. For more details, visit the Club’s website (www.sierraclub.org).

• The EPA, under Administrator Lisa Jackson, released new protections for toxic mercury from power plants.
• Proposed strengthening of fuel economy and carbon pollution standards for cars and light trucks to 54.5 mpg by 2025.
• The first-ever fuel efficiency standards for medium and heavy-duty vehicles sold from 2014–2018.
• Resistance to permitting the Keystone-XL pipeline that would carry oil manufactured from Canadian tar sands to export terminals in Louisiana and Texas.

Despite a fiercely hostile Congress, President Obama has moved forward on environmental protection.

U.S. Congress

President established a green-house gas re-
duction goal of 28% by 2020, equiva-

lent to taking 17 million cars off the
road. It will save the federal govern-
ment $8–11 billion in energy costs.

The reductions are based on action plans of some 53 federal agencies. This was the first time that the fed-
eral government developed clean energy plans agency by agency:

• With green investments of close to $100 billion, the Recovery Act created good jobs, reduced depe-
dendency on dirtier energy sources, and promoted the shift to wind and solar power, high-energy performance, low-emission buildings, and mass transit, and a modernized water and transportation infrastructure.

• The Obama Administration pro-
tected 1 million acres around the Grand Canyon from uranium and other mining—for 20 years.

• The Omnibus Public Land Man-
agement Act of 2009 will safeguard millions of acres of new wilderness, protect hundreds of miles of rivers, expand trails, and keep important habitats in Wyoming safe from oil and gas leasing.

• Seven-year ban on new oil and gas leasing and drilling in eastern Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans.

Atlantic Chapter Political Endorsements

Submissions

Send us a letter, an article, news briefs, comments, photos, graphics or other items of interest. Contact the editors at the e-mail address above for submission format and details. When querying, please write “Sierra Atlantic” in the subject line.

Deadline — Winter Issue

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Climate change is here—and worse than we thought

by James E. Hansen

When I testified before the Senate in the hot summer of 1988, I warned of the kind of future that climate change would bring to us and our planet. I painted a grim picture of the consequences of steadily increasing temperatures, driven by mankind’s use of fossil fuels. But I have a confession to make: I was too optimistic.

My projections about increasing global temperature have been proved true. But I failed to fully explore how quickly that average rise would drive an increase in extreme weather.

In a new analysis of the past six decades of global temperatures, my colleagues and I have found a stunning increase in the frequency of extremely hot summers, with deepening troubles ramifications for not only our future but also for our present.

This is not a climate model or a prediction but actual observations of weather events and temperatures that have happened. Our analysis shows that it is no longer enough to say that global warming will increase the likelihood of extreme weather and to repeat the caveat that no individual weather event can be directly linked to climate change. To the contrary, our analysis shows that, for the extreme hot weather of the recent past, there is virtually no explanation other than climate change.

The deadly European heat wave of 2003, the fiery Russian heat wave of 2010 and catastrophic droughts in Texas and Oklahoma last year can each be attributed to climate change. And once the data are gathered, it’s likely that the same will be true for the extremely hot summer the United States suffered through this past summer.

These extreme weather events are not simply an example of what climate change could bring. They are caused by climate change. The odds that natural variability created the extremes is minuscule, vanishingly small. To count on those odds would be like quitting your job and playing the lottery every morning to pay the bills.

Twenty-four years ago, I introduced the concept of “climate dice” to help distinguish the long-term trend of climate change from the natural variability of day-to-day weather. Some summers are hot, some cool. Some winters brutal, some mild. That’s natural variability.

But as the climate warms, natural variability too. In a climate warmed by climate change, two sides of the die would represent cooler-than-normal weather, two sides more extreme, and two sides would be warmer-than-normal weather. Rolling the die again and again, or season after season, you would get an equal variation of weather over time. But loading the die with a warming climate changes the odds. You end up with only one side cooler than normal, one side average, and four sides warmer than normal. Even with climate change, you will occasionally see cooler-than-normal summers or a typically cold winter. Don’t let that fool you.

My new, peer-reviewed study, published by the National Academy of Sciences, makes clear that while average global temperatures has been steadily rising due to a warming climate (up about 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit in the past century), the extremes are actually becoming much more frequent and more intense worldwide.

When we plot the world’s changing temperatures on a bell curve, the extremes are unusually hot and, even more, the extremes of unusually hot are being altered so they are becoming more common and more severe. The change is so dramatic that one face of the die must now represent extreme weather to illustrate the greater frequency of extremely hot weather events.

Such events used to be exceedingly rare. Extremely hot temperatures covered about 0.1 percent to 0.2 percent of the globe in the base period of our study, from 1951 to 1980. In the last three decades, while the average temperature has slowly risen, the extremes have soared and now cover about 10 percent of the globe.

This is the world we have changed, and now we have to live in it — the world that caused the 2003 heat wave in Europe that killed more than 50,000 people and the 2011 drought in Texas that caused more than $5 billion in damage are a prelude to events that will become ever more frequent and more severe.

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This is the world we have changed, and now we have to live in it — the world that caused the 2003 heat wave in Europe that killed more than 50,000 people and the 2011 drought in Texas that caused more than $5 billion in damage. Such events, our data show, will become ever more frequent and more severe.

There is still time to act and avoid a worsening climate, but we are wasting precious time. We can solve the challenge of climate change with a gradually rising fee on carbon collected from fossil-fuel companies, with 100 percent of the money rechanneled to all legal residents on a per capita basis. This would stimulate innovations and create a robust clean-energy economy with millions of new jobs. It is a simple, honest and effective solution.

The future is now. And it is hot.

James Hansen is a professor at George Washington University and a senior scientist at the Goddard Institute for Space Studies at Columbia University.

2012 a seminal year for the Earth

by Moïsa Bleichem

James E. Hansen published ‘Climate change is here and worse than we thought’ (above) on August 3. Two months later, the evidence of the warming climate is even more dramatic. We will look back on 2012 as the seminal year when global warming shows its face without mistake, and in a big way.

In mid-May, Arctic sea ice was still expanding, having already covered most of the land mass of the United States. Most of New York was in dry to moderate drought. At the same time the land surface temperatures were 1.85 degrees F higher than the 20th century average. An all-time record.

This means that whatever moisture there was in the soil was quickly sucked out of it. In fact, under average increased temperatures, more frequent rain is necessary for any plant growth at all. Fertile soil is composed of millions of bacteria and other microorganisms in every square inch. It’s an ecosystem that thrives on moisture. It needs moisture to survive, and they die during drought. If that happens too often, the foundation of vegetation is gone.

Already, the record low U.S. harvests of 2012 are a $20 billion loss for inurers. The World Bank has issued a global hunger warning.

Sea surface temperatures along the northeast coast of New England have set all-time records. In some places the sea surface is 6 F degrees above the historical average. In the gulf of Maine, sea surface temperatures are 5.6 degrees higher.

The sea floor temperatures are also much higher than normal. We know that fish are sensitive to temperature. Most require cold water. It is not yet known how this temperature leap is affecting marine ecosystems, and consequently birds and northern mammals. We do know that the oceans are in crisis. They are experiencing unprecedented species loss due to warming, acidification, and overfishing. Thus, life’s other foundation, the oceans, are in catastrophic decline.

What most people do not realize is that the Arctic, and its historical sea ice, are the control center for the northern hemisphere climate. The loss of Arctic sea ice impacts weather patterns that can lead to persistent extreme weather such as floods, droughts and heat waves. This is why the permanent ice retreat leads to persistent high temperatures.

The huge expanse of Arctic ice acts as a mirror reflecting excess solar radiation. It helps cool the ocean, and the planet. But as the sea ice melts, it exposes darker, warmer water that often disappear down deep holes called moulins. That water lubricates the underbelly of the ice sheet, moving it a foot a day toward the sea. Greenland is losing enough water each year to fill Lake Erie.

These are the massive and rapid changes that are leaving scientists in shock and disarray.

Yet not long ago Hansen said that we may not go above 1 degree C or we enter a world humanity will not recognize. Now that we are at 1.3 degrees C, he is proven right.

Unless we can figure out how to reverse course immediately, escalating temperatures are in the pipeline. Yet you won’t find a sane road map to that reversal by going to the Department of the Interior website, for example. President Obama has under his direction one-fifth of the land mass of the U.S. and 1.76 billion acres of Continental Shelf, a veritable kingdom of opportunity to do just that. Yet the declared slogan at the Department of the Interior is “Protecting America’s Great Outdoors and Powering Our Future.”

The stated plan is to use public lands for fossil fuel extraction. That translates into coal and natural gas mining on public lands, leasing a total of 320,000 square miles in the Gulf of the same design as the Deepwater Horizon, and leasing oil extraction rights to Shell in the fragile Arctic.

In short, the plan is to let the largest consumer of fossil fuels, could be the first step in providing the only true security—a healthy planet.

Moïsa Bleichem, a member of the Executive Committee, also chairs the Chapter’s Global Warming Committee and the Publications Committee.

At the same time, 97 percent of Greenland’s surface underwent a thaw, creating rivers of fast rushing water that often disappear down holes called moulins. That water lubricates the underbelly of the ice sheet, moving it a foot a day toward the sea. Greenland is losing enough water each year to fill Lake Erie.

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Cuomo kicks the can down the road—again

When Joe Martens was sworn in as commissioner of the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) in April of 2011, Andrew Cuomo presided over the oath of office. He did not raise his right hand, but before the oath was taken, the governor quipped, “There is no turning back Joe, nor even hydro-Cuoming.” Without missing a beat, Martens responded, “Does this mean I can tell the press that we have finally had our first conversation about gas-drilling?” Laughter followed, but the undertone was clear—Cuomo, from the start, wanted to put distance between his office and the final decision on fracking.

Later in the evening, Cuomo told a small group of advocates that he had serious doubts about DOH’s commitment to fracking. He raised questions about safety to the public. But by the spring of 2012, the Cuomo administration had effectively declared that the final SGEIS was imminent, but it would appear that public outcry to his nuanced approach keeps pushing back the release date. The apparent spring deadline was postponed until after the legislative session because, as Cuomo put it, “I don’t want a political decision.”

Throughout the summer, Governor Cuomo was dogged repeatedly at public appearances by activists—hundreds showed up at an economic summit he held in NYC, at his yogurt summit, at the state fair in Syracuse—culminating in a 2,000-person rally that shut down the streets of Albany and enlisted thousands of others to pledge resistance to drilling.

At that point the final SGEIS release date was months away from the election season and releasing controversial new drilling regulations would put him at odds with so many in his party who were running on strategic anti-fracking platforms. At the risk of making the run up to the fall election a sustained anti-fracking/anti-Cuomo commercial, the administration needed to delay the release of the final SGEIS past November 6 without revealing its blatant political motives.

Public health now at the center of the debate

As detailed in previous columns, the deficiencies of the state’s environmental review on fracking are substantial; no cumulative impact analysis for the 65,000 projected gas wells, no socioeconomic analysis to reflect the true costs borne by host communities, no comprehensible plan for where to dispose of the billions of gallons of wastewater and drill cuttings, no commitment to close the loophole that exempts drilling wastes from hazardous waste laws. But perhaps the most troubling has been the absence of a health impact assessment (HIA) on fracking when we know that other states have faced significant public health concerns, from nose bleeds and asthma to neuropathies and cancers.

The DEC has long maintained that the SGEIS on fracking is, in effect, a de facto health study, even though medical concepts are barely mentioned in the publicly available analysis. They have eschewed conducting an HIA with the claim that they have anticipated and eliminated all human exposure pathways for fracking chemicals and emissions, thus creating a scenario where there is really nothing left to study.

With the political imperative to find a substantive reason to delay drilling until after the election, the notion of conducting a health review suddenly appeared to be a worthwhile pursuit for the governor. On September 20, DEC commissioner Martens released, via press release, a statement rejecting the call for an independent HIA of fracking, but alternatively stating that the Department of Health (DOH) would commence a review of the proposed hydrofracking regulations, though the terms of such a review were vague.

While one can appreciate that the health impacts of fracking are now at the forefront of the state’s decision-making process, there is a credibility problem regarding the independence of the DOH from those in the executive chamber who will make the final decision on fracking. Clearly, claims that the proposed regulatory program would eliminate all public health risks demands independent and thorough verification—not further certification from political appointees.

The HIA requested by the environmental and medical community represents a very different approach. An HIA is a means of assessing the health impacts of policies, plans and projects using quantitative, qualitative and participatory techniques, facilitated by independent health experts. What the governor appears to be proposing is nothing more than an internal review from DOH of the near-final drilling regulations developed by DEC.

We have seen over the past four years an SGEIS process that has led to the firing of a DEC commissioner, the outsourcing of analysis to gas industry consultants, and a constantly moving time frame based upon political temperament. If Governor Cuomo is to take the health risks of fracking seriously, he needs to mandate a transparent public review by outside, independent experts. The DOH will be no immune to political intervention than the DEC.

The commitment to look at health impacts will extend the date of the final decision. 

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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 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 are not tax deductible; they support our effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. Thank you.

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Cuomo’s political ambitions have prevented him from saying what almost every politician understands: fracking is a bad deal.

Cuomo’s political ambitions have prevented him from saying what almost every politician understands: fracking is a bad deal.
Chapter focuses on natural gas and solar energy

The Atlantic Chapter has been busy on multiple fronts this year. Our chapter, many of our 11 Groups, and our staff in Albany have been working full tilt to stop hydraulic fracturing from coming into New York and our surrounding states. Efforts have included many volunteer and staff hours meeting with legislators to pass or pass various items of fracking legislation while the legislature was in session, organizing and attending rallies, producing an anti-fracking radio ad aired on multiple stations in the Southern Tier, and supporting the efforts of local grassroots groups working on the issue.

Our Chapter has undertaken two legal efforts to stop the development of infrastructure related to fracking. In one, we challenge the Spectra pipeline, which is set to carry natural gas from Pennsylvania into Manhattan and would open a large market for Marcellus produced (fracked) gas. In the other, we challenge a planned facility in Painted Post that would pump and ship up to 1 million gallons of water each day from the Corning aquifer to a Shell subsidiary in Pennsylvania for use in fracking. These and other anti-fracking efforts are supported by our general budget and our tax-deductible Fracking Defense Fund. If you’d like to support our work on fracking, it’s easy to donate online — just follow the link from our website at http://newyork.sierracorg/donate.html

Since the Atlantic Chapter joined forces with the Sierra Club’s Beyond Coal campaign, the campaign has added several staff in New York, significantly increasing our reach on renewable energy and efficiency. With the help of the Beyond Coal campaign, our dedicated volunteers, and local Groups, our Chapter is showing how renewable energy, efficiency, and conservation can solve our energy needs.

The Long Island Power Authority (LIPA) is considering several proposals for contracts to provide 2500 MW to Long Island’s energy grid. If natural gas proposals win these contracts it would result in a significant expansion of natural gas infrastructure, including pipelines and storage facilities, locking us into a natural gas future for decades and increasing the pressure to frack. This would have significant ramifications for how Long Island is powered for the next several decades. We need to build momentum towards renewable energy before current coal-fired infrastructure is put into place.

The clincher on the deal is that installation expense has been a big hang-up in getting clean energy infrastructure put into place. The recent appointment of John Koelmel as NYPDA chairman couldn’t have come at a better time. A native of Western New York and former CEO of First Niagara Bank, Koelmel could be the key to Western New York’s surviving the gathering storm. Obviously, he knows the nuts and bolts of financing and commerce. Now he is also in charge of one of the largest energy-producing and distributing entities in the world, NYPDA, which includes Niagara Falls and thousands of miles of energy-distributing power lines.

Governor Andrew Cuomo has announced that $107 million is now available through the NY-Sun initiative for a major solar power incentive program that will increase the amount of electricity generated by photovoltaic (PV) systems throughout New York.

The NY-Sun Competitive PV Program, which is being administered by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), seeks proposals for large (more than 50 kilowatts) PV systems to be installed at businesses, factories, municipal buildings and other larger commercial and industrial customers.

This is an expansion — both in geographical territory and in funding — of a two-year-old program that previously focused on large PV systems for the commercial, industrial and municipal sectors exclusively in New York City, Westchester County and the lower Hudson Valley. The newest awards stem from this more limited two-year-old program.

In addition to the competitive PV program, NYSERDA has also expanded its smaller-scale solar PV program (less than 50 kilowatts) under the NY-Sun initiative. Monthly funding under this program has increased from $2 million to $3.5 million for the remainder of 2012 and will continue at $3.5 million per month in 2013. This standard offer non-competitive open enrollment program provides funding for systems up to 7 kilowatts for residential sites and up to 50 kilowatts for nonresidential sites.

Governor Cuomo launched the NY-Sun initiative to double the amount of customer-sited solar power installed annually in New York, and quadruple that amount by 2015. This standard offer non-competitive open enrollment program provides funding for systems up to 7 kilowatts for residential sites and up to 50 kilowatts for nonresidential sites.

For more information on the NY-Sun Initiative, visit www.nyserda.ny.gov

State expands funding for solar power

Three western New Yorkers are key to surviving the gathering storm

We are therefore working to pressure the LIPA to select clean energy in its 2500 MW “Request for Proposals” (RFP) process. Offshore wind could become a reality for New York if LIPA moves forward to selecting the offshore wind proposal in the RFP process—including an offshore wind farm that could provide 600 MW.

Led by our Long Island and Niagara Groups, we have continued to increase public understanding of the CLEAN energy or feed in tariff (FIT) funding mechanism and work for its implementation. In Long Island, LIPA debated its FIT program at a public hearing to fast-track demand, and in western New York is ongoing to create a FIT pilot in western New York. We are organizing several sessions on fracking and renewable energy in a top NY energy conference (AERTC).

Finally, the solar homes program has resulted in 25 solar systems installed in member’s homes to date, and we’re just getting started! Visit www.sierracorg/solarhomes to make your home a renewable energy power plant.

The NY Water Sentinels program took a big step forward in June, when three trainings in the Southern Tier resulted in 80 Sentinels being trained to monitor 40 sites for gas drilling contamination. Right now we are acting on crucial outline data which will help to identify a spill or other incident if (or when) it does occur. Now you can “Like” us on Facebook, too, at http://www.facebook.com/NYWaterSentinels!
I n 2008, when natural gas prices were four times higher than today, landowners across central New York, many of them farmers, had heard of the Marcellus Shale. And it did not appear on the radar of the Albany-based environmental groups, including the Atlantic Chapter of the Sierra Club.

The Farm Bureau and emerging landowner groups tried to fill the information gap with public meetings and town hall meetings, but I was in anticipation of lease negotiations (which still have never really materialized). Church halls and fire stations weren’t big enough to hold the inquisitive and anxious crowds.

Meanwhile, the urban-based news media were clueless. After complaining to the Daily翰ton about meager coverage in Broome County, I didn’t get traction until I pointed out that a group in Deposit was closing a $90 million Marcellus deal, the first in New York. I even offered to walk in with Jim Worden, the leader of the landowner coalition in Windsor, where I live on 80 acres which have been in my wife’s family for three generations.

Coincidentally, a Scarsront Pa., daily had just started a series about the gas boom, and the city editor had a copy of it in hand when I showed up at the Binghamton Press with Worden, a savvy dairy farmer. The editors knew it was time to catch up. Jim, whose farm is too small to produce more than a modest income, was certain that natural gas was a golden opportunity for his family and community. An editor asked, if landowners will be winners, who might be losers? The environment, Jim said.

As a result of the meeting, the Deposit deal went public, making it more difficult for landowners to lose in the scoop up leases at rip-off rates and terms. But the DEC was repeating the drilling industry lines: the fracking process involved only sand and water; and a million wells had been drilled without a single proven incidence of drinking water contamination. It would be months before grassroots anti-drilling groups would begin forming and exposing the downside of the story.

Tom Wilber, an excellent reporter, sat in on that meeting four years ago, which almost immediately led to the best day-to-day reporting from the front lines of Broome County, which is still presumed to be the sweet spot of the Marcellus in New York.

About two years ago, Wilber left daily journalism to write his first book, Under the Surface: Fracking, Fortunes, and the Fate of the Marcellus Shale (Cornell University Press, 2012, $27.95). Given the fact that the gas rush has been Wilber’s beat from the beginning, he is a perfect fit with a university press. His journalistic approach to this huge downside issue is authoritative (and footnoted) without being pedantic. So far, only investigative reporter Graham Lee-Lustgarten has written more in depth about shale gas drilling, with the backing of ProPublica, the online powerhouse of public interest journalism.

In contrast, Wilber has been working independently, with a narrower focus on the Marcellus along the Pennsylvania border, especially Dimock, which has been the industry’s gift to New York fracktivists. This is the ideal book to give to neighbors who expect to lease their land for drilling — it’s not a shrill broadside that will trigger a defensive response.

Gas companies are required to disclose the risks of fracking, including financial price risks, to corporate investors and shareholders. They, however, are not required to make disclosures to landowners or to the affected public when they solicit gas lease contracts. Withholding such material information from public representatives is illegal. The DEC cannot resolve or enforce a tiny but dangerous MTBE spill in Goshen, how can it be trusted to regulate 70,000 frack wells independently, with a narrower focus on the Marcellus along the Pennsylvania border, especially Dimock, which has been the industry’s gift to New York fracktivists.

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Gas companies are required to disclose the risks of fracking, including financial price risks, to corporate investors and shareholders. They, however, are not required to make disclosures to landowners or to the affected public when they solicit gas lease contracts. Withholding such material information from public representatives is illegal. The DEC cannot resolve or enforce a tiny but dangerous MTBE spill in Goshen, how can it be trusted to regulate 70,000 frack wells independently, with a narrower focus on the Marcellus along the Pennsylvania border, especially Dimock, which has been the industry’s gift to New York fracktivists.

Johnny has written more in depth about shale gas drilling, with the backing of ProPublica, the online powerhouse of public interest journalism.

The DEC cannot protect citizens from the actual sale of the gas. Should drilling take place and/or toxic contamination occur, the property would become unsaleable, and property tax revenue could decline to zero. We do not know how much tax revenue gas production will generate for municipalities, or how much of this tax is va-

lure that only the source of mu-

cultural frack revenue — will be im-

plemented. However, we do know that the ‘regulation’ promised by the DEC draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement (SGEIS) is deficient and unable to protect the public from fracking. The SGEIS is not even a law or a regulation having the full force and effect of law.

We know the SGEIS omitted both a health impact evaluation and a municipal STPs for frack waste disposal. The DEC cannot protect citizens from even fundamental regulatory problems such as the personal crisis faced by four Town of Goshen families whose well water has been contaminated by MTBE, which leaked from adjacent Orange County DPW gasoline tanks. The DEC identified the problem, but there has been no abatement. The DEC cannot prevent or move to answer questions of the drinking water contamination. It is clean water. We know the DEC cannot protect citizens from even fundamental regulatory problems such as the personal crisis faced by four Town of Goshen families whose well water has been contaminated by MTBE, which leaked from adjacent Orange County DPW gasoline tanks. The DEC identified the problem, but there has been no abatement. The DEC cannot prevent or move to answer questions of the drinking water contamination. It is clean water.

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Journalist lets the fracking facts speak for themselves

continued from previous page

Not having change for parking is an inconvenience. Losing your water is not an inconvenience. Undoubtedly, there are hundreds of undocumented stories that don’t warrant an investigation, but which point to a sharp decline in the quality of life in Pennsylvania’s fracked communities. For example, Ken Ely, a quarry owner, learned that his missing family dog had been run over by a drilling truck; the driver, to avoid acknowledging responsibility, had taken away the body and disposed of it. I myself heard an unsolicited story from a Pennsylvanian about a Western landman who made his house calls with a pistol on his hip. The landman explained that some residents were hostile and he had the right to protect himself. In fact, he added, it was his right to shoot someone if the landman, even felt his life was in danger.

After more than a year of complaining to the state and receiving negligible relief, 15 Dimock households decided to sue Cabot Oil and Gas. Meanwhile, the company was racking up regulatory violations as fast as its lawyers could respond in court (at least 20 spills and accidents, with seven citations, plus three faulty permits for neighbors who may still be within the surface. I plan to buy copies for neighbors who may still bePersuadable.

The Atlantic Chapter’s Population Committee has received a grant from the Club’s national Ac- tive Newcomer Network to offer a high school essay contest for high school juniors and seniors, challenging them to write the best essay on the topic, ‘Are There Limits to Growth—Population, Consumption and the Environment?’ If you teach envi-

romental science, general science, social studies, economics or another relevant subject to high school stu-
dents, perhaps you already add a les-
on on this subject to your curricu-
um. If not, perhaps we can encour-
you to do so and provide you with a possible lesson plan to help you along. Or one of our committee members can come to your class-
room to introduce the topic and the contest. You can then either make it an assignment or encourage your students to submit an essay. The winners will receive a mon-
eyary award ($500 for first place) and, we are going to try our best to have the essay or, at least excerpts, published, which would look impres-
sive on any college application. In the process they would be learning and thinking about some of the most challenging environmental issues we face and coming up with ideas for what we all can do to address them. The contest is for the 2012-13 school year. We will be posting de-
tails on the Chapter website; www.
nework.sierraclub.org/

If you are a parent, you could en-
courage your own high school-aged kids to participate; if you are a teacher, you could be informing your students or making it an assignment for them to participate; if you are a concerned Sierra Club member, you could be reaching out to schools in your area, and/or you might want to be a judge of the essays next spring.

Please contact one of the co-

Chairs of the Atlantic Chapter Popula-
tion Committee, Diane Buxbaum (dbuxbaum@earthlink.net and Buxbaum.Diane @epamail.epa.gov) or Kathy Schwarz (k_schwarz54 @yahoo.com).

The Atlantic Chapter can take some pride in being the first environmental group to sound the alarm in Albany. Regulaton is complaint driven, and completed wells are routinely inspected not more than once every ten years. In recognition of this prob-
lem, in 2010 the EPA, which lacks jurisdiction to oversee fracking, an-
nounced a citizen watch program, “Eyes on Drilling,” but did not explain how citizens could observe drilling operations without trespassing.

Under the Surface is an important book for New Yorkers because it shows what could happen here, es-
pecially if the next governor rides to victory, as in Pennsylvania, in a cam-
paign powered by money from the gas industry. But the book deserves national attention as well. After all, the development of shale gas has great geopolitical significance, which

Cuomo kicks the can down road—again

continued from page 4

final decision well beyond Election Day, but there is not an infinite hori-

zont of indecision ahead. The good news is that the DEC has committed to restarting the regulatory process with a new round of public hearings. The old regulatory process will ex-
pire November 29, 2012, and the DEC does not anticipate finishing the public health review before that deadline. What is concerning is that in the fall of 2011, Commissioner Martens declared that the DEC would consider permitting after the SGES finalized, but before the rulemaking was complete. While we are guaranteed a new set of public hearings on the regulations, we may be testifying to the dangers of high volume fracking as the drill rigs are actually moving into New York. As oil and Gas Attorney Tom West says, “It’ll be a good thing for them to finalize the SGES, start processing some per-

mits, get the experience, and then base the rules and regulations on that experience and the final standards on the SGES.”

At the time of this writing, details of the public health study for fracking and the future of regulations are still vague. What is clear is that public pressure has sustained this delay and the DEC, DOH, and Cuomo’s team may not entirely know how to fulfill the next steps. The governor may be trying to or-
chestrate an illusion of appearing bullish on fracking and yet creating a regulatory structure too onerous to see any intensive drilling. But in con-
consideration of what is at stake and the amount of public resources that are being expended to conduct this cha-
rade, it may be incumbent upon all of us to finally stand up and put an end to the nuisance. The fight to ban fracking from New York is far from over.

Chapter sponsors essay contest for high school students

T

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tion Committee, Diane Buxbaum (dbuxbaum@earthlink.net and Buxbaum.Diane @epamail.epa.gov) or Kathy Schwarz (k_schwarz54 @yahoo.com).
After 20 years, Chris Burger still doesn’t take out household trash

by Hal Smith

It’s been 20 years since Chris Burger took out the garbage, but his wife Cindy doesn’t complain one bit. That’s because the Burger household generates virtually no trash.

When the Burgers, members of the Chapter’s Susquehanna Group, went public with their zero-waste prowess in 1992, the media took notice. GoodHousekeeping called Chris a ‘local hero.’ Elmagazine declared them ‘the most famous recyclers in America’ and TV cameras covered a very rare trip to the town dump near Whitney Point, an upstate village in Broome County. Even the Smithsonian paid attention by including a year’s worth of their garbage—all three pounds of it—in a traveling exhibit.

Perhaps even more surprising, the Burgers—a ‘normal’ middle-class couple—are still at it. Their two daughters have left the nest, so Chris and Cindy accrue only 1.5 pounds of garbage per year. That’s about a third of what the average American generates in a day. How’s that for a small carbon footprint? 20 years’ worth of waste fit into a paper grocery bag.

The Burgers found their inspiration at the first Earth Day in 1970, when activists were hammering at energy waste and consumerism. Few critics were connecting those dots to ‘climate change,’ which was not yet part of the green vocabulary. Meanwhile, the interest in living responsibly grew more confident and aggressive, ideally relying on the land movement’s embrace of self-sufficiency and a leaner lifestyle, ideally embracing America’s best (and first) recycling plan.

But crushing glass in 50-gallon drums — while wearing goggles and face masks — gets old fairly quickly. Run by volunteers, the recycling project was difficult to keep going. When the Burgers had an opportunity to buy six country acres in adjacent Schoharie County near Whitney Point, they built their current zero-footspace footprint home. Chris still wanted to establish a community-wide recycling program and realized it would have to be government run to be successful.

He soon got his opportunity. Broome County’s landfill was nearing capacity, and no town was volunteering to host a new one. Officials were looking into the possibility of ‘resource recovery’ — building an expensive garbage incinerator.

The touted benefits of incineration included less dependence on landfills, ‘free’ energy from burning garbage, and the recovery of five percent of the waste stream in the form of ferrous metals removed from the ash by a magnet. The downside: a huge public expenditure, reduced air quality, and sabotage of any effort to recycle paper, plastic, glass, ferrous metals and compostable organic matter.

Chris, who was working as an energy consultant at the time, believed the county would be best served by a first-rate recycling program that meant taking political action and he decided to run for a seat on the county legislature. For someone who had protested the Vietnam war and must not be allowed to become a substitute for renewable energy, ‘We throw things in the trash and think they magically disappear. But all we are doing is taking our little bag of garbage and, in effect, putting it into a bigger bag. There’s no science that shows landfill liners last any longer than the stuff we dump over them.’

In recent years, he has added fracking to his priorities list. As co-chair of the chapter’s Natural Gas Task Force, he has gone to San Francisco to meet with members of the Club’s board of directors, and last met with Executive Director Michael Brune in Washington.

‘The Club formerly viewed natural gas as a viable ‘bridge fuel.’ Now it insists that fracking is wrong-headed and must not be allowed to become a substitute for renewable energy,’ Chris says.

Chris Burger is available to address community groups on zero waste as well as fracking. Contact him at cwburger@frontiernet.net.

Hal Smith is editor of the Sierra Atlantic.
Explore, enjoy and protect

The greening of Knoxville, gateway to the Great Smoky Mountains

by Hal Smith

When I was an undergraduate at what is now Binghamton University, a professor told a class exactly what he thought of his students from New York City, who generally considered themselves superior to “townies” (commuter students and other locals). Downstaters, he said, are his most provincial students.

It’s taken decades, plus a fair amount of travel in my semi-retirement, for this Bronx native to truly understand what the professor meant: we all tend to fill in the blanks and make unacknowledged assumptions about people, places and ideas with which we are unacquainted.

It’s a simple lesson but I confess that I need to relearn it almost every time I hit the road, especially in the South, which continues to surprise and impress me. Consider Knoxville, the third largest city in Tennessee.

After enjoying the music, food, landscape, history and people of Memphis (on the Mississippi) and Nashville (mid-state), I didn’t expect much in the state’s less-travelled east. But this river city strikes a more appealing balance between small-town charm and urban sophistication. Moreover, however belatedly, Knoxville is rejuvenating itself by showcasing its considerable environmental assets.

“Blue way” and “green way” are the operative buzz words in Knoxville, which is developing a 1,000-acre “urban wilderness corridor” along the downtown waterfront, with ten parks, about 20 miles of trails, historic sites, and ample access to the Tennessee River for virtually year-round enjoyment.

The river enabled Knoxville to become the state’s first capital, a busy trading center, and a gateway to the South. Now the river is a very valuable recreational area along with the state parks, which are free.

Knoxvillians can amble into the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains within two miles of the city and be back in time for dinner downtown. These recreational areas are covered by cell phone service, too, and hard-surface trails have bathrooms, making it safe and convenient for family day trips.

For hardcore outdoor enthusiasts, Great Smoky Mountains National Park is only about 40 miles away. This is America’s most popular national park and, if you loathe tourist traps, you might want to consider using Knoxville as a base from which to visit this gem, rather than tacky towns clustered close to the park gates.

Knoxville’s parks and pear to have learned that play assets can be as important as industrial ‘parks’ in attracting industry, which competes for young knowledge workers. In fact, the Knoxville area has a large per capita concentration of residents with graduate degrees. The most obvious explanation for this is that the city is a college town—one of the largest universities east of the Mississippi, the University of Tennessee, has its main 560-acre campus on the river.

Another mainstay of the local economy is the nearby Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL), which developed the atomic bomb. Fortunately, it is engaged in some greener pursuits these days, such as the safe disposal of nuclear and other toxic waste, and does basic research on global warming at its Climate Change Science Institute. The ORNL, part of the Department of Energy, has some of the world’s fastest computers; the campus and its science museum are open for tours.

The Zebra Alliance, one of ORNL’s projects, is developing a high-performance zero energy home. Four new homes in a subdivision, built with contrasting materials, construction techniques and mechanical systems, are being intensively monitored over several years. Researchers have learned how to reduce the homes’ energy consumption by up to 60 percent.

The use of water, electricity and appliances is automatically simulated to mimic an average family’s pattern. In what the neighbors call the “robot homes,” lights and ovens, for example, turn on at the same time in the four homes. Researchers continuously receive data from hundreds of sensors to determine which materials and systems provide the most bang for the buck. The homes will be sold once the project runs its course.

With about 30,000 students and 4,600 ORNL staff and scientists, plus a large office building of employees at the TVA headquarters, along with a cluster of high-tech firms, Knoxville can support the cultural amenities of larger cities. It hosts, for example, the South’s oldest symphony orchestra, which plays in the Tennessee Theater, a 1928 movie palace whose restoration sparked a downtown renaissance.

Although Memphians and Nashvillians are better known as music centers, Knoxville’s music pedigree is also impressive. Mountain music, the folk precursor to so-called country music (which includes what is played by rhinestone cowboys who are “all hat and no cattle”), is America’s oldest musical form, born on the front porches of East Tennessee’s early settlers.

They played the guitar and fiddle (and later the banjo) for family entertainment, often on handmade instruments. Their Irish/Scottish/English musical heritage was “discovered” in the 1900s and found its way by the late 1920s to Knoxville, which had the first radio station in the state.

Knoxville subsequently provided much of the early talent upon which Nashville built its reputation.

• Roy Acuff, the “King of Country Music,” joined Grand Ole Opry in 1938 and was its first nationwide celebrity.

• Chet Akins, aka Mr. Guitar, became one of the premier songwriters and producers in Music City.

• Dolly Parton, still a schoolgirl, started her career on Knoxville radio and TV before heading to Nashville. As reported in Knoxville’s delightful East Tennessee History Center (free on Sundays), “...I boarded a Greyhound bus with my dreams, my old guitar, the song I had written, and the rest of my belongings in a set of life preservers—two life preservers for the trip to the south from the great-cest city. ‘So far, she’s sold about 100 million records and written 5,000 songs, including the late Whitney Houston’s signature tune, ‘I Will Always Love You.’”

Knoxville has given the music industry many other talented figures, including some early jazz and blues stars. Today, there’s still plenty of live music in Knoxville: top names are booked for campus venues and the city’s two historic theaters. And WDVX showcases local and regional talent with live performances at lunch time from the Blue Plate Special and admission is free.

The Coop, a cafe adjacent to the small stage, specializes in exotic formulas, including two lakeside curry cranberry pecan.

While Knoxville is not known as a foodie destination, there is no shortage of interesting places to eat, from dumpling sushi and real bagels to gourmet fare. And Knox may be the only place in the world with a gelato shop that features a blues singer on Saturday night.

The quickest way to get ac- quainted with city restaurants, while simultaneously getting a crash course in local history, is to sign up with Knoxville Food Tours. This service organizes walking (or van) tours of some of the city’s most notable districts, while sampling food and drink from restaurants and specialty food shops. However, the tour doesn’t include the area’s most exclusive place—Blackberry Farm, a 4,200-acre luxury resort, with a legendary restaur- ant, a short drive from the city. Dinner is $125 Travel & Leisure named it 2012’s number one U.S. resort.

Knoxville has also produced a successful film director—MGM’s Clarence Brown, who named Greta Garbo and directed more of her movies in the future.
CANDIDATES FOR AT-LARGE SEATS TO THE CHAPTER EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Donald J. Hughes

I have been active in the Atlantic Chapter since 2007, serving on the Executive Committee as a representative from the Iroquois Group. As an activist and environmental engineer, I have been involved in the construction of a trash incinerator in Syracuse, and have advocated for a variety of issues including better sewage infrastructure (ones that don't smell), recycling, and bicycle-friendly streets (we're making progress, finally!). I currently co-chair the Beyond Committee, and serve on the Energy Committee and the Gas Drilling Task Force. I have worked extensively on the clean-up of Onondaga Lake, and have recently been active in the fight against hydropfracking and ending our dependence on fossil fuels.

Our biggest challenge is global warming, and convincing the public to take it seriously.

So I am very excited about the Solar Rooftops campaign, promoting wind power, and the club's goal to 275 legislators on such issues as fracking, water use, solid waste, incineration, piping plovers, wetlands, indoor air pollution, lead poisoning, and development issues. I have been involved with the following Sierra Club efforts:• Fighting to stop the Jets Stadium power plant • Educating residents about pesticides • My vision for the chapter is to have a greater public presence, attract new members, and recruit additional activists.

Gary A. Abraham

Gary A. Abraham practices environmental law throughout New York State, including practice before NYSDEC, limited to public interest cases. While teaching environmental law at Southern Tier Legal Services in the School of Law at Lewis & Clark College, Abraham became involved in Concerned Citizens of Cattaraugus County, Inc., an environmental community group opposing the siting of a regional landfill, which was represented by the Environmental Policy Clinic at the University at Buffalo School of Law. Impressed with Clinic's work, he eventually went native, receiving his J.D. from the University at Buffalo School of Law in 1998, which included work under the direction of my career and a desire to make a life-long commitment to protect the Earth. I am presently the Atlantic Chapter Chairperson, with a slate of candidates with a very wide sense of involvement and activism. Further, the then chair announced he was stepping down. With two qualified candidates running, the group moved to add to the challenge with a self-imposed 2-term limit serving 4 years total in my tenure. I launched an annual leadership training program that helped reinvigorate the program. When I stepped down, the number of active groups with leaders had grown from two to seven.

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Autumn in full stride evokes sense of change

You're trapped in an auto, a bubble of convenience speeding through interstate fog. Your dest-
tiny: four hours in the car, ensnared by blacktop ribbons and insects life on the windshield.

The time is 6:45 a.m. You'd rather be sleeping. Were you awake and free to choose, you'd prefer to be photo-
graphing mallards on the river stak-
ing beside you. But you're trapped in the bubble, entwined by drifting thoughts.

A sun for gas gyrates hot coffee and a blueberry muffin. Back on the road, things look better with muffin in hand. You can look at the bright side. You're headed west, after all, with the sun at your back. As a mo-
torist, you have the chance to be-
come an objective world observer, passing judgment without involve-
ment, watching towns and lives speed by.

You understand the fog surround-
ing and how it forms in autumn, settling in valleys overnight, smoth-
ering sunlight for hours after dawn. Suddenly, a flash of bright sun and blue sky parts the curtain. It gets swallowed at once by blots of char-
coal fluff. On go the wipers. Off go the wipers. On go the lights. Off they go.

Sunlight wins at 8:45 a.m. The victory is greeted by silent applause and eyes gleaming sleepy. You can see things now.

The world seems a sunny, colorful place, filled with hills, trees, corn-
fields and a sense of change. Autumn has reached full stride. The bubble courses through it.

What strikes you on your journey through a billion or so falling leaves? Nothing earth shaking. You watch your 10.000th red-tailed hawk and still feel impressed. That rust-colored tail seems no less captivating than the first time; the bird's ability to play the wind no less commanding.

The red-tail circles a half-cut corn-
field. Parked at field's edge, covered with dew; a train of machinery slum-
bers. Where's the farmer? Probably milking.

After breakfast, he'll fire up the tractor to pull a chopper and wagon through the corn, haul the chopped slage to the barn and blow it into a silo. The victor will be heralded by distant trumpets. The bubble rises over them, glinting and glancing off, as fast as light through bicycle spokes.

The bubble races on. Gulls sweep by on the river, hundreds scurrying south. They bathe and preen in the shallows, taking time out. They ap-
pear unhurried, a benefit derived from planning ahead.

When the gulls do lift off, they will fly among baldies in search of autumnal fire. Red maple colors have mostly come and gone. Oak leaves remain green, or turn brown at the edge. The color of beaver pelts slick with rain.

Your mind wanders from foliage to focus on geese. They've been fly-
ing for days, wind-driven wedges warning everyone to wear extra feathers.

The ones you're watching appear small through bubble glass. You know they're honking Why can't you hear them? Maybe you'll get lucky. Maybe the geese still will be flying when this journey ends and home becomes yours once again.

You can stand in the twilight, stretching your legs, hearing them call.

You'll be standing in your own woods then, road trip completed. You'll smell leaves fermenting, fallen uncomplaining trees. No thoughts of highways. You'll be part of the world again.

Naturalist Rick Marsi, a member of the Susquehanna Group, is a journalist, photographer and writer of nature columns. His book of favorite nature columns is Wheel of Seasons, available at www.rickmarsi.com. ©2012 Rick Marsi

Roasted vegetable provides convenience, multiple recipe ideas

by Betsy Naselli

A s a vegan, one already has vastly reduced one’s carbon footprint. Reducing meat consumption is a big step towards healing the planet.

Being conscious of energy con-
sumption while preparing meals is an even more important area of concern. Using the same sizes so they will roast in the same amount of time. Sweet potatoes will cook a bit faster, so if you are using them in your mix they should be larger pieces. As for the amount of garlic, I would use at least a head of garlic, maybe more, as we love it at our house.

Place all of the vegetables, herbs and the garlic in a large bowl or large zip lock baggie. Drizzle with olive oil, enough to lightly coat everything, but not so much that it pools on the bottom of your container. Add a splash of balsamic vinegar (a table-

Roasted Veggie Wraps

For Roasted Veggie Wraps

 roasted vegetables

your choice of flat bread wrappers

chipotle non-dairy mayo or your favorite dressing

For Roasted Veggie Lasagna

roasted vegetables

no pre-cook lasagna noodles or fresh pasta sheets

non-dairy mozzarella style cheese

tomatoes

garlic

For Roasted Veggie Minestrone Soup

1 T olive oil

1 large yellow onion, finely chopped

2-3 cloves garlic, finely chopped

3 t. vegetarian Better Than Bouil-

non-dairy Parmesan style cheese

The green of Knoxville

The center, which charges no ad-
mission, offers creative outdoor pro-
grams for children and has a very rare pair of specimens—male and female ivory billed woodpeckers.

The site also pays homage to Marble City, as Knoxville was known in the 1800s. Local marble was used to build the National Gallery of Art in Washington and to create the lions that guard the New York City Library.

Two abandoned quarries on Jlm's acreage have been cleaned up and reclaimed by nature. The awesome evidence of the quarrymen's work has been mostly consumed by trees, water and weather, but what is still recognizable—the cliffs, the stone,-

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Method: Layer veggies, pasta, and roasted veggies, chopped into smaller pieces if large. 1 can of cannedellins beans or 2 C cooked, drained fresh basil, parsley, sage, oregano and/or thyme, finely chopped.

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**Iroquois**

**Cooperation boosts anti-fracking and litter campaigns**

As with all of the Atlantic Chapter, much of our time is spent on last-ditch efforts to stop hydrofracking. One successful effort was unique, as Rochester and Iroquois came together to sponsor and organize a bus to the Washington rally in record time. With the help of good leaders and endless e-mails, an almost full bus began in Rochester, picked up in Syracuse and successfully joined the rally without losing anyone. Both Rochester and Iroquois pledged money to make the trip affordable to all. The good news was that donations paid for the bus and all got to ride at a great price.

Our year-long litter campaign, spearheaded by our vice chair, really caught on with the enthusiastic support of a local columnist. For the first time, the city, county and state highway departments scheduled cooperative cleanups of all the major highways and interchanges, which had not been picked up in over 20 years. News items were amazing. There were great headlines and photos in the press showing signs reading ‘lane closing—litter cleanup.’ The results have been great.

Next efforts will focus on a county-wide calendar of all scheduled cleanups and an extensive education on litter prevention.

Onondaga Lake is always a large part of our work. Recently we attended an Onondaga Lake meeting held by Judith Enck, EPA Region 2 administrator, with many local organizations, to discuss necessary planning, as the funding for the lake cleanup ends in October. Planning and visioning for next steps are going full-steam and will be a big item on our plate.

Honeywell continues to plan and carry out amazing remediation for all the areas of its responsibilities and keeps all aware of progress.

**New York City**

**New York City activists resist pipelines, press for Gowanus Canal cleanup**

**Pipeline Update** Unfortunately the construction of the Spectra gas pipeline was approved. The Sierra Club, Food and Water Watch, and No Gas Pipeline NJ are waiting for the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to respond to their petition for rehearing, after which we will have 60 days to take action.

Meanwhile, both houses of Congress have now given the green light for Williams Companies and National Grid to build a pipeline connecting the existing Trans Continental pipeline in the Atlantic Ocean to a new line that would bring more natural gas to the Rockaways and other areas in the city. The new line pipeline would run through the Rockaways, under Jamaica Bay and through Gateway National Park.

**Street Fair** The Group’s annual street fair raised $3,000. The fair was also an opportunity for outreach, including collaboration with the Pew Environment Group, which generated postcards to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in support of longterm conservation and ecosystem-based management.

**Education** Anasa Scott is working with an elementary school in Harlem that has an organic garden. So far, the students have grown 400 pounds of food used by the school cafeteria for the students. The program is trying to raise funds to build a greenhouse.

**Gowanus Canal** The Club is represented on the community advisory group advocating for the cleanup of the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn. For the past three years, they have pressed for Superfund designation for the canal. The NYC Group has opposed all development on the edges of the canal, which is consistent with national Club policy to oppose development on coast and shore areas everywhere. The proposed cleanup plan will come out by the end of the year, followed by a 60-day comment period.

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**Atlantic Chapter executive committee 2012 election for at-large delegates**

To be eligible to vote in the election, you must be a member in good standing of the Atlantic Chapter as of the mailing of this newsletter in the fall of 2012.

Please read all the candidates’ statements on page 10. Indicate your choices by checking the boxes next to the candidates’ names on the ballot on this page. Each member may fill out only one ballot. Joint members use both ballots. Ballots should not be cut or separated. Each member may vote for up to four candidates. You may vote for fewer than four, but voting for more than four will void your ballot.

Do not remove the address box on this page—with its identifying Sierra Club number and your name—from the ballot; the Election Committee cannot count ballots that are separated and must throw them away. For your privacy, after membership is authenticated, the election committee separates all ballots from the names, puts them together and counts them with no identifying information.

Do not cover up your mailing address. It is used to verify that the ballot is being submitted by an Atlantic Chapter member. It will be removed before the ballots are counted. Secrecy will be ensured.

Putting your folded ballot in an envelope is the only way to mail it that conforms to postal regulations. (The paper weight is too light for machine handling, and your ballot will probably be destroyed or rejected.) Affix a first-class stamp and mail to: Election Committee, Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, PO Box 886, Syosset NY 11791.

Members who do not receive a ballot, or who damage or lose their ballot, may request a replacement from Atlantic Chapter office employees. They will send you a replacement ballot bearing your membership number and the signature of a Chapter staff member.

Only such replacement ballots sent to you from Chapter staff will be counted. No replacement ballots will be issued after December 15, 2012.

If you have any questions or problems, contact Chapter staff at 516-672-8252. Allow enough time for your problem or question to be resolved before the deadline. Mail your ballots so that they are received on or before December 31, 2012. Ballots will be counted in early January, 2013.

**NOTE:** Single memberships use one ballot. Joint memberships use both ballots.

Choose up to four candidates.

**Ballot 1**
- Gary Abraham
- Martha Loew
- Ken Baer
- Jeff Bohner
- Erin Heaton
- Gary Nickerson
- Erin Riddle
- Don Hughes

Choose up to four candidates.

**Ballot 2**
- Gary Abraham
- Martha Loew
- Ken Baer
- Jeff Bohner
- Erin Heaton
- Gary Nickerson
- Erin Riddle
- Don Hughes