It’s official—we finally have a climate movement

by Hal Smith

I appreciate a clever bumper sticker, though I don’t really think slogans are very persuasive. I also avoid crowds and virtually never attend rallies. Still, I queued up at 5 a.m. in mid-February with other Sierra Club members and boarded our chartered bus for a six-hour ride to Washington, D.C., for the largest climate rally in U.S. history (so far).

Why an outdoor rally in the winter? For starters, the fate of the Keystone XL oil from tar sands pipeline may be decided soon. Plus, 2012 presented us with much more than a teachable moment: it was a teachable year, and a glimpse of the Apocalypse. During the hottest year on record, the U.S. was wallowed by widespread drought, tornadoes, floods and a nor’easter/hurricane so historically disastrous that it started a bromance between Chris Christie and Barack Obama.

Moreover, Bill McKibben’s recent coast-to-coast speaking tour has begun to bear fruit, especially on college campuses. And many of the rest of us are frustrated, angry, and determined not to permit fewer than 200 bull-headed climate deniers in Congress to stop America from going Forward on Climate. In fact, according to a poll in December by Associated Press, nearly four out of five Americans think it’s time to deal with climate disruption.

Indeed, “the times are a-changing” when white-haired couch potatoes like me embark on a road trip far beyond our comfort zones. When the Sierra Club suspends its 120-year-old restriction on staff civil disobedience, the times are a-changing. When New York fracktivists surprise the oil and gas industry and battle it to a standstill for more than four years, there can be no doubt—the times are a-changing.

Essentially, the plan for the day was to convene a large and enthusiastic crowd on the National Mall for motivational speeches, followed by a march on the White House to pressure—and support—the President.

By the time the bus arrived at the Mall, I had been chatting for hours with Jim, a retired probation officer. Four years ago, we were no longer strangers. We had been driving the bus on a previous trip along with our captain, we agreed to keep an eye on each other and make sure we both got back to the bus for an on-time departure. We shared war stories from our checkered careers, including my recollection of researching an article about mules for a farm magazine about 20 years ago. As I learned from interviewing a former farrier, a mule won’t stand out in the rain the way a horse does. On a very cold day, you know where your mules will be—their nests, among the mares in the warmest spot in the barn.

Jim is a good listener. Shortly after, we arrived at the Mall it became bitingly clear this vast open field is not a very hospitable place when it’s 30 degrees and winds are gusting up to 30 mph. Let’s go up front and bury ourselves among the mares, he said.

Up to 50,000 people were arrayed around us, including parents with bundled-up children in strollers. Two 80ish women in fur hats chatted behind me; a thin boy about 13 years old in front of me wore a lightweight hoodie and cheap sneakers, squeezing his body together, while standing with his right foot mostly on top of his left.

Rev. Lennox Yearwood, the rally’s MC, announced that some oil and gas agents were known to be in the crowd but that was OK. ‘Give your neighbor a hug,’ he said with a smile. I looked behind me again; a fit 50ish woman in a hoodie and cheap sneakers, squeezing his body together, while standing with his right foot mostly on top of his left.

Native Americans were among the speakers who addressed up to 50,000 people at the Forward on Climate rally in Washington, D.C., bearing 30-degree temperatures and high winds in mid-February.

Fracking: DiNapoli leads investor push for disclosure

by Stuart Auchincloss

At the same time that the Governor and State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) are wondering what to do about fracking for natural gas, independently elected State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli is taking action.

DiNapoli is the sole trustee of the New York State Common Retirement Fund. The Fund has investments of around $150 billion, putting it among the biggest pension funds in the country. When DiNapoli speaks, Wall Street listens. Over the past three years DiNapoli has filed several shareholder resolutions with oil and natural gas companies in which the Fund owns stock, demanding disclosure of regulatory risk, the chemicals used in the hydraulic fracturing process and the identification and reduction of potential hazards associated with hydraulic fracturing.

Every year publicly traded companies must conduct an annual meeting of the shareholders. At this annual meeting shareholders may propose resolutions for all the shareholders to vote on. The conventional wisdom on Wall Street says investors should simply vote in support of company management or sell their stock in the company.

However, for progressive investors like DiNapoli, the annual meeting is an opportunity to change their companies for the better. Although shareholder resolutions are seldom binding on the board of directors, when more than 10% of a company’s shareholders agree that changes need to be made, most boards of directors take note.

Pension fund trustees are especially aware of the impact their investments have on society since they are managing people’s retirement funds. When people retire they want enough money to live on comfortably. Yet it takes more than money to live well in retirement; it takes a good place to live. Among other things, that means a healthy environment.

In February, EcoWatch published a press release describing the efforts of a group of investors concerned
You may have already received your yearly appeal letter in the mail; it is a reminder of how crucial our work in New York continues to be.

Last year’s extreme weather patterns confirmed what we have been saying for quite some time. New York is facing the very real, damaging effects of global climate disruption. The epic natural disaster of Superstorm Sandy brought to light what could become the new normal for the Empire State. If we maintain our addiction to dirty fossil fuels, such as fracked natural gas, imagine the storms that will continue to devastate New York’s vulnerable communities.

New Yorkers cannot afford the devastating costs of our continued dependence on fossil fuels. Water and land contamination, earthquakes, and air pollution are all likely consequences of this addiction. This could destroy our upstate economy, which depends on tourism, wineries, and organic farming.

Smart phone app fights ‘green’ crime

A new smartphone app makes it easy and confidential for citizens to report environmental crime.

Developed in collaboration with the Waterkeeper Alliance, the NYS Crime Stopper app gives the average citizen a tool to safely fight crime whenever they go. The app locates and gives directions to any police department, and can anonymously send a phone tip, e-mail tip or a photo tip, while never giving up the sender’s identity or phone number.

“Crime Stopper is recognizing that environmental crime is real crime with real victims,” said Robert Kennedy, Jr., president of the Waterkeeper Alliance.

Thanks to supporters like you, the Atlantic Chapter has been at the forefront in fighting off the use of dirty carbon-based fuels. We have worked tirelessly toblock dangerous high-volume fracking in New York. Any day now, Governor Cuomo could decide whether or not the state will move forward with the proposed plan to turn the Southern Tier, Central New York and the Finger Lakes into fracked industrial zones—with serious health, water quality, and agricultural ramifications for our entire state. And we must be prepared. We must not let up.

The Chapter gets the job done in Albany, and in the courts, as you can see from our two most recent legal victories for:

- Transparent regulation of nuclear plants, and
- Protection of your right to explore the Adirondacks in a kayak.

With your support, we can do more for NY in 2013

The need for our 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 again for all you do to protect New York’s environment.

Support chapter’s work in NYS

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Yes, I want to help the Atlantic Chapter preserve and protect the environment of New York state. I am enclosing my gift of:

- $500 □ $250 □ $100 □ $60 □ $35 □ Other $
- Check made payable to Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter is enclosed.
- I’d like to make a single payment by credit card.
- I’d like to become a sustainer with a $ ____ monthly or $ ____ quarterly credit card donation.

Bill to: □ Mastercard □ Visa
Acct. no. □ □ Exp. date □ □
Signature ___________________________
Name __________________________________
Sierra Club membership no. ___________________________
Street _______________________________
City ___________________________ State ______ ZIP __________

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

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

A copy of our latest financial report can be obtained by writing to Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, PO Box 886, Syosset, NY 11791-0886, or the NYS Attorney General.
Two more big victories
Court curbs secret NRC ‘exemptions’ at Indian Point

Decision paves the way to challenge hidden risks at scores of nuclear reactors.

by Charles C. Morrison

In a case that strengthens the right of recreational paddlers to cross private property, a state court has dismissed a suit against an Adirondack conservation magazine editor who asserted his right to paddle a route that links two lakes.

In Friends of Thayer Lake & Brandreth Park Association, et al. v. Brook Brown, the State of New York & NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, New York Supreme Court Justice Richard T. Aulisi has declared that the Shingle Shanty Brook-Mud Pond waterway is navigable under New York State’s common law.

The trespass claim against Adirondack Explorer editor Phil Brown and requests by Brandreth Park for damages were dismissed. This was a major victory for Brown as well as for DEC and Attorney General Eric Schneiderman. It is also an important victory for the Sierra Club.

Aulisi’s decision relied primarily on the law standard for navigability set in 1998 by New York’s highest court, the Court of Appeals, in the landmark case, Adirondack League Club v. Sierra Club. That case was triggered in June, 1991, when five paddlers, led by Tom Kligerman, then-co-chair of the Atlantic Chapter’s Adirondack Committee, went down the South Branch of the Moose River.

Their case reaffirmed the navigability standard that the waterway in question has “practical utility as a highway for transportation or travel. It placed recreational travel on an even level with commercial use in applying this test.”

Shingle Shanty Brook-Mud Pond is the link on Brandreth Park land between one part of the Whitney Wilderness Area (Lake Lila) and another part (Little Tupper Lake), in the Adirondack Forest Preserve. By the 1990s, when Little Tupper Lake was acquired from the Whitney family (Lake Lila was acquired in the 1970s), Brandreth Park’s illegal blockage of this waterway with a cable and no trespass signs had become one of the state’s highest court cases.

The DEC responded admirably. After determining Shingle Shanty-Mud Pond route is navigable, it offered Brandreth Park a compromise, which it refused.

It is too early to tell if Brandreth Park will appeal, but Judge Aulisi did not leave much room for that.

The decision’s main effect, coming after Adirondack League Club v. Sierra Club, is likely to lead to a further clarification of the law, which may be to dampen the enthusiasm of other landowners for creating illegal blockages. Charles C. Morrison is a member of the Chapter’s Adirondack Committee and retired as a planning director in the NY Department of Environmental Conservation.

Affordable, easy solar for Atlantic Chapter supporters

A s efforts to fight climate change accelerate, the Sierra Club is helping members and supporters drop dirty fuels. The Club launched its Solar Homes Campaign a year ago, aimed at catalyzing widespread deployment of clean energy.

Through an innovative partnership with Sungevity, a leading national solar service provider, the Club is able to offer its members and supporters an affordable way to install solar panels on your home. For every home that goes solar through this program, Sungevity will give the homeowner a $750 bonus, plus $750 to the Chapter for clean energy work and other conservation efforts.

Previously, in order to get solar panels on your home, you would have had to conduct extensive research, hunt for rebates, obtain a permit, and fork out $20,000. That was before the one-stop solar shop.

Residential solar companies such as Sungevity now offer a “solar service” that will install solar panels with no up-front cost, and handle all maintenance and service. The homeowner pays for clean energy with a small monthly bill—which may be less than the household’s current energy bill.

“In order to end our dependence on dirty energy, we need as many Americans as possible to switch to clean energy like rooftop solar. This is a high priority for the Sierra Club. We are urging all our members and supporters in New York to work with Sungevity to find out if solar is right for them,” said Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune about the program.

It’s a win-win-win. An average Sungevity customer saves 15% on electricity costs by going solar. The Atlantic Chapter will raise money for important campaigns. And more solar will replace coal, natural gas and other dirty fuels as Sierra Club members cut their carbon footprints and collectively help to scale up this key clean energy solution.

What you can do

Visit http://sierraclub.org/solarhomes for a free solar quote. Once you do, Sungevity will contact you to discuss whether solar is right for you. In five minutes, they can give you a really good idea about how much it might save you.
Fracking theater: Shakespeare or farce?

T he saga of fracking in New York continues to unfold like a serial novella with no clear conclusion, but every plot twist imaginable. With the heightened urgency of a cancer on our doorstep, headlines in the headline, activists feared Governor Cuomo would finally give in to the oil and gas industry and allow the drill rigs to be sited in the heart of New York. But instead there came a surprising 11th hour reprieve. Coordinated public outcry and resistance to the decision apparently changed the mind of a governor who was hours away from allowing the first wave of drilling to move ahead. For casual followers of New York’s most compelling day-time drama, here is a synopsis of the past few months:

In January celebrity-led protests that included luminaries such as Yoko Ono, Sean Lennon, Pete Seeger, Mark Ruffalo, Deborah Winger, and Natalie Merchant overwhelmed the State of the State address, budget hearings, and the DEC comment period. Activists were successful in putting the debate back on the Island agenda. This record-breaking public re-sistance leading up to the decision apparently changed the mind of a governor who was hours away from allowing the first wave of drilling to move ahead. For casual followers of New York’s most compelling day-time drama, here is a synopsis of the past few months:

In January, celebrity-led protests that included luminaries such as Yoko Ono, Sean Lennon, Pete Seeger, Mark Ruffalo, Deborah Winger, and Natalie Merchant overwhelmed the State of the State address, budget hearings, and the DEC comment period— in spite of a narrow 30-day public comment period over a busy holiday season.

This record-breaking public re-sistance largely ensnared the entire process as incomplete, improper and unwise. Aside from having to wade through hundreds of thousands of comments, some of which were lengthy and technical, the DEC still awaited the approval of the Department of Health (DOH) approval of the proposed regulatory program.

Last September, DOH Commissioner Nirav Shah was directed by Governor Cuomo to review the 4,000+ page SGEIS on fracking and the supporting regulations to determine if the established mitigation protocols were rigorously protecting public health. Without this review the SGEIS could not be deemed complete. In other parts of the U.S., fracking has been halted due to the unprecedented spectrum of health impacts ranging from loss of smell, memory problems, headaches to serious respiratory systems, neuropathies, and cancers.

On February 12, Commissioner Shah declared that his review of the SGEIS and supporting regulations would not be completed in time to meet the statutory deadlines for the revised regulations. Thus, the process expired February 27. In a letter to DEC commissioner Joseph Martens, Shah highlighted three separate studies on the public health implications of fracking—from the University of Pennsylvania, Geisinger Health Systems, and the federal Environmental Protection Agency—that would be pivotal in his decision-making. Shah suggested these studies were not expected to be finalized until 2015 at the earliest. Because of this commitment, it would be difficult for Dr. Shah to prejudge the outcomes of these investigations and advance his own assessment.

At the time of the announcement, the Sierra Club applauded Dr. Shah for waiting for the best available health information before making crucial decisions on fracking. By letting the regulations expire, Governor Cuomo and DEC Commissioner Martens showed great leadership in letting science drive the timeline.

But there were also some troubling undertones from a separate DEC announcement that cast an uncertain future over what at first glance seems like a long delay. In a press release, Commissioner Martens stated that: “...this does not mean that the issuance of permits for high-volume hydraulic fracturing would be delayed. If the DOH Public Health Review finds that the SGEIS has adequately addressed health concerns, and I adopt the SGEIS on that basis, DEC can accept and process high-volume hydraulic fracturing permit applications 10 days after issuance of the SGEIS. The regulations simply codify the program requirements.” The Sierra Club has long opposed this “rigs before rege” approach on the basis that environmental review must be meaningful. Public health without regulation. If issued, the SGEIS could not be deemed complete. In other parts of the U.S., fracking has been halted due to the unprecedented spectrum of health impacts ranging from loss of smell, memory problems, headaches to serious respiratory systems, neuropathies, and cancers. The Sierra Club has long opposed this “rigs before rege” approach on the basis that environmental review must be meaningful.

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The Chapter has already mobilized the legions of the SGEIS in anticipation of the completion of these studies. Comparable language has been introduced in the Senate. Passage of this legislation will ensure that Dr. Shah is given appropriate time to wait for emerging information and to further his own investigations, while relieving the political pressure on him. In addition, the Assembly legislation calls for a comprehensive health impact assessment including a public comment period. This will provide Dr. Shah with a substantive study that is specifically focused on New York health concerns while he awaits the results of studies primarily focusing on the experiences of other states.

But what have suggested this posture was adding merely to appease the anticipated anger from the industry for yet another delay, we will be well prepared if we move forward without regulations.

At the time of this writing, it is unclear if there will be any official order from the governor to extend the de facto moratorium on HVHF until the conclusions of these studies and proper review of the findings. DEC General Council Stephen Russo, who, in 2011, was brought in to construct the legal defense of SGEIS, is moving back to private practice, which indicates some level of surrender. But nothing is guaranteed.

Fortunately, the Assembly has passed legislation that will establish a two-year moratorium on the finalization of the SGEIS in anticipation of the completion of these studies.

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This will provide Dr. Shah with a substantive study that is specifically focused on New York health concerns while he awaits the results of studies primarily focusing on the experiences of other states. But what chance does the legislation have of passage in the Senate? In spite of bipartisan support, the Senate, with its tenuous power structure, may stumble in passing an extended moratorium based on a health impact assessment. The Senate may have the votes, but not the leadership to advance legislation. The 2012 fall elections yielded a three-seat advantage to Senate Democrats, but five break-away senators from the party may stumble in passing an extended moratorium based on a health impact assessment. The Senate may have the votes, but not the leadership to advance legislation. The 2012 fall elections yielded a three-seat advantage to Senate Democrats, but five break-away senators from the party may stumble in passing an extended moratorium based on a health impact assessment. The Senate may have the votes, but not the leadership to advance legislation. The 2012 fall elections yielded a three-seat advantage to Senate Democrats, but five break-away senators from the party may stumble in passing an extended moratorium based on a health impact assessment. The Senate may have the votes, but not the leadership to advance legislation. The 2012 fall elections yielded a three-seat advantage to Senate Democrats, but five break-away senators from the party may stumble in passing an extended moratorium based on a health impact assessment. The Senate may have the votes, but not the leadership to advance legislation. The 2012 fall elections yielded a three-seat advantage to Senate Democrats, but five break-away senators from the party may stumble in passing an extended moratorium based on a health impact assessment.

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Perhaps the most inconceivable aspect of the arrangement is that the IDC, while gaining some control over the Senate floor activity, has allowed the committee structure to be controlled by the Republicans, even though technically they should be in the minority. In spite of the fact that the two-year moratorium is sponsored by and has the full support of the IDC, the rest of the Democratic conference and at least a dozen Republicans, the bill must first advance through the state’s environmental conservation committee. Its majority membership includes some of the Legislature’s most ardent fracking supporters. If the moratorium passes the Senate gauntlet, it will end up on the governor’s desk, where the prospects of it being signed are still uncertain. The two-year moratorium bill made it to the governor’s desk (Gov. David Paterson) it was vetoed, but resulted in an executive order that establishes a moratorium on fracking, depicting a Hamlet-like anti-hero who agonizes over whether to frack or not to frack. But the simple reality of his own handiwork and obfuscation fails to capture his possible deeper vision for the Southern Tier’s shale country.

In the past year Cuomo has aggressively pushed to increase milk production for the burgeoning yogurt industry, promote wine and beer making to augment the tourism and recreational opportunities in areas targeted for drilling. He is also investing hundreds of millions of dollars into renewable energy and an efficient smart grid to deliver that power.

These massive allocations indicate the nature of the upstate economy, which is inherently incompatible with the short-term gains of natural gas development. While there is ample evidence that the governor has been toying with the idea of limited gas well development, there is equal proof that he has been quietly laying the groundwork for an alternative economic vision for the Southern Tier, one which may be well in place before any final decision is made on fracking.

In 1983 Andrew Cuomo’s father, Governor Mario Cuomo, closed a $6 billion nuclear plant (Shoreham) on Long Island at the tail end of its construction and at great cost to the state’s public health and safety. It was a gutsy political call—but it was the right one.

Fracking is Andrew Cuomo’s Shoreham and the decisions he makes in the coming months will reverberate for decades, both in terms of the health of New Yorkers and our prosperity within the clean energy economy. As we approach this drama’s next intermission, in anticipation of the tipping point, we must recognize that no matter what the analogous play is—be it Hamlet, Richard III, or some second-rate farce—we cannot be content with merely laying the groundwork. The Sierra Club and the activist community must continue to play our part, for it is public participation that has gotten us this far.
U.S. can learn from Europe about smart grid systems

I t is imperative that we proactively and rapidly move from fossil fuel dependence to carbon-free power in all sectors of the economy.

One way to get there is to embrace some of the thinking of Jeremy Rifkin, a prominent economist and advisor to leadership of the European Union. In his book, Third Industrial Revolution, he makes the case for the implementation of a renewable energy regime loaded by buildings, partially stored in the form of hydrog en, distributed via smart intergrades, and connected to plug-in, zero-emis sion transport...

Key to the Third Industrial Revolution is advances in information technology (IT) that enable development of smart grid systems. “The invention of second-generation grid IT has changed the economic equation, tipping the balance of power from the old, centralized fossil fuel and uranium energies to the new, distrib uted renewable energies,” Rifkin says.

He believes that the U.S. will lose its leadership in the global economy if it builds a centralized, top-down smart grid, in contrast to countries in the European Union, such as Ger many, that are building distributed and collaborative systems. The Atlantic Chapter advocates for proposals for a “New Energy Highway” aimed at a more efficient and reliable distribution of electrical power resulting in proposals to mainly improve on our centralized top-down grid systems. The proposal did not encourage new thinking about distributed and collabora tive systems. More recognition of innovative approaches to expand renewable energy, ensure reliability, and reduce transmission costs are needed, including an understanding that microgrid systems are on their way.

Microgrids are mushrooming around the world as innovative yet practical ways to supply and use carbon-free energy. Both the public and private sectors are turning to microgrids to ensure reliable and sustainable power that meets local needs efficiently without power disruptions and with reduced environmental impacts. Military bases, university campuses, health care facilities, manufacturing facilities and even communities are developing microgrids.

Microgrids are one of many ways we can act in our communities to advance toward a Third Industrial Revolution. We cannot wait for gridlocked governments to act. We as activists can work with our local communities to become “CLI mate Smart Communities.”

The Department of Environmental Conservation has teamed up with the New York State Energy Research and De velopment Authority to teach communities how to become energy smart and sustainable in housing, transportation, land use, heating, wa ter and sewage systems, and more.

Citizen action is a key to making this happen. (For more information go to www.dec.ny.gov/energysmartclimate and then follow link to “Energy Smart Communities” and to www.nyserda.ny.gov and follow link to “Energy Smart Communities.”)

Many thanks to Jessica Helm

On behalf of the Atlantic Chapter, thank you to Jessica Helm, our Chapter conservation chair for the past four years. Under her leadership, the Chapter has taken major steps to combat and hopefully stop hydrofracking, protect our waters, and modernize our ways of communi cating our conservation issues and calls to action. Jessica is now serving her second year on the Chapter’s national board of directors and is con tinuing her conservation and comm unication work in our Chapter.

Pick your passion

W HATEVER YOUR INTERESTS, opportunities abound to work with fellow Sierrans to enjoy, explore and protect the beautiful state of New York. Listed here are the names of conservation committees and their chairs. Pick your passion and join us.

Chapter Conservation Committees

Chapter Conservation Chair Susan Lawrence, 518-489-5721, consenrvation@newyork.sierracclub.org

Air Quality Warren Berger, 212-663-3708, airquality@newyork.sierracclub.org

Beyond Coal Don Hughes, 518-472-2150, beyondcoal@newyork.sierracclub.org

Biodiversity/Linda DeSefano, 518-408-2140, biodiversitve@newyork.sierracclub.org

Clean Water/Watershed Julie McQuain, 212-477-0472, cleanwater2@newyork.sierracclub.org

Energy Bob Ciesielka, 716-839-0180, energy@newyork.sierracclub.org

Environmental Education Kate Bartholomew, 607-228-7371, environeduction@newyork.sierracclub.org; Erin Heaton Meyer, 914-273-8590, environeduction2@newyork.sierracclub.org

Environmental Justice Aaron Mair, 518-534-3841, environeduction@newyork.sierracclub.org

Farm and Food Erin Riddle, 607-572-5503, farmandfood@newyork.sierracclub.org

Gas Drilling Task Force Kate Bartholomew, 607-228-7371, Gusti Bogok, 212-929-3849; Chris Burger, 607-692-3442. Same e-mail address for all three: gasdrilling@newyork.sierracclub.org

Global Warming Moisha Blechman, 518-329-0531, globalwarming@newyork.sierracclub.org

Great Lakes Wayne Howard, 585-350-0782, greatlakes@newyork.sierracclub.org

Hudson River PCB Cleanup Bill Koebeleman, 518-399-5027, Hudsonriverpcb@newyork.sierracclub.org

Indian Point Task Force Allegra Dencgler, 914-693-8023, indianpoint@newyork.sierracclub.org

International Population Kathy Schwarz, 845-358-1074, internationalpopulation@newyork.sierracclub.org

Open Space/Sprawl Susan Lawrence, 518-489-5721, openspace@newyork.sierracclub.org

Solid Waste Chris Burger, 607-692-3442, solidwaste@newyork.sierracclub.org

Sterling Forest/Hald yards Larry Andrews, 212-535-7563, sterlingforest@newyork.sierracclub.org; Jurgen Wekerle, 845-744-5116, sterlingforest@newyork.sierracclub.org

Sustainable Forestry Gerald Davison, 845-339-4509

Toxics Joseph Gardella, 716-683-6755, toxics@newyork.sierracclub.org

Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Task Force Stephanie Low, 212-427-9095, transpacific@newyork.sierracclub.org

Transportation Chair TBA

Water Sentinel Chair TBA

Westchester Airport Julia Shultz, 914-946-1271, airport@newyork.sierracclub.org

Wetlands Liz Kaszubski, 716-695-1570, wetlands@newyork.sierracclub.org; Bill Meyer, 914-273-8590, wetlands2@newyork.sierracclub.org

Wildlife & Wilderness Hal Bauer, 585-355-2625, wildlife@newyork.sierracclub.org

At its annual organizational meeting in New York City and in telephone conference call meetings, the Atlantic Chapter ExCom elected officers for 2013 and approved the budget for the year.

The Chapter opposed United Water’s proposed desalination plant for Rockland County’s water supply (see page 7) and supported the proposed remedial action plan for the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn.

On energy issues, the ExCom approved litigation that will seek a temporary restraining order and subsequent preliminary injunction prohibiting the DEC from issuing permits for fracking, following the anticipated conclusion of the regulatory process. The Chapter will also undertake a small market media campaign advocating for energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy (larger markets are already being addressed by the Beyond Coal Campaign).

In administrative matters, the ExCom supported the appeal of Anna Wilson to retain her membership and leadership privileges in the Sierra Club, and called for disclosure to her of all materials supporting the action against her.

The Chapter recommends a vote for Jim Dougherty in the upcoming election for the Sierra Club’s board of directors.

Editorial Committee Report

by James Lane, Secretary

Executive Committee Report

by Susan Lawrence, Conservation Chair

U.S. can learn from Europe about smart grid systems
It's time to get on the bus continued from page 1
guy, about 6' 6", stood alone, taking everything in. I sized him up several times and each time he bore no expression on his coarse face. He wore a heavy, long overcoat and, unlike virtually everyone else, he held no banner or sign. Meanwhile, a helicopter circled the crowd.

This did not seem terribly sinister to me. When about 50,000 people are poised to march on the White House, I assume that plainclothes police and the Secret Service embed themselves to take the crowd’s temperature. As Obama reviewed the language, I assumed that plainclothes police and the Secret Service embed themselves to take the crowd’s temperature.

I never considered taking notes on the speeches with numb or gloved fingers, especially since just about everything I heard in public events these days appears quickly on the Web (http://owh.com/2013/02/forward-on-climate.htm. Wilton Vought, a Binghamton videographer on our bus, has posted the highlights at http://owh.com/2013/02/forward-on-climate.htm. Sierra Club leader Michael Brune was the final speaker. Unlike the first one, writer Bill McKibben, our brilliant 350.org advocate for sanctuary, Brune didn’t read an eloquent speech. He appeared to have only a few notes. Trusting in the cadence and power of plain talk.

But I was most moved by the unexpected: a woman elder representing Native Americans from Oklahoma. No culture in the U.S. is better connected with the Earth, able to speak with greater simplicity. In picking up connected with the Earth, able to speak with greater simplicity.

As we approached the White House, I recognized the partially dismantled reviewing stand from which Obama watched his second inaugural parade. The crowd’s chanting grew louder, swelled by finish-line cheering. Jim handed me his iPhone and asked me to take his photo with his original climate slogan (“Why Fy?”) hanging around his neck. I felt a bit self-conscious in front of Barack Obama, but over the next few hours, I learned he wasn’t there, but on a golf course playing with oilmen. Perfect.

Nighttime retreat
The return bus trip was exhausting and macabre. At about the halfway mark, an accident on I-81 north stopped all traffic. After about two hours, we learned that a two-car crash, perhaps caused by an isolated snow squall, had ejected a passenger who stuck out from the other traffic. The site was being processed as a crime scene.

Tractor trailers were stopped as far as the eye could see, but cars were allowed to turn around and head south on the shoulders to the nearest exit. About an hour later, the bus driver, too, received permission to head south — but only by backing up in the fast lane. For about 3.5 miles. Within inches of a seemingly endless row of semis. In the dark. Unable to sleep, I watched two well-chosen videos on the bus screens. A documentary. “My Name Is Allegheny County,” tells the story of how a politically vulnerable (thinly populated) Upstate community masterfully used civil disobedience against Mario Cuomo’s attempt to saddle Allegheny County with a low-level radioactive waste site.

The second video was a record of a recent anti-fracking rally in Birmingham. For me, the only electric moment came when activist professor Sandra Steingraber still hoarse from speaking earlier in New York City for the Fund for Environmental Radioactivity.

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Tears for breakfast
I arrived home at 4:30 a.m., more than 24 hours from the time I had started from home. After about five hours sleep, I joined my wife at breakfast and began to review my notes to the sortie to the mall. Bill McKibben’s most memorable line was, “We were embarking on ‘the most fateful battle in human history.’ I started to tell her what Sandra Steingraber said, but choked up. “Honey, you’re exhausted! You need more sleep.” “It’s our time to step up,” I said, my eyes glistening.

Later, I learned that McKibben had Tweeted: “Today was one of the best days of my life because I saw the movement come together finally, big and diverse and gorgeous.” It’s official. We have a movement. It’s time to move. And/or write a check.

At times, we may need to retreat, or be forced to take detours. But it’s time for all of us to get on the bus.

Hall Smith, a freelance writer, is editor of the Sierra Atlantic and a member of the Susquehanna Group.

Investors push back against fracking continued from page 1
about the risks of fracking. On the theory that what gets reported gets managed, that it could become the final answer to corporate pollution, but that it could become part of the solution.

Now the Ceres coalition mobilizes a powerful coalition of investors, public interest groups (including the Club) and companies to build a healthy global economy. In addition, Ceres, from its headquarters in Boston, has joined a coalition of environmentalists who can inform and support the decision-making process and push back against fracking.

On February 5, DiNapoli’s office announced that it had reached an agreement with Cabot Oil and Gas that the company will publicly disclose its policies and procedures for eliminating or minimizing its use of toxics in its fracking fluid. As a result of this agreement, DiNapoli announced that he had withdrawn the shareholder resolution he had filed for the 2013 annual shareholder meeting. As a result of this agreement, DiNapoli announced that he had withdrawn the shareholder resolution he had filed for the 2013 annual shareholder meeting.

Of course this disclosure will not eliminate the problem of fracking by Cabot Oil and Gas. But using the company’s own disclosures can be like the mulch that a skilled gardener uses to kill weeds. This information can inform and support the decision-making process of towns to prevent fracking by land-use controls. Local governments can inform the environmental harm of the process and use its police power to protect the health, safety and environment of its citizens.

This is one reason that shareholder resolutions are useful for the anti-fracking campaign even though they are not the simple answer.

Almost 25 years ago the Sierra Club joined a coalition of environmental organizations and we daily concerned investors to create the Ceres Coalition (www.ceres.org). Back in 1989 it was radical and shocking to Wall Street that a group of investors would seek to use investor influence and shareholder resolutions to try to change corporate behavior. Now the environmentalists could see that shareholder action was not going to be the final answer to corporate pollution. It could be part of the solution.

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Desalination seeks a foothold in the wet Northeast

**DEC nearing decision on state’s first plant in Hudson’s critical Haverstraw Bay**

by Peggy Kurtz and Gale Pisha

New York hardly seems a likely place to need desalination to provide its drinking water. Average rainfall in the Lower Hudson is more than 49 inches, compared to 10.77 inches in San Diego and 4.49 inches in Las Vegas.

Yet desalination is exactly what United Water New York, a subsidiary of the multinational company Suez Environment, is proposing for Rockland County, just north of New York City. Water would be taken from a critical habitat on the Hudson River and desalinated for Rockland’s drinking water.

Rockland Sierra Club members have been fighting this massive desalination proposal for the past five years. Sierra Club was a founding member of the Rockland Water Coalition, which has grown into a coalition of 50 local, regional and national environmental and citizen groups, including Food and Water Watch, Riverkeeper, Scenic Hudson, NYSPIRG, and Clearwater.

**Dangerous climate precedent**

These bigger groups have gotten involved because of the larger significance of this project as a destructive precedent for water and energy policy at a very critical time. That’s also why Suez is putting so many resources behind it. They, too, see it as a foothold for desalination in the wet Northeast.

Desalination uses reverse osmosis, a highly energy-intensive technology, which also makes it the most expensive water supply source. It’s also the water supply source with the highest environmental impacts. For all these reasons desalination has always been considered the water supply method of last resort.

As the first desalination plant in New York and one of the first in the Northeast, this massive plant would move our state 180 degrees in the wrong direction on water and energy policy. This plant will lock New York into substantial increases in energy use at a time when it is urgent that we should be steeply reducing our carbon footprint.

The International Energy Agency warns that if the world continues to build carbon-intensive infrastructure in the next few years, by 2017 it will be impossible to hold global warming to safe levels. Desalination is a perfect example of carbon-intensive infrastructure that will lock in long-term increases in greenhouse gas emissions. (See www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/nov/09/fossilfuel-infrastruciture-climate-change).

**Crude of many species**

In addition, United Water proposes to build this plant on Haverstraw Bay, which is officially designated as “irreplaceable habitat” for the Hudson River. In fact, it is the highest rated habitat on the entire estuary. This area is critical habitat not only for certain Hudson River species, but also for federally endangered Atlantic coastal species.

**Downstream from Indian Pt**

Rockland residents are also concerned about the fact that the intake for this desalination plant would be sited 3.5 miles downstream from Indian Point nuclear power plant. This aging facility is leaking radioactive byproducts into the Hudson River. Reverse osmosis cannot remove tritium. Trace amounts of both tritium and strontium 90 appear in the drinking water from United Water’s pilot plant. Residents are rightfully concerned about the long-term effects of exposure to low levels of radiation.

Its proximity to Indian Point raises a further issue that would have larger repercussions for New York state. Indian Point has argued that releases of radiation into the river are acceptable, since the river is rated for industrial discharges. However, if this same water is to be reclassified as drinking water, that would set a very dangerous precedent.

**Better way to drinking water**

There are better options: smart growth planning, water conservation and efficiency, water reuse, repair of leaks, rainwater collection, and other low-impact water sources, as well as nonemergency water ordinances to reduce lawn watering, a large source of summer water use.

In 2012, overflow crowds attended the only public hearing in April and 1,200 public comments were submitted, in addition to 24,500 signatures on petitions opposing the plant. The County Legislature voted 15-1 to ask the DEC for a hearing in which unresolved issues go before a judge. Rockland County Executive Scott Vanderhoef and most of our state legislators have joined that call.

A decision appears to be imminent. The DEC is coming under tremendous pressure from corporate lobbyists in Albany to approve this desalination. We know that the governor can buffer the DEC from these pressures. Sierra Club is mobilizing calls to the governor every week. The governor must know that we hold him responsible for a decision based on the science, not on corporate profits.

We see this proposal as linked to...
RGGI needs update to account for true impact of methane

by Bob Ciesielski

The Atlantic Chapter has been ambivalent about backing the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) which has been operating in New York since 2009. Upcoming discussions about amending RGGI give us an opportunity to promote our vision of an improved RGGI, capable of helping to deal with climate change. 

New York is a member of RGGI together with Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont. New Jersey withdrew from the program in 2011.

The RGGI is a cap-and-trade system for carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions which applies to all power plants with a generating capacity of 25 megawatt (MW) or more in the member states.

The initiative was first discussed in 2003 by New York Governor George Pataki, who sought a strategy that would help the region lead the nation in the effort to fight global climate change. The effort initially aimed to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions at 2002-2004 levels by 2015, with an additional 10% reduction by 2020. The proposal also allows participants to purchase offsets to meet 50% of their emission reductions. One-fourth of revenue from carbon credits are to be dedicated to energy efficiency and strategic energy schemes.

RGGI sold its first carbon credits in September of 2008 at $3.07 per ton or carbon dioxide (CO2). By 2012, same allowances were sold for $2.06 per ton. These lower prices have been the result of actual carbon emissions being substantially less than the current cap allows under RGGI.

The 2013 cap allowance of emissions from power plants was 165 million tons of CO2, but the actual 2011 emissions were lower than previously anticipated due to massive increases in the use of natural gas in recent years. Methane, a gas at the point of combustion, gives off only approximately 50% of the carbon that is emitted by coal. This brings us to two crucial points concerning usefulness of RGGI in fighting global climate change.

First, while methane gas releases less carbon dioxide than coal or oil when burned, recent studies by Robert Howarth and Tony Ingraffea of Cornell University and others show that methane is a much more dangerous greenhouse gas than CO2 (For the science, see Ingraffea’s explanation below.) Based upon NASA studies, Howarth and Ingraffea discovered that methane from high volume, hydrofracking and horizontal drilling is 105 times more potent a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide in the first 20 years of its release into the atmosphere.

The study was based on an estimated moderate leakage of methane of approximately 3-4%, including the release of methane at well sites, through flaring, along pipelines, and at compressor stations and storage facilities.

While the fracking industry disputes the leakage claims, recent studies in the Western states show that the leakage rate is actually in the substantially greater range of 7-9% of drilled methane. This makes methane a much more dangerous and dirty greenhouse gas than CO2.

This issue has been raised by NYS Attorney General Schneiderman, continued on page 12

Old science, methane assumptions skew gas policy

In February, the federal Environmental Protection Agency announced what sounded like good news: emissions from power plants declined 6 percent in 2011. This was touted by the natural gas industry as evidence that increased use of gas reduces climate disruption.

To understand what’s behind the headlines, we need to consider why many journalists still report that natural gas is a clean fuel, Professor Tony Ingraffea of Cornell University offered a primer on measuring methane in an email to an activist list-serve. With his permission and slight editing, here it is:

EPA-reported emissions are calculated and reported as what are called CO2eq. That means the emissions of CO2, methane (CH4), nitrous oxide (N2O), and other greenhouse gases, converted to equivalent amounts of CO2 (hence, the CO2eq symbol).

The problem is that not all gases have the same effect on global warming. For example, methane and greenhouse gases are rated according to their effect on warming relative to that of CO2. That rating is called the Global Warming Potential (GWP), which is the ratio of the heating potential of another gas relative to that of CO2. With me so far?

Now, the Code of Federal Regulations, the law of the land that EPA and other government agencies must follow, has encoded a GWP of 21 for methane. That number is based on science completed before about 1997, maybe earlier and GWPs are constantly evolving as more is understood about atmospheric chemistry and global warming. That number 21 is now 25 according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report of 2007, and is now 33 according to the very latest peer-reviewed science. In other words, federal law has not kept up with rapidly changing science by at least 15 years.

It gets worse. Those numbers, 21, 25, 33, also result from a policy assumption, not just science. Here is why. The GWP for methane depends very strongly on what period of years one wants to make the comparison with CO2, That is a policy judgment call.

The numbers 21, 25, 33 are for a 100 year time horizon; in other words, taken over a 100-year period, how much more heating will methane cause relative to CO2?

2012 emissions who the hell cares about 100 years if we are, as Obama is saying, very worried about acceleration of global warming over the next few decades? The latest climate science estimates predict we will most likely be at 2 degrees C global warming in about 40-50 years, and really bad things will happen well before 50 years.

So, we should be looking at a shorter time horizon for GWP, right? Well, over a 20-year time horizon, the latest science says that the GWP for methane is as much as 105, not 21, not 25, not 33.

So, what does this mean with respect to the EPA emissions announcement [in February]? That 225 million metric tons of emissions from oil and gas is a low-ball estimate (it is not an actual measurement) consisting partly of CO2 and partly of methane, and the EPA is converting the methane emissions to CO2 equivalent emissions using the number 21: old science, short-sighted policy judgment.

The same reasoning applies to the issue of whether the U.S. has really made progress on its own against global warming. You recently read that CO2 emissions have decreased over the last few years in the U.S. True, but that’s because total energy use in the U.S. has decreased, and renewables (which do not emit CO2) have increased. But, CO2 eq has increased from the U.S. over those years because the U.S. is emitting more methane.
Trade pact deja vu: TPP a feast for corporate sharks

By Jim Mays

S
o, what's with this TPP thing? In 2009, the U.S. proposed to build on an existing trade agreement among four South American and Asian countries known as the Trans-Pacific Strategic Partnership agreement, the P-4. The intent was to re-shape it along the lines of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

However, very little is actually known about the details, as secrecy prevails, and even members of Congress generally involved in the process have been kept in the dark. But not just the so corporate “advisers.” What we know comes from leaked bits and pieces, some large, some small.

Currently, there are 11 countries participating in the negotiations. These include Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam, and the United States, and now Mexico and Canada, with Japan and possibly South Korea waiting in the wings. But not China, the dominant economy in the region. It’s quite a mix, most are democracies to varying extent, and most are so-called market economies. Some may have been included only because they were part of the P-4 agreement and others have existing trade agreements with the U.S.

Ostensibly, the purpose of a trade agreement is to ease the flow of goods across national borders, thus benefiting all concerned. The adjective “free” has been added to make it more appealing: who could object to “free”?

Duties on much of this trade are already very low, with the exception of items of special interest such as cotton and sugar for the U.S. and rice for Japan, and this likely will not change.

When Mr. Obama ran for office he pledged to reexamine existing trade agreements and to change how we structured these agreements. He pledged to renegotiate NAFTA, among other things now being considered.

However, very little is actually known about the details, as secrecy prevails, and even members of Congress generally involved in the process have been kept in the dark. But not just the so corporate “advisers.” What we know comes from leaked bits and pieces, some large, some small.

In 2009, the total U.S. global trade for TPP countries (excluding then non-members Mexico and Canada) amounted to 2.4%.

Agricultural market access is a major issue, and indications are that the U.S. is not about to grant greater access. When we speak of trade, most people think of things. And Sierra Club members may question why their Club is even involved in trade issues. The reality of trade is that it effects many environmental, health and social issues. Fracking and other energy issues relate to climate, and the current boom in drilling for gas has led to a glut, with the only apparent solution being export. Under current rules, gas exports require federal permits, but under an agreement such as TPP our ability to regulate would be limited.

Under current rules, gas exports require federal permits, but under an agreement such as TPP, our ability to regulate would be limited.

Trade in goods — as Lori Wallach of Global Trade Watch is fond of saying, “things you can drop on your foot” — is except for agriculture, not really the major purpose of agreements such as the TPP. It is an effort by the U.S. and its transnational corporations to gain or maintain control over certain aspects of the global economy. It is about eliminating disagreeable regulations. It is about the control of information in the form of patents and copyright; it is about controlling generic medicines and state-sponsored pharmaceutical schemes.

Many countries, such as Australia have such pharmaceutical plans in order to provide medicine at affordable cost. But the industry has fought this as an infringement on its right to profit. This is the same thinking that came up against mandatory drug licensing in the worldwide AIDs epidemic.

TPP is also about regulating certain key sectors of the world economy. U.S. trade agreements consistently limit the import into the U.S. of certain commodities such as sugar and cotton, while making it difficult for others to similarly protect themselves. Mexico suffered an enormous influx of subsidized, industrially-produced U.S. corn, displacing its farmer population (and leading to increase in economic migration north). It has also been argued that the TPP is about U.S. geopolitical influence in the region.

Bypassing the public interest

The proposed Investor-State Dispute Resolution mechanism follows the established model of investors being able to directly sue states before one of the international arbitration bodies. These disputes are resolved by three trade lawyers, behind closed doors, with limited appeal permitted.

Decisions are most often based on commercial or trade issues, with limited regard for the environment or social consequences. It is a system that allows investors to bypass laws made in the public interest, and experts a chilling effect on enacting such rules.

This is a system subject to abuse: the lawyers function on both sides of cases, and even in victory, a poor country can accumulate significant legal costs, money that’s not going to education and health.

El Salvador prevailed in a case brought by Commerce Group of Milwaukee, WI, involving gold mining. The case was decided on technical grounds, not environmental, and El Salvador was forced to pay legal fees of $800,000.

Given the limited benefits of the TPP and the major problems, there is hope that the entire process will collapse, much as did the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas. However, we have seen 15 rounds of talks. We really don’t know what is going on inside the negotiations, only that they go on. The U.S. trade representative is stepping down. Does this indicate problems? We just don’t know. So we must urge our legislators to do the right thing.

Next stop: fast track

The agreement will be sent to Congress in the very near future. But before that, a piece of legislation called Fast Track must be enacted. This rule creates time limits and permits only an up-or-down vote with no modification. Negotiation on this step has begun. This will be the first fight in stopping TPP; it hasn’t quite begun, so stay tuned! Urging our representatives to vote against it is exactly how we can make a difference.

The Club is deeply concerned about the impacts of the TPP on the environment and the economy, though it hasn’t taken a position on TPP as yet. No documents have been finalized and released, so what it contains is largely unknown.

Whatever many people individually, both within and outside the Club, have grave doubts that it will be anything other than the same old trade agreement and a replay of NAFTA — which the Sierra Club strongly opposes.

The Club’s position has been very clear — it will not support an agreement that replicates this old, failed model of trade and investment.

Jim Mays, jim@sierraclub.org, is a member of the Chapter’s TPP Task Force.

Learn more

A longer version of this article is available on the Activist Network’s Responsible Trade page, and more information on the TPP is available at www.sierraclub.org/trade/

You can also find information and sign up for the TPP Task Force at www.nyc.sierraclub.org/tpp-resources.

SIERRA ATLANTIC  www.sierraclub.org  •   www.sier club.org
DEC’s fracking unit has disturbing anti-regulation history

by Peter Mantius

A disturbing picture is emerging of the narrow subagency of state government that Gov. Andrew Cuomo is relying on to write the rules for fracking.

The Division of Mineral Resources, or DMN, was formed in 1983 as a unit of the state Department of Environ-

mental Protection. Its September 1994 report zeroed in on DMN practises and recommended regulations for oil and gas development.

The report noted that New York’s division defined its role as “the fostering, encouragement and promotion” of oil and gas develop-

ment. Its mission statement conspicuously omits any acknowledge-

ment of responsibility to protect human health and the environment. And DMN has for decades displayed an aversion to establishing formal regulations for oil and gas develop-

ment.

In 1994, the division’s chronic neglect of both environmental pro-

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ment.
I’m struck by the tendency of out- 
door apparel catalogs to feature 
squawk-clean models, devoid of 
all dirt, not a hair out of place, walk-
ing hither and yon in a state of hy-
gienic perfection.

Seed and garden catalogs look the 
same: It shouldn’t surprise anyone that 
the good folks at Burpee don’t 
seem to get dirt-covered, either.

But even more than the people 
in these catalogs, I marvel at the 
picture-perfect gardens and yards 
they attend. Their flowering shrubs 
burst with copious blooms. Their 
tomatoes hang plump on the vine. 
Their trowels look so shiny you 
could use them to serve apple pie.

I don’t know about your place, but 
my yard and garden, and the tools 
that maintain them, look more like 
they’ve been through a war. The truth

Healthy vegan for when you don’t feel like cooking

by Betsy Naelli

I spend a lot of time with food: 
soaking, sprouting, blending, bak-
ing. Most of the time I really enjoy 
the time I spend buying produce— 
whether it is in a grocery store or an 
outdoor market—and most of the 
time I really enjoy making meals for 
myself and my family.

There are those times, however. 
when I don’t. When I am just not in 
the mood, or have a touch of some 
flu or cold going around which 
makes me feel less than motivated to 
spend creative time in the kitchen. I 
like to have some “go-to” things on 
hand. I have probably mentioned in ear-
lier columns the convenience of hav-
ing cooked grains, beans, and greens 
on hand.

Bowl of Goodness

This recipe relies on you having 
a cooked grain (pasta, quinoa, 
millet, rice, etc.) on hand, and that 
you have sprouted lentils at the 
ready. The amounts are for one gener-
ally serving increase accordingly.

Don’t let the sprouted lentils al-
low your eyes to glaze over and de-
cide this recipe is not for you—they are 
quick and super easy to sprout. 
Please, do not use the micro-
wave—you’ve gone through the ef-
fort to sprout the lentils, after all.

Even apartment dwellers can be 
gardeners

The Edible Balcony, Alex Mitchell, 

A
fter reading—and sympathizing 
with—Rick Marsi (see column, 
top), I note the contrast in 
reviewing this book, with its lush pho-
tos of pristine herbs, fruits, veg-
etables and flowers.

But, as Rick indicates, hope will 
ultimately sprout in a gardener’s 
heart. And Alex Mitchell cultivates 
those tender seedlings.

Beginners and seasoned growers alike will find something of inter-
est and use here. Clever and whim-
sical ideas for repurposing house-
hold objects share pages with prac-
tical advice on cultivation, includ-
ing instructions for simple, low-
tech watering systems.

The author points out that 
repurposing items otherwise des-
tined for the landfill can become 
addictively satisfying, and notes 
that eccentricity can be a virtue: an 
experiment in Chicago produced 
1,000 pounds of vegetables grown in 
58 children’s wading pools (or “pad-
dling pools”—she lives in England). 
Mitchell, a former gardening col-
umnist for the Sunday Telegraph, has 
organized the book by useful 
categories which include, among others: 
• Ten easy crops 
• Least thirsty edible crops 
• Top 10 fruit trees for an orchard 

1/2 C cooked grain 
1 C washed and finely chopped 

3/4 C coconut or extra virgin olive oil 
1/4 t. turmeric (optional) 
1 t. dulse flakes (a sea vegetable high in minerals)—optional

Place a small amount of water in a 
saucerpan with a stainless mesh col-
ander that will fit inside, and find a 
cover to fit over it if your greens are 
raw. Place them in the colander and 
steam until tender. Then add the 
ground and seasoned lentils and steam 
again until heated and the lentils

Pot (“Two cocktails from one pot— 
what could be finer”), curing your 
own olives, and rooftop beekeeping. (“In Paris, there are hives on the glass 
roof of the Grand Palais exhibition hall.”)

Other sections, labeled Inspiration, 
highlight the successes of specific 
growers, such as the Eagle Street 
Rooftop Farm in Brooklyn. As 
Mitchell points out, not many farms have 
a perfect view of the Empire 
State Building. She quotes Farm co-
founder Annie Novak: “If putting food 
and next winter’s harsh weather to 
batch of plants for the deer to ingest 
value. This spring, anyway, I’m burned out.

And the variegated euonymus? 
Trellised to climb up the side of the 
house, bringing joy to all those who 
believe it.

Moving on to the numerous co-

A gale-force wind blew it down in 
the night. It lay heaped on itself, like 
Sisyphus did, knowing full well it’s 
not going to roll back down and land 
on your head.

Examples? 
A walk around the yard on a re-
cent Sunday offered plenty to 
 this gluton for 

to radiant red. The odyssey of pristine herbs, fruits, vegetables, 
and flowers. 

Betsy Naelli covers The Holistic Lifestyle 
Company in the Syracuse area. 
www.TheHolisticLifestyleCompany.com
Club backs Illinois moratorium

In the wake of controversial negociations between several environmental groups and the natural gas industry, Illinois’ Speaker of the House, Michael Madigan, has voiced support for legislation that would call for a two-year moratorium on fracking in that state.

Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune released the following statement in response:

“The Sierra Club is encouraged by Speaker Madigan’s support for a fracking moratorium in Illinois. The Sierra Club maintains that a moratorium is the best way to proceed right now, ensuring that public health and the environment are fully protected from the dangers of fracking.

Legislation that regulates fracking, even if it contains some elements worthy of support like HB2615, cannot make the residents of Illinois safe. A moratorium is essential because we don’t know the extent of what can go wrong with fracking, and we don’t have a full understanding of the potential threats to public health. The regulatory bill in Illinois just addresses a subset of the known problems. It will not make fracking safe and clean.

And important for our climate, we need to keep as much natural gas in the ground as possible. We oppose opening up new landscapes to drilling when we need to put all of our efforts into developing renewable sources of energy like wind and solar, and doubling down on energy efficiency. Across the nation, we’re showing we can trade dirty and dangerous drilling when we need to put all of our efforts into developing renewable energy.

Drilling for methane in the Marcellus Shale while claiming that the industry produces “clean” fuel is contradictory. The RGGI becomes a tool for fracking companies to freely drill for methane in the Marcellus Shale while claiming that the industry produces “clean” fuel.

Secondly, the model rules which govern RGGI are being reviewed. It will not make fracking safe and clean.

In this regard our question becomes, with both RGGI and a carbon tax, how is the actual greenhouse gas effect of methane derived from hydrofracking to be measured? We are asking that an accurate calculation of methane’s effect as a greenhouse gas be incorporated into any RGGI plan in the future. [See page 8 for Professor Ingraffea’s primer on why federal agencies are vastly underestimating methane’s impact.]

Merely measuring the CO2 output of burned methane is an insufficient measure of its greenhouse gas effect. Without bringing the full greenhouse effect of methane drilling and burning into the RGGI formula, the RGGI becomes a tool for fracking companies to freely drill for methane in the Marcellus Shale while claiming that the industry produces “clean” fuel.

Here’s the bottom line: scientists are telling us that water will be the new ‘oil’ of the next century, the resource that wars will be fought over. We are already seeing severe droughts and will see many more water shortages due to climate change, overpopulation, paving over natural surfaces, misuse and mismanagement of water.

If we move in the direction of desalination, we will be providing limitless amounts of water for unchecked consumption, without tapping into more sustainable options, all at the expense of the most urgent effort to reduce our energy use.

Whether or not you live in Rockland County, the task before us is to help shape a sustainable water policy that will build a stronger economy with green jobs and protect our communities with smart growth while protecting our resources.

Call the governor today. Tell him to grant an adjudicatory hearing (before judges) and our best chance for a decision based on the science. CALL GOVERNOR C UOMO at (518) 474-859 or e-mail gov.cuomo@ chamber.state.ny.us.

For more information, visit www.sustainablerockland.org.

More we drill, more we’re vulnerable

Gas is also opposed by some business leaders, who say plentiful and cheap domestic natural gas prices can help revive American manufacturing. Their corporations are engaged in a new ‘insourcing’ effort to bring back jobs from China, in part encouraged by current low U.S. natural gas prices. They believe that a rebirth of domestic manufacturing would produce far more jobs and far better jobs than exporting oil and gas.

Meanwhile, Western public and private lands remain under assault, and opponents have been reduced to opposing fracking, community by community, tract by tract. It is obvious that raising oil and gas exports will also increase pressure to lease, explore and exploit natural gas by drilling here at home. It also leaves the oceans vulnerable to disastrous spills and commits the United States to maintaining a costly military infrastructure to protect international shipping lanes and pipelines.

It’s time for the issue of energy exporting to become part of our overall discussion of American energy policy, because where we are headed has everything to do with environmental degradation and nothing to do with ‘energy independence.’

Jon Katz is a contributor to Writers on the Range, a service of High Country News (highcountrynews.org).