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The importance of the report lies in providing all the delegates with the same source of information, which could irrevocably harm the planet is changing due to elevated emissions-reduction plan, and they demand it now.

Amazingly, the report admits that the dire consequences with continued mass extinction of species and economic collapses. The IPCC's mission to "prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system." The 2 degrees C goal has been repeated endlessly in every publication discussing the topic not only for New York but for the region. A huge thank you to all Sierra Club members who have played such a role in stopping this ill-conceived project. Your calls to the governor, comments and donations turned this runaway train around!

Peggy Kurtz and Gale Pisha

What you can do

Donate: Your donations will help Sierra Club hire experts to advise us in the creation of a sustainable water policy.

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Come work with us! Rockland Sierra Club meets monthly. Dates are posted to http://atlantic2.sierraclub.org/ lowerhudson/.

IPCC's misguided yardstick understates climate crisis

by Moishe Blechman

I

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State definition of ‘clean energy’ too fuzzy

by Bob Ciesielski

New York’s energy future is being reshaped by the Public Service Commission’s proposed Reforming the Energy Vision (REV) plan. Additionally, NYSERDA, which has up to now been responsible for the state’s renewable energy and energy efficiency development, is also asking for comments to its Clean Energy Fund (CEF) proposal.

The Chapter and the Beyond Coal Campaign submitted comments about the CEF on December 8. Both the REV and CEF propose a transition to a market-based model for the development of renewable energy and energy efficiency.

The Sierra Club applauds NYSERDA’s proposed 10-year, $5 billion commitment to New York’s clean energy economy and its call for a “significant reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from New York’s energy sector” in its CEF proposal. However, a number of concerns have been addressed by the Sierra Club in its most recent CEF submission:

- New York should adopt enforceable 50% renewable energy and 20% energy efficiency targets by 2025, including interim goals. The current Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) calls for 30% of the state’s energy to be supplied by renewable sources but will expire at the end of 2015. This voluntary program will not reach its 2015 goal. If a market-based model handled by private utilities is to replace the RPS, there must be enforceable goals, including penalties, should the utilities fail to meet renewable energy installation goals.

- Neither the REV nor the CEF have addressed the large-scale development of renewables essential to achieving New York’s greenhouse gas reduction goals. NYSERDA has not budgeted any of its CEF resources for renewable energy development beyond 2015. The Sierra Club is calling for a separate fast-track proceeding to determine the near-term future of large-scale renewable development.

At this point, the costs of solar and wind energy are competitive with fossil fuels and nuclear sources. However, if a solicitation procedure for installing renewables is not implemented, renewable energy in New York will be hampered. The state should provide for flexible contracting policies for renewables, along with 20-year contracts to ensure market stability.

One flexible contracting mechanism successfully used on Long Island is the feed-in tariff (FIT), which permits renewable energy production by homeowners, small businesses, multi-unit buildings, farmers, industrial units, and utilities.

It is important to define the term “clean energy.” The CEF proposal interchanges the terminology for reducing greenhouse gases (GHG) with language concerning the reduction of carbon (CO2) emissions. The discussion sidesteps the effects of the extremely potent GHG methane on climate change. Methane is at least 86 times more potent a GHG than CO2 in the first 20 years of its release into the atmosphere. We are concerned that the fracking gas industry will use this confusion of language to claim that it is reducing GHG merely because methane combustion releases some what less CO2 than other fossil fuels. “Clean energy” should therefore be defined as that provided by solar, wind, small scale hydro, and heat transfer geothermal. All fossil fuels, especially methane gas derived from fracking, and also nuclear sourced energy, should not be considered “clean” energy. The use of the CEF to subsidize the further use of fossil fuels, especially the development of a methane gas infrastructure, would be completely contrary to the goal of reduced GHG emissions.

NYSERDA is recommending a phasing out of the systems benefit charge (SBC) on utility bills, which currently fund the state’s renewable energy and energy efficiency programs. The Atlantic Chapter is requesting that current funding levels be maintained.

We are also requesting that clean energy funds be earmarked solely for renewable energy development and energy efficiency, and not be arbitrarily transferred to the state’s newly formed Green Bank. Performance objectives for the development of renewable energy and energy efficiency by the Green Bank should be set and measured before further monetary transfers from the CEF are made.

The Sierra Club supports NYSERDA’s proposal to fully fund NYSun. The proposed solar manufacturing facility at Riverbend in Buffalo, recently announced by Governor Cuomo and funded by $750 million in state funds, has resulted in an additional $5 billion of investments by the solar manufacturer, and the proposed 4,000 jobs for the Buffalo area.

We urge approval of the Deepwater wind farm proposed off of Montauk, which would supply some 200 MW of renewable energy to eastern Long Island. NYSERDA expects to release another amended version of the CEF in February, with additional public comments to be made in March.

Bob Ciesielski, a member of the Niagara Group, Chairs the Chapter’s energy committee.

For more information, see our website: http://newyork.sierraclub.org

NYSERDA’s clean energy plan seems to include nuclear power and natural gas from fracking, which could make both eligible for subsidies.
Arrests nearing 100 as LNG protesters rally at Seneca Lake

Civil disobedience campaign aims to stop gas storage

At press time, police had arrested nearly 100 protesters in the “We Are Seneca Lake” civil disobedience campaign, which began on October 23. Multiple rallies have drawn hundreds of residents and numerous winery owners, local businesses and hecatombists.

In early December, the We Are Seneca Lake group held a rally to emphasize that, contrary to critics, the protesters come from their local community, though they are happy to get support from “outside” activists. That includes members of the Great March for Climate Action, who, earlier this year, walked 3,000 miles across America, from California to Washington, DC, to inspire action on climate change, in one of the largest coast-to-coast marches in American history.

The December action should dispel the myth that this movement is an “outside” movement, filled with professional protesters. However, we welcome all comers, as we must when dealing with a watershed for over 100,000 people and air that we all breathe. It will take people from all over to protect the environment and to stand up to Crestwood, the true outsider in this threat,” said Schuyler County business owners Phil Davis and Scott Signori.

Paula Fitzsimmons, a physician assistant for 28 years in Schuyler County, said, “I feel passionately about my patients and Seneca Lake and the preponderance of evidence is that the Crestwood project is a public health risk of an unacceptable magnitude. I am not willing to stand by any longer while the air quality deteriorates and the watershed is threatened.”

Protesters have been blocking the Crestwood gas storage facility gates since October 23. Since then, protests have been ongoing, with more arrests each week.

The protests are taking place at the gates of the Crestwood compressor station site on the shore of Seneca Lake, the largest of New York’s Finger Lakes. The methane gas storage expansion project is advancing in the face of broad public opposition and unresolved questions about geological instabilities, fault lines, and possible salination of the lake, a source of drinking water for 100,000 people.

Crestwood has indicated that it intends to make Seneca Lake the gas storage and transportation hub for the Northeast, as part of the gas industry’s planned expansion of infrastructure across the region.

The We Are Seneca Lake protests are aimed at stopping the expansion of methane gas storage, a separate project from Crestwood’s proposed liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) storage project, which is on hold pending a Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) issuing conference.

As they have for a long time, the protesters are continuing to call on President Obama, U.S. Senators Schumer and Gillibrand, Governor Cuomo, and Congressman Reed to intervene on behalf of the community and halt the dangerous project.

In spite of overwhelming opposition, grave geological and public health concerns, Crestwood has federal approval to move forward with plans to store highly pressurized, explosive gas in abandoned salt caverns on the west side of Seneca Lake.

While the DEC has temporarily halted plans to stockpile propane and butane (LPG) in nearby caverns—out of ongoing concerns for safety, health, and the environment—Crestwood is actively constructing infrastructure for the storage of two billion cubic feet of methane (natural gas), with the blessing of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

More background, including about the broad extent of the opposition from hundreds of wineries and more than a dozen local municipalities, is available on the We Are Seneca Lake website at www.wearesenecalake.com/press-kit/

Veterans defend lake against environmental enemies

by Sue Heavenrich

Retired Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Collen Boland zipped up a fleece jacket emblazoned with her name, rank and rows of decorations, then headed to Crestwood energy’s site on Seneca Lake There, she linked arms with others defending Seneca Lake from a proposed natural gas storage project. When a tractor trailer approached, Boland and the others refused to move. Within minutes sheriff’s deputies showed up and arrested the protesters.

Boland, who was born and raised in Corning, never thought of herself as an activist. She never thought of herself as a tree-hugger. After four years of service in the Army and another 11 in the Air Force, Boland retired.

But with industrialized drilling and gas storage encroaching on the local landscape, Boland reluctantly polished her boots and dusted off her awards and decorations and prepared to serve in a new way. In a press conference, she reflected on her years of military service and the places she was stationed. One thing they had in common, she said, is water. Children in Schuyler County and Dimock, Pennsylvania, like children in Malaysia and elsewhere, need access to clean water.

Explaining why she wore a “civilized” version of her Air Force jacket, Boland explained that she was trying to dispel the notion that “the only people standing up to protect our water, our air, and our communities are tree-hugging hippies or out-of-touch dreamers. Don’t get me wrong, I love trees, but I was never quite cool enough to be a hippie — and I’m certainly not dreaming,” she said to laughter and applause.

Boland is distressed and offended that people who oppose extreme fossil fuel extraction are being dismissed as “people who don’t belong here.” We do belong here, she declared.

“I am still serving, still defending. I am defending the natural beauty of the Finger Lakes region that I love against all enemies foreign and domestic. Crestwood is my enemy,” Boland isn’t the only Veteran defending the lake. Dwain Wilder, a former sailor, spent his Veterans Day in jail for his part in the protest.

Writer Sue Heavenrich reports on The Marcellus Effect; you can read her blog at www.marcelluseffect.blogspot.com.
Major energy decisions hang in the balance

Chances are that by the time you read this, Governor Andrew Cuomo will have made a major decision on fracking. At the time of this writing we have no foreknowledge of whether he will approve some ill-conceived drilling pilot program or will actually take steps to ban the controversial gas extraction technique. But what we do know is that thousands of New Yorkers will rally outside of Cuomo’s State of the State address on January 7 to celebrate the victory with him or double down on holding the governor accountable. Please join us for what could be the largest and most urgently needed anti-fracking rally to date.

What: Not One Well rally against fracking and for renewable energy at Cuomo’s State of the State address When: Wednesday, January 7, 11:30 am to 3 pm Where: Empire State Plaza, Albany (Indoors) Who: Hundreds of groups and thousands of New Yorkers just like you.

During the course of the campaign season, Governor Cuomo indicated that he would make a decision on fracking by the end of 2014. His determination of whether to move forward hinges upon an internal review of the proposed drilling regulations by the Department of Health (DOH). Meanwhile, simultaneous with the internal DOH review, a steady flow of independently produced peer-reviewed studies and research has exposed the potential health hazards of fracking operations. Recently a coalition of medical professionals and scientists released a comprehensive review of articles that peer-reviewed studies linking fracking to increased birth defects, asthma, neurotoxins, cancers and other serious medical conditions.

Almost 300 of those studies were published concurrent with the DOH review over the past two years. The notion that DOH is now receiving a new study-a-day on the health impacts of fracking makes clear that the health issue is far from resolved. The overwhelming evidence to date is that fracking, as currently executed, is a public health hazard.

If Cuomo was to truly listen to the science, as has been his mantra for the past four years, he really has no choice but to provide at least three to five more years for the scientific community to study and deliberate over the emerging data.

One narrative that concerns scientists and advocates alike is that Cuomo would advance a limited pilot program of test wells that would be studied as part of the ongoing review. Legally, such a move would be a violation of process, as no regulations are in place. It could also provide an uncomfortable precedent to ramp up more development without established rules or mitigations.

From a research perspective, there are plenty of active wells and drilling sites available to study in other parts of the country where fracking is allowed—making it unnecessary to create such potential hazards in New York.

Perhaps more to the point, while studying the individual aspects of well development has its own merit, the real public health crisis occurs with the cumulative impact of hundreds of wells and the ancillary infrastructure to support that development. No test well can replicate that in New York.

The Sierra Club has banded with dozens of other organizations for the Not One Well campaign to demonstrate that no one environmental or public interest group will back Cuomo if he decides to move forward—even with this intermittent step.

The issue of fracking is a political liability and distraction for Andrew Cuomo—and he can no longer afford to put off a decision. Every public appearance he makes is accompanied by anti-fracking protests and every day of delay invites more industry scorn for his indecision. He should begin his second term with a decisive policy that puts the issue to rest.

And while it would be tempting for him to take the politically expedient path of embracing the powerful oil and gas industry’s interest, such support could pave a path to the White house, it would also mean four more years of intense protest. Because of Cuomo’s leadership in enacting a gun control measure (the SAFE Act), many pro-Second Amendment rural landowners—the same demographic that is his base of support for decisions—has now turned against him. If he does push a fracking program forward, there will not be a legitimate cheering section behind him.

It also seems unlikely that any fracking program he unleashes will see financial benefit to the state within his time in office. Part of the issue is that during the more that six-and-a-half year de facto moratorium on fracking, all of us in the anti-fracking community have been busy implementing real blockades to drilling at the local level. And after all the municipal bans, enhanced setbacks, prohibitions, increased price points, reduced production data and mitigations are calculated, only a small portion of the Southern Tier is actually vulnerable to drilling.

While we can take some pride in this accomplishment, Cuomo may use the remaining “sacrifice zone” as cover to allow drilling only where it is perceived that political resistance is weakest—and walk away from the issue. We suggest that a wise governor would acknowledge there is an economy of scale to drilling development—and the public investment in building a fracking regulatory structure (which could cost as much as $150 million) could never be recouped in a constrained development area. Cuomo has to know that every point fracking will be a bad deal for the state’s taxpayers.

Obsolete economic study

The 2011 SGEIS included a flawed socioeconomic study of fracking in New York that extrapolated potential gas production data, job creation and revenue without exploring costs to taxpayers, municipalities and competing industries; it did not mention losses in property values and quality of life. Clearly, with the reduced drilling area, heightened mitigations, outdated base assumptions and data informing this study (and indeed much of the SGEIS), it is no longer accurate. Before any decision can be made, this study needs to be overhauled so that the public can get an accurate accounting of how tax dollars will be spent. In facilitating a drilling program should it move forward.

But even without knowing how Cuomo will decide, understanding the broader context of the energy decisions before the administration is important. Choosing fracking, with its appalling risks and destructive footprint, would be all the more abhorrent because it is simply not necessary. New York has a tremendous economic opportunity in renewable energy and there are equally important reasons to pursue wind and solar power that also need to be made before 2014’s end.

For instance, the state’s current renewable energy program is about to expire. New York’s Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS), with its goal of 30 percent renewable energy in by 2015, has already been successful at bringing new projects online, including 21 new wind farms. It has helped create hundreds of good new high-paying jobs and drive billions in direct investments in the state. We can envision a new RPS that would set the goal of 50% renewable energy by 2025. However, if the RPS is not renewed, the lack of a ten-year commitment would discourage clean-energy developers from continuing to invest in New York, and the Empire State will lose out on billions in economic investments and thousands of new jobs. At stake are major offshore wind and community solar projects that await approvals.

We are hoping that Governor Cuomo will use this opportunity to make constructive choices He can help get the state back on track by doubling down on clean energy.

We need your help to prevent the powerful oil and gas industry from fracking New York. The moratorium on fracking has stopped the industry from dumping toxic Pennsylvania fracking waste in New York. Meanwhile, the industry is aggressively building the infrastructure needed for fracking to proceed.

Contributions and gifts to the “Atlantic Chapter Fracking Fund” made through The Sierra Club Foundation (TSCF) are tax-deductible as charitable contributions, as they support public education, research, expert testimony and legal action necessary to further the Club’s conservation goals.

To make a donation, send a check payable to The Sierra Club Foundation, “Atlantic Chapter Fracking Fund” on the memo line. Send to: Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter PO Box 82825, Albany, NY 12203.

To make a credit card donation, please call Caitlin Fiedler, at 518-420-9144.

by Roger Downs, Chapter Conservation Program Manager
DiNapoli report details strangulation of the DEC

Cuts to the DEC, budget and staff have continued for more than a decade. Total DEC spending will decline this year and in each of the next three years by a cumulative total of 25.9 percent from the 2013-14 level.

DEC is responsible for most of New York’s programs to protect wildlife, natural resources and environmental quality. DEC programs range widely from managing fish and game populations and overseeing the extraction of natural resources to monitoring the discharge of pollutants and hazardous materials and cleaning up contaminated sites.

Since 2003, several new programs have been added to the agency’s list of responsibilities. These include the Brownfield Cleanup Program; the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative; and the Waste Tire Recycling and Management Act.

DEC spending was $795.3 million in SFY 2003-04 and $1 billion in SFY 2013-14. After adjusting for inflation, DEC spending rose by a total of 1.7 percent over the period examined. Since 2008, funding from state sources is down 15.1 percent. While federal funding has helped fill the gap, those resources are now declining as well. The state Division of the Budget projects that total DEC spending will decline this year and in each of the next three years by a cumulative total of 25.9 percent from the SFY 2013-14 level.

The size of the DEC workforce declined 10.4 percent, from 3,256 full-time equivalents (FTEs) in SFY 2003-04 to 2,913 FTEs in SFY 2013-14. It reached a peak of 3,779 FTEs in SFY 2007-08. Staffing in programs such as enforcement, air and water quality management, and solid and hazardous waste management has experienced significant cuts.

DiNapoli’s report also notes that two of the state’s major funds dedicated to the environment—the Environmental Protection Fund and the Hazardous Waste Oversight and Assistance Account—combined have been subject to sweeps in excess of half a billion dollars to provide general state budget relief in the past.

Support chapter’s work in NYS

We need your help to fight fracking, maintain the Chapter’s other critical conservation efforts and continue print publication of the Sierra Atlantic. Your membership dues primarily support the Club’s national priorities. Your additional support is needed to strengthen the 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. Thank you for your generosity.

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

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A copy of our latest financial report can be obtained by writing to Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, PO Box 38225, Albany, NY 12203, or the NYS Attorney General.
Nebraska protects our last great migration spectacle

by Hal Smith

The largest mass migration in American history was destroyed when buffalo, once numbering 40 million, were virtually wiped out in the West. But we still have the opportunity to see a migration in the U.S. that conservationist Jane Goodall says is one of the ten greatest in the world.

World travelers, in search of the most dazzling wonders of nature, go far afield to watch the migration of wildebeests (the Serengeti) and caribou (the Canadian tundra). But you won’t need vaccinations and a passport if you take a cue from Goodall; the anthropologist most noted for her research with primates has been making an annual pilgrimage to the Platte River in south-central Nebraska for more than a decade.

Goodall and thousands of other lovers of wildlife flock to the Platte to witness the spring migration of sandhill cranes. The birds fly up to 5,000 miles from Mexico and the U.S. Southwest to nesting grounds as far north as Siberia. They may well be the oldest bird species on Earth and, aside from the nearly extinct whooping crane (a flock of about 300 remains), sandhills are the only cranes native to North America.

From mid-February to mid-April, 80 percent of the world’s half-million sandhills sleep standing up at night in the Platte, the largest braided river in the U.S. By day, the birds scavenge in nearby cornfields, cleaning up what increasingly efficient harvesting machines have missed in the previous fall. Unlike every other state on their central flyway migration route, Nebraska forbids hunting the sandhills that have been descending on an 80-mile stretch of the river habitat for thousands of years.

You don’t need a hospitable friend who owns a cabin on the Platte, as Goodall does, to enjoy the spectacle. During the birds’ month-long stopover, thousands of tourists from all over the world come to Kearney, Nebraska, the “Sandhill Capital of the World,” and other nearby towns.

You’ll see cars parked on quiet back roads where visitors stop to catch glimpses of the flocks in fields and wet meadows. The birds are wary of people but fairly tolerant of automobiles, which can work as impromptu blinds, provided visitors stay inside their vehicles. Eco-tourists, curious passersby and wildlife photographers also cluster on viewing platforms on well-traveled roads.

However, hardcore birders rise well before dawn in order to quietly take up positions, under cover of darkness, in dedicated blinds before the birds leave the safety of the shallow Platte’s sandbars, which provide moth-like security against four-legged predators. The dedicated blinds, maintained by conservation groups, are usually located a stone’s throw from the river, offering a very close vantage point from which to watch the birds as they wake up with the warming sun. The birds begin socializing, which may include “dancing” and other displays of some of the most developed social behavior found in nature.

Sandhills, who can easily live 20 years, mate for life and live in family groups. A bonded pair can only be separated by death or an initial breeding failure. So their social behavior is broadly similar to other species, including the voyeurs who watch them with binoculars. Bird watchers will see sibling rivalry (for attention and food), bathing and grooming, squabbles with a neighbor over personal space, etc.

Despite astonishingly large numbers—up to 10,000 birds per half-mile—sandhill families manage to stay together through acoustic or visual recognition. Still, crane experts say it’s not uncommon to see a single distressed bird flying up and down the river calling for its mate or parents.

The first principle of responsible sandhill tourism is not to disturb the birds, who come to Nebraska to rest and fortify themselves for their arduous trip north. That is what the staff and volunteers stress at pre-dawn orientation programs presented by the Audubon Society and the Crane Trust, each of which maintains blinds on the Platte and manages habitat.

These are probably the two most prominent guardians of the sandhills continued on next page
Climate change threatens nearly half the bird species in the continental U.S. and Canada, including the Bald Eagle and dozens of iconic birds like the Common Loon, Baltimore Oriole and Brown Pelican, according to a new study published by National Audubon Society.

The study identifies 126 species that will lose more than 50 percent of their current ranges—in some cases up to 100 percent—by 2080, with no possibility of moving elsewhere if global warming continues on its current trajectory.

A further 188 species face more than 50 percent range loss by 2080 but may be able to make up some of this loss if they are able to colonize new areas. These 314 species include many not previously considered at risk. The report indicates that numerous extinctions are likely if global temperature increases are not stopped. It’s a punch in the gut. The greatest threat our birds face today is global warming,” said Audubon chief scientist Gary Langham, who led the investigation. “That’s unequivocal conclusion after seven years of painstakingly careful and thorough research. Global warming threatens the basic fabric of life on which birds—and the rest of us—depend, and we have to act quickly and decisively if we are going to avoid catastrophe for them and for us.”

“The prospect of such staggering loss is horrific, but we can build a bridge to the future for America’s birds,” said David Yarnold, Audubon president and CEO. “This report is a roadmap, and it’s telling us two big things: We have to preserve and protect the places birds live, and we have to work together to reduce the severity of global warming.”

Langham and other Audubon ornithologists analyzed 50 years of North American climate data and tens of thousands of historical bird observations from the Audubon Christmas Bird Count and U.S. Geological Survey’s North American Breeding Bird Survey to understand the links between where birds live and the climatic conditions that support them. Understanding those links allows scientists to project where birds are likely to be able to survive—and not survive—in the future. While some species will be able to adapt to shifting climates, many of North America’s most familiar and iconic species will not. The national symbol of the U.S., the Bald Eagle, could see its current summer range decrease by nearly 75 percent in the next 65 years. The Common Loon, icon of the north and state bird of Minnesota, may no longer be able to breed in the lower 48 states by 2080.

The Baltimore Oriole, state bird of Maryland and mascot for Baltimore’s baseball team, may no longer nest in the Mid-Atlantic, shifting north instead to follow the climatic conditions it requires.

Other state birds at risk include Brown Pelican (Louisiana), California Gull (Utah), Hermit Thrush (Vermont), Mountain Bluebird (Idaho and Nevada), Ruffed Grouse (Pennsylvania), Purple Finch (New Hampshire) and Wood Thrush (Washington, D.C.).

“We know that climate variables—including temperature and precipitation—determine where most birds live and where they don’t, because it is too hot, for example,” said Terry Root, a Nobel Prize-winning Stanford University professor who serves on Audubon’s board of directors but was not involved in the study. “The Audubon study determined the climate variables that dictate where all North American birds live today and then brilliantly used climate forecasts to project where birds will most likely occur in the future. We all will see the effects of changing climate in our own backyards. We just cannot ignore such a sobering wake-up call.”

The study, which was funded in part by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has numerous implications for conservation, public policy and further research and provides a new suite of tools for scientists, conservationists, land managers and policy makers. For example, the study identifies “strongholds,” areas that will remain stable for some birds even as climate changes and are candidates for protection and management.

Audubon has launched a new web portal—Audubon.org/Climate—dedicated to understanding the links between birds and global warming, including animated maps and photographs of the 314 species at risk, a technical report, and in-depth stories from the September-October issue of Audubon magazine, which is also devoted to the topic.

“Millions of people across the country will take this threat personally because birds matter to them,” said Yarnold. “For bird lovers, this issue transcends nasty political posturing: it’s a bird issue. And we know that when we do the right things for birds, we do the right things for people, too.

“Everyone can do something, from changing the plants in their backyard to working at the community and state level to protect the places birds will need to survive and promote clean energy. We are what hope looks like to a bird.”
Keeping on track to a green future

A s world leaders meet to forge new agreements that can bring us to a greener world in our communities and beyond, it is imperative that as environmental-ists we greatly escalate our efforts to join forces with other key stake-holders to move quickly to that green world.

That means cutting through the fog of false claims and arguments and shining light on the terrible threats to our environment and what needs to be done to counter-act them.

Twisting premises and percep-tions can obfuscate the issues and options. Some arguing for hydro-fracking for natural gas in New York and elsewhere say it will ben-eft our economy but overlook the economic impact of environmen-tal degradation and cleanup of all aspects of fracking, including de-velopment of massive infras-structure to transport gas.

The economic study done in conjunction with NYS’s Depart-ment of Environmental Conserva-tion (DEC) draft Supplemental Ge-neric Environmental Impact State-ment neither identified nor con-sidered the myriad of factors that, if the state authorizes hydro-fracking, would have great nega-tive impacts for our state’s short-and long-term economy, environ-ment and welfare.

We need a groundswell from the people to say no to hydro-fracking in our state and yes to greatly expanded energy conserva-tion, efficiency and renew-able en-ergy in all sectors of our economy. We all need to join the ‘Not One Well’ campaign that so far has emerged to date the state message at the capital in January our state will respond in thundering words that fracking must not move forward in New York.

And we need to escalate efforts to reform campaign finance and educate the public about ways to move to a green economy and fu-ture.

This Thanksgiving, my family, as usual, enjoyed engaging in some big-issue talk and this time we focused a lot on the aspirations of people around the world and their hope for improved standards of living.

I asked everyone to think about efforts to stop climate change. We talked about how aspirations to reach desirable standards of living vary so greatly around the world and are critical in how our world approaches climate change.

In Third World countries and in developing ones, including India, people’s aspirations are much lower than in the U.S. So how can we shift our aspirations to focus on a sustainable future rather than a hard-driving quest for consump-tion that destroys human resources as well as the rest of the natural world?

We need to fight for tax incen-tives for wind and solar energy as well as for energy conservation—not for fossil fuel and nuclear fuels.

We need to overturn the exemp-tions from the Clean Air and Clean Water acts enacted during the Bush/Cheney era and enact laws and regulations at the federal, state, and local level to promote energy conservation/efficiency and renewables that make economic and environmental sense.

We need to reform campaign finance and educate the public about ways to move to a green economy and fu-ture.}

We need to overturn the exemp-tions from the Clean Air and Clean Water acts enacted during the Bush/Cheney era and enact laws and regulations at the federal, state, and local level to promote energy conservation/efficiency and renewables that make economic and environmental sense.

And we need to escalate efforts to reform campaign finance and educate the public about ways to move to a green economy and fu-ture.

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IPCC’s misguided yardstick understates climate crisis

The “IPCC is stern on climate change, but it still underestimates the actual severity of the situation.”

Bill McKibben

Blechman art show opens in NYC

Distinguished illustrator R.O. Blechman, whose work regularly appears in a wide variety of publications, from The New York Times to the Sierra Atlantic (see above), has a ‘one-man show’ at the Landmark West! 157 Columbus Avenue, New York City. The exhibit closes on June 16. For more information, call Landmark West!, a group dedicated to preservation of the city’s Upper Westside, at (212) 196-8110.

Continued from page 1

who says that the “IPCC is stern on climate change, but it still underestimates the actual severity of the situation.”

A second voice of dissent came December 1 in The New York Times in a front-page article on the climate talks in Lima. In only the second paragraph it said: “Even with a deal to stop the current rate of greenhouse gas emissions, scientists warn, the world will become increasingly unpleasant. Without a deal, they say, the world could eventually become uninhabitable.” Later in the article, ‘Recent reports show that there may be no way to prevent the planet’s temperature from rising given the current level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and the projected rate of emissions.’

In other words, the idea that the planet can rise 2 degrees C and then stop makes no sense, given the physics of a buildup of atmospheric greenhouse gases. That fact is recognized by dissident climate scientists, although ignored by the IPCC. For these climate scientists, it is certain that the mission statement of the IPCC to prevent ‘dangerous interference with the climate system’ is over. The planet is moving into the unchartered waters of climate dysfunction.

A third voice came from an article last October in the science journal, Nature: ‘Ditch the 2 Degrees C Warming Goal.’ This paper has been published in the UK’s Guardian and in The National Geographic. In it, the authors, Victor and Kennel, say that average global temperature is not a good indicator of planetary health. One reason is that they say that the ideal climate is a function of the heat. They write that the 2 degrees C goal is wrong-headed and that ‘Politically, it has allowed some governments to pretend that they are taking serious action to mitigate global warming, when in reality they have accomplished almost nothing.’

A fourth strong voice of dissent came back in 2006. James Hansen wrote, ‘Further warming of less than 1 degree C will make the Earth warmer than it has been in over a million years. If fossil fuel emissions continue to increase, it will yield additional warming to 2-3 degrees C this century, and imply changes that constitute a different planet. I believe the evidence shows with reasonable clarity that the level of additional warming that would put us into dangerous territory is about 1 degree C, not 2 or 3. I am very confident about that.’ But he was ignored by the IPCC and, therefore, ignored by everyone, especially the media. Not following the climate Bible, Hansen’s prediction was marginalized to obscurity.

It is eight years later. We find that even a 1 degree C rise is too high. We have already activated unstoppable climate change. The Golden Rule should have been, Respect Earth’s systems, or pay.

The crucial mistake the IPCC made was to use temperature as a measure for climate change and to identify a temperature limit. Instead, knowing what causes the temperature to rise is what is important. We know that the climate system on Earth comes with 280 ppm of CO₂ in the atmosphere. It was the atmospheric base for at least 12,000 years of a working climate system. Only industrialization disturbed it. It needs to be recognized in the public mind that CO₂ and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are the baseline control of life on the planet, not the misleading 2 degrees C limit.

The IPCC scientists must be aware that the worst, and almost total, extinction event was at the end of the Permian period 255 million years ago when there were 400 ppm of CO₂ in the atmosphere—exactly the number in the atmosphere right now. Since the daily measurement of atmospheric CO₂ must be known to all scientists because of its importance in determining climate, why did the IPCC abandon that precise CO₂ tool for measuring climate change vulnerability and replace it with a temperature goal?

That substitution effectively hid the planet’s real vulnerability. Why was that idea ratified by a vote of about 200 member nations in 2009? And why does the IPCC continue to insist on the 2 degrees C measure as a limit when its own report indicates that goal needs to change?

Other voices consider 2 degrees C unacceptable and are pressing for a goal of 1.5 degrees C. From the calving of the gigantic iceberg in Greenland, it is clear that using temperature is irrelevant in measuring risk. The melting of Arctic ice may be telling us that we are now at the threshold beyond which we dare not raise the planet’s CO₂ levels.

But the IPCC’s AR5 does note the following: ‘...globally economic and population growth continued to be the most important driver of increases in CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel emissions.’ Embedded in this statement is a solution. The best way to reverse climate change is to reverse economic and population growth. Although this idea is tantamount to heresy, it is an evident necessity. Another and immediate necessity is a carbon tax, effective immediately.

Moisha Blechman chairs the Chapter’s climate crisis and publication committees.

National Club elections coming soon

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

The Sierra Club is a democratically structured organization at all levels. The Club requires the regular flow of views on policy and priorities from its grassroots membership in order to function well. Yearly participation in elections at all Club levels is a major membership obligation.

If you want to request an electronic ballot, which will save the Club time and postage, please sign up at https://secure.sierraclub.org/site/SPageNavigator/Membership/Eballot_Information.html

Members frequently state that they don’t know the candidates and find it difficult to vote without learning more. You can learn more by asking questions of your group and chapter leadership and other experienced members you know.


This site provides links to additional information about candidates and their views on a variety of issues facing the Club and the environment.

You should use your own judgment by taking several minutes to read the ballot statement of each candidate. Then make your choice and cast your vote. Even if you receive your election materials in the mail, please go to the user-friendly Internet voting site to save time and postage. If necessary, you will find the ballot is quite straightforward and easy to mark and mail.
I read an online article recently about the 12 foods that happy people eat, and I was happy to see that I consumed them, too.

I also recently read again about the super powers of turmeric:

- India has the highest consumption rate of the spice, turmeric, in the world. Turmeric is the primary spice used in curries.
- India also has one of the lowest rates of cognitive decline in the world, with a risk of Alzheimer’s eight times lower than that of the U.S.

What’s the connection between these two facts? The answer can be found in a powerful compound found in turmeric, which is a component of the curry spice turmeric. In fact, research shows that curcumin has profound protective effects for the brain.

Turmeric is the spice that makes curry yellow and it is really, really good for us.

I keep several containers and shakers next to my kitchen stove (much to the dismay of my sweet husband, who would much prefer that every item in our oh-so-tiny kitchen be kept out of sight behind a cupboard door) because I use them every time I eat and turmeric is one of that select few.

When I am cooking, I always add a bit of turmeric if the color doesn’t matter, but never so much as to alter the taste. It’s a natural choice if you are making ‘scrambled tofu’ because it will give your dish the color of scrambled eggs, but I also put it in soups and smoothies, in sauces and sautéed greens, and I always add a dash or two on top of my salad.

So reading again about turmeric and happy-making food choices got me thinking about designing recipes and menus around them. In fact, it has also encouraged me to make ‘happy meals’ the topic of my next cooking class session.

Gluten Free Pasta with Artichokes, Chickpeas, Capers and Sun-Dried Tomatoes

4 lbs of your choice of gluten free pasta, cooked and drained

1 head of garlic, cooked per instructions in recipe below for kale (can of artichokes—these can be marinated or not)

1 can, or two cups, of chickpeas, rinsed and drained

1/4 t turmeric

1/4 C sun-dried tomatoes, chopped

Heat oil in a non stick skillet over medium high heat. Add all garlic and cook until one slice of garlic sizzles gently. I also make up this batter and keep it in the refrigerator. Then, at lunch I can just make up one or two pancakes and fill them with whatever leftover vegetables I may have or do a quick baby spinach saute to put on top.

Wishing you a Happy New Year!

Are you wondering what are the 12 foods happy people eat? I’m happy to share my 12 favorites with you:

1) Greens
2) nuts and seeds
3) blueberries and acai berries
4) raw cacao
5) Foods high in vitamin B: legumes, nuts, oats, wholegrain cereals, bananas and coconut milk, almond milk and mushrooms
6) fermented foods
7) healthy fats: avocado, coconut (and fish, of you eat fish)
8) bananas
9) Foods high in vitamin D (oily fish) coconut milk, almond milk and mushrooms
10) complex carbs: chickpeas, lentils, nuts, oats, wholegrain cereals, bananas and starchy vegetables
11) maca root and
12) spirulina

By Betsy Naselli

The Atlantic Chapter encourages you to move toward a plant-based diet to protect the environment, human health and wildlife, and to make better use of natural resources. To learn more and receive more recipes, contact the Biodiversity/Vegetarian Outreach Committee at LK592FAR@lablinknet.com, (315) 488-2140, 5631 Onondaga Rd., Syracuse, NY 13215-1403 or go to www.newyorksierraclub.org/conservation/biodiversity.

Recipes:

Crispy Rice Pancakes (adapted from Vegetarian Times magazine)

For the rice cakes:
1/4 C long grain rice soaked at least eight hours, or overnight, rinsed and drained
1/4 C mung beans, soaked at least eight hours, or overnight, rinsed and drained
1/4 C coconut milk
1/4 C sliced green onions (about one half a bunch)
1/4 t turmeric
oil for cooking
Rinse and drain soaked rice and blend in blender or food processor with one cup water until smooth. Transfer to large bowl and set aside.
Rinse and drain mung beans and blend in blender or food processor with one half cup water until no lumps remain. Stir mung bean mixture into rice mixture along with remaining ingredients.
Heat oil in a non stick skillet over medium high heat. Add about one third cup batter and cook until bottom is crispy. Top with sautéed kale and fold to form half moon. Cook pancake one to two minutes more per side.

For the kale:
1 head of garlic, cloves peeled and thinly sliced
1 T olive oil
1/4 C water
about 4-6 cups destemmed and coarsely chopped kale
1/2 t turmeric
Place oil in skillet large enough to hold all the kale. Heat the oil on medium heat until one slice of garlic sizzles gently. Add kale and turmeric and stir to wilt and cover to cook until tender.
I serve this with sriracha but you could use any hot sauce you like. Or not.

Crispy Rice Pancakes

1) Greens
2) nuts and seeds
3) blueberries and acai berries
4) raw cacao
5) Foods high in vitamin B: legumes, nuts, oats, wholegrain cereals, bananas and coconut milk, almond milk and mushrooms
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11) maca root and
12) spirulina

Betsy Naselli owns The Holistic Lifestyle Company in the Syracuse area. Contact her at bnaselli@tacnycrr.com or visit her on the web: www.youngliving.org/vids/wellagain, or go to www.us.nyrorganic.com/shop/betty
Locavore movement overlooks farmworkers

Locally-grown food from small farms, an alternative to food from "factory farms," has become, thankfully, popular across the U.S., including the area covered by the Atlantic Chapter of the Sierra Club. On Long Island, where I live, Suffolk County remains the top agri-cultural county in terms of value of annual produce in New York. But there's an issue. Charges a Long Island professor, not being ad-dressed the situation of farmworkers at these farms: "Food movement advocates and consumers, driven to forge alter-na-tives to industrial agriculture, have neglected the labor economy that underpins local food production," writes Margaret Gray in her just-published book, Labor and the Locavore (University of California Press). Thus, she calls to buy local pro-motes public health at the expense of protecting the well-being of the farmworkers who grow and harvest the much-coveted produce on re-gional farms.

When it comes to factory farms, the public hasn't "been reluctant to recognize the exploitation of workers. But now being "overlooked" is "the role of hired labor in smaller-scale agrifood production." "Small farms," she writes in her book, "like their factory farm coun-terparts, are largely staffed by non-citizens, immigrant workers." But "the prevailing mentality within the alter-native food movement has not ab-sorbed this reality."

"Food advocates and their organi-zations display a tendency," she goes on, "to confuse local agriculture with global sus-tainable, and fair as a comparison of virtues against the factory farm that they so vigorously demonize. Yet this equation discourages close scrutiny of the labor dynamics by which small farms maintain their opera-tions."

Dr. Gray is a professor of political science at Adelphi University in Gar-den City on Long Island. The situation for farmworkers has long been a scandal in the U.S. The great journalist, Edward R. Murrow, did one of his most important TV documentaries, "Harvest of Shame," about the plight of migrant farmworkers. Pointedly broadcast on Thanksgiving Day, 1961, it exposed the conditions for, as Murrow said, the "humans who harvest the food for the best-fed people in the world." Paid outrageously small sums, ex-ploited by crew leaders who re- cruited them, housed in awful dwell-ings, they constituted "workers in the sweat shops of the soil."

And critically, he stressed, laws that protected other workers specifically excluded farmworkers.

Migrant camps in New Jersey, in Suffolk County and in upstate New York were among those that featured prominently in "Harvest of Shame." Back then, most of the farmworkers in the New York portion of the Atlantic Coast "migrant stream" were black. "From World War II through the early 1970s, the vast majority were African Americans from the South," writes Dr. Gray.

"This was a labor market profile...uniformly evident, whether on Long Island potato fields, Hudson Valley fruit and vegetable farms, Wayne County's apple orchards, Western New York's bean fields, North Country dairy farms, or the Finger Lakes vineyards." Then, in the 1980s, "Latinos came to dominate the re-gional agricultural labor market."

In New York, farmworkers "are not entitled to a day of rest, they have no right to have a day off" and do not get overtime pay. Moreover, many of the laws on the books that do cover farmworkers are "poorly enforced.

Dr. Gray's book focuses especially on the Hudson Valley of New York. "The Hudson Valley, the fabled agricultural region that lies to the north of New York City, is a particu-larly opposite setting for examining the absence of worker justice within the alternative food movement, as well as the many obstacles that lie in the path of workers' inclusion in the new food ethic," she writes. This area's "cultural identity trades on the currency of agrarian values and epitomizes precisely those farming sectors that have benefited most from the economic stimulus prom- ised by the alternative and local food movements."

Dr. Gray's book was titled "Healthy Food, Unsustain-able Jobs! Farmworkers Fight for Their Rights."

As examples of the "basic laws that cover other American workers, she noted that in New York farmworkers "are not entitled to a day of rest, they have no right to have a day off" and do not get over-time pay. Moreover, many of the laws on the books that do cover farmworkers are "poorly enforced."

Dr. Gray distributed a fact sheet put together by the Worker Justice Center of New York (www.wjcnyc.org) providing details of "Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act" that has been considered by the New York State Legislature—but not passed.

It would establish an eight-hour workday for farmworkers, allow them overtime pay after eight hours of work, provide one day of rest each week, require they be paid the minimum wage and "prohibit child farmworkers from being paid a wage lower than the minimum wage," have "the right to organize and bargain collectively for the purpose of repre-senting and protecting their inter-ests," ensure their housing "meets basic standards under the Sanitation Code," be eligible for unemployment compensation "when laid off from work or terminated" and receive disability benefits.

As her book concludes: "Buy lo-cal!" Yes, "support local farms," she writes, but at the same time "build a food movement that incorporates workers. People, she says, should nicely explain to farmers your food ethic and how it demands fair labor standards to be observed."

Support Your Local Sierra Club

Your financial contribution means a lot to us. By supporting our Chapter, you support Sierra Club work in your own backyard. This makes you an essential part of our efforts to protect our wilderness and wildlife, to improve the quality of life in our cities, and to promote the enjoyment of nature. Thank you.

From WWII through the early 1970s, New York's agricultural labor pool was made up of predominately African Americans from the South. During the 1980s, that market profile shifted to Latinos.

SUNY/College at Old Westbury. It was titled Healthy Food. Unsustain-able Jobs! Farmworkers Fight for Their Rights."
Chapter fears precedent, will appeal Ravenswood decision

by Rachel Treichler

The court ruled that "The issuance of an initial permit is a ministerial act not subject to review under either SEQRA or the Waterfront Act."

The Sierra Club and Hudson River Fishermen's Association (HRFA) have filed notice of appeal to challenge the decision by a Queens County Supreme Court judge that the first permit issued pursuant to the 2011 expansion of New York's water withdrawal permitting laws was not subject to environmental review.

The decision is a disappointment to those who were looking to the new water permitting law to provide protections from indiscriminate usage of New York's water resources.

"The decision sets an unfortunate precedent for the handling of subsequent permit applications," said Roger Downs, conservation director of the Atlantic Chapter. "We don't want to let this decision stand. The Ravenswood application is the first of more than a thousand applications expected to be received by the DEC for water withdrawal permits under the new law. The total reported capacity of these users is many times New York's total freshwater usage, and the DEC is issuing permits based on reported withdrawals in many cases."

For the DEC to be allowed to pass on these permits with no scrutiny of their impacts on other users and the environment may have devastating consequences as we enter an era of increasing water supply uncertainty," said Gal Hawkins, president of HRFA, also a petitioner in the case.

"The impacts of the withdrawals must be considered and mitigation measures required before permits are granted," he said.

"We believe we have good grounds for appeal," said Irene Van Slyke, chair of the Sierra Club New York City Group's water withdrawal committee and the lead volunteer on the case.

The October decision by Justice Robert McDonald denied the Article 78 petition brought by the Chapter and HRFA. The petition asserted that issuance of a permit to Trans Canada Ravenswood to take up to 1.5 billion gallons of water per day from the East River for operation of its Ravenswood power plant was invalid because the DEC had failed to conduct the required reviews of adverse impacts, as required by SEQRA and state and New York City waterfront laws.

The Ravenswood permit was the first issued to a non-public user under the 2011 Water Resources Protection Act and the implementing regulations adopted in 2015. The petitioners were represented by attorneys Richard Lippes, Gary Abraham, Rachel Treichler and Jonathan Geballe.

The court did not accept petitioners' claims. "The issuance of an initial permit is a ministerial act not subject to review under either SEQRA or the Waterfront Act," the opinion stated. "While ECL ß15-1501(9) does state that DEC 'shall issue an initial permit, subject to appropriate terms and conditions as required under this article,' the statute does not give the agency the type and breadth of discretion which would allow permit grant or denial to be based on environmental concerns detailed in an EIS."

Rather, the court said, "The statute left DEC with only one course of action regarding Ravenswood—the issuance of a permit allowing the facility to withdraw water from the East River at existing volumes."

Whatever information DEC could have obtained from conducting an environmental review, the court said, "could not have affected its decision to issue or deny an initial permit to TC Ravenswood. . . . The DEC had to issue the initial permit to TC Ravenswood on the basis of statutory specifications regardless of environmental concerns."

The petitioners had argued that even though DEC was required to issue a permit for Ravenswood's required capacity it was mandated by the new law to exercise discretion in setting permit conditions to ensure that withdrawals "will result in no significant individual or cumulative adverse impacts on the quantity or quality of the water source and water-dependent natural resources," and will incorporate "environmentally sound and economically feasible water conservation measures." ECL 815-1503.2 (f) and (g). It appeared to the petitioners that the DEC was mandated to conduct under the 2011 permitting law would have been substantially aided by an environmental review.

Closed-cycle cooling was one of the water conservation measures the petitioners claimed DEC should have considered in setting the conditions for the Ravenswood permit.

The court said that "The [water withdrawal permitting] statute does not vest DEC with the discretion to, in effect, compel TC Ravenswood to switch to a closed-cycle cooling system using lower water volumes because of information contained in an EIS."

However, the decision did not explain why the water conservation requirements of ECL 815-1503.2 (g) do not give exactly this discretion.

Nor did the court explain why the statutory mandate to issue water withdrawal permits to existing users in ECL 815-1501(9) precludes environmental review, while a similar statutory mandate contained in ECL ß 23-0503 (requiring the issuance of a gas drilling permit if the proposed spacing unit conforms to statewide spacing requirements) does allow environmental review.

The petition also claimed that the court's judgment was based on a failure to meet the water conservation requirements of the 2011 law and that DEC's failure to impose permit conditions to protect aquatic life in the East River violated the agency's public trust obligations. These claims were not addressed by the court.

A separate ruling by Justice McDonald granted Ravenswood's motion to dismiss and for summary judgment. The decisions are posted on the Atlantic Chapter website.

Attending the indoor rally against fracing and for renewable energy at Gov. Cuomo's State of the State address

Wednesday January 7

Empire State Plaza
Albany (indoors)

What you can do

To make a donation to support the Chapter's efforts in this case, please send a check payable to "The Sierra Club Foundation." Write on the memo line: "Atlantic Chapter: FC0241."

Please include a note with the check indicating your donation should be earmarked to help with the Ravenswood lawsuit. Send your contribution to Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter P0 Box 38225 Albany, NY 12203.

If you’d like to donate via credit card, please call Caitlin Pixley at the Chapter’s Albany office: 518-426-9144.