

# Sierra Atlantic

The Atlantic Chapter of the Sierra Club — Serving New York State

Volume 42 Winter 2016

## Showdown near in D.C.

# Release of text confirms TPP fears

We are now entering a critical stage of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) fight. President Obama is planning to sign the trade deal in early 2016, after which Congress will be able to vote on this dangerous trade pact.

Hundreds of Sierra Club chapters and volunteers have been working with labor, environment, and human rights allies to educate their communities about the TPP and convince members of Congress to oppose the deal. If you have not been engaged yet, this is *the* time to join.

Based on our initial analysis of the TPP text, the Sierra Club confirms that the TPP would not only fail to protect our environment, but would threaten our air, water, and climate.

### Multilateral rollbacks

The TPP actually takes a step back from the environmental protections of all U.S. free trade agreements (FTAs) since 2007 with respect to multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). Past deals have required each of our FTA partners to “adopt, maintain, and implement

laws, regulations, and all other measures to fulfill its obligations under” seven core MEAs. The TPP, however, only requires countries in the pact to “adopt, maintain, and implement” domestic policies to fulfill *one* of the seven core MEAs — the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This regression violates:

■ The bipartisan “May 2007” agreement between then-President George W. Bush and congressional Democrats;

■ The minimum degree of environmental protection required under the Bipartisan Congressional Trade Priorities and Accountability Act of 2015, also known as “fast track;” and

■ The minimum obligation needed to deter countries from violating their critical commitments in environmental treaties in order to boost trade or investment.

### Weak conservation rules

While the range of conservation issues mentioned in the TPP may be wide, the obligations are generally

very shallow. Vague obligations combined with weak enforcement, as described below, may allow countries to continue with business-as-usual practices.

■ Illegal trade in flora and fauna: Rather than prohibiting trade in illegally taken timber and wildlife — major issues in TPP countries like Peru and Vietnam — the TPP only asks countries “to combat” such

trade. To comply, the text requires only weak measures, such as “exchanging information and experiences,” while stronger measures like sanctions are merely listed as options.

■ Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing: Rather than *obligating* countries to abide by trade-related provisions of regional fishery management organizations (RFMOs) that could help prevent illegally caught fish from entering international trade, the TPP merely calls on countries to “endeavor not to undermine” RFMO trade documentation — a non-binding provision that could facilitate increased trade in IUU fish.

■ Shark finning and commercial whaling: Rather than banning commercial whaling and shark fin trade in, for example, Japan and Singapore, the TPP includes a non-binding list of suggested measures that countries “should” take.

### Climate change omission

Despite the fact that trade can significantly increase climate-disrupting emissions by spurring increased

*continued on page 3*

## What you can do

Please *call* these New York House members and urge them to vote against the TPP:

**Peter King** (Nassau & Suffolk)  
516-541-4225

**Kathleen Rice** (Nassau)  
516-739-3008

**Gregory Meeks** (Queens)  
718-725-6000

**Elise Stefanik** (North of Albany)  
518-743-0984

**Richard Hanna** (Southern Tier East)  
607-723-0212

**Tom Reed** (Southern Tier West)  
607-222-2027

# Paris climate pact is weak scientifically, but politically significant

by Moisha Blechman

There is good news from the Paris COP21. Most of the nations of the world, 196 of them, agreed to override their many differences and sign the Paris Climate Agreement of December 2015. That fact alone is a significant turning point. It merits the euphoria many people feel.

This is not the same as the scientific consensus that we have had for years. The agreement is political. It puts climate deniers out of business. Climate denial has made the American public the most oblivious to climate change of any nation in the world. The revelation that Exxon Mobil has spent millions on climate deception for almost 40 years should help create a new understanding in the U.S.; there should be no debate about climate change and its consequences.

The next piece of good news is that this accord is a triumph of public demonstration. The governments on their own would never have done it without a public outcry. The governments admit it, and the lesson has been learned. We have seen that demonstrations can create a political atmosphere that is irresistible. I marvel at the taste and creativity of the demonstra-

tions in Paris in spite of the terrorist attack. They turned the focus away from terrorism to climate justice. This is the most moving part of COP21.

At the Copenhagen conference in 2009, the guidepost for understanding climate change was changed to a temperature goal, 2°C, rather than parts per million of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. The substitution deflected focus from the seriousness of our polluted atmosphere. For six years the IPCC sang the 2°C tune without adjustment, as negative climate impacts became impossible to ignore.

The new Climate Agreement does contain an adjustment. It now says that the world must hold temperature well below 2°C and limit temperature increase to 1.5°C. We are now at slightly less than 1°C.

A New York Times report, “Key Points of the Paris Climate Pact,” says that it is the beginning of a universal intention to limit global warming. That is an important point. Just as the agreement is weak and contains loopholes, its very plasticity leaves room for negotiation. This is where public demonstrations can, and I believe will, demand continual improvement.

The pact requires the 196 nations of the world to meet every five years to strengthen their commitments. The pact does say that the 196 nations need to accelerate the transi-

tion away from fossil fuels and toward 100% renewable and non-polluting energy. Every four years, nations meet to discuss climate change in preparation for the five-year conference. As Mae Boeve of 350.org says, “Pressure from people will close the gap between what was signed and the action we need.”

Mae Boeve is referring to the fact that the agreement will not deliver a livable climate. That’s the bad news, and many activists are upset. As she says, “The deal represents important progress, but progress is not our goal. Our goal is a just and livable planet.” James Hansen is also very upset,

calling the climate agreement a “fraud.” This is understandable. Hansen is a scientist, and the very basis of the negotiation, which discusses temperature and not the CO<sub>2</sub> content of the atmosphere, is a false platform on which to create an agreement.

The public should be aware that the creators of the document are politicians, not scientists, and it is the politicians who are making the decisions. But something, and something real, has been accomplished.

*Moisha Blechman chairs the Chapter’s Climate Crisis Committee.*

## Frack ban would make target easier to hit

The world—and the U.S. in particular—has one possible trick up its sleeve to help keep the 1.5°C target in reach, but it would mean banning shale gas, said Robert Howarth, a professor at Cornell University who has done some of the most cutting-edge research on fracking.

Shale gas is composed largely of methane, a greenhouse gas that has escaped notice in the official proceedings at the Paris summit, where the focus is overwhelmingly on carbon dioxide. But methane is actually a much more powerful trapper of heat than is carbon dioxide over the short term.

“If we continue methane production at current rates, the world will run up against the 1.5° limit in 12 to 15 years,” Howarth said. “If we stop producing methane, which means stop doing fracking of natural gas and oil, the world wouldn’t run up against that limit for about 50 years.”

“So we could buy ourselves 25 to 35 years of time, which is critical. That could allow us to improve our political and socioeconomic responses to climate change and de-carbonize our societies accordingly. But if we’re serious about a 1.5° target, or even the 2° target, we can’t keep on fracking.”

*Source: The Nation*





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SIERRA ATLANTIC MISSION *The mission of the Sierra Atlantic is to educate and enlist the people of New York state to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment. We will do this by providing information about important environmental issues; sounding an alarm when the environment is threatened; reporting on the activities, outings and campaigns conducted by the Atlantic Chapter; celebrating nature; and inviting our readers to join us.*

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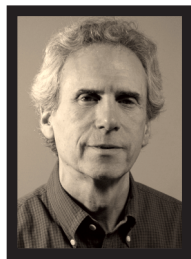
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## DEADLINE —

### SPRING ISSUE

Feb. 15—Final copy and camera-ready ads due

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## Message from the Chair

by Carl Arnold

## String of triumphs no reason to stop pressing ahead

**A**t the time of this writing, it's been a rather extraordinary week.

- Obama nixed the Keystone XL pipeline.
- Cuomo vetoed the Port Ambrose LNG project, upping the ante from his December 17 frack drilling prohibition. (See page 4.)
- The New York Department of State refused Entergy the certificate required for future use of the Hudson River for Indian Point.
- NYS Attorney General Eric Schneiderman is suing Exxon for its records to explain its deep well of deception since the late '70s.

• On the West Coast, the Portland, Oregon, City Council just passed a resolution — unanimously — opposing all new fossil fuel infrastructure.

Of course, the issues the Chapter continues to work on are vital, such as water, natural gas pipelines, and bomb trains — and all their accompanying infrastructure.

What we all must remember,

however, is a looming threat that could jeopardize everything we do. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) will be voted on in Congress, possibly in January. The documents from years of secret negotiations have finally been made public. (See page 1.) While there are many sources that describe the details of how bad it is, for me one area stands out: any dispute under TPP will be adjudicated by a secret tribunal. A law passed by a national legislature can be overturned if deemed to diminish the plaintiff's profits.

This has already happened under NAFTA. The TPP accentuates this nakedly corporate control, as will the TTIP (Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) and TAFTA (Trans-Atlantic Free Trade Agreement).

Which means that any law regarding health, labor, the environment — passed by Congress, the Japanese National Diet, various parliaments — will be out of our hands. It is nothing less than a direct assault on democracy.

Which means that our attention must focus on our representatives in Congress to defeat this monstrous power grab. For more on the Club's position, see what Ilana Solomon, director of the Club's Responsible Trade Program, has said. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ilana-solomon/>

Our movement must rise to another level of energy and commitment in the coming months. As Bill McKibben says at *Op-ed News.com*, "Don't expect President Obama (or President Clinton) to be out in the lead, and don't expect Congress to do a damn thing [unless we push them]... The job of movements is to keep brewing up the gale-force winds that shifted our political landscape last week — and to hope we can do it before hurricane-force winds, drought, flood and sea level rise shift our landscape."

The title of his article says it: **We Must Keep Brewing Gale-Force Winds to Shift the Political Landscape.** Our survival depends on it.

## The mighty American Chestnut

## Tree research and survival viable without genetic engineering

by Laurel Hopwood and Erin Riddle

**C**hestnut trees, which have been bountiful along the East Coast, are being devastated by blight fungus. In the fall edition of the Sierra Atlantic, an article ("The mighty American Chestnut: New York conservationists lead epic tree restoration effort") discussed both traditional and biotechnology efforts to save these majestic trees.

Unfortunately, the article could have given the impression that the Sierra Club approves the release of genetically engineered organisms into the environment. According to Sierra Club's policy, "Based on the precautionary principle, the Sierra Club calls for a ban on the propagation and release of all genetically engineered organisms, including field crops, orchard and forest trees."

Genetic engineering (GE) is a new technology that, unlike traditional breeding methods, allows the transfer of genetic material from one organism into a host organism of an unrelated species, thus bypassing the natural reproductive barriers between species. The genetic manipulation resulting from genes inserted by genetic engineering cannot be recalled and the altered characteristics will be passed on to future generations and continue to be reproduced in the environment.

A May 30, 2015 article in the *New Scientist* reveals that the first GE chestnut was planted in 2006, and there are now over 1,000 GE chestnut trees growing at various test plots in New York. Charles Maynard,

**You cannot design a biological system that's 100 percent foolproof, say geneticists critical of bioengineered chestnut trees. Sierra Club favors only natural breeding to resist devastating blight.**

of the State University of New York, stated, "We hope to obtain regulatory approval for trees to be grown outside permitted plots within three to five years."

In the documentary *A Silent Forest: The Growing Threat, Genetically Engineered Trees*, award-winning geneticist Dr. David Suzuki discussed how GE trees may adversely impact ecological systems. As Dr. Suzuki explains, the problem with genetic engineering has to do with the fact that GE plants and animals are created using horizontal gene transfer, as contrasted with vertical gene transfer, which is the mechanism in natural reproduction. Vertical gene transfer is the transmission of genes from the parent generation to offspring via sexual or asexual reproduction. By contrast, horizontal gene transfer involves injecting a gene from one species into a completely different species, which yields unexpected results. According to Dr. Suzuki, the assumption that the principles of vertical inheritance can be

applied to horizontal inheritance is flawed and is "just lousy science."

"Forests are already under tremendous pressure from climate change and human interaction," says Dr. Ricarda Steinbrecher, who has a PhD in molecular genetics. "Compared to crops that have been cultivated for thousands of years, trees are wild. If a GE trait enters a forest species, the implications could be absolutely horrendous. We could see the ecological system weaken and collapse."

According to Dr. Steinbrecher, "You cannot design a biological system that's 100 percent foolproof." Data backs her up. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, even at a 95 percent success rate, it is nearly impossible to control gene flow through pollen and seed dispersal.

The good news is that the American chestnut still exists throughout the forests of the Eastern U.S. Many of the trees that were killed off by the blight resprouted from the stumps. Many of these have survived to the point where they are producing chestnuts that are being harvested by people and feeding wildlife. There is also active work being undertaken to identify and breed naturally resistant wild American chestnut trees. The Sierra Club approves and encourages these non-GE methods being used to bring back the chestnut.

*Laurel Hopwood (lhopwood@roadrunner.com) chairs the national Club's Genetic Engineering Action Team. Erin Riddle (riddleriddle@gmail.com), is vice chair of the Atlantic Chapter.*



# Unneeded Fitzpatrick nuke plant should be closed with a just transition

by Linda DeStefano

My husband and I raised our cups (only filled with hot tea!) in celebration when we heard Entergy announce that it will close the FitzPatrick nuclear power plant in upstate Oswego County by the end of 2016 or beginning of 2017. But our joy was shaken when Gov. Andrew Cuomo and U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer responded with strong words of support for keeping FitzPatrick running and said they would do everything in their power to re-open negotiations and convince Entergy to change its decision. Keeping FitzPatrick open is a bad idea for the people who live in Oswego County as well as those of us (humans and other beings) who live in other parts of upstate New York,

as a catastrophic accident or terrorist attack would contaminate a wide area with long-lasting radiation. FitzPatrick has the same containment vessel design as the reactors that melted down in Fukushima, Japan, causing the death of some and forcing others to flee. These people will never be able to return to their homes because of the long-lasting radiation. The natural disaster that caused the battery system to fail and a subsequent meltdown at Fukushima could be repeated in Oswego if there were a severe ice storm. Further, FitzPatrick is the only reactor of its design that did not follow the recommendation of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to install a hardened vent. Instead, the owners of FitzPatrick came up with a jerryrigged system

that endangers workers there even more. In the case of a meltdown and the failure of the containment vessel, radiation would be vented through another building and then out into the air at ground level. A member of the team conducting the research, Joji Otaki, said on Aug. 15, 2012, that his group’s findings show radiation emitted following catastrophic meltdowns in three of the plant’s reactors is affecting the environment after the reactors were damaged by a 9.0-magnitude earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011. The Alliance for a Green Economy (AGREE) and the Nuclear Information and Resource Service (NIRS) recently released a white paper, “Replacing FitzPatrick: How the Closure of a Nuclear Reactor Can Reduce Greenhouse Gases and Radioactive Waste, While Creating Jobs and Supporting the Local Community.” The authors concluded:

- FitzPatrick’s full electricity generation could be replaced with energy efficiency and wind at less than the current cost of electricity from the nuclear plant.
- Diverting all of FitzPatrick’s revenue to clean energy could result in additional reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, equivalent to a 264 MW coal plant or 330 MW combined cycle natural gas plant.
- Replacing FitzPatrick with efficiency and wind could create more than twice the number of jobs currently provided by Entergy at FitzPatrick.
- Municipalities and workers af-

## What you can do

Contact Gov. Cuomo and Sen. Schumer to say that you want them to let FitzPatrick close and to use their good offices to pour greater resources into safe jobs for Oswego County, such as retrofitting buildings for energy efficiency and installing solar panels. Subsidizing the tax base in Oswego County during a transition would also help the community. Reach Gov. Cuomo at (518) 474-8390. Press #2 to leave a recorded message. Or press #3 to leave your message with a person. Reach Sen. Schumer at (202) 224-6542. For those who are represented by Congressman John Katko (who has joined the chorus of politicians trying to keep FitzPatrick open), call him at (315) 423-5657.

## TPP fears confirmed

continued from page 1 shipping, consumption, and fossil fuel exports, the TPP text fails to even mention the words “climate change” or the UN’s Framework Convention on Climate Change — the treaty that all TPP countries are party to.

### Lack of enforcement

Even if the TPP’s conservation terms included more specific obligations and fewer vague exhortations, there is little evidence they would be enforced. The U.S. has never once brought a trade case against another country for failing to live up to its environmental commitments in trade agreements — even amid documented evidence of countries violating those commitments. For example, the U.S.-Peru FTA, passed in 2007, included a forestry annex that not only required Peru “to combat trade associated with illegal logging,” but included eight pages of specific reforms that Peru had to take to fulfill this requirement. The obligations were far more detailed than any found in the TPP environment chapter, and were subject to the same enforcement mechanism.

But after more than six years of the U.S.-Peru trade deal, widespread illegal logging remains unchecked in Peru’s Amazon rain forest. In a 2014 investigation, Peru’s own government found that 78 percent of wood slated for export was harvested illegally. For years, U.S. environmental groups have asked the U.S. government to use the FTA to counter Peru’s extensive illegal logging. Yet to date, Peru has faced no formal challenges, much less penalties, for violating its trade pact obligations. It is hard to imagine that the TPP’s weaker provisions would be more successful. **New rights for fossil fuel corporations** The TPP would undermine efforts to combat the climate crisis, empowering foreign fossil fuel corporations

to challenge our environmental and climate safeguards in unaccountable trade tribunals via the controversial investor-state dispute settlement system. ■ The TPP’s extraordinary rights for foreign corporations virtually replicate those in past pacts that have enabled more than 600 foreign investor challenges to the policies of more than 100 governments, including a moratorium on fracking in Quebec, a nuclear energy phase-out in Germany, and an environmental panel’s decision to reject a mining project in Nova Scotia. ■ In one fell swoop, the TPP would roughly double the number of firms that could use this system to challenge U.S. policies. Foreign investor privileges would be newly extended to more than 9,000 firms in the U.S. That includes, for example, subsidiaries of BHP Billiton, one of the world’s largest mining companies, whose U.S. investments range from coal mines in New Mexico to offshore oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico to fracking in Texas.

### Locking in natural gas exports and fracking

The TPP’s provisions regarding natural gas would require the U.S. Department of Energy to automatically approve all exports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to all TPP countries—including Japan, the world’s largest LNG importer. This would: ■ Facilitate increased fracking. Increased natural gas production would mean more air and water pollution, health risks, and earthquakes. ■ Exacerbate climate change. LNG is a carbon-intensive fuel with significantly higher life-cycle greenhouse gas emissions than natural gas. ■ Increase dependence on fossil fuel infrastructure. LNG export requires a large new fossil fuel infrastructure, including a network of natural gas wells, terminals, liquefaction plants, pipelines, and compressors that help lock in climate-disrupting fossil fuel production. *Source: national Sierra Club*

ected by FitzPatrick’s closure could be supported through the economic transition for a lower cost than subsidizing FitzPatrick, if the state proactively negotiates with Entergy for a responsible and immediate decommissioning. For more information, visit [www.allianceforagreeneconomy.org/replacing\\_fitzpatrick.pdf](http://www.allianceforagreeneconomy.org/replacing_fitzpatrick.pdf) Also, <http://beyondfitzpatrick.org/> Linda DeStefano, a member of the Iroquois Group, represents the Atlantic Chapter in the AGREE coalition.

## Support Chapter’s work in NYS

We need your help to fight fracking infrastructure, 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.

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# Two victories in gas infrastructure battle

## Chapter beats Shell, stops Painted Post sale of water for fracking

by Hal Smith

Following more than three years of litigation, a state appellate court has decided in favor of the Sierra Club and other petitioners in the Chapter's suit challenging the decision of the Village of Painted Post to sell up to 1.5 million gallons of municipal water per day to a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell to frack gas wells in Pennsylvania.

In the last two months, two state courts have issued two decisions that could have sweeping repercussions in upstate communities that are selling, or may want to sell, municipal water.

First, on November 19, the Court of Appeals, the state's highest court, overruled a lower court, the Appellate Division (Fourth Department), which had decided that the Sierra Club and its fellow petitioners (other environmental groups and individuals) had no legal standing to sue Painted Post over violations of the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA).

The decision is precedent-setting on the issue of standing to sue under SEQRA — a legal concept that shelters many development projects from scrutiny. For more than 20 years, the Court of Appeals has ruled that only those who suffer *special harm* from a project are eligible to sue and force an environmental review. Persons who cannot show “a direct harm or injury that is in some way different from that of the public at large” are barred from going to court.

In this case, the Court of Appeals clarified that the injury suffered by a petitioner, while having to be differ-

**Highest state court rules favorably on “standing”; lower court then unanimously blocks village’s attempt to avoid full SEQRA review.**

ent from the public at large, does not have to be unique, and the fact that other people suffer the same or similar injury does not preclude standing, explained Sierran and attorney Richard Lippes of Buffalo.

The Court of Appeals’ favorable decision on standing sent the case back to the Appellate Division to decide whether a SEQRA violation had occurred.

On New Year’s Eve, the Appellate Division issued its decision, unanimously affirming the decision of the original trial court judge, Supreme Court Justice Kenneth Fisher. In March 2013, the trial court ruled that Painted Post’s bulk water sale was not exempt from review under SEQRA. Judge Fisher determined that the surplus property exemption claimed by the village does not apply to bulk water sales, stating “[A] large volume daily withdrawal of a resource vital to the wellbeing of our state is not a mere surplus sale of Village property akin to selling a bus or fire engine no longer needed by the Village.”

Consequently, Judge Fisher invali-

dated the bulk water sale agreement and issued an injunction against further water sales.

The Court of Appeals decision awards costs to the petitioners — Sierra Club, People for a Healthy Environment, Inc., Coalition to Protect New York, and five local residents.

Painted Post may still sell water if it does a proper SEQRA review, said Treichler, who provided her services pro bono. “Our next step is to get involved in that review and get the village or DEC, depending on which is acting as lead agency, to consider how heavy withdrawals from one well in the aquifer impact all the water users in the aquifer. Since Painted Post’s municipal wells are at the deepest part of the aquifer, others will experience impacts from Painted Post’s excessive use before the village does.”

Painted Post draws its water from a shallow, rain-dependent aquifer that it shares with several communities, including the Town of Corning. The Corning aquifer is one of the state’s 18 primary aquifers and it is the only one of those 18 that is “potentially approaching or has exceeded the sustainable limit” of the resource, according to the Susquehanna River Basin Commission.

Since the aquifer is rain-dependent, there is some concern that it could not withstand periods of drought resulting from growing climate instability.

“The amicus brief filed by the New York Council of Mayors in the case asks the Appellate Division to consider that it will be very costly and burdensome for New York municipalities to do SEQRA reviews

before they enter into bulk water sales,” Treichler said. “This position strongly suggests that many municipalities are currently entering into bulk water sales without conducting SEQRA reviews.

“We encourage Sierrans across the state to check if their local municipalities are engaging in bulk water sales and to make sure that any new sales are made with SEQRA reviews.

“We also invite people to join the Chapter’s new water listserve to share ideas about water issues.” Sierrans who want to subscribe should contact Caitlin Pixley (caitlin.pixley@sierraclub.org).

## Cuomo blocks Port Ambrose LNG terminal

by Ann Aurelio

After approximately three years of petitions, phone calls, rallies, and hearings, Gov. Cuomo took center stage in Long Beach on November 12, when he rejected the proposed Port Ambrose liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal.

Had this offshore terminal been built it would have been sited near the shipping lanes of New York harbor. It would have interfered with proposals for a wind farm project. Recently, the director of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management stated that New York offshore wind projects are a top priority for the Obama Administration.

The terminal’s purpose was to import LNG through a series of pipelines that would have been submerged in the waters off the coast of Long Beach. Since the Southern Tier of the state is potentially rich in natural gas, it was feared that high-volume fracking would feed this facility, ostensibly an import terminal, and transform it into an export hub that

**After three years of opposition, Long Island is spared from a risky offshore facility exposed to storms, terrorism, and accidents near a major shipping lane. Instead, the site may be viable for offshore wind.**

would encourage fracking and possibly turn much of the Southern Tier into a natural gas field.

The governor’s veto of the Port Ambrose project means that the state will not be exposed to new sources of fugitive gas escaping into the air. LNG is not only highly flammable; it is a source of potent greenhouse gases in the form of methane.

Residents were also concerned that in cases of severe storms, such as Super Storm Sandy, the terminal

was at risk of being damaged. It also could have been a target for terrorism. Economically, it would have only added six permanent jobs for New York, but a wind project in the area could offer many more jobs permanently.

Governor Cuomo’s rejection follows a series of actions taken to protect New York’s environment and lessen its dependence on fossil fuels, including a fracking ban, a commitment to achieve a 40% carbon emission reduction statewide by 2030 and 80% by 2050, and a pledge to source 50% of New York’s energy from renewables by 2030.

“We applaud Governor Cuomo’s decision to put the health of families in New York and the region before the demands of big polluters,” said Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune. “Permitting the construction of natural gas infrastructure would only further the devastating effects natural gas has had on our climate.”

Ann I. Aurelio is vice chair of the Chapter’s Long Island Group.



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### All Creatures Great and Small



“Every good thing, great and small, needs defense”

- John Muir

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# Albany Update



by Roger Downs, Chapter Conservation Program Manager

## Clean-energy economy requires diverse political movement

Change is difficult. Even when we know it will lead to something better, we always seem to resist the transition.

With the criminal convictions of former Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos, change in how the 2016 legislative session is managed seems inevitable as lawmakers brace for who will be next in the cross hairs of U.S.Attorney Preet Bharara.

The removal of high-ranking figureheads to date has not been enough to inspire action on real political reform, but it may momentarily weaken the stranglehold special interests have on the legislature. In Albany’s current pay-to-play culture it is generally assumed every transaction is being watched, every conversation wiretapped. Will the added scrutiny make 2016 a year for doing the people’s business or produce a do-nothing legislature crippled by fear?

So far we have seen some promising signs that change, no matter how difficult, is coming.

On the environmental front, the governor’s first year of his second term in office has been something of a political rebirth — starting with the bold banning of fracking, the revolutionary Revising the Energy Vision (REV) process, and a public declaration to make New York a global leader on climate — by mandating that at least half of our energy comes from renewable sources by 2030.

This commitment is backed by billions of dollars of potential state investment in solar, wind and efficiency programs that, coupled with proper market signals and a smart transmission grid, could positively transform New York’s economy and

For too long, the environmental community has ignored the connection between the exploitation of nature and the subjugation of people, and we have much to gain by tackling both.

combat climate change.

But Cuomo’s rebranding as a climate champion has inconveniently strained his administration’s obsession with retaining jobs in western New York — many of which are steeped in uneconomic coal and nuclear plants that are failing and looking to close.

While retiring the state’s four remaining coal plants (Dunkirk, Cayuga, Huntley, and Somerset) would immediately remove 13 percent of carbon emissions from the state’s electric sector, it would also remove their central financial contributions to local tax bases — hurting employment, gutting school funding and other ancillary benefits. These have sustained small upstate communities for years.

While a diminished demand for electricity and a glut of cheap natural gas have made these dirty plants uneconomic, the Cuomo administration, through the Public Service Commission, has provided bailouts to these plants, on the backs of ratepayers, for hundreds of millions of dollars. These bailouts have proved to be a clumsy, expensive way to prop up community tax bases and job retention.

The governor is fully aware that he cannot reach his greenhouse gas emission cuts alone through renewable energy development without phasing out coal, oil, and gas. Yet the inevitable transition will be difficult without the apparent political fallout that comes with hurting labor and local economies.

It is abundantly clear that the entire reconstruction of New York’s energy grid, efficiency retrofits, and the manufacturing of solar panels, wind turbines, and smart grid hubs will create tens of thousands of new jobs. But the timing and ramp-up of the workforce is still uncertain. What is needed is political leadership and outside funding to help workers and float community tax bases during this transition.

Cuomo’s conflict with the socioeconomics of phasing out fossil fuels in pursuit of carbon neutral alternatives is not uniquely his own conundrum. The Sierra Club and the larger environmental community have also struggled with building support for this transition — and we have often been callously unconcerned with the plight of workers and environmental justice communities in our own pursuit of greenhouse gas reductions. The marginal gains we have made in combating climate change have often disproportionately benefited more privileged New Yorkers.

But as the severity of climate change has accelerated and the chasm of financial inequity has widened, we have also seen the climate movement crack open and envelope a much wider spectrum of participation. NY Renews, an exciting new coalition of labor, faith and environmental justice groups, is forming and poised to pound the halls of Albany, demanding real action on climate — and the kind of just transition to a renewable energy economy that restores prosperity and dignity to workers and their families.

The idea is that we can address both the climate crisis and the inequality crisis with the same set of policies. As the impacts of climate change mount, the crises of inequality and democracy will continue to grow as well.

The Sierra Club is proud to be a part of this coalition that includes and is excited by the possibilities of what such a broad coalition can accomplish. In the coming legislative session we will be demanding a climate mandate codified in statute, ensuring that the existing resources and revenue streams are intentionally targeted and allocated toward vulnerable, impacted, historically disadvantaged, and front line communities. But existing resources will not be enough. To move as rapidly as possible, we need new revenue and a broad vision to support a game-

changing transition. Our platform is as follows:

■ New York State commits to climate sustainability with a binding goal of 80% emission reductions by 2050 and sets a path toward 100% clean renewable energy, with an interim goal of a 40% cut in climate pollution by 2030 and 50% renewable energy by 2030. This mandate will be implemented across all aspects of state government with an environmental/climate equity screen to identify impacted and disadvantaged communities that ensures the development of community benefits and good jobs.

■ A legal requirement is created to equitably disburse 40% of funds collected pursuant to an order of the PSC or from NYSERDA into environmental justice and low-income communities. Such environmental justice “filters” will facilitate the transition to a new clean energy economy that is supportive of localized economies, healthy environments, community well-being, and local control of resources.

■ Local jobs in clean energy are created and workers impacted by the current transition are protected through public investment, renewable energy retraining programs, mandated job standards and targeted local hiring commitments.

Schools and communities are compensated for short-term local tax revenue losses where the energy industry is in transition.

■ New York allocates substantial funding beyond what’s currently projected to create a worker and community-centered transition to a 100% clean, non-extractive economy through projects in energy efficiency, renewable energy, energy transmission, transportation (including public transit and zero-emission vehicles), telecommunications, agriculture, and other infrastructure. To pay for these programs, a climate pollution penalty — a price on greenhouse gas pollution and other co-pollutants — is created that would increase each year.

The platform is ambitious, but certainly not as daunting as the challenges climate change has placed before every New Yorker.

The Sierra Club sees value in the NY Renews campaign far beyond just the components of the legislation. What we are building is a political movement — one that is diverse, resilient and powerful. For too long the environmental community has ignored the connection between the exploitation of nature and the subjugation of people, and we have much to gain by tackling both.

Please join us in pushing for this transition to a just and equitable clean energy economy in New York. We could all use the change.

### Farewell to our editors

This will be the last issue of The Sierra Atlantic edited and produced by Hal Smith and Dorinda White. Due to health issues, Hal has decided to cut down on his professional responsibilities.

We extend our best wishes and immense gratitude for all that they have done to make the Sierra Atlantic a joy to read, inspire, and inform.

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## *The Pope's Encyclical Revisited*

# From consumerism to voluntary simplicity: can we make a profound cultural change?

by Joseph Bonasia

Pope Francis's encyclical about the environment is more than a call for policymakers to take significant action on climate change. To think otherwise is to diminish its meaning and significance.

The Pope does indeed address climate change, taking nations to task for having thus far mustered so weak a response to this issue, but his primary concern is with the root cause of the environmental crisis: our consumer culture, a culture that at once severely compromises the quality of life of individuals and the health of the planet.

Lesser actions — a few laws here or a new policy there — although laudable in their intent and certainly steps in the right direction, will not provide sufficient and lasting change. The Pope calls for nothing less than what is needed: a “cultural revolution,” a dramatic change in lifestyle based upon values and attitudes other than those of a psychologically and spiritually corrosive consumer culture, and this change must begin with the individual.

“The ecological crisis,” the Pope writes, is a “summons to profound interior conversion.”

Real life illustrates the Pope's point.

“What's your favorite pastime?” I once asked two students. “Shopping! It's all about the money!” the first young lady replied. The other quickly added, “I even have shopping strategies. Sometimes I focus on socks, other times I focus on shirts and hoodies. Most of the time, I focus on jeans. I have over 35 pairs of jeans.”

Do these remarks disturb you?

It takes about 1,500 gallons of water to grow the cotton needed for *one* pair of jeans. It takes another 1,360 gallons to dye and finish the jeans, and 1,500 gallons more to launder them after being purchased and worn.

Furthermore, cotton is one of the most pesticide-laden crops grown: two-thirds of a pound per pair of jeans. Cotton also requires herbicides and synthetic fertilizers harmful to soil and water. Stonewashed jeans are washed using pumice stones that had to be mined with large equipment that burns oil and gas, and spews greenhouse gases into the air.

Much of the stone and the cotton gets shipped — lots of greenhouse gases — to China, because China doesn't have the environmental protection laws we do, so they can dye the cotton with synthetic indigo made from coal or oil and then send the dirty water into rivers, which discolors the water and kills the river

by depleting the water of its oxygen. Then, of course, the jeans have to be shipped to stores and we drive our cars to and from the mall — in both cases involving more burning of fossil fuels, more greenhouse gases. Long before they wear out, these jeans end up in landfills or incinerators.

It is not surprising if the negative impact of jeans upon the planet isn't what you found disturbing in these ladies' remarks. The environmental

of ecological disaster, it isn't true.

My mother is 89 years old and in poor health. Last year, on Christmas Eve, she refused to go to the hospital as instructed by her doctor. “This could be my last Christmas with my family!” she argued and declared she wasn't stepping foot out of her house, where everyone would be gathering.

Later, when she was saying grace over dinner, she suddenly began crying. For 63 years it had been my father who had been the one to say grace, and he had died just two short years earlier. My mother misses my father every day, still. That's why she was crying, and there is no number of jeans or new phones that can mean to her what her relationship to

That is meaningful and satisfying to her.

There is a grace there that she can't get from any material item.

“What do you want for Christmas, Mom?”

“Nothing! Don't get me anything! I have enough things!”

She knows what makes for the truly good life and what doesn't.

In his encyclical, Pope Francis makes it clear that a truly satisfying human life is to be found in the cultivation of one's gifts and in the richness of relationships with family and friends, God and Earth — by living according to the values espoused by the great spiritual traditions and corroborated by modern psychology — not in the shallow pursuit and acquisition of material goods so much promoted by consumer culture that it has become the focus of daily life.

Because “the mere amassing of things and pleasures is not enough to give meaning and joy to the human heart,” modern man — the consumer — is left feeling empty, and the emptier a person's heart, the Pope writes, “the more he or she needs things to buy, own, and consume.” Driven as it is by our dissatisfactions, “the pace of consumption, waste, and environmental change has so stretched the planet's capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes ...”

The ecological damage we have inflicted upon the planet is, in fact, indicative of how negatively we ourselves have been damaged by our consumerism.

The only viable way to save the planet, because it is the only response that gets to the root cause of the environmental crisis, is to live according to “an ancient lesson...the conviction that ‘less is more’.” One does not need yet another pair of jeans or shoes or the latest phone or a bigger car or house or hot tub. One needs to live simply in attentive appreciation of the satisfactions one experiences in one's relations with each person and the natural world, and in the creative development of one's gifts, a life so much richer than one marked by the obsessive pursuit of consumption.

“To be serenely present to each reality,” writes the Pope, “however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfillment...It is not a life lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full.” It is a lesson to be taught and learned and lived if we are to help ourselves and effectively confront environmental crisis.

The Pope is not the first to offer such insights. Many other individuals and organizations have said the same, the Worldwatch Institute being a notable one. In its 2010 edition of “State of the World: Transforming Cultures: From Consumerism to Sus-

*continued on next page*



*What makes the good life? Shopping and unsustainable consumption? True satisfaction comes from cultivating one's gifts and relationships, good citizenship, living simply and serenely in the moment and in harmony with nature.*

consequences of buying what we don't need isn't apparent and isn't on our minds at the point of purchase. More likely what disturbed you was that something seems unhealthy, perhaps even wrong, in these young ladies' values.

Why would anyone think they needed or should even want 35 pairs of jeans? Similarly, why, in three months' time, did 75 million people rush out to buy the iPhone 6 last year? Obviously, they thought having these things would improve the quality of their lives and make them happy. This is the basic tenet of our consumer culture: the acquisition of *things* makes us happy. And while it is also driving the planet to the brink

my father meant, nor what her relationships with her existing family mean.

When my son announced he was going to marry the lovely young lady sitting next to him at the table, whom we all recognized to be his soul mate, that was, to my mother, a gift far more valuable than any *thing* under the Christmas tree.

And to whom was she praying, but to the God she has believed in all her life and in whose name her wedding vows were sanctified, the God she prayed to when she and my father had their heart attacks.

My mother can no longer travel to church for Mass, but she never misses watching it on television.



# Perspectives

## We won't end the crisis until we deal with overpopulation

by Moisha Blechman

President Obama, Pope Francis, and the Paris COP21 climate conference all agree: we have a climate crisis. We all agree that it is the most pressing issue of our time, that it is more dangerous than any other issue confronting humanity. The cause is understood. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an agency of the United Nations, states that the CO<sub>2</sub> pollution warming the planet and acidifying the oceans is caused by human activity. We all know what activity that really means. It means burning fossil fuels, which have given us an unparalleled life of convenience and comfort, and our dependence on this delusionally “cheap” energy is deep in our culture. At the same time, the by-product of burning — cumulative CO<sub>2</sub> pollution — is changing every function on the planet. It is changing the average temperatures, the weather patterns, the sea levels, the rainfall frequency and intensity, animal distribution and plant growth. It is disengaging ecosystem synergy, leaving birds and animals starving. The additional heat on every square meter of the planet is sucking soils dry and killing the microbes that make soils productive. Agriculture itself is increasingly unreliable, due to drought and floods that are also caused by the changed climate. For all this, human activity, especially burning fossil fuels, is responsible.

If there were no human beings, none of these problems would exist. Fewer people would automatically diminish the impact. What a joyful prospect that would be for the plants and animals of the world! Given our population, is it possible to have a green economy? Can we convert to zero emissions by 2050 when we need to feed, clothe and shelter 7 to 9 billion people? As the IPCC states, the root problem of climate change is people—their expectation of convenience, comfort, even luxury for those with money. For our way of life, the world is highly over-populated. Here are some examples. ■ When a baby is born in the U.S., we have a new consumer. He will use 10 disposable diapers every day which are made with oil-created plastic and synthetic material, which will immediately be trucked to a landfill where they will sit for the next 500 years before they finally disintegrate. A baby can be toilet trained as soon as he can walk, usually at one year of age. Today, disposable diapers are made to be so comfortable that the average child is not using a toilet until he is 3 years or older. That is 10,680 plastic diapers for every newborn, 7,000 of which are not necessary. If the child is not nursed for a few years, he will be fed formula that is highly processed with heat. In the fossil-fuel free life, no baby bottles are needed and formulas can be dispensed with. But corporate propaganda overwhelms the federal rec-



ommendation to nurse infants, even in non-industrialized nations. ■ When I ride the New York subway in winter, I notice that almost every passenger is wearing what we could call quilted oil. The wool coat has been replaced with a coat made with oil. With the existing population, wool is no longer an option. It would require more sheep than the planet can support. I don't think there is a green way to provide winter wear for the present population, much less an increasing one. ■ No one has yet identified the misuse of oil for recreation in the form of motorized recreation, meaning motor boats and yachts, off-road vehicles, snow mobiles, snow making for ski slopes, car racing and so on. As the population increases the industry expands. It becomes harder to abandon and replace with green options. ■ Today, a growing economy really means growing the consumer base (or increasing population), which grows the tax base, which in turn grows income available for the military. Fifty-two percent of our federal taxes go to the military. The U.S. military uses more oil than any other entity in the world. A diminishing population in the U.S. would shrink the money available for industrial military intervention, or any kind of war. If we are serious about saving life on Earth, we have to recognize that real security will shut off the oil spigot for military activity. ■ The health of the American economy is often measured in housing starts. Yet the plumbing in new houses is made of plastic/oil. The wood needed for all housing deprives the planet of the forests that would otherwise be a CO<sub>2</sub> sink. Driveways and new roads are made of asphalt, a petroleum derivative. The mechanical systems that make new houses work cost more CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to manufacture and operate. A rising population base encourages new housing, but it is a huge planetary negative. The biggest CO<sub>2</sub> cost to the planet is probably just feeding people. The entire system of growing food has morphed away from the family farm for local consumption to an industrial system that uses oil to plow,

plant, fertilize, irrigate, spray with chemical herbicides, harvest, and finally ship all over the U.S. This includes importing food from and to distant nations on ships that burn especially dirty oil. China and India import American grain to feed their own overpopulated nations. California is a huge source of food grown on vast mechanized farms. Americans enjoy summer foods from South America all winter. Both California and South American produce arrives by fuel-expensive air freight every day. ■ Each birth accelerates the growth of this system and is dependent on it for life. There other major challenges for increasing population numbers. One is having sheer space on which to settle and create a home. Increasingly, we either take away habitat from birds and animals, or we deform and reshape the land itself to create housing space. Another challenge is the looming water crisis. Aquifers in China, Saudi Arabia, and the American Midwest are either gone or in the process of rapid depletion. Even water-rich regions have a housing limit for water use. These are major and universal trends. A key step to meeting the climate crisis is to understand its underlying and fundamental cause: humanity is really mired in a population overshoot crisis. In the world of nature, overshoot is solved with starvation and disease. We want to avoid that. When people realize that the American dream is evaporating primarily because there is less pie for everyone, they might choose to have fewer children. Otherwise, what will their future be? The least we can do to build a sustainable future, including a safe climate, is to make all the benefits of Planned Parenthood freely available, and create a social environment that encourages families to take advantage of it. It is proven that education for women, and freedom for each and every woman to decide her own life, promotes rational choices when it comes to child bearing. We all agree that we have a climate crisis. But we must also agree that a surging population will cancel every other measure to save our planet.

## From consumerism to voluntary simplicity

continued from page 6

tainability,” a section reads, “Preventing the collapse of human civilization requires nothing less than a wholesale transformation of dominant cultural patterns. This transformation would reject consumerism — the cultural orientation that leads people to find meaning, contentment and acceptance through what they consume — as taboo and establish in its place a new cultural framework...” In a chapter titled “Inspiring People to See That Less Is More,” Worldwatch writes, “Voluntary simplicity is an age-old philosophy that advocates turning away from the pursuit of money, possessions, and greed in order to live more deeply and fully — limiting outer wealth for a greater inner wealth.” But The Worldwatch Institute isn't Pope Francis, whose combination of position and character wields enormous influence. He brings global attention to the root cause of the environmental crisis as few others can. Of course, revolutionizing a culture is an intimidating task, a great “spiritual and educational challenge” (which would have to be the focus of another article). But the change we need begins with the individual, and moves to a collection of individuals, who ultimately have the power to bring pressure to bear upon the political and economic entities whose actions impact the environment. If we distort or ignore Pope Francis's main thesis — if we view it merely as a call for action on climate change and not as one for profound cultural change — we do so at our own peril and that of the planet. If we don't change on so fundamental a level, it may well be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it will be for us and our children to avoid the environmental and social catastrophes scientists say are coming.

Joseph Bonasia, a member of the Long Island Group, lives in Smithtown.



# Communities on planned route rallying against Pilgrim Pipeline

by Mary Finneran

When this was being written, New Yorkers were finalizing their plans to celebrate Thanksgiving. We like to think of it as a day commemorating the time when immigrants from England joined the local inhabitants in sharing their bounty.

Alternatively, some would say that holiday is more a time to reflect on how the historical Pilgrims usurped the homes, land, and universal rights of the indigenous peoples.

This second scenario parallels in several ways how today's Pilgrim Pipeline Company tries to come across as a good neighbor in New York and New Jersey when, in essence, its objective would usurp the people's rights to a healthy home and environment. The company intends to profit from the export of refined petroleum products, which would be of little or no benefit to citizens who would have to live with the dangers and decimation inherent in oil pipeline construction and maintenance.

Pilgrim Pipeline Holdings LLC is a company whose president, Errol Boyle, and vice president, Roger Williams, are both former executives of the well-known — some might say nefarious — Koch Industries. Their

**Pilgrim, led by former Koch executives, faces stiff opposition as 58 towns, so far, stand against pipeline.**

proposed Pilgrim project would involve the construction of two oil pipelines sharing the same six-foot ditch for a 170-mile stretch through the Hudson Valley and south. The requisite pumping stations, the equivalent to compressor stations for natural gas, are planned to be at about 50-mile increments. Five lateral pipelines are also in the plans.

One of the main parallel pipelines would carry Bakken crude oil (and quite possibly tar sands crude) from Albany to refineries in Linden, New Jersey. (These products would reach Albany via infamous “bomb trains.”)

A second pipeline would transport the refined petroleum, including such products as kerosene, gasoline, or heating oil, back to the port of Albany. According to Pilgrim, “The pipeline would handle an estimated 200,000 barrels in each direction each day (a total of 73 million barrels annually), roughly the amount of fuels currently transported along the

Hudson by other modes of transportation.” Despite the implication of this statement, there is no evidence that the “other modes of transportation” would be replaced by the pipeline, nor that pipelines would be preferable.

The Pilgrim Pipeline(s) path plan in New York would, for the most part, follow I87, the eastern part of the NYS Thruway. It would traverse numerous creeks and rivers, including the Hudson, and very deep and wide gorges — the Catskill, Cauterskill, Esopus, and others. Where the geography of the thruway precludes this path (for some reason wide gorges don't seem insurmountable to them), the company would hope to follow electric power rights of way and other utility ROWs, although both National Grid and Central Hudson Gas and Electric have stated that they would not allow their ROWs to be used by Pilgrim because of liability concerns.

Kate Millsaps, formerly of the New Jersey Sierra Club, helped spearhead the opposition there in 2014. New Jersey led the charge so that eventually all the townships on the pipeline path in the state have filed either resolutions or ordinances against the pipeline. New York is rapidly adding resolutions by the week opposing it as well. Between the two states, 58 towns have passed resolutions. There

have also been anti-pipeline zoning ordinances and county resolutions.

In November, Pilgrim announced it had filed an application, including a draft environmental impact statement (dEIS), with the NYS Thruway Authority in August, three months earlier. So much for timely transparency!

Subsequently, Robert Magna of the Thruway Authority wrote a letter to the DEC, offering it the opportunity to take on the role of lead agency due to the SEQRA Title I status of the project. The DEC responded that it “will participate in the Thruway Authority's coordinated and rigorous review of the project application to ensure that all the potential environmental impacts are adequately identified and addressed.”

In a press release sent out by the Coalition Against the Pilgrim Pipeline NY (CAPPNY), the Atlantic Chapter's conservation director, Roger Downs, said the following regarding Pilgrim Pipelines' dEIS:

“...The document's dismissive tone about the risks associated with these pipelines starkly contrasts [with] our national experience with catastrophic crude oil pipeline spills and explosions that have resulted in billion-dollar cleanup costs and devastated communities.”

Refined oil, gasoline, kerosene, etc., are even more volatile than crude, and to see the two paralleling each other seems to be more than just doubling the danger — especially considering the natural gas pipelines they would cross.

New Yorkers associated with CAPP have requested that towns on the path reject the Thruway Authority's request to be the lead agency to review the Pilgrim Pipeline application, and request that the DEC be granted that position. Recently the DEC said it would work with the Thruway as co-lead agency, but this does not resolve the Thruway's conflict of interest — it would receive revenue for use of the Thruway's ROW.

Also, as Roger Downs said, “Pilgrim's twin pipelines would threaten our drinking water supplies, gravely endanger every community in [its] path, and bring even more oil trains into New York ... to service the southbound crude oil pipeline.”

In other words, this new assault against New Yorkers by the oil industry must be stopped. This writer personally would like to see the application be denied immediately by the Thruway Authority due to the lack of feasibility of two parallel, volatile pipelines running along a route that sees megatons of vehicles vibrating the ground through which the pipelines pass. As a former welder I would not want to guarantee my welds would meet such a test.

Regardless of the strategy, let us hope that before the next Thanksgiving, we will be proud and grateful to have sent this Pilgrim packing.

For more information, visit [www.stoppilgrimpipeline.com](http://www.stoppilgrimpipeline.com).

*Mary Finneran is an art teacher and member of the Mid-Hudson Group. She serves on the Chapter's Gas Task Force.*

## Last-quarter progress moves state's energy needle

by Bob Ciesielski

In the last quarter of 2015, the Atlantic Chapter was busy monitoring, advocating and, in some cases, applauding a number of important energy developments in New York.

Here's a roundup:

■ The Atlantic Chapter, the Club's Beyond Coal Campaign (BCC), and numerous environmental organizations have made formal comments to the Public Service Commission (PSC) on the New York Energy Plan and the Reforming the Energy Vision (REV) plan, and to NYSEDA on its Clean Energy Fund (CEF) and the Green Bank proposals.

■ This summer, the release of the New York Energy Plan set goals of producing 50 percent of the state's electricity from renewable sources by 2030, reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 40 percent by 2030, and a 600 trillion Btu increase in energy efficiency. On October 8, Governor Cuomo restated the goal of reducing GHG emissions by 40 percent by 2030. In December, the governor directed the PSC to establish a Clean Energy Standard to mandate 50 percent renewable energy generation and the GHG reduction targets by 2030.

■ The governor has also announced an initiative to work with the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) to increase payments for the burning of carbon. In other actions, NYSEDA has pledged \$1.5 billion over the next ten years towards development of utility-scale renewable energy solar and wind

projects.

The Chapter and BCC continue to advocate mechanisms to insure these goals are met. Goals must be mandatory, with interim targets to measure progress. Penalties could be imposed for failure to meet renewable energy installation targets. Variable contracts such as renewable energy power purchase agreements (PPAs), requests for proposals (RFPs) and the feed-in-tariff (FIT) can all be implemented to guarantee that production and installation goals are met.

■ In the private sector, NRG, which owns the Huntley (Tonawanda) and the Dunkirk coal plants, has announced plans to close Huntley and mothball Dunkirk. Testimony given in PSC hearings concerning the Cayuga coal plant indicate that transmission line upgrades could eliminate the need for the plant. Studies have shown that all three plants could close without electricity reliability issues.

■ Meanwhile, Entergy has announced the closure within the next several years of the FitzPatrick nuclear plant on Lake Ontario, which employs 600 workers. (See page 3.) In this realm, the Chapter and the BCC have been working to promote a “just transition” strategy in the state, which would provide replacement jobs and/or job training for union workers employed at these plants, and reimburse municipalities and school districts for lost revenue from reduced property taxes.

It is necessary to rapidly increase renewable energy facilities and energy efficiency to replace energy from closing coal, nuclear and oil

plants. We must also prevent the buildout of a fracked methane gas infrastructure in the state. The artificially low price of methane gas is being used to promote the fuel. Yet the economic opportunities of renewable energy and energy efficiency are enormous.

For example, the Solar City plant in Buffalo has already started hiring some of its initial 1,500 workers to manufacture one gigawatt of solar panels per year. The economics of increased onshore and offshore wind construction would also be a great boom to the state. The cost of solar and wind is now competitive with fossil fuels and nuclear in many areas.

■ The momentum brought about by the Paris Climate Summit is noticeable. During the summit, New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli announced a proposed increase of \$3.5 billion in sustainable, low-carbon investments in the state pension fund. (See page 9.)

We applaud his announcement as trustee of the pension system, but will be monitoring investments to prevent “low-carbon” investments from going to nuclear power or fracked methane gas corporations.

While methane produces less carbon dioxide at combustion than coal or oil, the gas itself is 86 times more potent a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide in its first 20 years in the atmosphere. Nationwide leakage above 2% of fracked methane has proven the gas to be the most dangerous producer of greenhouse gases.

*Bob Ciesielski chairs the Chapter's Energy Committee.*





## Enviro Close-Up

by Karl Grossman

# At our house, the sun pays the electric bill

**W**e've had solar power energizing our house in Sag Harbor on Long Island for six years now—and it's a bonanza!

Once the photovoltaic panels are up on your roof, nothing more needs to be done. They harvest electricity from the sun even on cloudy days. Never in the half-dozen years have the 38 panels on our roof needed any care. And frequently, looking at the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA) meter attached to the house, I see the numbers going backwards — we're producing electricity for which LIPA reimburses us.

Then there are the two thermal solar panels heating up water and sending it — very well-heated — into the house. The other day, it was 64°F outside but the thermometer on the hot water tank in the basement showed water from the thermal panels coming down at 130°F. Amazing! And these panels are also care-free.

Meanwhile, the price of solar panels has plummeted since the panels were installed at our house in 2009 — and efficiencies have gone up, Dean Hapshe of Harvest Power was saying the other day on a visit to check our installation.

Hapshe is the dean of solar energy installers on Long Island. He got into the solar energy field in 1980 and

**Three years ago, top utility executives gathered at a Colorado resort to hear warnings about a grave new threat to operators of America's electric grid: not superstorms or cyberattacks, but rooftop solar panels.**

with his decades of experience has served as a teacher of others in the industry.

When he and his crew put our system in, the cost of the photovoltaic panels, which produce 7,500 watts — an average-size system — was \$6 a watt. "Now it's down to \$3.65," Hapshe was saying. The efficiency rate has risen to 21 percent — getting close to the 25 percent efficiency of solar panels on space systems such as satellites and the International Space Station. That means more electricity is generated for every ray of sunlight.

The thing about solar power is that once it's installed, the sun sends

no bill.

And that has been vexing for electric utilities around the nation.

Indeed, the motto of Harvest Power, based in Bay Shore, Long Island, is: "Let The Sun Pay Your Electric Bill."

"Utilities wage campaign against rooftop solar" was the headline of an article in March 2015 in *The Washington Post*. The story by Joby Warrick, a Pulitzer Prize-winner who often writes about energy issues, begins: "Three years ago, the nation's top utility executives gathered at a Colorado resort to hear warnings about a grave new threat to operators of America's electric grid: not superstorms or cyberattacks, but rooftop solar panels."

"If demand for residential solar continued to rise, traditional utilities could soon face serious problems from 'declining retail sales' and a 'loss of customers' to 'potential obsolescence,' according to a presentation prepared for the group. 'Industry must prepare an action plan to address the challenges,' it said.

"The warning, delivered to a private meeting of the utility industry's main trade association, became a call to arms for electricity providers in nearly every corner of the nation." The article continued. "Three years

later, the industry and its fossil-fuel supporters are waging a determined campaign to stop a home-solar insurgency..."

*The New York Times*, in an April 2014 editorial, "The Koch Attack on Solar Energy," spoke of how "the Koch brothers and their conservative allies in state government have found a new tax they can support. Naturally it's a tax on something the country needs: solar energy panels."

*The Times* noted how the Koch brothers, their Koch Industries based on oil refining, "have been spending heavily to fight incentives for renewable energy, which have been adopted by most states. They particularly dislike state laws that allow homeowners with solar panels to sell power they don't need back to electric utilities. So they've been pushing legislatures to impose a surtax on this increasingly popular practice, hoping to make installing solar panels on houses less attractive."

"Oklahoma lawmakers," the editorial said, "recently approved such a surcharge at the behest of the American Legislative Exchange Council, the conservative group that often dictates bills to Republican statehouses and receives financing from the utility industry and fossil-fuel producers, including the Kochs."

On Long Island, support for solar power by LIPA — created with a mission to encourage the development of solar and other forms of renewable energy on the island — has gone down and down. The once hefty rebate LIPA provided for solar installations has now descended to a paltry 20 cents a watt.

But New York State still provides up to \$5,000 in support, and the federal government offers a tax credit of 30 percent of the cost of a system.

The capacity and economics of renewable energy are wonderful. *The New York Times* ran a front-page story last November headlined: "In Texas, Night Winds Blow in Free Electricity." It told of how in Texas "wind farms are generating so much electricity" that it is being "given away."

There are those who seek to make money from expensive electricity generated by gas, coal, oil, and nuclear power — and they would try to quash the renewable energy revolution now underway. They need to be stopped, and the bonanza of safe, green, inexpensive electricity be allowed to flow.

*Journalist and Sierran Karl Grossman is a member of the Long Island Group and professor of journalism at the State University of New York/College at Old Westbury. He is the author of six books and his investigative reporting appears regularly online at CounterPunch, the Huffington Post and other sites. For nearly 25 years, he has hosted a nationally aired TV program, Enviro Close-Up.*

## Letter to the editor

### NYC developers likely to pounce on EPF for waterfront pork

**G**ov. Andrew Cuomo and state legislators are likely to propose misspending Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and other funds on environmentally damaging boondoggles in disaster-prone locations in and over the lower Hudson River and other waters in the next few months — unless the Sierra Club mobilizes to prevent this.

These illegal, environmentally destructive, in-the-water, pork-barrel projects will be hyped as "natural," "sustainable," "resilient," "park," "wetland restoration or mitigation," "environmental education," "public access," and/or other "multi-use" projects.

But subsidizing rebuilt "piers" and buildings for non-water-dependent uses in and over near-shore waters will put people in the path of deadly storms and hurricanes, degrade or destroy irreplaceable marine habitats, and ruin scenic views of open water.

The federal Clean Water Act effectively prohibits building non-water-dependent projects and buildings in public waterways because it's essential to protect and preserve existing, naturally occurring habitats in rivers, wetlands and coastal waters for navigation, and for sustaining coastal and global fisheries, marine mammals and other living marine re-

sources. But our governor and some state legislators and their political allies seem to think it's okay to disregard this basic national environmental law when they plan how to spend state taxpayers' money.

There are more than enough desirable, proven-to-be-effective measures for preventing storm and hurricane damage by investing public funds in genuine "resiliency" measures in upland areas — that is, *not in the water*.

These include billion-dollar projects for storm-proofing Housing Authority buildings and for keeping

mass transit viable. But the single most important measure for what climate change experts refer to as "adaptation" involves *not spending money* — that is, simply shifting new real estate development away from coastal waters by ending public subsidies for building in floodplains and, especially, for building in the water. Subsidizing new development not just *along* the water but *right in it* moves in exactly the wrong direction.

Reducing carbon emissions with energy efficiency/conservation measures should be a top Club priority. But so should *ending public subsidies* for new or rebuilt real estate on fills, "piers," pile-supported platforms etc., and buildings on top of those structures for amphitheaters and for office, performance space, retail, museum, parking, classroom or other non-water-dependent uses (at Piers 26, 40, 54, 55, and 57 in the Hudson River offshore, for example). The Hudson River Estuary Committee works to prevent this kind of misuse of our rivers and other offshore waters and of limited public funds.

As for the national and international big picture: there are likely to be mass migrations in search of drinkable water and food — especially protein — all too soon. The

*continued on page 10*







# Cooking for a Small Planet

by Betsy Naselli

## ‘Vegan comfort foods’ — an oxymoron?

No, it is not an oxymoron! Yes, vegan foods, devoid of dairy and meat and eggs, can indeed be comfort foods even if you did not grow up eating them and are new to the idea.

I was searching for inspiration for this column when I sat down at my laptop and then there it was in my e-mail! Not what you might imagine; it was not one of the many recipes I get from gluten-free or vegan cooking websites. It was a discount offer for a local Italian restaurant, showing a photo of a large scoop of mashed potatoes topped with a round of beef topped with mushrooms and gravy with three whole carrots snuggled up beside it. “Now, that is comfort food,” I thought.

Coincidentally I have been working on a go-to recipe for a sorta veggie burger meatball that I can appease my husband with. It is difficult to find gluten-free, non-GMO, non-soy burgers or meatballs at the grocery store, and when you do they

are very pricey. I have one below for you to try.

And, a replacement for those traditional mashed potatoes, and yes, a mushroom gravy. I think you can figure out the carrots, yes?

### Ramped-up Mashed Potatoes

(Well, they really are only “ramped-up” in the spring when ramps are found at the local market, but garlic and leeks fill in nicely here.)

- 1T extra virgin olive oil
- 1 leek, white and light green part only, washed and finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, chopped fine
- 2 or 3 medium sized potatoes (I like Yukon Gold or Idaho) washed and cut into 1-inch chunks (Peeling is optional if they are organic.)
- a *head* of garlic, not a clove, separated and peeled, not chopped
- 1/2 head of cauliflower, or 1 small one, washed and cut into large pieces
- 1C of white beans, cooked and drained — navy, flageolet, cannellini or even garbanzos. (Rinse if you are

using canned beans.) Mash beans with a fork.  
extra virgin olive oil to taste  
sea salt to taste  
freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Heat the oil in a large pot, not a skillet. When hot, add the chopped garlic and leek, turn heat to medium low, stir and cook until it is soft and translucent, not browned.

Add potatoes, cloves of garlic and cauliflower to pot along with a cup or so of water. Cover and cook until the potatoes are tender. Watch to be sure the pot does not cook dry; add a bit more water if necessary.

When cooked, drain, saving any liquid. Add beans and mash all together with a potato masher or quickly process in food processor. If you use the food processor be sure not to process too much because the potatoes will become too gluey. If needed for the consistency you like (I prefer a chunky, rustic, kind of tex-

ture) add cooking liquid; add olive oil, salt and pepper to taste.

### Veggie/Meatball Burger

- 1 clove of garlic, chopped fine
- 2 portobello mushrooms, or about 2C of another mushroom of your choice
- 1C of pecans, toasted
- 2 stalks of celery, roughly chopped
- 1 small onion, roughly chopped
- 1 carrot, roughly chopped
- 1/2 to 1C of rolled oats
- 2T ground chia or flax seeds
- seasonings to taste: Italian seasoning blend (for more meatball-y flavor) basil, oregano, salt, and pepper

This is most easily prepared in a food processor. I start with the garlic and chop it into small pieces in the processor, then add the mushrooms and chop those fine. Then add the pecans, celery, onion, and carrot, and process further, but stop before it is pureed completely. A rough-ish blend is best.

Turn out into a bowl and stir in oats and seeds. Add seasonings of your choice to taste. Let sit about 20 minutes to soak up seeds and oats. If mixture is still too wet after that time, add a bit more oats. If it is too dry to form into a ball or burger, add a bit of water, stir and let sit a few more minutes.

These can be made into balls or burgers and can be baked on an oiled sheet in the oven at 350 degrees or sauteed in a pan with a small amount of oil.

### Nutty Mushroom Gravy

- 1C of raw cashews, soaked 4 hours or overnight, drained
- 1/2T extra virgin olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1/2 onion, finely chopped
- your choice of mushroom — I like the wild mushroom blend with lots of shiitakes
- 1t dried thyme or one tablespoon chopped fresh thyme
- salt and pepper to taste

In a large skillet, lightly brown the garlic and onion in the oil, then add the chopped mushrooms and thyme and saute over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until mushrooms are tender and have released their liquid.

Meanwhile, drain and rinse cashews and place in a blender with just enough water to blend thoroughly. Add it sparingly as you blend. When mushrooms are cooked, add blended cashews to the pan, cook briefly to warm through and season with salt and pepper and more thyme if you wish.

Place a burger or three balls on top of a large scoop of mashed potatoes and top with a generous amount of mushroom gravy. Snuggle up your carrots. Be comforted. Be very comforted.

*Betsy Naselli owns The Holistic Lifestyle Company in the Syracuse area. Contact her at [bnaselli@twcny.rr.com](mailto:bnaselli@twcny.rr.com) or visit her on the web: [www.youngliving.org/oils/wellagain](http://www.youngliving.org/oils/wellagain); or [www.us.nyrganic.com/shop/betsyn](http://www.us.nyrganic.com/shop/betsyn)*

*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 [LDESTEFANO3@twcny.rr.com](mailto:LDESTEFANO3@twcny.rr.com), (315) 488-2140, 5031 Onondaga Rd., Syracuse, NY 13215-1403; or go to [www.newyork2.sierraclub.org/conservation/biodiversity](http://www.newyork2.sierraclub.org/conservation/biodiversity).*

## Cuomo wants to nearly double environmental fund

Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s 2016–17 budget plans include a \$300-million appropriation to fully fund the NYS Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) for the first time since the fund was created in 1993.

The Cuomo plan will nearly double the size of the EPF, bringing it up to full funding for the first time in its history.

The fund is a source of support for capital projects that protect the

environment and enhance communities. Capital projects are usually large projects that purchase land or construct facilities. Most projects that receive grants of EPF money combine it with other funding sources that require matching funds.

The EPF is the most important source of funding for new park lands and campgrounds statewide, as well as new forest preserves in the Adirondack and Catskill parks. It also

supports smart growth grants to small communities, municipal recycling projects and farmland protection.

The EPF approved by the Legislature in 2015 currently stands at \$177 million. Recent polling shows that New York voters strongly support additional spending on environmental priorities.

Polling conducted in 2015 by the Adirondack Council, Open Space Institute, The Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land showed broad voter support for increased conservation spending. Polling showed that New York voters are by far most supportive of conservation spending on water quality and rebuilding infrastructure. They also support funding programs that preserve forests and wildlife habitat, improve air quality, keep parks open and well-maintained, and provide public access to waterfronts.

Specifically, voters strongly support fully funding the Environmental Protection Fund. Of those who were offered a description of the state’s EPF, more than seven in ten (73%) said they support full funding.

Cuomo has also proposed putting another \$100 million in a new state fund that provides grants to local governments for faltering sewer systems or clean-water infrastructure.

The EPF has been raided during difficult budgetary times, dropping to as low as \$134 million in the 2010–11 fiscal year. The funding level still has to be approved by the legislature during negotiations with Cuomo over the next three months.

## Developers will seek waterfront pork

*continued from page 9*

human body cannot make its own protein.

Fisheries are the single most important source of protein on the planet — for subsistence fishers in coastal waters off NYC, and off low-lying nations like Bangladesh alike. Without aquatic habitats there can be no wild fisheries.

Please read [www.WestwayThenandNow.org](http://www.WestwayThenandNow.org) and its FAQ links for more information. It’s crucial that Sierra Club activists and leaders be aware of the points in this letter and on that website before taking inadequately informed positions (or endorsing plans like NYC Mayor deBlasio’s OneNYC plan, which are decidedly mixed bags).

It’s profoundly important that good, long-standing Sierra Club positions in favor of preserving existing, naturally occurring aquatic habitats, ecosystems and fisheries be integrated with the Club’s climate change, “sustainable food” and state

budget positions, and that more activists speak out about these issues in upcoming public forums.

The next few months are likely to be a make-or-break time for saving the lower Hudson River from harmful development — and saving the great laws and Sierra Club case law that are supposed to protect these waters. Please contact the Hudson River Estuary Committee’s co-chair ([allison.tupper@verizon.net](mailto:allison.tupper@verizon.net)) if you can help, or if you need more information.

We hope New Yorkers throughout the state will become more active and vocal before EPF and other funds allocated through the state budget are misspent destroying priceless natural resources instead of saving them.

MARCY BENSTOCK

*Marcy Benstock is a member of the Hudson River Estuary Committee and a long-time member of the Sierra Club’s NYC Group.*



# ‘True’ victory at PSC clears way for new drinking water approaches

by Peggy Kurtz and Gale Pisba

Rockland activists won a major victory for the environment on December 17 with the defeat of a massive desalination proposal for the Hudson River. As soon as the news hit the internet, one of our friends called immediately to ask, “Is this a *true* victory?” This was, indeed, a groundbreaking decision by the Public Service Commission! But these things are never simple.

## What did we get and what didn’t we get?

In this decision, the Public Service Commission (PSC) ordered Suez to formally abandon plans to desalinate Hudson River water for Rockland County’s drinking water and instead work with the community on greener, less expensive water sources.

For eight years the Sierra Club and other citizen and environmental groups have fought Suez’s desalination plan because of potential harm to irreplaceable river habitat, concerns about drinking water drawn 3.5 miles downstream from a leaking nuclear power plant, and increased greenhouse gas emissions from energy intensive desalination.

Following this decision, ratepayers will still have a battle ahead over the \$40-plus million surcharge for desalination planning costs. We also will still need to hire experts to ensure that the company plans are the best they can be. And yes, we have our work cut out for us to realize a full conservation plan here in Rockland.

But this decision means that the

**New partnerships ready to formulate holistic alternative to desalination of Hudson River.**

community can now concentrate on creating a sustainable water policy, rather than fighting desalination.

## After 8 years, what did we win?

What we achieved here was something remarkable: a *huge David-and-Goliath victory that stopped a bad proposal from the second biggest water company in the world*. This was an empowering victory for *citizens*, working with a coalition of professional groups, elected officials, and experts. Sierra Club and other activists were key to this victory.

Here’s some of what we accomplished:

- We brought the issue of public accountability for state agencies to the fore.
- We have forged an invaluable partnership among local environmentalists, and a close working relationship with regional environmental groups and elected officials. These relationships have already proven their effectiveness on other issues, such as stopping the development of a casino in Sterling Forest and, now, the Pilgrim Pipeline.

■ Most important, we are helping change water policy. With this decision, the PSC has taken the first steps toward a water policy that looks be-

yond big, energy intensive construction projects, such as desalination, in favor of more energy-saving, climate-resilient and holistic solutions. The PSC is currently in the midst of finalizing REV, a big, sweeping package of energy reforms, and it anticipates that a big water re-envisioning is next. So the PSC is watching the work of the Rockland County Water Task Force closely.

## What’s ahead?

Everything we have accomplished was to get us to this point, where we can put our energy and resources into creating a sustainable water policy.

Now the challenge is for Rockland County to build a model water

policy based on green solutions, such as conservation, efficiency, repair of leaking pipes, and smaller supply sources. We will also need a vigorous and sophisticated public education program to foster a strong water conservation ethic.

We will also need to continue to retain experts to review Suez’s plans to be sure we are able to achieve the high goals set by the PSC decision.

Join us in this next phase of the work! Learn more about the issue and how you can help at [sierralowerhudson.org](http://sierralowerhudson.org) and [www.sustainablerockland.org](http://www.sustainablerockland.org).

*Peggy Kurtz and Gale Pisba are co-chairs of the Lower Hudson Group Desalination Committee.*

# Club: no more gas-fired power plants

The Sierra Club Board of Directors has approved a change to the energy resources policy, adding new gas-fired electric generating units to the list of energy resources the Sierra Club opposes. The new policy language, added to Section E, Resources Opposed by the Sierra Club, states as follows:

“Natural Gas: The Sierra Club opposes new electric generating units powered by natural gas, including peaking and combined cycle units. Consistent with the board’s goal of eliminating all fossil fuels from the electric sector no later than 2030, it is critical that the U.S. avoid further high-capital investments in new natural gas plants and related infrastructure.”

This new policy follows the updated fracking policy adopted by the board in January.

The board’s decision was informed in part by supportive comments from the national Beyond Coal Campaign leadership team, which expressed concerns that “extraction, transport and burning of natural gas is causing significant environmental harm, including releasing large amounts of methane and carbon dioxide, and constructing new natural gas plants and related infrastructure diverts desperately needed funding away from accelerating the transition to 100% clean energy.”

The revised policy language is posted in the Conservation Policies section of Club’s website.



## Conservation Action

by Susan Lawrence, Conservation Vice Chair

# Local communities need to step up climate change efforts

A major component of world action to greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and curb global warming is to take action ASAP in our communities, at the ground level. The Sierra Club, with its massive grassroots possibilities, is an important catalyst and activist in these efforts.

At the Paris summit on climate change, after critical and challenging negotiations, nearly 200 countries made concrete commitments to reduce climate change. This obviously needs to be a comprehensive approach for all sectors of the world’s economies.

However, much of New York’s work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions has focused on the large-scale production and transmission of electricity. Governor Cuomo’s recent announcement about his Clean Energy Standard is encouraging because it emphasizes the need to act in all sectors and set some new, earlier targets for action. The Cuomo administration needs to work with many stakeholders to set and enable

**To get involved, find contact information on the Chapter’s website: [newyork.sierraclub.org](http://newyork.sierraclub.org)**

hard but realistic targets with time deadlines for emission reductions.

Much of the creativity and concrete initiatives for action need to start in our localities with the involvement of the full range of stakeholders, including local government, the business community, environmentalists, the environmental justice community, labor, faith-based communities, and others.

Living in Albany, I have been pleased to learn about some local actions affecting my community and others like it. In conjunction with the People’s Climate Movement and the Paris Summit, Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan recently issued a press release emphasizing Albany’s major actions to move toward sus-

tainability by signing the global Compact of Mayors. (New York City and Rochester are also Compact cities.)

Albany has been taking action in many sectors for some years, including becoming a Climate Smart Community under the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation’s program. Leaders of the Hudson-Mohawk Group have been working on the Mayor’s Sustainability Committee. (To read more, go to <http://www.albanyny.org>, then News and then Press Release, 12/8).

My Assembly representative, Patricia Fahy, recently announced that the governor signed legislation she sponsored to enable localities to purchase their street lights from utilities and to then convert them to LED lighting, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions and saving utility costs. This is an example of the many ways localities and their stakeholders can work to curb climate change. “Sustainable” cities, towns, and counties can also pool resources to produce solar energy in their communities. This is just a

short list of what can be done, especially by linking with other stakeholders as part of the People’s Climate Movement.

To get involved with the Sierra Club, you can reach out to our Chapter Energy Committee and Gas Task Force and to leaders in your regional Sierra Club Group. (Go to the Chapter website for contact information at [newyork.sierraclub.org](http://newyork.sierraclub.org)).

We are eager to engage with our members and supporters around the state and multiply efforts to drastically reduce global warming in constructive and effective ways. If you are not doing so, you can also reach out to others in your locality who are working on these issues — linking our efforts is core to the People’s Climate Movement.

Please speak with me and other Chapter and Group leaders about your interests, concerns and efforts in your community.

*Susan Lawrence is conservation vice chair and legislative chair of the Atlantic Chapter and conservation chair of the Hudson-Mohawk Group.*



# Case study: how ‘zone defense’ can turn the tide in rural organizing

by James Britell

**A**rural Oregon coastal county decided to file a lawsuit to weaken the endangered species protection of the western snowy plover, a seabird that nests on beaches along the Pacific Ocean. The habitat protection strategy for this bird involves closing many miles of beaches to motorized vehicles from Canada to Mexico so the nests and the birds are not disturbed. In Oregon, virtually the entire coastline is undeveloped state park, so weakening plover protections could open new miles of beaches to ATVs. The county sought to persuade other rural counties, towns, and organizations to join their suit. By the time environmentalists realized that resolutions to join the suit were appearing on agendas of public bodies in a four-county area, some municipalities had already signed on. The challenge to the campaign was to mobilize local citizens in widely separated places to stop their local elected officials from joining the suit and to persuade organizations that had already passed resolutions to rescind them. None of the 20 or so environmental groups with members in the county had more than a few hundred local people as paid members although, together, the groups had almost 1,400 members in the area (about 3 percent of the total population).

**How you can turn out five times as many people as the opposing side, with just 48 hours’ notice, even if your side consists of small groups, in distant places.**

Fortunately, although Oregon and West Coast groups in general have strong individual identities, they have a history of working closely together on ancient forest campaigns. In particular, Audubon, Sierra Club, and statewide umbrella groups have often worked closely together. So the leaders of the groups developed a new strategy to deal with this problem that was beyond the ability of any one group to solve. Oregon conservation groups, with and without local chapters, joined forces to collectively identify their members in the area and to treat them as a single entity for the purpose of the campaign. The groups merged their mailing lists and sent a joint alert to all their members in the region under a masthead, which listed all the groups. Each group paid for its own postage. This alert informed everyone about the issue, kicked off the campaign and solicited volunteers. Having a pre-approved, off-the-shelf alert, with many groups on the masthead, meant any organization had pre-approval to oppose any local resolution with the authority of its own and all the other major groups in the state and, later, dozens of major groups on the whole West Coast, without pre-clearing it with anyone. As a result of just this initial joint alert, several legislative bodies voted to either not join the lawsuit or rescind previously adopted resolutions. The campaign was faced with one big, final, important public meeting (in the county that instigated the suit) at which the county was to finally decide to authorize the suit. In organizing for that meeting, this campaign broke some new ground. The campaign didn’t know when the meeting would be scheduled but it did have the contact information for the 1,400 members of those 20 organizations. To prepare for the meeting, the campaign used the 15 people who came forward in response to the request for volunteers in the first mailing to phone all the 1,400 people and ask them to commit to stand by to attend a public meeting whenever it might be called. About 200 of the 1,400 members agreed to do this. When the meeting was finally announced a week later, it was with only 48 hours’ notice. The 200 people on standby were then called, and 125 of them showed up for the meeting. The meeting went on all day because so many wanted to testify. Although the county had only 60,000 residents and covered a thousand square miles, and the campaign only had 48 hours to get ready, there

was a large turnout. Turning out five times as many people as the opposing side changed the perception that motorized interests controlled and dominated the public process, which till then they had. The 125 people in that meeting were drawn from a dozen different national and regional environmental groups, but collectively they were the activist base of the county. Those who attended the meeting were astounded to find their county had so many environmentally active people and immediately after the public hearing formed a new countywide organization. No organizational or turf issues surfaced during this effort. Each group paid for its own alerts and chipped in for common expenses. Only one grant for \$1,000 was needed to pay phone bills. The rest of the expenses, including a full-page \$1,600 ad and all the mailings, were raised through contributions. The 20 groups involved in alerts and phoning included the Green Party and the Democratic central committees of two counties. Ultimately, 20 Oregon groups contributed people and 14 other California and Washington state groups contributed other support. Organizations in San Diego and Seattle furnished two attorneys for legal advice, as the county had an aggressive conservative legal foundation that had agreed to finance the lawsuit. A note on confidentiality: Each group’s membership list was called only by one of its own members; lists were not retained or reproduced and the originals were returned. No caller saw any names other than the segment for their own organization. Update for 2015: Despite the great turnout, the county proceeded 3-0 to file the lawsuit, but it was not successful and the county lost. The three county commissioners who voted to proceed with the lawsuit left office, two defeated in subsequent elections, in part because this group stayed together to work against them in subsequent campaigns. The ocean beaches in this county and Oregon are as closed to ATVs today as they were in 2002 and the population of snowy plovers has increased from 100 to 300. (The sign-on letter and ad for this campaign and website are discussed and illustrated in the chapter on sign-on letters in my handbook “Organize to Win,” downloadable at Britell.com

**Calling through member lists**

Members of environmental organizations don’t mind being called and won’t hang up as long as you initially identify yourself as a member of, and are calling on behalf of, their own organization. Only an organization’s members should call the members of that organization. Members of organizations with a name like Save or Protect or some plainly pro-environmental name are the most motivated and usually 40-50% or more will agree to do what you ask. Organizations with aggressive reputations attract more activists. Audubon members are less moti-

vated than the Sierra Club but even 15-25 percent of their members will agree to be active — Sierra Club perhaps 40 percent. The biggest problem in any contact effort is inaccurate phone numbers and getting through answering machines. But you may have better luck getting people to return messages than you think. About 5 percent of the people you call will be exceedingly grateful for the call and volunteer to not just come to a meeting but also be telephone tree captains or become really active. These people have apparently decided already to become active and were just waiting for someone to ask. Most people belong to only one or two organizations, and there is not a lot of overlap between local memberships of environmental organizations. Most of the members of Audubon are not members of the Sierra club and vice versa. But even the most extremely conservative counties in the U.S. have lots of potential activists.

**Never “cold call” without a script**

Some people are far better making calls than others, so check on success after a dozen or 20 calls. People who don’t get results should be taken off this duty. People who are good at making cold calls love doing it and vice versa. If you are using email, ask potential volunteers to add you to their address book so your future emails won’t be rejected as spam. Members of environmental groups don’t distinguish among and between them and don’t much care who prepared an alert. People are interested in issues, not organizations, and are just grateful that someone got busy. When groups work, together it will generally increase the membership of both groups. When people become more active, they increase the number of groups they join. The most likely potential Audubon member is a currently inactive member of the Sierra Club (and vice versa). For non-fundraising matters, a written appeal to take an action (like write a letter) has a success rate of a half percent — or probably less — but a phone call might appeal to 10 to 15 percent. Active people always know other active people; so when somebody commits to take action, right then, always ask them who else in their community might want to get involved. Sometimes potentially active people belong to no group at all or belong to civic groups such as the League of Women Voters. For broad-based community campaigns, many of your best activists will always end up being conservative and Republican. Broad-based ecological campaigns function best when they confine discussions to campaign issues.

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