

# Sierra Atlantic

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

Volume 32 Fall 2005



## Will a global-warmed NYC become a ghost town?

by Moisha Blechman

Global warming is not a “War of the Worlds” scenario. It is a real threat, and we must deal with it now. Consider the impending impact on New York City.

New York is the largest city in the U.S., with 7.3 million people living in its five boroughs, and 20 million — about 8% of the U.S. population — housed in its metropolitan region. It is the artistic and entertainment capital of the world, the home of Wall Street and the seat of the UN.

But — surprise! Along with Calcutta and Shanghai, it is one of the most vulnerable to global warming. In the twinkling of a lifetime, or even within a generation, New York City could become a ghost city with 20 million scattered refugees. Gradually, the natural rhythms of city life, utterly dependent on sea-level (or lower) transportation, will sink under ever-rising and expanding seas. The damage will be magnified by increasingly frequent and intense storms. At the same time, the city will become much hotter with less, if any, nighttime relief.

There will be more ground-level ozone and insect-borne disease. Because of drought, exacerbated by

higher evaporation rates and salt water intrusion, New York City may not be able to guarantee its water supply.

The heat itself is something to contemplate. While the world average temperature has risen by one degree, New York City’s average temperature has risen by four degrees since 1880 due to the “urban heat island” effect. Consider what the urban heat island effect will be when the average world temperature rises by, first, four degrees by 2030, and 10 degrees by the end of the century. Before long, New York will have the same number of 90-degree days as Miami does now, and then the same number as Houston.

The threats from global warming extend well beyond the heat. Sea-level rise will contribute to periodic flooding, followed by permanent inundation of lower Manhattan and parts of New York City’s 600 miles of coastline as well as parts of Brooklyn and Queens. In 1999 it was estimated that the sea-level may rise by as much as three feet or more in 95 years. That estimate did not take into account disintegrating ice in Greenland and the West Antarctic Ice Sheet.

The most recent scientific report shows that Greenland’s southern-

### Special Global Warming Issue

*The most significant characteristic of modern civilization is the sacrifice of the future for the present, and all the power of science has been prostituted to this purpose.*

—William James

Too often, the threat of global warming is discussed in general terms. With this issue of the *Sierra Atlantic*, we focus with stark specificity on the probable effects on our state, from New York City to the Adirondacks. While Washington seems unable to face up to the threat, calls for action are getting some attention in Albany and other statehouses. Along with reports on what is happening in Albany, we look at what each of us can do, from lobbying for better regional carbon emissions standards, to installing compact fluorescent bulbs and building sustainable homes.

most glacier went from about a foot a day of movement to 120 feet a day! Experts believe that this change in rate at which the glacier transports ice to the ocean implies significant increases in sea levels around the world. Last February, scientists found that the West Antarctic Ice Sheet (WAIS) is hemorrhaging 250 cubic kilometers of water yearly. Even modest global warming will irreversibly destabilize the WAIS. The disintegration of the WAIS will raise sea levels by 20 feet.

The elevation of most of lower Manhattan is at or less than 10 feet. (This includes Battery Park City, the World Trade Center site, the West Side Highway, South Street Seaport, the FDR Drive, and the Bellevue Medical Center.) It will all be vulnerable to increasingly frequent flood-

ing from storm surges, followed by permanent inundation.

The same will be the fate of the Harlem River and East River Drives; the Henry Hudson Parkway from 125th Street almost to 79th Street, and the West Side Highway from 42nd Street to Canal Street. Regional interstate highways with low elevation segments include I-95 and I-80 in New Jersey; the Belt Parkway, I-278 and I-478 in Brooklyn; the Grand Central and I-678 in Queens; and the Major Deegan Highway along the Harlem in the Bronx. Much of Coney Island will disappear, turning the residential community of Seagate into an island. The New Jersey Meadows will become a salt lake. Jones Beach, Fire Island and Westhampton Beach will first fragment

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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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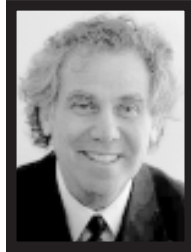
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### DEADLINES – WINTER ISSUE

September 15 — Article proposals due for review by Publications Committee

October 3 — Final copy and camera-ready ads due

November 15 — Newsletter mailed to 45,000 members



## Message from the Chair

by Ken Baer

## Vote for the Transportation Bond Act

As individuals, each of us can do our part to reduce our energy consumption and therefore produce fewer greenhouse gasses. Using mass transit instead of automobiles is a good first step.

Using mass transit can not only reduce pollution, conserve natural resources, and save money, but can add to the quality of our lives. Taking a bus or train allows you to read or take a nap, as someone else is at the controls. Passengers experience less stress, and might even feel refreshed after traveling.

In November, New York state voters will have the opportunity to approve a \$2.9 billion transportation bond act. \$1.45 billion will be funding Metropolitan Transportation Authority capital projects. Specifically, this money will be spent as follows:

- \$450 million toward constructing a much needed 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue subway line in Manhattan that would

reduce rush hour congestion that at times poses safety problems

- \$450 million toward constructing a Long Island Railroad link to Grand Central Terminal that would significantly reduce travel time for many commuters

- \$326 million for NYC Transit capital projects including new subway cars and buses

- \$124 million for LIRR and Metro-North capital projects including new railroad cars

- \$100 million for a rail link from JFK Airport to lower Manhattan.

The other \$1.45 billion will provide funding for other transportation projects. Of this amount, \$50 million will be spent statewide to pay for the higher cost of natural gas or hybrid-electric buses over the cost of diesel buses. Other projects include river trails, rail trails, bikeways, park-and-ride lots and "safety" improvements. Some of the wiser projects in this category that will be partially funded

by the bond act and their total cost are:

- \$8.5 million for trails along the Genesee River in Monroe and Livingston counties

- \$7.1 million for the Western Gateway Transportation Center in Schenectady

- \$6.4 million for an intermodal transit terminal in Binghamton

- \$4.9 million for rails-to-trails projects in Erie County

- \$4.8 million for a rail trail from Poughkeepsie to East Fishkill.

The Atlantic Chapter Executive Committee is disappointed about roads that will be funded that are unnecessary and might contribute to sprawl. As a whole, though, the bond act is a good one that will help reduce the production of greenhouse gasses and provide other environmental and economic benefits. The Chapter encourages you to vote for the Transportation Bond Act in November.

## Clean hybrid taxi cabs coming to New York City

by Bob Muldoon and Dominique Cokley

In the past, a clean cab in NYC might have meant one without wrappers on the floor or dirt on the seats. Now you can hop into a cab and expect it to be roomy, clean and air conditioned.

But we still have "dirty" cabs: each year, the standard cab, a Ford Crown Victoria, generates 4 tons of smog pollutants and 9.2 tons of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that causes global warming. Multiply that by the almost 13,000 cabs on the road each day and you have a real pollution factory in operation.

A bill signed into law this summer will bring a new, cleaner cab onto the road. The new law, championed by Councilmember David Yassky and supported by City Council leadership (Speaker Gifford Miller and Transportation Chair John Liu), allows cabbies to start driving cleaner hybrid cars that use an electric and gas engine. Mayor Bloomberg gave his unequivocal support when he signed it into law in July.

The Sierra Club first approached the city about using hybrid cars last summer. Over the past year, we met with city agencies, the City Council and the taxi industry to explain the benefits of hybrids. This spring we teamed up with the New York League of Conservation Voters, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Coalition Advocating for Smart Transportation to help push legislation.

Hybrid electric vehicles hit the market in the last few years and demand has exploded. The early versions were small economy cars that slashed gas consumption by switching to the electric engine at low

Hybrid taxi victory will cut gasoline usage and reduce CO<sub>2</sub> from cabs by 40 percent.

speeds and at full stops. Now, eight models are on the market, including larger SUVs such as the Ford Escape, the Toyota Highlander and the Lexus RX400h.

A Ford Escape hybrid can get almost twice the gas mileage of a Ford Crown Victoria. For cabbies, that means cutting gas costs in half. It also means fewer trips to the gas station and more time to pick up fares.

For the rest of us, it means a cab that can cut some smog-related pollutants by about 80% and reduce carbon dioxide by almost 40%. Replacing a conventional cab with a hybrid

is like taking two old cabs off the road. Fuel-efficient taxis also means reducing our reliance on foreign oil.

Hybrid cars run just like a regular car with one exception: when stopped or driving slowly, the electric engine can power the vehicle — that is the secret to its fuel sipping abilities. Imagine cabs lined up to get on the FDR and not making a sound because they automatically switch to electric. Now take a deep breath — no pollutants out of those tailpipes while they sit there!

The new law goes into effect in October. One taxi fleet owner has already said he will roll out hybrid taxis once they are approved. New York City will then join San Francisco, which put 15 Ford Escape hybrids taxis on the street in December.

Bob Muldoon is associate regional representative in the Sierra Club's New York City field office. Dominique Cokley is an intern in the office.

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# Time for action: regional carbon rules now in play

by Charles Church

Right now, many consider the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) to be the most important program in America for the campaign against global warming.

Amid great fanfare in June, 2001, Governor George E. Pataki announced the formation of the New York State Greenhouse Gas Task Force, noting his commitment to positioning New York "as a national leader on the critically important issue of reducing greenhouse gases."

In early 2003, the Center for Clean Air Policy, in collaboration with the Task Force, issued a report, recommending a two-step process: first, a cap on carbon emissions from New York power generators, then an agreement on regional coordination of state caps.

Given this advice by his own appointees, and the reality that New York state alone contributes almost one percent of the world's — that's right, the world's — total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, many expected Pataki to put a New York carbon cap into effect without further ado.

But the governor caused a stir by ignoring this advice, announcing instead that he had asked governors in the Northeast to join a regional strategy to develop a market-based cap-and-trade program for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from power plants.

On September 29, 2003, the commissioners of the environmental agencies of nine member states — the New England states, plus New York, New Jersey and Delaware — adopted the program that is RGGI. RGGI represents the first multi-state

compact in the nation intended to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from power plants. The idea is to curb these emissions by creating a regional market in which power plants can buy and sell CO<sub>2</sub> credits among themselves, as each state works toward complying with the cap.

Under this cap-and-trade program, power plants that keep their emissions below their allowed level would have credits that they could sell, and dirtier plants would be able to buy these credits to meet their obligations. Developers and plant owners would have a financial incentive to build and operate clean, efficient plants, and modernize dirtier plants through cleaner fuels or new equipment.

After this cap-and-trade regimen for power plants has been implemented, the RGGI states may consider expanding the initiative to embrace other sources of greenhouse gases. Moreover, the program design will permit other states seamlessly to join RGGI. (Right now, Pennsylvania and Maryland are participating as observers in RGGI discussions, and one hopes that they soon will become full partners).

The importance of RGGI cannot be overstated. Not only will curtailing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the region's power plants be a very important step in reducing America's carbon emissions, but it also will serve as a platform and model for future programs — for example, one put forth by the federal government, if it ever gets its act together. Especially because of its value as precedent, we must not allow a weak RGGI regimen to happen.

## What we can do

We can add our voices to those championing meaningful reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. You can phone or write:

Governor George E. Pataki  
State Capitol  
Albany, New York 12224  
518-474-8390

Denise M. Sheehan  
Acting Commissioner, DEC  
625 Broadway  
Albany, New York 12233  
518-402-8540

The original agreement called for completion of the program design by April, 2005, at the outside. That goal was not achieved (no surprise there), but the current prediction fixes September or October, 2005, as real and achievable dates.

Environmental Advocates of New York (EANY), doing very fine work indeed, has assembled a vast coalition of environmental, religious and health-related groups to put forward a set of sound principles for RGGI. Among these, naturally, the level of the proposed reductions in carbon emissions in the region has great importance. The coalition urges that these reductions be set at 10% below current levels by 2010, and 25% by 2020. Right now, the RGGI states are considering cap levels that are nowhere near these.

I have forcefully advocated for Sierra Club itself to get into the fray by joining EANY's coalition with all the tub thumping we can muster. However, right now an existing for-

mal policy against "pollution trading" stands in the way. The policy document, by my lights, is a sorry piece of work. It devotes more than a printed page (single-spaced) to defining the conditions under which a trading policy would be all right. However, all this carefully wrought prose is preceded by these six words: "The Sierra Club opposes use of (pollution) trading." Hence the big question: if all trading is forbidden, why all the verbiage on when trading would be okay?

I'm thinking that the policy must be amended, to give trading of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions the separate attention it deserves. (To be clear, I am not now urging that the current ban on "pollution trading" be changed in other respects.) Such an amendment would be far from a blank check; instead it would carefully delineate the situations in which such trading would be approved, perhaps even supported wholeheartedly.

Right now, what we can do here in New York is call or write Governor Pataki and Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Denise Sheehan, urging them to work harder for more meaningful reductions in carbon emissions than they are now considering. Postcard campaigns would be terrific. These reduction levels are in play right now, so we all need to act fast.

*Charles Church is a member of the national Global Warming and Energy Committee of Sierra Club, chair of the Global Warming Committee of the Atlantic Chapter, and chair of the World Climate Crisis Committee of the NYC Group.*

# Kunstler's *The Long Emergency*: why the Old Union has an edge

*Industrial civilization is in big trouble, and the American people face a future of hardship and turbulence.*

That is the message of *The Long Emergency* (Atlantic Monthly Press, \$23), the new book by James Howard Kunstler, an Upstate New Yorker and a shrewd and engaging social commentator. He tells us what to expect when we pass the tipping point of global peak oil production and climate change.

*Globalism will wither. Life will become profoundly and intensely local. The consumer economy will be a strange memory. Suburbia will become untenable. We will struggle to feed ourselves. Desperation at home and a vanishing middle class may provoke extremist politics in America, which may not hold together as a nation. Meanwhile, we will face a grueling contest over the world's remaining oil resources.*

*Say farewell to easy motoring and commercial aviation. Life in the Long Emergency will be about staying where we are. For most of us, that means New York state. That is why we are excerpting the portion of the book that assesses the state's prospects as part of what Kunstler calls the Old Union.*

by James Howard Kunstler

The states of New England, the mid-Atlantic, and the upper Midwest, which make up the historic Old Union of the Civil War period, seem united in destiny as they face the Long Emergency — just as they seem distinct in many ways from the Old South and the Southwest. They will hardly be immune to the ravages of energy resource depletion, but people in the Old Union may be in a somewhat more favorable position.

For one thing, the region possesses the residue of a preindustrial or protoindustrial civic infrastructure,

based on established habits of group covenant and, ultimately, a respect for the rule of law. Physically, the Old Union still contains an underlying fabric of towns and small cities embedded in some of the nation's best agricultural terrain, and the cultural memory for using them as an integral living arrangement still exists. The civilizational software for running democratic communities remains alive.

In distinction to the Old South, the institutions for maintaining a commonweal enjoy a more certain and abiding respect in the Old Union, in particular the law and the courts that serve it. Except among

mafiosi and gangbangers, there is no generalized habit of settling differences extralegally, and violence is not normative or regarded with romance-tinted tolerance. This is not to say that the region I call the Old Union has no history of bad behavior or endemic collective shortcomings. But I regard it as less likely to fall into hopeless lawlessness, anarchy, or despotism, and more likely to salvage the bits and pieces of our best social traditions and keep them in operation at some level.

The Old Union is far more secular than the Old South, less beset by superstitious and despotic fundamentalist religion, and more generally inclined to observe a traditional separation between church and state. The Puritanism that looms distantly in its history contained a core of discipline that worked in favor of group survival under conditions of extreme hardship that may return in the Long Emergency. Eventually, that Puritanism evolved into the resourceful and disciplined traits we associate with New England Yankees at their best: thrift, rectitude, perseverance, and allegiance to a community. Its cultural baggage, via a line of figures as diverse as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, H. L. Mencken, and Camille

Paglia, includes a lively conversance with the history of ideas free of dogma and cant.

The Old Union also contains many of the nation's largest industrial cities, as well as the most extensive contiguous suburbs, all presenting substantial liabilities. In the short term, the biggest cities will be places of desperation, disorder, and economic loss. New York City could become largely uninhabitable if the electric grid and the natural gas distribution system malfunction even moderately. Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington present similar logistical nightmares, though they contain far fewer high-rise buildings than New York City. All other things being equal, I believe every one of these cities will shed large fractions of their populations as the Long Emergency continues, year after year.

Even as that happens, they will retain the value of their important sites. Some people will remain in them. New arrangements and economic behaviors will emerge in them, and some healthy elements may begin to take shape, even as the cities continue to experience a generalized agony of contraction.

For instance, New York's waterfront may come back into use at a

*continued on page 4*



## Conservation Action

by Hugh Mitchell, Conservation Chair

### "We'll have to take two cars — *but don't tell anyone!*"

By now every Sierran knows some of the effects of global warming, yet no one but my wife and I know the effect it has on the Mitchells' breakfast table conversation.

Hugh: "I've got to get some exercise this morning; do you want to come with me to the health club?"

Barbara: "Yes, but I've got some errands to do first."

Hugh: "I hate to take two cars."

Barbara: "My errands will take an hour; why don't you come with me?"

Hugh: "I've got to get home as soon as possible to work on an article about global warming. I guess we'll have to take two cars — but *don't tell anyone!*"

At the risk of being called a hypocrite, I'm writing about this because it shows how all the tiny decisions we make can contribute to global warming and how much we need to change our basic habits to reduce the use of fossil fuels.

Every gallon of gas we burn emits 22 pounds of carbon dioxide. Multiply this by millions of cars traveling millions of miles daily and any high school kid can conclude that the CO<sub>2</sub> in auto exhaust is an environ-

All the tiny decisions we make can contribute to global warming.

mental concern no matter what purposeful obfuscations are thrown up by George Bush and Exxon-Mobile.

The facts are in, and they reveal that the worst terrorism is not coming out of the Middle East but from our American tailpipes and smokestacks. We need to reduce our fossil fuel consumption by 50% *starting immediately*.

#### Effects on New York

Some interesting research coming out on the effects of global warming Upstate should dispel debate over the topic. Every spring, when its world-class lilac collection in Highland Park blooms, the City of Rochester puts on a festival. Since they need to plan for thousands of visitors, the organizers have a considerable economic bet riding on when the lilacs will flower.

They should be helped by David

Wolfe, associate professor of horticulture at Cornell University, whose research on lilac blooming dates in New York indicates the flowers are blooming four to five days earlier than they did in 1965.

Further data on early spring blooming of other "indicator species" show similar results. The famous Finger Lakes wine grapes now start blooming six days earlier. New York apples are starting to bloom a full nine to 10 days earlier. Other horticultural studies relevant to global warming suggest the peak flavor of the northern cabbage crop will decline. Too hot.

Furthermore, dairy farmers, who already have their back to the economic wall, will have to air-condition their barns to maintain top milk production. This will put them at a competitive disadvantage to Southern milk producers who have already invested in air conditioning.

#### Canada and the Arctic

There can be positive and negative local effects from increased greenhouse gases heating our cool northern New York atmosphere, but when these data are extended far-

ther north into Canada, the picture becomes much bleaker, revealing melting arctic glaciers, rising sea levels or worse. The possibility of a sudden release of vast quantities of CO<sub>2</sub> and methane gas (21% more lethal than CO<sub>2</sub>) from the huge Canadian peat bogs would create a runaway greenhouse effect the likes of which have not been seen on the planet for 55 million years. Considering this terrifying scenario, is it reasonable to ask if modern technological civilization is the instrument of the sixth great wave of extinction of life on earth?

#### The Great Lakes

Current science offers no clear answers on how global warming will affect that 20% of the world's fresh water located in the Great Lakes. Perhaps a more difficult question is whether the thirsty areas in the rest of the nation (and Mexico) will see the Great Lakes as massive reservoirs that could save them from the coming drought.

If so, this could cause serious problems for the ecology of the Great Lakes — they are more fragile than they seem, since they recharge at a rate of only 1% a year. Efforts are currently underway by the International Joint Commission on the Great Lakes to strengthen water management policies of the states and provinces bordering the Lakes. Particularly telling is the concept of keeping the water within the watershed and returning the waters to the lakes in at least as good a condition as when it was removed.

#### Key to understanding

I believe the key to understanding global warming is to look at our pattern of needs and then sort out what is optional and what has been created by an overheated advertising industry.

There's no question that, since World War II, the West has reaped a cornucopia of goods and services from our massive wealth. We need to be reminded that so-called "goods" are not always a good, and that one of the definitions of cornucopia is "excess."

#### A few recommendations

I don't have enough space here to discuss the many possible solutions, but they include the obvious: immediate conservation; immediate investment in renewable energy resources, including wind, solar, geothermal, and biomass; and the consideration of other technologies such as carbon capture, hydrogen fuel, and fuel cells. (See pages 6 and 7 for solutions each of us can implement at a personal level.)

A basic action formula to start solving global warming is to immediately educate ourselves and our fellow citizens about the issue. This is why this edition of the *Sierra Atlantic* is devoted to the problem.

Secondly, we need to lobby for immediate solutions by government and industry. But above all, we can not delay taking action — because the facts are in. We cannot wait for the best fire truck to arrive. We need to consider radical solutions now to put out the fire.

## Kunstler's *The Long Emergency*: why the Old Union has an edge

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much smaller scale than the city experienced in the previous twentieth-century heyday of gigantic freighters and behemoth passenger liners. We may see the return of sailing ships, or sail in combination with the "twilight" technologies of oil and even coal-based steam. Small-scale commercial fishing may return in the once-bountiful Hudson estuary. A new New York might coalesce around these things on a reactivated waterfront, in a new low-rise community of buildings and small-scale wharves — while in Manhattan's interior, the old corporate towers remain abandoned and dangerous. Similar events might occur in Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.

A process that might transform them into livable, fully functioning, appropriately scaled human habitats might take decades or centuries. The architectural theorist Andres Duany has remarked that the ideal civic environment might be found in the intimate form of the Gothic city accessorized with halogen lights and decent plumbing. The great, brutal, hypertrophic, industrial metropoli of America might evolve into much more intimate and human-scaled places. We might consider ourselves lucky if the process gets under way in the twenty-first century.

The gigantic smear of suburbia that runs almost without interruption from north of Boston through Connecti-

cut, New York, New Jersey, Baltimore, Washington, and northern Virginia is not going to be a happy place.

This suburban portion of what was once called megalopolis may become as much a forbidden zone as the South Bronx became in the late twentieth century. The inhabitants of the Bronx in 1925 would never have believed how desperate their borough would become in 1970, and we may look back on our suburbs similarly from 2050.

Water resources and water power will be extremely important in the twenty-first century and the Old Union has plenty of water, as well as the topography that makes water follow the law of gravity and become available for useful work. New England has the capacity to reinstate a comprehensive system of small, community-oriented hydropower operations, as well as small-scale manufacturing based on hydro. Its agricultural potential is greater than it currently appears, based on today's sclerotic dairy industry. The region could go a long way toward feeding itself if it had to. Western New York, alone, could be far more productive. Amish families have only recently begun to expand there from Pennsylvania, and their example to others in the use of traditional methods can only be salutary as the Long Emergency advances.

The Great Lakes have been a deeply underused economic resource for the past half century. This remark-

able freshwater inland sea stretching from New York to Minnesota has the potential of unifying an ordered matrix of towns and farms and appropriately scaled cities with a transportation system that is not dependent on nonrenewable energy. Without the destructive, entropic effect of cheap oil, a Great Lakes fishery might become both productive and sustainable. The small towns are still there, waiting to be rehabilitated — mothballed at their centers and encrusted with strip malls on their edges. They will be less difficult to reconfigure than either the great cities or the suburbs.

In recent years there has been talk of a colossal pipeline project that would send monumental quantities of fresh water from the Great Lakes to rescue the Southwest — thus allowing the continued suburban expansion of cities such as Denver, Phoenix, and Las Vegas. Since it is the premise of this book that continued suburban expansion is impossible, I don't think this has to be a concern, not to mention the fact that a project of such scale would also violate the principal terms of the Long Emergency, which will obviate all super-scale enterprise.

*Excerpted from The Long Emergency ©2005 by James Howard Kunstler; reprinted with permission of the publisher, Grove/Atlantic, Inc.*

# Albany Update



by John Stouffer, Legislative Director

## While the Feds fiddle, states feel the heat

**W**ith the cast of characters now running the federal government, the odds of the earth getting hit by a comet are a lot better than the odds of constructive action from Washington on global climate change.

Fortunately for us and the other critters and plants we share the planet with, there are alternatives: state governments.

Many states, New York among them, have adopted measures to promote the use of clean renewable sources of electricity as well as to promote the conservation and efficient use of electricity.

Since the generation of electricity is one of the largest sources of pollutants that cause global warming, about 25%, every kilowatt we don't use, every efficient light bulb or appliance that we do use and every kilowatt generated by a technology that does not emit greenhouse pollutants keeps the problem from getting worse. New York's requirement that we get at least 25% of our electricity from clean renewables by 2013 and the financial incentives New York offers to homeowners to install solar power are two examples of actions by our home state to forestall global warming.

Another significant source of greenhouse pollutants is transportation, which produces even more pollution than electric generation. New York and other states have adopted measures promoting mass transit to reduce vehicle miles traveled and the

pollution these vehicles emit.

In addition to measures like these, some states are actually starting to regulate emissions of climate change pollutants from vehicles and power plants. For example, New Hampshire's Clean Power Strategy requires a reduction of carbon dioxide emissions from its power plants to 7% below 1990 levels. On the transportation side, California recently set standards for greenhouse gas emissions from cars.

There are several efforts afoot in New York to regulate greenhouse gas emissions.

On the electric generation side of the equation, there are proposals in the legislature and an effort that Governor Pataki is leading to get a large number of Northeastern states to adopt a regional cap on emissions of

greenhouse gasses, the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). The RGGI process has yet to identify a target level of reduction of greenhouse gasses, but also proposes to involve pollution trading. Legislation introduced by Assemblyman DiNapoli (A.4459) and Senator Marcellino (S.2730) proposes to cut emissions of greenhouse pollutants to 25% below 1990 levels. This legislation passed with strong bi-partisan support in the Assembly, but like a lot of good environmental bills this year, died in the Senate. Assemblyman Brodsky has introduced legislation (A.1570) that in addition to reducing power plant emissions from oxides of nitrogen, mercury, and sulfur dioxide, would require reduction in greenhouse gas emissions at 7% below 1990 levels.

### 2005 Session overview

## The 'Bruno problem' — a brick wall in the Senate

**T**he 2005 Legislative session was definitely a mixed bag. The Sierra Club achieved several victories in legislative priorities relating to the budget: reform of the empire zone program, funding for Jamaica Bay access, and increased funding for the Environmental Protection Fund.

We also saw our top non-budget priorities advance through the Assembly: wetland protection, capping carbon emissions, expanding the container deposit program, authorization of municipal open space funds, and controlling residential trash burning.

On the other hand, these issues, chosen by consensus among environmental groups as the most significant ones facing New York, ran into a brick wall (Senator Bruno) in the Senate. The Sierra Club and our allies put significant work into the wetlands issue and the bottle bill. These were probably the hardest-worked environmental issues this session. Despite the fact that the bills didn't pass through the Senate, we smoked Senator Bruno out on all of these bills.

His public statements on many of these bills go far toward being explicitly anti-environmental. His staff has told us that its polling shows that people are not all that focused on the environment. On one level they may be right. Unlike many of us, the general public probably does not walk around thinking about the health of the environment all the time. However, that does not mean

that they agree with Senator Bruno on wetlands protection, or the Bigger, Better, Bottle Bill. I think Senator Bruno is unwisely testing New York's electorate. His behavior makes it look as though, based on his polling data, he's assuming that people don't care about the environment. Our challenge is to prove him wrong.

### **Wetlands**

Even though we didn't get our bill through the Senate, we made some important advances. We ran radio ads jointly with Trout Unlimited, and, with our other media work and grassroots outreach, we have significantly raised the public profile of the wetlands issue. We have also significantly added to our coalition.

In addition to our traditional allies, the New York State Conservation Council and a large number of local officials came on board. Our *Wetlands at Risk* report, showing that state law protects only 6% of New York's wetlands, has gained fairly wide recognition and is even cited in the findings of a proposed New Paltz wetlands ordinance.

Upon the recommendation of the Chapter's Legislative Committee, we reached out to the Brennan Center; its report in June documented that Senator Bruno is essentially single-handedly stopping the bill from moving, even though 49 of 62 Senators support it and only three have gone on record in opposition.

While opposition of the majority

The Atlantic Chapter is very supportive of the overall goal of the legislative and RGGI proposals, but has concerns about the emission trading these measures propose. Similar trading programs exist for emissions of sulfur dioxide, the prime mover of the acid rain problem and oxides of nitrogen, one of the principle components of smog. These programs cause concern for Sierra Club because they can allow power plants to greatly exceed their fair share of emissions by buying pollution rights from other facilities. This means that the people living around these power plants are subjected to poor, perhaps even dangerous, air quality.

To address carbon emissions from the transportation sector, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has announced draft amendments to regulations governing New York's Low Emission Vehicle program to adopt California's greenhouse gas standards for cars. A round of hearings produced overwhelming public support for these regulations.

By taking action to reduce in-state greenhouse gasses, New York can positively impact both the national global warming policy and the problem itself. As more and more states adopt laws that mandate greenhouse gas reductions, the more likely it is that the federal government will finally do the right thing. Also, since New York emits as much greenhouse gas as Sweden and the Netherlands, we can have a significant impact.

leader could be considered discouraging, in one way it's an important advance. Last year at this time Bruno was able to stop the bill without being on the record. By forcing him on the record, we now have a public debate, with the environmental community, the Assembly, the governor and a majority of senators in support of wetlands protection and Bruno against it.

In another development, through a freedom of information request, interns and staff in the Chapter legislative office found records showing that First Grafton, a real estate development project comprised of Senator Bruno, his family members and a top Albany lobbyist, had a history of violating federal wetlands law. The *Albany Times Union* used this information in a two-part expose of ethical problems dogging the project. These articles showed that Bruno's company was involved in selling plots of land containing wetlands at the same time that he was working to kill our wetlands bill. His ethical lapses not only reflect poorly on him, but also on the Senate Republican majority. Republican senators, by returning Bruno to his leadership position, are tacitly supporting his use of the majority leader position to advance his economic interests to the detriment of the state's environment.

### **BBBB**

The Bigger, Better, Bottle Bill

*continued on page 10*

## Clarence Gregory, leading Sierran, passes away

On August 15, the Sierra Club lost one of its most dedicated volunteers. Clarence Gregory, a club member since 1969, served with distinction as the Hudson-Mohawk Group's treasurer and membership chair. On the Chapter level, Clarence served as chair of the Financial Affairs Committee for nearly two decades. Clarence was conscientious in his preparations for meetings, meticulous in preparing budgets, and dedicated to the Sierra Club.

Above all, Clarence was fair, kind, and warm-hearted. We will miss him dearly, and will always remember the trips to meetings in his fuel-efficient Prius. May Clarence rest in peace with the other "greats" in the Sierra Club pantheon.

# Earthships: a sustainable solution in search of mass appeal

by Hal Smith

While the "green" building movement is helping to curb the energy appetites of new buildings, marketing considerations require them to be fairly conventional, limiting energy savings. But any hope of avoiding ecological catastrophe will probably require us to more radically re-think our notions of sustainable architecture.

What if a visionary were to develop a proven way to build homes with recycled materials so that the structures heat and cool themselves, make their own power, catch all their own water, and process their sewage?

Meet Michael Reynolds, an architect practicing and teaching on a 640-acre subdivision about 12 miles outside of Taos, New Mexico. He came of age in tandem with the environmental movement and has focused his professional life on making housing part of the solution to the problems of solid waste, clear-cutting of timber, water shortages, water pollution, the energy crisis, and the lack of affordable housing.

The result is the self-build, self-contained Earthship, a structure whose walls are made of recycled tires filled with rammed earth and laid in courses like bricks. The tire walls, which are built into the side of a south-facing slope (or partially submerged into the earth, with excavated earth mounded to the northern roofline), create what would otherwise be a cave-like structure except that the long south walls are built of glass, flooding the inside with light year-round, plus solar heat in the winter. The earthen tire walls are about



A visitor enters the west side of a model Earthship open to the public (above) near Taos, NM. Recycled bottles are embedded in the adobe wall, which is built with used tires. The south wall (top) provides solar electricity, light and winter heat. More conventional styles are possible.

ally doubles the cost of a house. Saddled with huge mortgages and other debt, Americans are obliged to work more hours than any of our peers in the Western world — usually for at least 30 years.

So the lack of affordable housing is not merely a problem for the homeless poor. The soaring cost of new homes (now at a median price of \$219,000) is putting home ownership out of reach of even middle class families. Even those with two wage earners are resorting to the latest wrinkle in residential financing — interest-only mortgages, which start out with lower payments that can quickly balloon.

## Energy savings

Although Earthships built by contractors can cost about as much as a conventional home, there's a key difference: the Taos homes have their own energy systems in the form of rooftop solar panels and small wind generators. So owners pay no electric bills and the home site can be far from power lines, where land is less expensive. If they take on the labor themselves, which is more feasible with this type of construction, owner-builders can cut costs about 40 percent.

When you calculate the avoided costs of electricity, heating and air conditioning, Earthship owners can save hundreds of dollars monthly — and they are independent of power plants whose fossil fuels are a major cause of global warming. In the future

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Photos by Dorinda White, Susquehanna Group

## Green buildings open for tours Oct. 1

If you are interested in learning how to incorporate green building practices, energy efficiency, and clean energy into your home, school or building, plan to attend the Northeast Sustainable Energy Association's 2005 Green Buildings Open House on October 1, 10 am to 4 pm.

Homeowners and building managers will be on site to describe their green building features and answer questions. Many of the buildings will demonstrate how solar hot water systems work, how photovoltaics produce electricity, and how wind can be used to generate power.

The Northeast Sustainable Energy Association organizes the event. For building listings, go to <http://www.nesea.org/buildings/openhouse> or call 413-774-6051, ext. 30.

three feet thick, which makes them enormously heavy and stable, creating thermal mass that keeps inside temperatures constantly in the mid-50s year-round, anywhere in the country, just as in a cave. In summer, the Earthship is naturally cool; in winter, it takes very little sunlight to warm up the interior.

In keeping with the Southwestern influence, the tire walls get an adobe (clay) finish. For interior walls, which are not load bearing, recycled aluminum cans, too, are laid in courses, bonded together and plastered with clay. Esthetically, the Earthships near Taos look quite whimsical, perhaps even like the setting for a sci-fi film. This is not surprising because Taos, which has a long history of attracting freethinkers, including artist Georgia O'Keeffe and writer D.H. Lawrence, was a counterculture mecca in the '60s. But there is no reason why the structures can't look more conventional or achieve their thermal mass with (more expensive) concrete or stone walls rather than tires.

Then why tires? Stacking and packing them with earth doesn't require much skill, and mountains of used tires are free, Reynolds notes. Both factors make Earthships more feasible as do-it-yourself projects.

More than 30 years ago, Reynolds realized that the citizens of the developed world had lost the ability to house themselves. Mud wasps and birds can build their own nests, he points out. Beavers know how to cut down trees and create a secure dwelling with an underwater entrance that keeps out predators. Indigenous peoples living in remote areas build their own modest but serviceable housing with free, natural materials at hand. The last generation of Americans able to do that lived in owner-built log cabins.

## Cost

But we who live in so-called advanced societies are generally helpless to provide a home for ourselves, unless we have the income sufficient to support a mortgage, which gener-

## Learn more

Hundreds of Earthships have been built all over the U.S. and in other countries over the last 30 years. You can visit the Taos subdivision's "model home" for a very brief tour or rent one by the night or week, starting at \$150 per night.

To learn more about building a sustainable home, Earthship Biotecture offers construction manuals, a video/DVD, hands-on workshops in Taos, and phone consultations with Michael Reynolds. For more details, go to [www.earthship.org](http://www.earthship.org).

If you are an art-loving environmentalist and want to combine a visit to Earthship headquarters with a vacation to Taos (it claims more galleries and artists per capita than Paris), go to [www.exploretaos.com](http://www.exploretaos.com).

## Global Warming Timeline

**1827** Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Fourier, a mathematician who served under Napoleon, was the first person to realize that the atmosphere keeps us warm. He said Earth's gasses are like greenhouse glass walls. Hence, the "greenhouse effect."

**1850s** John Tyndall analyzed the gasses in the atmosphere one by one. He discovered that 99 percent of the atmosphere has almost no greenhouse effect. Three gasses that do are water vapor, carbon dioxide and ozone.

**Early 20th century** The scientific consensus was that atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations would remain fairly static because any extra CO<sub>2</sub> released by fossil fuels would be absorbed by plants and the oceans.

**1930s** During a series of warm years, British coal engineer George Callendar compiled the most reliable data available on CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, finding hints of a buildup. This finding was neglected.

**1958** Charles Keeling started measuring CO<sub>2</sub> for 47 years until his death this summer. Some scientists consider his records the most important environmental data set of the 20th century. It proved the steady increase in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>.

**1965** Geophysicist Roger Revelle served on the President's Science Advisory Committee Panel and helped publish the first high-level government mention of global warming.

**1970s** Al Gore, who had been a student of Revelle, spoke with President Jimmy Carter, who became interested in sustainability. Carter installed a solar panel on the White House. The U.S. started to fund alternative energy development.

**1980** President Reagan's elected vice president, the solar energy research

# Solutions require uncommon common sense — and the will to change

by Moisha Blechman

Common sense should tell us that if all of life evolved under a certain composition of the atmosphere, changing that condition by one-third will destabilize everything.

And so it has. We have already kicked into gear a global warming crisis. Current concentrations exceed anything seen in the last 420,000 years, and probably the last 20 million years. Forecasts call for CO<sub>2</sub> levels to rise dramatically from today's 378 ppm of CO<sub>2</sub> to 560 ppm or more by as early as 2050. The World Wildlife Federation pleads that we must not allow CO<sub>2</sub> to go as high as 500 ppm because Earth's ecosystems cannot tolerate it and will fail.

Thus, it can not be emphasized too strongly that radical change is not negotiable. While it is true that our federal government is actively obstructionist in that regard, there is much that both we, as consumers, and local governments, can do. The technologies exist. All we need is the will. Following is a beginning list of actions we can take.

- **Trees.** We need to develop a passion for trees and put them in every possible place, including city-wide roof-top planting programs. Trees require water, but they return rain. 100 million additional mature trees in U.S. cities would save \$5 billion per year in energy costs. They are the least expensive way to reduce the summer peak electricity load. They cool in the summer, and they shelter buildings in the winter. They absorb CO<sub>2</sub>. Deforestation causes 17 percent of global warming.

- **Eat foods in season.** Always consider shipping distances. Generally, locally grown produce is more healthful and encourages local farmers.

Processed foods are also highly packaged and are wasteful of every kind of energy. As much as possible, eat unpackaged foods, the real foods, and bring your own bags to take them home. Improved health is a dividend.

- **City gardens** deliver significant quantities of vegetables to their communities and should be protected at all costs. Every deserted lot and demolition of a building is an opportunity for a garden. Rural communities and new developments need to set aside space for shared vegetable gardens as a component of zoning and normal community living.

Add gardening to the required curriculum of both urban and rural schools.

- **Eat organic.** Organic farming builds carbon in the soil instead of allowing it to break down and escape

The consequences of what we are doing to the environment are not difficult to understand, and yet we continue business as usual.

as CO<sub>2</sub>, which happens in conventional farming. Nitrogen fertilizers (not used in organic farming) contain N<sub>2</sub>O, which is a greenhouse gas 310 times more potent than CO<sub>2</sub>.

- **Meat.** If you are not a vegetarian, eat meat sparingly, especially beef. Much more than any other domestic animal, cows release large quantities of methane during the digestive process. Cattle and pig manure release methane and nitrous oxide when collected in manure ponds. Lamb is a better choice.

- **Respect nature's design.** She put oil and coal in the ground for a reason. It's her waste dump, and it's where it was designed to stay. Whenever we go against nature's design, it is at our peril. See how little you can use.

- **Plastic is made of oil.** Plastic packaging is ubiquitous and terrifying in its consequences. As children we played tag and tried to avoid be-

ing "it." Try a new game. Try to avoid being caught with "it." This is a very hard game. But the attempt is worth it since plastic has a double polluting life, first in manufacture, and second as waste. It is littering the oceans and making methane in landfills.

- **Cars.** Every gallon of gas used produces 20 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub>. With millions of drivers commuting, how many excess pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> are we putting into the atmosphere just because we don't care, or because we have allowed the automotive and oil corporations to make that decision for us? If the Model T Ford got 24 miles per gallon 97 years ago, why do we let SUVs get 13 today? Sixty or more miles per gallon is feasible. We have to become passionate about insisting on the highest possible mileage standards. When you buy a car, choose an electric hybrid. They work, and will soon be commonplace.

We pay for speed with increased gas consumption. A cruising speed of 50 or 55 miles instead of 70 or 75 will significantly lower gas used.

- **Car pool whenever possible.** Use public transportation as a first choice.

- **Oppose the NASCAR race track** proposed for Staten Island. Cars in NASCAR's premier-level races average four miles per gallon during 500-mile races. They use only *leaded* gas and trash up to 60 tires each per

race weekend.

Professional racers are allowed to use leaded gas. NASCAR alone puts 4 million pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere annually.

- **Recreational gas consumption** by off-road RVs, snowmobiles, power boats and yachts, jet skis and the like cannot be justified. They all need to be mothballed. This may be a hard sell, but we have a planet at stake. The kickers and screamers might learn to love the serenity and excitement of sailing, gliding, cross-country skiing, biking, surfing, etc. The dividend is air you enjoy breathing and less polluted lakes. The underlying problem is that fossil fuel-based recreation is heavily promoted by corporations who benefit from it.

- **Fly less.** If you took half as many trips, and made each one of them twice as long, it would be a significant savings of CO<sub>2</sub>. Air travel has an unfair advantage over other modes of transport because airlines do not pay a fuel tax. It is the world's fastest growing source of greenhouse emissions and is responsible for about 10% of total greenhouse emissions.

- **Reduce lawn size** with alternative plantings. When there is a large area to be mowed, try mowed paths instead. The mowing of the lawns of America consumes huge quantities

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## Compact fluorescent bulbs are a light but effective step

by Bob Muldoon

Scientists agree that what we do to reduce carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions in the next 10 years will make a dramatic difference on global warming's impact on our climate.

Luckily, our homes and offices can be much more energy-efficient when we use such everyday items as compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFs).

If every American household used just one compact fluorescent light bulb, it would prevent enough pollution to equal removing one million cars from the road. They are also excellent for apartments, schools or offices where lights are on continuously throughout the day or night.

There are two significant advantages to compact fluorescents — they use less energy and they cost less in the long-run.

Since CFs use one-fourth of the electricity compared to a standard incandescent bulb, they use much less energy and give off much less heat. Environmentally, CFs have a ripple effect. First, they avoid power plant pollution by using less electric-



ity. They also help reduce power used for air conditioning by lowering heat released in a building. And they reduce the amount of manufacturing, transportation and labor involved in maintaining lightbulbs.

Compact fluorescent bulbs are usually more expensive than standard incandescent light bulbs but the price difference is declining as they are becoming more and more common in hardware stores and drug stores. The higher initial cost of compact fluorescent bulbs will easily pay for themselves by lasting up to ten times longer than regular bulbs.

*Bob Muldoon is associate regional representative in the Sierra Club's New York City field office.*

### What we can do

- Convert your home to CFs. Try a few out and find the brand you like before using them throughout your home.

- Do a quick count of incandescent bulbs in your apartment building, school or office (in hallways, conference rooms, bathrooms). Then calculate the potential savings and ask the building manager why they are not using compact fluorescent bulbs. Share this article with them.

- Ask your local grocery store to stock CFs.

- Share this article with local governments and groups.

- Become active with the Chapter's global warming committee.

One word of caution — all CFs contain trace amounts of mercury. Look for CFs with low levels of this toxic heavy metal. Recycle used CFs. If you can't find a recycler, dispose of these bulbs as a hazardous waste.

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**1980s** Congressman Al Gore co-sponsored the first hearings on global warming and ways to encourage technologies to combat it.

**1982** Revelle published a widely read article addressing the rise in sea level and the relative role played by the melting of glaciers and ice sheets.

**1983** The EPA released a report on the possible threats of man-made emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>.

**1988** was so hot and full of extreme weather that the public became focused on global warming for the first time. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was established by the World Meteorological Organization and the UN.

**1997** More than 160 nations met in Kyoto to limit greenhouse gases for developed nations. The outcome of the meeting was the Kyoto Protocol. The U.S. agreed to reduce emissions from 1990 levels by 7 percent from 2008 to 2012.

**1997** The U.S. Senate unanimously voted not to ratify any treaty that would result in serious harm to our economy or impose mandatory greenhouse reductions on the U.S. without also imposing them on developing nations.

**2001** The IPCC released its third assessment report, concluding on the basis of new and stronger evidence that most of the observed warming over the past 50 years is attributable to human activities.

**2001** President George Bush announced that the U.S. would not ratify the Kyoto Protocol.

*compiled by Moisha Blechman*

# Its nearly snowless future will forever change the Adirondacks

by Bill McKibben

As the world's climate steadily warms over the next 100 years, computer projections and scientific models make clear that the Adirondacks will shift in ways it is hard for us even to imagine now. Winter may essentially disappear. The forest we know may give way to an entirely different woods. Those changes in turn will fundamentally alter our economies, and our psyches as well.

By 2100 "Adirondack" will mean something very different.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change — all the world's top climatologists, assembled by the United Nations — issued their forecast for the century in 2001. Globally, they said, the planet could expect an increase of about 5°F, with a worst-case scenario of about ten degrees. The planet's average temperature — now 60° — would grow to 65° or 70°, which may not sound like that much until you consider that since the last Ice Age the planet's temperature has warmed only about one degree a millennium. We're going to see it heat up 50 times that fast. That world, by all projections, will be wetter than the one we've known, and probably stormier. Polar ice will start to melt, and sea levels will rise.

Scientists project the planet's future more confidently than they forecast for particular regions — the local effects of mountain ranges, lakes and oceans make it harder to focus on smaller areas. Still, in 2001 a team of New Hampshire scientists working for the federal government



*Reduced snowfall that will affect the economy, decline of maple trees, dulling of fall colors and the invasion of non-native species are among the changes global warming will bring to the Adirondacks, the jewel of Upstate New York.*

has released a regional assessment for New England and northern New York, the so-called NERA report, one of 16 such studies prepared for different regions around the country.

The report focused on two climate models, one compiled by British researchers and the other by Canadians. Sometime this century the climate of Boston will come to resemble, depending on which model you consult, the climate of Richmond, Virginia, or the climate of Atlanta, Georgia. All of a sudden, Adirondackers may be living in the Smokies.

To understand what that means, consider first the forests that cover nearly all solid ground inside the Blue Line. Broadly speaking, of course, trees live where they live because it's the right climate — the

temperature and the precipitation meet their needs. Drive to Disney World and along the way you'll notice the woods slowly changing.

So, again broadly speaking, if you make Onchiota more like Orlando you would expect the forest to change too. No one is predicting palm trees lining Long Lake, but five different climate models cited by the NERA assessment scientists suggest that "by 2100 the major components of the forests will be oak and hickory."

"Every forecast shows that maple will be outcompeted," says Shannon Spencer, a research scientist at the University of New Hampshire's Complex Systems Research Center. "Maple is the largest loser. Beech and birch also have trouble. Pine and oak tend to be winners."

Invading species lured by balmier climes might in the end do as much to change the Adirondack forest as the direct effect of temperature itself. The woolly adelgid, for instance, is a lethal pest that has decimated hemlock stands in southern New York and New England — in some forests only a few hemlocks survived their onslaught. Its advance appears to have halted somewhere around Albany, probably because it can't cope with severe winters. "But with increasing temperatures, especially with winter minimums, that will allow species and diseases to

multiply more easily," says Spencer. "In colder regions it's the freezing temperatures that don't allow them to survive now over the full cycle" — indeed, one Connecticut cold snap wiped out 93 percent of the pests in one study. If you remove the chill, you remove the region's best protection.

Long before trees disappear, some of their products may be in short supply. Maple syrup, for instance, is as temperature dependent as any other agricultural crop — perhaps more so. Corn will grow, albeit slowly, in a chilly year. But sap won't run at commercial volumes unless there is a string of nights below freezing and days above forty degrees. In the past, those perfect weeks came most commonly between the middle of March and the middle of April. But as the NERA report showed with an array of regional statistics, recent warm years have caused sap to flow in early February, led to shorter seasons, reduced the quality of the syrup, and cut the total volume. "Because it is highly dependent upon prevailing climatic conditions," the report concluded, sugaring "may be irreparably altered under a changing climate."

Not everyone makes syrup (and Price Chopper will probably still have plenty of grade A from Canadian suppliers). But every Adirondacker waits for late September — for the few weeks when green and gray, the default colors of our woods, give way to the bonfire of reds and yellows and oranges. There's a reason that tourists stream north to peep at leaves — down where they come from they don't get much color, because oak leaves and hickory leaves don't do much in the fall. Our brilliant colors, according to the NERA report, may by century's end give way to "browns and dull greens." And as that happens, I imagine, the magnitude of these changes will finally hit home for most people. These are quiet mountains and forests, not full of the Ansel Adams splendor that marks the West. But for the weeks around Columbus Day they are as outrageously, insistently beautiful as any spot on earth.

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## Earthships in search of mass appeal

*continued from page 6*

ture, when the availability of reliable, affordable power may become an issue, those with their own power plants will seem prescient indeed.

### Water miserly

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the Earthships on the arid, scrubby land outside of Taos is that they have no water wells. The design includes a huge below-ground cistern in the house, where rain water is collected from the roof. Since the area receives only about 10 inches of rain annually, the filtration and plumbing system makes maximum use of every drop.

Water is processed so it can be reused: the first use is as potable water for drinking and bathing; then as gray water for flushing the toilet or for the indoor greenhouse below the southern windows. Finally, the so-called black water from the toilet is routed to a septic tank, from which the leachate goes via underground pipes to irrigate and fertilize very large rubber-lined planters that provide landscaping around the home.

This approach to water consumption deals effectively with water scarcity, common in the West, and pollution from sewage, which is common all over the U.S.

The contained sewage-treatment system, which cuts household water

use by more than half, is the most technologically sophisticated aspect of an Earthship. For do-it-yourselfers who don't want to tackle it, Reynolds' company sells drop-in panelized control modules and an instruction booklet that simplify construction.

One of the biggest factors holding back wider acceptance of the Earthship model is that it is easily stigmatized by its use of recycled materials. Tires are considered garbage and many people don't want anything to do with garbage, Reynolds notes. Similarly, waste water is considered irredeemable. But where some see garbage (used tires) or sewage, Reynolds sees a resource.

"Many people think that just because they have money, they don't need to worry about anything else," Reynolds once told an interviewer. "But people are starting to realize after September 11, and after California's energy crisis, that they are vulnerable no matter how much money they have."

"What I want to do is make the Earthship available to everyone.... Then if they don't want it, fine — pay utility bills, be lost in the shuffle when the power goes down, or whatever. It's up to you..."

*Hal Smith, a member of the Susquehanna Group, is co-editor of the Sierra Atlantic.*

## OUTINGS • OUTINGS • OUTINGS



### Get Out There

There's nothing like learning about nature with fellow Sierrans. New York's Groups offer a great variety of activities — and lots of them — for you to have fun while expanding your understanding. For an up-to-date list of Sierra Club outings, go to <http://newyork.sierraclub.org/outings>

*If you need information, have questions about the Atlantic Chapter Outings Committee, or wish to volunteer, call 212-791-2400, option 1, or send an e-mail to [acocoutings@pobox.com](mailto:acocoutings@pobox.com)*

# Adirondack forests, economy face profound change

*continued from page 8*

To watch that fade slowly to drab will not be easy.

For some it may be easier to imagine doing without winter. I have neighbors who grumble about the snow and ice — they and their descendants may have a lot less to grumble about, according to Tony Federer, a forest meteorologist who has worked over the years to perfect a hydrologic model for the area. “I can plug numbers into my program pretty easily,” he says. “What happens if the temperature goes up two degrees? You get major reductions in snow.”

Partly, he says, that’s because winter temperatures in the region already hover near the freezing level. “A lot of the time we have snowstorms now when the temperature is pretty close to freezing.” And the computer simulations all show the greatest warming coming during the winter months.

If you trust the across-the-post-office-counter wisdom, that’s what is already happening — nearly everyone thinks that winters are shorter and easier than they were a generation ago. Barry Rock, who directed the NERA project, grew up in Barre, Vermont: “I can remember fence posts routinely being covered for weeks at a time, and one of the first signs of spring was being able to see the tops of the posts by early March.” No longer, he says. Snowfall in northern New England has already dropped 15 percent from the mid-1950s, and the data from across the hemisphere makes clear this is not just a regional trend. On average, winter arrives about eight days later and exits about nine days earlier than in 1970.

If winter can shrink by more than two weeks in 30 years, it is not impossible to imagine it nearly disappearing under the scenarios now envisioned by climate scientists. Already lakes are freezing later and melting earlier.

In fact, the NERA chapter on winter ends with the following warning: while some alpine ski areas may still be able to make snow, albeit for a shorter stretch each year, “the cross-country and snowmobile industries . . . may become non-existent by 2100.” Non-existent, as in no more. No snowball fights, no snowmen, no sleigh rides, no pond

hockey, no snowshoeing, no tracking animals through the snow. Hey, but look on the bright side — mud season would last a lot longer!

Plenty of Adirondackers depend on snow for more than pleasure, of course, and so far they’re trying to keep a stiff upper lip. Still, the prospect of warmer winters does send paradoxical shivers down the backs of some Adirondack business owners. Old Forge, for instance, bills itself as the Snowmobile Capital of the East.

Elsewhere in the park, tourist businesses are more diversified, and few are quite as fearful of a change in seasons.

Still, if winter were to go away for good, the region’s image would change dramatically. “Maybe the next time the Olympics come it will be the summer games,” laughs Sandy Caligiore, director of communications for the Olympic Regional Development Authority. “It’s conceivable, looking into the crystal ball, that 50 years from now we are an economy similar to what Myrtle Beach is now, what Hilton Head is now, where we’re offering golf or tennis rather than snowboarding. . . . We might have to get ahead of the curve and plan accordingly. Maybe we build more golf courses. Maybe we start marketing and promoting ourselves around fishing, hiking, canoeing on a year-round basis.”

It might just work — other places will be warming too, of course, and if Boston feels like Atlanta, Atlanta may feel like a place you want to get out of for a vacation. “Already our surveys show that the low humidity of the area has a positive effect on our visitors in the height of summer,” says McKenna. Those people currently retiring to the South might decide to retire to the North instead, if extreme weather came to mean heat, not cold.

But even if the end of winter left money in the till, it almost certainly would come at a cost. “Winter’s part of the deal here,” says Nancie Battaglia, a well-known High Peaks-based photographer who has spent much of her adult life seeking out the glow of sunrise against the snows of the mountains. “It makes us all stronger people.” And it lets us huddle around the woodstove, and make jokes about “three months of bad sledding.” And it lets us appreciate

spring in a way no Georgian ever has.

There are a few scientists left who aren’t convinced the climate is going to change dramatically. Curt Stager of Paul Smith’s College points to a set of temperature readings from the New York State Ranger School at Wanakena that date back 71 years. At least at that one spot, he says, temperatures have actually gotten a little cooler since the 1920s. If that trend continues, he says, we might not have to worry about global warming — at least as much as we have to worry about acid rain, invasive species, overdevelopment and disease wrecking beech trees.

And others try to take a longer philosophical view. Ross Whaley, for many years dean of the Environmental Sciences and Forestry School at Syracuse, and a longtime Adirondacker, says, “I do know that the Adirondacks won’t be the environment that I cherish.” Still, he adds, “the kids of 2100 will simply think that the Adirondacks is just the way it is supposed to be, because they have known nothing else.”

Perhaps the most important question is, what, if anything, can we do to slow down this lightning-quick warm-up? Scientists caution that it’s far too late to prevent global warm-

ing — that we’ve already raised the temperature, and that the carbon we’ve pumped into the atmosphere will automatically raise it some more. But most agree that aggressive action to switch our economies away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy would at least nudge the trajectory of the warming a bit, and perhaps give natural systems a bit more time to cope with what’s coming. In real terms, that means driving smaller cars, insulating homes better, raising prices on oil and gas instead of drilling for more, and sharing all the advanced technologies we are developing with China, India and the other countries just starting down our path.

None of those seems particularly politically popular right now — who wants to pay more for gas? But then, who wants to stare at a hillside of brown in September? If the scientists are right, that may be the choice we’re right now making.

[Adapted from the March/April 2002 issue of *Adirondack Life* magazine; reprinted with permission.]

*Bill McKibben is a noted environmental writer and former Adirondacker who is now writer-in-residence at Middlebury College in Vermont.*

## Hudson-Mohawk Sierran summits Kilimanjaro, never sets foot on ice

Roger Gray, a member of the Hudson-Mohawk Group Executive Committee and co-chair of the Adirondack Committee, climbed 19,500-foot Mt. Kilimanjaro in February. Kilimanjaro is the tallest mountain in Africa and the tallest free-standing mountain in the world.

His group of five climbers hailed from Canada, Great Britain and Germany. The German organizer, who has a Ph.D. in atmospheric science, arranged for the trip because he wanted to make the climb before the snows of Kilimanjaro, made famous in Ernest Hemingway’s 1940 short story, had completely disappeared. On the fourth day, the lead Tanzanian guide for the seven-day expedition told the group of climbers that 10 years ago, from the fourth day until they reached the summit, they would have been climbing on ice. As it was, the expedition never set foot on ice, and at the summit the remnant glaciers were only a distant view.

*Janet Given-Chen*



## Executive Committee Report

*by James Lane, Secretary*

The Chapter ExCom met in Buffalo on June 18; some additional matters were handled by telephone conference calls later in the summer. One major step was the selection of the Chapter’s 13 delegates to the Sierra Summit this September: one outings leader, one senior activist, one young activist, the Council delegate, and nine at-large slots. The Chapter will give them partial expense reimbursement. Each of the 11 Groups has also named one delegate.

The ExCom approved participation as a party in an adjudicatory process to protect the Lloyd Aquifer on Long Island, which is threatened with drilling by the Suffolk County Water Authority. The Chapter is also investigating whether to join in a state court lawsuit for wetlands protection in Stewart State Park in Orange County, along with our ongoing federal lawsuit. The Chapter endorsed the 2005 Transportation Bond Act and opposed a proposed Jamestown Power Plant.

In administrative matters, the Chapter urged the national Club to take steps to strengthen the grassroots institutions of the Sierra Club, such as those concerned with regional work. Internally, the ExCom established a conservation revolving fund, so that projects can begin before the associated grant money is received.

Our legislative assistant, Sarah Kogel-Smucker, has resigned to go to law school. The ExCom commended her for the excellent work she has done.

### Group Chairs

**Finger Lakes** John Kaminsky, 607-257-5909, kaminskyjd@twcny.rr.com

**Hudson-Mohawk** Susan Lawrence, 518-489-5721, shlawr2@aol.com

**Iroquois** Martha Loew, 315-492-4745, mloew@twcny.rr.com

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**Lower Hudson** George Klein, 914-238-8846, georgeklein@optonline.net

**Mid-Hudson** Bibi Sandstrom, 845-255-5528, bibis@juno.com

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Frank Regan, 585-224-9075, frankregan@rochesterenvironment.com

**Susquehanna** Scott Lauffer, 607-748-4470, slauffer@stny.rr.com

## The 'Bruno problem' — a brick wall in the Senate

*continued from page 5*

passed on the floor of the Assembly on June 20. Atlantic Chapter activists played a significant role in pushing the bill at two critical points. Our role in turning key votes to pass the bill in the Assembly Codes Committee and on the Assembly floor has been publicly acknowledged by the bill sponsor, Assemblyman DiNapoli. So to you who made phone calls on this bill, pat yourself on the back — you made a difference. Sarah Kogel-Smucker's efforts coordinating our grassroots efforts were superlative, so kudos to Sarah as well.

Every one of the legislators on the Sierra Club's target list voted for the bill, and a total of 97 Assembly members voted aye.

Finally, we would be remiss if we didn't acknowledge Assemblyman DiNapoli's dauntless efforts to garner support for the bill. Senator Bruno made some interesting remarks in response to Assembly passage: "(i)t's one of the dumbest things I've ever heard of. We're going to make rubbish carriers out of everybody that

goes shopping. It's just nonsense. It's just pandering to the greenies."

Let's make sure that this and other intemperate remarks from the senator are not forgotten.

### Empire Zones

The Empire Zone program expired at the end of March. While reauthorization was certain, our goal was to curtail sprawl-inducing Empire Zone designations. Last year we proposed to limit zone designation to areas already served by sewer and water infrastructure. Assemblyman DiNapoli wrote a "Dear colleague" letter on the topic, and we got more than 40 majority party Assembly members to sign on. Also, we asked that bad actors — businesses that violated state environmental and labor laws — be denied program benefits.

We achieved 90 percent of what we were looking for in the 2005-2006 budget that passed. But the legislation failed to address the critical issue of boundary amendments. Literally one of the last bills that passed contained measures to apply

the sewer and water infrastructure requirement to Empire Zone boundary amendments.

In addition, businesses that have poor records of environmental compliance cannot be certified to receive the benefits of the program. The Atlantic Chapter conceived, led and lobbied this effort with our ally UNITE HERE. Susan Lawrence and the Sprawl Committee put a lot of work into this. I think we should all take a minute to pat ourselves on the back for this one, too.

### Energy

The fate of legislation to cap CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from power plants has an eerie similarity to that of the wetlands and BBBB bills. A.4459 directs the DEC to adopt regulations capping emissions of carbon at levels 25% below 1990 emissions. The bill passed the assembly in April, but never even got out of the Environmental Conservation Committee in the Senate despite the fact that Senator Marcellino, the committee chair, is the Senate sponsor.

### Environmental Budget

Pataki proposed and the Legislature agreed to permanently increasing the EPF appropriation to \$150 million. We requested and the Assembly pushed for more local waterfront revitalization and local parks funds from the governor's proposal of \$6 million for each to \$14 million for each.

We worked with Southern Queens Parks Association to get \$1.6 million for waterfront access in Southern Queens.

Governor Pataki's proposal to establish fees for wetland permits ran into the Bruno problem.

### Community Preservation Act

The CPA, a proposal to allow municipalities to create open space protection funds if they are approved by a local referendum, had the same problem in the Senate that the wetlands bill did. Developers, and therefore Senator Bruno, don't like it. The Assembly passed the bill with strong bipartisan support.

*John Stouffer*

## Will a global-warmed NYC become a ghost town?

*continued from page 1*

into islands and then disappear.

La Guardia Airport is only 6.8 feet above sea level and already maintains a dike and pumps for flood waters. Teterboro Airport is five feet above sea level and Kennedy Airport is 11.7 feet. All four area airports, including Newark, are near the water and vulnerable to storm surges. Closure of the airports, even temporarily, can lead to major disruptions to the entire Eastern seaboard travel system.

Most at risk to flooding are the many access ramps and other entry points to the bridges and tunnels that are close to sea level. For example, the Manhattan entrances to the Holland Tunnel and the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, and the mile-long Battery Park underpass, are all at flood-level elevations.

The Northeast of December 1992 was a dress rehearsal for the future. Near-hurricane force winds, coupled with a high tide and a full moon, brought the water to 8.5 feet above sea level, flooding lower Manhattan and portions of the FDR Drive. Storm-surfing waters poured down subway staircases and shorted the electrical power that controls signals for the entire subway system. The underground railway systems of PATH and the city subway system were virtually shut down, as were sections of Metro North, Long Island Railroad and New Jersey rail lines. All this happened though the surge surpassed critical levels briefly and by only one or two feet. At the time, this was considered a 40-year event.

No longer. The newly-blanketed oceans, having absorbed so much excess heat, are now releasing much more of the moist energy that creates hurricanes. The hurricane belt is extending its former boundaries, both in the southern hemisphere and to the north, to probably include

**As the hurricane belt extends its boundaries, subways and airport runways will flood more often, and as temperatures rise so will the threat of insect-borne disease and dangerous levels of ozone.**

New York City. Yet even with small storms, the higher sea levels will produce the kind of flooding associated with the strong, relatively infrequent storms of today.

Subways are particularly vulnerable. Nearly every rail tunnel system has significant points of entry below the 10-foot contour line. The vulnerable points include stairways, air shafts, manholes, emergency routes and street gratings.

To avoid the breakdown of the system, it will be necessary to elevate all of this infrastructure, including extensive portions of the transit tunnel network.

A study by Environmental Defense warns that the future climate will affect the health of New York City residents. "High air temperatures can inflict severe, direct stresses on human health and result in higher mortality. Mortality tends to increase precipitously above a certain temperature threshold."

Currently, that threshold in the city is 90°F for daytime highs and 74°F for nighttime lows. The number of days per year when threshold temperatures were reached has increased significantly in the past 50 years, and is expected to increase two-fold over the current average of 13 in the next 10 years. By 2090,

those conditions could prevail one out of four days annually.

The warming city is a recipe for increased urban ozone production. Stable air masses, high humidity, and temperatures above 64°F increase the rate of the chemical reactions involving sunlight and fossil fuels which form ozone. At ground level, ozone is a poison. Not only is it a serious problem for the old and the asthmatic, but it reduces lung function in healthy adults and reduces the ability of infants and children to grow normal, mature lungs. For exercising adults, ozone levels as low as 180 ppb has dangerous consequences. Already, in the jogging capital of the world, the region is frequently listed in the "severe" category. Dangerous exercise days will increase significantly, especially for children.

There is nothing better than warm moist air to encourage mosquitoes bearing infectious diseases. Actual outbreaks of malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases and associated mortality will depend on the public health response. However, spraying as one response involves high costs and risks to humans and ecosystems. Insecticidal spraying of marshes and wetlands is damaging to the animals, birds and marine life they support, and leads to the evolution of pesticide-resistant mosquitos.

Rising sea levels can stress the city's water system. Places where fresh water can be withdrawn from the Hudson River, such as the Chelsea Pumping Station in Dutchess County, could become too salty to use. This facility becomes crucial during the drought conditions caused by global warming. Another potential stress occurs if the rising sea level causes salt to seep into the coastal aquifers of Long Island. There is concern that Nassau and Suffolk County users could call for

access to the city water supply at tremendous infrastructure costs. Higher temperatures will cause increased evaporation from land and water surfaces which will lead to reduced runoff from watersheds. Increasing population will make greater demands on the city for water.

Long stretches of sandy beach are one of the great amenities of the metro region. The combination of sea-level rise and storm-generated erosion threatens their very existence. Westhampton Beach, Coney Island and Rockaway Beach all lie at 10 feet or fewer above sea level. Seagate is only slightly above 10 feet. Freeport, Jones Inlet and Point Lookout are all especially developed, and all have approximately 10 foot elevations.

All these same stresses will adversely impact the Jamaica Bay wetlands, and all other of New York's extensive and valuable marshes and wetlands, including the Gateway National Recreation area. Movement inland by marshes is limited by existing urban development.

Denial is our worst enemy. Had we reacted to the science in the 1970s with normal good judgment, we could have pulled together and averted global warming. There were voices attempting to be heard, and they got as far as the White House. But, with the election of Ronald Reagan, they were effectively silenced.

A substantial amount of climate change is already in motion and will continue from greenhouse gases already emitted. The denial cannot continue. If we are to limit the severity of climate change, we must stop deforestation and reduce fossil fuel emissions by 70 to 80% immediately. Only radical measures taken now will save New York City.

*Moisha Blechman chairs the Atlantic Chapter's Publications Committee and is former chair of the Chapter's Global Warming Committee.*

# Gravity, a grand but subtle presence, helps trees — and squirrels

by Rick Marsi

The ground is making news again. Things will soon begin falling on it — leaves, for example — so people are looking down more than usual. Squirrels, wind and gravity seem the primary cause.

Throw in the sun for good measure. If the Northern Hemisphere didn't start turning away from it at this time of year, trees wouldn't start closing down their in-house food factories and laying off leaves.

If the wind didn't blow, those leaves would hang tough until hard frost convinced them to fall. As for gravity, everyone knows it's around — a grand presence but subtle. If you don't put a belt on, your pants droop. If you don't stay in shape, the northern part of your body begins migrating toward the southern part. Those are gravity's subtle incarnations.

Sometimes it speaks rather loudly. Once I slept in a house over which red oak trees towered. I lay in bed and heard acorns striking a tin roof like marbles, then rumbling down toward the gutter. That's gravity, too.

Hungry squirrels often use it to make sure they get food to eat. These days, all sorts of territorial disputes are being mediated in the treetops where squirrels reside. Tempers flare as normally mild-mannered rodents start kicking each other out of oak trees they've shared for six months.

Most of the altercations are food-related, with red, gray and fox squirrels vying for winter feeding territories.

When a victor emerges in a particular tree, that squirrel often begins severing clumps of oak twigs and watching them fall. Attached to these



*"You talkin' to me?!"*  
Food fights can erupt in fall as squirrels vie for acorns to stash for winter.

leaves and branchlets are acorns. Once they've fallen, the squirrels run down, pick them up and start thinking of where to stash them. Some acorns get stuffed in knotholes. Others end up in the ground, buried for retrieval at a later date.

Researchers confirm some of these buried nuts never get found. The squirrels forget where they put them. On the other hand, squirrels retrieve a good many nuts, so they don't starve to death over winter. The nuts they don't find germinate in spring and grow up to provide acorn bounty.

On a recent September afternoon, great chattering drew me into a woodland resplendent with oaks. Two gray squirrels were arguing high overhead.

Whenever their squabble turned especially fevered, I sneaked up a

couple feet closer. Shortly, I found myself directly below them. Glued to the trunk of a tall chestnut oak, they crouched 10 feet apart, staring daggers at one another. From the larger one's mouth bulged an acorn.

First came a face-off as both squirrels growled and jerked their tails like wildly twitching snakes. Then a chase ensued, with the nut-bearing squirrel dominating. When its rival had scampered through oak limbs toward trees in the distance, the victor descended, that acorn still stuck in its mouth.

Great digging followed, right under the tree. A burial process began. Was I watching the planting of one more oak tree or the stashing of food for the winter? "Does it matter?" I wondered. Either way, nature wins in the end.

Naturalist Rick Marsi is a journalist, public speaker and leader of eco-tours. Contact him at [www.rickmars.com](http://www.rickmars.com). ©2005 Rick Marsi

## Solutions

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of fuel. Use only organic fertilizer for your lawn.

- **Wearing layered clothing** — see how low you can keep your home temperature. In the winter, your body can adjust to somewhere between 60°F and 64°F on the thermostat and be comfortable. Have lap blankets for inactive times like reading. In the summer do the reverse. In the summer your body will adjust up about 20% higher. Fans help.

- **Electricity.** First conserve, and then make your own. If you own your home, it is easier and less expensive than you think. Extend this idea to all public buildings in your community, such as schools, town halls, clinics and hospitals. Change town building codes to require green building from all developers. "Green building" can mean "off the grid" in the many small towns of New York.

- **Utilization of residential and commercial rooftops** across the U.S. for solar energy could provide 710,000 of the current electrical capacity of 950,000 megawatts. Make the electrical wires marring the landscape obsolete, an artifact of the past.

- **Architects and contractors** as professionals are proving lazy. They are not promoting alternative systems. Sierrans need to wake them up. Passive solar heat is a functioning success. GE, for example, is offering roof-integrated tile photovoltaic systems to create electricity. These tiles integrate seamlessly into a roof of even a traditional home. They can save up to 60% in fuel costs. The smallest unit cuts emissions as effectively as 50 trees. State aid is available to help with initial costs.

- **All appliance purchases** should be Energy Star models, which conserve energy. Wherever possible, unplug appliances not in use as well. Most plugged-in appliances draw electricity. Dishwashing by hand can be just as time-efficient — and save more water — than a dishwasher.

"Every good thing, great and small, needs defense." — John Muir

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## Chapter calls for nominations for five at-large seats



The Atlantic Chapter Executive Committee (ExCom) sets Sierra Club conservation policy in New York state and administers the Chapter. Some ExCom members are chosen by their local Groups. Others, the at-large delegates, are elected by the Chapter membership statewide for two-year terms. This fall's election will fill five at-large seats.

If you're interested in running for one of these seats, please let the Nominating Committee (NomCom) know. Send your name, address and membership number to Nominating Committee, Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, Susquehanna Group, PO Box 572, Endicott, NY 13760, or by e-mail to [slauffer@stny.rr.com](mailto:slauffer@stny.rr.com). If you include a statement about your qualifications and reasons for running, it will help the NomCom decide whether to nominate you.

Anyone not nominated by the NomCom can become a candidate by filing a petition signed by at least 50 members of the Chapter, which must be received by the NomCom by October 13.

October 13 is also the deadline for all candidates to submit the final version of their ballot statements of up to 250 words. If you communicate your desire to run to the NomCom by Sept. 26, you'll be guaranteed a response by Sept. 29, so that you'll have time to petition if necessary.

The ballot will appear in the winter issue of the *Sierra Atlantic*. Votes will be counted in early January, 2006, with the winners taking office at the ExCom meeting in January.



## Group Roundup

### Susquehanna

#### *Jack Davis receives Spirit of the Sojourn award*

The Susquehanna Sojourn presented its 2005 Spirit of the Sojourn award to Group member Jack Davis.

Jack's long-term commitment to the environment and to the water quality of the Susquehanna River watershed made him an easy choice for the award.

The Susquehanna Sojourn is sponsored by the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay to promote the stewardship of the rivers feeding Virginia's Chesapeake Bay. (See <http://www.acb-online.org/>.) Each year participants canoe sections of the Susquehanna River.

When the canoers stopped at Grippen Park in Endwell, Group Chair Scott Lauffer spoke about the contamination of groundwater by a nearby IBM facility in Endicott. Toxic vapors from the water have been seeping into hundreds of residential and business basements.



Jack Davis

### Lower Hudson

#### *Activists work to unite religious, environmental groups*

Activists from the Lower Hudson Group (Westchester, Putnam and Rockland counties) are participating in The Hudson River Project: Caring for Creation and the Common Good. This is an effort led by the Garrison Institute to unite the religious and environmental communities in dialogue to protect the Hudson's watershed. The program is based on an ongoing DEC plan.

### Mid-Hudson

#### *Program on owner-built solar hot water systems a big hit*

A program on building your own solar hot water system brought the highest-ever attendance to the Mid-Hudson's May meeting, jointly held with Mensa and open to the public. Speaker Jan Shuster explained why a solar hot water system is both a better investment than photovoltaics and better for the environment.

A pamphlet, *Maine Solar Primer*, provides information on how to build a solar hot water system. It is available for \$5 from the Maine Solar Energy Association, RR 1, Box 7751, Jonesport, ME 04649.

Mid-Hudson is also holding its annual tag sale Sat., Sept. 24, 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. (raindate: Sept. 25) at Mulligan's Irish Pub parking lot, on Rt. 376, 2 miles south of Raymond Ave./Vassar College, Poughkeepsie. Take advantage of "dollar bags" at closing time.

The fight for the Kingston waterfront is gearing up as the developer for the 574-acre Tilcon property in Kingston presented an environmental impact statement

that minimizes the Group's concerns. Mid-Hudson Sierrans are participating in an informal alliance with other organizations to show that the current proposals on the Kingston waterfront are too big, do not fit in with the unique character of Kingston, and are environmentally destructive. Check out [www.ci.kingston.ny.us](http://www.ci.kingston.ny.us) and click on the meeting calendar to attend the next planning board or city council meeting and ask some questions.

And check out [www.friendsofkingstonwaterfront.org](http://www.friendsofkingstonwaterfront.org) for updates and to see what you can do.

### Niagara

#### *Victory over unfair toxic waste siting*

In June, the Niagara Group sent a letter to Governor Pataki urging him to sign legislation prohibiting any more permits for hazardous landfills until the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) complies with a 1994 court order to provide a geographically equitable siting plan for hazardous waste landfills in New York state.

Governor Pataki signed the legislation into law. Vince Agnello, president of Residents for Responsible Government, another group supporting the legislation, said, "[Governor Pataki] is putting environmental justice back in the forefront in the state. This is a major victory for us."

The law calls for the DEC to set down guidelines guaranteeing fairness in statewide disposal of all hazardous wastes. Currently, Chemical Waste Management, in Niagara County, is the only hazardous waste facility in the Northeast.

### Rochester

#### *Neighbor Notification Law passes in Monroe County*

In a supportive role, the Rochester Group helped the passage of the 48-Hour Neighborhood Notification Law in Monroe County. It took years of nudging this along. Now, companies that use liquid pesticides will be required to give their clients' neighbors 48 hours of notice by mail each time they spray. It's a state law that passed five years ago in Albany, with an opt-in provision for counties.

Rochester's experience can help other groups pass this law in their county. Check its Neighborhood Notification web page at <http://newyork.sierraclub.org/rochester/neighborhoodnotification.htm>.

Also, the Group welcomed a national Sierra Club bicycle outing to the Genesee River waterfront in June. The cyclists were pedaling the Erie Canal bike trail from Buffalo to Albany. Over a Thai take-out dinner, cyclists learned about local conservation and environmental issues.



### Hudson-Mohawk

#### *Group sponsors seminar on planning, zoning, SEQRA*

In April the Hudson-Mohawk Group sponsored a well-attended seminar on planning, zoning and the State Environmental Quality Review Act process. The seminar was intended to provide training and dialogue for Sierra Club members and others working to protect our environment. The seminar received praise as a critical tool for activists who are concerned with sprawl and environmental degradation in our local area.



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