



Mountain State Sierran

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January/February 2015

1st anniversary of water disaster: Will protection bill be gutted?

Jim Sconyers

Remember the Great Water Crisis of 2014? The public water supply for 300,000 people in the Kanawha Valley was tainted. Homes and businesses could use the water only for flushing toilets and firefighting.

What happened? We've learned a lot in the ensuing year. After years of creep and expansion, one single irresponsible private water company, West Virginia American Water (WVAW), was the only water source for all those thousands of people. And just upstream from their water intake from the Elk River sat a Freedom Industries tank farm holding thousands of gallons of toxic chemicals used by the coal industry.

These corporations exhibited classic disregard for public safety and health. Criminal behavior was apparently commonplace at Freedom. Their tanks and containment structures had been allowed to crumble over decades. WVAW had one — and only one — intake for the water for their whole system. Nobody at WVAW bothered to check what risks were present upstream from its water intake, or to develop effective plans in case of a spill upstream. And they refused, over the years, to build an alternate water intake; once the sole intake was poisoned, the whole system was ruined.

Add to that, more malfeasance at the local and national levels. Freedom's tanks held a chemical called crude MCHM. But nobody — not Freedom, not WVAW, not the federal Centers for Disease Control — had a clue how this material could affect human health. Naturally, that didn't prevent tanks full of the stuff from being stored in dilapidated containers right above the only water supply for nearly one-fifth of West Virginia's entire population.

The results were predictable. The tanks leaked, the water system was poisoned, 300,000 citizens and businesses had to do without water. Responsible officials ran in circles, pointing fingers and ultimately fabricating safe levels out of whole cloth so they could soon announce it was OK to drink the water again.

And now we come to the first anniversary of the spill, on Jan. 9, a few days before the 2015 session of the state legislature opens. This time last year, legislators and the governor were oh so outraged and concerned and determined — "Never again," etc. After all the obligatory boohooing and chest thumping, a water system protective bill was passed.

Now, rumors and scuttlebutt are rampant. In fact, they're more than rumor. It is clear that industry is determined to weaken or gut the protections of the 2014 bill. Cynical calculation is that enough time has passed and memories have faded. The Legislative session opens Jan. 14, and the water bill will hit the fan soon thereafter.

Do you drink water? If so, you have a vested interest. The bill protects all water systems in the state, not just the Kanawha Valley. So when the corporate lackeys who sit as members of the West Virginia House and Senate start meddling with our pretty fair water protection bill, they'll be messing with your water too. But who cares? You?

New York state bans fracking after looking at the science

Beth Little

By now most readers of this newsletter will have heard that New York has banned fracking.

Actually, the conclusion of the New York State Department of Health (DOH) is, that "until the science provides sufficient information to determine the level of risk to public health from High Volume Horizontal Fracturing (HVHF) to all New Yorkers and whether the risks can be adequately managed, HVHF should not proceed in New York State." The NY DOH conducted a public health review of scientific literature, made field visits and talked with health and environmental authorities in states with HVHF activity. Rather than a guarantee of absolute safety, they required sufficient information to understand what the likely public health risks will be; and they found that, currently, that information is insufficient. (http://www.health.ny.gov/press/reports/docs/high_volume_hydraulic_fracturing.pdf)

The areas they reviewed were human exposure to and health outcomes from:

- 1) Contaminants in air or water,
- 2) Naturally occurring radiological materials that result from HVHF activities, and
- 3) The effects of HVHF operations such as truck traffic, noise and social changes on communities.

I was particularly glad to see the third item, because even if they do everything right, and there is no water contamination, no spills or accidents, and no toxic air emissions; there are still the trucks. When fracking comes, it isn't just one well; it's a field of wells. And each well needs hundreds of trucks — large 18-wheeler diesel trucks — coming and going 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for months and months, extending into years. This means thousands of these trucks in a gas development area. In a rural area of small towns, winding roads, farms and forests, this is a nightmare for residents.

Then there is the additional impact of the lights and noise, which also goes on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And finally there is the influx of transient work crews.

In their major findings, the NY DOH found community impacts associated with boom-town economic effects such as increased vehicle traffic, road damage, noise, odor complaints, increased demand for housing and medical care, and stress. They cited numerous historical examples of the negative impact of rapid and concentrated increases in extractive resource development resulting in indirect

community impacts such as interference with quality-of-life, overburdened transportation and health infrastructure, and disproportionate increases in social problems, particularly in small isolated rural communities where local governments and infrastructure tend to be unprepared for rapid changes. Rates of traffic fatalities and major injuries were higher in heavy-drilling counties.

Other Major Findings

- **Air impacts** that could affect respiratory health due to increased levels of particulate matter, diesel exhaust, or volatile organic chemicals. They referenced McCawley's study (WVU School of Public Health), which determined that heavy vehicle traffic and trucks idling at well pads were the likely sources of intermittently high dust and benzene concentrations, sometimes observed at distances of at least 625 feet from the center of the well pad. These emissions have the potential to contribute to community odor problems, respiratory health impacts such as asthma exacerbations, and longer-term climate change impacts from methane accumulation in the atmosphere.
- **Drinking water impacts** from underground migration of methane and/or fracking chemicals associated with faulty well construction. Groundwater contamination clusters were found to be due to gas leakage from intermediate-depth strata through failures of annulus cement, faulty production casings, and underground gas well failure. Shallow methane migration has the potential to impact private drinking water wells, creating safety concerns due to explosions. Some studies suggest additional sources of potential water contamination, including surface spills and inadequate treatment and disposal of radioactive wastes.
- Further **soil and water contamination** resulting from inadequate wastewater treatment.
- **Earthquakes** induced during fracturing. Although the potential public health consequence of these relatively mild earthquakes is unknown, this evidence raises new concerns about this potential HVHF impact.

The thing is, this information has been out there for years. It's old news to the residents of Frackistan, the heavily drilled counties in West Virginia. And the NY DOH admits that they just did a "review," not a new study. So how come none of our elected officials or environmental "protection" agency leaders could reach similar conclusions? Could it be that the NY DOH is comprised of people with more integrity, who haven't been influenced by politics or bought by campaign donations and lobby gifts from the gas industry?

I just wish that Gov. Tomblin were as attentive to science and as concerned about the health of West Virginia citizens as Gov. Cuomo is about New York.



Book Review

Overheated: The Human Cost of Climate Change

by Andrew Guzman

Review by Richard Mier, Martinsburg

On TV the other night, I watched a beautiful nature documentary on the waning and waxing fortunes of two of the Arctic's most fearsome predators, the polar bear and the killer whale. As a result of climate change and the loss of arctic sea ice, the polar bear's icy platform for hunting, as you likely know, is rapidly disappearing, and its survival is in question. Though we don't as often think of waxing effects from climate change, there are some. In this case, loss of sea ice has opened large areas of arctic waters to predation from increased numbers of killer whales. There is human fallout here, of course, since increased narwhal killing by orcas has resulted in fewer narwhals available to some of the resident Inuit communities that rely on narwhals for their subsistence.

The show was impressive to me because it detailed how these imbalances — warmer waters, less ice, more orcas, fewer narwhals, more trouble for the Inuit — involve not only temperatures and species loss, but also struggling human populations. This is also what Andrew Guzman's new book, "Overheated," is all about.

Guzman — and he's quick to tell you this — is not a scientist. He was trained as an economist, became a lawyer and is now a professor and associate dean at the University of California, Berkeley. He's an expert on international trade but became convinced that being a student of international systems without accounting for climate change was like "being an expert on terrorism in 2001 and yet ignoring Al-Qaeda."

For anyone not familiar enough with the geophysical elements of climate change "Overheated" includes more than enough to bring you up to speed on the scientific details. Guzman shines, though, when describing the human effects of climate

change. He catalogues these effects in four extensive chapters, each concerned with a central threat: too much water, not enough water, human conflict over water and how climate change degrades human health.

Though aware of what's happening to low-lying islands like the Maldives, Tuvalu and Tonga, I was a little surprised to read about the even more serious existential threat that rising seas pose to places like Bangladesh, where half the population of 150 million people live in low-lying areas and where a one-meter rise in sea level will submerge 17.5 percent of the country, including an estimated half of the rice-producing land. With few resources to deal with huge internal migration and decreased productivity, catastrophic instability and loss of life would be likely.

Guzman continues, always emphasizing human effects, by describing why glacier loss is so detrimental to human survival in Bolivia, how drought contributes to conflict and death in Darfur, how upstream water diversion relates to instability in Turkey, Iraq, Syria and nuclear Pakistan, how decreased soil moisture in Africa leads to lower agricultural yields, increased religious and ethnic tensions and, eventually, political upheaval. He describes in a straightforward way why climate change is a risk multiplier likely to push already stressed regions and regimes to the brink and beyond.

As Guzman himself writes, "Overheated" is "not a feel-good book," nor should it be. He finishes with a clear-eyed chapter listing his notions of what can and should be done. In the end, his explication of how human beings are and will be affected by climate change, and what to do about it, proves to be an antidote for catastrophism and pessimism. Knowledge is power here, as everywhere, and Guzman delivers the goods. He deserves praise for this thoughtful book.

More people are employed in solar than coal. *Business Insider* (7/21/2014) quoted statistics from The Solar Foundation and MSHA stating that solar jobs are outpacing coal mining 142,698 to 123,227. King coal still has a few more ancillary workers employed in fields like shipping and railroading, but maybe not for long. Take that, all you people worried about "jobs" in a clean economy.

National Club elections coming soon, get ready to vote

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

The Sierra Club is a democratically structured organization at all levels. The Club requires the regular flow of views on policy and priorities from its grassroots

View from the Chair

— Jim Sconyers

Jim's Swan Song

OK, so I'm no swan — but you get the point. As of Jan. 10, I am no longer West Virginia Sierra Club Chapter Chair. In the immortal words of Robert Hunter, "What a long strange trip it's been."

My tenure began in the 1990s when our major issues were, among others, the Blackwater Canyon and roadless areas in the Monongahela National Forest. Then I had an interruption for a few years when I had to leave the state as an economic migrant. Returning in the 2000s, a new issue emerged on our radar screen: the Marcellus gas tsunami. Obviously, there's been plenty to do.

In all, I've been Chapter Chair for a decade. I was amazed when I did the arithmetic and came to that conclusion. Yikes! Enough already! As one of my closest colleagues in the Chapter often points out, it's high time for us old, white, male dinosaurs to shuffle off the stage and make way for new leadership. This is the sound of me shuffling. I would be happiest to see myself replaced by someone who is

not a similar dinosaur, but those chips will fall where they may.

I have been inordinately proud to be able to speak in public many times and announce, "I'm Jim Sconyers, Chair of the West Virginia Sierra Club." While that doesn't always engender fear and trembling among our "opponents," believe me it gets their attention and respect. They know I speak for more than 2,000 citizens deeply committed to a better West Virginia, and a better planet. West Virginia with clean air, clean water, healthy communities, and good jobs in a vibrant economy based on clean energy — this is our mission.

So ... this is good-bye as Chapter Chair, but hello to one more hard-working environmental activist. That's where I came from, and that's what I return to. I'll continue as a member of the Executive Committee, with another year to serve in my current term. I look forward to working with my wonderful fellow members there.

Thanks so much for giving me the opportunity, and honor, to serve.

See you in the trenches!

New Membership Chair asks for help

Chuck Conner, Membership Chair

Some of the new members may recognize my name from the welcome letters or postcards you have received in the past year. I quietly slipped into the Membership Chair position last January. To start getting grounded, I read the position description on the national website and joined the Membership Chair's email list. I have since realized that, like most folks who volunteer, this isn't the only time I freely offer, so giving this position the time it needs is beyond one person's ability.

For the position to be more effective, we need a few others to step up and take on some of the membership tasks — in most states, there is a Membership Committee. In the next several newsletters, I will outline examples of ways to offer assistance. The first is:

If you plan to attend an event and are willing to distribute Sierra Club membership applications, we would appreciate the help. I can order a bunch and have them on hand to send to individuals. I would need 2-3 weeks

notice to be sure I could get them to you in time.

We also can provide stickers to distribute — "Beyond Oil," the Sierra Hiker for windows and the Sierra Hiker temporary tattoo (very cool and colorful).

Your membership in Sierra Club is crucial to our being an effective organization. Being involved is a part of that. If each of us takes on a small task, it will lessen the burden on all of us, and we will accomplish our goals.

Another aspect of membership is to provide feedback on the operation and direction of the WV Chapter. How can we serve you best? Many of you, as new members, do not provide an email address so we cannot make use of current technology to keep you informed about local issues. I know we all get way too much spam and other annoying notices, but deleting is just a click away.

My contact information is in the directory on the back page. If you can assist in the recruitment process, let me know.

Thanks to each of you for your dedication to the Sierra Club and its mission.

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Contributing	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 150	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 175
Life	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 1000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 1250
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Help your Chapter stay strong for the hard work we do to keep West Virginia wild and wonderful.
 Make a quick and easy donation from the Chapter's home page: westvirginia.sierraclub.org

2015 Chapter Outings

Sat, Jan 10

Coopers Rock Day Hike

rated moderate to strenuous —

Join us for our 4th annual "Hike to the Overlook." This is a moderate to strenuous hike (depending on weather and condition of the trails) of about 7 miles. We will start at the Day-Use lot, hike the Scott Run Trail, and then continue on the Roadside Trail to the overlook. The plan is to eat lunch at the Overlook, and then hike back to the cars. Bring snacks/lunch and water; trekking poles can be helpful, as sections of Scott Run Trail are fairly steep in places. Be sure to dress for the weather; sturdy/waterproof footwear is HIGHLY recommended. Contact leader for directions, rendezvous location and start time.

Leader: Aaron Vedock, 540-805-0019, amvedock@hotmail.com

Nearest town: Morgantown

Web info: coopersrockstateforest.com

Sat, Jan 17

Sugarloaf Mountain Day Hike

rated strenuous — We will hike 6-7

miles on Sugarloaf Mountain in Maryland. Some trails are steep, with loose rock and slippery dirt. Allow 3 hours for the hike with a 10 a.m. start time. The exit for the mountain is 10 miles south of Frederick, MD, off I-270. Please pre-register with trip leader.

Leader: Pam Peitz, 240-818-6554, pspeitz@hotmail.com

Nearest town: Frederick, MD

Web info: sugarloafmd.com

Maryland Chapter Outings

Our neighboring chapter to the east has an active outings program, with many trips coming into West Virginia or western Maryland. These outings, by highly experienced leaders, range from easy to strenuous, and are open to everyone. Join an outing by checking out their calendar at

maryland.sierraclub.org

Allegheny Group Outings

Sierra Club members in the Pittsburgh area belong to the Allegheny Group. They have a moderately active outings program as well as links to other local outdoor activities. Visit their website for an outings calendar and more details at

alleghenysc.org

Potomac Region Outings (PRO)

This is an activity section of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter, with an extensive outings program run by leaders who live in and around the Washington, D.C., area. A calendar of activities, information and updates can be found on their website at

www.sierrapotomac.org

West Virginia Chapter Outings

For updated listings of outings sponsored by the West Virginia Chapter, check our Chapter website at

westvirginia.sierraclub.org

Perspectives on Outings

— Russ Flowers, Outings Chair

Looking Back & Looking Ahead

Looking back, it is hard to believe that another year has come and gone, and it's been two years since I became the Chapter's Outings Chair. I am happy to have the opportunity to serve the Club; it was a perfect fit. I love the outdoors, meeting people, and my beautiful home state of West Virginia. We are fortunate that our Club has such wonderful members. It is the dedication of many outings leaders that makes this job easy and enjoyable.

In 2014, our outings leaders led more than 50 outings. The diverse opportunities ranged from hikes in the Cranberry Wilderness; cross-country skiing in Canaan Valley; bird watching along the Ohio River; trail improvement service projects at Coopers Rock; kayak float-paddling down the Cheat River; blueberry picking at Dolly Sods; and a train ride on the Cass scenic railroad. There truly has been something for everyone, with offerings at different skill levels.

Because they are always open to members and nonmembers alike, these outings have been a great way to meet up with old friends, meet new ones and share fellowship with like-minded people, all while soaking in the natural beauty of our incredible state.

In addition to the outings, we held an Outings Leader retreat at Canaan Valley State Park in June. We had a great time hiking the park trails. Following the hikes, we all came back to the campground for a cookout and fellowship. The OL Retreat is definitely a keeper.

Another milestone in 2014 for the outings program was SierraFest, held at Blackwater State Park in September. Outings Leader Training (OLT) 101 was held with six new leaders trained and one attending for an OL refresher.

To improve the efficiency of completing OL certification, we added Basic First Aid and CPR training. We were fortunate to have a local certified instructor there to teach us. Altogether, 11 outings leaders took the First Aid/CPR training. As with OLT 101, there was lots of interaction and positive discussion.

One suggestion was to have a Facebook page dedicated just to outings. This page could also be linked to the Chapter's main Facebook page. This, coupled with postings on the website and in the newsletter, could improve the way our outings are advertised and, in turn, reach more people. What great thinking!

Another super idea the group came up with was to offer advanced trainings such as OLT 201 more often so more overnight outings can be offered. In 2015, we want to keep the momentum going and train more outings leaders.

Another take-away from SierraFest was from a presentation about the Birthplace of Rivers National Monument. It was informative and educational. Realizing the importance and significance of this proposed National Monument, I will make it a goal to have more outings to that area to give it more exposure and educate more people of its significance.

Looking ahead

To continually improve and meet your needs, I ask for your constructive feedback and suggestions to make our outings program even better. Are there other types of outings you would like to see offered? Perhaps you would like to see more outings in certain locations in the state. Are we doing a good job getting outings information to you through the newsletter and website?

The outings aspect of our Club is meant to get us outside so we can appreciate the wonder of nature. Thus, it is important to me that we provide the types of opportunities that would get us all the most motivated to do so. If you have an outings wish, odds are there are others who will enjoy such an opportunity as well.

All in all, 2014 was very successful. Moving forward, I challenge myself and extend the challenge to all members to continually improve and enhance our outings program in 2015.

In closing, I personally wish to thank all the outings leaders who led outings and all those who went on an outing. You are the ones who make this program a success and bring the Club to a personal level. I offer each and every one of you a standing ovation.

If you have comments, questions, concerns or suggestions, feel free to contact me. And, as always, thanks for your support of WV Sierra Club Outings as we look ahead to the New Year.

Take to the Outdoors!

Sierra Club Liability Policies For Chapter Outings

Sierra Club outings are open to everyone, members and non-members alike. Each outing is intended to be a wholesome, safe, and enjoyable experience in the outdoors. Participants must have suitable clothing, gear, and stamina, and are encouraged to select activities that match their individual abilities for outdoor adventures.

The Club offers a variety of outings from "easy" to "moderate" to "strenuous" that suit all activity levels. The difficulty of each outing is clearly designated in the announcement. Reservations are generally not required unless noted, but the outing leader may be contacted in advance for questions about the terrain, the difficulty and recommended gear.

Activities are normally held "rain or shine," but may be postponed at the leader's discretion for safety reasons in the event of inclement weather. Participants are reminded that all outdoor activities carry a degree of risk, and some take place in locations where professional emergency medical aid may be two or more hours away. People with health concerns should consult a physician to determine the advisability of participating in these or similar activities. The leader is responsible for the safety of all participants, and has the final authority to decide whether or not an individual may participate on a specific outing. Sierra Club safety policy requires that helmets be worn on bicycling outings, and a personal flotation device (PFD) be worn when using personal watercraft such as kayaks or canoes.

Unless noted in the announcement, Club outings are intended for adults. Children and

dogs are not normally permitted, unless an outing is so designated. Minors (under 18 years of age) must be accompanied by a parent or a legal guardian, or they must have both 1) a signed permission slip, and 2) the leader's prior consent to participate in the Club outing. Sierra Club outings officially begin and end at the trailhead.

Travel to the official starting point and back, even from an advertised meeting place, is the sole responsibility of each participant. While the Club encourages car-pooling, such arrangements are strictly between the riders and the drivers, and are not a part of the outing. Participants assume full responsibility and liability for all risks associated with such travel.

All participants on Sierra Club outings are required to sign a standard liability waiver, which can be viewed on the web at www.sierraclub.org/outings/chapter/forms or by calling 415-977-5630.

The Sierra Club does not charge for chapter outings, although payment of park entrance fees, a share of campsite rental costs, permit fees, equipment rental charges, etc. may be required from the participants. The Sierra Club practices "leave-no-trace" trail techniques, including hiking and camping on durable surfaces, minimizing campfire impacts, packing out all trash, respecting wildlife, being considerate of other visitors, and leaving the environment as it was found.

The Sierra Club's California Seller of Travel identification number is CST 2087766-40. Registration as a seller of travel does not constitute approval by the State of California.

Please contact the Editor for submission guidelines or advertising rates. Contributions to the newsletter may be sent to the Editor at:

celliot2@comcast.net

**Deadline for
March/April issue
February 6**

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Contact Candice for details
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cglagola@mail.wvnet.edu

(Put name of recipient under subject)

Messages for legislators can be left at:

1-877-565-3447 or 304-347-4836

Mail address:

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The production of this issue of the *Mountain State Sierran* was unavoidably delayed due to technical difficulties with the editor's computer. Everything seems to be back to normal now, so the March/April issue should arrive on time. For up-to-date information about meetings and outings, or to view past issues of the newsletter, please visit the Chapter's website at:

westvirginia.sierraclub.org

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