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 artic 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 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 on 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 of California, Berkeley. He’s an expert on international systems without accounting for climate change was “being an expert on terrorism in 2001 and my tenures 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 happy 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 that is one reason I’m happy to see you in the trenches, not to be sure I could get them to vote in the past year. I quickly slipped into the Membership Chair position last January. To start getting ground, 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 will need 2-3 weeks to prepare.

**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 quickly slipped into the Membership Chair position last January. To start getting ground, 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.

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**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 an email in the mail (or by Internet) if you chose the electronic delivery option. Please make your voting decisions at your leisure and submit your completed ballot by the deadline.

The election is your opportunity to vote for candidates who reflect your vision for the future of the Club and the environment.

**DONATE TODAY**

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

**View from the Chair**

Jim’s Swan Song

By Jim Sconyers

January/February 2015
2015 Chapter Outings

Sat, Jan 10 Coopers Rock Day Hike

Looking back, it is hard to believe that another year has come and gone, and to think that it was just a short time since I assumed 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 projects on Coopers Rock; kayak floating and 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 outings 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 and paddling. Following the hikes, we all came back to the campground for a cookout out 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 that we hold a Facebook page dedicated specifically 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 a 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.

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

Opinions expressed in the Mountain State Sierran are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Sierra Club. This newsletter is published bimonthly by the WV Chapter of Sierra Club and distributed to all paid members.

2015 Sierra Club Calendars now available at 30% off retail.

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Inside this Issue

1
1st Anniversary of Water Disaster: Will Protection Bill be Gutted? • New York State Bans Fracking after Looking at the Science

2
View from the Chair: Jim’s Swan Song • Book Review: Overheated: The Human Cost of Climate Change by Andrew Guzman • New Membership Chair Asks for Help • National Club Elections Coming Soon, Get Ready to Vote • Membership Form

3
Perspectives on Outings: Looking Back & Looking Ahead • 2015 Outings • Liability Policy for Chapter Outings

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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