

M A S S A C H U S E T T S

SIERRAN

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Spring 2005

*Reaching More Than
26,000 Sierra Club Members
in Massachusetts*

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Massachusetts Sierra Club

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Annual dues in the Sierra Club are \$39, of which \$1 is for a subscription to the Massachusetts Sierran.

SENATE SELLS OUT ARCTIC REFUGE

Letter from the desk of James McCaffrey, Director

In a landmark vote that has pitted environmentalists against oil interests for decades, the Senate recently voted 51 to 49 to sell out the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, all for a mere pittance of the nation's oil supply. One of our nation's last great wilderness areas, the Arctic is teeming with wildlife, including calving grounds for 150,000 Caribou, and is still largely unspoiled by either commercial oil exploration or any human activity. The indigenous Gwich'in Indian Nation still depends on the area to sustain their native way of life.

Last month's vote did not give the green light for actual drilling in the Arctic, but instead attached projected revenues from drilling to the federal budget. By including potential future oil revenues in the budget – with figures artificially inflated 800% by bill sponsors – the vote does set the stage for congress later this year to approve actual drilling. And while it is a symbolic victory for the oil-soaked Bush administration, which has long sought to open the refuge for its pals in the industry, the razor-thin margin was a far cry from a mandate. Even as the republican leadership declared victory, a bi-partisan coalition of members of Congress vowed to keep the refuge off-limits from drilling. Here in New England, Senators John Kerry (D-MA) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME) maintained their long standing support for protecting the Arctic by offering an amendment to strip drilling revenues from the budget.

Even as oil prices continued to rise steeply before the vote, big oil was actually pulling out of drilling in the Arctic. In February, Alaskan Governor Frank Murkowski threatened to lease areas just off the coastline of the refuge for drilling. This does not require a vote from Congress. Last year, the same threat yielded no bidders from the oil industry. And oil industry stud-

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On the cover: **Maple Trees** Photograph by Elisa Campbell

MASSACHUSETTS

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Circulation of the Massachusetts Sierran is over 26,000 outdoor-minded, environmentally aware readers.

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Whither our Parks: Parks Commissioner Fired in Controversial Move by Governor

By James McCaffrey & Elisa Campbell

On February 4, Governor Mitt Romney “requested the resignation” of Kathy Abbott, Commissioner of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). The stated cause for the firing was that some sidewalks had not been properly plowed after a record snowstorm dropped more than two feet of snow across most of Massachusetts. Regrettably, four high school students who were walking along the VFW parkway - instead of on the sidewalk - were struck by a truck traveling on the parkway. Fortunately, all of the students have recovered, and the Principal of the West Roxbury High School has reported that all students are doing well and have returned to class.

While there is no question the incident should not have occurred, the circumstances surrounding the accident are somewhat less apparent. As the hours passed immediately following the incident, it became clear that there may be more to the story - and the firing - than the reasons stated by the Governor’s public relations office. Were the sidewalks in fact cleared after all? What was the driving record of the motorist who struck the students? Did the Governor’s office have other motives in so promptly calling for the resignation of the Commissioner? Was under-funding of the agency really to blame for potential operational shortcomings? And was it possible that Kathy Abbott was in fact doing too good a job for some in the Governor’s office?

Progress Made, Progress Lost

Despite overriding concerns for public safety, environmentalists were immediately outraged by Abbott’s dismissal, partly because she had been

doing such a stellar job at improving public safety. Kathy Abbott provided new leadership and vision for DCR and was expanding the public’s participation within our parks system. Significant progress was being made in understanding our park resources and how to manage them better. Sierra Club outings leaders have noticed a marked improvement in the quality and marking of trails, policing of our state forests and parks, enforcement of existing rules, and more outreach to parks users and friends groups by DCR staff and management.

In the weeks and months leading up to the accident, the Commissioner had called upon the Governor’s office and the legislature to provide more money to adequately maintain the urban parks system. Commissioner

“Was it possible that Kathy Abbott was doing too good a job for some in the Governor’s office?”

Abbott had also signed - the day before her dismissal - a contract with the Mass Highway Department (MHD) to help the parks agency plow some of the DCR owned roadways. And in the days following the incident, major print and media outlets began reporting that Governor Romney had actually used \$40,000 of DCR’s funds to throw a send-off party for the New England Patriots - on private, not public, property.

Senate and House Convene Oversight Hearing to Investigate

To try to understand what had happened, and to make sure it didn’t happen again, Senators Barrios (D-Somerville) and Resor (D-Acton) convened a Senate Oversight Hearing to get to the bottom of things. At the hearing it quickly became clear the initial story was incomplete. Senior officials from the Romney administration testified before the hearing that “serious operational failures” had been the reason for Abbott’s dismissal, while taking credit for the agreement with MHD that Abbott had executed, and then stating publicly that snow clearing was no longer a problem. Subse-

quently, Abbott’s temporary replacement was then presented with numerous pictures of sidewalks and portions of DCR roadways that were still not clear of snow - this now being almost three weeks after the blizzard, nearly a week after Abbott had been fired, and moments after state officials had claimed all the snow was cleared.

Groups Testify - Underfunding Creates Public Safety Risks

For those most familiar with our parks system, including the volunteer friends groups who help maintain them and the environmental groups who work to protect them, it was clear that something else might be to blame for the tragic incident that occurred along the VFW. The Sierra Club and numerous other groups presented compelling evidence at the hearing that chronic under-funding of DCR had led to the agency’s inability to do its job, including protecting the safety of the public who use our parks system. This was precisely what Kathy Abbott had been saying as well.

Our 450,000 acre parks system includes 2,000 miles of trails, 39 pools, 39 rinks, and 3,500 campsites, and the necessary infrastructure to support those facilities, including 1,500 buildings, 3,500 miles of roads, 900 miles of sidewalks, 270 bridges, 263 dams, and more than 2,000 parking lots. But no one can manage and maintain facilities without funds. Massachusetts used to spend about 1.4 cents of every taxpayer dollar keeping our parks clean, safe and well maintained, but now we spend less than 2/3 of a cent.

As any frequent reader of the Sierran may remember, this underfunding is not new. Over two years ago, the Sierra Club and other environmental groups jointly issued a report warning of a pending crisis in our parks system, including risks to the public safety. But the budget has not improved. In fact, since our report, DCR has seen an almost 40% reduction in its funding. Those cuts translate directly into public safety risks including understaffed parks, declining workforce, limited operating hours

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Is Spectacle Island a Park?

By John Lewis

Once upon a time there was a large mound of smoldering rejects of our civilization in Boston Harbor. That was Spectacle Island more than 20 years ago when the Sierra Club became the chief champion for the formation and planning of the Boston Harbor Islands State Park. Years went by and a national recreational park was formed inside the boundaries of the state park, but only on land above the low tide mark. The ownership of the islands remained with various entities which were to cooperate with the National Park Service.

Spectacle Island became the repository of moderately contaminated dirt from the upper level of the "Big Dig." The island was covered with 14 million cubic yards of dirt, raising the elevation of the north knoll to about 220 feet. Among the long list of mitigations for allowing the Big Dig project to deposit the Big Dig dirt, the new island was armored with large rip-rap on the north and east sides, sunken fishing boats and assorted barges were removed from the west side, and a leachate cut-off wall installed behind the west beach (to be made with imported sand) to keep the

leachate from wetting the beach. A visitors' center was built (at this moment it is used by the workers on the island), a large sturdy dock was built, the dirt was covered with a layer of material to block water infiltration, and was then covered with several feet of topsoil in which was planted shrubs, bushes and grasses.

The vegetation has for the most part grown well, and



it's a great ocean, city, harbor and airport view from the north knoll. I have even seen a large male deer. I took a picture, for proof!

The cost so far is probably around \$7 million, paid for as mitigation by the Central Artery Project (the Big Dig).

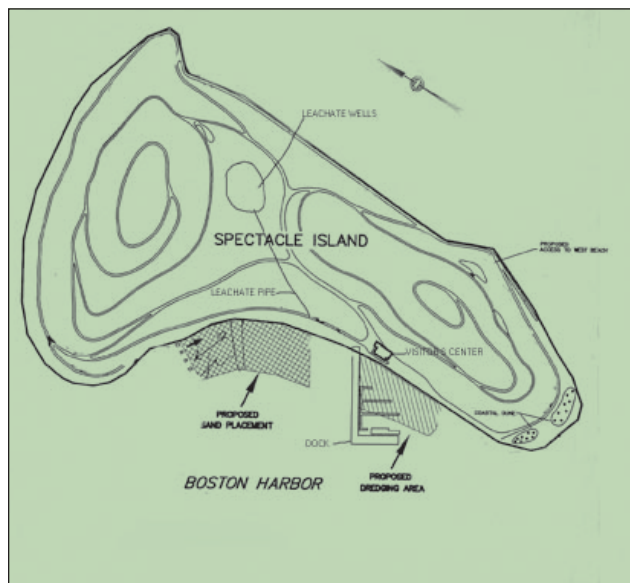
But all is not well. Spectacle Island was closed last summer; we can only hope it will be open for visitors this June of 2005. The landfill leachate collection system has not worked as designed. The system's plan was that the leachate behind the western beach cut-off was to be pumped back to the east and, at the highest point in the saddle area, run into 10 leachate wells that penetrated the plastic fill cover. The idea was that the leachate would then slowly leach through the rip rap armor on the east and west sides into the harbor. This avoided the legal necessity of obtaining a point source permit which would be required if the leachate came out a pipe and drained directly into the harbor. What in fact happened was that the leachate pipes and wells plugged with a sort of growth. Chemical treatment only improved the situation briefly. The leachate contaminants are not horrible pollutants; they are mostly metallic salts, no oil or PCB's or other organics. Though a direct pipe into the harbor would probably cause no discernable pollution in the harbor, allowing a point source to flow directly into a body of water from a capped dump is considered a very bad precedent by the DEP (and probably is).

The small volume of gray water from the visitor's center is supposed to be added to the dump leachate as a method of disposal.

In order to open Spectacle Island for the summer of 2005, the temporary solution is to remove the leachate from the island by a tank on a barge to a shore location where it will be pumped into the Massachusetts Water Resources Administration (MWRA) system. The gray water (of much smaller volume) would be removed in the same way: by barge. All this would allow Spectacle Island to be open this summer.

The long term solution being considered is to build a sewage line underwater to Long Island at the cost of \$1

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Poison in Your Deck? Protect Children and Pets

By Gil Woolley

Now that it's spring, it is time to look around the yard to see if you are exposing children and pets to a deadly poison: arsenic. For the past 30 years, almost all the wood used in decks, play houses, picnic tables and other outdoor structures has been treated with chromated copper arsenate (CCA) to combat fungus and insect attack. The pressure-treated wood of a typical deck contains several ounces of arsenic, and, despite industry claims, it continues to leach out for many years. The leached-out CCA is clearly visible as a pale green film on the surface of the wood.

The arsenic in this film is readily absorbed into the body through skin contact. Small children have lots of exposed skin, and they often put their fingers in their mouths. CCA washed off the wood accumulates on any surface beneath, and provides another opportunity for absorption through the skin and by hand to mouth.

While everyone knows that arsenic is a deadly poison when ingested, not everyone is aware that, even in trace quantities, it can cause rashes and scabs on the skin. Over the long term, it can cause cancer. Animals living in enclosures made from CCA-treated wood become sick, and sometimes die.

To protect children and animals from arsenic, exposed CCA-treated wood can be sealed with paint or varnish, but over time the arsenic seeps through and, if any green film is visible, the wood must be recoated.

Do not burn CCA-treated wood!

Do not, on any account, burn CCA-treated wood in either a stove or an open fire! Burning releases arsenic vapor into the air; the vapor may be inhaled, producing very serious

effects. The ash is also highly toxic.

CCA-treated wood is no longer manufactured for domestic use, but existing stocks may be sold. Wood protected by less toxic treatments is now available.

Gil Woolley is an activist and long-time member of the Chapter's Executive Committee as well as a frequent contributor to these pages.

HELP DECIDE THE DIRECTION OF THE SIERRA CLUB!

This fall's Sierra Summit in San Francisco will include members establishing the conservation priorities for the Sierra Club for the next 5 to 10 years. Be one of the 16 people representing the Massachusetts Chapter. In addition to attending the Summit, you will be expected to participate in discussions of possible priorities with other chapter volunteers on email or in person. Please submit a short statement of your interest and why the chapter should select you by Thursday May 12 to office@sierraclubmass.org and put Sierra Summit in the subject line.

Make A Difference

We send out an appeal in March to each of our members, asking for contributions directly to your Chapter. You will not receive any contributions requests from national Sierra Club in this time period, as we want you to concentrate on your local Chapter.

These contributions really do make a difference to us, and are an important part of our Chapter's budget.

When you make a donation to the Chapter, you support the Sierra Club's work in your own backyard. You allow us to continue our work to protect wilderness and wildlife, to improve the quality of life in our cities, and to promote the enjoyment of nature.

Please be as generous as you are able—remember, these funds directly affect your way of life in your neighborhood.

Thank You. You can mail your check to:



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Wanted: Forest Guardians

By Elisa Campbell



The Massachusetts Chapter is launching a new initiative to help protect our irreplaceable state forests and parks system. These natural areas are under constant threat from both near and far, including: budget cuts, lack of planning for conservation and preservation, and pressures for recreational uses that degrade the environment, to name but a few. Often the biggest threats are from just outside the park, including invasions by all-terrain vehicles from neighboring private lands, inappropriate land use on properties that abut the parks, or sometimes even encroachment by private land owners. Then there are problems from even further away. Currently, our forests and parks are under attack by invasive pests that kill trees and shrubs, like the fungus which attacks beeches, and the hemlock wooly adelgid, as well as the possibility of Sudden Oak Death being introduced from nursery plants. Also, invasive plants can take over and reduce the habitat for native species. Then there are the old stand-bys, such as smog and acid precipitation, that have degraded forests across the entire northeast.

Most of these threats to our state-owned public lands are not new. For example, the state parks agency (formerly the Department of Environmental Management, now the Department of Conservation and Recreation) has seen nearly two decades of budget cuts. Just since 2003 the parks agencies have seen a cut of nearly 40 percent. It's clear that to change our "Commonwealth's" commitment to our public lands, we need

to raise the level of awareness, activism, and overall support for our state forests and parks system.

This effort is vitally important. Massachusetts has very little federally-protected land, and aside from the Cape Cod National Seashore, we don't have any national parks with an emphasis on nature at all (we have some fine historical parks). Massachusetts does not even have any National Forests. The public land that is preserved in our state is protected by the state or by local towns. Preservation of these lands has a direct effect on our quality of life, and the diversity of species that we share our lives with.

What you can do

Do you have a favorite State Park or Forest? Do you live near one? We want to form a network of Forest Guardians who want to protect these lands from the variety of threats they face. Want to join us? Please send me your contact information, and tell me which parks and/or forests you know and want to help. I'll form the network and get you in contact with other Forest Guardians. Also, as a certified Sierra Club trip leader, I'm interested in leading trips that show both why an area is special, and what the threats are to

those areas. So if you know of a good hike in your state park or forest, let me know. We can work together to develop a fabulous Sierra Club hiking program designed to show people what we collectively own – our great forests and parks system- and then we will get more people involved in protecting it.

Finally, we are creating a place on the Sierra Club Web site to help the State Forests and Parks. We're looking for your input: pictures and explanations. (Please see sidebar for more details.)

Elisa Campbell is the Chair of the Chapter's Public Lands and Open Spaces Committee and has written frequently for the Sierran about the parks.



Lady Slipper photo courtesy Elisa Campbell

Your Pictures on the Sierra Club Website

The Massachusetts Chapter is creating pages on the Chapter Web site about the State Forests and Parks. We invite your participation! We'd love to have a place on the Web for every Forest and Park in the system ... but we don't expect to get there immediately. We'll start with information as we get it; and we plan to get it from you, our members, who know the value of places in your "neighborhood."

What we want from you:

1. Pictures of the Park or Forest - These should be beautiful pictures of what makes this place special, and, if possible, pictures of the threats to it. Examples include views, healthy forests, people actively enjoying human-powered recreation (hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, canoeing, etc.); and also trails eroded by all-terrain vehicles, trash dumped in the park, etc. The beauties or threats should be clearly visible in the photographs.
2. Captions and explanations with each picture, so we can include that information on the Web site. Which Park or Forest? Is it in the Park or Forest, or near it? What's the point of the picture? Approximate date of the picture? If there are recognizable people in the picture, do you have their permission to "publish" the picture?
3. A brief discussion of the place, what's great about it, what the problems are.

Technical Info

We need 72 dpi images about 4x6 inches. Can't do that? If you have prints or slides but no scanner; or you have digital photos bigger than that but not the software to make them smaller- don't let that stop you! We can help! Contact Elisa Campbell at ecampbell@sierraclubmass.org

Extinction In Our Lifetimes?

The Northern Right Whale

By Cindy Delpapa

Few things match the thrill of seeing the surprising grace of a giant whale breaching or diving. Few whales are as sought after as the Northern Right Whale for viewing both for their playful nature and for their tolerance of boats. It is this easiness around boats that may bring an end to future generations enjoying these magnificent mammals.

Extinction

The Northern Right Whale is on the brink of disappearing from our oceans. With barely 300 individuals known to exist and fewer than 100 breeding females, the fate of the Northern Right Whale could be decided in the next decade. The loss of even one whale, especially if it is a female, brings the Northern Right Whale population closer to a point where recovery is not possible. Many factors have contributed to the precipitous decline of the Northern Right Whale, starting with huge harvests by the whaling industries in the 18th and 19th centuries. Modern threats are not as blatant but the whales still suffer losses from fishing gear entanglements, habitat losses and ship strikes.

Ocean Road Kill

Northern Right Whales follow ancient migration routes from their warm water calving grounds off our southern states to rich feeding grounds in the northern Atlantic. The shipping industry also uses these near-coastal waters, setting up a dangerous situation for the whales. The whales are not afraid of ships; this lack of fear leads, inevitably, to collisions between whale and ship with dire consequences for the whale. Recently a breeding female was killed as a result of a ship

strike off North Carolina. Unfortunately, the shipping industry is growing: the ships are larger and more shipping facilities are proposed along the Atlantic coast. An increase in ship strikes seems unavoidable and extinction more likely if changes are not made soon.

"The loss of even one whale, especially if it is a female, brings the Northern Right Whale population closer to a point where recovery is not possible."

Hope

The Sierra Club's Atlantic Coast Ecoregion (ACE) team is mobilizing on behalf of enlightened and effective controls of shipping to protect the Northern Right Whale. Ports or projects proposed for particularly sensitive whale habitat, such as calving and feeding areas, need heightened scrutiny and alternatives identified away from these critical areas. The Sierra

Club has long been a leader in protecting the Northern Right Whale because they frequent the rich feeding grounds in Massachusetts Bay. ACE is taking the lessons learned here to the waters from Atlantic Canada to Florida. It is only through a coast-wide effort can we hope to stave off extinction for these extraordinary animals.

What you can do

ACE needs volunteers to help save our Northern Right Whale. Without immediate action, the fate of the Northern Right Whale is bleak, and without volunteers working on this issue, the needed changes to our shipping controls may not materialize in time. We need all kinds of volunteers, from a region-wide coordinator of the campaign to helpers with outreach at local events. If you are interested in learning what you can do to help please contact the Massachusetts Chapter Office at (617) 423-5775.

Cindy Delpapa is the Massachusetts Chapter's representative on the Atlantic Coastal Ecosystem team.



"Churchill" was entangled and later found dead

Right Whale photo courtesy NOAA

Green Power Options

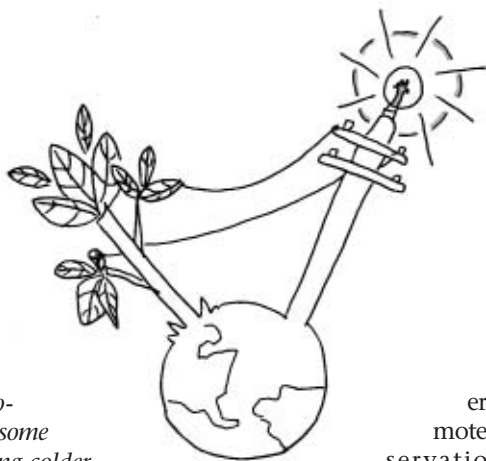
By Ethan Hoag

Glaciers receding all over the planet, winters getting shorter, storms more frequent and violent, ocean levels rising, some parts of the globe getting colder.

There is little doubt that our planet is warming and its climate is changing. It's not something that's far in the future: it's here now and it's accelerating. Why? Because the sun shines through our atmosphere and heats up the earth, but the heat can't escape through some of the gases in the atmosphere. We have added to those gases, primarily carbon dioxide, by burning carbon-based fuels like oil, coal, natural gas and wood. We've turned our atmosphere into a blanket that won't let the heat escape.

The rate of "greenhouse gases" being generated by burning fossil fuels to produce energy cannot be sustained. We need to find another way. Unfortunately, the proposed national energy policy being debated in Congress focuses almost exclusively on providing billion dollar subsidies for more extraction and use of fossil fuels – the exact opposite of what is needed. In order to combat climate change and create a healthier environment, we need to conserve energy and start taking advantage of the renewable energy resources that stand ready to supply a substantial portion of our energy needs.

Fortunately there are glimmers of hope from state governments and Canadian provinces. It's only a baby step but it's in the right direction. As a result of utility deregulation in the late 1990s, states and provinces are creating market-based incentives for



utilities and other power generators to promote energy conservation and to utilize renewable energy sources. Renewable sources are considered to be those that are constantly renewed by natural processes. Examples include solar and wind power, small hydropower and land fill gas, but not large hydropower (which has major environmental consequences).

In Massachusetts, utility restructuring legislation passed in 1997 established a Renewable Portfolio Standard

"As more and more people purchase Green Power a strong message is sent to the market - we care about the sources of our electricity."

(RPS), one of the first in the nation. This legislation mandates that a small percentage of the power supplied to consumers must be from renewable sources that started operating on or after January 1, 1998. The requirement started at one percent in 2003 and increases to five percent by 2010.

In order to implement this and other new energy policies throughout the region, an accounting system, called the Generation Information System (GIS), has been established to track the attributes of all electric power generated and sold in New England. Every megawatt-hour (MWh) of electricity produced is assigned a GIS "certificate" that documents its characteristics (type of generator, emissions, location, etc.). Every company that sells electricity to end-users is required to acquire certificates in an amount equal

to the electricity it sells. As electric customers, we receive an "information disclosure label" in our electric bill once every three months telling us the sources and environmental impacts of their electricity, and these disclosure labels are now based on GIS certificates.

The certificate prices vary greatly depending on the source; those for coal-generated certificates are generally transferred for free because there is little demand for certificates with negative environmental characteristics. In contrast, solar or wind certificates fetch the highest prices because they are both environmentally appealing and scarce. Since this new system allows for the monetization of environmental benefits it is already stimulating the development of new sources of renewable energy in the region.

There are two ways an individual can opt for green power. Some electricity suppliers offer green power options right on their customers' bills. Their customers may opt for all, or some fraction of their supply to be green. Other renewable energy companies offer so called "Tag" products whereby an individual may purchase renewable energy certificates separately from their regular electricity supply by contact-

ing the supplier of the Tags. Tag products are usually sold in fixed increments, or "blocks" which enable you to match all or a portion of your electricity use with certificates from renewable energy generators. Whether you "green" your electricity by paying a small premium on your regular electric bill, or by purchasing a Tag product, you guarantee that the amount of green energy you purchased will be dispatched onto the regional electric system, effectively displacing dirtier, polluting power sources.

If you live in a town serviced by Massachusetts Electric, you can participate in a new program called "GreenUp" which enables you to choose among four companies offering renewable energy service to residential and small commercial customers. Your electricity is still

physically delivered by Massachusetts Electric, and Massachusetts Electric still ensures the service. GreenUp participants pay a little extra each month to ensure that the electricity they use is matched with certificates (see GIS discussion above) from renewable energy generators.

Unfortunately, Mass Electric, a National Grid company, is the only supplier offering this option in Massachusetts. Customers of other utilities have no option to purchase green power through the regular monthly electric bill. NSTAR, which serves approximately 1.4 million customers in the Greater Boston area and is the largest utility in the state, has asked the Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Energy for permission to offer green energy, but their product is inferior. NSTAR proposes to offer only one option that would "green" just 25% of a customer's usage. NSTAR has not been clear about the resources that would make up their green power offering or the price premium. With a marginal NSTAR option being the only choice for the largest utility customer base in the state, this does not bode well for increasing the supply of new renewable sources in the region. NSTAR's monopoly access to customers also increases barriers for competitive suppliers interested in offering green power options to NSTAR customers.

Don't let frustration with the current situation deter you. Customers who buy green power are effectively "voting with their pocket books" for the creation of more renewable energy generators. As more and more people purchase green power products, a strong message is sent to the market and to political leaders that says, "we care about the sources of our electricity." And the result will eventually be a shift away from subsidies and investments in fossil fuel and nuclear power sources and toward renewable energy generators.

Ethan Hoag is a retired electrical engineer living in Boston and has been active in the Sierra Club for 20 years.

Green Energy Options

Renewable energy suppliers offering products through the Massachusetts Electric program:

Sterling Planet:

www.sterlingplanet.com, 1-866-464-7336

Mass Energy Consumers Alliance:

www.massenergy.com 1-800-287-3950

Community Energy Inc.:

www.communityenergy.biz, 1-866-946-3123

CET and Conservation Services Group:

www.greenerwattsnewengland.com, 1-800-689-7957

The two largest electric utilities in the state:

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Get Your Feet Wet: Find Those Vernal Pools!

By Cindy Delpapa

As New England creeps toward spring the large snow piles begin to melt, the rains come and mud season descends, and puddles and pools appear in depressions. These common spring pools deserve close consideration since many host a fascinating ecosystem, thoroughly adapted to these fleeting pockets of water.

These pools, called either vernal (spring), ephemeral, or temporary pools, because they do not persist as permanent water bodies, vary in size from just a few feet across to acres wide. Most often they are the result of spring melt-water and rains puddling in low lying areas where high groundwater or soil conditions prevent the water from draining quickly. It is this temporariness that has given rise to a unique survival strategy by many species.

Eggs and small larvae are tempting snacks for fish and other aquatic predators. A water body destined to disappear is not habitat for fish, which means fewer predators than in a permanent pond. Some species, notably fairy shrimp, are so well adapted to life in a spring pool they never leave, their eggs able to withstand years of desiccation if necessary. Other species of animals use vernal pools as nurseries for their eggs and young.

Among the species dependent on vernal pools as nurseries are some of this state's rarer salamander species, including blue spotted and marbled salamanders. These salamanders travel from upland forests to deposit their eggs, often in the very same pool they hatched from if it is still there. Several salamander species crawl from beneath the leaf litter on a cold rainy night in March, often called Big Night by salamander enthusiasts, to travel the few yards or even a mile to their vernal pool. Eggs laid in the autumn by other species manage to survive the New England winter to hatch out in the spring. Regardless of who or when, all the eggs develop quickly, racing against the inevitable drying of the pool.

Vernal pools may also be cluttered with wood frog eggs, fingernail clams, even turtles and aquatic insects. A little patience and a ramble through a local forest in April to look for a vernal pool could be rewarded with a glimpse of gelatinous egg masses attached to woody debris or floating in the pool, or feeding fairy shrimp, swimming along on their backs.

Massachusetts protects some vernal pools, primarily through the Wetland Protection Act and the Massachusetts Surface Water Quality Standards. To be protected, the pool must be certified as hosting the unique species which are wholly dependent on these pools for at least some part of their life cycle. These species are called "obligate species." Unfortunately, these laws do not protect the upland

habitat of the adult salamanders unless there is a rare species at risk.

The *Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program* oversees the certification process and maintains the database of certified pools, but they rely heavily on volunteers to find and catalog the pools. One need not be a professional biologist to certify a pool; in fact following the certification steps is a great way to learn more about these fascinating ecosystems and early spring is the season to act before these temporary pools disappear.

See the sidebar for Web sources of information about vernal pools. The Massachusetts Audubon Society's sanctuaries have a number of children and family programs about vernal pools or their inhabitants. Visit their web page (www.massaudubon.org) and search on vernal pools in their programs section or call your local sanctuary. The Trustees of Reservations also offer events at vernal pools; their website is www.thetrustees.org. People keen on learning about vernal pools in-depth can check out the new book by local author Elizabeth Colburn for a definitive guide to this unique ecosystem: *Vernal Pools: Natural History and Conservation*. (McDonald and Woodward Publishing).

Cindy Delpapa is a stream ecologist and urban rivers coordinator for the Massachusetts River Ways Program.

Vernal Pool Information Sources on the Web

Natural Heritage's web page for details on vernal pool certification:
www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhesp/nhcvp.htm

Vernal Pool Association's site:
www.vernalpool.org

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Get Involved! Your Chapter and Group Need You

By Deborah Holt

During the past couple of years participating in chapter, group and issue meetings, leading outings, and tabling at Earth Day, I have become aware that the inner workings of the Sierra Club are a mystery to many people – including members! Having been in this situation myself not so long ago, I thought it might be helpful to talk about how the chapter and groups operate, why member involvement is so critical, and how to get involved.

The Massachusetts Chapter represents members at the state level and is our liaison to the national organization. It interprets and implements national policy and communicates with and supports its groups. Additionally, the chapter represents the Sierra Club to the public, the media, and government. To help carry out its responsibilities, the chapter employs a small staff that consists of our director, James McCaffrey, and our part-time administrative assistant Yi Ching Fedkenheuer. Also working out of the chapter office is Jeremy Marin, associate regional representative, who works on transportation issues in our area. If you call the office in Boston, you are likely to speak with one of these three people.

Groups represent members in their communities and neighborhoods. Massachusetts has five groups at present: Cape Cod, Greater Boston, Pioneer Valley, Blackstone Valley, and Essex County. Some are more active than others. There is no formula that dictates a group's size or how many groups a state can have. Any members in a given area can establish a group, and group formation, effectiveness, and survival is directly correlated to the activity and commitment of the members.

The Massachusetts Chapter Executive Committee provides oversight for the chapter. Each group has its own Executive Committee as well. Executive committee members are elected to one or two-year terms. The chapter and groups may form issue committees if an issue warrants a dedicated and/or long-term effort and if they have the resources.

The chapter and groups rely on volunteers to serve on executive and issue committees. When the Sierra Club was founded in 1892, it was a California organization with one objective, to preserve Yosemite. In the last few decades of the twentieth century, the



Photograph of hikers in Quabbin by Elisa Campbell

Club became a national organization. The Massachusetts Chapter evolved from the New England Chapter in the early 1990s, which had previously evolved from the Atlantic Chapter (the entire east coast!). The Club's presence in every state gives us powerful political clout. Members' active participation insures continuity of operation at the chapter and group levels. On a recent outing I led, a young participant said that her involvement with the Club was handed down by her parents.

How you can get involved

You can begin by attending your group's executive committee meeting and finding out what your group is working on. Don't just attend one meeting. Be persistent. Get to know other members in your area or com-

munity. Your participation will be welcome! If you don't know whether your community is represented by a group, call the office and ask. If you don't know when or where your group meets, you can find this information in the quarterly *Massachusetts Sierran* or on-line at www.sierraclubmass.org.

If there's an issue in which you'd like to involve the chapter or group, contact the chair of the appropriate committee and ask for time on the next meeting's agenda to discuss the issue. Committee chairs are listed with their email addresses inside the front cover of the *Massachusetts Sierran*, as well as on the web site. If there is no committee that would logically deal with your issue, contact someone on the chapter or group executive committee.

When making your presentation, make it clear at the beginning whether your purpose is informational or requires a decision. Allow time for questions. A handout might be helpful. If you are asking the committee to take a position on an issue, it helps to provide a draft of the wording.

You can also get involved in many other ways:

- **Subscribe** to the *Sierra Club Activist Network (SCAN)*. This monthly email, which is sent to anyone who requests it on our website, provides timely information about club actions and activities.
- **Make** your voice heard in your community by writing letters to the editor of your local newspaper.
- **Participate** on outings and consider becoming a volunteer outings leader.
- **Write** articles for the *Sierran* about issues that your group is involved with.
- **Help** distribute pamphlets or assist with tabling at some event.

We look forward to meeting you and, better yet, working with you in the near future!

Deborah Holt is chair of the Chapter's Outings Committee and a member of the Greater Boston Group's Executive Committee.

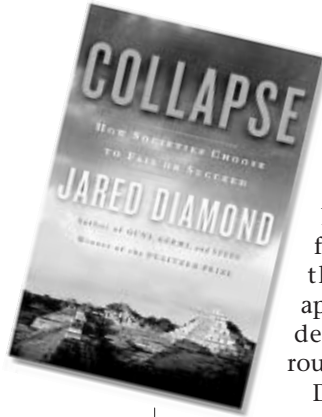
BOOK REVIEW:

Collapse

Reviewed by Diana Muir

Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed

By Jared Diamond
Viking Press
592 pages, \$29.95



Consider the pig. In Polynesia, pork has always been the dish that made a meal into a feast, the animal that advertised its owner's wealth. Yet four centuries ago the people of the small Polynesian island of Tikopia gave up the pig. They did so because it takes ten pounds of vegetables to produce a pound of pork. On a small island (pop. c. 1200,) the choice was between feeding more people or producing pork for chiefly feasts, and the Tikopians chose to support a larger population on a less opulent diet.

Intriguingly, the same century that the Tikopeans gave up eating pork, the Japanese gave up both beef and pork, as well as the use of horses for transport. Like the Tikopeans, they lived on an island that could support more people if they ate vegetables and used human porters in place of horses.

Now consider the Norse settlements in Greenland, which, though largely forgotten today, flourished for almost 400 years with a population of 5,000 Vikings - none of whom ate fish. No one understands why. Given that Icelanders and Norwegians are notoriously fond of fish, the refusal of Greenlanders to eat them is inexplicable. Their inability to establish the kind of friendly relations with the Inuit who colonized Greenland from the west some centuries after the Norse colonized it from the east is easier to understand, even though making friends might have enabled the Norse to emulate Inuit success at hunting bowhead whales from buoyant umiaqs, and the Inuit to learn the art of iron smelting. After all, two peoples competing for the same hunting grounds do not nec-

essarily see friendship as a goal. And certainly no one can have expected the Norse to foresee that Greenland's fragile soils would erode faster than Norwegian soils. So, after four centuries of success, the Greenland Norse appear to have starved to death on an island surrounded by fish.

Diamond likes to divide everything into numbered parts; his complex, sprawling

new book, **Collapse; How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed**, is divided into three. The first part is a series of fascinating stories about entire societies that collapsed, with environmental mismanagement playing the crucial role. The second part consists of stuff-you-already-knew about the ways our generation is destroying the environment worldwide, via mining, deforestation, soil erosion and the other usual suspects. Third are sections on *Paths to Success* and *Why Do Some Societies Make Disastrous Decisions*. Here, Diamond is groping toward a comprehensive theory of why some societies collapse while others continue.

Diamond concludes that Tikopia was able to make wise choices because it was highly homogeneous but not highly stratified. By Polynesian standards - there were islands where commoners had to prostrate themselves when a chief went past - Tikopian chiefs were scarcely elevated above the common herd, they hoed their own fields and ate no better than commoners.

Greenland went hungry partly because of the extreme privilege of the Bishop, who not only occupied the richest farmland but directed resources that could have been used in food procurement toward the hunt for walrus tusks to purchase such luxuries as silk vestments and communion wine.

Japan, on the other hand, was able to make great strides during the Tokugawa period (1600-1867) not only toward stabilizing its population, but in maintaining soil fertility, preventing erosion, and largely halting defor-

estation. Like Tikopia, Japan was highly homogeneous. Unlike Tikopia it was highly stratified. If Tikopia became sustainable by cooperation, Japan became sustainable by fiat. The Shogun told the bureaucrats, who told the village heads, who told the peasants what they would and would not do.

Norse Greenland, however, did not fail because it mismanaged its resources, but because it was defeated in war. The Inuit in their eastward expansion across the Arctic has already wiped out the less technologically well-adapted Dorset people. They then took on and wiped out the Norse, who starved to death not because they made bad ecological choices but because they were unable to defend themselves from the Inuit.

Diamond fails to see that what Tikopia, Iceland, and Japan have in common is not only that they were islands, but that for many centuries they were free of war. War is one of the great demographic correctors. Deaths in battle and, more importantly, death by the disease and famine that follow armies have regularly reduced populations to more sustainable levels. With no invasions causing population to fall, and no likely way to expand their resource base by conquering somebody else, these three islands chose to husband their resources. Easter Island, by contrast, collapsed because the several tribes preferred to use their energies in efforts to conquer one another, rather than to focus on sustainability.

But even here, the picture is not simple. On Tikopia, one of the ways that population was kept within numbers the island could support, was to choose a weak clan and exterminate all of its members, leaving more resources for everybody else. Human societies are far more complex than the bird populations that were the subject of Diamond's early research, and far harder to make general rules about.

The one clear lesson that emerges is that no problem can be solved unless it is first taken seriously. In this fascinating and fundamentally optimistic exploration of history on a global scale, Diamond succeeds in persuading the reader that almost every problem has

(continued on page 15)

MBTA's Silver Bus Line: Taxpayers pay the price

By Jeremy Marin

The MBTA is misleading the public and it is going to cost taxpayers \$600 million – all in the name of poorer service.

In March, the Sierra Club released *MBTA's Silver Line, Taxpayers Get Less for More*, a report documenting a history of misinformation and public relations spin by the MBTA in an effort to sell the public on its Silver Line, a bus route in Roxbury.

In 1987 the MBTA tore down the elevated Orange Line that ran from Roxbury to downtown Boston. It promised a replacement that would provide “equal or better” service to the community. Until 2003 that service was a slow, dirty diesel bus releasing fumes that contributed to residents suffering asthma rates six times the state average.

In 2003 the MBTA opened the Silver bus Line along the route. Hailed by the MBTA as a speedy and convenient replacement to the former subway line it has failed to live up to the hype. The bus is slow, often stuck in traffic, and generally overcrowded. The MBTA's promise of faster service using technology and a dedicated bus lane, have yet to be seen.

Now the MBTA wants to build bus tunnels at the downtown end of the route, at a cost of \$1 billion.

Instead, the Sierra Club report shows, the MBTA should send trains through the existing (but unused) rail tunnels that go to the same stations. MBTA studies also show that using trains instead of buses will double ridership, improve Green Line service, reduce neighborhood impacts, and save at least \$600 million.

SILVER LINE: FACT & FICTION

MBTA Says: Service is faster than it ever was

The Truth: Service is much slower than that promised in 1987

MBTA Says: Trains can't fit into tunnels

MBTA Says: Existing tunnels aren't safe

The Truth: Trains can and do go into the tunnels

MBTA says: Using new technology the bus will run faster, tell riders exactly how long until the next bus will arrive, and prevent 'bunching'

The Truth: None of these systems have worked to date and service is far worse than it was with the Orange Line

MBTA says: The bus shelters are adequate

The Truth: The bus shelters offer no shelter from the elements and are designed like inverted umbrellas

Citing MBTA studies, the report shows that:

- *Using the existing tunnels would save taxpayers \$600 million.*
- *The existing light rail tunnels are in good shape and can be used for light rail.*
- *Light rail on Washington Street would more than double ridership.*
- *The speed promised with the new computerized technology has not been met.*
- *The “dedicated bus lane” is constantly blocked by cars rendering it useless.*
- *Ridership is less than half of what it was when the Orange Line served the community.*

Contact Governor Romney to tell him to build the Silver Line as light rail – saving taxpayer's money and improving service to Roxbury. You can call him at: (617) 725-4005 or email him at: goffice@state.ma.us

The report is available online at www.sierraclubmass.org/slreport.pdf

Jeremy Marin is an Associate Regional Representative for the Sierra Club.

Spectacle Island

(continued from page 4)

million, and perhaps a small treatment station on Long Island for another \$1 million plus maintenance.

In addition, the sand imported by barge to form a beach in the cove just to the north of the dock has migrated south and piled up under the dock, where it has probably been stopped by the wave screen under the dock. The cost of moving the sand back to where it started is estimated to be in the neighborhood of \$400,000, a lot of money to pay out every few years. Finally, there is also an unresolved issue of asbestos on the natural south beach.

Theoretically, all of this would be paid for out of mitigation money from the Central Artery project. The Department of Conservation and Recreation and the city of Boston are the two owners of Spectacle Island and need to have a properly functioning park before they become responsible for maintenance. If there is no clear way to accomplish this goal, Spectacle Island will remain closed for the summer of 2005. That would be yet another promise of the Central Artery Project unfulfilled.

John Lewis is Chair of the Greater Boston Group and has been active in the Sierra Club for more than 30 years.

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Back on Track: Keeping Options Open for the North-South Rail Link

By Louise Lewis



Acela photo courtesy of Sierra Club

The Sierra Club continues its work, two decades old now, to connect the rail lines that enter the city from the north and south, so that a traveler could ride from, say, New York City to Portland, Maine, without having to get off the train and change stations by subway or taxi in Boston. The Club is working on several fronts: finding funding for the project, keeping the right-of-way available, and getting the federal draft environmental impact statement released.

In April of last year, the Sierra Club hosted a *Conference on Public-Private Funding* with five rail industry leaders. The attendees formed a task force, some of whom will hold a Costing Workshop this spring of technical, tunnel and risk experts, to update cost figures which are now six-years-old.

In the meantime, efforts are underway to get funding to finish the environmental review. Although the state's environmental review of the proposal was accepted almost two years ago, the federal portion of that review was never released, despite the fact it had been completed. The stat-

ed reason for not releasing it was that the MBTA had withdrawn as project sponsor and did not have the funds. Senators Kennedy and Kerry have requested \$5 million to continue the environmental review. In the House, Congressman Lynch requested \$2.5 million, which did not make it through the committee.

In Massachusetts a bill has been filed in the legislature by Representative Grant of Beverly to preserve the right-of-way. The Sierra Club has endorsed this bill.

What You Can Do

We are asking the Massachusetts Congressional delegation to make their support of the North-South Rail Link funding known to Congressman Lynch. Sierra Club members can help by contacting their Congressional Representatives and repeating this request.

Louise Lewis is Chair of the North-South Rail Link Committee, which is a sub-committee of the Chapter's Transportation Committee.

From the Director

(continued from page 1)

ies show that even at full yield, any oil from the Arctic would be very costly to recover, take at least ten years to bring to market, and would provide only six months of US supply before the well in the Arctic runs dry. To add insult to injury the industry has stated that much of the oil from the refuge would go to foreign markets, not the U.S.

Perhaps most telling of the party lines, and the desperation which defines this issue, is the last minute horse-trading that occurred. Florida's tourism, fishing, and coastal real estate industries are dependent on a coastline unspoiled by offshore oil drilling. As the Arctic Refuge went on the auction block on the Senate floor, Senator Martinez of Florida ended a 50-50 tie to block drilling by switching his vote. In exchange, the administration promised Martinez that no drilling would occur off Florida for at least another four years. In fact, the administration's concession was meaningless. Florida's coastline already has a moratorium, signed by president Clinton, in full effect until 2007. If anything, the precedent of drilling in the Arctic will make it easier for the industry to drill offshore. Perhaps Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi put it best. "If this refuge is not special enough to be saved, then there is no place in the United States that is safe from oil rigs, including the coastlines that for now are protected from offshore drilling."

The Sierra Club will continue to fight for the Arctic and the preservation of our nation's last wild places.



Whither our Parks

(continued from page 3)

at facilities, shortened seasons, more swimming areas marked "swim at your own risk", illegal dumping, uncontrolled off-road vehicle use, and deteriorating and unsafe structures.

When he merged the metropolitan and state parks systems, Governor Romney promised a "world class park system." You can't build a world class park system with words only. Nationwide, Massachusetts ranks 48 out of 50 in what we spend to protect the environment. Instead, Governor Romney fired a world class public servant who dedicated her professional life to parks, and had made significant strides toward improving them, even as the Governor and the legislature failed in their joint mission to adequately fund lands held in the public trust. Our parks need us. What is unfortunate is that the commonwealth did lose one of its most qualified and dedicated Parks Commissioners in history, one who was uniquely qualified to create a world class parks system for all. Unfortunately, politics took precedence over parks. It seems the Governor had decided who was at fault even before the police had arrived on the scene at the VFW parkway.

Want to help?

See the article "Wanted: Forest Guardians" on page 6.

For a copy of the Club's hearing testimony, visit: www.sierraclubmass.org

Collapse (book review)

(continued from page 12)

a solution, once the problem is taken seriously. While *Collapse* is not a paradigm-shifting tour de force on the level of *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, it is a lively read that may help reshape our notions of how societies can make wise choices.

Diana Muir is working on a new book on the role of overpopulation in history.

Events and General Membership Meetings

EARTH DAY ON CAPE COD

Friday April 22

Time: 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Place: Unitarian Universalist meetinghouse,
840 Sandwich Road,
Falmouth, MA

John Holdren will speak on the subject "Environmental Change and the Human Condition." Dr. Holdren is a Harvard scientist, an authority on energy policy and global warming, and the director-designate of the Woods Hole Research Center. After his lecture, there will be a reception with dessert. This is a free event, open to the public. Sponsored by the Sierra Club's Cape Cod Group. For more information, contact Bob Murphy at (508) 563-5948 or e-mail David Dow at: ddow@sierraclubmass.org

OUTINGS

SPRING WILDFLOWER HIKE - GREATER BOSTON GROUP

May 7

Time: 10:00 AM

Join us for a 6.5 mi hike in the mountains of the southern Wapack Range (New Ipswich, NH). We will look at, identify, and discuss spring wildflowers encountered along the trail. The hike is moderately difficult, involving some elevation gain. Contact Leader Mena Schmid for more info and to sign up at (617) 388-5331 or at: aschmid@rcn.com

MT. GREYLOCK STATE RESERVATION HIKE - PIONEER VALLEY GROUP

April 23

Time: 9:00 AM

Head for the hills and Massachusetts' highest mountain to celebrate John Muir's birthday (April 21). The route will be decided by the leader based on conditions. It is not likely that we will go to the summit. Contact leader Elisa Campbell by April 16 for info or to sign up at (413) 256-4247 or at: campbell@oit.umass.edu

MT. HOLYOKE RANGE STATE PARK HIKE - PIONEER VALLEY GROUP

April 30

Time: 9:00 AM

The Metacomet-Monadnock Trail goes from CT to NH, and in the leader's opinion the Seven Sisters portion on the Mt. Holyoke Range is the toughest part of the trail in MA. Let's do it in the spring before the heat of summer! There are fabulous views from some overlooks and the Summit House. It's all up-and-down so it's tough, but rewarding -- you'll feel you've accomplished something! Contact leader Elisa Campbell by April 27 for more info and to sign up at (413) 256-4247 or at: campbell@oit.umass.edu

WENDELL STATE PARK HIKE - PIONEER VALLEY GROUP

June 18

Time: 10:00 AM

The mountain laurel blooms in mid-June and it is gorgeous! Join us for an easy hike on old logging roads and the M&M trail to revel in the mountain laurel in Wendell State Forest. This is a good hike for novices -- as long as you can tolerate mosquitoes: flowers and bugs arrive together. Contact leader Elisa Campbell by June 15 for more info and to sign up at (413) 256-4247 or at: campbell@oit.umass.edu

HOLD THE DATE!

**SUNDAY, JUNE 26, 2005,
4 PM - 6 PM**

The Greater Boston Group's Membership Committee is beginning a "How To" series. On June 26th we will hold the kick off event to encourage responsible municipal activism for environmental conservation. Meet with a local official to discuss what you can do in your neighborhood or what you would like to see done and learn how you can become more effective.

Watch the next Massachusetts Sierran or our website at sierraclubmass.org for the speaker, location and updates.

CLUB REQUESTS MORE REVIEW ON OFFSHORE WIND PROPOSAL

The Sierra Club supports renewable energy to reduce both our dependency on fossil fuels as well as the resultant negative environmental impacts caused by fossil fuel energy production. Recognizing the dilemma presented with balancing our needs for clean renewable energy and the need to appropriately site all energy facilities, the Sierra Club, along with other environmental groups and the U.S. EPA, has called for additional studies to be conducted before permitting moves forward on the Cape Wind offshore energy proposal. Further analysis will provide sufficient information to allow the Sierra Club and other interested parties to make an informed recommendation - based on the merits of the proponent's proposal - on whether the project, including scale and location, is appropriate for this site, and in the best public interest. The Sierra Club is confident that a thorough SDEIS analysis will help provide a more comprehensive framework necessary for any regulatory entity to make a final and credible disposition of the permit applications for the Cape Wind project. To read the Club's comments and learn more about the Cape Wind proposal, please visit our website at: sierraclubmass.org/capewind

MASSIVE WETLANDS FILL TOUTED AS SMART GROWTH

The city of New Bedford plans to expand its regional airport and create one of the largest and most environmentally destructive wetlands fills ever proposed in Massachusetts. The project would require approximately 40 acres of wetlands filling and an additional 182 acres of tree clearing in sensitive areas that surround



the airport. Approval of this project would establish a dangerous statewide precedent for the filling of wetlands. These wetlands provide flood storage for the

205

area, purify drinking water supplies, and provide habitat for several state-listed rare and threatened species. Comments from the public are being accepted until April 22nd. To Find out how you can speak out on behalf of water quality, wetlands, and wildlife, visit our website at sierraclubmass.org/ewb.

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