



Sierra Club Forum 2019 REPORT
A Free Enterprise Solution to Climate Change
Which side are you on?

By Jack Bradigan Spula - JBSpula@gmail.com

ROCHESTER REGIONAL GROUP—Explore, enjoy and protect the planet

SIERRA CLUB ECOLOGUE



Bob Inglis speaks with Bob Duffy before Forum

The Sierra Club built its reputation on heroic quests on both sides of the Great Divide. In the purple prose style of his era, we can say Muir and his bosom comrades dared to cross many a yawning chasm, keeping the lodestar of Wild Nature always in their gaze. Well, any canyon the founders may have encountered was a mere hairline crack compared to what we're seeing today in climate politics. But once again the Club is exploring ways to get the message across.

The Rochester Regional Group did its part with the 2019 Forum, held at the Rochester Convention Center on April 17. Diverging from the usual script – that is, taking a break from what's often disparaged as “preaching to the choir” – the RRG collaborated with a more diverse set of partners and helped select a rather unexpected kind of speaker. Even the venue -- Rochester's Floreano Convention Center -- was not the Club's typical habitat.

Working with the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce and other co-sponsors (Mothers Out Front, Citizens' Climate Lobby, Rochester People's Climate Coalition (RPCC), Pachamama Alliance, and the University of Rochester College Republicans), the RRG sponsored a talk by a leading conservative climate activist, former US Rep. Bob Inglis of South Carolina. Inglis's topic – “A

Free Enterprise Solution to Climate Change” – was a fairly clear challenge to many of us who think of capitalism and market fetishism as “original sins” that have thrust the planet into climate-crisis mode.

Inglis is founder-director of RepublicEN (republicEn.org), which defines itself as part of the “EcoRight.” “We want to solve climate change,” says the group, not only pledging action but contradicting the climate denialism so evident on that end of the spectrum. “We believe the free market is (Continued on Page 3)

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I'm finding it harder and harder not to feel helpless and discouraged when facing the multi-faceted issue of saving our planet. It seems like terrible news surfaces every week. As I type this, the latest hot topic is the announcement that koala bears have been classified as "functionally extinct." The week before that, a sweeping United Nations (UN) report stated that 1 million plant and animal species are at risk of going extinct.

A generation or two from now, there are many species that children will only be able to experience through photographs and films. I can't recall that happening when I was a child – that there were photographs of extinct animals that my parents could point at and say, "They were still alive when I was your age." Soon, parents of young children *will* be saying that, and I can't get the thought of that out of my head.

The UN report identified several culprits: deforestation, overfishing, the continued use of fossil fuels, land and water pollution, and invasive species. We've known about all of these problems for decades, and it infuriates me that we as a collective species seem to prioritize our desires, conveniences, and bank accounts above our planet's survival.

All of this feels pretty overwhelming. I feel like I should be constantly doing something to address these issues, be doing more than I am now, be far more active in Sierra Club activities than I am now, just *be more*. Work and home obligations take up so much of my time that I have no idea how I can accomplish this, and that stresses me out.

Here's the thing, though. This is something I need to remind myself of more often, and something that I'd imagine many of you do, too. We all have obligations that require our time and energy, and that's okay. We all have only so much of ourselves that we can "give" before we begin to feel burnt out, and that's okay too. The important thing is that we recognize the significance of the challenges our world is facing and invest what we can in addressing them.

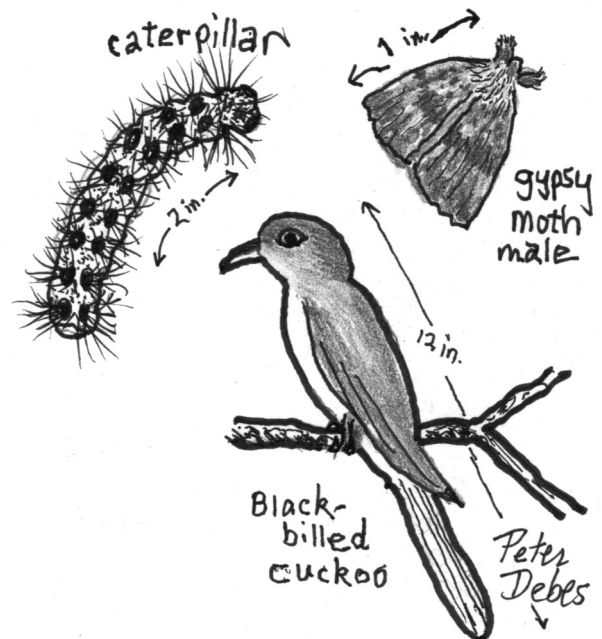
There are plenty of small things that each of us can do that don't require a lot of time. Simple daily practices like recycling, avoiding plasticware, and cutting down on or eliminating meat and dairy products from our diet are all actions that have an impact. Leveraging opportunities to talk to others about environmental issues helps as well. We have a Sierra Club table at events throughout the year where we do exactly that, and are always looking for **volunteers** to help out for a couple of hours. (More details on page 5; Email JKastner@weeblox-uzzl.com) Contacting government representatives and participating in comment periods adds another critical voice to issues and doesn't require a huge time investment. We post about opportunities for these actions on our Facebook page.

The issues we're facing can easily feel insurmountable, but it's not too late to address them. All of us have opportunities to make an impact, and it's important to take advantage of them when we can, but we also shouldn't demand more of ourselves than we have to give. We're all in this together.

NATURALIST'S CORNER

By Peter Debes

Here is the gypsy moth, which overwhelmed predators and completely defoliated forest by our cabin near Tupper Lake a few years ago. It looked terrible. That summer, I heard black billed cuckoos, ~3 pairs, calling from around the area. They can eat the bristly caterpillars, and disgorge the skin and bristles, which most other birds cannot do. Though they could not stop the voracious caterpillars, the gypsy moths brought my first encounters with these cuckoos in that area. There's another thing that ecologists think about the ugly sight of large sections of defoliated trees. It's not all bad! It opens up the understory and helps young trees, wildflowers, and shrubs, and can help keep the forest more diverse, and thus support more animal life too. Ahh! The wonders of nature.



the answer.” Of course, appeals to “free market” ideology, simultaneously vague, ambiguous and persuasive, could mean a lot of things. But for RepublicEN, it boils down to one key policy proposal: enacting a refundable, “revenue-neutral” carbon tax “upstream” of the consumer – that is, a tax imposed “at the mine, pipeline, or refinery.”

But doesn't this mean, in net effect, a “big government” throwing its weight around – violating a key conservative-libertarian principle? Not to RepublicEN's way of thinking. “With a revenue-neutral carbon tax, the government does not keep the money raised from the tax, which means the government does not grow” [emphasis in original]. “Instead, 100% of the tax revenue goes back to the American people. This may be done by offsetting taxes elsewhere (e.g. cutting payroll or income tax) or by sending dividend payments to households.”

Though the carbon tax is at the center of his policy ideas, Bob Inglis's Forum talk emphasized personal concerns and communication. He led with a kind of conversion story: Early in his Congressional career (1993-98 and 2005-2010) he'd been a climate skeptic, but when he joined the late Sen. John McCain and others on a 2006 fact-finding trip to Antarctica, he confronted undeniable evidence that climate change was real and immediate. The conversion came at a price: a newly un-skeptical Inglis faced opposition from partisan climate interests, and he lost his seat to, you guessed it, an extreme far-right challenger, Trey Gowdy.

If you missed the April 17 Forum – and particularly if you stayed away because of objections to the messenger – you can view the whole program online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OtWlKirr2SY> (courtesy of RPCC and videographer-activist Robert Withers). We highly recommend you at least sample it.

For our members and other left-leaners, Inglis presented a lesson on how to substantively engage those with “free market enterprise” and other traditional conservative values. He urged people on both sides to drop the “sanctimony” and to approach others with a true desire to understand what they care about and why. He shared his own story about connecting with a marine biologist over their common angst of caring for an aging parent. Only after making that connection was he able to truly take in the scientist's lessons about what's being lost under the water's surface due to climate change. About connecting with the “other,” he said “Only after they know you care, will they care about what you know.”

We could quote Inglis at length, but you really should hear him in his own voice, especially since he dwells on the need for interpersonal communication across ideological and political divides. The video has some bonus features, as well. It includes opening remarks from RRG chair Jessica Slaybaugh and Mothers Out Front organizer Neely Kelley, plus the presentation of our RRG 2019 Forum environmentalist award to RPCC activist and former Sierra Club RRG Chair, Linda Isaacson-Fedele.

Some observers thought our audience this year, though large, didn't include enough of RepublicEN's natural constituency. True, we didn't attract as many from the

political right as hoped. But people who self-identified as conservative were on hand, and certain comments we got on feedback forms indicated that it was “mission accomplished” to some extent.

“Democrats and Republicans working together. Best forum ever. Congratulations on 20 years,” wrote one participant. “Excellent bipartisan effort,” wrote another. “Helps to develop language and messaging to reach consensus to take action.” A third participant saw a path forward: “Try to brand/market for your atypical audience. I'm part of the choir. The Sierra Club has been preaching to the choir for decades. We need more diversity of thoughts, opinions, demographics to keep change and participation alive.” Even some who are devotedly left-secular might say, “Amen to that.”



Wanted: SECRETARY for ExCom monthly meetings.

Are you a natural note-taker? Would you like to work with a great group of personable and dedicated people? Our meetings are on the first Tuesday of each month, downtown, at the Harro East building on Andrews Street, 6:30 to 8 PM. We need a detailed account of our discussion and action items. You would be asked to email your notes to board members hopefully that same week to facilitate action items. Our meetings are scheduled to go for 2 hours, and you may need another hour or two to pull them together, email to the rest of the board, and incorporate any corrections from board members. Occasionally, there may be some other correspondence to send. Bonus – you will be privy to everything the RRG is working on and have input too! **Email our Chair, at Jessica.A.Slaybaugh@gmail.com.**

Controlling Nature, the Great Lakes and Our Present Crises

By Peter Debes Peter8245Debes@gmail.com

The industrial revolution included the invention of big machines that dwarfed our previous capacity to modify the earth's surface for our advantage. Gigantic mines that eat away entire mountains is a frequent example. We also create huge hills of buried waste that dominate the immediate landscape. We create monstrous dams that control the flow of major rivers. Over time, it appears we have created at the same time, the impression that we have control over some of the forces of nature. Tsunamis, hurricanes, and tornadoes, earthquakes etc., we acknowledge we have limited control over.

For the Great Lakes, there has grown a belief that with our engineering feats, we can reliably control the level of the lakes, at least enough to prevent serious damage to properties that were built in areas most susceptible to "the forces of nature." As the weather predominantly followed what seemed like long-term patterns, this became the expected belief. Thus, it seemed reasonable to build houses and marinas at heights only a bit higher than long-term levels, even on very low sand bars that were created by periods of high lake levels, especially at the end of the last ice age. In other cases, homes have been built on bluffs or hills right at the lake's edge. Some of these places bear testimony to the fragility of these places when the fierce waves of

storms combined with high lake levels buffeted them, leading to undermining, erosion, and collapse. A perfect example is Chimney Bluffs in Wayne County, where the forces of erosion have created a stark landscape of knife edge ridges that front the lake.

With these assumptions of our ability to control nature, development expanded along the edges of the lakes and the St. Lawrence River that drains the water from all five of the Great Lakes. Shipping that once was confined to the deeper channels of the St. Lawrence downstream, was expanded all the way to the uppermost Great Lake, Lake Superior, by building locks and canals around obstacles like Niagara Falls and rocky rapids. Development downriver in Montreal expanded along the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Rivers too. A dam was constructed across the end of Lake Ontario so that water could be used to hydro-electric power, and manage the level of the Lake. The result is the dilemma we are facing now- our inability to predict and manage the water flowing from the largest system of freshwater lakes in the world.

When rainfall exceeds long-term averages, especially over the Northern lakes and Canada, there is flooding of all the rivers and streams. This then causes flooding in Lake Ontario, and along the Ottawa River and parts of Montreal. So there is a limit to how much water can be allowed out of the dam on Lake Ontario, which means the Lake will start to rise. Further complicating this is the limit to how much water is released into the St. Lawrence river, because in the natural channels, too much water flow prevents big ships from going upstream, affecting a multi-billion dollar industry. So owners of property in



Chimney Bluffs State Park, Wolcott, NY

susceptible locations built on

false assumptions, want more water released from Lake Ontario, but this cannot happen because that would further flood properties around Montreal, and prevent the passage of ships. If too much water is released from Lake Ontario and expected precipitation does not happen, the lake level would go way down, affecting most marinas and the amount of water in the St. Lawrence would be too little for the big ships to pass.

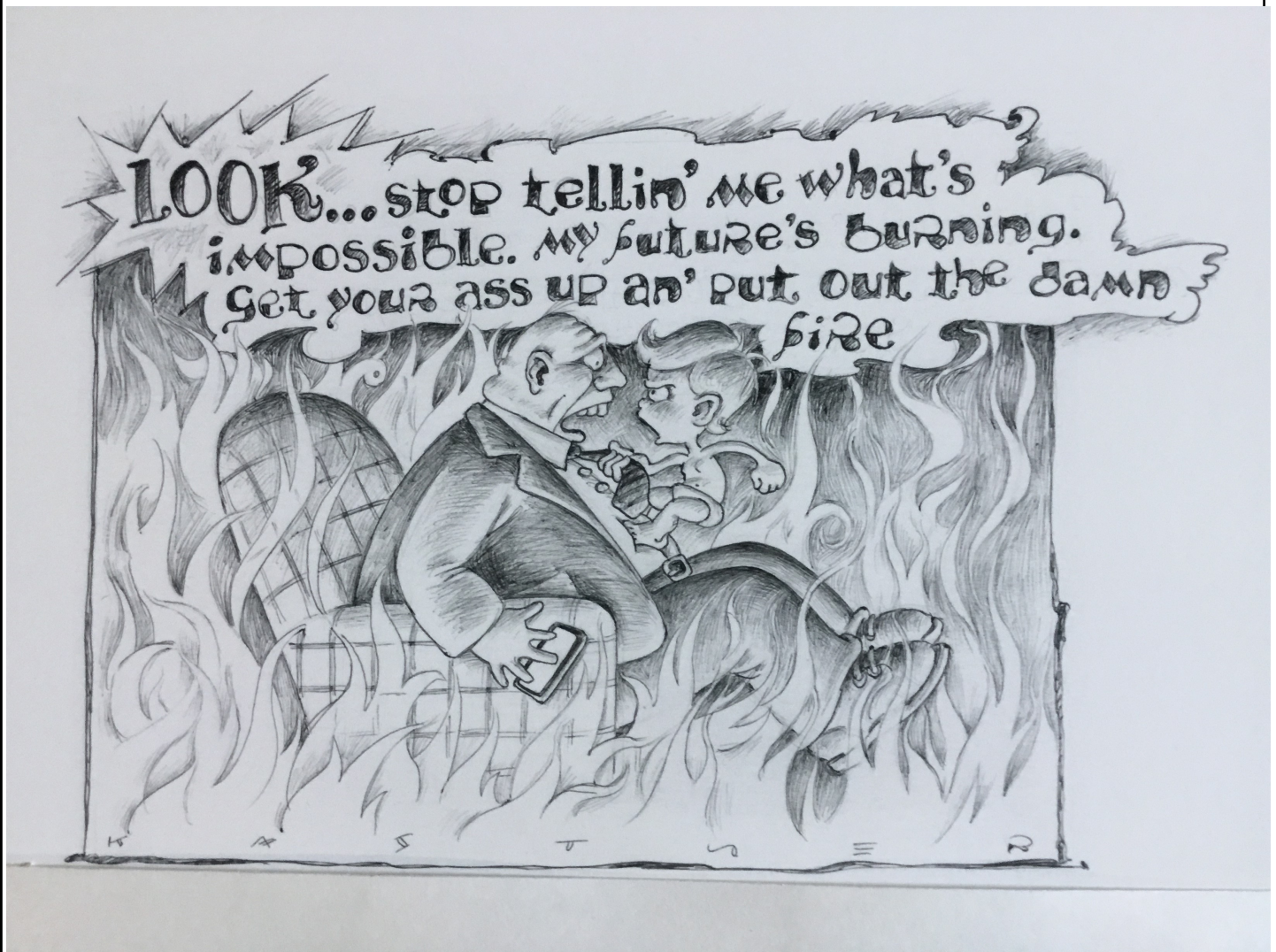
There is little point in blaming any of the groups affected by these problems. All was developed over years with a false assumption that we could always control the forces of nature acting on the system. Now, we must anticipate that such things will keep happening and relocate, rebuild, or restructure systems to accommodate the reality of the future, a reality that seems certain to bring even greater changes in the weather and climate.

WE REALLY DO NEED MORE VOLUNTEERS

John Kastner, whose cartoon you see below, is our **tabling** and volunteer coordinator. You know, when you go to an event and there are groups or vendors that have displays and/or **tables** with information, things to buy, etc.? Your local RRG goes to a number of events each year where we could use more helpers to simply answer questions, engage the people walking by, hand out information, take donations, etc. We would always pair a new person with a more experienced member, so you can be assured that someone will be with you to help, train, and just have friendly conversation. We all have our own styles, and different areas of knowledge, so you don't need a PhD in some environmental subject! Some of the events we table at are the Clothesline Festival (you get in free), Alternative Fair (https://www.metrojustice.org/alternative_fair16), various eco-fairs, school events, the ADK Expo at Mendon Ponds Park, the Indigenous Music and Arts Festival at Ganondagan, and more.

We sometimes could also use people with **audio-visual tech** skills, and **ASL interpreters!**

Won't you consider contacting John (jkastner@weeblax-uzzi.com) and getting out to some events? We always take time to enjoy whatever else is going on, too, before and/or after your shift. Make new friends, get to new events and places, bring your family!



Cartoon by John Kastner

PLASTIC PLANET By John Kastner jkastner@weeblax-uzzl.com

I'm not much of a shopper. I tend to avoid the malls. I find the prospect of looking for the one tiny item I need among acres of stuff intimidating. Nevertheless, I was in a Lowe's store on Sierra Club business recently and I was overwhelmed by the 40 ft. ceilings and shelves stacked 20 ft. high, all receding into the distance beyond the comprehension of my straining eyeballs. Finding what I needed seemed like a hopeless task. It was hard to believe that there could be enough people in Rochester to buy all this stuff...and this was only one store among thousands, in one city among thousands...as hard to get your mind around as rafts of plastic debris the size of continents floating in all of earth's oceans.

Since it came into common use just after World War II, plastic waste from discarded packaging, tableware, beverage containers, toys and trinkets, junked autos and air craft, construction, industrial, institutional, and hospital disposables and nearly every other manufactured item, has continued to accumulate in the environment. Nestle, alone, sells one BILLION single use water bottles every day EVERY DAY! Use your imagination to add what multiples of that Coca COLA and PepsiCo contribute. Only ten percent of all plastic ever produced has been recycled. It's stunning to realize that all the toy soldiers, Barbie dolls and action figures we played with as children...as well as all the plastic forks, spoons, cups and plates we ate off of, are still out there somewhere getting into trouble...trouble for wildlife and trouble for us.



China and several other smaller nations have stopped accepting our recycled plastic. Many other countries are considering similar action. In Asia and Africa plastic is spilling into the streets and clogging rivers and drainages. Road cuts in Jakarta reveal plastic strata to a depth of 30 ft. Much of recycled plastic in the United States is now being land filled for lack of markets to accept it.

Plastic in the oceans blocks the sunlight that phytoplankton need to make food for themselves and oxygen for us. By now most of us have heard how fish and sea birds mistake plastic for food and die when they eat it. You may have seen the pictures of dead whales washed up on beaches filled with hundreds of pounds of plastic trash. But the story doesn't end there, the forces of nature work on plastic garbage grinding it into ever smaller particles until it is microscopic and light enough to be carried by wind and rain to the far corners of the earth.

The Great Lakes, which supply drinking water to millions of people and countless millions of wildlife, are filled with micro plastic particles...as is the water in plastic bottles. Table salt made from sea water also contains micro plastic particles and now...so do we. They continue to accumulate inside us and no one knows what this portends for our health over the long term.

The plastics industry is a major customer of the fracked gas industry, which is a major source of the greenhouse gasses that drive climate change. By supporting fracking, plastic manufacturing also contributes to the pollution of the vast quantities of water used by that industry. Much more water is wasted in discarded half empty plastic water bottles.

We are burying the world in plastic and filling our bodies with it and the bodies of many other life forms as well. Yet, the plastics industry is making plans to double and triple its output without any measures in place to deal with the waste. All of it is driven by the limitless demand for the easy, fast, cheap and convenient lifestyle we enjoy at the expense of the environment that sustains us. Recycling will never catch up with consumption.

It doesn't require all that much of us to buy a durable stainless-steel water bottle and keep it handy. Likewise, it isn't all that hard to keep reusable cloth bags in our cars and use them. A set of reusable bamboo, wood or metal utensils in their own little case fits nicely into pocket, purse or pack. The planet desperately needs us to follow the rule of buy used, buy local, buy organic and, above all, BUY LESS if we want it to continue to sustain us. One of my favorite bumper stickers says it all, "The best things in life aren't things." However, personal responsibility is not nearly enough. We must educate others and press the government to help. We must also pressure government to force industries to be responsible for what they produce throughout the entire life cycle of their products. This will likely make stuff more expensive, which will encourage us to buy less of it...a closed loop of conservation leading to a cleaner, healthier environment.

Getting government to act means getting ourselves to act. If you are too busy to do this, you are likely too busy. I know I am way too busy to be writing this. Democracy is more than just a show of hands. It requires breaking a sweat physically or mentally or both. I'm trying to live part of my life for those who will come after me. I hope that you will, too...God, we could sure use the help. A relatively easy way to do this would be to **help us talk to people at tabling events**. This would be a great help, as the half dozen or so of us that are currently doing this are exhausted. We would like to cover more events. Ten or twenty people donating a couple of hours for two or three events a year would go a long way to spreading out the work and staving off burn out. It's really not hard work and we'll train you. **Please contact me, John Kastner, at jkastner@weeblax-uzzl.com.** Thank you for caring.

INFORMAL BALLOT

By Margie Campaigne

Your local Rochester Regional Group is seeking your input and ideas for our next Environmental Forum. As you know, this year we not only partnered with several other environmentally focused groups but also realized and decided it was time to stop “preaching to the choir” as it were. We therefor were thrilled when a woman involved with the umbrella group Rochester People’s Climate Coalition revealed she had an established relationship with former Republican Congressman Bob Inglis, a convert to the climate change cause. Thus our 2019 forum, after much hard work on the part of several organizations, including the Chamber of Commerce, came into being.

Our focus these past few years has been on climate change, as we believe it is the number one challenge of our time. Here is where YOU come in! Are you aware of a champion of climate action whom we could invite to be featured in 2020? (Well-known busy people often have their schedules set many months to a year in advance). Or do you have a climate-centric topic to suggest that needs coverage?

Ballot options: You may write your ideas for topics and speakers below, and mail them to us at Sierra Club RRG, P.O. Box 10518, Rochester, NY 14610-0518. (You may **copy** this page if you don’t want to cut your newsletter). Or, email them to your Ecologue editor, Margie Campaigne, at **mcampaigne@hotmail.com**. Please use “Informal RRG Ballot” in the subject line and answer all questions.

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These are topics I/we believe need to be covered in an upcoming Forum:

These are presenters/speakers that I/we believe would be timely and on point:

I/we have contact information for those mentioned above [] Yes [] No

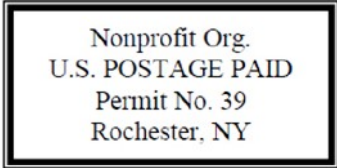
If yes, please provide: _____

Your name(s) and your contact info (email, phone #): _____

I/we are willing to help with the forum, and/or tabling events throughout the year, as time and availability allows: [] Yes [] No

I have interest in the open ExCom Secretary position: [] Yes [] No

Rochester Regional Group of the Sierra Club
P.O. Box 10518
Rochester, NY 14610-0518
 Message line: 585-234-1056
 www.sierraclub.org/atlantic/rochester; Find us on **Facebook** and **LinkedIn!**



Executive Committee Members

Jessica Slaybaugh, Chair: Jessica.A.Slaybaugh@gmail.com
 Peter Debes, Secretary:
 peter8245debes@gmail.com
 Margie Campaigne, Ecologue Editor: mcampaigne@hotmail.com
 John Kastner: jkastner@weeblax-uzzl.com
 Jack Bradigan Spula: jbspula@gmail.com
 Frank Regan: frankregan@rochesterenvironment.com
 Joe Grinnan, Treasurer: fjgrinnan@aol.com
 Ronald Garrow: Ronald_garrow@yahoo.com

Committees & Projects- Leaders

Biodiversity/Vegetarian: Margie Campaigne
 mcampaigne@hotmail.com
 Climate Change: Frank Regan
 frankregan@rochesterenvironment.com
 Friends of Washington Grove:
 Peter Debes
 peter8245debes@gmail.com
 Open Space/Parks: Hugh Mitchell
 goshawk@twc.com
 Wetlands: Sara Rubin
 rubin150@aol.com

***The opinions expressed in the articles within are those of the authors and are not necessarily an official Sierra Club position or policy.**

Summer 2019 Calendar			SIERRA CLUB and other environmental events	
DATE	DAY	TIME	MEETING/EVENT	LOCATION
6/20, 7/18, 8/16	Thursdays	6 - 7 pm	Climate Change Committee meeting	Contact FJRegan@gmail.com for time & place
June 4th	Tuesday	6:30-8:30 pm	Executive Committee Meeting	Harro East Bldg., 400 Andrews St., Suite 600
June 8th	Saturday	10—11:30 am	ADK Expo Bog Walk, with Peter Debes	Mendon Ponds Park, meet at ADK "Hikes Start Here"
July 2nd	Tuesday	6:30—8:30 pm	Executive Committee Meeting	Harro East Bldg., 400 Andrews St., Suite 600
July 27th - 28th	Sat.—Sun.	10 am to 6 pm	Indigenous Music and Arts Festival	Ganondagan State Historic Site, County Rd 41, Victor
August 6th	Tuesday	6:30—8:30 pm	Executive Committee Meeting	Harro East Bldg., 400 Andrews St., Suite 600
May 12th to November 24th	Sundays	9 am –1 pm	Brighton SUMMER Farmers Market *Rain or Shine*	Brighton HS parking lot, 1150 Winton Rd South
All year	Every day	M-F 8am-9pm Sat-Sun 9am-8pm	Abundance Coop Food Market: local, organic, sustainable food, open to public	571 South Ave., Rochester, NY in South Wedge (585) 454-2667 www.Abundance.coop

*****Watch our Facebook page and website for information on upcoming community meetings, outings & other activities*****

All Committees are local volunteer groups of the Rochester Regional Group of the Sierra Club.

Follow us on Facebook to keep up-to-date on new events throughout the year—www.facebook.com/SierraROC

Executive Committee meetings are open to Sierra Club members. All other meetings are open to everyone.

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