



The Hostile Giveaway: Connecting the Dots of Water Privatization

by Wayne Howard,
Great Lakes Committee

April 5th marked the tenth anniversary of our Great Lakes Committee (GLC)! It's time for celebration and time to reflect on the core issues that brought us together. As the founding chair, it's been a pleasure to work with our group of dedicated, enthusiastic volunteers. We've become like family. While the GLC has engaged in state and regional Great Lakes legislation and local education, all of our work inevitably leads us back to the basic human right to water.

Our committee was inspired by Laura Arney who introduced many of us to the issue of water privatization as presented in the film *Thirst* in February 2005. In the film, the people of Bolivia, India and Stockton, California rose to take back their municipal water that had been taken over by a private corporation. Discussions following the film motivated Hugh Mitchell and several of us to form a Great Lakes Committee whose focus is, through advocacy, to preserve and restore the Great Lakes and to become better stewards of our most precious resource.

We joined the efforts of the national Sierra Club's Water Privatization Task Force, including Dale Stocking (the orthodontist in *Thirst*), who led the citizens' group in Stockton. Stockton's community-owned water was privatized by OMI/RWE/Thames in 2003, with promises to rebuild their infrastructure. Their rates increased 8.5% and their leakage rate doubled. For four years they

fought to regain their system – only to find millions of dollars in repairs as routine maintenance had been neglected.

In 2005, the American Society of Civil Engineers found that “each day, six billion gallons of clean, treated drinking water disappear, mostly due to old, leaky pipes and mains – enough water to serve the population of a state the size of California.”

The Pressure is On

This situation has become extreme in Detroit, with about 34% of their system found to be leaky. In the past decade, over 140,000 water shutoffs have occurred, following massive layoffs in the auto industry. An effort was made to collect past due water bills – some in the range of \$1,000 to \$3,000, to as much as \$10,000. Following shutoffs, the houses are deemed condemned. In many cases, social services came in to take children away! (Last summer the United Nations declared these practices to be in violation of human rights.) The *Detroit Free Press* reported in March an additional 9.3% rate increase.

Just this past month, this situation is being repeated in Baltimore. As reported in the *Baltimore Sun*, over \$40 million is owed to the city - \$15 million in commercial accounts. Yet, shutoffs are being targeted to only residential customers. Baltimore's rates have increased 42% in the last three years, making it unaffordable for 1/3 of the population. About 60,000 home shutoffs are projected by the end of the summer.

What do these two cities have in

common? In addition to high poverty and unemployment, the large, multi-national corporation, Veolia, has been pushing to privatize their water. (*Detroit Free Press/Baltimore Sun*). Similar pressure has occurred in St. Louis, where the community turned down Veolia's proposed contract. In Buffalo, Veolia is currently managing their system, with rates three or four times that of Rochester/Monroe County.

Tightening the Vice

Why is this happening? Cities are strapped for cash and are forced to consider public-private partnerships, rather than public bonds, to upgrade their infrastructure. While this has been going on for some time, suddenly the vice seems to be tightening (see foodandwaterwatch.org):

- Large, secret trade deals: Have you been following what's happening with the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP)? NAFTA defined water as “a good or an investment.” Water will go to the highest bidder no matter the local need.
- The State Revolving Fund (SRF) has been cut by \$707 million (23%) since 2014. The SRF provides low-interest loans to municipalities to match public bonds to upgrade water infrastructure.
- The Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) gives low-interest loans to private water corporations which competes with the SRFs.

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From the Chair: Thank You For A Successful Annual Forum



Thank you to all our members who attended and supported our Environmental Forum on April 21, and thank you especially to all who donated to help us cover the costs of that event. It was successful beyond our dreams, due in great part to the help we had from a collaboration of other organizations, especially Monroe Community College, the University of Rochester, the Rochester Institute of Technology, Solar Liberty, Cool Rochester, Renewable Rochester and the Rochester People's Climate Coalition. Almost 700 people attended, the largest turnout we have ever had for a Forum.

Dr. Hansen commented on his way back to the hotel that it was the most productive speaking opportunity he has ever had! He had coverage in *City Newspaper* (front page!), the *D & C*, and on the Evan Dawson show. He also spoke to students at the U of R and RIT (over 250 students there) and really appreciated the chance to address a young audience.

This Forum is only one step toward focusing our nation and its leaders on the crisis of climate change. We need your continuing support and participation in the events we



will be planning with our new coalition, the Rochester People's Climate Coalition, to make change. We will be notifying you of other events as we plan them and will need your participation.

We also have three vacancies on our Executive Committee, which meets once a month. If you want to make a difference in our community, please contact us to attend and observe one of our meetings. You can really make a difference with the Sierra Club, the largest environmental organization in our country.

Peter Debes,
Chair



Dr. Hansen's keynote presentation at the Environmental Forum. All photos courtesy of Vesna Sanders

What Should Be the Future of the Ginna Nuclear Plant?

by Peter Debes, Chair

The New York State Public Service Commission held a hearing in Rochester on May 7 at City Hall, on a proposal to extend the life of the Ginna power plant. This plant, now past its expected “life span” (began operation in 1970) requires greater expenditures to continue functioning due to its outdated technology and aging structure. The Sierra Club is against propping up this plant or building new nuclear plants for a number of reasons, a few of which I will outline here.

First some brief background info: Ginna is owned by Chicago-based Exelon, one of the nation’s largest electricity generators, which closed on its \$7.9 billion merger with Constellation Energy in March 2012. Exelon was already the largest nuclear-plant operator in the country, with 17 reactors at ten sites in Illinois, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Ginna is costly to maintain and losing money, so on February 13, 2015, RG&E filed a proposed Reliability Support Services Agreement (RSSA), negotiated between the utility company and the owners of the Ginna nuclear reactor. RGE Exelon petitioned the State to raise the rates claiming its power is needed to provide reliability

in the grid here. It is understandable that the workers for these companies, who packed the hearing in supportive T-shirts, argue strongly to continue the operation of the aging plant. It assures them their jobs. Yet research shows that our area is actually declining in energy use already due to conservation, and that the energy from Ginna was only critical to the grid for a few hours on one hot day a couple of years ago.

Consumers would pay more for their energy to continue operating the plant and guarantee Exelon an 11% profit too. Many of the consumers in Rochester are in low-income households and would be seriously affected by the extra burden of this price increase. In the State’s Revised Energy Vision Plan, the State has already established a long-term plan to transition from carbon-based energy plants to renewable sources. Many employees at the hearing argued the benefit of nuclear energy as “clean” in that it does not produce carbon emissions to the extent fossil fuel plants do. The emissions part is undeniable, but the “clean” argument ignores the production of dangerous nuclear waste that must be stored 100,000 years until it is safely depleted of radiation. There

is no site for storing this dangerous waste and even a remote site under a mountain in Nevada proposed by Obama several years ago was refused by people in that State. In fact, there is no way to guarantee the safety and security of such waste for such periods of time. Currently the waste is stored on site at Ginna.

The petition to continue the plant and raise rates funnels energy and money away from realistic, sustainable, long-term solutions: an aggressive energy conservation program with incentives and assistance for low-income households that would eliminate the need for more power production almost indefinitely: funding a switch to renewable energy sources and remodeling the grid to accommodate a multitude of small inputs from solar homes, wind-generators, etc.

The reality is that the skills and talents of these good workers will absolutely be needed in transitioning to renewables and changing the structure of the grid, so while they would lose their jobs at Ginna, they would all find jobs with multiple companies during the decommissioning of the plant. For more information, please contact the Rochester Regional Group.



Water Privatization (continued from p. 1)

- Obama’s New Infrastructure Plan, the Water Finance Center at the EPA, provides tax breaks on bonds for privatized projects.
- Obama’s 2016 budget includes \$7.7 billion over the next decade for the new National Infrastructure Bank to facilitate public-private partnerships (in water and other infrastructure), while it cuts an additional \$54 million from the SRFs.

Will Rochester become the next Detroit, Baltimore or Buffalo, with privatized water and higher rates? We all need to take steps to ensure that does not happen. Join us in promoting the Sierra Club’s national policy, which recognizes water as a human right and public trust, promotes publicly financed, owned and operated water and waste water services and encourages the use of municipal water – instead of bottled water.

This Changes Everything

by John Kastner

The Earth continues to warm dangerously as I sit here mulling over the respective viewpoints of Naomi Klein and James Hansen. On the face of it, Dr. Hansen's ideas on how to respond to the climate crisis seem more practical: tax carbon at the source, then give all the money directly to all the citizens in equal measure, who will then use it to pump the economy and perhaps fund the switch to renewable energy and energy efficient technology – a market-based solution. Meanwhile, giant energy corporations would be incentivized to avoid the fee (tax) by moving into the burgeoning renewable sector as households across the world delight in finding substantial dividend checks in their mailboxes every month. Even my son likes this solution based on human greed, which he sees as a more reliable driver of our behavior than altruism.

Klein sees things somewhat differently. This same market-based view of organizing human endeavor is what led us to the place where money has become, literally, more important than life. This is amply illustrated in the rapidly escalating scale of human and environmental disasters directly attributable to our blind lust for profit – and fossil fuels. Even a partial list amazes: The Exxon Valdez; the World Trade Center (9/11) and the many wars spun off it by the invasion of Iraq; the Gulf oil spill, the hurricanes Katrina, Sandy and Haiyan; the mega tornadoes and catastrophic droughts; the poisoning of the Kalamazoo, Elm and Yellowstone rivers; Lac Megantic and other oily, gassy infernos; the fracked sacrifice zones that contaminated the air, land and water of whole communities...tens of thousands of people sickened, injured, killed. None of the above crimes have changed government energy policies. None of the corporate criminals responsible have been

sufficiently punished to compensate victims or deter careless, reckless behavior. The bias of governmental energy policy is crystal clear: the health and safety of our families, our environment, and all its nonhuman families are expendable to the interests of the market economy. Ultimately, this includes the health and safety of the families of the CEOs, the boards and stockholders of all the corporations engaged in vigorously dismantling the web of life on planet Earth.

It's the market – capitalism, to be precise – that has brought us the dilemma in which we now find ourselves. Its basic premise of continuous, unregulated growth and no-holds-barred, take-no-prisoners expansion is destructive of everything, even itself, as the great stock market crashes of 1929 and 2008 so dramatically demonstrated. It concentrates wealth and power, perverting our democracy and interfering with the ability to address an array of pressing problems. It monopolizes our media to the point where we receive hourly updates on the health of the economy and virtually nothing on the health of the planet...until it has created some spectacular environmental fiasco too huge to ignore.

There is a fundamental difference between the values we try to instill in our children – respect, responsibility, truthfulness, honesty, sharing, love, and service to our communities, our planet, and each other – and the values our economy operates on at its highest levels – greed, exploitation, coercion, deception, ruthlessness, denial, expedience, secrecy, top-down dictatorship, and profit above all other considerations. The results of our schizophrenic attempt to embrace these mutually exclusive mores displays itself, not only in our trashed ecosystems, but also in the great numbers of our confused, uneducated, unemployed and troubled youth. The laws by

which we conduct our economic affairs are not compatible with the laws by which our planet operates. Attempting to repair what we have done to it with more of the same seems ultimately doomed to failure. When I try to point this out to my friends, I am labeled “communist”, “socialist”, or “dreamer”, as if no other way of organizing ourselves to meet our needs where possible – as if the demonstrable insanity of capitalism is our only choice. We have drunk the Kool-Aid so completely that capitalism has become our one, true, unassailable religion... but not for everyone.

Naomi Klein, in her landmark opus *This Changes Everything*, credits indigenous peoples with rising to the forefront of the battle to save our planet from the rapacious, dominant paradigm. It turned out that their relationship to the Earth, developed over millennia of direct experience, was the proper ethic all along. They have said “NO!” to the mega energy corporations eager to wring profits over the corpse of nature. They have bravely placed themselves squarely in the path of the crazed, fossil fuel juggernaut to protect their mother.

Klein writes movingly about how the invading oil from the disastrous BP Gulf oil spill has disrupted the reproductive cycles of countless species at their most vulnerable and elemental level, the egg. She identifies her own difficulties to conceive with the difficulties faced by these non-human species. Thus, she poignantly illustrates our inseparable relationship with all Earthly life. The Earth, then, is not here for our personal use. We are one among its great host of children, traveling with it on its adventure through time.

I must confess I feel, at this late hour, that Dr. Hansen's approach offers the best chance of success in the short term, but our survival
(continued on p. 5)

This Changes Everything (continued from p. 4)

will not be sustained by a relationship that relegates the Earth to the status of our personal toy box. Much is made of the declining quality of our educational system, and rightly so. It should not be used to manufacture cogs for a dysfunctional machine. Rather, it should be a vehicle for opening young minds and hearts to the wonder, mystery and beauty of the great planet on which it is their privilege to ride. If we are to be successful in the long run, it will be that mushy, messy, unquantifiable bond between mother and child called love that saves us. It becomes our task to make it so.

Stay Informed: Like Us on Facebook

One of the best ways to stay informed about where we are and what we're doing (such as next year's Annual Forum and related activities) is to follow us on Facebook. Our Facebook page is the go-to source for the latest information on our activities. We also use it as a way to share important environmental news and take-action opportunities.

Visit the Rochester Regional Group's page at www.facebook.com/SierraROC. You can also keep up-to-date on our Great Lakes Committee's activities at www.facebook.com/GreatLakesRochester. The Sierra Club Transitions group is now Resilient Rochester, and is at www.facebook.com/ResilientRochester. AND the Vegetarian-Biodiversity Committee is on Facebook now as well! Search for the group by name to find their page.

A Solar EMpowered Rochester

by Aprille Byam

Did you know that the total power used on this entire planet in 2010 can be delivered by the sun in 90 minutes? Or that the average retail price of electricity in New York State is the 4th highest in the country? Or that the West Antarctic ice shelf is expected to collapse entirely by 2020?

Each day, the sun provides us with the energy we need to run our lives. Solar panel technologies have advanced to capture more than just visible sunlight, so clouds do not keep power from being generated. There has never been a better time to invest in solar.

- Panel technologies have advanced and cost has come down. The next generation of panels is 15-20 years away. Just about as long as the warranty on current panels.
- Incentives and grants are bringing costs down. There are a myriad of financing and support options available to help make the numbers work for you.
- Our planet needs us to rethink the types of energy we consume. If we continue on the path we have been on, there won't be much left for future generations. The time to change is now.

On a brisk Saturday last November, Dr. Susan Spencer gave a talk at TEDxRochester about advancements in solar technology, the impending climate crisis, and the need for action here at home. It did not fall on deaf ears. The City of Rochester responded with interest and ROCSPOT was born.

ROCSPOT, the Rochester Solar Power Organization Team, is a supporting organization to the Rochester Solar Initiative (RSI). The RSI has two primary objectives:

1. Bring solar panel manufacturing to Rochester – creating enduring jobs in the process.

2. Deliver solar power to every house, business, and building in the city by 2025.

These are ambitious objectives, but what is super exciting is that the process is underway. This is really happening!

ROCSPOT is working with organizations large and small, partners within our Solar Coalition such as Bausch & Lomb, RIT, local installers, and churches, and others to map out the transition to solar in our city. Currently, we are working with St Monica's church in the 19th ward and on our first Solarize the Flower City campaign in the Southeast Quadrant of the city.

ROCSPOT is committed not only to solar, but to Rochester, and to helping all of our neighborhoods to lift themselves out of crippling energy poverty. Our approach to any project not only considers technology, but a holistic perspective of those who will be impacted. Programs are designed to include:

- Volume-based solar discounts
- Solar education on financing and installation options to best suit your needs
- ROCSPOT serving as an intermediary with our trusted installers
- STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, & Math) education in classrooms and rec and summer programs
- Job training for installation and manufacturing jobs
- Veteran's support programs

To find out more about ROCSPOT today, visit www.rocspot.org!

Rochester People's Climate Coalition: A Growing Local Force

by Linda Isaacson Fedele and Sarah Mittiga

The Rochester People's Climate Coalition (RPCC) is a new local organization whose unofficial mission is to be the hub of all climate action in our area.

The "official" mission is to address the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, to prepare for the impacts of global warming, and to bring people together to create a more environmentally just and sustainable society for all.

RPCC's goals are to:

1. Build a major force for change that will influence legislators to pass meaningful climate action laws
2. Educate the general public about man-made global warming and mobilize them for direct action
3. Encourage local leaders to take steps to prepare our region for the future effects of climate change (e.g., update transportation and utilities infrastructure)
4. Leverage collective power to encourage local media to improve their coverage of climate-related issues

The Rochester People's Climate Coalition (RPCC) formed in September 2014 during the weeks leading up to the People's Climate March, when 30+ organizations in

the greater Rochester area joined together to voice support for the march. We are proud that Sierra Club was a founding member, and continues to help lead the organization. Note that the Coalition is a coalition of organizations. Since September, RPCC membership has grown to over 40 organizations, as climate change has become an unavoidable issue of concern globally and locally.

In April, just before our 17th Annual Environmental Forum featuring "rock star" climatologist James Hansen, RPCC held a press conference at City Hall, with Mayor Warren in attendance and touting the City's resolve to put a climate change action plan in place. At the Press Conference, RPCC member representatives featured the Forum and the additional 14 Earth Weeks events that RPCC member organizations helped to organize.

The press conference is just one example of how RPCC helps to amplify local actions. RPCC also fosters collaboration among member organizations, with some exciting results. In the remainder of 2015, RPCC organizations are looking to push for a local/state green jobs bill, to hold a Candidates Forum on Climate, and to



RPCC
Rochester People's Climate Coalition

draw attention to the December 2015 Paris talks that seek to establish a global agreement on emissions, and more.

RPCC is a growing local force. Do you belong to an organization that is concerned about climate change? Whether your organization focuses directly on environmental issues, or simply wants to show support for climate action, joining RPCC is a way to be a part of an exciting local movement. Internally, your organization simply needs to decide to join, and to identify an RPCC representative/liaison to receive RPCC communications. RPCC offers different membership levels, meaning that participation can be as simple as signing-on as a supporter, or as involved as sending a representative to our leadership team. To see RPCC's growing membership list, learn about different membership levels, and to join, see: rochesterpeoplesclimatecoalition.org, and go to the "Membership" tab.

Tax Deductible Gifts: The Lesser-Known Facts

Your Rochester Regional Group is financially supported by the National Club with a portion of membership fees and by the donations that you send directly to us. Gifts to the "Sierra Club Foundation, Rochester Regional Group" are tax deductible and can be used to help us fund newsletter publications and educational programs. You will receive Foundation acknowledgement for the IRS.

Gifts made out simply to "Sierra Club, Rochester Regional Group" are not tax-deductible, but we can use them without restriction— that is, also for legislative advocacy. Please know that your donations, regardless of which type, enable us to make a difference for the environment right here at home. We have very low overhead compared to many organizations - 88.4% of your donation goes directly to the support of Sierra Club conservation programs. Your support is much appreciated.

Our address is: Sierra Club - Rochester Regional Group, P.O. Box 10518, Rochester, NY 14610-0518

NATURALIST'S CORNER Pete Debes

CAN YOU FIND ME? Common gray tree frog

on a trunk
or branch,
almost
impossible
to see!



Sticky pads on
toes make this an
agile tree-climber.
(usually near water)

Often heard
calling in the
evening or at
night. A 1 or 2
second rapid
trill on one note
"brrrrrip"

Help Stop It

by Robert Withers

We inherited a beautiful and bountiful planet, as have countless generations before us. A planet with abundant and diverse plants and animals, healthy oceans and forests, and almost endless potential. Almost.

We are the first generation to steal the future of mankind. We are the first to plunder the oceans. We are the first to knowingly change for the worse the destiny of man. The seven billion of us alive now are changing the chemistry of the air and water. The laws of physics will determine the outcome. It doesn't look good.

Morally, it has to be the greatest crime against humanity

ever committed. Its impact is, of course, not limited to humanity. It is ecocide on a planetary scale. The consequences are beyond our ability to predict or even imagine.

It is wrong and it will not stop until we make it. It is our duty as nothing else has ever been to stop this crime against life itself.

It is ironic that many who proclaim their actions to be based on morals and concern for our children stand as a last bastion against the undeniable immorality of our actions.

Politely lobbying representatives who depend on climate change denial as a pillar of their career will not stop it. Nearly one third of our federal representatives fall into

this category. Politely lobbying the large number who get major campaign donations from the carbon lobby will not change it. That accounts for another third.

Filling the streets with masses of peaceful demonstrators will help stop it. Making climate change and what we can and should do about it a part of every policy discussion will help stop it. Bringing climate change into our lives as workers, citizens, parents and consumers will help stop it.

Most of all, it is the concern we must all have with the morality of our actions that will stop it.

We are compelled to take action. It is the only moral thing to do. We don't have long.



**Rochester Regional Group
of the Sierra Club**
P.O. Box 10518
Rochester, NY 14610-0518
 585-234-1056
<http://newyork.sierraclub.org/rochester>
 Find the Rochester Regional Group
 on Facebook and LinkedIn!

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Executive Committee Members

Dr. Cenie Cafarelli, Treasurer: mollyclelia@aol.com
 Margie Campaigne: mcampaigne@hotmail.com
 Jeff Debes, Webmaster & Conservation Chair: jeff.debes@gmail.com
 Peter Debes, Chair: phdebes@frontiernet.net
 John Kastner: jkastner@weeblox-uzzl.com
 Paul Sanders: pas271@gmail.com
 Jessica Slaybaugh, Newsletter Editor: jessica.a.slaybaugh@gmail.com
 Robert Withers, Political Action Chair: rwithers@rochester.rr.com

Committees & Projects- Leaders

Biodiversity / Vegetarian: Margie Campaigne
mcampaigne@hotmail.com
 Friends of Washington Grove: Peter Debes
phdebes@frontiernet.net
 Global Warming and Energy: Robert Withers
rwithers@rochester.rr.com
 Great Lakes: Kate Kremer
greatlakes@newyork.sierraclub.org
 Open Space: Hugh Mitchell
mitchehp@gmail.com
 Transition Effort: Dr. Cenie Cafarelli
mollyclelia@aol.com
 Transportation: Frank Regan
frankregan@rochesterenvironment.com
 Wetlands: Sara Rubin
rubin150@aol.com

Summer 2015 Calendar

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

Date	Day	Time	Calendar/Event	Place
June 13	Saturday	9:00am-4:00pm	ADK Ourdoor Expo	Mendon Ponds Park - beach area
June 14	Sunday	9:00am-1:00pm	Brighton Energy Fair	Brighton High School parking lot
June 22	Monday	6:30-8:30pm	Global Warming & Energy Committee Meeting	First Unitarian Church, Room 201, 220 Winton Rd. S., Rochester, NY 14610
July 6	Tuesday	6:30-8:30pm	Executive Committee Meeting	TBD
July 25	Saturday	10:00am-6:00pm	Ganondagan Native American Dance & Music Festival	Ganondagan State Historic Site
July 26	Sunday	10:00am-6:00pm	Ganondagan Native American Dance & Music Festival	Ganondagan State Historic Site
July 27	Monday	6:30-8:30pm	Global Warming & Energy Committee Meeting	First Unitarian Church, Room 201, 220 Winton Rd. S., Rochester, NY 14610
August 4	Tuesday	6:30-8:30pm	Executive Committee Meeting	Harro East Bldg., 400 Andrews St., Ste 600
August 24	Monday	6:30-8:30pm	Global Warming & Energy Committee Meeting	First Unitarian Church, Room 201, 220 Winton Rd. S., Rochester, NY 14610

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

The Eco-Logue is printed on 100% recycled paper with green plant-based toner.