



Politics and Climate Change

by John Kastner

Everything involving people is political. Whatever the circumstances - government, business, academia, arts, science, the non-profit sector or religion - people organize and lobby to advance their agendas. Their motives may or may not be admirable or in the general interest, but politics is entirely human and pretty inescapable.

As defenders of the planet, we have our agenda too. It may seem that our goals are in everyone's long term interest. However, in the halls of power, things are not quite so simple. We know there are those in government prepared to obstruct sunlight and deny gravity if there is sufficient money in it. Of course, there is more than sufficient money spread around government to do anything those spreading it want government to do. It is the greatest obstacle to effective action on climate change and a host of other urgent issues that threaten big trouble for our species and all life in general.

Fossil fuel money has compromised the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. Large amounts of cash from unknown sources funneling into a "grass roots" organization called Citizens United has succeeded in lifting any limitations on the amount of money that can be given to political campaigns by private or corporate donors with agendas of their own. Massed money fuels climate change denial and obstruction of any attempts to deal with it. It also prevents any measures to control the activities and contributions of big banks.

While grassroots environmental groups organizing mass public demonstrations like the People's Climate March and civil disobedience a-la Keystone Pipeline and Seneca Lake are all essential responses to environmental threats, politics, legislation and enforcement are where the rubber meets the road. Those without money have little traction. A recent study by Princeton University found the United States to be no longer a democracy but an oligarchy. We are governed by the vast fortunes of a few families...the

1%. All political hopefuls pay homage to the Kochs, the Adelsons, the Goldman-Sachs, as well as various foundations and political action committees whose benefactors remain hidden in the shadows. Politicians come with their hands out and leave with pockets full of cash and obligation. Their hearts, however, are empty of compassion for those who gave them their votes.

Obviously, if we are to secure the leadership and sweeping legislation, we need to move humanity back from the brink of extinction via environmental collapse. We are going to have to break up this rigged system by changing where the money for elections comes from. It's an environmental priority

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and some headway has already been made. Two states, Arizona and Maine, have managed to pass public campaign financing laws which resulted in the election of at least one teacher to congress...a good start.

There are too many Americans desperately preoccupied with securing the ordinary necessities of life for their families to have developed a proper sense of urgency about our growing environmental predicaments. Unfortunately, some of our countrymen, like those living in Flint, Michigan, and Porter Ranch, California, are beginning to learn the hard way just how vulnerable their water and air are.

Most Americans, even those who acknowledge the seriousness of climate change, have little understanding of how much will be required of them to effectively address the problem. Our situation is such that it will require a massive worldwide effort, coordinated among all nations, to mount a proper response to this global threat and secure a sustainable way of life compatible with the systems that support it. We will need strong leadership to bring the American people together as one. We have done this before when faced with a national crisis and prevailed. We can do it again.



From the Chair: Connecting the Dots and Making Change

First, I will begin with a big thank you to our Executive Committee, our co-sponsors, donors, and you, our essential members for helping to make our 18th Environmental Forum a notable success. I also thank the First Universalist Church in Rochester for providing an attractive space in the heart of downtown Rochester for the event. Here is what your support and membership enabled us to achieve this year...

Our topic, agriculture and climate change, allowed us to highlight the serious contribution industrial style animal agriculture makes to green-house gas emissions, more than all the transportation modes we humans use. We chose this topic because it points clearly to actions we citizens can individually take immediately to slow climate change-notably to reduce

or, better yet, stop the eating of meat and dairy products. We learned from one of our keynote speakers, Keegan Kuhn (Co-producer of the film *Cowspiracy*), that a person, by giving up eating even just one burger a week, can have a greater effect at slowing climate change than by installing solar panels on the roof, or purchasing a Prius to conserve fuel. Ultimately, personal action to change our *eating habits* is imperative to stop the serious effects of climate change.

This year's Forum also connected the unsustainable exploitation of resources (land required for intensive animal agriculture) to the exploitation of labor, especially immigrant farm-workers. We heard of the unjust practices that occur on some farms, emphasized by a

personal account by one Mexican worker of his inability to get necessary medical help for a job injury and his impending deportation.



Antonio Salinas Guzman and Carly Fox

We were especially pleased in this year's Forum to have arranged to bring Keegan Kuhn to three classes focused on environmental issues at R.I.T. These 75 students were riveted by his compelling presentation and gave him enthusiastic applause at the end of each class. These are our leaders of tomorrow and we are determined to expand such presentations to more classes and universities in our area in conjunction with future Forums.



Keegan Kuhn

We have also made notable progress in bridging the gap to people of color in our community. In the past year, we have recruited two people of color, Lucienne Nicholson and Bill Lewis, to join our Executive Committee. They are bringing valuable insight and connections within the

community so that we can expand our efforts and help educate a broader community about the realities of climate change. In addition, we welcome Christina Nitche to our Executive Committee as secretary and also as producer of this newsletter, the *Ecologue*. Our former newsletter producer, Jessica Slaybaugh, has agreed to become our new Vice-Chair.

Now we are engaged in thinking ahead to

our goals for next year's Forum and actions needed on local environmental issues- and are making a concerted effort to attract two more people to our Executive Committee to enable us to reach our goals. If you would like to make a real impact on dealing with climate change and other critical environmental issues, and work with an inspiring group of committed citizens in your community, please give me a call. We need you!

Peter Debes, Chair
peter8245debes@gmail.com
585-271-4796



Klaas and Mary-Howell Martens

Towers of Power: Not for the Birds

By Jack Bradigan Spula

Not long ago it was reported that coal ash residue was showing up on the white blades of electricity-generating wind towers at Maple Ridge, a huge wind farm near Lowville, NY. As it turned out, the ash was coming from a coal-fired power plant at Somerset, NY, some 200 miles to the southwest on the Lake Ontario shore in Niagara County. You could view this as a metaphor made palpable: dirty coal technology defiling the bright promise of electricity from wind.

But today there's another connection between the town of Somerset and wind power. And the metaphor's been turned upside down. Because a large wind project with the picturesque moniker "Lighthouse" is roiling the sociopolitical waters of Somerset and other communities in northeast Niagara and northwest Orleans counties.

The Lighthouse project, to be developed by the private Virginia-based company Apex Clean Energy, envisions planting as many as 70 wind towers, each over 600-feet tall (including blades), spread out in a long row on open land (though near residences and infrastructure). The huge "target area" includes parts of the towns of Somerset, Niagara County; and Yates, Orleans County.

The siting of these towers – each unit much larger than older-generation wind towers seen elsewhere in Western and Central New York – will have obvious impacts on the viewscape. And the latter is a key value in lakeshore communities whose economies depend on tourism and recreation. But there is more than sightlines and unobstructed vistas at stake here.

Lake Ontario's south shoreline, its associated wetlands and upland buffer zones form an internationally-recognized significant migratory bird habitat. Moreover, the particular site for the proposed towers is only a short flight north of one of the biggest "draws" for birds: the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge and New York State's Tonawanda Creek and Oak Orchard Creek wildlife management areas.

For millennia our corner of the state has been vital to sustaining Eastern North American bird migrations and nesting. And important habitats – including traditional air spaces and migratory routes – have already been decimated, with vast tracts drained for agriculture or paved over.

We're lucky, though, to have a dedicated birding community that's accumulated a great deal of data about migration patterns, and the like. Many birders and other protectors of wildlife are firmly saying no to Lighthouse.

For example, last November the Rochester Birding Association (RBA) submitted a letter to the state Public Service Commission opposing wind towers at the proposed site. Citing recent studies done by Audubon NY, the Nature Conservancy and the NY Natural Heritage Program, RBA noted that "the area proposed for Lighthouse Wind project... overlaps with areas predicted to have high to very high abundance and richness of migratory birds during spring and fall migration."



The RBA takes special note of the site's nearness to the Iroquois NWR and adjacent sanctuaries: "[I]t is to be expected," says the group, "that when these resting waterfowl resume their migration they will head directly north into the Lighthouse Wind project. The same is true heading south in the fall."

When many of us consider bird migrations hereabouts, we naturally think of ducks and geese. But numerous species of raptors and songbirds are at risk, too – more than a few species of hawks and owls, wrens and blackbirds, sparrows and many

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more, including species of concern. And we're talking not just about fly-overs and resting stops; vast numbers of birds use these critical zones for breeding and feeding, as well.

RBA's conclusion: "Based on an abundance of biological data... the proposed project area is likely to have unacceptable levels of avian mortality. Therefore, it is not a suitable region for large industrial wind turbine facilities... [The plan] will put millions of birds in danger of collision and death. [D]evelopment of wind turbines along the south shore of Lake Ontario is ill-advised; the cost in birds and wildlife will be too high for the people and the ecological balance of New York State. We respectfully advise that the Lighthouse Wind project be relocated to an area that will result in fewer avian casualties."

Much more will be said and written about the environmental costs and benefits associated with the Lighthouse plan. Isn't the inevitable negative impact on birds more than enough, just by itself, to nix or at least drastically trim the plan? Why not put smaller, more decentralized, towers and wind farms in other, less vulnerable places? Forget accusations of "NIMBYism" (NIMBY=Not In My Back Yard); we deserve sound, sensitive policymaking.

Go to www.lakeontarioturbines.com for more info.

Sunday Walking Tours

Explore the new green infrastructure at the **Brighton High School & Middle School**

Experts in horticulture and engineering will be explaining the purpose of the plantings and hardscape design.

9:30 am
June 19, July 17, August 21
and September 18

(the 3rd Sunday of each month)

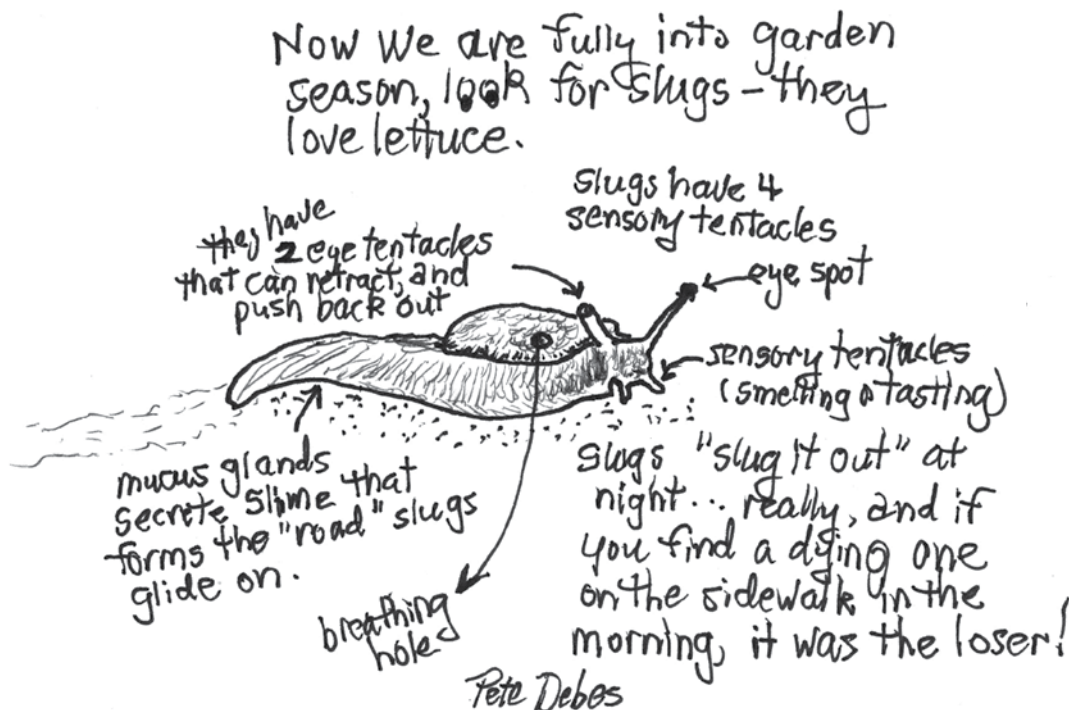
Beyond a quick glance while driving past, it is an opportunity to get an up-close look at the beautiful new installation!



(meeting place is in front of the BHS building)

Naturalist's Corner

by Peter Debes, Chair



Energy Democracy

Getting to 100% renewable energy is one goal of the climate change movement. How we get there will determine the kind of society we will be living in when we arrive. I have been working on the Sierra Club Great Lakes Committee (GLC) for many years. This thoughtful group of people taught me to look beyond the important concerns of conservation and restoration of the Great Lakes and into deeper issues of social justice and public trust. GLC is promoting the water of the Great Lakes as a “Commons” and hopes to work with City of Rochester organizations to promote water as a human right, affordable for all. There are corporate forces working to take control and profit from growing water issues. People all over the world are fighting to promote public rather than corporate ownership of water. Public access and affordability, issues of social justice, are as important as protection and restoration of water resources; both are achievable.

The same applies to energy; the difference being that our current energy system is largely already privatized. Ceal Smith, Research Director for the Renewable Communities Alliance, in her 2011 article “Monopoly Energy or Energy Democracy?”, wrote,

“After decades of secrecy, exemption and billions in taxpayer subsidies, we are just beginning to understand the true cost of monopoly energy in our communities, public health and environment. And to make matters worse, when developed under the central, industrial energy model, even renewable energy sources like wind and solar take on the same destructive qualities.”

With the push for renewables we have the opportunity to decentralize our energy production. Rooftop solar, micro wind, geothermal, micro hydro, efficiency, conservation and even

lifestyle changes are all local; they belong to all of us. Personal renewables, municipal renewables, neighborhood micro grids and a growing number of creative and cost effective conservation and efficiency measures - these should be the first line of response to climate change. Technology is developing daily that will reinforce these actions with energy storage and increased renewable capacity in our existing cities and towns.

The New York State’s Reforming the Energy Vision (REV) process has innovative components and offers funding for distributed local energy. Communities, especially low-income areas, can make decisions that will benefit their towns in part because they will be able to own them. This is key! Energy Democracy!

When local people make decisions about how to generate their own energy and then engage in creative ways to live within that energy source - we begin to move into a more sustainable world. Similar to the local agriculture movement, encouraging people to participate in co-ops and work on the farm, so renewable energy advocates can inform communities about choices they have regarding energy. The Department of Energy recently reported that currently available rooftops can provide 40% of our national electricity needs with photovoltaic systems. Local energy can use our existing human footprint - rooftops, parking lots, roads, buildings and even water mains (micro hydro!) - and can leave intact our rural and natural spaces, so crucial to our already stressed wildlife.

Not surprisingly, as with water, there are corporations spending money and political influence to stop local energy from being anything but a niche effort. Environmentalists have been the watchdogs of our privatized

energy system for decades. Yet now some environmental websites promote 100% renewables based on centralized, privately owned energy projects and a privately owned, nationally centralized transmission system bringing energy from massive solar and wind projects in the West to the power needs of the East.

When climate change advocates call for 100% renewable energy without clearly stating how they intend to make it happen, they are unwittingly the advocates of corporate answers to our energy

“With the push for renewables we have the opportunity to decentralize our energy production.”

future. At the Chili Public Service Commission (PSC) public hearing on Large Scale Renewables and the Clean Energy

Standard, I was appalled to discover that the enormous growth in renewables to meet the 50% by 2030 goal is almost entirely relying on a massive growth of privately owned large-scale renewables. This will require a massive new transmission system as well as 600-foot turbines and unimaginable acres of solar panels on precious rural and forested land. It is clear that corporate voices have won this round as distributive energy, which uses existing human spaces and local transmission, is only a minor player in NY’s REV. Only a huge environmental and social justice chorus will change this. I encourage all to write to the PSC and voice your desire for local, distributed energy as the road to a sustainable future.

Kate Kremer
Sierra Club Great Lakes Committee,
Chair

Coming to Grips-and-Gripes with Transportation Policy

By Peter Debes, Chair

“Our Broken Roads,” a recent *Democrat & Chronicle* piece about the deterioration of our transportation network, tells what happens when short-term financial gains trump concerns about long-term viability.

In the same vein, *The Limits to Growth* (Donella Meadows, et al., 1972) long ago challenged a pair of assumptions: that growth can continue indefinitely, and that government should actively promote it. These assumptions, which undergird US policies and those of most other countries, have led to rampant exploitation of the world’s natural resources.

With little concern for the consequences, these policies have often brought ecosystems to the point of collapse. But huge fortunes were created along the way; eventually this new wealth even helped the working and middle classes achieve a higher standard of living. Yet most of the wealth has remained in the hands of the owning class. Now the lure of profits and the political power of big money seem to have led to the monstrous conundrum we face: a transportation network as unsustainable as it is vast.

Here is my thinking about this troubling reality. The motor vehicle industry’s unchecked growth made our country dependent on auto production for continued prosperity. Federal and state governments cooperated with the industry, pouring huge sums of money into more and better roads and expressways. This in turn made more places accessible for homes or extracting resources, and also for easier distribution of goods and services.

As long as the economy was expanding rapidly, we could finance the construction and maintenance of new roads and bridges without shortchanging other social goods like education

and health care. Nonetheless, funds for modernizing and improving mass transportation options took a back seat in planning in most parts of the country.

For example, Rochester’s light-rail subway succumbed to age and disrepair and was partially converted to expressway or filled in. This not only ended Rochester’s most viable option for expanded light rail; it also facilitated white flight from city to suburbs, producing more serious racial and socioeconomic segregation and ensuring ever greater dependence on roads and personal transportation.

Meadows and her co-authors warned of the danger of such policies. They foresaw that the environmental and maintenance costs would rise to equal or surpass society’s ability to pay for them, especially in an era of general economic decline.

“The only way we can even partially sustain our current lifestyle is to fundamentally restructure our society.”

The *D&C*’s “Our Broken Roads” documents the serious condition of many roads and bridges in the Rochester area: 1/4 of all roads are in poor condition, 1/3 of the state’s bridges are obsolete or structurally deficient, and the individual vehicle owner now lays out around \$1,700 annually for repairs and maintenance.

Today we are deferring the huge costs of maintaining highways and bridges to prevent serious cutbacks in other essential services. But this cannot continue: petroleum products are used for most resurfacing, etc., and as the costs of these products rise, municipalities will find it harder

and harder to pay for repairs.

Governments have provided only limited subsidies to expand and upgrade mass transit, citing huge initial costs. But now these same governments must consider raising highway tolls and gasoline taxes substantially to reflect the real price of maintaining the road network. “Our Broken Roads” tells how officials are reluctant to resort to toll and gas-tax hikes, and how they are even looking at decommissioning and removing some roads and bridges.

It seems to me that the only way we can even partially sustain our current lifestyle is to fundamentally restructure our society. This restructuring will take the form of “smart growth”, which centralizes population in urban areas and reaps huge energy savings from the efficient movement of people and goods and reducing wear and tear on roadways.

Such a shift will mean taking decisions about housing construction out of developers’ and contractors’ hands. But this is our only option: No longer can we allow the kind of urban sprawl that has swallowed up so much valuable open space and prime agricultural land in the Rochester area.

We can bring about such change by making local, state and national leaders heed our demands. We must advocate for smart growth and for restructuring our communities for more efficient transport and energy conservation.

And not least, we can change things by choosing where and how we live. With the right basic choices, we can ensure a good future for our children and grandchildren – and for the whole community.



Cartoon by John Kaster

FLASH BULLETIN

4-Story Apartment Building Proposed In the Middle of Cobbs Hill Park

By Hugh Mitchell

Rochester Management, Inc., who manage the old senior citizen residence called Cobbs Hill Village, have filed an application with the City to tear down six of the 1958 housing units and build a 4-story apartment on Norris Drive across from the Lake Riley lodge. For some unknown reason this proposal has been put on 'fast track' within City government.

We have many details on this proposal, but few of the political facts and forces involved. Our Sierra Club position is that a 4-story apartment building (to be followed by a 3-story apartment) has no business being constructed on the 9.5 acre property which is surrounded by Cobbs Hill Park.

Historically, this area was 'temporarily' carved out of Cobbs Hill Park in response to the need for emergency housing for Italian

and German POWs during the Second World War. In 1957, again in response to social needs, the city deeded the property with a 40 year lease to construct 6 barrack-type, single story residences for "rental purposes only to aged persons residing in the City of Rochester".

Currently, these old buildings are still occupied by elderly citizens living on fixed incomes. However, if the Rochester Management proposal passes City review, some of these seniors will not be able to afford the cost of the new apartments, which are designed for Middle Income - market rates.

If the old buildings are too dilapidated to safely house seniors and the proposal for new apartments fails to pass review, we believe the land should be returned to Cobbs Hill Park.

Sat July 23rd &
Sun 24th

**Volunteers
Needed for**

**THE GANANDOGAN
NATIVE
AMERICAN
Dance & Music Festival**

**Help educate our community
about working towards a
better future.**

Interested in participating at
The Sierra Club table?
Give us a call at 615-4335!



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Summer 2016 Calendar

*All Committees are local volunteer groups of the Rochester Regional Group of the Sierra Club.
 Also follow our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/SierraROC/) to keep up to date on new events throughout the year.*

Date	Day	Time	Calendar/Event	Place
June 25	Saturday	9:00am-4:30pm	Chapter Meeting	Rochester Museum & Science Center
July 23 & 24	Sat & Sun	10:00am-6:00pm	Native American Dance & Music Festival	Ganondagan State Historic Site 7000 County Road 41 (Boughton Hill Road) Victor, NY 14564
August 1	Tuesday	6:30-8:30pm	Executive Committee Meeting	TBD Guests invited. Call 585-271-4796

* The Great Lakes Committee Meeting will resume in September