

History Ignored *Forgetting About Air Force Plant 51's Toxic Wastes*

by Hugh Mitchell

Like a bunch of kids pointing fingers at each other, they say some other agency should clean up one of Rochester's most polluted toxic waste sites - Air Force Plant 51 at the end of Dewey Avenue, next to the Monroe County Water Authority's Shoremont Treatment Plant. For example, in what must be one of the biggest whoppers of all time, the Defense Department, with the deepest pockets in the world, claims they have no more money for clean-up of this dangerous site. But other agencies involved with remediation of toxic waste, from the US Army Corps of Engineers to the New York's DEC, have failed to move rapidly on remediation of this festering sore on the shores of Round Pond.

Air Force Plant 51 is a huge, old rotting World War II Defense Department factory, originally called the Odenbach plant. During the Second World War they made landing barges there and did other metal fabrication. Later the Air Force took over the plant to produce B-52 bomber bulkheads and Talos missiles. In those dirty old days the toxic waste produced from such manufacturing was unceremoniously dumped in the back yard, which in this case happens to be the wetlands on the edge of Round Pond. There this stew of

Genesee River Canoe Access Map

A River to Call Our Own

by Laura E. Arney

As some locals have focused attention on the revival of the Port of Rochester, others have initiated a Genesee Riverway Trail. Coincidentally, the Atlantic Chapter of the Sierra Club has funded work within the Rochester Regional Group to promote recreational use of the Genesee River from Lake Ontario to Pennsylvania. A significant result of this effort is a two-sided, laminated, fold-up map which has been researched, designed, printed, and is now available to Sierra Club members and the general public. It features the watershed outline, river mileage, and notes on 34 access points. Mileage (according to 1967 DEC survey) and GPS points are included as well as mapped adjacent highways.

The Genesee River is a sprightly flowing river in the southern section, much of it suited for trout fishing. Although the section north of Letchworth Park is slow and sediment laden, the paddling is nice due to

reliable summer flow and to tree-lined and vegetated banks. The river is dynamic and cuts and fills in high water creating many meanders. The usual accesses at highway bridges are now being enhanced as the bridges are rehabilitated by the Department of Transportation. River access from Genesee to Avon is difficult. More canoe access in the City of Rochester is being planned. The group *Friends of the Genesee Riverway Trail* will be promoting bike and canoe activities. We are lucky to have our own river. Come and enjoy it.

Maps are \$2.17 each for Sierra Club members, and \$5.43 for non-members (includes shipping and tax). Please make checks payable to "Sierra Club RRG" and send to: Sierra Club RRG, c/o David Ruekberg, 3558 Oatka Creek Rd., Leroy, NY, 14482. If you have questions, email David at SierraRochTix@hotmail.com. Please allow 2-3 weeks for delivery.

toxic poison has lain festering since the Air Force bailed out in 1959 and the site was declared surplus.

In November 1999 the Army Corp of Engineers conducted a site investigation to determine what areas might be contaminated. They discovered at least seven toxic waste

sites including the "Area One" site which was a shallow toxic pond used to collect wastewater from electroplating operations. This liquid pool of poisons included the following primary contaminants: acetone, several forms of Dichloroethane (DEC), Tetrachloroethane, Ethyl benzene, Trichloroethene (TEC), chromium and other volatile organic compounds and metals. Hardly the kind of cocktail you want flowing into Round Pond, which flows into Lake Ontario only one and a half miles from the main water intake pipe for two thirds of the drinking

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History Ignored (continued from page 1)

water of Monroe County. The pond was pumped out and declared safe by the "rapid response action team" by Spring 2001. At that time the Corps declared, "No definite timetable has been set for the other investigations due to a lack of funding."

The foul ball was then thrown to the NYS DEC to investigate further how to clean up the estimated remaining seven to nine unremediated toxic sites. In January 2002 the DEC announced that the current property owner, 4800 Dewey Avenue Enterprises, Inc, had signed a *voluntary agreement* to investigate further. By April 2002 six quart sized bottles were found on the site with the trade name of Chlorextol or PCB's, a major carcinogen. Another search of the site later found an additional 123 containers characterized as hazardous waste such as oil cans and batteries. These wastes were removed, but as of October 2003 (the last DEC report) studies of the sediments in Round Pond area detected "...elevated concentrations of various metals and organic compounds in the wetlands and sediments adjacent to the site." In other words the site has still not been adequately remediated and toxic wastes have moved outside the property boundaries. When a full investigation is complete in all likelihood Plant 51 could be ranked as the largest toxic waste site on the shores of Lake Ontario.

The Monroe County Water Authority, the next door neighbor, has assured us that our drinking water continues to pass every federal and state drinking water test and further, "... tests of fish from Round Pond indicate that no more restrictive advisories are needed than for fish in Lake Ontario." Still, the Sierra Club contends that Air Force Plant 51 can not be ignored by way of some weak voluntary agreement with the current owner, requiring the person least responsible for the mess to shoulder the economic burden of suing state and federal authorities to force them to accept their responsibility to pay for the clean up.

Add Your Voice

Frank J. Regan, Communications Chairperson

'Why,' you might ask, 'don't our country's environmental policies match good science?' (The Union of Concerned Scientists tells us, "*Bush Administration Distorts Science - The White House has suppressed or distorted objective scientific analysis that fails to support its political goals.*") The answer, as you know, is that many times good science conflicts with present economic necessities--or at least perceived necessities. The public has been led to believe that environmental health must take a backseat to growth--when, in the end, that reasoning is suicidal.

The scale at which environmental degradation goes on seems overwhelming and hopeless. So, what can the average person do about it all? One thing that just about everyone can do, and especially Sierra Club members, is voice your concerns publicly. And, one of the best venues for that is your local newspaper, where the letters to the editor are one of the most widely read sections. With over 3,000 Sierra Club members in just the Rochester area alone, that is a lot of clout.

We should all express that voice,

that deep concern all of us have as Sierra Club members, to see that our local environment is preserved for generations to come. The Sierra Club has excellent online resources to buttress your arguments at the national (sierraclub.org), state (newyork.sierraclub.org/), and local (newyork.sierraclub.org/rochester/) levels. In addition, you already get the Sierra Atlantic from the Atlantic Chapter. And you can also get a (free) subscription to the club's activist network publication, *The Planet*, by visiting www.sierraclub.org/planet, or by writing to Sierra Club Activist Desk, 85 Second St., 2nd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105.

Adding your voice to an action e-mailing matters. If you write an informed letter to the editor of a widely read newspaper, it matters more. Writing a detailed essay on a regional environmental concern matters even more. Find a moment to express your views as a Sierra Club member to the media. Those rushing development beyond our capabilities to cope with it did.

Take Action to Keep Mercury Out of Our Air

A record 511,000 Americans have already urged the Bush administration to start cleaning up toxic mercury pollution from power plants as soon as possible. Now, the EPA has extended the deadline on the comment period until June 29, 2004. Please comment today and tell friend about this issue to help us reach our goal of 1 million comments by the end of June.

The EPA estimates that one in six U.S. women of childbearing age has mercury levels in her blood high enough to put her baby at risk. In 2001, the EPA estimated that, by 2008, a 90% reduction in mercury emissions from

coal-fired power plants was possible with available technology and strong enforcement of the current Clean Air Act. Instead of requiring power plants to use modern technology that could start reducing mercury pollution within four years, the Bush administration's ill-conceived plan would delay cleaning up this dangerous pollutant for decades.

Visit www.sierraclub.org/mercury to take action today! Or send a letter directly to: EPA Docket Center (Air Docket) U.S. EPA West (6102T), Room B-108 1200 Pennsylvania Ave. NW., Washington, DC 20460, Attention Docket ID No. OAR-2002-0056

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Outings, Summer, 2004

Date/Time	Destination	Leader
June 5 Call 218-0688 for information on meeting place and time.	Unpaved Highways at Mendon Ponds Participate in a deeper involvement with pond life and an awareness of unseen natural patterns in our largest county park. We will look and search for the ways animals wind their way through areas and for what reasons. We travel established black top highways. How different are the trails of most wildlife? We will look at animal behaviour, their lives, needs and survival. Do they in fact travel the same highways through the woods? What would cause a change in their travel patterns?	Bonnie Bessette
July 17 at 9:30 AM. Meet at First Unitarian Church parking lot	Helmer Nature Center Explore natural features of a little-known gem in Irondequoit.	Howard Camp
August 14 Meet at Hopkins Point at Mendon Ponds Park; call 218-0688 to check meeting time.	Canoe on Hundred Acre Pond while learning about animal and bird life as well as natural progression. Option: some members may help to open a culvert between the ponds; bring boots if you'd like to be a part of this option.	Bonnie Bessette
Sept. 18 at 9:30 AM Meet at parking lot near picnic area in Genesee Valley Park	Biking the Genesee Valley Greenway Bring your bicycle: ride the Genesee Valley Greenway trail to Scottsville along a deserted canal. View the remnants of locks.	Howard Camp

Sierra Club Response to Proposed Steuben County Wind Farm by Bob Siegel, Energy Committee Chair

The Steuben County Sierra Club group recently filed comments for the controversial Wind Farm Proposal in Prattsburgh in response to the developer Ecogen's draft scoping document. While acknowledging that Sierra Club supports wind power as a viable and important alternative to fossil fuels, important questions about this particular proposal need to be answered before the club can offer its support. Ecogen and its rival Global Winds, have leases on approximately fifty sites each that they hope to develop. Steuben County co-chair, Rachel Treichler states that information about the actual turbine size and tower construction needs to be provided. It would be helpful to know why, for instance, a smaller number of larger turbines couldn't be used. The developers are asking for a less rigorous Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) claiming that impact would be minor. Opponents feel that given the magnitude of the project, a full scale EIS should be required, one that considers the cumulative impact of these sites on wildlife corridors, as well as quality of life for residents and for

the tourists upon whom the area is dependent as a major source of revenue. In a separate statement, Audubon New York pointed out that some of the sites' proximity to the Hi-Tor Wildlife Management Area is a concern since this site has been designated as an Important Bird Area and as a New York State Bird Conservation Area.

Frog call Project by Sara Rubin

Go out now, in the spring, and tape record frogs as they call. Label and save the recording. In case that land comes up for development, with the tape you can document the presence of the various species that live there. Town Boards, Conservation Boards, and Regulators are impressed with aural evidence of the value of undeveloped wetlands as habitat.

Your tape recording could help save a wetland.

For more information, contact: Frog Call Taping Project, Sara Rubin, Wetlands Committee, Sierra Club, phone 442-6890, e-mail: rubin150@aol.com

Want to Help the Sierra Club?

We need a gregarious person to volunteer as Membership Chairperson. This important job can be as big or as little as you chose, but we do expect a lot of new members to sign up this summer. We hope you can find some time to help Sierra Club. Call Hugh Mitchell (585) 244-2625.

Toxic Tour, April 17, 2004



Hugh Mitchell discussing air emissions at RG&E's Russell Station

CALENDAR

June 5	Saturday	-- Outing: Unpaved Highways of Mendon Ponds (see pg 3) ----- call 218-0688 for info/sign-up	
June 9	Wednesday 7:00 PM	Conservation Committee	Corner Place, 983 Monroe Ave.
June 10	Thursday 4:00 PM	----- ExCom picnic & meeting-----	----- Brockport YC
June 17	Thursday 7:30 PM	Alternative Energy Committee	25 Brook Hill Lane, Apt. 2 ³
June 23	Wednesday 7:30 PM	----- Wetlands Committee-----	----- 150 Sunset Drive, Brighton
July 14	Wednesday 7:00 PM	Conservation Committee	Corner Place, 983 Monroe Ave.
July 15	Thursday 7:30 PM	----- Alternative Energy Committee-----	----- 25 Brook Hill Lane, Apt. 2 ³
July 17	Saturday 9:30 AM	Outing: Helmer Nature Center (see page 3)	meet at First Unitarian Church¹
July 28	Wednesday 7:30 PM	----- Wetlands Committee-----	----- 150 Sunset Drive, Brighton
Aug. 11	Wednesday 7:00 PM	Conservation Committee	Corner Place, 983 Monroe Ave.
Aug. 12	Thursday 6:30 PM	----- ExCom meeting-----	----- St. John's Meadows
Aug. 14	Saturday	Outing: "Canoe 100-Acre Pond" (see page 3)	Hopkins Point, Mendon Ponds Park⁴
Aug. 15	Sunday	----- Eco-logue deadline-----	-----
Aug. 19	Thursday 7:30 PM	Alternative Energy Committee	25 Brook Hill Lane, Apt. 2 ³
Aug. 25	Wednesday 7:30 PM	----- Wetlands Committee-----	----- 150 Sunset Drive, Brighton

¹First Unitarian Chrch, 220 Winton R. South

²Open to members. Call Hugh Mitchell at 244-2625.

³Call Mike Dahl, 586-4618, for directions

⁴Call 218-0688 to check meeting time

Visit our web site at <http://newyork.sierraclub.org/rochester>

Also worth a visit: <http://rochesterenvironment.com>

To add your name to our E-mail list send your address to FrankRegan@RochesterEnvironment.com and put "subscribe SC Mailing List" in the subject line.

Call 585-244-2625 for information about Sierra Club events and voice mail.