



SIERRA
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Iroquois Messenger

NUCLEAR POWER IN NEW YORK

By Tim Judson

In the last three years, awareness of nuclear power and radioactive waste has revived in New York State. Thousands of downstate residents and dozens of municipalities are calling for the closure of the Indian Point reactors in Westchester County, following a series of near-accidents and the September 11, 2001 attacks. While the future of the plant is uncertain, the struggle has set the stage for a renewed debate over NY's energy future.

One of the issues is the vulnerability of high-level nuclear waste stored at six operating reactors. This irradiated nuclear fuel is flammable and stored under water in warehouse-style buildings. At the FitzPatrick and Nine Mile Point 1 and 2 reactors in Oswego County, the fuel pools are suspended several stories above ground. The consequences of a fuel pool fire could dwarf the Chernobyl and Three Mile Island meltdowns. Environmental groups are calling for hardened storage of irradiated fuel to mitigate the danger until a viable long-term solution is developed.

By mid-summer, all of New York's reactors may be owned by two

holding companies, Entergy and Constellation, both supporters of expanding nuclear power. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission will soon decide whether to approve a 20-year license extension for the Ginna reactor near Rochester. Entergy and Constellation plan to seek extensions for the other NY reactors over the next few years. This trend poses not only increasing safety dangers, but a financial and political debacle, as well. Ginna is the smallest nuclear plant still operating in the US. The 20-year extension will cost ratepayers at least \$3 billion dollars in purchased electricity – money which could be spent on renewable energy and environmental cleanup. Relicensing all NY reactors could force residents to invest at least an extra \$30 billion in nuclear power over the next 42 years.

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BOOK REVIEW

By Matthew Schueler

Gathering Moss A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Oregon State University Press, 2003.

I have often sat on a carpet of moss, but never wondered why it was short, or why it was usually in the shade, or how a clump that looked so dead one day, could be flourishing the next. This thin volume taught me dozens of things about Bryology — even the word — the science of mosses and how that science interacts with others. But to give the impression that this is some dry as dust textbook is to imply *Finnegan's Wake* is about a dead guy. This is a beautiful book, where Latin binomials are used like names in a love poem. The author has succeeded in her desire to carry the message "That mosses have their own names. Their way of being in the world cannot be told by data alone."

Ms. Kimmerer, who is an associate Professor at the College of Environmental Science and Forestry, does not "lighten" her science by letting us feel her fascination and passion for her subject. The essays

Continued page 3

WINTER SCHEDULE

Events are free and open to the public at University United Methodist Church (UUMC), 1085 E. Genesee St. Park and enter on University Ave.; meet downstairs. Meetings are usually on the fourth Tuesday at 7:30 PM. Descriptions on page 1. Information 428-1905.

ExCom meetings are for Sierra members only, at the Jamesville Train Station in Jamesville Plaza at the corner of Route 173 and Jamesville Road on third Wednesdays at 7:00 PM. Please come and bring your ideas. Information: 492-4745, unless otherwise listed.

- Feb 17 Excom
 Feb 22 Sunday, 2:00 PM Outing. Winter Nature Walk, Clark Reservation
 Feb 24 Tuesday, 7:30 PM. John Weeks: *Natives & Aliens*.
 Mar 16 Excom
 Mar 21 Sunday, 2:00 PM Outing. Spring Trek, Clark Reservation
 Mar 23 Tuesday, 7:30 PM. Dereth Glance: *Rainforests & Fuel*
 Apr Outing TBA
 Apr 20 Excom
 Apr 27 Tuesday, 7:30 PM. Bill Kappel: *Tully Valley*

OUTINGS DESCRIPTIONS

Lisa Daly — updates & cancellations
 315-428-1384, ldaly@yahoo.coms

— Sunday, February 22nd at 2:00 p.m. Join a Council of Park Friends naturalist for a late-winter walk through Clark Reservation! We will explore the woods in search of animal activity. Dust off your snow boots and get out to explore a unique landscape. We'll look for animal tracks and signs, identify plants and trees (yes, even in winter!) and discuss the role of winter in Central New York. Meet at the Nature Center.

— Sunday March 21st at 2:00 p.m. Got cabin fever? Join Council of Park Friends for an early spring trek through Clark Reservation! We will meander the meadows, wander the woodlands and check the lake for signs of spring. Warmer days are coming. Let a CPF naturalist lead you in search of spring! Meet at the Nature Center.

Directions to Clark Reservation — From Syracuse: Take Rte 481 south to Jamesville exit. Follow Jamesville Rd to Rte 173 in Jamesville. Take Rte 173 west for 1.25 miles to Park Entrance. From Buffalo/Rochester: Take I-90 east to exit 34A. NYC/Albany: Take I-90 west to exit 34A. Continue with directions from Syracuse.

NATIVES & ALIENS — FEBRUARY 24

John Weeks, Environmental Consultant at Baltimore Woods, will show slides and talk about the advantages and disadvantages of common alien and native invasive plants. He will explain how to judge their value to wildlife as well as how to control them. He will also discuss attitudes about alien versus native species relative to other human activities.

John has been a consultant in land management and program design for 30 nature centers, public school districts and municipalities in New York. He has written many publications, including technical and research bulletins, 600 newspaper columns on natural history and 1000 *Nature of Things* radio spots for WRVO. He has received numerous local and state Community Service Awards. If you've ever enjoyed exhibits or other elements of a nature center, you can bet that John Weeks has a hand in its design.

RAINFORESTS & FUEL — MARCH 23

Dereth Glance, Program Coordinator for the Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE) since 2002, will tell us how our dependence on fossil fuel threatens America's rainforests and the Finger Lakes National Forest. She'll show how we can protect those places as well as solve environmental problems through our electric bill.

Dereth has been active in social justice issues for many years, translating her passion for active democracy to protecting the environment. Growing up in Michigan, she was never allowed to go near neighborhood tributaries and rivers because of industrial pollution. She organized Clean Water Action in Michigan, to fight for legislation to disclose the contaminants in drinking water. In Indiana she organized the effort to stop the transportation of High Level Nuclear Waste on highways and railroads. She has worked in many cities on a variety of direct grassroots environmental campaigns. Visit <www.citizenscampaign.org>

FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Tree huggers,

My Resident Red Squirrel is a great weather predictor and should consult for the weather channel. It made a dozen large, neat, round, piles of spruce cones under the spruce and, I assume, is happily munching away. Sure beats the gray squirrel's battle against my "birds only" devices on the feeders. I feed the grays cheap duck corn, but they want expensive bird feed. My birdseed bill this year will only be exceeded by the snow/ice damage.

Turning from squirrels to the world: I was fortunate to be a delegate at the Third Non-Governmental Organization Forum on International Environmental Cooperation in China, held at Remin University in Beijing in November. The topics included sustainability,

biodiversity, global climate change, greening, water, protection and resource conservation.

From there I went to a Forum on Women and Sustainable Development in Xi'ang where I spoke on Recycling — only Part of the Process. We visited research centers on sustainable models for homes, agriculture, and energy. The highlight was talking with women from rural communities who have massive concerns about pollution and education. The experience was fantastic. I'm not sure what I contributed of lasting value. But the mutual emotional support for environmental concerns was more valuable than the information we exchanged.

I returned to Syracuse to snow, went to London, came back to no

snow for the holidays. Since then my life is full of shoveling, scraping, and catching drips. How about just enough warm weather to make being outdoors fun and to melt ice dams.

Anyway, it is time to restore America. Be sure to vote in the Primaries on March 2 for a solution to tree cutting, oil drilling, dirty air, polluted waters and deceit — then VOTE in November.

For the Earth — it's the only one
Martha Holly Loew

CORRECTION

Our last issue incorrectly stated that County Executive Pirro had appointed a Council on Environmental Health to pursue burning tires. The Council has been in existence for many years and was not formed for that purpose. Please visit <<http://www.ongov.net/Health/environmental.html#council>> to see the scope of the Council's activities.

From page 1

range widely, discussing moss morphology, reproduction and distribution. Yet always, the thread of humanity is woven in; these stories are personal. They leave little doubt that moss and human have importance to one another, and we deny each its place at our peril. The least scientific but most powerful essay in the collection called, "The Owner," would find itself at home in *The Sand County Almanac*.

[Ms. Kimmerer will speak at the Syracuse Botanical Club meeting on March 1, in the DeWitt Library.]

SIERRA CANDIDATES

The Sierra Club is organizing a **Candidate Forum** for this year's Board of Directors election. By hearing directly from all the candidates on a variety of topics, it will allow members to make a more informed choice when voting.

Responses to set of questions posed to all candidates will be posted on the Club website. Join the forum <<http://whistler.sierraclub.org/listsub/?listname=BOD-CANDIDATES-OPEN-FORUM&>>

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(* denotes ExCom members)

MIDLAND AVE SEWAGE PLANT

By Aggie Lane
478-4571

The Midland Avenue sewage plant struggle began March 1999 when Onondaga County announced that it would build a regional sewage treatment facility (RTF) the size of a football field on the residential block of Oxford and Blaine Streets. This site is in a low-income neighborhood on Syracuse's south side. The county declared that this RTF was the only feasible way to stem pollution from combined sewer overflows (CSOs) into Onondaga Creek.

But in the fall 2001 the Partnership for Onondaga Creek, a grass-roots group concerned for the creek and surrounding communities, convinced Syracuse's common councilors that there was a better way. The councilors unanimously voted not to sell the land to the County. This prompted a crisis because the county cannot seize city-owned land. It sued the city in federal court for eminent domain rights. The judge told the municipalities to

work it out with the each other and with the other stakeholders.

In August 2002, two feasible solutions to the CSO problem were negotiated: both underground storage systems. These alternatives to the RTF are acceptable to the city and the Partnership for Onondaga Creek because they respect the community and the creek. Unfortunately, negotiations broke down when the county demanded that the city accept the county's proposed RTF for the Armory Square area in return for the underground solution at Oxford-Blaine. The city refused. After the breakdown, the judge awarded eminent domain rights to the county for its CSO projects. The city announced it would fight for its sovereignty in the federal second circuit court of appeals.

In February 2003, after being awarded city land, County Executive Nick Pirro unilaterally declared he would build a smaller RTF on

Centro's property a little further south of Oxford-Blaine's residential homes. The city and Partnership contend that this downsized plant is better than the original RTF, but not good enough: it still pollutes the creek with combined sewage in amounts that would make it difficult to revitalize the creek.

Now the county and city are talking again, trying to craft an agreement. Without one, the Partnership will continue to struggle for the best alternative to help the community that is affected by this massive construction project. On the south side people will be relocated and others will lose their homes no matter which CSO project is eventually built. The best possible project could enhance their community and the creek that flows through it.

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