



Save the Pine Bush

October/November Newsletter

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Vegetarian/Vegan Lasagna Dinner Wednesday, October 21 2009, 6:00 p.m.

Neil Gifford

Conservation Director of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission

will speak about

Conservation of an Urban Oasis: Managing Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Albany Pine Bush Preserve

Neil Gifford will talk about the Pine Bush Commission's recent habitat management work to promote not just the Karner Blue, but the other significant species that call the Pine Bush home.

At the First Presbyterian Church, (State and Willett Sts, Albany, please enter from State St.). All-the-vegetarian-and-vegan-lasagna-you-can-eat, garden salad, garlic bread and homemade pies. Only \$10 for adults, \$5 for students, and \$2 for children. People who make reservations are served first. For reservations, please leave a message for Rezsins Adams at 462-0891 or Lynne Jackson at 434-1954 or email pinebush@mac.com. Interested people are welcomed to attend the program beginning at 7:00 for which there is no charge

The Great Dune — October Save the Pine Bush Hike Saturday, October 24

Meet: 9:30 am SUNYA Campus Circle (Collins Circle) Bus Stop picnic table
1400 Washington Ave. Albany

Leader: John Wolcott. **For more info:** Call John Wolcott at 465-8930

This will be nice fall walk to a very interesting natural landmark which we haven't had a hike to in awhile. The Great Dune is the largest dune formation in the Pine Bush, possibly anywhere in upstate New York. An immense cluster of parabolic dunes windblown into one immense one, with a blowout bowl, almost like an isolated other natural world by itself. At the lee end is an immense very high slip face. It's something better understood from the air than being right on or in or next to it. Topos and Aerials will be brought along to look at. A stunning example of a geomorphological feature of the Schenectady-Albany Sand Dune Belt.

Note: At the very western beginning of the lengthy north lateral sandridge a housing development was built in 1998. This has detracted from having a complete picture of this formation and leaving

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Bringing Back Sustainable Karner Blue Populations

by Grace Nichols

ALBANY: Using the Freedom of Information Act, both Save the Pine Bush and Brian Nearing of the *Times Union* requested data that has been collected about the number of Karner Blue populations. We were astounded at what we found. The numbers of butterflies counted have plummeted in recent years, dipping below 1000 butterflies. Figures of what population level is sustainable vary; some say 3000 butterflies are sustainable (even though Karner Blues were extirpated from New Hampshire at that level) while others say it takes from 7000 – 12000 butterflies to make a stable community.

We have been well below that for many years.

The official reasoning is that the weather – not that different from weather parameters of the last 10,000 years and not very different from Saratoga weather (blissfully, Wilton Preserve butterfly numbers are up around 3000-5000 butterflies) – has caused declines. However, we know that multiple impacts have been pummeling these butterflies – the landfill and its air emis-

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September Biogas Talk

by Gregg Bell

ALBANY: At the September Pine Bush dinner I gave a talk on biogas. For most Americans, biogas is a new idea. While biogas is actually an ancient technology, and while it is used extensively in developing countries and in Europe, there is still limited understanding of it here in the US.

Given this situation, I structured my slide show half around low-tech biogas as used in developing nations to illustrate its benefits and its simplicity. The other half was about high-tech biogas as used in Germany to show its possibilities.

Biogas, also called anaerobic digestion, is similar to compost. The compost process is the

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Sustainable Butterflies, from page 1

sions, highways, habitat loss, and insecticides (the city was using them at the landfill and we can guess the businesses and householders in this area may very well be using a lot), and their strong dependence on lupine plants all are conditions they live with.

What's herbicides got to do with it!?

Another hypothesis is the presence of herbicides – both those used for wildlife management by the Preserve staff, those used by the neighbors of the Pine Bush, and by highway maintenance workers — may be affecting our threatened and endangered insects. Herbicides, often Roundup (a trade name for glyphosate,) are ubiquitous.

We are concerned about use of roundup – particularly the spraying—because in many instances wildlife is extremely sensitive to this chemical.

- Not only is glyphosate a systemic poison which poisons leaves, stem and flowers – it is also a very effective agent against lupine. While most plants need 5 administrations to be killed, lupine dies with one application.

- We are only beginning to have study results showing the effect of herbicide-contaminated-plants on Karner Blues. One was conducted by University of Minnesota researchers in Wisconsin habitat. This study showed some changes in larvae but there are not sufficient studies. So far as we know, there have been no such studies in NY looking at the effect of glyphosate on lupine and Karner Blues.

The question raised is: **Does the use of the herbicides end up contaminating or reducing nectar plants in this area?**

But wildlife has often had a hard time withstanding herbicides:

- We DO know that Glyphosate – particularly its surfactant—has led to Great Plains Spadefoot declines on New Mexico. Similar studies need to be done here and the precautionary principle needs to be followed.

- We DO know that a herbicide-treated plants when included in a New York Museum of Natural History captive butterfly exhibit killed 100% of the butterflies.

- We DO know that sexoxydin, a different herbicide, was responsible for a 33 percent decline in rare butterflies in Europe.

- We know that annually, across the United State, 7 million song birds die from household use of herbicides – mainly Roundup, primarily to kill dandelions.

- We know that lepidopterists are concerned that current dramatic butterfly and moth declines are tied to agricultural use of Roundup which has nearly exterminated nectar plants in many agri-

cultural areas.

- We are also aware that many people, including the Yurok and Kerok Nations (California Tribes who fought pesticides spread by timber companies with the organization the Seventh Generation Fund) have observed increased cancer rates in their people, due to gathering and using herbicide contaminated food and medicine plants.

We need to have real studies on the pollutants and their effects on butterflies and the Karner Blue. We need to follow the precautionary principle when taking actions that impact Pine Bush land.

Some suggestions for immediate action:

We would like:

- A Moratorium on the Landfill Expansion
- The acquisition of lands bordering the preserved Pine Bush to increase habitat and habitat corridors.

- A reduction of speed on 155 during butterfly season (to 25 mph), two weeks out of the year during Karner blue flight season.

- Tax breaks for homes that plant native plants and favored nectar plants for the Karner Blue.

- Massive reintroduction of Karner Blue Butterfly to prevent extirpation.

- Education for neighbors of the Pine Bush to help conserve the butterflies by limiting their pesticide use and planting butterfly nectar plants.

- Increased study on the impact of pollution such as air and water contamination on the 45 rare species of the Pine Bush.

Additionally, we can protect many different species of insects by encouraging Crossgates, Wall Mart, SUNY and other businesses to replace their mercury light bulbs with sodium vapor light bulbs. These protect insects from light pollution, enabling them to be safe at night. Some species just die if not granted protection;

(Some of these ideas were copied from Tim McCabe's 1993 Entomological Survey, available from the Albany Pine Bush Commission.)

Thanks to the Preserve for providing the FOILed herbicide records, and thank you to Dr. Ward Stone and Lynne Jackson.

Neither a Borrower or a Lender Be

By Terry O'Neill

“The days of wine and roses did never go away”--
The message of the budget Mayor Jennings has in play.
For fifteen years he's not foreseen a single rainy day.
The time has come that for this fiscal fecklessness we'll pay.

His buddy George Pataki helped us live beyond our means.
Now the piper's bill is due and so are all the liens.
'cause when that Wall Street crashed and tanked and all went up in smoke
Albany was not exempt from going nearly broke.

But Jerry has for all these years rubbed shoulders with the wealthy
The delusion this has put him in for the city is not healthy.
The town is just a city not a profit-making firm.
Soon this bleak reality will make our Mayor squirm.

But not before our taxes rise and services get cut
Will everyone in Albany see he's got us in a rut.
Democrats are infamous for their taxing and their spending.
Now Jerry's got us hooked but good on predatory lending.

Buckmoth Monitoring

ALBANY: Grace Nichols has been taking volunteers out the Pine Bush to monitor buckmoths. The protocol is very simple and does not bother the moths at all. A volunteer scans for 10 minutes and counts moths and then take 10 minutes off. It is a lot like bird counts that can be done by anyone.

The buckmoths are fuzzy, diurnal, and a striking white/black and red. They also love the autumn and are extremely unusual and rare. The NY variety differs genetically from others found in other parts of the country.

Buckmoths are an indicator species for high quality pine barrens habitat. They are a species of special concern in NY State. The buckmoth is a species worthy of our care and attention!

Hike, from page 1

it natural all around it. I have to say that this scar on the land was allowed over our loud and highly visible, legal actions. This debacle occurred largely because that, in addition to other factors, neither the Town of Guilderland nor the Pine Bush Commission really understood this relationship to the Great Dune.

Take the usual precautions against UV radiation and lyme disease: UV sunglasses, sunscreen, wide brimmed hat, light-colored clothing, long-pants and long sleeves.

The hike to the Great Dune is free and open to the public!

Biogas, from page 1

natural biological breakdown of organic wastes where oxygen is present. Compost happens in backyards for free. It is widely understood and widely practiced. Composting gets rid of unwanted organic waste food or plant wastes. The resulting material is a rich additive for the soil in your garden. However, that's it. There are few other benefits from composting.

Like compost, anaerobic digestion is a natural process of the biological breakdown of organic wastes. The only difference is that it happens where no oxygen is present. The result of anaerobic digestion is mostly methane and carbon dioxide. Anaerobic digestion can happen in a landfill where the resulting methane is uncontrolled and drifts into the atmosphere. There, it is twenty times as destructive as a global warming greenhouse gas as is carbon dioxide. Unlike composting and landfills, intentional biogas is produced in highly controlled environments, and it produces numerous benefits. With a biogas digester, all of the methane is captured, destroyed, and used productively. None escapes into the atmosphere.

In India, simple digesters for the use of one family are sold for \$115 by an appropriate technology non-profit organization. In Indonesia, biodigesters are made from plastic bags for almost nothing. Across the second and third world, two million simple digesters are currently saving forests and earning money for families. Instead of desperately foraging further and further into the woods every day for sticks to burn to cook their food, more families are using food wastes and animal manure to generate methane which they burn in simple gas cooking stoves.

In May, on a company study trip, I was fortunate enough to visit three advanced biogas plants and engage in two days of discussion with a biogas engineer. Germany leads the world in high-technology biogas, currently with about 4,200 high-tech medium-to-large biogas plants. In contrast, the United States has a grand total of 125 digesters. Plants of the German type use the methane in internal combustion engines typically to create 1 to 2 MW of electricity and an equivalent amount of useful heat. In addition, the digestion process eliminates pathogens from manure and other input materials and the resulting material ends up similar to compost as a nutrient-rich soil additive. Air emissions from high-tech biogas plants are minimal.

Used on dairy farms, biogas plants eliminate the most serious impact of the farming operation, namely cow manure. Every cow creates 120 pounds of manure every day. Many farms in central New York have 1,000 to 2,500 cows. You do the math. Just imagine the enormous piles of

Pesticide Reductions Won at Albany Common Council

We can fight City Hall and Win!

By Grace Nichols

ALBANY: Save the Pine Bush research revealed that the City of Albany has been in violation of its own Pesticide Ordinance, not only at the Landfill, but also citywide, including public sites such as the Corning Preserve, the Washington Park Lakehouse, the Senior Center, the Visitor's Center and City Hall.

We have consistently been presenting our research as it has developed since last Spring, and in the FEIS plan for the Landfill Expansion, the City agreed to stop using rodenticides – a danger to hawks, owls, coyote and other top predators – at the Landfill, where so many animals hunt and are at risk.

Late in the summer, we released our finding about city wide use of pesticides, particularly of rodenticides, placed near species and also children. Countrywide, there are 10,000 child poisonings from rodenticides each year. The Common Council was taken aback to find out they are in violation of the pesticides reduction city ordinance and called a special Department of General Services meeting.

At the Department of General Services meeting, representatives of Ehrlich Pesticides apologized for one mistaken administration of rodenticide up at the Landfill since the agreement in the FEIS. They have enrolled in a Green Shield program to phase out all EPA Toxicity Category I, II, III pesticides and ask that we look at the record in December to see that they will be in compliance by then.

Ehrlich representatives felt they should use Talstar P (active ingredient bifenthrin) but upon being educated that bifenthrin is a suspected endocrine disruptor currently being tested by the EPA, they pledged not to use it.

Perhaps most importantly, the pesticide applicators promised that they would go over the

cow manure which is being generated every day in our state. Where do you think that manure goes? Despite excellent programs operated by county soil and water conservation districts across the state to mitigate the problem, some of that manure finds its way to streams and lakes, where it becomes drinking water. Biogas plants scattered across farm areas would eliminate manure run-off into bodies of water and would eliminate atmospheric methane produced at the bottom of huge manure piles, all while producing environmentally clean electricity and heat.

Used in urban areas, biogas plants have

Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPM) for the proposed Habitat Restoration Plan (which is mitigation for the landfill expansion) and try to eliminate the harmful components. When questioned on Zinc Phosphide, they said they wouldn't use it. The Honorable Michael O'Brien, chair of the City's Department of General Services Committee, and the pest applicators reassured me that there would be additional hearings about the Habitat Restoration Plan and the IPM would be as risk free as possible.

We don't honestly know what the process for that part of the Pine Bush's future will be, nor if Ehrlich Pesticides has won that contract. However, their verbal willingness to backtrack from some of the most toxic, comprehensive pesticide use is a good direction and one which will require our vigilance and advocacy to encourage.

We did not set out to become pesticide experts, but we have found out that it is our privilege and our duty to read the laws, read the warnings and thereby safeguard both the City of Albany and our precious Pine Bush.

Finally, as Ehrlich Pesticides learns to do business in a new way, we are confident that they are better protecting their workers, attracting green customers and doing their part to make our earth a little healthier. We honor their willingness to change

We feel this is a big win, because the City conceded that they had made some longstanding mistakes and have pledged to stop spreading these poisons. We hope other pesticide applicators, who work the private industry, will also make these reforms. We also will continue to FOIL records to make sure that nobody makes errors and uses substances that are not safe. We are also sharing our data and research with Ehrlich Pesticides so that they can know the dangers of the pesticides they have previously chosen to use.

It is important that we continue with our "watchdog" function in helping City Hall's policies to be as environmental as possible.

many benefits as well. There, they remove half of what goes into landfills. They eliminate potent methane greenhouse gas from oozing out of landfills into the upper atmosphere. Then, on top of preventing these environmental negatives, biogas plants produce clean, useful heat and electricity.

I call biogas a huge environmental benefit. The reason the US is so lax in using this promising technology is the opposition of the utility industry and government policy concerning wholesale electricity payments to producers of alternate energy.

Sally's Recycling Corner: Recycling Mystery: Medication

Whether it's a bottle of baby aspirin in a cabinet above your kitchen sink or a shelf of prescriptions on the bathroom shelf, medication is a common household item.

In fact, a Maine Department of Environmental Protection study says the use of over-the-counter medications has risen 60 percent since the 1990s.

But what happens when you get rid of the nasty cold and no longer need that cough medicine? Should you throw it in the trash? Or can you flush it? Disposing of medication and (its containers) can be tricky. So, let's get down to the bottom of this week's recycling mystery.

Where Do I Start?

First, let's define what "pharmaceutical waste" actually encompasses. Dubbed "pharmaceuticals and personal care products as pollutants" (PPCPs) by the EPA, these products include:

The University of Illinois reports approximately 4,600 tons of PPCPs are discarded annually in the U.S. alone.

- Prescription and over-the counter therapeutic drugs
- Veterinary drugs
- Fragrances
- Cosmetics
- Sun-screen products
- Diagnostic agents
- Nutraceuticals (e.g., vitamins)

Sources of PPCPs range from pharmaceutical manufacturing and residues in hospitals to your very own medicine cabinet.

According to the EPA, some PPCPs do not pose a significant threat, however this isn't the case for all medications. Because PPCPs

do not dissolve easily and don't evaporate at normal temperatures, they make their way to domestic sewers or waterways and can excrete toxic materials.

Your medication's label will denote if it can be safely flushed. If it does not, check the FDA's Web site for a list of flushable medications and the substances that can contaminate waterways.

What Can I Do With My Leftover Meds?

So, the question still remains: How do we properly dispose of harmful medications that cannot be flushed? First, contact your city or county government's household trash and recycling service to check if your community offers drug take-back programs or other household hazardous waste programs that may accept the substance.

If that is not an option, there is a proper way to dispose of the drugs at home. In February 2007, the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy issued the first consumer guide for proper disposal of prescription drugs. Here's a quick rundown of disposing of your medications:

- Take prescription drugs out of original containers.
- Mix drugs with a substance such as cat litter or used coffee grounds.
- Place this mixture in a disposable container with a lid. The guide suggests an empty margarine tub or a sealable bag.
- Remember to conceal or remove any personal information and prescription number by covering it with permanent black marker or simply scratching it off.
- Put the sealed container with the mixture along with the drug containers in the trash.

Is There Another Option?

Donating your excess medication is a great way to avoid flushing medication while scoring some philanthropic points. UNICEF estimates that around 9.7 million children under the age of five die due to preventable causes and lack of ba-

sic services to treat illnesses such as pneumonia, diarrhea, malaria and HIV/AIDS. These deaths could be preventable with some medications that could be hanging around in your bathroom.

The Health Equity Project is a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to making healthcare a universal human right by providing access to quality medications to developing countries. The Health Equity Project accepts some medicinal donations such as antibiotics, anti-malarials, pain-relievers, HIV/AIDS anti-retrovirals, Diflucan and flucanazole.

Why Is It Important?

There's a lot of controversy surrounding the issue of flushing any drug. A 2008 investigation by The Associated Press found that 250 million pounds of pharmaceuticals are flushed each year by hospitals and long-term care facilities.

There's a notable presence of pharmaceutical substances in our drinking water. In 2008, a CNN report found that, "A vast array of pharmaceuticals – including antibiotics, anti-convulsants, mood stabilizers and sex hormones – have been found in the drinking water supplies of at least 41 million Americans."

What does that mean for us? According to the EPA, studies have shown that pharmaceuticals are present in our nation's waterbodies, some causing ecological harm. However, to date, scientists have found no evidence of detrimental effects on human health.

According to Dr. Raanan Bloom, an environmental assessment expert for the FDA, the main way medications enter water systems is by people taking them and then naturally passing the substance through their systems.

"For those drugs for which environmental assessments have been required, there has been no indication of environmental effects due to flushing," says Bloom.

This article written by Amanda Wills, who is the Assistant Editor of Earth911.com



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A Project of the Social Justice Center
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