

# Save the Pine Bush

March/April Newsletter

Mar/Apr 11 No. 107 • 33 Central Ave., Albany, NY 12210 • email pinebush@mac.com • phone 434-1954 • fax 434-6659 • web <http://www.savethepinebush.org> • Circ. 1000

## Vegetarian/Vegan Lasagna Dinner Wednesday, March 16, 6:00 p.m.

# Neil Gifford

Conservation Director of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission  
*will speak about*

## Update on the Pine Bush & The Commission's Work on the Landfill Reclamation

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.

## Welcome Spring With Save the Pine Bush Saturday March 19, 9:30 AM

**A ski or hike to Karner, New York**

**The type locality of the Karner Blue Butterfly – An early grandly planned railroad exurb that, fortunately never was.**

Meet at 9:30 AM at: Pine Bush Discovery Center parking lot on east side of Route 155 opposite 'T' intersection with Old State Road

Co leaders: Any Arthur and John Wolcott • For more info; call: 465- 8930

Join us on a visit to a forgotten locale at the crossing of Old Karner Road with the AMTRAK tracks. This was bypassed when New Karner Road was built and then after a while the crossing was closed. This place was the location of the railroad stop half way between Albany and Schenectady established in 1831 when the first chartered passenger railroad in the Western Hemisphere was constructed here and for it's first several years ran only between Albany and Schenectady through the Pine Bush. For many many years, there was only the railroad station building and a few nearby farms in the vicinity. Nevertheless the place was assigned the

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## Dr. George Robinson Sheds Light on Landfills, their Possibilities and Problems Post-closure.

Dr. George Robinson is a professor in the Biodiversity and Conservation Policy graduate program at the University at Albany. He is very knowledgeable about landfills, as much of his work has involved transforming old landfills into positive open spaces which can meet the needs of local wildlife and local communities. Dr. Robinson's students have traditionally used the Pine Bush as a place to conduct studies; Dr. Robinson maintains a good relationship with the Pine Bush Commission which stands to gain a lot of funding from the proposed Landfill closure project. Though Dr. Robinson is predisposed to believe in the possibilities of Landfill reclamation, he also has experience with the difficulties of such projects. He came to our dinner on 1/19/11 to share his knowledge with us.

Good news: At our request, the Common Council has just invited Dr. Robinson to advise them on the "Restoration."

Dr. George Robinson first presented at a Pine Bush dinner in 1994 with a talk on the shrinking pool of native plants in NY State and has been a friend to the Pine Bush virtually all of his professional career. The historic bumper-sticker "Don't Mall the Pine Bush" is found in his office up at SUNY Albany. Dr. Robinson doesn't only know a lot about landfills; he is a pioneer in both landfill reclamation and restoration biology. With a wry grin, Dr. Robinson noted that there is an interesting interaction between malls and landfills. They both take up rare habitat when zoned poorly, and conspicuous consumption itself leads to very prominent and conspicuous landfills/landmarks. Dr. Robinson calls our landfill a landform.

Wow, there sure is a lot to know about Landfills! The reclamation of landfills is an important environmental issue as we are generating landfills at a shocking rate and we need to do something

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## *Dr. Robinson - Continued from Page 1*

with them once they are brimming with waste. The EPA uses the term reclamation to refer to digging up landfills and taking the waste away but in the context of NY State landfill policy, reclamation means taking degraded land and revegetating it. In contrast, restoration means returning higher quality land to a more natural state, a recapitulation of the original natural ecosystem in a location. Dr. Robinson was adamant, "You can do reclamation but not restoration on a landfill (or any highly degraded land.)"

We saw some great slides of landfill reclamations—one was of the Festival Gardens in Liverpool; another one was the Ferry Point Park in the Bronx which provided grassy meadows and open space for a highly developed urban community. Even more impressive was the reclamation of a small uncapped landfill in the Meadowlands of New Jersey. Dr. Robinson's team was able to get free subsoil – from a Manhattan post office site and also free topsoil mulch from decaying leaves from another site. He noted that about 40,000 cu. yards of subsoil and 20,000 cu yards of top soil would have been immensely expensive so they were very fortunate to get these, which needed to be "disposed of" anyway. They were able to plant islands of trees and allow the birds and the winds distribute seeds from surrounding plants to bring in vegetation. The birds of New Jersey used this patch of open habitat and they effectively seeded the land along with the wind. Amazingly, when Dr. Robinson returned in 20 years, he had successfully "grown" a woods – a woodlot. He hastened to explain that it was not a planned execution of a design – that wasn't possible. He just set the stage for natural forces to take over and the fertility of the surrounding lands was able to effectively reinhabit that place with seeds, plants, shrubs and trees. He had prepared the way by introducing little islands of trees to the habitat.

As regards the Rapp Road landfill – which is smack in the middle of rare Pine Bush habitat-Dr. Robinson commented "I can't be all high and mighty about it; my university is probably the largest single contributor to the landfill, and we are paying! About \$50 a ton, but of course, it should be more," (because of the environmental cost of the structure). Dr. Robinson noted that there are areas of concern down at the "toe," below the foothills of the unlined dump (GAL). Because the clay from the cap on the dump slides downhill, the soil at the foot of the hill is very acidic from the clay. The tree roots in that spot have died and no one is exactly sure why; it could be the acidic soil or some other factor, such as a methane and hydrogen sulfide release. Methane doesn't kill, it just displaces oxygen in

the soil, which may inhibit growth in some way. However, it is often accompanied by hydrogen sulfide, which gives the methane the objectionable odor it carries with it. Hydrogen sulfide is not considered beneficial to tree roots or to lungs. (I found out later, it is also a central nervous system depressant – a neurotoxin.)

In addition, in one area of concern near Patroon Creek, Dr. Robinson has detected high levels of salt (4000 ppm) and ammonium at concentrations of 50 ppm. Whereas salt is likely coming in from I-90, ammonium is generally associated with decaying waste and could be coming from the older, unlined landfill. Since unlined landfills often leak, he suggests we watch for the presence and effects of landfill leachate on the land downhill. As most nongaseous substances like to flow downhill, rain included, it is likely that any leachate may be headed the same place the water goes – Six Mile Reservoir. But this is speculation, not observation, so we will just have to see, unless we can find a way to remediate any leaking from the landfill.

Yet, that \$18 million "mitigation" wasn't slated for remediation so we'll continue to talk about reclamation and the landfill.

Dr. Robinson also commented on the newer landfills which are lined by thin geotextile membranes which are impervious to water. The decomposition rate in these "tombs" is very slow. Dr. Robinson believes that they have been able to have an efficient capture of methane. The slopes of the new landfills are well drained to prevent erosion and "suitable vegetation" is supposed to go on top. In his own experimentation on top of the super large and high Freshkills landfill in Staten Island, Dr. Robinson observed a less than 0.01% survival rate amongst seeds that were sown there. This meant that much of the planting depended on wind and species bringing in the plants. There is a very intimate interaction between surrounding habitat and the habitat which is nurtured on top of the landfill.

One practical challenge of landfill reclamation is the fact that landfill regulations only apply for 25 yrs after the closure of the landfill. At that point, it is assumed that most of the methane has dispersed. But this means that any problems and needs the landfill has at that point are left unaddressed. The time lapse does reduce the chance of methane collecting somewhere and blowing up – as it did in a garage on the South End when methane followed the groundwater to this location.

The second major challenge is the very large industrial footprint of the landfill, given all they need to function.

Third, the landfill is likely to need re engineering as conditions change and problems arise.

Fourth, cover vegetation is variably successful.

The Ecological Challenges which Dr. Robinson faced in Fresh Kill and which we certainly face in Albany include:

1) These are large areas to reclaim and it is very expensive to bury them in soil and sand layers; They are expensive to seed, expensive to maintain.

2) The surrounding landscape is best if it supports the vegetation desired. If it does not, invasive plants may take over the site.

3) Substrate properties can be less than ideal; materials brought in as final cover are not always clean, and sometimes contain a lot of junk.

4) Steep slopes; it is very difficult to stop erosion; lower levels are poorly drained and become silted up.

5) There is direct exposure to sun and wind. Because there are no trees, the elements are very harsh on the land and young plants. It is a little like the High Peaks on top of a landfill because of unbroken wind.

Dr. Robinson would like to see the Reclamation proceed slowly and thoughtfully. He believes that there should be lots of testing areas on the steep slope areas to see what works; Just look and see if this method can stop erosion, get things to grow. His recommendations were to

- 1) Test section by section
- 2) Have contingency plans
- 3) Vary the design and see what works. Just because it looks good on paper doesn't mean much. One dry summer or spring and you can lose thousands of dollars of seeds, effort and plantings.

One of things I gathered from the presentation is that we don't have to completely reinvent the wheel. We can look to other examples of the same thing. I'd like to know more about other landfill ventures and what worked or didn't work. Wildlife preserves all over the country have been impinged upon by landfills so there are many experiences of coping with closure. Montezuma Wildlife Refuge, which provides habitat for migratory birds in the Atlantic Flyway, and which hosts bald eagles, has to cope with Seneca Meadows Landfill. Their advocacy group, Concerned Citizens of Cattaraugus County, has good information about what a very large landfill has done to their land and community out there.

Another thing I noticed is that no other landfill is doing controlled burns on top of the landfill, so far as anyone knows. It would nice to not be the first experiment, here in the middle of a fairly large city.

I asked Dr. Robinson about acquiring land which is discussed in the "Restoration" plan. Dr.

Robinson suggested cataloguing suitable parcels to suggest for purchase.

The new landfills, which are sealed and lined, are tombs, according to Dr. Robinson. They slow down decomposition and entomb the garbage on site.

All landfills eventually leak, and regulations aim to prevent leaching into ground water and other future degradation. Older landfills that have undergone lengthy decomposition may be returned to some useful state for people and wildlife, but they are still full of trash.

In closing, please incorporate at least one "Buy Nothing Day" into your week; if you already have one, please add another.

Never has all life so depended on a people redefining success and pursuing a different happiness. We cannot afford all the stuff we throw away, nor to lose the habitat it will smother.

Stay warm, do good work and be in touch.  
— Grace Nichols

### ***Hike to Karner - Continued from Page 1***

name of Centre, New York.

In 1882 the name of Center, N.Y. was changed to Karner when Thodore Karner and a W. W. Thompson filed a plan with the Albany County Clerk's Office for an impressive residential sub-division. Karner and Thompson advertised the place as having wonderfully fresh air. Which of course it did because of all the pines and no manufacturing industry nearby. They didn't mention the smoke and noise of the trains. Maybe that's why virtually nobody bought house lots there. Otherwise it's a mystery as to why this village never materialized. Thompson and Karner even promised to build a school house and church and a nice central park. The locale was already well know to entomologists and to lepidopterists specifically. An indication of this scientific interest in the locale of Karner, N.Y. is an article by James Bailey in 1877 entitled: "Center New York Entomologically Considered." Then there's an article published by Samuel Scudder in 1901 entitled "My First Namesake", which refers to the locale with it's new name of Karner. Later a Russian emigre; famous novelist, English literature professor at Harvard and Cornell, studied and more precisely identified a butterfly specimen raised on eggs laid long before; near Karner and so Named by Nabokov — The Karner Blue Butterfly. In addition to all of his work in other careers; Vladimir had become an intense and expert lepidopterist by avocation. Vladimir Nabokov is probably known around the world for his novels "Lolita" and "Prin" and for his analysis of and naming the Karner Blue. Likewise the Type Locale for which

Note: Come to the Albany Common Council Meeting on Monday, March 7, 2011 at 7:00 PM at City Hall, Eagle Street, Albany. Save the Pine Bush will be asking the Albany Common Council to follow the City's pesticide law.

## **Ad Hoc Albany Committee To Uphold Environmental Law.**

February 7, 2011

To the Common Council and Members of the Press:

The City of Albany has violated its own Pesticide Ordinance since its passage in 1998. Two years of FOILS and activism, from 2008-9, focused on protecting our birds of prey from anti-coagulant rodenticides and phasing out the use of insecticides near the Pine Bush. After an obvious herbicide spraying near children in a public park was publicized in the press, the Common Council recognized the dimensions of the problem and formed a Committee on the Pesticide Ordinance. In part, that committee was formed due to report the City Auditor published on pesticide purchases and applications by the City funded with tax dollars.

That Committee began meeting in late Spring in 2010. Many presenters spoke to the committee, including our Parks and Recreation staff, who did not obey the ordinance; Judy Stacey, the City Gardener, who did read the ordinance and abided by it; Albany County representatives who have been able to successfully follow their own pesticide ban (more extensive than ours) with a simple and effective education and accountability system; Cornell Cooperative Extension personnel who teach programs on Integrated Pest Management; Laura Haight of NYPIRG, whose organization helped pass the 1998 ban; Gregg Bell who exposed a previous instance of the City disobeying State Pesticide Law and others. Many ways to implement the law have been discussed.

Nonetheless the Committee stopped meeting last fall during Budget Season and has not yet begun to meet again.

Pesticides continue to be used. They are sprayed on our public spaces. They are spread on the football field at Bleecker Stadium where high school students play. They are put in the Normanskill Watershed, where the golf course does not even live up to the standard set by Colonial Acres golf course nearby which uses far fewer chemicals.

It is time that the City just obeys the law. The current state of affairs makes mockery of the environmental legislation on the books in this state.

We demand sustainability and green accountability.

Signed,

Ward Stone, ScD, former NYS Wildlife Pathologist

Peter Henner, Esq

Steven Downs, Esq

Kathy Manley, Esq

Mark Mishler, Esq

Rezsín Adams, Save the Pine Bush

Anne Rabe, Center for Health and Environmental Justice (CHEJ)

Grace Nichols, Save the Pine Bush

Tracy Frisch, MS Entomology

Virginia Boyle Travers, Hudson-Mohawk Chapter, the Sierra Club

Elyse Kunz, Community Advocates for Safe

Nabokov names the Karner Blue is famous because of that. Because Nabokov's initial studies of the Karner Blue were with museum specimens, he didn't actually visit Karner New York until 1950 when he caught several specimens of the butterfly. The actual type locale of the Karner Blue Butterfly appealed to Vladimir Nabokov so much that he referred to it as a "Sandy Paradise."

The only area immediately adjacent to Karner is a tract at it's south east acquired by Colonie with a Community Block Grant upon the suggestion of Colonie resident named Roger Hall. Lesser known is that Roger Hall requested this at the urging of Save the Pine Bush. The Save the Pine Bush March hike to Karner will be through this preserved area by way of a remnant of Center House Road. There participants will get some idea of what the area looked like to Vladimir Nabokov and

earlier biological scientists such as Samuel Scudder, James Bailey and Joseph Lintner. We will visit the sites of the schoolhouse, the railroad station, the site of a big ice house, the park and look at the one street actually built, "Thompson Street." We will see what is left of a once very extensive area of sand dunes and upland savannah like grass, shrub oak and scattered pitch pines.

A place so ideal for Karner Blues that they were at one time reported to be so numerous as to block the sun from view. We will see for ourselves what is left of Karner and it's adjacent natural area and consider what to do to preserve what's left of both. We can discuss and exchange ideas for better connecting the Discovery Center to the Karner's Type Locality and to the planned light rail connection between Schenectady and Albany. — John Wolcott

# Organic "Waste" Composting: A Random Local Update

Courtesy of Mother Nature, I spent my "snow day" talking trash. Here is some of what I found.

At RPI, there are at least two food "waste" projects. One is a prototype small methane digester. The other is a dumpster composter, which digests its load in 7 days.

Unfortunately, hardly anyone seems to want the compost, which they have been giving away free. It would be ideal if a farmer picked up the material and composted it on site. As of 2009, Sodexho at RPI was going to try to compost campus food "waste" but I do not know what came of that. More info on RPI's Student Sustainability Task Force is at

<http://sstf.union.rpi.edu/SSTF/About.html> .

At SUNY Albany, food "waste" composting possibilities may include in-house vessel options and small biodigesters. Apparently, Chartwells "owns" the food "waste," so the mechanics of getting it composted may be a bit complicated. The Radix Center composting initiative (<http://radixcenter.org/radix-center/231-2/>) may work well for small scale SUNY events, but not for the large volumes that SUNYA routinely generates. SUNYA is also researching what other colleges are doing with their food waste. At SUNY Binghamton a chef hauls food waste to be composted off site (<http://www2.binghamton.edu/sustainability/campus-initiatives/food.html>). Union College has an Earth Tub at one of their dining halls (<http://www.union.edu/Resources/Campus/sustainability/solutions/dining.php>). The University of Wisconsin at Osh Kosh will convert organic waste into energy at a nearby plant in an industrial area (<http://www.jsonline.com/business/112809279.html>). Lots more on what SUNY Albany is trying to do on sustainability and "trash" here <http://www.albany.edu/gogreen/> . SUNYA is hosting a meeting with students from the Capital Region to discuss sustainability initiatives on April 2, 10 am to 4 pm at the Standish Room in the Science Library at SUNY. Contact info for the SUNY Office of Environmental Sustainability is [gogreen@albany.edu](mailto:gogreen@albany.edu) (518) 956-8120.

Evidently there used to be organic "waste" recycling done in Rensselaer County by ECO Waste, with We Care Organics ([www.wecareorganics.com](http://www.wecareorganics.com)). The Rensselaer operation was sold by ECO Waste to County Waste, I understand, but County

Waste no longer runs it, and I can get no info from them today on where it was, what may be left of it, etc. Perhaps others of you out there may know? Does anyone know how to reach the people that used to sell worm castings at the Troy Farmers Market? They were called "As the Worm Turns" and were based on McChesney Avenue in Brunswick, I believe. Red wigglers love food "waste."

The Rensselaer County Environmental Management Council's Anne Shaughnessy is monitoring the unfolding SWMP situation across the river in Albany. More info on the Council is at <http://www.rensselaercounty.org/Environment%20Management%20Council/Environment%20Main%20Page.htm> .

I invite people in Rensselaer County to link efforts to move high quality organic food "waste" from kitchens at large institutions such as colleges and hospitals to happy homes as useable, valuable compost. This would reduce the need for Rensselaer County municipalities to throw their lot in with Albany's "trash" solution. It could be a boon to urban farmers, make sanitation workers happier, and get us on the road to zero waste, a laudable goal that is best achieved rather than simply yearned for. I am not fond of wringing my hands, looking at the sky, and crying, "The sky is falling! The sky is falling!" The optimist in me won't let me, anyway. Want to get organic food "waste" composting going? Let's go! Contact me, Sheree at 286-0359 (weeknights and weekends) or email [Sheree@nycap.rr.com](mailto:Sheree@nycap.rr.com).

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## Pine Bush Parcels Project

by Andy Arthur

About a month ago, I started working on a project for Save the Pine Bush, working to compile a updated list of parcels in the Albany Pine Bush that would be highly desirable for future conservation by the Pine Bush Commission. I met with long-time Save the Pine Bush volunteer, John Wolcott, to find out which parcels were worth saving.

He came up with about 500 acres of land he felt highly desirable, about half of which immediate threat of development.

I have been studying aerial photos, topographic and tax maps. I also received copies of the tax rolls from Guilderland, Colonie, and Albany.

I am working on compiling a list explaining the benefits of adding various parcels to preserve. I also am compiling a list of ownership of property, taxes paid, and it's assessed value. I hope to create a detailed list similar to the "Save the Pine Bush Conservation Plan" that Save the Pine Bush created almost 20 years ago. We need to make it clear to the Pine Bush Commission, we want more lands preserved, and not just expensive kiosks and decorations.

We need your help! If you about know about unique and undeveloped lands around the Pine Bush that should remain wild for future years, please call me at 281-9873 or email [andy@andyarthur.org](mailto:andy@andyarthur.org). Personal stories and experiences are most helpful, along with any assistance you can give in researching these important lands. Thank you!

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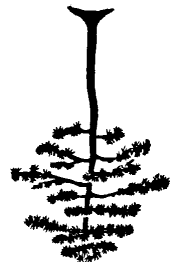
## Sally's Recycling Corner

by Sally Cummings

GreenDisk <http://www.greendisk.com> is the manufacturer of GreenDisk High Quality Recycled Diskettes and is the world's leading software recycler. GreenDisk's Corporate Disposal Program addresses the issues of secure disposal of information assets, wasted storage costs, and the legal liability related to software licenses in a cost-effective, environmentally responsible manner. Personal computer users throw away approximately 4 million diskettes every day -- nearly 1 billion disks per year. Those disks go straight into landfills, in which they can take 450 years to degrade. GreenDisk collects outdated and unsold diskettes and recycles the packaging. The company then magnetically erases, reformats, and relabels them with a GreenDisk label printed on recycled paper for sale. If you have diskettes that are on their way to your company's dumpster, put them in an envelope and mail them to GreenDisk (Attn: CDIP), 5640 South Durango, Tacoma, WA 98409.

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