

April 2008

RENewsLetter



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* Read about this project's history

[A Decade of RochesterEnvironment.com](#)

"I am convinced that ecology cannot be kept secret. Environmental openness is an inalienable human right. Any attempt to conceal any information about harmful impact on people and the environment is a crime against humanity." -- Alexandr Nikitin, Russian environmentalist.

The Free environmental newsletter from RochesterEnvironment.com

<http://rochesterenvironment.com>

"Our Environment is changing: Keep up with the Change."

Opening Salvo

The Fuel Cost and Food Crisis

Too often, I suppose, the words crisis and environment are linked in today's corporate media because TV, radio, magazines and newspapers consistently frame their stories around attention-driven eye catchers. That's lamentable because it triggers the 'chicken little' response in the public rendering serious attention to important stories null and void. When an actual disaster faces the public, we fail to act because we've become too inured to the plethora of calamities clamoring for our attention. (I know this criticism is usually levied on environmentalists, but we have little ability to reach the general public except through the media.)

Anyway, from the miasma of news out there, I hope most are getting the sense of urgency surrounding the present food crisis. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recently said "Without full funding of these emergency requirements we risk again the spectre of widespread hunger, malnutrition and social unrest on an unprecedented scale," —from [TheStar.com | World | UN task force to take aim at food crisis facing the world's poor](#) That's a pretty clear statement of concern.

A myriad of causes surround the reasons for the present food crisis—climate change, economics, more farmable land being used for biofuels (which Bush denies and may actually be true because the problem is one of speculation not actual fact at the moment), political unrest, etc.—including the rise in the price of fuel—namely oil, or (more refined) gas, that gas our vehicles so crave.

Fuel then is helping to fuel the food crisis. The rise in fuel prices ripples through the world's economies rendering the US dollar cheaper in some countries, making the delivery of food more



expensive, and the cultivation and spread of pesticides (which require fuel) more dear, meaning that a farmer is less inclined to produce necessary food basics like rice and wheat if some other crop will make better economic sense for him or her.

So, what are we doing about it? We could donate our [tax rebate checks](#) from the government to trusted international organizations to help the starving. (Which, my wife and I intend to do, though, I know we're supposed to be using that to save our economy by shopping—like before.)



[Downtown Rochester](#)

Be Proactive:

If your local media is not being preemptive (meaning investigative reporting) in providing you with all the environmental information you need to make informed decisions about our Rochester-area environment, contact them and let them know you think this information is vital.

And/or, come to this site often.

[Help Promote](#) If you believe in the concept of [RochesterEnvironment.com](#), we invite you to help promote this unique and useful website.

[Print our Brochure](#)

[Environmentalists](#) can help promote this site also by listing [RochesterEnvironment.com](#) on their sites.

Listing on [RochesterEnvironment.com](#) on your site is promoting your site.

Or, in the longer more sustainable run, we could be adopting a sensible policy towards the use of fuel. Rochester, or rather [RGRTA](#), this month is working on lowering the bus fare and mapping out more strategic bus runs. Best and most responsible idea I've heard locally on the gas cost crunch yet.

Also, we could be parking our cars and walking, using a bike, paddling a kayak and not power driving that duel-tank 140 gallon tank cruiser up and down the lake, lowering our thermostats, covering our hot water heaters with a thermo blanket, turning off the lights when we're not using them, etc. Though, these things only really make sense if we are also moving across-the-board towards more sensible fuel use. ...you know, so people, people who have no more cargo to throw overboard (that is, no excess in their earnings) can at least afford food basics to keep them alive.

Sensible would be moving towards renewable energy sources like wind (like they are now doing in Monroe County in Naples and Hamlin) and solar (hey, a solar car just drove into town this month).

But, during a food and fuel crisis is not a time to push your political agenda. Immediately, it's the people who are starving who are most important right? Then, non-sensible fuel options we should avoid. Drilling in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), like Bush brought up again for the zillionth time this week, is not a good idea because it damages one of our last pristine ecologies while doing nothing about our fuel prices. (Even in the best scenario, gas doesn't get moving down the pipes for at least ten years.)

Another bad idea for dealing with the fuel crisis, which fuels the food crisis, is the idea of giving a fuel tax break this summer. First, as the NYS governor expresses, unless the oil companies pass on that gas tax break on to their customers **YOU WON'T SEE A BREAK IN GAS PRICES**. But, even if the oil companies do pass on that gas tax break on to us, it would still be the wrong response to a global energy and food crisis. A gas tax break this summer would send the wrong message to the public that in times of troubles America's first response is to make sure we don't suffer the consequences of our fuel choices. For a long time now, the message from the world is loud and clear: There's climate change going on because of human activity. One of those activities is the use of global warming gases. Unless a major wholesale change is made towards reducing our use of these gases, our planet will heat up and (as we are now seeing) people will starve.

A summer gas tax break says Americans do not want to be inconvenienced by their continued reliance on global warming gases, and that is what the world will hear. Wouldn't it be a far more reasonable response to the rising fuel costs to conserve our energy today, not screw up our local economy with a tax break (hey, with a tax break the people who fix our infrastructure are not getting their money), make a change towards renewable energy and immediately help the starving?

I know, I'm an idealist: saving people, saving the planet, what next?

BTW, this story this month kind of hints at the future we are moving towards if we don't clean up our act: *Europe Turns Back to Coal*, Raising Climate Fears <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/23/world/europe/23coal.html> When push comes to shove, as it has over human history, there is going to be a major urge to do the most convenient and selfish thing—keep doing the wrong-headed things that got us into this state, a planetary collapse. To get the big picture on this fatal flaw in human thinking, read "[A New Green History of the World](#)" by Clive Ponting. Here's what it says on the back jacket: "Human beings prosper by exploiting the earth's resources until those resources can no longer sustain the society's population, which leads to the decline and eventual collapse of that society."



Hottest Issues This Month

During the month of April, two hot environmental stories for the Rochester area seem to rise to the top of the many news links I posted in [Environmental News](#): the Great Lakes and Earth Day 2008. Everyone, including majors, industry, educational facilities, governmental organizations, the media, and, of course, environmental groups, found one way or another to celebrate Earth Day. I detect in my hopeful yearnings that besides the economic fact that it's a good time to look green, that there is too a deep message from the public to the political candidates that we indeed care about the health of our planet. When you think about it, it's hard to imagine all this attention to the biological machinations of our planet ten years ago.

So this year's Earth Day saw school kids collecting garbage and [recycling](#) (not to mention that April kicked off Mayor Duffy's third annual [Clean Sweep](#) program that is becoming a model for annual citywide cleanups), a speech by Monroe County Executor Maggie Brooks where she launched a 'green fleet' program, the New York State Department of Conservation (DEC) receiving state grants to help localities in their efforts to clean up [brownfields](#), state comptroller DiNapoli in an April report highlighting a 'green' practices program to get all local governments to operate more efficiently, a "Cache In, Trash Out" event that got kids involved with Earth Day celebrations, the [Rochester Sierra Club's Tenth Annual Forum](#) where experts looked at [transportation](#) in Rochester's future, and last but not least the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) kicking off it's [Great Lakes 2008 Earth Day Challenge](#) to rid our waters of unwanted drugs. I'm sure I left out some important events, but there was so much going on in Rochester on Earth Day month that it was hard to track it all.

As I mentioned, the EPA's program to cleanse the Great Lakes of unused pharmaceuticals (with local support from the [Center of Environmental Information](#) ((CEI)) was one of the big items on the Great Lakes. To what extent we need to remove unused drugs from our water supply has yet to be determined, but this problem is confounded by the normal process of pharmaceuticals passing through our bodies, through the waste system, and into the same body of water we eventually drink. Our water treatment system was not designed to treat trace drugs, what do we do? Almost no testing of drugs in our waters has been done for the Rochester area (or any other area, I suspect) but now that this concern has been publically expressed, this issue is going to be with us a long time. We don't know the full extent of what unused drugs entering the Great Lakes do to us, nor the animals (including fish) and plants that surround the Great Lakes, but we should find out.

Finding an acceptable lake level was still sorting itself out in April. Nature used to sort this sort of thing out and mankind adapted to it, but now that we know we can change the lake level we, not Nature, now decides what concerns come first: environmental or recreational pursuits in finding a proper level of the lake? One of the plans—Plan 2007—has been rejected so there will probably have to be a compromise between men and Nature (as the thinking now goes) will have to adapt to that. Yet, in truth, Nature is incapable of adapting or being conquered, as Nature is simply the laws of physics. So, like the failed efforts to control the Mississippi River over the years, periodically we may be able to protect individual interests but over the long term water and eroded top soil (mud) and pesticides and fertilizers find their ways around levees and create havoc and create dead zones further on down the delta. A plan that fails to consider Nature's preeminence is doomed.

Also, the issue of diversion came up again in April, where Canada and the states surrounding the Great Lakes (of which our state is included), are attempting to forge an agreement on how to protect our waters from being diverted out of the Great Lakes Watershed area. Agreement may be circumvented because of [1994 North American Free Trade Agreement \(NAFTA\)](#). For those who thought keeping Great Lakes waters in the Great Lakes, a mostly self-contained system, was going to be easy think again.

*** **Don't' forget:** I can only cover a fraction of how environmental issue pertain to Rochester, NY. Please all the [news, updates](#), and my blog [Environmental Thoughts](#) to get all of April's online news links.

Rochester Issues

[Animals](#) [Commuting](#)
[Wetlands](#) [Food](#)
[Air Quality](#) [Energy](#)
[West Nile Virus](#)
[Urban Sprawl](#)
[Brownfields](#)
[Rabies](#) [Lead](#)
[Poisoning](#)
[Lyme Disease](#)
[Recycling](#)
[Plants](#) [Finger Lakes](#)
[Invasive Species](#)
[Deer Problem](#)
[Geese Problem](#)
[Pesticides](#) [Parks](#)
[Water Quality](#)
[Genesee River](#)
[Zebra Mussels](#)
[Great Lakes](#) [Wind](#)
[Power](#)
[Environmental Health](#)

Overall, you cannot come away from even just one month's encapsulation of just one city's environmental news and not see how humanity now drives Nature.

Like it or not the anthropogenic affect of man on Nature is so profound (and continuing to grow) that as you look for man's footprint in each story, you will understand how our relationship with our environment is forever changing the direction of evolution.

We are warming the planet, determining what species thrive and what species fail, what chemicals interact with everything, what bodies of water rise and which one fall—in short we (as a species) are no longer just bystanders in our environment—we are at the helm.



[RochesterEnvironment.com calendar](#), updated every day, lists all environmental events, educational programs, activities, seminars, and rallies.



[Environmental Site of the Month Award](#)

Each month, included in the RENewsletter goes out an environmental award for the best Rochester-area environmental web site or blog that best helps promote the need to protect and offers solutions to our area's environmental issues.



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Our monthly RENewsletter is best when read online because of dynamic links. It encapsulates all the [news](#), [actions](#), and [events](#) and goes right to your e-mail free.

For a quick tour of all that [RochesterEnvironment.com](#), check [Contents](#) or find out all [About RochesterEnvironment.com](#).

Other Hot Environmental Issues

Besides the Gas Crisis, there are other energy issues for April. The town of Hamlin, which has dealt with the issue of the placing of wind farms in Monroe County, has voted for them, albeit with laws and restrictions. This has been a contentious issue for Hamlin for some time now, but it shows that our region too has become part of the energy solution.

Naples too will probably get their wind farms by way of 'mitigation funds' that is funds to compensate the township for the possible inconvenience of constructing wind turbines in their area. I am glad that these communities are finding ways to accept renewable energy, which could help save the planet. Were oil burning, nuclear, coal burning plants, or even hydroelectric companies paying such mitigations funds to operate in a community that ending up doing far more environmental damage than any wind farm could ever do?

In my mind, there is something wrong with holding the wind farms industry hostage to provisions that previous energy suppliers never had



[Air Quality in Rochester, NY](#)

to consider. The large problems of Global Warming and Sustainability (not to mention that we could with the same subsidies that these other energy provider have gotten over the years, rebuilt our energy policies around new the concept of renewable, clean energy that could also provide entrepreneurship and a revitalization of our economy) could be solved.

Our new governor has announced plans for the state's largest solar energy project—enough to power 6,500 households. And, a solar car, build by an enterprising individual, rolled into town. Monroe County Executor Maggie Books announced that Rochester will be one of the few cities to test a new General Motors fuel-cell powered vehicle. In that vein, a Rochester family is donating some big bucks to provide solar energy research. There was a glitch over at the Gina nuclear plant over an 'unauthorized change to emergency plans' and some news about making a hydro-dam to power a making hydrogen and, lastly, community complaints in Shelby about odors coming from an ethanol plant. Overall, when you think about such things, you would not have heard about such a variety of energy issues just ten years ago in our area—because things are changing and Rochester is very much a part of that change.

[Brownfields](#), says one state-wide environmental group, are not getting cleaned up—that is, upstate says a local newspaper. What's the problem? Not enough staff and no can decide who's going to do the funding. What are Brownfields? They are abandoned sites, usually in urban locations, that are tainted by either real or perceived contamination, making them undesirable for private redevelopment efforts. Mostly, I'd say it's like this: Because business economic systems do not factor in our environment it's OK to run a business while using up any natural resource you want, dump anything anywhere, and when you leave just pick up and forget about the toxins and damage you left behind—and it won't cost you a thing. Some other business might want to build there, but it's cheaper and easier to start somewhere else that's fresh. Trouble is, we're running out of those untainted places. Maybe we should find a way to factor in our environment into our economic models so that Brownfields don't get left behind.

A short note on Global Warming for our area... The state attorney general is trying to combat air emissions that contribute to Global Warming and we had an April temperature of 86 degrees that broke a 119-year-old record. In another article, migratory birds are showing up in our area sooner and the NYS DEC is slamming the EPA for lowering standards for greenhouse gases and ground-level ozone. One thing is for sure, while we point fingers and argue about where to set the bar for measuring Global Warming, it will go on and it will affect our area. For those who think a warm New York will be a pleasant New York haven't thought the thing through.



On the Positive Note

Green business is growing in Rochester. At a conference in April green building, which uses energy more efficiently and overall promotes better practices for our environment, is heralded as not only environmentally friendly but economically wise. Here at RochesterEnvironment.com we often get request for businesses going green, so much so that I've created a new page called Green Business--<http://www.rochesterenvironment.com/Green%20Business.htm> It's just a start, but we're beginning to post news links about businesses trying to go green and resources for that aim. We don't provide links or promote individual business that identify themselves as green because I have no way of making sure that is so.

Brighton is going the whole hog and has created an entire section of its town goal as [Color Brighton Green](#) showing that with proper leadership and community involvement a major change in direction can be made by a community towards being environmentally friendly.

There was an energy fair in town, showing homeowners and business how to be green and an article about green construction. This reminds me of a story I heard on one of my sources that spoke about green deconstruction. Wouldn't it make a lot of sense when we are deconstructing a building (instead of simply blowing it up, though that is cool for some to observe) to find a way to reuse all the material from a spent building? Entire businesses can and are being built around taking apart buildings and finding markets for much of the materials that went into the building of the building. If some enterprising individual jumped on this idea here in Rochester, that would be a great economic and environmental boon. Think of this environmental shift in our present attitude as a great opportunity to change for the better—and more sustainable. Green is hot.

I cannot leave without mentioning a big positive story that Rochester is now a founding reporter of the Climate Registry. This story cannot be understated. Again, as in many areas Rochester takes the lead (the Clean Sweep program, lead poisoning laws, energy research, etc.) in environmental matters. Oh, the [Climate Registry](#) is "is a nonprofit partnership developing an accurate, complete, consistent and transparent greenhouse gas emissions measurement protocol that is capable of supporting voluntary and mandatory greenhouse gas emission reporting policies for its Members and Reporters. It will provide a verified set of greenhouse gas emissions data from its Reporters supported by a robust accounting and verification infrastructure." And finally, the New York State Thruway Authority has put recycling containers in all twenty-seven travel plazas on the Thruway. We have a long way to go to clean up our collective environmental act, but measures like this where recycling becomes a way of life, even when you are traveling through our state is a positive sign.

On-Going Concerns

There is still a lot of talk about the bat disease, White-Nose Syndrome. National Public Radio did a wonderful program on this issue and it's a great listen: [Bat Die-Off Mystery \(broadcast Friday, April 18th, 2008\)](#). Because this large-scale bat die-off could impact our state's diseases (many like [West Nile Virus](#) are insect borne) and our agriculture, this issue should be on our radar—our [Watch List](#). And, like [Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia \(VHS\)](#), and Bee Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), which also could impact our local environment, funding for studies are not coming fast enough to find answers before devastation in our fish, bee and bat populations occur. We should be supporting governmental efforts to support studies to find answers quickly, not sit back and lament that it's too bad that some animals that we don't particularly care about are dying off in great numbers.

[Rabies](#) has already shown up this year in our area, which may to some just be a 'normal' occurrence of a rare, but 'normal' rabies incident. But, what we need to remember is that raccoons-vector rabies has been slowly moving North from the South for years and constitutes an on-going environmental problem: raccoons which are plentiful in our area have not been a putative source for rabies in the past but will be more so in the future. I'm not saying, we should be freaking out over raccoons and rabies, but this kind of relationship between animals and harmful diseases to human should be on our radar. There is even a lecture serious by the NYS Department of Health on the 'relationship between human infections diseases and diseases of animal origins.' Really, check out the [Environmental News](#), I'm not Chicken Little.

Essays – by Frank J. Regan

Connecting the dots.



[Recycling](#) -There is something inherently sound in the practice of recycling that insures sustainability.



Get all Rochester-area Environmental [News-links!](#)

Our news links offer a distinct opportunity for our community to keep abreast of all that is happening with our environment, and because of our [news archives](#) and [Update Archives](#), keeps these stories forever for further research.

News Help

Please consider sending me (verifiable) Rochester-area environmental stories that would be appropriate for RochesterEnvironment.com and this newsletter. Send to [Frank Regan](#).

RochesterEnvironment.com
"It's where you live."

CONTACT - E-MAIL:
FrankRegan@RochesterEnvironment.com



Environmental Thoughts

RochesterEnvironment.com has been blogged:-so now you can discuss Rochester's Environment instantly. Add your comments, be a part of Rochester's environmental discussion. Also get this blog into your favorite reader as a feed:

<http://rochesterenvironmentny.blogspot.com/feeds/posts/default>



Watch List

(These Rochester-area Environmental Concerns Should be on your Watch List, or on your radar if you are concerned about our area's environment.)

Frank J. Regan.

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For problems or questions regarding this web contact

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Thank you webmasters for linking with RochesterEnvironment.com

The silent stories [important stories we didn't hear much about]:

A plum disease—plum pox virus—is creeping towards the Rochester area and because this disease affects our fruit agriculture drastic measures are required to curb it. And [Arbor Day](#) (remember that's in April too along with Earth Day) was celebrated with awards going out to Buffalo and a citizen organization called [Re-TreeWNY.org](#). Ontario, Canada has passed a province-wide ban on the sale and use of the aesthetic use of lawn and garden pesticides. While we only have the [48 Neighborhood Notification Law](#) here in Monroe County, I'm sure this ban enacted so closely to New York State must be sending shivers through the pesticide market here in the United States. It is going to be harder and harder to make the argument that pesticides are critical to our way of life if an entire province next door has found a way to live without them.

Environmental Actions you can take for our area

Check on environmental actions for our area everyday at RochesterEnvironment.com:
<http://www.rochesterenvironment.com/action.htm>

News Summary for this month

Get all the Rochester- area environmental news Go **April 2008** News-links

http://www.rochesterenvironment.com/news%20archive/april_2008_news.htm

Environmental Updates for this month

Get all the Rochester- area environmental Updates for this month and find out what RochesterEnvironment.com has done. Go to **April 2008** Daily Updates

http://www.rochesterenvironment.com/Updates%20Archive/updates_april_2008.htm

Environmental Events for this month

Go online for the most up-to-date listings <http://www.rochesterenvironment.com/calendar.htm>

Rochester-area Environmental Site of the Month



Be sure to check out this new site where one of Rochester's great environmentalists, Judy Braiman, gives you information and recourse on potentially dangerous and toxic children's toys. Over the years, as chair of Rochesterians Against The Misuse Of Pesticides (Ramp) Judy has help lead the Rochester community towards a cleaner environment. Check out Kindersafe.org and maybe someday we'll see a RAMP website will an archive of all their accomplishments.

[Kindersafe](http://www.kindersafe.org/kindersafe/) - <http://www.kindersafe.org/kindersafe/> "In the fall of 2007 a series of reports on toys that were contaminated with lead, asbestos, cadmium, arsenic, and other dangerous materials alerted the public to a children's health hazard. While hazardous toys are not a new problem, the problem has grown substantially due to lack of adequate federal action and a dramatic increase in toy imports. It is currently very difficult to identify safe and unsafe toys. Many organizations are working to identifying hazardous toys and share that information with the public. There are also efforts underway to change consumer product policies and improve safety. This website provides links to information on toy safety and to groups and resources that can be used to take action on product safety."