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CRISIS, ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE - Myth and Truths

by Tina Schvejda, Chapter Chair



As 2002 begins, our elected officials continue to face tremendous pressure by certain energy industries to provide America with energy at any cost, and by any means.

The Bush administration insists we must become independent of international energy sources. Easy to say, but how are we going to achieve that goal? What changes to our lifestyle must we make?

If each and every American did her and his part, to conserve energy at home, at work, and in their vehicles, huge amounts of energy could be saved. Yet the Bush administration has never asked this of us.

Do we really need to drive bigger, faster, more monstrous vehicles? Do we really need to build another mall, only to have it replaced within a decade by a "newer, bigger" mall further out? Do we really need more land ripped up by development, more roads built instead of mass transit, more species becoming extinct due to habitat loss, and water quality degraded due to our human demands?

Conserving and finding alternate energy sources will ultimately be the only way to become energy solvent. While we may still depend on oil for a portion of our energy requirements, the "need" to drill domestically, particularly in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), is a sad myth.

Studies have shown that oil from the Refuge would be the equivalent of a 200-day supply. Then what? Such short sightedness for less than one year's worth of

gasoline! For these reasons and others, I oppose opening the Refuge to drilling.

This issue has also touched me at a very personal level. I had the good fortune to actually visit the Arctic Refuge a few summers ago. My husband Dennis, younger son Stephen and I rafted down the Kongakut River to the Beaufort Sea. The trip extended over two weeks and provided a vivid memory that I'll always treasure.

Upon arriving in the valley of Caribou Pass within the ANWR, I experienced complete removal from civilization for the first time in my life. The world of Man lay far away, over the mountains of the Brooks Range, some 750+ miles distant. No roads, cars, homes, cell towers, malls or ANY other human element are evident in this truly wild place.

The Arctic Refuge is special to Gwich'in Native Americans. They have lived lightly on this earth for many thousands of years. The Arctic Refuge is a symbol, even for those who will never visit it, of the link between wilderness and wildlife, and the need for both, now and in the future. Members of the Gwich'in nation respect and worship this land as a sacred place.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is truly one of the last wild jewels of our nation. It has been called the Serengeti of North America. The land is among the most complete, pristine, and undisturbed ecosystems on earth. Here coastal lagoons, barrier islands, arctic tundra, foothills, mountains, and boreal forests provide a combination of habitats, climate, and geography unmatched by any other northern conservation area - conditions that support the Refuge's diverse community of life.

That wildlife includes Porcupine caribou, grizzly and polar bears, packs of wolves and musk oxen. More than 160 bird species, 36 kinds of land mammals, nine marine mammal species, and 36 types of fish reside in the Refuge for at



least part of the year.

The Gwich'in depend on the caribou as a food staple. Hundreds of thousands of caribou come and give birth to their young each spring. Even exploratory drilling by oil and gas companies would be a real threat to their calving grounds. Biologists warn that roads, pipelines, drilling pads and other infrastructure and pollution necessary for oil extraction will irrevocably harm this unique fragile environment.

I believe that we must take a balanced approach to energy. We must aggressively promote clean energy technologies, including energy efficiency, wind, solar, fuel cell, geothermal, biomass and other renewable energy sources. Investing in clean energies will make our economy more efficient, reduce oil imports and create more American jobs than oil production in the Refuge.

We could enact emergency conservation measures like those used earlier this year for California's energy crisis, or reinstate daylight saving time, as was done during the energy crunch of the early 1970's. We should refocus Congressional

efforts away from tax breaks for Big Oil and the nuclear industry and toward tax breaks and consumer credits for the purchase of energy-efficient appliances. [See the article by Steve Knowlton on page 2.] Here is a breakdown of some renewable-energy options:

WIND POWER: Wind farms are being developed more rapidly because technological improvements have made the energy comparable in price to imported natural gas, which fires many of the country's power plants. The amount of wind-power generation capability in the United States is expected to grow by more than 75 percent this year to about 4,500 megawatts. That's enough to power about 4.5 million homes, according to the American Wind Energy Association.

SOLAR POWER: Solar's share of the energy market is small compared to wind and biomass, but it's expanding rapidly in Japan and Europe. Use of photovoltaic cells in the United States has lagged in the last decade. However, the Energy Department has increased funding for solar research, and scientists are investigating thin-film technology as a cheaper way to produce electricity from the sun. [Again, see the article by Steve Knowlton!]

ELECTRIC VEHICLES: About 2,500 electric vehicles are on the road in California, where air-quality officials will require even more sales of the zero-emission vehicles beginning in 2003. Automakers are fighting the rules, calling the vehicles expensive, and their heavy batteries impractical. State officials, however, consider electric or hybrid vehicles an important step toward cleaner air and a bridge to fuel cell technology.

FUEL CELLS: Fuel-cell vehicles use the power generated when hydrogen and oxygen combine. When pure hydrogen is used, the only byproduct is water vapor. Several technological challenges remain before fuel-cell vehicles can be mass-produced. Fuel cells need a low-cost hydrogen source, potentially costly fueling stations and fuel tanks that are both compact and safe to handle the ultralight, flammable gas.

In closing, there are still plenty of viable energy saving alternatives to ruining one of the last truly wild beautiful places in the USA, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Americans, you and I, must help do our part in protecting our nation's wild heritage for our families and our future.

A NEW TRENTON - New Opportunities

by Jeff Tittel, Chapter Director

Great changes were brought about by the election in November. We have a new Governor and a new Assembly Speaker from the Democratic Party, after eight years of Republican administrations. The Republican majority in the State Senate is also gone, but at the time of this writing it is not known how the two parties will share power in an evenly divided chamber. These changes bring new people, new philosophies, and new policy agendas into the Statehouse. This should be a time of great opportunity for us to push an environmental agenda in Trenton once again.

For the first 23 years after the founding of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), on Earth Day in 1970, our state led the nation in designing new programs for environmental protection. Eight years ago that stopped. We spent the Whitman years fighting cuts in DEP enforcement and fighting Gov. Whitman's spoken attitude that economic growth took priority over environmental protection.

As Governor, Jim McGreevey will face many challenges: a budget crisis, a need

to fix our schools, and high auto insurance rates and property taxes. He has also promised to work for cleaner water and air, and to fight sprawl by bringing Smart Growth to New Jersey. One reason why we believe he will honor these commitments is that the other problems are large and systemic and may take years to solve. The environment offers the incoming Governor a chance to accomplish quick victories in the early days of his administration at a time when it matters most in shaping the public's perception of him. Many changes can be made inexpensively, like strengthening protections for potable water supply reservoirs. Just collecting the \$7 million in DEP fines that have gone uncollected during the eight Whitman years can fund new programs. By just enforcing the laws already on the books, Jim McGreevey could become an environmental hero, and he could completely restore public confidence in the DEP.

A Governor who is willing to make the State Plan mandatory for state agencies, and who will stop funding sprawl-induc-

(Continued on page 3)

CHAPTER WELCOMES NEW GROUP IN HUNTERDON COUNTY

On Nov 10 the Chapter Executive Committee unanimously authorized a new Sierra Club Group to serve Hunterdon County. Meetings will take place at 7pm on the THIRD WEDNESDAY of each month at the Flemington Public Library, 118 Main Street, Flemington, NJ. Upcoming meetings are scheduled for January 16, February 20, and March 20.

The Group is currently focusing on the proposed re-zoning of the Flemington Speedway property from Industrial to Commercial. Such a change would allow the owner to sell the property to an interested mall developer. The Speedway is listed with Preservation New Jersey as one of the top ten most endangered historic sites in New Jersey.

For more information about the group, please contact Ruth Prince, Acting Chair, at (908) 284-9103.

If you live in Hunterdon County, please use the Group Ballot on pg. 6 to vote for Group officers.

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