

# Save the Pine Bush

## January/February Newsletter

Jan/Feb 11 No. 106 • 33 Central Ave., Albany, NY 12210 • email [pinebush@mac.com](mailto:pinebush@mac.com) • phone 434-1954 • fax 434-6659 • web <http://www.savethepinebush.org> • Circ. 1000

### Vegetarian/Vegan Lasagna Dinner

Wednesday, January 19, 6:00 p.m.

## George Robinson Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biological Sciences, University at Albany  
*will speak about*

### Problems And Prospects For Landfill Reclamation

The City of Albany is spending \$18 million to “restore” the landfill to Pine Bush ecosystem. Dr. Robinson will let us know the challenges and prospects to this very expensive restoration project - a project that will cost more than all the Pine Bush land the City of Albany has ever purchased for preservation.

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 Rezsín Adams at 462-0891 or Lynne Jackson at 434-1954 or email [pinebush@mac.com](mailto:pinebush@mac.com). Interested people are welcomed to attend the program beginning at 7:00 for which there is no charge.

## Save The Pine Bush First Winter Hike Of 2011 Saturday January 15, 10:00 AM

Meet at 10:00 AM at: Pine Bush Discovery Center parking lot on east side of Route 155 opposite ‘T’ intersection with Old State Road

For : **A winter’s walk but X country skiing if good snow cover present**

Due to the advance of global heating we haven’t had many X country ski tours for some time but this winter seems an exception, so lets enjoy this while we can.

Leader : Claire Nolan

Note : There are CDTA localized shuttle buses to several points in the Pine Bush from X Gate’s parking lot and back . Call CDTA for details if you have not a car or don’t wish to drive one. This is the only use of Crossgates that SPB recommends. **For more info Call: 465-8930**

[www.savethepinebush.org](http://www.savethepinebush.org)

### What’s afoot at the Preserve?!

*By Grace Nichols*

November 2010 was notable in that folks in the community kept contacting us about the Albany Pine Bush Preserve. First it was the neighbors over on Lincoln Ave, wondering why the “forever wild” patch next door was being clearcut, as a new road was being put in connecting Lincoln Ave and Fox Run. Now that the people who had asked for that road for a decade were evicted, the City has put in a good one. Fox Run, of course, looks like it’s been bombed. The neighbors wondered if all the trees would be removed, giving them an excellent view of Mt Trashmore, as the dump is now called by almost everyone. They wondered about trucks driving back and forth along the new road. As Sally Cummings and I rushed over there to take a look, take photos and request a meeting with the Preserve to discuss

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### Update on Albany’s Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP)

Sometime in January, the General Services Committee (GSC) of the Albany Common Council will hold a meeting at which the city’s solid waste consultants, Clough Harbour @ Associates (CHA) and Bill Bruce, will discuss their response to comments submitted by representatives and friends of Save the Pine Bush on the proposed long-range solid waste management plan written by the consultants. This meeting was not scheduled as of December 27. GSC Chairman Mike O’Brien said he intended to provide ten-day notice for the meeting.

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) granted a request from the city for extra time -- until mid-February -- for the city to complete its review of the report. Despite stating at the October 25 ACC public hearing on the report that they could quickly produce a response to oral and written comments, CHA and Mr. Bruce were unable to do so, which apparently led to their request for an extension. As of De-

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## *Preserve - Continued from Page 1*

it – we also happened upon two really nice folks hired by the Preserve to drill mammoth holes in 550 acres of aspen and paint the inside with Accord, an extremely concentrated form of roundup. I am concerned about what happens to soil and tree roots and soil organisms when this concentrated poison is pumped downwards by the vasculature of the tree.

Hmm.

Shortly thereafter, my friends, some graduate students who study in the Pine Bush, told me blithely that the Preserve is herbiciding scrub oak after burns to “curb it’s enthusiasm.” I nearly choked. “WHAT??! I foiled all their pesticide records and they said they were only killing black locust and aspen – and cutting some white pine!” I stammered. I wasn’t sure it was a good idea but at least they were comparatively non-native to the Pine Bush. But, alas, it’s true – the professor also saw this scrub oak procedure.

Now native scrub oak have grown after controlled burns, generally started by folks from the First Nations of that region, for thousands of years without such help from herbicides. According to my student-friends, the Preserve staff rationalized this by announcing the “need” to promote willow and other diversity. I know for a fact that controlled burns were done without herbicides and nature was self-sufficient that way. I know that native plants are reestablished through mechanisms such as wind and wildlife dispersal once a burn clears the ground.

They, the folks at the Preserve, know this too. But the impulse to tinker is strong: and thus is born the need to pour poison into this natural system in order to “improve” it—and they do it with our money. This is a bad theory, this idea that the ecosystem is just begging for American Chemical Industry intervention and cannot make it without us. It’s ahistorical and carries risks for the species there, including for the rare buckmoth who feeds on these plants.

I followed up with a phonecall to Joel Hecht (Stewardship Director at the Preserve), ranting about how the FOILs (Freedom of Information Law requests/responses) lied by omission. He said I needed to talk with Neil Gifford (Conservation Director and Joel’s boss) about all that, but that he wanted me to know not to worry as the label on the Roundup can carried all the environmental toxicology information known about the product. I said “you lie – and this is how I know. When I punch in “glyphosate”(roundup’s active ingredient) into Google with the phrase “environmental effects of” I get over 300,000 articles. It doesn’t fit on a label. “Some of those articles are about the effect on Spadefoot toads, some about the effect on lupine, some about the effect on

Karner. I sent articles to Joel at his request.

(Just then I was writing a paper on mycorrhiza which are beneficial soil fungi. I had found a good study on the inhibitory effect of Roundup on mycorrhizas in an in vitro lab study. I eventually gave a copy of that study to Joel.)

Well, said Joel “I didn’t do it. We had an applicator come in.”

Then, my friends in wildlife rehab called me: “we found a fox and skunk in traps... we didn’t know trapping was allowed.” I said, “yes, and so is shooting.” They said “no, couldn’t be – and besides, anybody’s foot could be caught in that trap.” I saw they had a point.

And then I got to thinking... John Wolcott (their elder who has been working on the Pine Bush all his life and whose butterfly walks and testimony helped get the Karner Blue listed at the federal level) telling me that preserve staff said that he can’t walk off trail to see butterflies and photograph them. However, the trappers and hunters CAN walk off trail to kill wildlife. Go figure?! They’ve even documented all this scientific stuff about how walking off trail can reduce wildlife density. That’s true. But hunting and trapping does what? Check out the site: this is permitted much of the year.

Now ordinarily, I support hunting, fishing and other self-sufficient nature-based lifeways that get people out in the wild. But in this case, you’ve got to wonder about the inconsistent policy.

However, this is the least of my worries at present (until my foot is caught in a trap, that is.)

So we all trooped down to two meetings at the Pine Bush Preserve on Dec. 16, 2010 to begin to sort out some of these issues.

### *Pyromania?*

Because Commission meetings are during the day, they are a little tough for working folks to get to, and on this particular occasion, an environmental citizen representative who is on the board, Aaron Mair, was not able to attend. So it is fortunate that Sally Cummings, I, and Wildlife Rehabber Judy Grose-Johnson were able to go on December 16, 2010.

The meeting included some dry segments on business which revealed very interesting numbers such as the \$180,000 contributed to the Commission by the landfill each year, and also the millions in savings for a rainy day and the real cutbacks the Preserve has voluntarily weathered in order to save money given the general economy. They travel less and go to less conferences now, apparently.

It also included some wonderful audiovisual aids. We saw a powerpoint about counting bees. They didn’t think to count bees before herbicides

but they did count them afterwards and there were a lot. 43 species – very beautiful animals. The boxes of bees will be on display at the State Museum and all are encouraged to view them. Kudos to Jason Bried, Preserve Ecologist for doing a bee survey. Bees are extremely sensitive to all sorts of environmental pressures and we are grateful that so many varieties are still here and inhabiting the Preserve lands.

A new film on the necessity for controlled burns was shown—it will be running in the Discovery Center now.

I remember one of my chief concerns about the upcoming, rather alarming, plans for “mitigation” out at the landfill. I waved my hand in the air and said “I read in the Master Plan that you were going to burn test plots as models for habitat restoration over the landfill. I thought I was hallucinating. You aren’t planning to burn on top of a landfill, are you?”

Neil Gifford answered loudly “Why yes, we ARE going to burn on the landfill.” I was stunned. What about methane? Neil went on to explain that the methane sinks in cool air and will not explode on top of the landfill. This was discussed in greater detail at the evening meeting with the Lincoln Ave. Neighbors of the Pine Bush. Neil Gifford (Conservation Director of the Preserve), Joe Giebelhaus (Landfill Director) and various folks from Applied Ecological Services, the company designing the farfetched Landfill Habitat Restoration plan all met back at the Discovery Center with us that evening.

Before we all left the Commission meeting, I sprinted (which is a funny sight) over to Harvey Alexander, another citizen member of the Commission who is also a professor at The College of St. Rose. Do you think burning methane on top of a landfill is safe? I asked. He said, “well, yes.. methane sinks.”

But methane explosions are not unknown in Albany. A house in the South End, built by Charlie Touhey over a capped construction landfill, blew up in 1987 when the home owner turned on his toaster. After years of negotiations, about a half dozen of these Touhey-built houses were moved off the site to prevent any re-occurrence.

There are 8000 unintentional landfill fires in the US each year; I have never heard of anyone intentionally burning at a landfill, particularly one with human neighbors not so far away.

Recently, in fact, in Bay County, CA in mid October, 2010, Channel 7 news reported

“Some Bay County residents are upset about a nearby construction and demolition landfill that keeps catching fire. The last fire has lasted three days.

County health officials now say the situation may be a health concern. This cloud of smoke

came from K-Max Construction and Demolition landfill at the corner of highway 390 and Pipe Line Road east of Lynn Haven. Smoke has been drifting out of the burning landfill for at least three days. Bay County fire officials responded to the fire initially, but can't do much because it's a privately owned landfill. They say this is a Department of Environmental Protection issue."DEP permitted this particular private landfill, so they heavily regulate these kinds of situations. Although Bay County is certainly monitoring to insure that fire doesn't spread to any adjacent properties," said Valerie Lovett, Bay County P.I.O. The Bay County Fire Department is doing what they can to help the already three day long situation."

When unintentional landfill fires can cause a variety of community health problems, we in Albany County may want to be wary of actions that might cause such an event.

### *Meeting the neighbors*

To his credit, Neil Gifford apologized to the four neighbors of the Pine Bush Preserve who attended the evening meeting for not having contacted them in advance regarding the tree cuts and other changes to their neighborhood. His lengthy explanation included the colorful maxim: "Habitat Restoration is like making sausage. The process is awful but the end product is good." He said that once all the work is done, in a few years, it'll start growing back and then you WILL have a forever wild backyard.

There will be a lot of traffic up and down going to the Fox Run site which will also house a nursery and provide access to the Landfill site. The City and their contractors will do that work in the initial stage and they are working closely with the Commission.

Meanwhile, that patch on Lincoln Ave will host the sand from some excavations at the Nanotech building at SUNY which will eventually be part of the plan to spread 2 to 3 feet of sand all over the top of the closed landfill as a cap which is to be converted into Pine Bush habitat. Steven Apfelbaum of Applied Ecological Services showed us a very detailed powerpoint with his plans for how this will work. Neither he, nor Neil think there will be a problem with sand blowing or sliding down steep slopes. They believe that planting a cover crop will solve that problem.

We did ask Mr. Gifford about the burning at the Landfill once again. He said that it is more dangerous alongside the landfill but he's done that 5 times. I didn't know he had tried this risky procedure, but maybe the neighbors were fully informed. As we discussed this, Mr. Apfelbaum, who has designed landfill restorations around the country, offered that he had never burned on a landfill before though he has burned wetlands which also give off methane. He also said after

Neil again told us methane sinks, that methane rises. He also said "well, maybe we could just mow," but Neil stayed firm in his opinion that we should burn.

Mr Giebelhaus, Dump Director, said that he cannot stop the methane smell all the neighbors are complaining about partly because the incineration equipment is old (1986). But he CAN, he said, perfectly control the amount of methane given off by the capped landfill to ensure that burning habitat on top of it is safe.

Joe Giebelhaus and Neil Gifford were united in saying that it is absolutely awesome that Landfill generated funds will be used for habitat restoration on an unprecedented scale.

Many of us disagree: we think that real mitigation for the impacts of the landfill do not include capping the landfill – an expense that operation should fund out of its "profits." Mitigation involves buying up land to replace what was lost and testing for environmental pollution caused by the landfill – and remediating that.

Later on, I found out that a total of 6 million dollars have been spent by the city on acquiring Pine Bush land thus far. They will spend between 15 and 18 million on this restoration. We, the environmental community, are appalled that this "mitigation" money is going to this risky project, rather than to acquire as yet unprotected Pine Bush.

We are appalled that the Preserve placed on this land has a conflict of interest in that their own activities, the nursery, the biologists, the work they will do to create seed banks etc. is dependent in believing and promoting the supposition that you CAN create pine bush where there is only a mountain of garbage. In other words, the assault on the Pine Bush (the landfill) will fund the only publically funded organization positioned to launch a public campaign in defense of the Pine Bush. We assume they are being given little incentive to revolt and say "NO –we want the land itself not the old landfill."

In any case, it is clear that there is little public knowledge of what goes on out there, and little citizen participation in the decision making. It is clear that the folks spreading the pesticides have not even read the literature on the environmental effects of the pesticides. It is clear that there are HUGE money interests and conflicts of interests involved in the conservation policy which is funded by our tax money.

No entity can do its best in the absence of public scrutiny. In the case of conservation policy, it is always supposed to be open to scientific critique. Yet in Albany County the government, with landfill monetary concerns, the Landfill itself, who is concerned about their self-perpetuation and greenwashing themselves, are unified at the table with the Conservation

Director of the Preserve.

When the Preserve makes money by cutting down 70 year old white pine, I have a problem with that because there is an incentive besides good ecological sense in cutting them down.

This is that scenario writ ten thousand times larger.

The Preserve now makes money by helping the Landfill look good. They are left promoting the funneling of bond monies into a project which will employ their people and publicize their name. It will hopefully promote them to the godlike stature of having created a globally rare ecosystem atop Mt Trashmore. If they get away with burning on top of it without creating a firestorm, all the better.

The simple act of demanding that that money be funneled into an ENVIRONMENTAL mitigation plan of land protection is less dramatic perhaps. It would take a real backbone to buck the huge financial interests that want this risky business to proceed. So far, the Preserve has not shown this courage nor any indication that they plan to follow the precautionary principle in their work.

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### *SWMP Update, continued from page 1*

cember 27, CHA and Bill Bruce had not provided Mr. O'Brien with their response document.

SPB and friends objected to the primary recommendations contained in the CHA-Bruce report -- to establish a large regional solid waste management authority and a large or giant-sized disposal facility -- and proposed a variety of alternatives. SPB insisted that neither an authority nor a large disposal facility is needed. Written comments were sent in by Andy Arthur, Sally Cummings, Tom Ellis, Bertil Schou, James Travers, Timothy Truscott, and Barbara Warren; oral comments were made by Greg Bell, Sally Cummings, Tom Ellis, James Travers, and Russell Ziemba.

Even if the Common Council endorses the regional authority/large disposal facility concept, the battle is not lost. Both the regional authority and large disposal facility face enormous obstacles. For more information, contact Tom Ellis at 518-453-8874 or tomellis309@yahoo.com or Save the Pine Bush.

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**See Photos and Read about the amazing Uyt Kyck Drumlin In he Schenectady – Albany Pine Bush at:**  
**<http://www.savethepine-bush.org/uytkyck>**

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## Rethink Plans for Disposal Facility

*Congratulations to Tom Ellis for his excellent letter-to-the-editor which appeared in Thursday's Times Union (12/30/10) concerning the SWMP plan, the proposed solid waste authority and the possibility of an incinerator being constructed in the area. The letter is shown below.*

*In addition to the points Tom made in his letter, it should be mentioned that shifting Albany's landfill debt to a solid waste authority will not relieve Albany taxpayers from the obligations of that debt. Instead of paying the City of Albany for that debt, taxpayers will instead be paying a tax bill from the solid waste authority (in addition to the regular City taxes), freeing Albany's inept management to continue to create more debt. The taxpayers will be responsible for paying all this debt, no matter what entity it is placed under.*

Published: 12:00 a.m., Thursday, December 30, 2010

The Albany Common Council is reviewing a long-range solid waste management plan written by city consultants, Clough Harbour and Associates and former city planner Bill Bruce. The primary recommendation contained in the report is creation of a regional solid waste management authority. The state Department of Environmental Conservation has given the city until February to pass judgement on the proposal.

The authority's purposes would be to (1) centralize solid waste decision-making for the region in the hands of a few people, (2) construct a large disposal facility, (3) lock, for the long term, all or most municipal governments in the region into providing trash and making up any deficits in the authority's budget, (4) transfer tens of millions of dollars of Albany city landfill debt to the authority, and (5) block for another decade or two the development of vigorous waste minimization initiatives and aggressive recycling and reuse programs.

CHA and Bruce have in the past spoken enthusiastically about trash incineration or some variation of it. The first draft of their report mentioned their preference for a 1,500 tons-per-day facility that would meet the disposal needs of 700,000 people.

This region needs neither an authority nor a giant disposal facility. With creative, competent, and diverse leadership, local governments, corporations, and individuals could within a few years develop a decentralized resources recovery infrastructure composed of hundreds of recycling, repair, composting, and reuse centers.

Such a network already exists to some extent. Greatly expanding it would provide employment for some of the chronically underemployed and unemployed. Such facilities would stimulate economic development, build communities, be more flexible, better protect the environment, be easier to establish and discontinue, generate many more jobs, be far less risky financially for local governments and taxpayers, and save and/or recover far more energy than a large, centralized disposal (resources destruction) facility.

Tom Ellis, Albany

*Sally's Recycling corner from the NY Times, 12/25/10*

## The Dump

*By Hank Pellissier, hpellissier@baycitizen.org*

San Francisco's garbage dump, the Recology San Francisco Solid Waste Transfer and Recycling Center, does not throw out much trash. The majority of its rubbish gets productively recycled, at the transfer station at 501 Tunnel Avenue or the Pier 96 sorting facility. Recology, an employee-owned company, oversees the complex operation.

**Head of the Class** -San Francisco diverts 77 percent of its waste, the best landfill-avoidance rate for any large city in the United States. The goal for 2020 is zero waste. The 3-Bin Recycling Program started in July 1997.

**Table Scraps** - Compostable items from the green bins — including scraps and leftovers from 5,000 restaurants — is first taken to the Organics Annex Building, where it is transferred into long-haul trucks that deliver it to Vacaville. There it is transformed into dense compost, nicknamed "black gold."

**Valuable Leftovers** - San Francisco residents and businesses have composted more than 757,000 tons of material over 13-plus years by using the green bins. That means 18,400 metric tons of carbon dioxide have been put back into the soil, a benefit equivalent to keeping nearly 3,600 cars off the roads.

**Neighbors Hired** - Contents of the blue recycle bins are taken to Pier 96, where they are separated into 16 categories of glass, metal, plastic or paper products.

**Bury Me Yonder** - Black-bin garbage is compacted at the transfer station before it is hauled to Altamont Landfill. The 1,400 tons of landfill that San Francisco creates daily represent a 35 percent drop in the last decade.

**Winged Retreat** - Hundreds of sea gulls throng near the garbage, trying to eat the rotting food. They vanish abruptly when Wade Neeley, Recology's in-house falconer, arrives with a Harris's hawk on his arm.

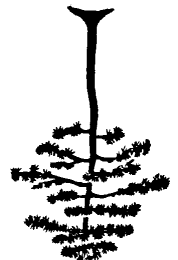
**Beauty in the Rubble** - Recology's unique artist-in-residency program provides studio space and a stipend of \$1,000 a month to "scavenger artists" who create work out of discarded material they find on the premises.

**Careful Handling** - Two employees are trained to extract Freon from all discarded refrigerators. Fluorescent bulbs are shipped off the premises to specialists who remove the mercury.

**Compost or Pay** - With laws mandating composting, residents can be fined for not using green bins. Over the past year, compost collection increased by 100 tons per day.

Return Service Requested

Save the Pine Bush  
A Project of the Social Justice Center  
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