

Environment

Landfill fight revs up with railroad study

by Michael Sparr

The landfill saga in Rush Township continues, taking on a new dimension after the R.J. Corman Railroad Company applied to reactivate 20 miles of railroad between Clearfield County and Snow Shoe Township. The former Beech Creek Railroad is planned to serve a new quarry, landfill and industrial park being developed by Resource Recovery, LLC.

Among the more than 100 residents who turned out to a Feb. 10 informational meeting, the majority voiced concerns on at least two fronts. First, the ongoing effort to keep Resource Recovery from building the landfill, and second, the years of work local residents have put into building and maintaining this Rails to Trails project as a benefit to the community.

"We (the community) are very disappointed in the way the STB is going about the scoping process," Rush Township Supervisor Mike Savage said after the meeting. "Almost everyone thought they'd have a chance to discuss the process. Unfortunately that was not the case," Savage said.

The meeting itself did not turn out as many hoped, causing attendees to question if their voice had any effect.

"We were disappointed it was not an auditorium-style sit-down meeting," said Gail Harris of Boggs Township.

Instead, the presentation, meant to introduce the idea of re-activating and building the rail line from Clearfield to Centre Counties, was held in the Philipsburg-Osceola Area High School gymnasium without any seats. Tall display boards were set up to show various maps where the railroad would be constructed and re-activated. Attendees were able to view the maps and ask questions pertaining to the railroad and the STB's Environmental Impact Statement process.

An STB official explained that the agency will then do an environmental impact study on 13 specific categories and send the results to Washington D.C. The study will include categories such as safety, air quality, noise, and effect on recreational facilities. Comments and observations from the public will also be considered in the study, according to an STB handout.

Representatives of STB, TranSystems, headquartered in Kansas City, R.J. Corman Railroad Group based in Kentucky, People Protecting Communities, and Rails to Trails were on hand to answer questions. Resource Recovery officials did not attend.

"If the landfill happens, the railroad ben-



Residents of Rush Township are concerned that this railroad and its associated Rails to Trails initiative will revert to use for a proposed landfill if the Surface Transportation Board approves the move. Voices file photo

efits everyone. It is more environmentally friendly than trucks," Tim Potts, R.J. Corman Railroad's Clearfield Division manager, told *Voices*. "And if it comes by rail there will be more local employment

opportunities versus truck drivers from New Jersey or wherever."

see Landfill, pg. 14

Alice Fuller: The first lady of birdwatching

by Delia Guzman

Alice Fuller's "Bird Watch" column just completed its 15th year in *Voices*, and in those years she's never missed an issue; that's 150 columns of her poetic and fact-filled observations about the natural world and its avian inhabitants. *Voices* celebrated the milestone by talking with Alice about her life watching birds. Ed.

In a life dominated by birds, it's hard to pick out any one special moment as a favorite birding experience; such is the case for lifetime birdwatcher and octogenarian Alice Fuller.

"I grew up in upstate New York, among the dairy farms in Afton," Alice said. "We fed birds on the farm, and walking around I saw a lot of them. One day, I saw a myrtle warbler, or yellow-rumped warbler as it's called now. I went inside and identified the bird using Peterson's [field guide], and I decided right then that I was going to

"There's the artistic, poetic kind of birdwatcher who sees the beauty of the bird and listens to the song. That's what Alice does; she's a poetic birder, and that's what she writes in her columns."

-Ted Fuller

Cornell University to study ornithology with Dr. Allen."

"Dr. Allen" is Dr. Arthur Allen, the ornithologist who founded the world-renowned Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and created the first graduate program in that subject in North America. His student and research partner, Peter Kellogg, was Alice Fuller's advisor when she completed her master's degree in 1946 in what was then called Environmental Science. Among birdwatchers, these men

are the giants of American ornithology in the 20th century.

After college, Alice's first job was in "the wilds of North Dakota," she said, in 1947 as an editor for a monthly magazine, *North Dakota Outdoors*, with an office in the capitol building in Bismarck. Once there, she started teaching the friends she made about birding.

"There weren't any [birdwatching] clubs or anything established out there, but I guess I started a trend. I made life-long

birders of some of my friends. Once I flew in a game warden's plane to chase migrating snow geese, and I used to drive out onto the prairies to find sage grouse hens.

"Once, a friend and I had three flat tires on one trip to see the sage hens!"

After a few years in Bismarck, Alice was called back east when her mother became ill, and she began working as an editor at the Agricultural Experimental Station at Penn State. Her life would take another turn quickly thereafter.

"I was at my cousin's one day, and I saw a man sitting there on the couch smoking a big cigar. I thought he was just one of the rude cousins," Alice said. This "rude cousin" turned out to be Ted Fuller and, despite her first impressions, they married in 1955.

"I always say there are two kinds of bird-

see Fuller, pg. 12

from Fuller, pg. 11

ers,” Ted said. “There are the scientific kind, the listers, who talk about the details and the field markings of the birds. They’re obsessed with counting and details, like they’re getting scalps. Then there’s the artistic, poetic kind of birdwatcher who sees the beauty of the bird and listens to the song. That’s what Alice does; she’s a poetic birder, and that’s what she writes in her columns.”

“I learned enough science when I was in college,” Alice added. So, in addition to helpful information about field marks and bird songs, she has tried to bring the beauty and the poetry of nature and of birds to her readers each month in her columns, often telling personal stories of being in nature with the birds and watching their habits.

Alice often mentions Ted and their daughter Roana in her column, and from their earliest days together, the family took trips to see birds all over the country, including many trips back to the prairies and the Badlands of North Dakota. They hope to go birding in the state once again this June, and they just took their yearly trip to see the coastal birds of Delaware and Maryland last month.

One of the major Pennsylvania birding projects in which Alice participated was the state’s first breeding bird atlas in 1984, a publication she often quotes in her columns. A breeding bird atlas lists the bird species that are found in the state during the breeding season (April–June); the state is divided up into “blocks,” and local birders volunteer to roam the highways and back roads of each block they sign up for.

Alice and her friend, artist Dorothy Bordner, who provides the illustrations for “Bird Watch,” traveled many miles, counting birds, watching for nesting/breeding behavior and braving the “wilds” of

Clearfield, Centre and Huntingdon counties.

“One time, we were driving in the boon-docks in Clearfield County, and we got stuck in a mud puddle,” Alice said. “Luckily, we went to a house nearby, with some nice ladies who called some men to pull us out of the puddle.”

The Fullers all laughed when *Voices* suggested that they might be considered the “First Family of State College Birding,” saying that other people would more rightly deserve such a title. Still, the family has been birding together for more than 50 years.

Daughter Roana learned about birds from Alice, but her interest waned as school began to occupy more of her time. However, during the compilation of the first breeding bird atlas, she went along on trips with her mother and Bordner. She said they renewed her interest in birding.

“I’d gone off to college by this point, and I wasn’t really birding then,” Roana said. “But I got back into birding because of Mom and Dorothy’s atlasing trips.” Her interest has continued to this day, and the Fullers and Bordner also contributed to the upcoming atlas, with Roana taking a major role, coordinating several blocks and counting birds all over the county.

Ted modestly summed up his role in the family’s birding adventures this way: “I see something, and I point it out, and they do the identification. I’m not too good at that!”

Like all birders, Alice has had her share of frustrating bird searches. For years, she tried to see a painted bunting, a bird whose breeding plumage features the rainbow-like colors of tropical parrots.

“We went to Florida, to Corkscrew Swamp and Ding Darling [National Wildlife Refuge in Sanibel Island, Fla.], looking for this bird,” Alice said. “But we were always there an hour before or an hour after someone else had seen one.”



Photo by Debra Grim

Alice and Roana Fuller look on as Ted Fuller points out a sign for the Fuller Wetlands—no relation—near the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology on the Cornell University campus lands.

Finally, during a late-winter visit to Lloyd Bentsen State Park in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas — far too early for the bird to have started its migratory journey back north into the U.S.— she saw one.

In the 1970s, Alice began writing about the birds of central Pennsylvania for the *Clearfield Progress*.

“The publisher was a birder, and so he asked me to write a column,” Alice said. “Then I started writing for the *Centre Daily Times* for a little while, and then I started with *Voices*.” Alice has also been published in such national magazines as *Birdwatcher’s Digest*.

When asked to name her favorite bird, Alice cannot name just one.

“I’ve always loved black-capped chickadees and bobolinks, because I grew up with them. I love the hermit thrush and the

veery because their songs are so beautiful. Out West, I love to hear the canyon wren’s song; it’s also beautiful. And I love black terns, the way they fly; they’re so elegant.

“I like crows too; they’re so smart. I call them DOSCs: ‘dispassionate observers of the contemporary scene.’ Bluejays are smart too.”

She said she has been to too many wonderful places to pick a favorite birding spot either.

“There are so many of them,” Alice said. “Ding Darling, Cape May and Stone Harbor [in New Jersey], Merritt Island [in Florida] and Ocean City, Md., in the winter.

“I’d love to go back to Belize, Trinidad, Panama — that’s a great place for birds — and Australia, New Zealand.

“When I die, I hope I go to another world where there are more birds.”



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Is nuclear power the answer to climate change?

by the Peace & Social Action Committee of Friends Meeting

The United Nations Climate Change talks, which took place in The Hague in November 2000, determined that nuclear power is a dangerous and unnecessary technology. In April of the following year, during its Sustainable Development Conference, the U.N. went further and unequivocally denounced nuclear power as a sustainable technology. In an interview with England's *The Independent* a spokesperson representing the International Atomic Energy Agency admitted that it was very questionable that nuclear power could stop climate change.

Is central Pennsylvania going to be affected by nuclear power, considered by many to be negatively altering our global climate? The general public is led to believe that nuclear power is an endless source of energy that can abate our global climate problems, but this is simply not the case. There are claims that the use of nuclear power can stop or at least slow down climate change but this does not seem likely, especially when considering the entirety of the nuclear fuel chain. The chain starts with uranium mining, which is then converted, then enriched before being transported to a

construction site before finally being disposed of. At this time there is currently no known safe manner in which to dispose of nuclear waste. The net result is that nuclear power produces emissions of 73 to 230 grams of CO₂ per kilowatt-hour of electricity produced.

As there are a limited number of high-grade uranium ore deposits, when these high-grade deposits become exhausted, lower-grade uranium ore will have to be used. This in turn will lead to CO₂ emissions that are at even greater rates than coal-fired stations. The result will be that even more CO₂ will be released causing even more global warming.

In the Kyoto Protocol written at the June 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and signed by President Bill Clinton, countries were asked to reduce greenhouse gases by specific percentages. President George W. Bush overturned it with the unfortunate result that Congress did not ratify the protocol. It was a clear embarrassment to many of us who know that the United States produces 25 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions with a projection of even more in the years to come. Should our citizenry ask President Barack Obama to reinstate The Kyoto Protocol? It is the opinion of the State

College Friends Peace & Social Action Committee that it should be reinstated.

We have all heard about "emission credits"—the trading among the 36 signers of the protocol—among industrial plants that emit less carbon who can sell resulting credits to those who have exceeded their allowances. This is seen as a loophole allowing polluting industries in countries that signed the protocol to continue to pollute the atmosphere. The Obama Administration considered building more nuclear reactors, which would have cost the taxpayers \$50 billion but thankfully it did not become part of the stimulus plan. In addition, building more nuclear reactors will undoubtedly add more CO₂ to the atmosphere.

In Pennsylvania, residents have noticed that the summers are getting warmer and air conditioners are being used for longer periods of time. Scientists tell us that nuclear power does not work well in climates that are warming due to global changes in the Earth's weather patterns. Recall that in the summer of 2004 hundreds of people died across Europe due to a massive heat wave. Nuclear reactors were forced to shut down in Europe and similarly in the United States. In fact, it is common to see nuclear reactors being forced to close during heat

waves. Nuclear reactors require large quantities of water to keep their cores cool—water that is already in limited supply worldwide, even dangerously limited right here in Centre County.

Climatologists tell us that if the demands of developing countries are met by burning fossil fuels, more and more carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases will enter the atmosphere. This could lead to rising seas, elimination of other large bodies of water, fiercer storms, longer droughts, and severe medical conditions. Some of these changes are already in evidence. Recall that many of our U.S. cities have smog warnings. Such heavy air pollution is most notably causing a haze across southern Asia, mainly from car exhaust. The recent Olympic Games held in China and the massive effort on the part of the Beijing authorities to clear the air before the games began was indeed a stark reality.

How can we stop or at least ameliorate global warming? So far, the evidence tells us that certainly not by adding more nuclear reactors across the globe. Nuclear power plants, without a doubt, will exacerbate the global climate problem.

The Peace & Social Action Committee of the State College Friends Meeting: jmm5@psu.edu or (814) 237-0242.

Handsome tundra swan heralds the onset of spring

by Alice Fuller

Flying high, heading north. On a recent sunny Monday morning, the notes of calling voices floated down from blue skies. One naturalist described it as musical laughter. I raced into the house for binoculars; wet clothes could wait a bit to dry. High overhead, in a long thin V, a flock of swans moved swiftly across the sky.

They were wasting no time on that bright day; I wondered where they would find open water on which to rest. W. E. Clyde Todd observed that cold is not a deterrent to swans, but they do need open water. In his *Birds of Western Pennsylvania*, he commented, "When the ice has weakened on Erie Bay and open leads here and there, the swans may be expected."

Somewhere, some place, the swans expected to find some sign of winter's weakness on a lake farther north.

While I watched them move on, a couple of the swans apparently had moved out of place and were jockeying for a new position in one of the trailing lines. It made me think



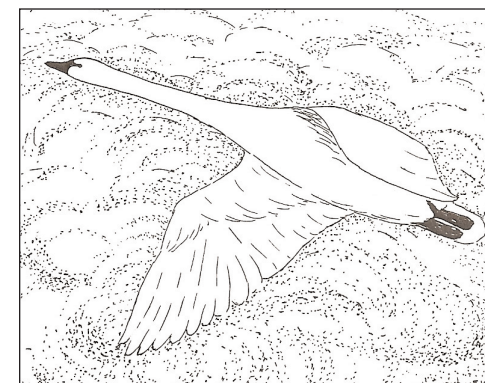
of a funny cartoon I had seen in *Audubon* magazine. The cartoonist had sketched some swans flying in an inverted V with the swans on the two outer points leading the way. One swan is saying to another, "I have a nagging feeling we're doing something wrong." With six inches of snow lying on the ground today, I wonder if those swans flying high and fast on Monday might not have the feeling that they, too, had been doing something wrong.

One hopes that many more swans will travel our way as lakes and ponds thaw and the birds take time in central Pennsylvania for a brief rest from their long journey to the northernmost reaches of our continent. One can hardly picture a more beautiful sight than a flock of handsome tundra swans floating undisturbed on a mirror of water,

with their pure white bodies contrasting with the deep blue surface.

The Tundra swan is the species we most often see in our part of the country, and it is the most common swan in North America. They live primarily on vegetable matter and therefore choose to feed in shallow water. Their long necks can reach down to pull up roots of wild plants, and they can submerge head and neck for quite some time. Often they tip up like the dabbling ducks, and if it is amusing to see them feed in this fashion, it is even funnier to see the great white bottoms of the swans protruding from the water.

Tundra swans are exceedingly fast fliers and are also very competent swimmers, being extremely graceful at both activities. One observer, E. S. Cameron, is credited with this quotation in several bird books: "A compact flock of from four to six swift-flying swans will circle the whole basin of the lake several times, and then, as if tied together, alight in the closest proximity to each other, yet never collide. They will pitch upon the water in the most graceful



manner imaginable, without bringing their long legs forward, or making any splash."

Swans we see in the spring and fall are most likely to be tundras. Occasionally, we do see mute swans in our region, and that can be during any season. The mute swan is a European species brought to this country to adorn parks, lakes and estates; some have escaped to become wild birds. Usually, most of the wild mute swans are found on the Atlantic seaboard, especially on Long

see Swan, pg. 14

from Landfill, pg. 11

Potts said the rail line would create "at minimum six new jobs" for local residents. He also said R.J. Corman Railroad Company contacted Resource Recovery LLC as the I-80 Interchange was being disputed. "We called RRLLC when the I-80 Interchange did not work out for them," he said.

Landfill opponents charged that public information was limited, such as copies of the Federal Register.

"The Federal Register was not accessible to the attendees at the meeting," Savage explained. "And the displays did not include any of the 13 environmental impact categories or the four alternatives listed in the Federal Register."

In 2004, Resource Recovery, LLC, contacted the supervisors of Snow Shoe and Rush Townships proposing the installation of a landfill, incinerator and industrial park on a 5,800-acre site that straddles both counties. Opposition to the landfill in Snow Shoe led to the development of People Protecting Communities, a grass roots organization comprised of residents focused on keeping the landfill out. After being

openly rejected in Snow Shoe, Resource Recovery won acceptance among Rush Township supervisors and proceeded to pursue a point of access road from I-80 to service their proposed dump. In August 2005, the I-80 point of access road was rejected.

Then in November of 2007, PPC organized to oust Rush Township Supervisor Jack Shannon, who had supported the landfill and successfully replaced him with landfill opponent Mike Savage.

Five months later, the federal Surface Transportation Board, which is responsible for authorizing the construction, operation, and maintenance of new rail line facilities, revealed that R.J. Corman Railroad planned to reactivate rail lines to service the Resource Recovery landfill.

In January 2009, the Surface Transportation Board prepared to conduct an Environmental Impact Statement.

"We're looking at culverts, alignments and road crossings," said Dick Balas of TranSystems, a third party contractor. "We have to look at what the impact of these things will be on the environment."

The STB official who refused to give her name said the agency is halfway through the Environmental Impact Statement

process. She explained that after the Alternatives Development and Impact Assessment stages are completed, the agency will conduct a meeting to address the EIS draft. Upon addressing the comments on the EIS draft, the STB will issue a final draft and send it to Washington D.C. for board review, which will issue a final decision.

from Swan, pg. 13

Island and southward.

Although both species are all white, they are easy to tell apart. The mute swan swims with its neck gracefully curved, while the tundra swan holds its neck straight and its bill level. It also has a black bill, while the mature mute swan has an orange bill with a black knob at the base.

I recall last spring visiting Grazier Mill Pond, which is not far from Warrior's Mark. Amid the numerous mallards and one male pintail duck swam a solitary tundra swan. It apparently had the good sense to find a safe refuge from the snowy skies. The bird moved serenely among the mallards, whose green heads dusted with snow made them look as though they had turned prematurely

The board review is scheduled for the spring and summer of 2010, according to the agency's informational handout.

Contact People Protecting Communities at www.stoplandfill.com.

For more information on the Surface Transportation Board go to www.stb.dot.gov.


Information about R.J. Corman Railroad is available at www.rjcorman.com.

gray. The tundra swan in flight sketched by Dorothy Bordner might be a bird that was marooned in a storm and at last hastens to catch the next migrating flock to pass by.

On a March day over a hundred years ago, Henry David Thoreau penned these words that will touch a responsive chord in many of us who feel deeply about each spring's arrival, the laughing voices of swans high overhead and the wonders of new beginnings: "Each new year is a surprise to us. We find that we had virtually forgotten the note of each bird, and when we hear it again it is remembered like a dream, reminding us of a previous state of existence. How happens it that the associations it awakens are always pleasing, never saddening; reminiscences of our sanest hours? The voice of nature is always encouraging."


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CLOSED MONDAYS

A stimulus package of, by and for the people

by Christopher Uhl

Ever since coming of age in the sixties, during the Vietnam War, I have longed to believe in my country, yearned to feel proud of my citizenship. But from that time until just recently, the truth is that I was often been ashamed of “my” country’s policies and actions.

And then along came this fellow Obama—a tapestry of Black, White, Indonesia, Africa, America, Christianity, Islam—a mongrel uniquely suited for a nation of mongrels.

As I watched the election unfold something began to shift inside me. Where there was once despair and cynicism, I now felt a measure of hope and excitement. Just prior to voting, I said to myself, “If this guy wins, I’m going to D.C. for the inauguration.” This was not a rational decision. I didn’t weigh the pros and cons. I simply thought to myself, “I have gone to D.C. so many times to protest; I want to go to celebrate.”

As I stood by the Washington Monument amidst the multitudes on that cold January day, I realized that there was something beyond “celebration” that had compelled

Our World

me to travel to D.C. It wasn’t just about this guy Obama being inaugurated. At a personal level, I realized that I had come, in some measure, for my own inauguration—my own induction—into citizenship! I had come to say “Yes!” to my country—to declare my readiness to act as a citizen instead of a cynic.

That was over a month ago. In the interim we’ve witnessed a deepening recession, skyrocketing unemployment, epidemic foreclosures, banking failures and more. People, who have lost their jobs and can’t meet mortgage payments or health care costs, are burdened with angst and fear. Even those who still have jobs register alarm as their “nest eggs” rapidly shrink.

Our government’s first response to the economic crisis has been the Recovery and Reinvestment Act—the so-called “Stimulus.” As this stimulus money was

being divvied up, I found myself sitting here in Central Pennsylvania watching and hoping for good news. But then it occurred to me that citizens don’t just “watch and hope.” They act.

As I considered both where and how I could act, I realized that there is arguably no more appropriate and powerful an arena for citizen action than the social-geographic unit we call “neighborhood.” As Jay Walljasper of the Project for Public Spaces points out, “The neighborhood is the basic unit of human civilization. Unlike cities, counties, wards, townships, enterprise zones, and other artificial entities, the neighborhood is easily recognized as a real place. It’s the spot on earth we call home.”

So, imagine, if you will, gathering with the folks in your neighborhood to really consider your own—not the government’s—heartfelt responses to the question, What needs to be “stimulated” and “stimulating” in your neighborhood? For example, how about “stimulating” hospitality, conversation, kindness, creativity, household enterprises, art, mutual caring, and trust? And to this end, what if we removed the fences separating our properties and refash-

ioned them into front-yard benches? And what if we envisioned neighborhood intersections, not as simply places where two streets come together but as neighborhood gathering places with bulletin boards, food stands, tables, play spaces, and art?

Why stop there? What if we began to wear nametags and to genuinely greet each other, stripping away the anonymity that keeps us cloistered and alone? And what if we established neighborhood enterprises—producing bread in front-yard, wood-fired bread ovens; exchanging home grown vegetables, herbs, and eggs from backyard gardens and hen houses; displaying hand made quilts for barter or sale, growing u-pick strawberries and blueberries next to our sidewalks, offering free foot massages to people trekking home from work, placing a favorite book or magazine in a special “giving box” by our mailboxes? And while we are at it, how about making a map of neighborhood households based on an inventory of household gifts and talents as well as needs?

see Stimulus, pg. 22



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