

REENERGIZING NEW YORK FOR THE 21ST CENTURY
BY LISA RAINWATER, PHD
RIVERKEEPER, INC

At the core of Riverkeeper's forty-year history has been a deep-seated concern over the impact human beings and the industries they run have on one of the most valuable and beautiful waterways in all of North America: the Hudson River. In the 1960s a strong band of citizens comprised of commercial and recreational fishermen witnessed grave impacts on the Hudson River fisheries from a variety of industries, including power plants, auto factories, and manufacturing plants. With steadfast civic action, the group spearheaded efforts to stop the construction of a power plant deep within the belly of Storm King Mountain. Riverkeeper's predecessor, the Hudson River Fishermen's Association, as the group became known, was successful at stopping the power plant. Their actions were instrumental in carving out federal environmental laws that now protect our waterways from becoming industrial sewers.

While the health of the Hudson River has come a long way in the last forty years, threats to the River and its watershed persist. Raw sewage continues to seep into the river from points up and down the Hudson every time it rains. Power plants – large and small – continue to use outdated technologies to draw water from the River and in the process kill billions of fish, eggs, and larvae annually. And small and large industry continues to dump in the Hudson, often until they are discovered by Riverkeeper's boat patrol and are then forced to stop and remediate.

On the horizon is another growing threat to the Hudson River and its environs. As the population has expanded, the suburbs have expanded with it. What once were considered rural areas have now been swallowed up under the rubric of the 'greater New York metropolitan area,' leading to massive housing developments, mega mall proposals, asphalt strip malls, and once bucolic landscapes now subdivided and dotted with mammoth mansions. With these new 'developments,' comes an insatiable need to satisfy the energy demands of buildings and people who didn't exist ten or twenty years ago. This ever-growing need for more energy has startling implications for the health of the Hudson River, its watershed, and the people who call it home.

THE QUEST FOR ENERGY

Like much of the county, New York is facing an energy crisis. And like much of the country, how we, as a community of New Yorkers, choose to address this energy crisis will have short- and long-term ramifications for our families and our environment. We can choose to consume energy with a surmounting, voracious appetite – increasing the number of power plants and their impacts on the Hudson River and increasing our detrimental contributions to global warming, or we can choose to use energy wisely –

decreasing our reliance on dirty energy and decreasing our wasteful behaviors that directly impact the River and the environment that we will soon hand over to our children.

Energy has given us some of the most important advances in all humankind – but it's also come at a terribly high price. If we are to continue to make improvements to the River we love and the world in which we live, Riverkeeper sees only one sustainable option available: Smart Energy production *and* use. We now need to strive and put all our resources into the effort to reduce the costs of energy production and energy use on our environment and on our health. That's what *Reenergizing New York* is all about – using state of the art technologies to meet our energy needs and simultaneously benefiting our local communities and the environment we need to survive.

From power plants to sewage treatment plants to housing development projects, Riverkeeper has tried through the years to focus on as many sources of pollution impacting the Hudson River as possible. With the 21st century fully underway, a comprehensive energy plan has become a brand new component of our strategy not only to protect our River but also to protect the very environment that helps sustain it and us. As the 2006 National Academy of Sciences study on Indian Point made clear, there are no technological impediments to changing the way we get energy. Realizing this, Riverkeeper is focusing now more than ever on energy issues, how it's produced, and how it's used. We believe this last piece of the puzzle, which may be the most difficult, is the piece that will ensure that our River, its watershed, and its human population remain healthy for decades to come. An added bonus, of course, is that in this transition Indian Point, along with the dangers it poses to the Hudson Valley, will become an obsolete form of energy production that will only serve as a reminder of a bygone era.

In launching our *Reenergize New York Campaign*, we are in many ways harkening back to our roots. We don't support the building of dirty power plants to whet our energy appetite, and we definitely don't support a twenty-year license extension for the Indian Point nuclear power plant that continues to suck in billions of gallons of Hudson River water a day. There are myriad alternatives to antiquated, large-scale, dirty forms of energy production, and, like our predecessors, we stand charged to protect the Hudson River. At this juncture, it entails the quest for (and commitment to) safe, reliable, affordable energy sources.

THE TIME IS NIGH

It's been nearly seven years since New York rang in the new millennium, and in that time the worldview has changed. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 brought the world together, if but for a brief moment, to mourn with New York and the rest of the country. Within the next year, the United States government embarked on a global

war on terrorism, leaving a trail wrought with tremendous loss of life, unstable geopolitical regions, and a mounting debt placed heavily on the shoulders of our children. Oil prices have soared, forcing sectors of the American population to choose between paying heating bills or buying food and medication. The federal government's attempt to 'handle' the emergency hurricane crisis in the Gulf a year ago was feeble and misguided, raising more questions than answers as to its ability to handle an emergency of any size, much less a nuclear one. The term "global warming" has now entered the vernacular, in part because of Vice-President Al Gore's recent film, but also because people have an innate ability to see and understand the truth, despite repeated attempts to keep us in the dark.

All of these factors have converged into one looming issue facing all Americans, young and old: energy. How will we address our increasing energy demands? How will we be able to afford such demands? How will we begin to decrease these demands? How will we be able to reduce our CO₂ emissions in hopes of halting the devastating effects of global warming? How can we avoid high risks associated with antiquated forms of energy? How will we again become world leaders in innovative, safe technologies that can be exported to other parts of the world? Unfortunately, with the passage of the *Energy Policy Act of 2005*, Congress missed the opportunity not only to take into consideration all that has happened in recent years but also to address these critical questions.

As the Union of Concerned Scientists noted, "Congress chose to largely follow the path of a 19th century fossil-fuel past instead of crafting an energy bill for the 21st century that would lead us to a clean energy future." If there had ever been a time when the energy future of America could have been led down a new, clean, secure path, it was 2005. Instead, the \$12.3 billion energy bill maintains the status quo - providing huge tax breaks and financial incentives to traditional (*read fossil fuel and nuclear*) energy producers already reaching all-time high profits. It does little to reduce our dependence on foreign oil, fails to address global warming, and provides paltry incentives for renewable energy.

But that doesn't mean we should give up hope. Across the country people are starting to talk - *and act*. People who have never thought about energy are talking about wind farms and solar panels. Farmers have begun to lease small parcels of land for clean, renewable wind turbines; homeowners are cashing in on state rebates for solar panels faster than states can fill the orders. People who have never considered themselves 'environmentalists' are talking about the impacts of global warming. Consumers are trading in their gas-guzzling automobiles for hybrids and fuel-efficient vehicles. People who have never thought about where their energy comes from are talking to their electricity providers and demanding 'renewable-only' energy options. And they're purchasing it when available.

Throughout American history the federal government has failed the public. Throughout American history states and local governments have stepped in to fill the gaps and right the wrongs. Throughout American history, citizens have banded together to force policy change when policymakers can't seem to do it on their own.

The time is nigh for change – big change. And the Empire State is set to take the lead in transforming how energy is produced and used in this country.

REENERGIZING NEW YORK – SMART ENERGY PRODUCTION

Implementing a comprehensive, all-inclusive energy plan for New York State would be a home run for the next governor, for securing safe and reliable energy is critical to the social, environmental, and economic future of the State of New York. This plan should include changes in how energy is produced and how energy is used.

One of the most important ways to greatly diminish the cost of energy production on society and our environment is to change the way it is produced. New York State should begin to move away from relying solely on large power plants to generate electricity. Do we really want to depend on archaic technologies that pump poisonous gases into our air, that generate radioactive waste known to be deadly for 300,000 years, that destroy our fisheries, and that leak radioactive poisons into our groundwater, and that fill our fish with mercury? The federal government may have opted to continue subsidizing the coal and nuclear industries, but the State has the ability and the responsibility to step in and provide incentives for increased renewable energy production. Financial incentives, long-term purchase power agreements, solar rebates for residential and commercial properties, real net-metering for commercial properties, and renewable energy certificates are but a few means with which to encourage safer and cleaner alternatives to the current forms of energy production in New York.

The NYS Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS), adopted by the Public Service Commission in September 2004, requires that a minimum of 25% of the State's electricity demands are generated from renewable energy sources by 2013. We have seven years to meet this standard – and according to NYS Comptroller Alan Hevesi's report, the benefits will be enormous, flooding the market with up to 43,000 high-paying new jobs, generating revenue for farmers, reducing public health care costs, jump-starting in-state investments, broadening the tax base, diminishing pollution, and stabilizing energy prices for consumers.

Wind, solar, biomass, and geothermal are safe, reliable, *and viable* technologies that can be implemented in New York State today. These technologies are not only safe and reliable but they also greatly lessen the need to lay large transmission lines through our neighborhoods and the Hudson River, since they can often be sited in close proximity to where the energy is needed most. A sound energy plan that seeks to phase out large,

polluting power plants in the coming decades will go a long way in jumpstarting the renewable energy sector and ensuring that future generations won't be plagued with polluted air and water, decimated fish populations, and additional tons of deadly radioactive waste sitting on the banks of the Hudson River.

During the first six years of the new millennium, we have unfortunately seen little progress in changing the way we produce energy in New York State. With the clock continuing to tick on reaching the targeted goal of 25% renewables by 2013 – coincidentally the end of Indian Point 2's operating license – the next governor must act quickly and resolutely in bringing renewable energy to New York. He also needs to know, however, that the public stands behind him, because how we produce energy in New York State is only one piece of the energy puzzle.

REENERGIZING NEW YORK – SMART ENERGY USE

The other piece of the energy puzzle is how we *use* energy. It is this piece that lies in the hands of New Yorkers, because all the windmills in the world won't negate the social and economic costs associated with energy if we continue to increase consumption of energy at the current rate. Smart energy use – a combination of energy efficiency and energy conservation measures – is key to reducing the need for large power plants, protecting the Hudson River from pollution and fishkills, and reducing our contributions to global warming. Luckily, there are myriad ways we, as New Yorkers, can take a proactive role in reenergizing New York in order to ensure a safe, secure, and reliable energy future for our children and our children's children.

And, New Yorkers have already proven their tenacity and civic commitment to Smart Energy use. This August, during the record-breaking heat wave, Mayor Bloomberg issued a proclamation to city dwellers, requesting that everyone conserve energy in order to ensure energy reliability during the hottest days. New Yorkers banded together and conserved energy – doing their part to avoid what could have been a week's worth of unstable electricity supply. With energy bills continuing to rise and the planet's environment continuing to become less stable, there is no better time than now to consider how we use energy on a daily basis – not just during the dog days of summer – and to change our behavior accordingly. If we all do our part, small changes at home and at work can bring huge payoffs – economically and environmentally.

Smart energy use is two-fold: efficiency and conservation. Efficient energy use can be achieved through a variety of measures, including:

- ✓ *Buy and/or replace appliances and technological equipment with Energy Star products.* These items use less energy while performing the same functions. The upfront costs may be slightly higher, but the amount you save over time on energy bills will more than compensate.

- ✓ *Replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs.* The bulbs may cost a bit more, but they last up to five years and reduce your energy bill significantly.
- ✓ *Spring clean year round.* Keeping the vents on your appliances free of dust and debris enables them to run more efficiently, requiring less energy to keep your food cold and to dry your clothes.
- ✓ *Install a low-flow faucet on your showerhead.* You won't feel the difference in the shower, but your water heater won't have to work as hard to keep large volumes of water hot.

Energy conservation has gone far beyond our collective memory of President Jimmy Carter wearing a cardigan during the 1970s energy crisis and asking Americans to 'conserve' energy. There are many ways to conserve energy without losing the comforts of modern life, including:

- ✓ *Turn up your thermostat.* By setting your air conditioner or central air two degrees higher than your current setting, you greatly reduce your energy use without sweating during those hot summer days.
- ✓ *Keep doors and windows closed when using air conditioning.* Businesses, in particular, often prop doors open to lure customers in during hot days. If you see a business cooling the outdoors, ask to see the manager and explain the importance of Smart Energy use.
- ✓ *Think before you open your refrigerator.* Every time you open the fridge, you are letting out cold air. The longer the door remains open, the warmer the fridge becomes, prompting the motor to kick in.
- ✓ *Unplug energy vampires, when not needed.* The conveniences of modern day life have brought with it a mountain of tiny gadgets that need to be charged. The charger continues to draw energy, even if the device is not plugged in. (This also applies to television sets, cable boxes, computers, and other common equipment found in the modern home.)
- ✓ *Install a smart metering device to monitor your energy use.* Smart meters show the consumer when energy demand is high and low. Keeping track of fluctuations not only tells you when its best to run your dishwasher or dryer but also reduces strains on the grid.

This fall Riverkeeper calls on our members, elected officials, and the general public to join us in making significant changes in how we produce energy in New York and how

we use energy in New York. For five years tens of thousands of New Yorkers have signaled their wish to see Indian Point closed. Twenty million people live within a fifty-mile radius of the nuclear plant that sits a mere twenty-four miles from New York City. If each of us did our part to practice Smart Energy use, we could make great strides in diminishing Indian Point's antiquated contribution to New York's energy supply. The less energy we use, the less energy that needs to be produced.

New York State could become the leader in 21st century renewable energy production and Smart Energy use. Our new governor needs to know that New Yorkers stand committed to weaning ourselves from energy sources that are unsafe, pose security risks, damage our environment, and contribute to global warming. Our new governor also needs to know that as individuals, we are willing to change our energy behaviors – even in the smallest ways – to reduce our energy demands and thereby limit the number of new, polluting plants from coming online in the future.

Changing the way we use energy and changing the way energy is produced in the Empire State are critical to achieving this goal. The benefits reaped from this action plan are numerous, including protecting our River, saving money, reducing our contributions to global warming, bringing high-paying jobs to New York State, and showing our children how to be responsible and active community members.

We encourage you to visit our website throughout the fall to learn more about our *Reenergize New York Campaign*, and how you can make a difference. If New York State leaders and residents all do our part, we can continue to protect the Hudson River, its fisheries, and its watershed, while leaving a legacy of beauty and serenity to our children. If a band of fishermen could come together and halt a power plant forty years ago, surely we can come together and commit to a Smart Energy plan for the next forty.