



FOLK

Friends of the Land of Keweenaw

www.folkup.org

Ted Soldan - Editor

Newsletter

December 2010

Upcoming Events

March 18-19- UPEC Celebrate The UP Event at the Jutila Center at Finlandia. The entire event is free and open to the public. See <http://www.upenvironment.org> for details

Plastic

Plastic floats. We produce a lot of it each year, mostly for "one time use." After its one use, lots of plastic makes its way into the ocean. This stuff wanders around on wind, wave, and current until it finds the ocean gyres. These relatively quiet zones of the oceans cover roughly 40% of the oceans, or 25% of the planet, and they are becoming clogged with plastic refuse.

These and other facts about our addiction to plastic come from an article in the November 2006 issue of *Best Life* called "Plastic Ocean" by Susan Casey. We produce 60 billion (with a "B") tons of the stuff each year. And we are just beginning to understand the way some of the chemicals added to plastic to make it supple or fire resistant for example, affect our ecosystems and our bodies.

Plastic does not biodegrade. It does break into pieces though. Ever smaller bits are floating in the plastic stew in the gyres. Some are the right color and shape to fool hungry creatures that this material is food. Dead birds have been found with digestive systems clogged with plastic.

Confronted with these facts, you might think, "At least I recycle my plastic." But do you? Inside the triangular arrows on the bottom of modern plastic containers is a number from 1-7. This number identifies the type of plastic. According to Casey, "...only two of them, PET (labeled with #1 inside the triangle and used in soda bottles) and HDPE (labeled with #2 inside the triangles and used in milk jugs) - have much of an aftermarket." So no matter how carefully you sort and recycle the other grades, most of it winds up in the landfill anyway.

"Well at least I'm making new milk jugs out of my old ones," you might tell yourself. Currently, there is no legal way for manufacturers to use recycled plastic for food containers. In the best case scenarios, they would spray a virgin layer of plastic inside the jug made with recycled plastic. Most recycled #1 and #2 plastic in fact goes into things like carpeting and clothing. Glass bottles can be melted down to make new glass bottles, but plastic essentially can't.

What can you do? Use your FOLK bag when you shop, and collect some more so you never have to use another throw away plastic bag again. Stop buying food in plastic as much as possible. Think about the packaging for the products you consume. Drink less soda and bottled water. The better you get at being a conscientious consumer, the better off future generations will be.

Sun Generated Power in the Copper Country

When thoughtful people make a decision, it gets your attention. Rolf and Candy Peterson, residents of Houghton, Michigan, have decided to invest in a photovoltaic (PV) system for their home. When fully functional, sometime around the end of 2010, this 2 KW system should generate enough electricity to offset all the power they currently purchase from the local utility.

When asked why now seemed to be the right time, Rolf quickly answered, "net metering." He explained that it has been within the last year that his local utility has allowed customers to sell back any excess electricity they generate, effectively running their electric meter backwards, up to the amount they use in a year. Many utilities have been cautious about any local power generating until recent state laws mandated they provide net metering for their customers. With net metering and a properly sized array of PV panels on their roof, customers can effectively pay for their entire system within the 25 year warranty period of the panels, thereby getting nearly free electricity after that.

When asked what they thought the payback period would be for their system, neither knew nor seemed to care. Candy said, "Providing our own power with a carbon neutral system is plenty of payback for us." They went on to explain that few people think about payback periods for major purchases like cars or Jacuzzis. Rolf noted that the reading he'd done said 20 years is a worst case scenario, taking into account equipment failure and replacement costs. One of his colleagues purchased and installed a system that was to have a 20 year payback, and after a year, the payback was readjusted to 5 years because the system performed so much better than expected and because his electric rates went up.

Many people express misgivings about PV in the Copper Country because of the short winter days and frequent cloudy days. Rolf explained that his research indicated that PV panels produce power even on cloudy days; up to about 80% of a sunny day's production. And the short winter days are balanced by long stretches of sunlight during the summer. He said one expert told him that Copper Country PV systems will produce on average about 80% of a comparable system in Arizona. One current little known financial incentive to PV systems is the ability to sell your power in mega-watt hour (MWH) chunks (called solar SREC credits) to buyers that need the green credits. "An Ohio utility is currently paying about \$350 per MWH," Rolf said.

Another major decision was whether to integrate storage batteries into their system. They explained their situation is somewhat unique, in that they spend 6 months of each year on Isle Royale. "Batteries couldn't possibly store enough power during the summer months for us to use all winter, and they contain toxins," Candy said. (continued on back)



FOLK

FOLK, formed in 1989, was established to oppose the siting of any paper/pulp mill in Keweenaw Bay. FOLK continues to promote a healthy environment in the Keweenaw Peninsula and the Lake Superior Watershed.

(Please Print) Name «FIRST_NAME» «LAST_NAME»

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Telephone «PHONE» Date _____

- | | |
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(**Sun Generated Power** – continued from front) They decided instead to let the power grid be their battery. This is commonly known as an intertie system. So all summer long while they're managing the wolf/moose study on Isle Royale, their power meter will spin backwards as they generate more than they use, and during the rest of the year when they're home, it will spin forward as they consume more than they generate. Any excess power generated beyond what they use in a year is a gift to the utility, and if they don't generate enough, they'll have to pay for it. Selling that potential excess power to the utility requires installation of expensive hardware, and in addition the utility only pays wholesale prices for excess power.

When asked about the long term economics of the investment, the Petersons felt comfortable. Even if there is no payback, they feel they're doing the right thing; and if, as some experts predict, electric power costs increase annually by double digits for the foreseeable future, it may turn out to be the best investment they've ever made.

A MESSAGE FROM the Editor

By Ted Soldan

This is my last FOLK newsletter as editor. I thought readers might be interested in a short history of my tenure. About 6 years ago, my wife Alice and I attended our first FOLK meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to determine if there was enough energy among the leadership to keep FOLK going. The Steering Committee asked for volunteers for various unfilled positions, and I chose to take over the membership mailing list. When the newsletter editorship opened up, I took that on as well.

Before I took over, articles were solicited from Steering Committee members, collected and edited by one person, and then handed to another person that did the layout. This was submitted to the printer, where sufficient copies were printed, along with sheets of mailing labels. Then a group of FOLKers got together and stuck on the labels and folded them. Finally, the batch was taken to the Houghton Post Office for bulk mailing.

I decided to do the layout using Microsoft Word, and wound up writing most of the articles. Alice's sharp eye edited each and every newsletter. Once completed, I emailed it to the FOLK Steering Committee for comments. Then I did a mail merge that printed each person's address information on the page, saving the step of attaching a mailing label. All the newsletters were printed on my salvaged HP 4SI-MX laser printer which was capable (when it wasn't cranky) of printing both sides in one pass. Then Alice and I folded, tabbed, and collated the pages. Usually the next day, I'd drive to Houghton to mail them.

The mailing list needed a lot of work. We instituted a "Return Service Requested" regimen, which quickly told us that a surprising number of addresses were invalid. Each newsletter cycle since then, we've received several newsletters back with updated addresses allowing us to keep the list current.

We also developed a technique for keeping track of members' donation dates and amounts, and printed their expiration date next to their name on their newsletter. Using a different salvaged IBM 4019 laser printer with an envelope feeder, I printed return envelopes and stuffed one in each newsletter to make it easier for members to mail their donations.

For about the past year, I found the newsletter production cycle very difficult to complete. Mid-year, I announced that I would stop doing the newsletter after the December edition. It was my hope that someone would step forward and work with me on the last two issues of the newsletter, and then take over. Unfortunately, that didn't happen. It is my hope the newsletter will continue bringing crucial environmental news to our members. Change is often a good thing, and I look forward to watching the evolution of this newsletter from the sidelines. Anyone interested in filling the editor position should contact FOLK President Linda Rulison 334-2553

FOLK's 2010 Highway Cleanup

by Rosemary Grier

Board members and volunteers recently completed FOLK's 21st season in Michigan's State Highway Clean-up Program. FOLK was one of the founding organizations in the highway clean-up program. This year we picked up over 22 bags of roadside litter along our two mile section from the Houghton-Baraga county line south on US 41. Each year FOLK has received a participation certificate from the State, with the most current one hanging on the wall at the Frostie Freeze in L'Anse. Please consider joining our crew to help keep our part of Michigan's highway beautiful! Clean-up months are May, July and September. Clean-up dates are published in the FOLK newsletter. For more information about the highway cleanup, contact Rosemary Grier @ 334-2660 or send an email to fupemail389@folkup.org

Results from FOLK's Annual Meeting

Folk's 2010 general membership meeting was held November 10 at the Portage Lake District Library. A revision of FOLK's by-laws was on the table, and it was unanimously passed by the members. FOLK's Board of Director officers for the 2010-2011 year were also elected. They are: Linda Rulison – President, John Evans – Vice President, Fran Whitman – Secretary, and Ted Soldan – Treasurer.

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