It’s hard. But necessary.

**Breaking Up with the Sierra Club**

by Sanda Steingraber

*No right way is easy...We must risk our lives to save them.*

—John Muir, Sierra Club’s founder

Dear Sierra Club,

I’m through with you.

For years we had a great relationship based on mutual admiration. You gave a glowing review of my first book, *Living Downstream*—a review that appeared in the pages of *Sierra* magazine and hailed me as “the new Rachel Carson.” Since 1999 that phrase has linked us together in all the press materials that my publicist sends out. Your name appears with mine on the flaps of my book jackets, in the biography that introduces me at the speaker’s podium, and in the press release that announced, last fall, that I was one of the lucky recipients of a $100,000 Heinz Award for my research and writing on the environment.

I was proud to be affiliated with you. I hoped to live up to the moniker you bestowed upon me.

But more than a month has past since your executive director, Michael Brune, admitted in *Time magazine* that the Sierra Club had, between 2007 and 2010, clandestinely accepted $25 million from the fracking industry, with most of the
donations coming from Chesapeake Energy. *Corporate Crime Reporter* was hot on the trail of the story when it broke in *Time*.

From the start, Brune’s declaration seemed less an acknowledgement of wrongdoing than an attempt to minister to a looming public relations problem. Would someone truly interested in atonement seek credit for choosing not to take additional millions of gas industry dollars (“**Why the Sierra Club Turned Down $26 Million in Contributions from Natural Gas Interests**”)?

Here, on top of the Marcellus Shale, along the border between Pennsylvania and New York—where we are surrounded by land leased to the gas industry; where we live in fear that our water will be ruined, our mortgages called in, our teenage children killed in fiery wrecks with 18-wheelers hauling toxic fracking waste on our rural, icy back roads; where we cash out our vacation days to board predawn buses to rallies and public hearings; where we fundraise, donate, testify, phone bank, lobby, submit public comments, sign up for trainings in nonviolent civil disobedience; where our children ask if we will be arrested, if we will have to move, if we will die, and what will happen to the bats, the honeybees, the black bears, the grapevines, the apple orchards, the cows’ milk; where we have learned all about casing failures, blow-outs, gas flares, clear-cuts, legal exemptions, the benzene content of production fluid, the radioactive content of drill cuttings; where people suddenly start sobbing in church and no one needs to ask why—here in the crosshairs of Chesapeake Energy, Michael Brune’s announcement was met with a kind of stunned confusion.
The Sierra Club had taken money, gobs of it, from an industry that we in the grassroots have been in the fight of our lives to oppose. The largest, most venerable environmental organization in the United States secretly aligned with the very company that seeks to occupy our land, turn it inside out, blow it apart, fill it with poison. All for the goal of extracting a powerful heat-trapping gas, methane, that plays a significant role in climate change.

Climate change: identified by The Lancet as the number-one global health problem of the 21st century. Children, according to the World Health Organization, are among its primary victims.

It was as if, on the eve of D-day, the anti-Fascist partisans had discovered that Churchill was actually in cahoots with the Axis forces.

So, I've had many weeks now to ponder the whole betrayal and watch for signs of redemption from Sierra Club’s national leadership. Would it be “coming clean” (to quote the title of the executive director’s recent book)?

Freed from the silence that money bought, would it now lend its voice in support of environmental groups in New York State that seek a statewide prohibition on fracking? Would it come to the aid of those in Pennsylvania calling for a halt to the devastation there?

Would it, at the very least, endorse the modest proposal of Physicians, Scientists and Engineers for Healthy Energy, who recommend a national moratorium on fracking until human health impacts are researched?

And would Michael Brune humbly ask forgiveness from antifracking activist Lisa Wright, formerly on the executive committee of the Sierra Club’s Finger Lakes
chapter? As recently as last May, in response to a direct query from Wright, who had become suspicious, Brune wrote, “I do want to be clear about one thing: we do not receive any money from Aubrey McClendon, nor his company Chesapeake. For that matter, we do not receive any contributions from the natural gas industry. Hopefully this will alleviate some concerns.”

The answer to all of the above questions: No.

So, Sierra Club, call some other writer your new Rachel Carson. I’ll be erasing your endorsement from my website.

And take back these words, penned by your own fierce and uncorruptible founder, John Muir, that have hung for years by my writing desk:

Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature’s peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The wind will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.

There is no peace in the mountains and hills over the Marcellus Shale. No glad tidings. The forests of Pennsylvania are filled with chainsaws, flares, drill pads, pipelines, condensers, generators, and the 24/7 roar of compressor stations. The wind that blows east from the gas fields carries toluene, benzene, and diesel exhaust. Sunshine turns it all into poisonous ozone. Storms send silt into trout streams from denuded hillsides and cause good people to lie awake at night, worried about overflowing impoundment pits full of neurotoxic chemicals and overturned frack trucks full of carcinogens.
Even now, plans are being laid to transport 88.2 million gallons of liquid propane and butane to caverns that lie beneath the idyllic New York lakeshore where my ten-year-old son was born. (“This transaction is yet another example of the successful execution on our plan to build an integrated natural gas storage and transportation hub in the Northeast,” says the company called Inergy.) When you tramp through the fields and forests where I live—40 percent of the land in my county is leased to the gas industry—cares don’t drop off like autumn leaves. They accumulate like convoys of flowback fluid laced with arsenic, radium, and barium with no place, no place to go.

And, yes, they are fracking in Rachel Carson’s beloved Allegheny County, too.

The hard truth: National Sierra Club served as the political cover for the gas industry and for the politicians who take their money and do their bidding. It had a hand in setting in motion the wheels of environmental destruction and human suffering. It was complicit in bringing extreme fossil fuel extraction onshore, into our communities, farmlands, and forests, and in blowing up the bedrock of our nation. And I can’t get over it.

So, here are some parting words from the former new Rachel Carson.

The path to salvation lies in reparations—not in accepting praise for overcoming the urge to commit the same crime twice. So shutter your doors. Cash out your assets. Don a backpack and hike through the gaslands of America. Along the way, bear witness. Apologize. Offer compensation to the people who have no drinkable water and can’t sell their homes. Whose farm ponds bubble with methane. Whose kids have nosebleeds and mysterious rashes. Write big checks to the people
who are putting their bodies on the line in the fight to ban fracking, and to the grassroots groups that are organizing them.

Finally, go to Washington and say what the Sierra Club should have said in 2007: Fracking is not a bridge to the future. It is a plank on which we walk blindfolded at the point of a sword. There is no right way to do it. And the pirates are not our friends.

Sincerely,

Sandra Steingraber

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Sandra Steingraber is the author of *Living Downstream*, newly published in second edition by Da Capo Press to coincide with the release of the documentary film adaptation. This essay is the first in a weekly series by Sandra—published at www.livingdownstream.com—exploring how the environment is within us.
Another X Factor group has reportedly broken up. In more ways than one, Alex & Sierra have called it quits a year after Camila Cabello left Fifth Harmony. True love is officially dead. This romantic duo that won The X Factor U.S.'s final season parted ways, both romantically and professionally. Why did Alex and Sierra break up? Take a seat and grab a tissue A&S fans. There doesn’t seem to be any apparent negativity regarding their breakup and their relationship remains a beautiful one. They decided to remain friends and pursue their own solo careers. While many A&S fans have been struck by grief, they understand and have expressed their support on Twitter. Alex and Sierra were overwhelmed by their sweet messages and thanked fans in a separate tweet. Sierra Club Canada Foundation (SCCF) is a registered charity whose mission is to be a voice for the earth. We work to protect and preserve the natural environment and to empower people to be stewards of the earth in their communities. Beyond her responsibilities leading Sierra Club Canada from media interviews at all hours, to racing to coalition meetings, to being our well-informed voice to the public â€“ Gretchen is quietly out there on Facebook trying to raise funds for Sierra Club Canada Foundation on the occasion of her birthday this month. Now recruiting - be a #HikingHero today! Sign up to hike for the planet now until November 4th. Sponsor the Youth Career Connect Conference - July 27-29, 2018 - OTTAWA. Melissa Munro â€“ June 26, 2018. The Sierra Club is an environmental organization with chapters in all 50 United States, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico. The club was founded on May 28, 1892, in San Francisco, California, by the Scottish-American preservationist John Muir, who became the first president, as well as the longest serving president at approximately 20 years in this leadership position. The Sierra Club operates only in the United States. Sierra Club Canada is separated from the Sierra Club. No right way is easy. . . . We must risk our lives to save them. â€“John Muir, Sierra Clubâ€™s founder. Dear Sierra Club, Iâ€™m through with you. For years we had a great relationship based on mutual admiration. You gave a glowing review of my first book, Living Downstream—a review that appeared in the pages of Sierra magazine and hailed me as â€œthe new Rachel Carson.â€ Since 1999 that phrase has linked us together in all the press materials that my publicist sends out. Your name appears with mine on the flaps of my book jackets, in the biography that introduces me at the speakerâ€™s podium, and in the The Sierra Club is America's largest & most influential grassroots... In November, Georgia showed up in record numbers to vote. Now, we have the opportunity to determine the control of the Senate, which will either allow our new president to enact the changes we need -- or ensure doing so will be nearly impossible. Together, we can do this! Text “Georgia” to 69866 now to join the fight for democracy and help us contact all the Georgia voters on our list.