



Sierra

Newsletter of the Coulee Region Group
DECEMBER 2022

Preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known. —Carl Sagan



Chapter Award Celebration!

Thursday, December 1 at 6:30 p.m.



Join us on Thursday, December 1st for the Sierra Club Wisconsin Chapter Award Celebration! So much of the Sierra Club's work is done by dedicated volunteers, recognizing our award recipients is one of the best parts of our year. This virtual ceremony will celebrate these environmental leaders from across the state.

Two CRSC members are being honored! Board president **Kathy Allen** will receive the Merit Award and veteran board member **Pat Wilson** will receive the JJ and Pat Werner Award!

Register at: www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/blog/2022/11/2022-chapter-awards-winners.

No Winter Gathering

COVID and other serious illnesses are still causing problems in our community, so we will not have our annual winter gathering this year. We will try to schedule an in-person event as soon as conditions permit. In the meantime, please enjoy every minute we have on this beautiful planet.



Season's Greetings

"In nature, nothing is perfect and everything is perfect." - Alice Walker

Education Grant deadline Jan. 6

CRSC offers grants of up to \$200 each for **environmental education projects to schools or community organizations involving young people at the elementary and middle school level** within the CRSC region: Crawford, Grant, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Richland, Trempealeau, and Vernon counties.

Applications may be completed online, emailed or mailed. **The deadline for applications is January 6, 2023.** For more information, visit sierraclub.org/wisconsin/coulee/Education or tinyurl.com/CRSC-Education.

Funding for our environmental grants is possible thanks to an annual grant from the Paul E. Stry Foundation, shared dues from Sierra Club member-ships, and donations made by community members. To learn more about donating to help support environmental education, please email CRSierraClub@gmail.com.



SALT!

The Wisconsin DNR's Salt Wise initiative (www.wisaltwise.com) notes that we rely on salt to keep our roads safe in the winter and to soften water in our homes year-round but using more salt than is needed comes with a heavy price. In Wisconsin and much of the United States, chloride from salt is infiltrating into our lakes, streams and groundwater.

Often missed in the discussion is home water softening. According to the Salt Wise site, "Most wastewater treatment plants are not able to remove salt from wastewater, so every bag of salt that goes into your water softener passes through the treatment plant and into a local lake or stream. If you are on a private septic system, softener salt is infiltrating into groundwater. Increasing your softener's efficiency protects our freshwater resources."

Salt Awareness week is in late January, but we can always look for alternatives and best practices. For example, there are water softening systems that use no salt. And there are salt-free options for taming icy driveways and sidewalks. In the City of La Crosse, residents who participate in a "Salting Smart" survey can get a free salt cup to use with a city-provided sand/salt mix.

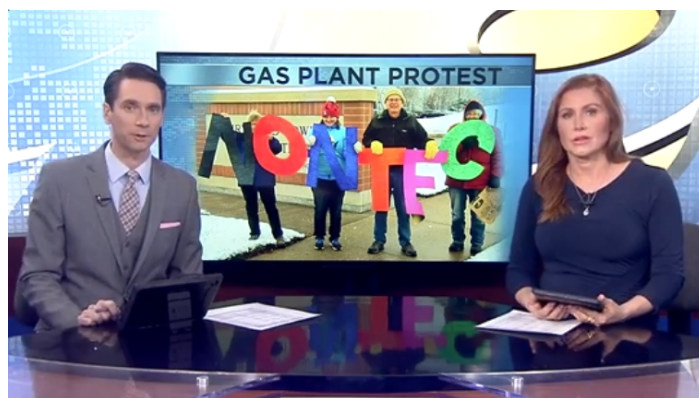
NO NTEC!

On Wednesday, November 16, several members of the Wisconsin Sierra Club gathered at headquarters of Dairyland Power Cooperative in La Crosse to highlight the problems with Dairyland's plans to build a new power plant fueled by fracked gas, the Nemadji Trail Energy Center (NTEC).

Jadine Sonoda, campaign coordinator for the Wisconsin Chapter, noted that the plant would be uneconomical and not do enough to decrease greenhouse gas emissions. Rather, the Sierra Club and others are urging Dairyland to invest in clean energy production from wind and solar as well as programs that will reduce energy need and investments in storage.

In addition to Jadine, CRSC board president Kathy Allen also spoke at the press event, and read comments from a CRSC member who is also a Dairyland Power customer.

Kathy also wrote a letter to the La Crosse Tribune editor, published on November 16, which included conclusions by Rocky Mountain Institute that 90 percent of proposed U.S. gas plants, including NTEC, will ultimately cost more than if investments were made in renewables and efficiency.



WXOW-News 19 reported on the Nov. 16 press event.

In many cases, the cost of renewables is now lower than that of fossil fuels, with the gap expected to widen in coming years. Climate economists warn that fossil fuel investors and customers face growing financial risks from potential "stranded assets." Economics and the climate crisis support an immediate shift to renewables.

According to Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the U.N. Environmental Programme. "This [UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2022] report tells us in cold scientific terms what nature has been telling us, all year, through deadly floods, storms and raging fires. We had our chance to make incremental changes, but that time is over."

STOP I-94 EXPANSION!

Recently, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation announced that the state has selected an eight-lane expansion as the preferred alternative for their I-94 East-West project. This project will exacerbate climate change, racial disparities, and water pollution, and more.

For months, transportation, social justice, and environmental groups have strongly urged the DOT to choose a "Fix At Six" solution (<http://fixatsix.org>), which would be more equitable, less costly, and more climate conscious. Expanding highways to fix congestion only induces more traffic. To slow global heating, we must prioritize systems that require less fossil fuels. The cost of this project is projected to be more than \$1 billion.

* Submit comments by January 17 (tinyurl.com/WISC-FixAt6)

Trempealeau Solar Tour

Every year in October, the American Solar Energy Society sponsors community Solar Tours around the country to help people connect with those who have installed solar systems and learn how they can join the solar movement.

The Trempealeau Villagers' Solar Tour was part of this national effort. Organized by Lois Taylor, RN, MA, a wellness professional and long-time solar advocate, the tour featured five homes and the Trempealeau Hotel. See wellnessbranch.com/spotlight/solar_tour

Homeowners told about their own journeys to the sun. Attendees learned that even if you don't have the perfect solar site, you can still benefit from installing solar panels. One homeowner noted that his system reduced his whole utility bill when solar production was high because Trempealeau Municipal Utility includes electricity along with water and sewer. Lois's installation included a pole-mounted system and panels on her garage. She talked about her system and also provided handouts about the coming incentives in the IRA and other programs and incentives.

The Inflation Reduction Act will expand tax credits for those who install solar through 2032. Unfortunately, you must have a tax liability in order to take advantage of the credit and, if the credit is more than your tax liability, you will not receive a refund for the difference. But, you may carry the unused credit to following years.

If you are considering solar, now is the time to get your assessment and get on the list for an installation. Electricity costs will not be going down and every bit of solar that replaces coal or gas helps with the struggle to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. And, more solar installations will mean more places for others to tour next October!

More December events

12/ 6: Virtual Volunteer Night to stop I-94 expansion 6:30 p.m. online tinyurl.com/WISC-Vol94

12/ 6: Peter Allen - Creating Healthy Ecosystems 7:00 p.m. The Historic Fortney, 100 N. Main St., Viroqua valleystewardshipnetwork.org

12/ 7: Call-In Day for FixAtSix (see details at cr-sierra.blogspot.com by December 5)

Kudos!

Congratulations to CRSC board member Ned Gatzke and his wife, Carol. They have received a Monroe County Stewardship Award as Conservationists of the Year. They will receive the award at the annual Land Stewardship Banquet on January 28 at the American Legion Hall in Sparta.

* Attend the December 6 Volunteer Night (tinyurl.com/WISC-Vol1206)

* Participate in the December 7 Fix at Six call day (details will be posted at cr-sierra.blogspot.com)

* Sign the petition to support the Fix at Six solution (fixatsix.org/supporter)

* Join the Wisconsin Sierra Club Transportation Equity team (email cassie.steiner@sierraclub.org)



12/ 7: Saving money with planning and electrification 6:30 p.m. ONLINE or in person at the Vernon County Historical Society www.vced.energy

12/14: Author Joseph Bruchac reads from his book "A Year of Moons." 6:30 p.m. Pearl Street Books. tinyurl.com/PSB-Bruchac

12/15: Virtual Volunteer Night to protect Wisconsin wolves 6:30 p.m. tinyurl.com/WISC-VolWolves

What would you like to see?

The Wisconsin DNR is developing a regional master plan for properties it manages in the "Western Coulees and Ridges Ecological Landscape," which includes all or portions of all eight counties of the Coulee Region Group area. Public input is needed as part of the scoping phase.

Please use this opportunity to share your thoughts. What would you like to see for the management of habitats, species and other natural resources on over 167,800 acres of DNR property in the region, including parks, natural areas, wildlife areas, fishery areas, and other properties. See the list of properties at widnr.widen.net/s/ghnsct6b9s/fl_mp_wcr_full-property-list

The public input is open through December 23 for the Scoping Phase of the project. Learn more and provide your input at tinyurl.com/DNRInputForm



Regional Conservation Planning

The Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin is organizing a group of conservation partners in Wisconsin's Driftless Area to make a plan. Together, they're determining the top priorities for protecting the region's unique features and biodiversity.

They state that the unique landscape of the Driftless Area is one of the most biodiverse places in Wisconsin, featuring rare and unique natural communities that provide habitat for numerous wildlife species. With a grant from the Eddie Schwartz Conservation Fund of the Windward Fund, the Natural Resources Foundation is creating a collaborative conservation plan to preserve the Driftless Area's biodiversity within its rarest habitats: barrens, oak savannas, prairies, and grasslands.

Other partners in the planning effort are Driftless Area Land Conservancy, Landmark Conservancy, Mississippi Valley Conservancy, Pheasants Forever, The Nature Conservancy, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Conservation measures identified to date include prescribed burns, invasive species control, conservation easements, financial incentives to landowners for conservation, and continued land management and restoration efforts. We hope coordinated efforts will increase conservation success in the Driftless Area.

For more information, see www.wisconservation.org/driftless-area-conservation-planning



Grant will help preserve prairie

Hixon Forest's Lookout Prairie will receive a boost thanks to a \$2,000 grant from the C.D. Besadny Conservation Fund of the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, with \$2,000 of matching funding from the City of La Crosse. The funding supports the efforts of Friends of the Blufflands to preserve and protect this remnant bluff prairie.

According to Friends of the Blufflands Board President Pat Wilson, "With this grant and the City's matching funds, Friends has been able to hire a professional contractor to continue the restoration of this prairie ecosystem with its globally unique flora and fauna." The contractor will eliminate invasive trees and plants.

Lookout Prairie is one of several remnant hill prairies in Hixon Forest and the surrounding bluffs. Removing trees and brush and then maintaining the open prairie with prescribed burns helps preserve this important habitat for the many native species of plants and animals.

The majority of the threatened species and species of special concern in Hixon Forest reside in the prairie habitat. The prairies are estimated to support over 1,000 insect species.

Friends of the Blufflands works in cooperation with the City of La Crosse, Mississippi Valley Conservancy, The Prairie Enthusiasts and other area conservation groups to restore and maintain natural resources for the benefit of all area residents and nature lovers. Friends of the Blufflands is a member of the regional Bluffland Coalition.

Coulee Region Sierra Club Board Elections Information and Ballot

Thank you for participating in the democratic process of electing your local Sierra Club representatives! Just enter your member number and then vote for up to four candidates, to begin two-year terms in January 2023. The candidate bios are below. Please complete one ballot per member (both members in a Joint membership may cast ballots). You will receive a link to the online ballot and your member number in an email OR via postcard. Your member number is required so your membership can be verified by the Election Committee. **Please vote either with the online ballot OR by printing, completing, and mailing the ballot shown below.**

**** All ballots must be received by midnight December 30, 2022. ****
If you choose to use the ballot shown below, please mail it by December 20 to
1815 Cameron Ave. La Crosse, WI 54601

Dorothy Lenard - Dorothy recently retired from her role as an Administrator for the School of Natural Sciences, Engineering and Math at Viterbo University. She has a degree from Michigan Technological University in Forest Hydrology and a Master's in Servant Leadership from Viterbo. She and her husband Rich grew up in a small bay town on Lake Michigan surrounded mostly by State land. Yes, she loves and misses the lake effect snowfalls and outdoor saunas in the winter. Having lived in all regions of the United States, they eventually chose the Driftless area to settle down in and raise their three children. She has been active in numerous community activities and boards. Her passion is studying the environment, especially water protection. While on the La Crosse City Council, she worked with others to pass in 2009 the City of La Crosse and County of La Crosse Strategic Plan for Sustainability. In the summer, her family has a huge community garden in their yard where their specialties are garlic and perennials. Preparing and sharing sustainable food with family and friends is her favorite hobby.

Carol Miller - Carol is a professor of sociology at UW-La Crosse. She teaches Sociology of Gender, Rural and Urban Sociology, Policy & Society and other courses on global issues while conducting research on globalization, poverty, food insecurity and agritourism in Wisconsin. Carol has assisted local organizations like CouleeCap and Habitat for Humanity with data analysis projects and has been a member of the Holmen Area Historical Society for 24+ years, often serving on their Executive Committee. She also volunteers with the cats at Coulee Region Humane Society and has been a member of Sierra Club for seven years.

Avery Van Gaard - Avery was born and raised in La Crosse, as well as rural Vernon County. She is a crew lead at Coulee Region Ecoscapes, a local landscaping business that centers planting native plants, installing rain gardens, and other ecologically beneficial practices. She has served on the board of the Coulee Region Sierra Club group for several years and was previously a representative of the group to the Executive Committee. When she is not working, Avery has assisted in the group's campaigns and events - from the 2017 Water Quality Forum to the current "Ready for 100" campaign.



Coulee Region Sierra Club Board Elections - Ballot

Vote (X) for up to three people. Mail your ballot by December 20 to ensure it is delivered by December 30. If you vote online, please do not use the mail-in ballot. Email CRSierraClub@gmail.com OR call 608-315-2693 with questions.

Member number: _____

_____ Dorothy Lenard

_____ write in

_____ Carol Miller

_____ write in

_____ Avery Van Gaard

_____ write in