



Sierra

Newsletter of the Coulee Region Group

FEBRUARY 2020

Congratulations, Elizabeth Ward, new John Muir Chapter Director!

TUESDAY, February 25 at 6 p.m.

Volunteer Night!

Myrick Park Center

(789 Myrick Park Drive, La Crosse)

Join us at our **Volunteer Night** to help make our upcoming events and initiatives a success! Like to make phone calls? We can give you a list and script. Prefer to text or email? We've got needs for that also. LOVE



graphic design or social media? We need help with those. Whatever you like to do, we can use your help. *If you've been thinking about getting more involved*, this would be a great place to learn about a number of different campaigns and see what you'd like to do. If you have two hours to give to make a difference and can't do more than that, then this is a great place for you as well!

No party is complete without (vegan) snacks, so we'll have those too! If you can attend, please sign up (optional) at tinyurl.com/crscvolnight or through the FB event at www.facebook.com/events/485756712374824/

February 18 is Wisconsin's "non-partisan" primary election for the spring election. Voters will choose two of three candidates for the April state Supreme Court ballot. In fact, the Supreme Court is fully partisan with a current 5-2 Republican majority. Watch a recent forum (start at 5:00) at tinyurl.com/WISC-013020.



The presidential primary season begins this month with the Iowa caucus and New Hampshire primary followed closely by South Carolina and Nevada. Super Tuesday primaries, March 3, will include California for the first time this year.

Absentee in person voting begins on Monday, February 3 and continues through February 14. Check with your municipal clerk for specifics. By voting early, you won't need to worry about weather, health, or other surprises on election day.

Ensure you are properly registered, check your polling place, learn what's on your ballot and more by looking yourself up at myvote.wi.gov.

All Wisconsin workers who are eligible voters may **request up to three successive hours off work** on election day in order to vote. You must request the time in advance. Your employer gets to choose the time of your absence and is not required to pay you for those three hours. Read more at tinyurl.com/wivotingtime.

Early support and work for presidential candidates who have good environmental track records and policies is crucial. Several national environmental groups have offered candidate score cards. If you haven't yet chosen a candidate, now is the time. Donating money, helping with phone- and text-banking, canvassing, holding public meetings, writing letters to the editor are all ways we can help good candidates advance.

- * www.greenpeace.org/usa/climate2020
- * 350action.org/2020-tracker
- * centeractionfund.org/environmental-report-card

Once you decide, educate neighbors and invite others to join you. You can join the Sierra Club's texting team by signing up at www.sierraclub.org/politics

Thank you, Karl Green!

Our thanks to Karl Green for his informative and wide-reaching presentation on local and regional water quality issues at our January meeting! Karl noted that our area is fortunate to have abundant water sources, unlike so many regions of the world that suffer chronic shortages, but that many of our surface and ground waters are “impaired” by contaminants (visit dnr.wi.gov/topic/impairedwaters to learn more).

While environmental laws regulate point sources of water pollution, they don’t address non-point sources, such as runoff from agricultural lands and residential areas.

New Board officers

At its first meeting of the new year, the CRSC board chose new officers for 2020. Kathy Allen is 2020 Chair, Cathy Van Maren, Vice Chair, Veronica Bauer, Secretary, and Nancy Hartje, Treasurer. We thank Pat Wilson for his years of leadership as board chair. Pat will serve on the board as a general member with Ned Gatzke, Maureen Kinney, and Avery Van Gaard.

Most of this non-point pollution occurs during storm events, and, as we’ve noticed here in the Driftless Region, large storms seem to be increasing in intensity and frequency in recent years, triggering problems with runoff in both urban and rural areas!

But this is an issue that we can help do something about. Here are some tips from Karl:

- Keep your vehicle properly maintained so it doesn’t leak fluids onto streets and parking lots.

- Prevent trash and pet waste from getting into the streets where it can wash down sewers and directly into our waterways.

- Rethink your landscaping and yard maintenance. Could you collect rainwater or help it infiltrate before it runs off your property? Could you reduce or eliminate your use of fertilizers and other chemicals, or time their application so they’re less likely to run off? Could you add gardens or native plants to reduce mowing?

The state offers education and assistance for communities and individuals. Resources are listed at the UW Cooperative Extension Water Resource Education page: clean-water.uwex.edu/partners.html.

Clean Water Lobby Day

CRSC members joined hundreds of Wisconsin citizens who visited with their legislators on January 30 during Clean Water Lobby Day hosted by Wisconsin Conservation Voters. The talks focused on bills coming from the Water Quality Task force.

AB 790/SB 725: Funding for county conservationists. These bills would increase funding by \$2.9 million for county conservation staff, our first line of defense against water pollution by providing testing and monitoring, helping farmers design and construct safe manure storage facilities, establishing conservation cropping practices, aiding in nutrient management plans, and helping landowners find funding for conservation work.

AB 321/SB 302: The CLEAR Act. PFAS, also known as “forever chemicals” because they remain in the environment without breaking down, are a danger to all living things. They are found



in firefighting foam, non-stick cookware, clothing, carpeting, food packaging and more, The CLEAR Act would let the DNR establish health standards in the state’s water, soil, and air and require the clean up of PFAS where they are found.

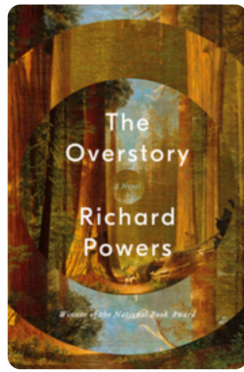
AB 423/SB 424: The SCHOOLS bills. Lead in drinking water affects infant and child development and health. These bills would require all schools, daycares, and summer camps to test their drinking water for lead and make results available to the public. If elevated levels are found, alternative safe drinking water must be supplied until the situation is remedied.

AB 794/SB 708: Polluting the process. Citizen lobbyists asked their legislators to oppose these bills which would change the state’s science-based groundwater protection process to allow polluters to interfere as the science is being examined by the Department of Health Services.

Learn more and how you can help protect our clean water at conservationvoters.org.

CRSC (Online) Book Club!

Our online book club is off to a great start. We are reading *The Overstory*, a Pulitzer prize winner about trees and the people who love them. Because the book is long and deep, we will continue discussing it through February and start our next book in March. To get in on the action, please join us through this link: tinyurl.com/crsc-overstory.



Grants awarded!

The Coulee Region Sierra Club will fully fund four projects this spring semester through its environmental education grants program. We will highlight their projects after the semester ends.

Help with newsletter

So we can better cover the whole Coulee Region, please email crsierraclub@gmail.com with environment-related stories and activities in your area. We'll include them in our newsletters and social media.

Pledge to CLIMATE ACTION: TRANSPORTATION!

The transportation sector is now the largest contributor to U.S. greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Transportation accounted for the largest portion (29%) of total U.S. GHG emissions in 2017. Light duty vehicles (passenger cars and light trucks) and medium- and heavy-duty trucks account for more than 80% of transportation sector emissions.



February 4 is TRANSIT EQUITY DAY honoring the birthday of civil rights icon Rosa Parks. A coalition of groups including the Labor Network for Sustainability, Sierra Club, Amalgamated Transit Union, NAACP, and others, highlight the value of public transportation in ensuring citizens of all ages, incomes, colors, and abilities equal access to jobs, education and training, services, businesses, events, public facilities, social activities, and a full, healthy life. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that *it costs more than \$9,000 per year to own and operate a car*. Without good public transit, many people are left out - can't take a job because the bus route ends before the work does, can't make an appointment because the bus doesn't go to the office, can't shop at a store because there's no bus service there on weekends. Often many more public dollars are spent on parking facilities and ever-widening highways than on public transportation, special transportation, and

bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure. Public transit is more cost effective for communities and families, improves air quality, relieves congestion, is healthier and safer, is available to all and reduces greenhouse gas emissions, Support public transit, use public transit, fight for public transit.

Driving Habits Every gallon of gas we use emits about 20 pounds of CO₂, so higher mpg vehicles are good, but we have to stop using fossil fuels. Drive less, bike and use public transportation more. Strongly suggest those hosting meetings and conferences offer an online option. If you can, move closer to work or school. Carpool or use a combination of park-and-ride plus public transportation. Consider an EV (used EVs cost about the same as used internal combustion engine cars) when you are ready to change vehicles. Buy products grown, made, produced, and sold closer to home to reduce emissions from shipping products long distances. As you plan vacations and trips, seek climate-friendly transportation options. Greyhound, Jefferson Lines, and Amtrak are lower emission options for long distance travel. Reduce or eliminate air travel. If you must fly, fly economy on a fuel-efficient airline like Norwegian (33% more efficient than industry average). More at theicct.org and afdc.energy.gov/states/wi and commutesolutions.com/commute-cost-calculator.

Move your community Changing personal habits makes a difference but changing community habits makes a much bigger difference. Does your community have public transportation? Can you coordinate an informal ride service (see tinyurl.com/ruralrides)? Can communities change policies to encourage development where services, shops, and facilities are walkable or available by public transportation? Support and encourage expansion of the SMRT bus, a public-private collaboration to bring public transit to rural areas. Set up community ride boards, combine shopping trips with neighbors. Help your community list local clean transportation options. The Sierra Club offers resources, stories, and ideas to help people and communities think about new ways of moving people and goods that are cleaner, safer, and healthier. See sierraclub.org/transportation.

Journey to clean energy

Last month, Dairyland Power Cooperative announced plans to retire its Genoa coal-fired power plant in 2021. John Muir Chapter director, Elizabeth Ward, responded, “One less coal plant means cleaner air, cleaner water, and progress toward reducing climate-disrupting emissions. But, replacing coal with fracked gas would be an economic and environmental disaster.”

Wisconsin’s Public Service Commission (PSC) recently approved Dairyland’s plans for a new fracked-gas plant in Superior. Other permitting issues are still being debated in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Ward says, “Dairyland’s proposed Nemadji Trail Energy Center gas plant would saddle us with decades of climate-polluting emissions, wreak havoc on groundwater systems in northern Wisconsin, and is projected to be uneconomic less than a decade after it would come online.”

On the same day, the PSC approved the Nemadji Trail plant, they also approved construction of a 149-megawatt “Badger State” solar farm in Jefferson County which will sell power to Dairyland. More large-scale solar farms will be considered by the PSC this year.

Last year, the Center On Wisconsin Strategies studied benefits Wisconsin could see if it produced all its power needs renewably within the state. Not only would such a move retain the \$14.4 billion spent annually on out-of-state fuel costs, but it would add nearly that same amount of new economic growth. See tinyurl.com/cowsonwienergy.

Tyler Huebner of Renew Wisconsin notes that solar installations already constructed and under consideration would take up less than half of the land Wisconsin farmers currently have in federally-subsidized programs paying them not to grow crops. Read more about this at tinyurl.com/newisolar

2020 PROGRESSTIVAL FEBRUARY 29 * 1 – 5:30 PM CONCORDIA BALLROOM

1129 LA CROSSE STREET (accessible by #4 bus)

**ACTIVIST FAIR * WORKSHOPS
SNACKS/DRINKS * SPEAKER**



**ELECTIONS * COMMUNITY * SOCIAL JUSTICE * VOTING
ANTI-RACISM * ENVIRONMENT * HEALTH * EQUITY
COOPERATION * RESPECT * SUSTAINABILITY**

Your DONATION at the door helps pay for the event. ALL ARE WELCOME.
Hosted by CouleeProgressives.org, a virtual community of progressive activists.
More at tiny.cc/Progresstival2020

The Coulee Region Sierra Club will table at the February 29 “Progresstival” at the Concordia Ballroom in La Crosse. If you are in the area and would like to help table, please email crsierraclub@gmail.com. If you will attend the event, please stop by and sign up for an ACTION item for our work on clean water, renewable energy, and transportation equity in 2020!

Soil Health event February 22

Soil Health & Diversity: Keeping Farms Economically & Ecologically Sustainable” will be held Feb.22 at Southwest Tech in Fennimore from 1 to 4 p.m. Register at www.facebook.com/grantcountyruralstewardship.

Wisconsin water recreation

A new year of John Muir Chapter water adventures will begin soon! From weekend car camping trips on quiet Wisconsin rivers to longer trips on exciting whitewaters. Find information at: tinyurl.com/jmcwatertrips.

Upcoming programs

The DNR will host a Volunteer Day from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on February 12 at Blue River Barrens State Natural Area to clean up trees, shrubs, and invasives on site. Blue River Barrens is in Grant County near Boscobel. Email jared.urban@wisconsin.gov for details.

The Mississippi Valley Conservancy will host a Valentine’s Snowshoe Hike at 10 a.m. at the La Crosse River Conservancy at Stoney Creek Inn in Onalaska. Register ahead: tinyurl.com/mvc021420.

DOT seeks your input

The VW Mitigation Program is seeking public input on the spending of \$10 million in Volkswagen Diesel Emissions Environmental Mitigation Trust funds for electric vehicle charging station grants. Email wvsettlement@wisconsin.gov or call 608-261-6262.