



# Sierra

Newsletter of the Coulee Region Group

MARCH 2023

*"[T]he shifting seasons risk severing a whole series of relationships essential to the natural order." -  
Parts of US see earliest spring conditions on record, The Guardian, February 24, 2023*

**TUESDAY, March 28, 7 p.m.**

**Vernon County Energy District:  
Community Approach to the Energy Transition  
with Alan Buss, President, VCED**

**Register: [www.tinyurl.com/CRSC-032823](http://www.tinyurl.com/CRSC-032823)**

Inspired by the Soil and Water Conservation Districts formed in the 1930s, an Energy District is a non-profit organization that serves a specific county. It fosters the development of locally tailored energy solutions that account for the demographic, geographic, and regulatory factors in that county. An Energy District empowers local energy users to make change, facilitates cooperation between diverse public and private stakeholders, and stimulates the local economy by promoting investment in energy projects and jobs. Through education and

community outreach, an Energy District increases adoption of energy efficiency measures and renewable energy production, thereby reducing carbon emissions and other pollution. Finally, an Energy District improves community resiliency through distributed energy generation and storage. Learn about the Vernon County Energy District from its president, Alan Buss, and why this is an important movement at the dawn of a new energy reality. Please register for the link at [www.tinyurl.com/CRSC-032823](http://www.tinyurl.com/CRSC-032823) or by calling 608-315-2693. The event is co-sponsored by Sierra Club Wisconsin Chapter Moving Beyond Coal to Clean Energy Team.

## **Leopold Day on March 4**

Aldo Leopold's essays in "A Sand County Almanac" will be featured in a series of events in the La Crosse area for the state's annual Leopold observance held each year on the first weekend in March. Leopold, a conservationist, forester, philosopher, educator, writer, and outdoor enthusiast, is considered by many as the father of wildlife management and of the United States wilderness system. He died in 1948 fighting a neighbor's grass fire at "the shack," his family getaway near Portage.

Since 2004 the state has honored Leopold and his conservation legacy, "to inform and inspire us to see the natural world as a community to which we belong." The La Crosse event is planned each year by representatives of local environmental and conservation groups.



There is no charge and no registration is required for these events.

On **Saturday, March 4 from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m.** at the Myrick Park Center in La Crosse. The Leopold observance will be the theme of WisCorps' "Nature Saturday." The family activities will include crafts, scavenger hunts, and live animals.

At 11 a.m., the Friends of the Marsh will hold a family-friendly hike around the marsh starting from the Myrick Park Center. The theme will be Aldo Leopold's "Marshland Elegy," from A Sand County Almanac. Hikers should dress for conditions.

From 12:30 to 3:30 p.m., the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge Visitor Center on Brice Prairie will host events including a talk by retired UW-L professor Steve Simpson, author of "Essays to My Daughter on Our Relationship With the Natural World," and a walk and talk led by Jay Fernholz, retired landscape architect. Refuge staff will be available to answer questions, and volunteers from the Friends of the Refuge Mississippi River Pools 7 & 8 will provide hot cocoa after the walk. Please dress for winter weather!

Learn more at [www.tinyurl.com/LaXLeopold23](http://www.tinyurl.com/LaXLeopold23)

## Outings Leader Training

If you love to hike and explore places around Wisconsin and want to share those experiences with others, consider becoming a Sierra Club Outings leader.

New leaders or leaders needing to renew their certification can complete online training modules at their own pace. To complete the training (be certified) they will need to attend an online discussion/review of the modules, one on March 16 and the other on March 23.

All outings leaders need to have at least basic First Aid/CPR training. The club will offer training at a central location in March.

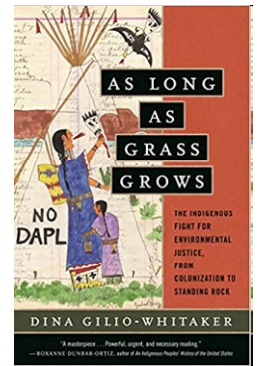
If you sign up for Outings Leader training, you will also get the date for the First Aid/CPR training. Register at [www.tinyurl.com/23WISCLdrTraining](http://www.tinyurl.com/23WISCLdrTraining)

For more information or questions, contact Liz Wessel, [lizard59sc@yahoo.com](mailto:lizard59sc@yahoo.com).

## Book Club

The Sierra Club Wisconsin Chapter's book club meets from 7 to 8 p.m. on the first Tuesday evening of every other month and everyone is welcome to participate.

On March 7, the book will be **As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock** by Dina Gilio-Whitaker. This nonfiction book details the history of Native Americans in the United States since European colonization, including criticisms of the modern conservation movement as exclusionary to indigenous concepts of land and environmental stewardship, and coverage of the 2010s Dakota Access Pipeline protests at Standing Rock. Register at [www.tinyurl.com/WISC-0323Book](http://www.tinyurl.com/WISC-0323Book) and learn more about the book club at [www.tinyurl.com/WISC-23Books](http://www.tinyurl.com/WISC-23Books)



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## Affordable Connectivity

The Federal Communications Commission offers two programs to help low-income individuals access affordable internet and phone service.

Lifeline provides subscribers a discount on qualifying monthly telephone service, broadband Internet service, or bundled voice-broadband packages purchased from participating wireline or wireless providers. To qualify, a household's Adjusted Gross Income (AGI--line 11 on the 2021 1040 form ) must be at or below 135% of Federal Poverty Guidelines. For a one-person household, that is \$18,347. Learn more at [www.fcc.gov/lifeline-consumers](http://www.fcc.gov/lifeline-consumers)

The Affordable Connectivity Program offers a discount of up to \$30 per month for eligible households (up to \$75 for those on eligible Tribal lands). In addition, eligible households can receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop, or tablet. To qualify for this program, a household must have an AGI at or below 200% of Federal Poverty Guidelines. For one person, that is \$27,180. Learn more about this program at [www.fcc.gov/acp](http://www.fcc.gov/acp)

**Seeking one or two people to help with the newsletter.** Report on environmental events and initiatives in your community, help proofread, or be the backup publisher. Call or text 608-315-2693 or email [CRSierraClub@gmail.com](mailto:CRSierraClub@gmail.com) for details.

## More March Events

3/ 2: MVC volunteer for the wild at Tunnelville Cliffs State Natural Area from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. [www.tinyurl.com/MVCMarch23](http://www.tinyurl.com/MVCMarch23)

3/ 8: Sierra Club Virtual Volunteer Night at 6:30 p.m. [www.tinyurl.com/WISC-030823Vol](http://www.tinyurl.com/WISC-030823Vol)

3/ 9: Urban Prairie Gardens at 6 p.m. at the La Crosse Public Library. [www.tinyurl.com/LPL-PrGard](http://www.tinyurl.com/LPL-PrGard)

3/ 9: MVC volunteer for the wild at Sugar Creek Bluff from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. [www.tinyurl.com/MVCMarch23](http://www.tinyurl.com/MVCMarch23)

3/14: MVC volunteer for the wild at Boscobel Bluffs State Natural Area from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. [www.tinyurl.com/MVCMarch23](http://www.tinyurl.com/MVCMarch23)

3/18: Wisconsin Waters talk at Kickapoo Valley Reserve 10:30 a.m. [www.kvr.state.wi.us/Events/Calendar](http://www.kvr.state.wi.us/Events/Calendar)

3/18: Black River Falls Book Club - Braiding Sweetgrass at the Meditation Station at 2 p.m. [www.tinyurl.com/BRF-BookClub0](http://www.tinyurl.com/BRF-BookClub0)

3/20: Sierra Club program - Rights of Nature and Indigenous Activism at 6:30 p.m. online. [www.tinyurl.com/WISC-RoN](http://www.tinyurl.com/WISC-RoN)

3/23: MVC volunteer for the wild at Boscobel Bluffs State Natural Area from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. [www.tinyurl.com/MVCMarch23](http://www.tinyurl.com/MVCMarch23)

3/28: MVC volunteer for the wild at Boscobel Bluffs State Natural Area from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. [www.tinyurl.com/MVCMarch23](http://www.tinyurl.com/MVCMarch23)

## Rural Power

The passage of the 1936 Rural Electrification Act, part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, changed rural America. The revolutionary legislation allowed the federal government to provide low-cost loans to cooperatives formed by farmers for rural electricity distribution. Cooperatives provide services and benefits to owner-members who democratically control operations.

Rural electric cooperatives (RECs) are still operating. In Wisconsin, there are 24 distribution co-ops and one generation and transmission co-op, Dairyland Power.

As climate concerns dictate a rapid transition to zero-carbon fuels and renewable energy offers new opportunities for rural landowners, RECs are on the front lines of the power debate.

A January 2022 article by Minnesota Public Radio notes that Connexus, Minnesota's largest REC, is building

solar-plus-battery storage facilities in response to owner-members' interest in greener electricity and lower costs.

On the other hand, in Wisconsin, Dairyland Power is planning a new fossil gas facility which will be responsible for high carbon emissions and may leave owner-member co-ops with high "stranded asset" costs.

Around the country, REC owner-members are waking up to their potential power. The Institute for Local Self Reliance estimated, in 2016, that, "more than 70 percent of cooperatives have voter turnouts of less than 10 percent." Factors that keep member involvement low include members who don't understand how cooperatives work, members who just don't vote, and bad or bad-faith policies that co-op boards use to retain control while blocking members from making changes.

Co-op owner-members concerned about the environment have the power to make a difference.

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## Cooperate by Dena Eakles (<https://letkindnesswin.wordpress.com>)

The definition of cooperate is, "to work jointly toward the same end." You remember the saying and probably have experienced, "Many hands make light work." In the early 1900s, it was a necessity to help one another, especially rurally. And it was that joint effort of neighbors that built electric transmission lines and created distribution cooperatives like Vernon Electric and twenty-four more coops in our state.

The fact that cooperatives have remained solvent through the years is a testament to core principles: they are member owned and democratically run. That means members elect Delegates and the Board who in turn hire the CEO to run the day-to-day business of the cooperative. That business should be of concern to every member since it is our monies that feed the system and allow it to run.

What causes a cooperative to fail? Apathy of the membership is a major contributor to the detriment of a coop; conflicting goals is another. Misinformation or lack of transparency can cause conflict and can upend the cooperative spirit. Competition from outside might also influence a cooperative negatively.

Remember Vernon Electric Cooperative is a distribution co-op. Dairyland Power is the generator, supplying electric energy to co-ops through coal power plants and other means. And, while that has been a working relationship, there are environmental factors influencing our need for locally-generated renewable energy. Drive through the Driftless and you'll see solar panels on homes. Most, like the ones I own, are grid-tied. That means when extra energy is produced it goes back into the pool of electricity that Vernon Electric transmits. Over time, local panels will reduce costs for all if allowed to continue.

Times are changing. This is not a time for apathy. Get in the know or stay in the dark. The next VEC annual meeting is Saturday, March 25, Bylaws, rate increases and other important issues will be raised. Your vote matters.

