



Sierra

Newsletter of the Coulee Region Group

APRIL 2021

"Today's interim report from the UNFCCC is a red alert for our planet. It shows governments are nowhere close to the level of ambition needed to limit climate change to 1.5 degrees and meet the goals of the Paris Agreement." - United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, February 26, 2021

April 20 at 7 p.m. online
Meet the Sierra Club - 100 years of environmental advocacy
An Earth Week program

Register for link at tiny.cc/meetthescc

Every April, you will find the Coulee Region Sierra Club tabling at the annual La Crosse Earth Fair. We provide information about our current campaigns, invite people to participate in our events and connect people with our advocacy efforts. This year, because of COVID-19, there will not be an Earth Fair, but there will be a virtual Earth Week. Our April 20 online program is for anyone wishing to learn more about this special club, one of the oldest and largest environmental advocacy organization in the United States.

Join us and bring your friends. Find out about upcoming activities. Learn how you can amplify your voice to work for clean water, a renewable energy future, and a better state budget. See how the Coulee Region Sierra Club supports regional environmental education programs. Visit <http://tiny.cc/meetthescc> to register for this online event.

Outdoor opportunities

While CRSC can't hold official in-person events until at least July 4, there are opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors on your own or with members of your household.

April 3: Nature Saturdays at Myrick Park (WisCorps) A free seasonal program from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m. Taught by WisCorps nature teachers, the event is for all ages. Dress for the weather! You must sign up in advance at www.wiscorps.org/programsforadults. Masks and social distancing will be required. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

April 10: Tree planting support (MVC) Help newly planted trees in the Cassville Bluff Natural Area from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The Mississippi Valley Conservancy will supply instructions and materials. Social distancing required. mississippivalleyconservancy.org/events/volunteer-wild-tree-planting-support

April 23-25: On-your-own highway clean-up (CRSC). Pick up some bags, gloves, and vests from CRSC and spend an hour or two with your family group along this roadway in the middle of our beautiful marsh picking up trash. Call Pat at 608-788-8831 for details.

You're Invited!

2021 Earth Fair - Week Long Virtual Event

April 19 - 25th, 2021

with Drive-Thru Recycling Fair - Sunday, April 25th 10-3PM - Myrick Park, La Crosse, WI

The 2021 Earth Fair will include a week long celebration filled with virtual content and activities for all ages.

We will culminate the week with a drive through recycling event in Myrick Park.

www.sustaininstitute.com/earthfairlacrosse

La Crosse Mayoral Survey

The Coulee Region Sierra Club asked candidates for La Crosse mayor to respond to a short survey. The club will not endorse, but encourages City of La Crosse members to watch forums and read survey answers to help them decide. The election is on Tuesday, April 6, but people may request an absentee ballot at myvote.wi.gov and may vote absentee-in-person voting at City Hall from 9 a.m to 2 p.m. on April 1 and from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on April 2.

Candidate forums:

- March 3 League of Women Voters: youtu.be/FNQ4W5Y02qs
- March 8 The Center LGBTQ Connection: www.facebook.com/events/893713318107194/
- March 15 Chamber of Commerce: <https://youtu.be/HxIANQjM2s8>
- March 16 Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship: www.facebook.com/events/434241774537737
- March 17 La Crosse Criminal Justice Management Council: <http://tiny.cc/0317LaXMayorForum>
- March 18 WKBT-TV and League of Women Voters: www.news8000.com/news/politics/elections/
- March 22 LWV, WXOW, WPR: wxow.com/2021/03/22/watch-635-p-m-la-crosse-mayoral-debate/
- March 25 UWL Free Speech Week event: <https://youtu.be/iYtYtnWGcHQ>

Survey responses:

1. A top goal of the Sierra Club nationally and of our Coulee Region group is to accelerate the transition to 100% clean, renewable energy. What are 1-3 ways that the City could assist in this transition, either within city operations or by supporting the wider community?

Vicki Markussen: When we think about fighting one of the biggest issues of our time, climate change, I find much of the change seems to be sparked and accelerated at the local level. The City has made its pledge to become carbon neutral by 2050 and made strides in moving to electric fleets, adjusting cleaning product use, and adding solar panels to projects and we are extremely lucky to have a common council and mayor with the foresight to lead on this initiative.

The council began some steps outlined above. This month in fact, La Crosse is restarting its sustainability group to develop better metrics for success – beyond what it measured previously, electricity consumption. New strategies must be created to meet this new goal. Through my work in the community, I know who we can add individuals to this committee who can pave an innovative path forward. These include: Gundersen Health System that was the first healthcare system in the country to produce more energy than it consumed; Western Technical College that developed a sustainability plan that looks at energy, waste, planning, and community engagement; and Trane Technologies whose Gigaton Challenge will help customers reduce carbon emissions. These are resources. Engaging Xcel Energy can help develop a plan that has local investment.

Small projects like the Bike Share that is about to launch in La Crosse, allowing for reduced use of vehicles, begins a new form of public engagement in alternative transportation.

I want to share a story of disconnect. I recently spoke to the UWL Student Senate. They asked a question about sustainability. I answered similar to my information provided above. We moved on to a discussion of parking and reduction of cars. There was pushback on this idea. When asked, every single student raised their hand stating they had a car on campus. There is a disconnect between sustainability and their own actions. Consumer education must be a part of the City's new plan. As a citizenry, we must pledge to conserve water, reduce solid waste, increase our recycling, and use alternative transportation as much as possible.

I think things we can do as a city and in common council, is adjusting the MTU's as the largest user of diesel and our police force as the largest user of gasoline (creating CO₂ emissions). The City has increased vehicles using propane versus gasoline. We must continue this adaptation.

Propane police cars would emit 15% less CO₂/ mile. MTU Diesel-electric hybrid buses use 47% less fuel per mile. Just four diesel-electric hybrid buses saves 19,000 gallons of fuel! My engagement with the community provides me with insight into public-private partnerships and local expertise that can be used to create an innovative sustainability plan. I have the experience to bring together government, businesses and nonprofits in getting real results for this city. I will ensure we work with experts in our private and public sector as well to make our community more sustainable.

Mitch Reynolds: I have pledged to fulfill the goal of attaining 100% clean and renewable energy in La Crosse by 2050. There is no greater priority for our community and our society as a whole than to combat global climate change. Attaining 100% clean and renewable energy in our community plays a small part in securing a sustainable planet and also creates a model for other communities to follow.

Primarily, to achieve a renewable future, we can continue some of the practices already in place in our city through efforts like through the addition of solar panels on our municipal buildings. In addition, we can transition to all electric vehicles to the city fleet and take advantage of the power generated by our solar infrastructure to power that fleet.

I would like to create an on-bill financing program so that property owners can make energy efficient improvements to their homes and finance those through the city, potentially through the city water utility. This creates a relatively risk-free means for the city to finance greater energy efficiency and renewable energy, again like solar panel additions to homes so that we can also transition our homeowners to 100% renewable adoption.

Finally, I plan to follow through with plans to add a sustainability coordinator for the city of La Crosse. Our best intentions to fulfill our 100% renewable energy pledge will come to naught if we do not have a specialized position within city hall to follow through. This position will basically act as a project manager for all of our sustainability efforts.

2. Part of the Sierra Club's mission is "To Explore, Enjoy and Protect the Planet." La Crosse is fortunate to have many amazing natural areas to explore and enjoy, including city properties. What could the City do to make these areas more explorable and enjoyable for all residents while still protecting our amazing natural resources?

Vicki Markussen: Getting outside is integral to the health and vibrancy of our community. While with the 7 Rivers Alliance (a regional collaboration organization), we identified the outdoors as a place that restores and fuels us as a community. This generated a partnership with a group called the Outdoor Recreation Alliance. I assisted with holding three conferences that united the community. From there, volunteers did incredible work of creating hiking, biking, and snowshoe trails. They also united bird watchers, canoeists, fly-fishermen, and other silent sports to brand our area. We are blessed to be in a region with amazing natural resources and a wealth of outdoor fun from canoeing, kayaking, hiking, exploring the trails, bluffs, river, and marsh is part of the fabric that makes La Crosse one of the best places to live, work, and play.

Another project I am very proud of is the Eagle Watch area on the Northside of La Crosse on Rose Street. The need for a safe space where people can bird-watch and take in the beauty of the Mississippi was needed. Along with the North La Crosse Business Association, myself at the Chamber saw the opportunity to create dedicated space as part of the redesign of the I-90 exits. The highway re-do project provided the funding (\$1 million) for the purpose of beautification along the river in 2018. The two groups then helped with the design of the space.

There is a balance to be struck between preservation and conservation. I see them going hand-in hand. ORA and the Mississippi Valley Conservancy must both hold places in our community. I look forward to navigating that relationship moving forward.

Mitch Reynolds: Continually adding access to our amazing natural spaces will be a priority. Whether that access comes with advocacy for new trail access at specific easements or additional landings along our waterways for kayaks or canoes, the key to getting our community to enjoy our natural areas, is to provide access to those areas. In addition, I will continue to support the partnerships the city's parks department has with groups who make equitable use of our city's natural spaces a priority.

Continued on page 4

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD - ONLINE BUDGET HEARINGS!

April 21 at 6 p.m.: Governor Evers' Bounceback Budget listening session on Climate Change and the Environment. Registration link: evers.wi.gov/Pages/BudgetListeningSessions.aspx

April 28 at 10 a.m.: Joint Finance Committee public hearing on legislative budget proposal. Learn more here: legis.wisconsin.gov/topics/budgetcomments

3. Do you have a favorite outdoor activity or outdoor space in the La Crosse area?

Vicki Markussen: Anything near the river is my favorite place. I find water calms me and takes me away from the world - that may be walking, being in or on the water, or just sitting back watching the beauty of the Mississippi. It cleanses my thoughts and sparks my creativity. I didn't realize it's power until I lived in La Crosse. It makes me so proud to call this area home.

A close second favorite is visiting the surrounding communities of our driftless area. There is nothing like getting into a back coulee with a small creek running through it that just inspires awe of the beauty.

Mitch Reynolds: I love the bluff trails we have in our community. I love to walk and run those trails. I am an advocate for those who bike and I certainly would love to try cross-country skiing at some point, but mostly I just love to walk. To listen. To observe. To be grateful for the wonderful outdoor spaces that are in our backyard.

Budget meeting with Sen. Pfaff

On March 26, five members of the Coulee Region Sierra Club met with Senator Brad Pfaff and his staff via Zoom to talk about Sierra Club budget priorities. Senator Pfaff expressed support for the items we talked about, including:

- * Responsible transportation funding, including increased funding for local road and bridge repair, public transit, and walking and biking infrastructure with less funding for new roads. Senator Pfaff also shared some of our concern about the proposed I-94 expansion in Milwaukee;
- * Increased funding for energy efficiency, including more money for Focus on Energy;
- * Safe, clean drinking water for all of Wisconsin, including addressing PFAS, nitrates in well water, and the replacement of lead service lines where they exist;
- * Expanding the well compensation program to bring the contamination criteria in line with federal standards and updating the program's financial qualifications to allow the program to serve more Wisconsin residents;
- * Continuing support for the important Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program to promote land conservation and protection, and the need to extend it until fiscal year 2031-32 at \$70 million per year.

Representatives Steve Doyle and Jill Billings have excellent Sierra Club voting scores, so our board sent them a letter highlighting Sierra Club budget interests.

We would like to work with CRSC members in other areas to set up meetings with their legislators. If you have a meeting set up, please let us know. For help setting up a meeting, please email crsierraclub@gmail.com.

PFAS Forever and Everywhere

While La Crosse joins many other communities in scrambling to deal with contamination of drinking water by PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) from the use of firefighting foam near the La Crosse Regional Airport, the problem is much bigger. As noted in this Wisconsin Sierra Club blog post, "These compounds can be found in our food if packaged with PFAS containing materials or grown in PFAS contaminated soil. They can also be found in commercial and household products like non-stick pans, water repellent fabrics, firefighting foam, drinking water, and much more." (www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/blog/2020/07/pfas-101)

The Sierra Club has joined other environmental organizations in suing the Department of Defense, which plans to incinerate millions of gallons of PFAS-containing fire fighting foam in several states. (www.sierraclub.org/articles/2020/02/sierra-club-earthjustice-and-frontline-communities-sue-dod-over-pfas-chemicals)

The Environmental Working Group, known for its buying guides, has produced a Guide to Avoiding PFAS Chemicals (www.ewg.org/avoidpfas). A March 2021 Sierra Magazine article focuses on PFAS and outdoor gear. (www.sierraclub.org/sierra/outerwear-shield-you-rain-and-forever-chemicals)

The CDC reports that most people in the United States have PFAS in their blood. It will be hard to return this genie to its bottle. To learn more, visit this EPA page: www.epa.gov/pfas/basic-information-pfas and to find more about which products contain PFAS, see this article by Sharon Lerner from a December 2020 article in The Intercept: theintercept.com/2020/12/02/pfas-chemicals-products

Learn and explore

April 1: The New Climate War: A Conversation with Dr. Michael E. Mann, 2 p.m. online. (Environmental Defense Fund) <http://tiny.cc/Mannclimate>

April 2: "Growing Cities" film discussion, 7:30 p.m. online. (First Unitarian Society and Save the Farm) <http://buildingunitywisconsin.org/event/first-friday-film-discussion-growing-cities/>

April 7: Waste-One Woman's Fight Against America's Dirty Secret, 5 p.m. online. (Union Theological Seminary) <https://utsnyc.edu/event/waste-one-womans-fight-against-americas-dirty-secret/>

April 7: Virtual Outing to Yosemite National Park, 7:30 p.m. online. (Great Waters Sierra Club) <http://tiny.cc/YosemiteOnline>

April 8: Rights of Nature 101, 5 p.m. online. (Center for Democratic and Environmental Rights) <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/rights-of-nature-101-an-introduction-to-the-rights-of-nature-tickets-139508059361>

April 12: Wisconsin Conservation Congress, 7 pm online (DNR) <http://tiny.cc/WISC-ConsCongress>

April 15: Bats!, 7 p.m. online (SE Gateway Sierra Club) <http://tiny.cc/WIBats>

April 17: Wisconsin Public Transit - Rural and Urban, 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. online (Wisconsin Transit Riders Alliance) tinyurl.com/WTRA-041721

April 17: Whole Garden & Farm Planning: Making the Most of Your Space, 2:00-3:30 online (Michael Fields Agricultural Institute) \$20 registration. <http://tiny.cc/gardenplanning>

April 19-25: La Crosse Earth Week (online/in person) www.sustaininstitute.com/earthfairlacrosse

April 24: Trail-Trek Challenge event, 10 a.m., online. (MVC) www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org/ttc

April 24: Ask Me Anything About My EV, 2:00-5:00, La Crosse City Hall Parking Lot (masks required) <http://tiny.cc/AMAEV-LaCrosse>

April 25: Earth Week Drive-Through Recycling Fair, 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m., Myrick Park (drive-through only) <https://www.sustaininstitute.com/efspecial-events>

April 28: Public Budget Hearing, 10 a.m. online. (JFC) <http://tiny.cc/JFCOnlineHearing>

Earth Month with Sierra Club

The Earth Day movement has grown to be the largest civic event in the world with over 1 billion people around the world taking action. During the month of April, there are many ways you can join Team Sierra to celebrate our communities and demonstrate your activism. Visit www.teamsierra.org/everycorner to learn how to take free virtual classes, raise money, earn prizes, get outside, and take action!



Bike share comes to La Crosse

DRIFT Bike Share will start up in La Crosse this month. Koloni, an Iowa based sharing company, and La Crosse Neighborhoods, Inc. have created a partnership to launch the program.

Initially, 40 bikes will be located around the center city at eight designated docking locations sponsored by local businesses and institutions. Community residents and visitors will be able to access the bikes by downloading the Koloni app, creating an account and scanning the QR code on the bike.

Rental costs will depend on account type which includes a \$60 annual option and a pay-as-you-ride hourly option. In many communities with robust public transportation systems, bike share offers commuters and tourists "last mile" access to more locations and events. Details will be available at www.facebook.com/driftcycle

Help

We need help with our newsletter! Can you write about what's happening in your community, submit calendar or action items, or interview local Sierra Club members or activists in your county? Help make the newsletter better and more useful! Please email CRSierraClub@gmail.com

WCC Spring Hearing - April 12



Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC) and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will once again hold the annual Spring Hearings online. The public will have the opportunity to provide input on the natural resources proposed rule changes from the DNR, and advisory questions from the Natural Resources Board (NRB) and WCC through the online input option which will open on April 12, 2021, at 7 p.m. and will remain open for 72 hours.

To view this year's questions, visit the Conservation Congress web page: dnr.wisconsin.gov/about/wcc/springhearing Register through the Sierra Club to get a reminder when voting time comes and a copy of the club's Wisconsin Voter Guide. Visit tiny.cc/WISC-ConsCongress to register.

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WisCorps Position Open

WisCorps in La Crosse is hiring a Director of Conservation Corps Programs. The Director will be responsible for all current programming and staff, including training, risk management and safety, projects and logistics, and budgetary responsibilities. Application deadline is April 9. WisCorps is devoted to ensuring equal employment opportunity. For details, please visit www.wiscorps.org/directorofccp

Input on second daily train

The Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago (TCMC) Intercity Passenger Rail Project adds a second daily round-trip passenger train on the 411-mile corridor between Chicago, Illinois and Twin Cities (St. Paul and Minneapolis) in Minnesota. The TCMC Service will follow Amtrak's existing long-distance Empire Builder route. The new service will complement the existing Empire Builder schedule, providing travel flexibility with both a morning and mid-day departure from Chicago and St. Paul.

The additional daily intercity passenger rail round-trip will integrate with the existing Hiawatha Service schedule. The additional frequency will also facilitate existing and planned intercity bus and shuttle connections to communities located off the rail corridor.

Extinction: The Facts

A new documentary series by Sir David Attenborough is highlighted in a recent article in Sierra, the magazine of the National Sierra Club. (www.sierraclub.org/sierra/sir-attenboroughs-extinction-facts-shows-how-things-got-so-bad)

"You won't see epic migrations and breathtaking wilderness ... Viewers learn that 1 million species face extinction, the insect apocalypse threatens global food production, and climate change and pollution are accelerating these threats."



Echoing the call for urgent change, a recently-released report from the United Nations Environment Program concluded that, "our global food system is a primary driver of biodiversity loss," with agriculture alone being the identified threat to 24,000 of the 28,000 (86%) species at risk of extinction. The report says a reform of food systems is "urgently needed," including moving toward more plant-heavy diets, reducing food waste, protecting land rather than converting it to food production, and farming in a more nature-friendly, biodiversity-supporting way, limiting the use of inputs and replacing monoculture with polyculture farming practices. Read more at: www.unep.org/resources/publication/food-system-impacts-biodiversity-loss

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation is seeking public input on this project by April 9. To learn more, visit wisconsindot.gov/Pages/projects/multimodal/tcmc.aspx

Other plans, to get train service into Madison and to get a train from St. Paul to Eau Claire, are also underway. Read more about the West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition's plans at www.westwisconsinrail.org

Amtrak is 47 percent more energy efficient than car travel and 33 percent more efficient than air travel according to the 2019 U.S. Department of Energy Data Book.

