



# Sierra

Newsletter of the Coulee Region Group

MARCH 2021

*"If an indigenous woman from humble beginnings can be confirmed as Secretary of the Interior, our country holds promise for everyone." - Rep. Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior nominee*

## **March 18 at 6 p.m. online** **Transit Talk with Sen. Brad Pfaff**

**Co-sponsors: CRSC, La Crosse Area Transit Advocates, La Crosse Municipal Transit Utility, and Citizen Action of Wisconsin Driftless Co-op**

**Register for link at [tiny.cc/lata-pfaff](https://tiny.cc/lata-pfaff)**

Join us on Thursday, March 18 from 6 to 7 p.m. for an online forum with State Senator Brad Pfaff. Senator Pfaff serves on the Senate Committees on Transportation and Local Government, Agriculture and Tourism; Economic and Workforce Development; Universities and Technical Colleges; and Utilities, Technology and Telecommunications.

We'll hear from Senator Pfaff about the budget and the Climate Task Force recommendations regarding public transportation. He may also touch on the effects of COVID-19 on public transportation operations, new technology--from electric vehicles to public transit apps, and the role of a robust public transportation system in providing equitable access to jobs, education, recreation, services, and life for all regardless of location, wealth, health, age, and ability. There will be time for participants' questions, too.

Please JOIN US! Register at [tiny.cc/lata-pfaff](https://tiny.cc/lata-pfaff) You will also be able to submit a question for Senator Pfaff at this registration site. This is a Cisco Webex event, accessible by computer, smart phone, tablet, or by dialing in from any phone for those who register and receive the link.

## **March 3 at 7 p.m. online** **The Clear Water Farms Program** **On-Farm Sustainable Water Management**

**Hosted by Chippewa Valley Sierra Club**

**Register at [tiny.cc/CVSC-Clearwater](https://tiny.cc/CVSC-Clearwater)**

Nitrate pollution from agriculture is pervasive across Wisconsin with about 42,000 wells and 300 public water systems exceeding safe levels of nitrates, affecting rural and urban populations alike. The Clear Water Farms Program, developed by Madison-based River Alliance of Wisconsin, works with farmers to develop aggressive and documentable improvements to on-farm water management. Working with River Alliance, Miltrim Farms, a large dairy in Marathon County, became the first farm in North America to achieve certification on the rigorous Alliance for Water Stewardship's International Standard.

Michael Tiboris, Clear Water Farms Director for River Alliance, and David Trimner, fourth-generation farmer and General Manager of Miltrim Farms, will discuss practice changes and the long-term management plan instituted to minimize Miltrim's impact on the Eau Pleine River watershed and look ahead to implementing this process for whole watersheds and supply chains. Join us to learn about River Alliance's trailblazing approach to ensure that Wisconsin farms have a clear path to put their commitment to water stewardship into action.

RSVP at [tiny.cc/CVSC-Clearwater](https://tiny.cc/CVSC-Clearwater) for Zoom access information.



## Solar on Schools

SOLS ([SolarOnLaCrosseSchools.org](http://SolarOnLaCrosseSchools.org)) is a group of La Crosse parents, teachers, students, and community members working to help the La Crosse Public School District install solar panels at its properties. The group educates about the importance of transitioning quickly from fossil fuels to renewable energy and helps raise money, with tax-deductible donations made to the La Crosse Public Education Foundation, specifically for district solar projects.



A 2019 study by Stanford University concluded that, *“taking advantage of all viable space for solar panels could allow schools to meet up to 75 percent of their electricity needs and reduce the education sector’s carbon footprint by as much as 28 percent.”* ([news.stanford.edu/2019/05/02/happens-schools-go-solar](http://news.stanford.edu/2019/05/02/happens-schools-go-solar))

Benefits of solar on schools include:

- \* reduced greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution;
- \* tremendous energy cost savings for school districts;
- \* new and exciting learning opportunities;
- \* green energy career and job-exploration opportunities;
- \* visibility of the projects in neighborhoods increases conversations about renewable energy and provides a model for those considering installing solar.

SOLS founders include members of the Coulee Region Sierra Club’s Ready for 100 team, and they used the Sierra Club Climate Parents’ 100% Clean School Districts toolkit to help start their initiative. See it at [www.sierraclub.org/climate-parents/100-clean-energy-school-district-organizing-handbook](http://www.sierraclub.org/climate-parents/100-clean-energy-school-district-organizing-handbook)

The Midwest Renewable Energy Association also hosts a Solar on Schools resource at [www.midwestrenew.org/solar-on-schools](http://www.midwestrenew.org/solar-on-schools) which offers tools, advice, guidance and resources, including a great webinar, “The Benefits of Solar for WI K-12 Schools.”

If you would like to start a Solar on Schools group in your community, please email [crsierraclub@gmail.com](mailto:crsierraclub@gmail.com) for help and support. You may also visit the SOLS website and email them at [SOLSSooner@gmail.com](mailto:SOLSSooner@gmail.com).

### La Crosse Energy Survey

The City of La Crosse is working on its Energy Action Plan. If you live in the City of La Crosse, please consider completing the energy survey found at [tiny.cc/laxenergysurvey](http://tiny.cc/laxenergysurvey) by March 5.

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## Support On-Bill Financing in La Crosse

By Ben Wilson, Citizen Action of Wisconsin

Residential carbon emissions are a major source of US greenhouse gases. Green home upgrades (like solar panels, new insulation and air sealing) help to reduce carbon emissions, save money on utility bills and create family supporting jobs in the green energy sector. Thousands of Wisconsin residents are unable to upgrade their homes because of up front cost, credit history or due to the fact they are renters. On-bill financing can address this problem.



On-bill financing allows utility customers to install energy-saving green upgrades at no up-front cost. Watch this YouTube video to learn how on-bill financing works:

[youtu.be/JxoApQkEhyA](https://youtu.be/JxoApQkEhyA) The utility pays for the upgrades initially and the home owner pays them back as a line item on their utility bill. Customers see a net saving right away on their utility bill. This clears the way for many more people to install green upgrades. It reduces carbon emissions, creates jobs in the green sector (America's fastest growing job sector) and provides consumers with a net savings on utility bills. On-bill financing even creates new public revenue streams through financing charges.

La Crosse could offer on-bill financing options through its public utility.

Please use this form to contact the mayor and city council and let them know you support an on-bill financing program through La Crosse's public utility: [tiny.cc/laxonbill](http://tiny.cc/laxonbill) For even more impact, send a personal email to the mayor at [kabatt@cityoflacrosse.org](mailto:kabatt@cityoflacrosse.org) and the council at [zccouncilmembers@cityoflacrosse.org](mailto:zccouncilmembers@cityoflacrosse.org)

## March 2 - The Big Share!

Join us for a fun-filled Facebook live event Tuesday, March 2 over the lunch hour. We'll have trivia questions, chat with a variety of guests and share a special storybook video created by volunteers. The event is part of the Wisconsin Chapter's participation in the Big Share, a 36-hour virtual fundraising event hosted by Community Shares of Wisconsin.

The Meet and Greets will include leaders speaking about protecting the gray wolf, increasing access to public lands, protecting safe drinking water, and stopping tar sands pipelines in Wisconsin.

We'll be on Facebook live from 11:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Hop on anytime to join the fun. As an added incentive, gifts made during the Big Share Power Hour between noon and 1:00 p.m. will be matched and can help us win additional cash prizes from the Big Share sponsors.

Sign up for a reminder here: [tiny.cc/WiSCBigShare](https://tiny.cc/WiSCBigShare), visit our Big Share page: [bit.ly/SCFbigshare](https://bit.ly/SCFbigshare), follow us on Facebook and Twitter and #CSWBigShare and help build the buzz by sharing our posts.



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## March 30 - Cover Crops

On March 30 at 7 p.m., Sinsinawa Mound Center and Grant County Rural Stewardship will host an online presentation: "Cover Crops for Soil Health and Increased Profits." The one-hour event will feature Adam Kramer of Black Sand Granary followed by a panel of area farmers who have been utilizing cover crops on their land. There will be an opportunity for questions following the presentation.

Black Sand Granary is located near Patch Grove, Wisconsin in Grant County. Adam has described their mission as reducing tillage, using cover crops, incorporating as many "cash" crops as possible in rotation, and rehabilitating perennial vegetation when possible. Their progressive approach ensures customers get the most out of their land while still keeping it fertile and productive for generations to come.

The event is open to the general public. There is a \$10 registration fee to attend and the deadline to register is Monday, March 29th at 4 p.m. Register online at [www.sinsinawa.org/moundcenter](http://www.sinsinawa.org/moundcenter) or by calling 608.748.4411 extension 811.



## March 5 - Aldo Leopold Event

"Coloring the Conservation Conversation" is the title of this year's featured speaker, J. Drew Lanham.

A native of Edgefield, South Carolina, J. Drew Lanham is the author of "The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature," winner of the Reed Award from the Southern Environmental Law Center and the Southern Book Prize, and was a finalist for the John Burroughs Medal.

The lecture will take place on March 5 at 7 p.m. and accessible, free, on the Viterbo University D.B. Reinhardt Institute for Ethics in Leadership Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/viterboethics](https://www.facebook.com/viterboethics)



The Coulee Region Sierra Club is working on the idea of offering an Environmental Stewardship Award to high school students in our region. If you are a current or retired educator or someone with an interest in this topic and would like to help with this initiative or serve as a resource person, email [crsierraclub@gmail.com](mailto:crsierraclub@gmail.com)

## Coulee Region people

This month we talk to CRSC members, **Donna and Dave Swanson** of Platteville.

### What got you interested in the environment?

*Dave has been interested in hunting and fishing since he was a teenager. Together, we have enjoyed camping, hiking and birdwatching for many years. In recent years, we became concerned about the effect of manure spreading from large industrial dairy farms and the potential impact on surface and ground water. This issue took center stage in our lives when a new CAFO housing 1,700 dairy cows plus calves and other stock was built about a mile from our home in 2017.*

### What got you interested in the Sierra Club?

*The fact that Sierra Club advocates for issues that we are concerned with brought us to join the organization about 10 years ago.*

### What are your environmental concerns?

*Clean water is really our primary concern in our area. We live in a very rural area so air quality is only an issue during manure spreading season and our neighbors tell us that comes with the territory. We expected the smell of manure to a certain extent because we both grew up on farms, but the recent introduction of large volume liquid manure spreading has brought not only increased noxious smells but the potential for groundwater contamination. We have started testing our well water annually and so far we don't have an issue but we've read about the problems in Kewaunee County and know that these issues could arise, especially if the number of industrial farms continues to increase.*

### How have you worked on those interests?

*With Dave's interest in trout fishing we are also aware of the negative impact manure spills have on streams. We joined the Water Action Volunteers a few years ago and began monitoring a stream in our area. Unfortunately, we've had to give that up. Heavy rains a couple of summers ago changed the dynamics of the spot we were monitoring and we felt it wasn't safe for us to continue there.*

*We do continue to work on the issue of water quality and any other environmental issues that affect our area through Grant County Rural Stewardship. We are part of a small group of people that started the organization three years ago primarily in response to the new CAFO that was built near us. Since that time we've held public events about issues related to CAFOs and the use of*



*regenerative agriculture as a way to protect and improve our environment. We've presented movies at the local library and theater that dealt with sustainability and farming hand-in-hand with nature.*

*Our county joined with two neighboring counties two years ago to conduct a study of well water quality in our area. The research is intended to learn more about contamination of rural wells and the factors and sources that create the contamination. We held a public presentation featuring two of the researchers following the completion of the first part of the study.*

*As public hearings occur that are related to permits or legislation connected to water quality, we attend or submit testimony to make our concerns and feelings known to the State departments or legislators involved.*

### What are your favorite outdoor activities?

*We have changed our camping from tents to trailers and RVs but still enjoy finding spots with picturesque views, good trails and quiet opportunities to enjoy nature. The Wisconsin State Parks are always great with generous, nicely screened sites and good hiking trails. Close to home, we also take advantage of the Army Corps of Engineers Grant River Recreation campground near Potosi. Before moving to Southwest Wisconsin we lived near Stevens Point. There are several nice county campgrounds in Portage and Marathon counties. Dave has been checking out some of the trout streams in Southwest Wisconsin and during the winter, he's had some luck with ice fishing on backwaters of the Mississippi and Wisconsin Rivers.*

### Do you have a 2021 environmental wish?

*Our wish would be that government agencies and legislators take a much stronger stand to protect the environment and public interests, rather than those of private entities and corporations.*

## Budget Season

On February 17, the Wisconsin Sierra Club applauded Governor Evers' 2021-23 biennial state budget proposal. The proposal includes funding for climate programs, drinking water programs and more.

Wisconsin Sierra Club Chapter Director Elizabeth Ward issued the following statement:

"Budgets reflect our priorities, and they put our values into practice. Governor Evers' budget demonstrates that this administration is committed to moving Wisconsin to action on both equity and climate. Sierra Club recognizes this budget as one of the strongest we've seen, and we specifically applaud the funding of critical steps on environmental justice, meaningful progress on clean and equitable transportation initiatives, the resourcing of efforts that will reduce carbon emissions, and extensive action in service of a clean energy economy.

"While the overall package of the budget promises significant progress on our core values, Sierra Club is disappointed by green lighting of the I94 expansion. The highway proposal is not in line with the commitment to social justice and climate action that we see in the rest of the budget."

Some of the highlights from the proposed budget:

- Environmental Justice - the budget funds a long-overdue office on Environmental Justice and funds an equity officer in each state department.
- Focus on Energy Funding - The Governor's budget doubles the funding for Focus on Energy, the state's renowned energy efficiency and clean energy program. In addition to increasing the funding, the budget proposes targeting some of the Focus on Energy funding towards low-income residents.
- Land Protection - the Budget recognizes the need to protect our natural landscapes and use them as an opportunity to mitigate climate change. The budget includes the reauthorization of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship fund and funding for the study of climate sequestration through old-growth forest protection.
- Drinking-Water Protection - the budget works to address Wisconsin's water pollution crisis by funding lead pipe removal, funding programs to target run-off pollution and well compensation. The budget proposes increasing fees on factory farms, requiring that the polluters help fund oversight.
- Supporting Local Leadership - the budget includes funding for local action on climate change, including funding for staff, research, and local initiatives. The budget also restores local control on certain plastic containers.

- Parks Access - The budget proposes allowing all fourth graders to have free admission to State Parks, mirroring the Federal Every Kid Outdoors program. This will help ensure cost isn't a barrier for kids to visit Wisconsin state parks.
- Biking and Walking Infrastructure - the budget increases funding for the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) for biking and walking infrastructure and restores condemnation authority for non-motorized trails.

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You can watch the Governor's budget address on YouTube at [youtu.be/VM\\_4zNT5EsI](https://youtu.be/VM_4zNT5EsI) You may recognize a few Sierra Club members in the presentation! The online format allowed the Governor to include clips from the virtual Budget Town Halls, including comments from our own chair, Kathy Allen, who said, "I think it's time for us to take bold action, and to really do everything we can. ... We could be investing in pilot programs in both rural and urban areas that not only combat climate change and build resilience, but also provide jobs and training for communities that desperately need them right now."

While the Governor's budget is a step in the right direction, there are still issues to be addressed, including his inclusion of the "Zombie Highway," an expansion of I-94 in Milwaukee that will cost more than \$1 billion and is opposed by a broad range of groups from social justice communities to environmentalists and transportation equity advocates.

The Governor's budget address is the first step in a months-long process, so our lobbying and advocacy work is not over! If you are willing to help Sierra Club achieve a state budget that protects the things we care about, please visit [tiny.cc/jmcbudgetteam](https://tiny.cc/jmcbudgetteam) to sign up for regular action items, about one per week, throughout the state budget process (now through summer 2021),

For more information about how the Wisconsin budget process works, visit the Wisconsin Budget Project at [www.wisconsinbudgetproject.org/budget-toolkit](https://www.wisconsinbudgetproject.org/budget-toolkit)

### Help

Need help with 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](mailto:CRSierraClub@gmail.com)