



News of the
Southeast Gateway Group
of the Sierra Club

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SOUTHEAST SIERRAN

Rate Increases as WE Energies Transitions to Natural Gas?

WE Energies announced plans in February of 2024 to spend \$1.2 billion to convert its Oak Creek Power Plant from coal to natural gas. The plant is expected to be up and running by summer 2028. WE Energies also plans to spend \$200 million on a new liquified natural gas storage facility in Oak Creek, and \$280 million on a gas-fired reciprocating internal combustion engine near Paris Generating Station. An additional \$183 million will be spent building a pipeline connecting these two facilities. WE Energies aims to retire the coal units at Oak Creek by the end of 2025 as part of their transition to clean power and has stated these new gas plants are needed for the transition. The natural gas plant in Oak Creek will serve primarily as a backup source for WE Energies renewable energy sources, according to officials.



WE Energies' Paris Generating Station in Union Grove:
A natural gas based combustion turbine plant.
www.we-energies.com/company/pdf/Paris.pdf

WE Energies has also stated that they expect to have a higher energy demand in coming years with the Microsoft Data Center Development in Mount Pleasant and other industrial developments. Meanwhile, Microsoft has announced that they have partnered with National Grid Renewables to build a new 250 megawatt solar project in Wisconsin that will begin operating in 2027.

Several environmental groups, including the Wisconsin Chapter of the Sierra Club, are not excited about WE Energies' plan. "Gas plants are an additional fossil fuel, so adding more fossil fuel infrastructure does not get us to a clean energy future that we so desperately need," said Cassie Steiner, a senior campaign coordinator for the Wisconsin Chapter of the Sierra Club.

At the same time, WE Energies has requested from the Public Service Commission (PSC) permission to increase rates. This will be the third increase in three years. Rates would increase by 6.9% in 2025 with an additional 4.8% in 2026. These increases disproportionately hurt lower income communities living in Milwaukee and surrounding areas. These communities already experience an energy burden (the

percentage of household income spent on energy costs) double that of wealthier and predominantly white communities in Southeastern Wisconsin. Wisconsin's Citizens Utility Board (CUB), whose goal is to provide a check on monopoly utility companies, notes that Wisconsin investor-owned utilities already get the fifth highest profit rates in the country and that costs have doubled in the last 20 years.

As stated by Cassie Steiner, "Yet another costly increase from We Energies that will disproportionately burden Black, Hispanic, and Latinx Milwaukeeans. We Energies is raking in profits, increasing rates, and proposing expensive fossil fuel projects that only further harms their customers. Issues of climate justice and racial justice go hand in hand, and there is no greater example than Milwaukee. While We Energies CEOs' pockets are being padded, Milwaukeeans are paying the price."

The Citizens Utility Board (CUB) encourages homeowners, renters and small businesses to voice their concerns to the PSC about WE Energies plans this fall when there will be opportunity to make public comments on the proposals. As Tom Content, executive director of CUB has stated, "From the filing it appears that We Energies wants to have its cake and eat it too: They want to make money on all the new solar and natural gas plants they're looking to build, and they want to keep profiting on coal plants long after they're shut down," continued Content. "Saddling hundreds of millions of dollars of additional costs on customers who are already paying among the highest prices in the Midwest for electricity is something the Public Service Commission will need to evaluate very carefully." CUB provides information on how to make comments on this case, PSC case 5-UR-111, at this site:

<https://cubwi.org/we-energies-rate-case-for-2025-and-2026/>

Source materials for this article listed at bottom of page 6.



The Oak Creek plant occupies 1,000 acres of lakeshore and uses an average of 6,000-6,200 tons of coal daily.
www.we-energies.com/company/pdf/oak-creek-power-plant.pdf

GET INVOLVED → START HERE!



<https://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/line-5>

Kenosha Comment Writing Party: Tell the Biden Administration, ~ NO to Line 5! ~

**Tuesday, July 16, from 5-7 PM
Southwest Neighborhood Library
7979 38th Ave, Kenosha, WI 53142**

Every day, illegally in trespass, Enbridge Energy, a multi-billion dollar corporation, is dangerously moving oil through northern Wisconsin violating the Bad River Bands sovereignty. Now, Enbridge is trying to expand that pipeline for years to come, putting at risk the water, fish, plants and animals, humans, and more, with the threat of an oil spill.

The Biden Administration is taking comments on Enbridge's proposal and they need to hear about the dangers of the pipeline and the need to deny permits for the reroute. To help get as many comments as possible, we're hosting a series of comment writing parties throughout Wisconsin.

Join us on July 16 to get an overview of the reroute and to learn what the Army Corps is considering. Get answers to any questions you may have and have fun with others as you write your comments for the government. For more information contact Heather Wittrock: heather.wittrock@sierraclub.org or (608) 256-0565

Saturday, July 20

Perhaps you're not in the market for a new car right now, but you may be interested in "driving smart" to maximize your fuel mileage. *Drive \$mart Wisconsin* will host an event on July 20 from 10-2 at the Greenfield Public library (5310 W Layton Ave) featuring presentations on how to drive smarter, plus a display of various electric cars on site. Find details on their facebook page: facebook.com/groups/drivesmartwi



It's Cooler on the Water! An Educational Boating Event

Join us for a discussion about common water pollutants, their impact on local freshwater wildlife habitats, and how you can reduce your impact on these ecosystems. Try your hand at trivia to take home pollution-preventing prizes. Then head out in kayaks and canoes for some paddling on the Root River and see what wildlife you can spot.

The cost per participant covers their boat, oar, and life jacket rental. All participants will also take home a free goodie bag of items and information to aid in water pollution prevention. Presenters include Root-Pike WIN, SEWRPC, and UW Parkside Associate Professor of Biology, Dr. Jessica Orlofske.

Registration is required. Children must be at least 10 years old and accompanied by an adult. \$10 per person is due upon arrival. Cash, check, and card accepted. Located at the **Root River Environmental Education Community Center**, 1301 W 6th Street in Racine

RAIN DATE: Thursday, July 25th from 5:30 - 7:30 pm. Should there be inclement weather, cancellations will be emailed by 3:30 pm on event day. **To register visit:**

www.tinyurl.com/wfwpaddle2024





Paddle on the Root River Tues., August 13, 5-6:30pm

Join the UW-Parkside Library and the Root River Environmental Education Community Center (REC) for a paddle

to celebrate the **Great Lakes, Great Read** initiative.

The books selected for this year are *The Best Part of Us* by Sally Cole-Misch and *The Water Walker* by Joanne Robertson.

Registration is required. Tickets are \$10/adult & \$5/child and due upon arrival. Cash, check, & credit card accepted. The cost per participant covers their boat, oar, and life jacket rental. For ages 10 and up and children must be accompanied by an adult.

Learn about other *Great Lakes, Great Read* events at: <https://greatlakesgreatread.org/>



Join the Sierra Club Wisconsin Book Club!

Our Book Club meets virtually to discuss a book related to climate change, environmental justice or equity in the outdoors.

Our next discussion will be held on Tuesday, Sept. 3 from 7-8 PM

We will be discussing *Paper Valley: The Fight for the Fox River Cleanup* by David Allen and Susan Campbell



When government scientist David Allen arrived at his new job site in the 1990s, the Fox River near Wisconsin's Green Bay was dominated by hulking paper mills, noxious industrial odors, and widespread ecological damage. Confronted by his lack of resources to force the politically powerful "Paper Valley" polluters to fix their mess, Allen proceeds against all bureaucratic odds in building a \$1 billion case against the paper company bosses.

Two small but vital players, Allen along with journalist Susan Campbell were relentless in bringing the case to the public at the time. They do so again in this book: an act of radical transparency to uncover the intrigue that nearly blocked the cleanup behind the scenes at US Fish and Wildlife, Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources, and the US Environmental Protection Agency.

In a rare and major environmental win, the Fox River became the site of the largest polychlorinated biphenyls cleanup in history, paid

for by the paper companies rather than taxpayers, to the tune of \$1.3 billion, and completed in 2020. This true story of struggle, perseverance, and success inspires hope for environmentalists who strive to restore natural landscapes. The detailed account given in this book is meant to inspire and offer practical knowledge and solutions for those fighting similar opponents of environmental cleanup and restoration.

Find our event page by searching "Sierra Club Wisconsin Book Club" on Facebook, or on the Sierra Club Wisconsin website. Sign up to receive the Google Meet Invite or phone number to call in. Please join us for as many book club reads as you would like, and feel free to drop in even if you haven't finished the book or are only able to attend one discussion during the year. Books are selected from a list of recommendations from book club attendees. Contact Cassie at cassie.steiner@sierraclub.org with questions.

Don't miss out! Get on our e-news list!

SEGG e-news are emails with notices about club events and outings in between receiving the regular newsletter. Sign up on the SEGG website or email Laura Schulz at schulztwin2@gmail.com.

Don't Let **RANGE ANXIETY** Stop You from Purchasing an Electric Car



Various studies have found that more than 80% of consumers hesitate to purchase an electric vehicle due to their concerns about range anxiety, or running out of charge when there is no place to charge. The level of anxiety is impacted by not only the purported range of the electric vehicle, but the driver's personality traits, understanding of the different dynamics that impact the car's driving range, and the driver's own experience with having "run out of gas."



This map shows the Round 1 awarded locations for new charging stations based on Wisconsin's Electric Vehicle Infrastructure plan.

Similar to driving an internal combustion engine car (ICE), electric car drivers adapt to the timing of stopping for an electric charge (just as they did for gas) as they get to know their car. And similar to driving an ICE car, many electric vehicle drivers opt for the safe route of recharging when they have depleted 80% of their range—instead of the electric equivalent of rolling into the gas station on fumes.

Research and anecdotal conversations with electric vehicle owners indicate that once a person makes the transition to an electric vehicle, most of the range anxiety goes away. Some of our SEGG electric car owners have explained that they have become comfortable with planning ahead and using their car's charging station search feature or mapping apps to assist with that planning.

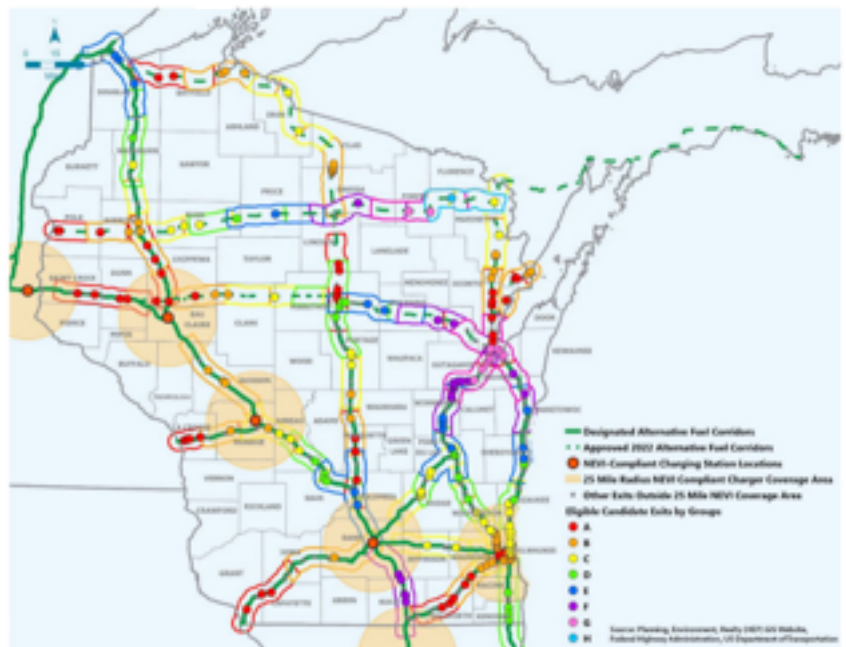
Tesla-specific charging stations, typically with 8 charging ports, are usually located near stores or restaurants which allow the driver to take a break on longer trips while the car is charging. Adapters are commercially available for non-Tesla electric cars to allow them to use the nation-wide Tesla charging network.

Even hearing that, many potential electric vehicle owners will be happy to hear that Wisconsin has a plan to build additional electric charging stations along the state's "Alternate Fuel Corridor" or AFC system. The National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) formula program was established under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to distribute \$7.5B nationwide in funding for the purpose of building out electric vehicle networks across the country. Wisconsin will receive \$78.5M for electric vehicle charging stations along federally designated Alternate Fuel Corridors (AFC). NEVI requires charging stations every 50 miles on the AFC.

Once these chargers are in place, it will be even easier to get around Wisconsin with an electric vehicle. Considering that electric car batteries have an expected life of 8 to 20 years, coupled with the new requirement of a charging station every 50 miles (or less), range anxiety may soon be coming to an end for these routes in Wisconsin.

Please check this website for the maps and the whole electric vehicle infrastructure plan:

<https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/projects/multimodal/electrification.aspx>



This map shows the NEVI plan build out for Wisconsin.

CONGRATS to The REC!



A 2024 Grant Recipient

One of the grants SEGG awarded this year was to the Root River Environmental Education Community Center (REC), located at 1301 W 6th street in Racine. The REC is a partnership between the University of Wisconsin-Parkside and the City of Racine, with a mission to provide community members with opportunities to explore the Great Lakes and connected ecosystems through recreation, education, demonstration, and research. Activities at the REC are coordinated by the College of Natural and Health Sciences at UW-Parkside.

The REC requested funding from the Southeast Gateway Group to support the Root River Explorers Program, environmental education field trips for underserved youth groups in summer 2024.



In the Root River Explorers Program, participants experience a 1.5-hour canoe/kayak trip and a 1.5-hour environmental education workshop on water quality and the Root River Watershed or invasive species.

Funds from SEGG were able to support two offerings of the Root River Explorers Program. Both sessions were filled by 4th graders from Frank Elementary School in Kenosha. The students had a great time kayaking and learning about the Root River.

Thank you SEGG members for supporting this program!

Touring the Racine Wastewater Treatment Plant

SEGG wants to extend our sincere thanks to the staff at the Racine Wastewater Treatment plant for providing a very informative look at the inside operations that treat our “wastewater” before returning it to Lake Michigan.

Our guide, Travis Gonzalez, very patiently answered all our questions about the multi-step process and left us with a few tips on how we can help keep this important infrastructure running smoothly.

We were reminded that “flushable” wipes may flush but they don’t break down in the system thus have to be removed in wastewater processing. We heard about basketball-sized grease balls in the system and the importance to keep oil and grease out of drains.

Did you know? Food ground up in your garbage disposal is actually good for the enzymes in the treatment system.

And please don’t flush bags of doggie doo-doo!

THANK YOU!



Thank you to our gracious guide, Travis!



Community Composting

Composting is a way of recycling organic materials into a valuable soil amendment. As we were reminded in our tour of the Wastewater Treatment plant, our home garbage disposal is a good way to recycle food waste while keeping those organic food items out of the land fill. (Please observe your disposal manufacturer's guidelines.)

Many people recycle their vegetable scraps through home compost piles to enrich their own home garden soil, but not everyone is in a position to set up a backyard compost pile. Not everyone has garbage disposals, either.

Yet, we are fortunate to have some community programs in and around Racine so that you can turn those peelings, wilted greens, coffee grounds and egg shells into an environmentally friendly compost.

1. If you're in the city of Racine, the city has a composting program that allows residents to drop off food waste at the City's Pearl Street site. You must register for this program and there is an annual fee. Contact the City Clerk at (262) 636-9171 for more information.

2. Sturtevant also has a program with a drop off site at the Sturtevant Village Hall at the green Compost Crusader bin. You must register with the Village Clerk and pay an annual fee of \$25. More info is available at: <https://www.sturtevant-wi.gov/community/page/composting-introduction-letter>.

3. Racine Interfaith Coalition (RIC) and the Racine Dominican Laudato Si' Action Team have teamed up to begin a new program with two pilot sites where food waste scraps can be dropped off.

The available locations are at North Pointe United Methodist Church on Erie Street and at Christ Church United Methodist at 5109 Washington Ave. Green Compost Crusader bins are found in the parking lots. This program requires you to register and pay an annual fee of \$25. A list of acceptable food items is provided with registration and more info can be obtained by emailing Dave Backmann at davebackmann@gmail.com.



For those interested in composting at home, including not just food scraps but also certain yard waste such as leaves and grass clippings, the DNR has a wealth of information about how to start composting at home in a publication at this website:

<https://apps.dnr.wi.gov/doclink/waext/wa182.pdf>

It's worth noting that even for those with a home compost system, it still may be useful to take advantage of one of these programs as there are

some items that cannot go into a home compost but may be included in a commercial grade composting program such as those run by Compost Crusaders. These items include cheese, cooked meat and seafood products including bones, bread products or candy.

Composting helps to keep food scraps out of landfills, decreasing methane emissions. A healthy compost also helps your soil to retain water, reducing erosion and allowing for less frequent watering of gardens. We hope you will find a method that works for you!

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Sources: "We Energies Oak Creek natural gas plant would be up and running by 2028" Evan Casey, Wisconsin Public Radio, April 9, 2024. www.wpr.org/news/we-energies-oak-creek-natural-gas-plant-2028
news.microsoft.com/2024/05/08/microsoft-announces-3-3-billion-investment-in-wisconsin-to-spur-artificial-intelligence-innovation-and-economic-growth/
"We Energies Files Third Rate Increase in Three Years; Marginalized Milwaukeeans Will bear the Brunt of Higher Rates" Megan Wittman, Sierra Club Press Release, April 15, 2024 www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2024/04/we-energies-files-third-rate-increase-three-years-marginalized-milwaukeeans
cubwi.org/we-energies-rate-case-for-2025-and-2026/ cubwi.org/we-energies-and-wisconsin-public-service-corporation-seek-800-million-rate-increase-for-2025-2026/

Save a Tree & See in Color!

Email schulztwin2@gmail.com to request a full-color, digital newsletter emailed instead of a paper copy.



Your tax-deductible donation helps us continue to "Explore, Enjoy and Protect" SE Wisconsin.

Checks can be made out to *Sierra Club SEGG* to be used towards any purpose, or to *Sierra Club Foundation* to be used strictly for educational programs and activities. Mail donations to: Jeff Sytsma, 3508 Washington Ave, Racine, WI 53405



SEGG encourages you to WRITE to your legislators on the issues you care about. Find your representative at legis.wisconsin.gov

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The newsletter of the Southeast Gateway Group is published quarterly by Group members. Please send articles, event submissions, photographs, corrections and/or comments to: Laura Schulz - schulztwin2@gmail.com

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White River Canoe/Kayak Recap

By Al Sommer

On May 19, four of us met at White River County Park in anticipation of a nice casual float down the stream of the White River from this park to downtown Lyons. It was a nice day, the river was a little high, but not intimidatingly so. *What could go wrong?!?*

This photo was taken before the start of the trip, while we are all still clean and dry. There was no indication that there were trees downed across the river requiring portages.

The first tree across the river caused one of us to upset and necessitated others to get out and chase a paddle downriver and then come back and help empty a kayak of a good portion of the river. Testimonial 1: iPhones can take a dunking. Testimonial #2: Al will purchase a waterproof phone case for the next outing!

At the next downed tree, all of us were required to get out at one side of the river and slog through 15 -20 feet of mid-shin deep mud, dragging the canoe or kayak over the trunk of the tree, and then re-entering the boat from mid-river.

These mishaps occurred in the first half of the trip and the rest of the trip was uneventful but beautiful; irises were in bloom, spring was expressing itself, temperatures were nice, even water temperatures (fortunately!)

Near the end of the trip the river goes under a bridge and there is a four-foot drop through a series of rocks. This was a real test of our navigational skills and we all passed successfully! Having conquered every challenge, we are eager to meet future river outings with greater confidence.



Pictured L to R: Ruth McGee, Ryan Iesl and Paul Ambro



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