



It's Our Nature

Newsletter of the Fox Valley Group of the Sierra Club - Wisconsin Chapter Vol. 24 Issue 1

Fox Valley Group Meetings

April 11, 2024 - 7:00pm

Recycling & Solid Waste

Girl Scout Building *(next to Bubolz Nature Preserve)*

4693 N. Lynndale Drive, Appleton

Jordan Hiller, Recycling and Solid Waste Program Coordinator for Outagamie County. He is responsible for driving sustainability initiatives within our community by developing and implementing innovative recycling and waste reduction programs.

May 9, 2024 - 7:00pm

Fireside Chat

Camping/Cooking in Wisconsin & Beyond

Girl Scout Building *(next to Bubolz Nature Preserve)*

4693 N. Lynndale Drive, Appleton

Bring a chair and join us around the campfire in the back of the Girl Scout building as we discuss getting outside, camping and cooking in the woods. We will have a display of tents, gear and cooking meals using stoves, dutch ovens or an open fire.

Bring a drink and your own utensils: plate, fork, spoon, to sample omelets, dehydrated meals, cobblers, foil dinners, s'mores, sandwich pies, hot dogs, maybe even make some ice cream.

Bring your ideas of favorite foods for the campground.
Share some of your favorite camping spots.

Do you have any used camping gear you are wishing to donate? Let us know. We are looking at making this available to others who are just starting on their camping experience, possibly having a gear swap/fundraiser in the future.

June 13, 2024 - 6:30pm

Evening Hike at Purdy Nature Preserve

Apple Creek YMCA

2851 E. Apple Creek Road, Appleton

We are not having our regular meeting in June so come out to this enjoyable intermediate hike. This unique parcel of land features wooded hills and ravines, open fields, restored prairie, ponds and wetlands, and pine plantations – all accessed through a network of approximately 3 miles of trails. We will be meeting at the Apple Creek Y parking lot, Sign up at sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley (click on the outings/meetings link) or contact Monny Hjerstedt, 920-558-0013

July, 2024 - No Meeting

August 8, 2024 - 6:00pm

Sierra Club Picnic

Plamann County Park - Chris Brandt Shelter

1375 E. Broadway Drive, Appleton

Come share your summer with fellow Sierrans. Grill will be provided. Bring a dish to pass, your own meat for grilling, beverages, and place setting.

Details and subject can change

Follow us at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley

www.facebook.com/foxvalleysierra

From the Chair

March 2024

Hello Fox Valley Sierrans

For many weeks now, our milder than normal weather has been coaxing us back outside. Red-winged Blackbirds have been back for some time and nest building is well under way, with many birds already sitting on eggs. Your Outings Team from the Fox Valley Sierra Group has been busy planning a wide variety of activities that will help you explore the natural beauty all around us. Be sure to check out the details inside.

Spring also brings a very important upcoming election. While the presidential candidates have already been selected "unofficially", please don't skip the ballot box on April 2nd. There are two referendums on state constitutional amendments, circuit court races, school boards to elect and other issues of local importance on the ballot.

Why are these so important? First, the two referendums could potentially have a far reaching impact on how future elections are conducted. Also, many municipalities are leaders on issues like environmental sustainability, public health, and social concerns. Policies that aren't getting national attention can get traction on the local level. Third, local elected officials represent fewer people, and therefore typically are more responsive to your personal/community's needs and interests. It can be easier to get your voice heard. Finally, many future state and national candidates cut their political teeth as members of school boards, city councils and local judiciary. YOUR vote helps to select what that candidate pool looks like for years to come.

Want to find out more? Start at Vote411.org for more information about state and local candidates and ballot initiatives.

See you at the polls on April 2nd and out and about during our busy spring and summer Fox Valley Group season.

Penny Paiser Wilson
Fox Valley Group Chair

Top 10 Decisions to Watch in 2024

from the Wisconsin Chapter of the Sierra Club

February 22, 2024 - Two months in and the stage is set for a decisive 2024. After years of work, multiple environmental decisions are expected that could make this a groundbreaking year for climate action. Add in a huge election and decisions about legislative maps and we are sure to see the ripple effects for years to come. Rest assured, we'll be busy educating and advocating for our water, land, wildlife and democracy, right down to the very last moment. Here are the top 10 things to watch in 2024.

10. Will wetlands protection be prioritized over a private golf course? - Late last year a court revoked Kohler Company's permit to fill wetlands to build a golf course at Kohler-Andrae Lakeshore, a fragile ecosystem that includes Kohler Andrae State Park. If the Kohler Company recognizes the damage their proposal could cause the lakeshore and chooses to walk away, this year could mark the end of this years-long battle.

9. Will the PSC finally address energy burden disparities? - The energy burden (the amount of your income you spend on utilities) of households in predominantly Black and Hispanic/Latinx neighborhoods is roughly double that of households in predominantly white neighborhoods in Milwaukee. The PSC will have a number of opportunities to address and reduce the disparity, including improving We Energies' low-income program, a rate case, and a pilot program that would cap energy burden for some of We Energies' most burdened customers. With WEC Energy Group's announcement that they will build out 3,000 megawatts of new, expensive gas, those decisions will greatly impact all WEC customers and could increase energy burden.

8. Will we see a boost in local, clean energy in WI? - Communities across Wisconsin continue to use the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and other programs within President Biden's Clean Energy Plan to invest in clean energy and further their climate goals. This year we'll continue to see new programs announced by the Biden Administration ensuring Wisconsin communities take advantage of these programs.

7. Will federal protections for wolves continue? - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced a plan to create a first-ever nationwide gray wolf recovery plan. That work will be ongoing throughout the year and could impact federal protections for our grey wolves in Wisconsin.

6. Will Wisconsinites get protection for their drinking water? - This year the Department of Natural Resources is creating new regulations to protect our water from lead pollution and is seeking permission from the legislature to move forward on protections from PFAS.

5. Will the civil rights investigation halt the I94 expansion? - Late last year the Federal Highway Administration opened a civil rights investigation into the proposal to expand the I94 highway in Milwaukee. The result of this investigation (submitted on behalf of over 30 organizations) could result in major changes to the project, including a repair instead of expansion.

4. Will local voices prevail? - Last year, Dairyland Power Coop applied for a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture program that would allow power coops to transition off of fossil fuels. At the same time, Dairyland continues to move forward with the proposal to build a gas plant on the shores of Lake Superior, despite local opposition.

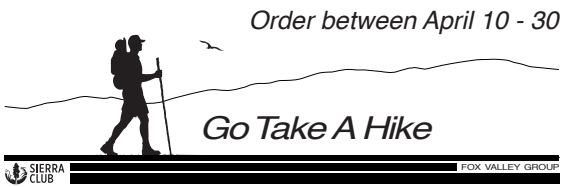
3. Will Enbridge's Line 5 be shutdown once and for all? - The fate of Enbridge's Line 5 pipeline, which jeopardizes the Great Lakes, our climate, and Tribal sovereignty, could be decided this year. While Enbridge is appealing the court order to shut down the pipeline by 2026, they are also seeking a workaround that would allow them to keep operating Line 5.

2. What will new maps mean? - Based on a Wisconsin Supreme Court ruling late last year the legislature was required to pass new legislative maps that do not give either party an advantage. In 2023 alone, we saw the legislature undermine transit funding, science-based wolf regulations, clean energy, and more. A new legislature could create many opportunities to see bold action on climate change like we need. Opportunities we've seen our neighboring states take advantage of.

1. Will a climate friendly president be elected? - Deadlines to address climate change, like the need to decarbonize the electric sector and conserve 30% of our land and water to protect biodiversity by 2030 are approaching. The next Presidency will be critical in determining whether we can achieve these goals.

Honorable Mention. Will Wisconsin accept clean energy from the west?: - A lack of transmission capacity has blocked clean energy from coming into Wisconsin. Some wind and solar farms in neighboring states have sat idle because there aren't transmission lines to connect to. For Wisconsin to get to 100% clean energy, we will need to invest in clean energy around the state, increase energy efficiency, and get some energy from out of state. This year, the Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC) will vote on two of these critical transmission lines.

If you'd like to participate in making sure the answers to these questions ensure a safe and clean future, check out our Volunteer opportunities at sierraclub.org/wisconsin



FVSG Spring/Summer Shirt Sale

Fox Valley Sierra Club is promoting a shirt sale to raise funds to support our club operations. We have a new logo design for 2024!

The proceeds from the shirt sale go to support our outreach programs in the Fox Valley, promoting the outdoors and protecting the environment.

The shirt vendor is Bonfire.com. The sale runs from April 10 to April 30.

Starting on April 10, shirt orders can be placed at URL: bonfire.com/fox-valley-sierra-club

Your order will be shipped directly to you from the vendor Bonfire. Orders estimated to arrive by May 20th.



Healthy Lakes, Rivers and Wetlands should be a goal for us all.

by Penny Bernard Schaber

As we welcome spring and a new growing season it is important to think about the health of all of our waterways. This would include the health of lakes, rivers and wetlands which have been impacted by many things, including urban and suburban development and agriculture and industrial development. Recreational uses also impacts our waterways through boating, fishing and hunting activities.

When looking at and learning about the health of our waterways, we should consider several aspects including, but not limited to, aquatic invasive species, water quality related to point source, and nonpoint source pollution including storm water or agricultural runoff.

One of the very important things to do for protecting our waterways is to learn about and plan to use buffer strips at the water's edge. Buffer strips help to control runoff and absorb excess nutrients and pollution. It is important to use native plants in the buffer strips as native plants have many beneficial aspects to them.

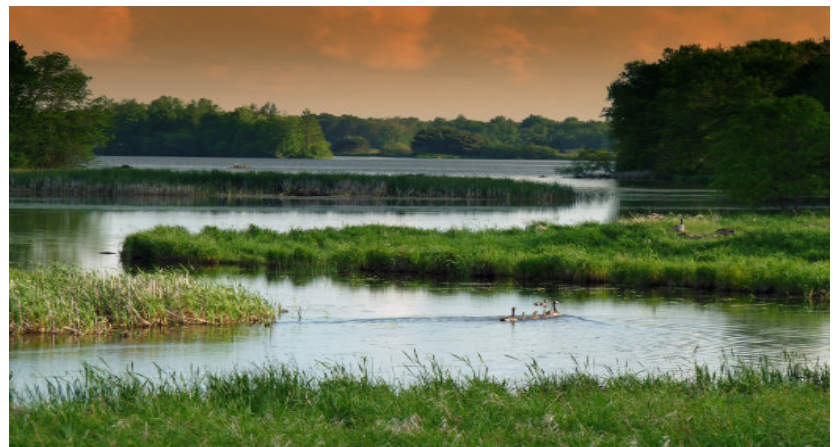
Here are two resources for Native Plant guides:

- Landscaping Alternatives for Terrestrial Invasive Flowers and Grasses (Publication number: NH-402)
- Landscaping Alternatives for Common Invasive Wetland and Aquatic Plants (Publication number: WY-110)

These brochures are available in print or online and can be ordered from the DNR at: DNRAISinfo@wisconsin.gov or the brochures and other information can be viewed on the Wisconsin Horticultural website at <https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/>

Taking care of our waterways is really important and is a main step in taking care of ourselves and our planet. Hopefully these resources are helpful to you.

This information was gathered from the Fall/Winter 2023 edition of Lake Tides the newsletter of the Wisconsin Lakes Partnership.



Annual Spring Hearing And Public Input Opportunity

The Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC) and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will once again offer their annual opportunity for the public to provide input on a variety of natural resource-related questions online starting at noon April 10 to noon on April 13, 2024.

The link will be placed on the WCC and DNR's Spring Hearing webpage and can be found at dnr.wi.gov by searching "Spring Hearings."

Volunteer Naturalist

Mosquito Hill Nature Center is looking for a Volunteer Naturalist to assist with group events throughout the year. Training will be provided. Contact Mike Hibbard or Amy Cutter at 920-779-6433 for more information.

April 27 • Saturday • 9:00am - 1:00pm

Earth Day - Tree Planting/Park Cleanup - High Cliff State Park

Celebrate Earth Day by helping the park plant trees and pick up debris. Bring gloves if you can; otherwise, the park will supply you with the other needed tools. Meet at the gathering space/upper pavilion. This event is hosted by High Cliff State Park & Friends of High Cliff State Park.

April 28 • Sunday • 11:00am - 2:30pm

Restored Wetland Tour on the Oneida Nation Land

We learned about the restored wetlands at our October 2023 meeting but needed to reschedule our tour due to weather. Spring will be a great time to see how the restoration project is improving water quality and habitat. We will leave from Appleton at 11:00, meeting at the park and ride lot on North Ballard St and Highway 41. The tour will last approximately 2 hours with a combination of driving and short walks on Oneida Reservation Lands. Limited to 20 people, please call the leader for details and to sign up for the tour. Penny 920-739-6041 or sign up on our website www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley

Our guide will be Tony Kuchma, Wetland Project Manager for the Oneida Nation. Alternate day June 1st if weather is bad.

May 11 • Saturday • 10:00am - 1:00pm

Barkhausen Waterfowl Preserve Hike

Join us for a 5 mile hike along the west shore of the Bay of Green Bay at the L. H. Barkhausen Waterfowl Preserve. There are 920 acres of forest, meadows and wetlands where prehistoric Indian tribes once hunted, fished, and camped. This natural area is home and refuge for a wide variety of waterfowl, wildlife, and plant species. Bring a lunch for afterwards if you want.

For more information and to sign up Contact Peter Jobe, pjobe1@gmail.com (use Subject: Sierra Club Barkhausen Outing) or by phone: 920-460-5915 (leave message). Or sign up using our site at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley

May 18 • Saturday • 9:30am - 2:00pm

Garlic Mustard Removal at High Cliff State Park

Join us as we pull out those nasty garlic mustard plants. Meet us at the Indian Mound Trail parking lot at 9:30. Bring a lunch, water and maybe gloves. We will work on the Indian Mound Trail in the morning, have lunch and then do some work in the afternoon on the Forest Management Trail. Easy hikes, moderate amount of work mostly bending down to pull out the plants.

-Sign up by May 16th. Monny Hjerstedt, 920-558-0013 text/call, mhjerstedt17@gmail.com

Or register at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley
Make a weekend out of it! Join Jo and myself Camping at the Family Campsite. We will be in campsite #41 Friday and Saturday night.

Reserve a site at <https://wisconsin.goingtocamp.com>.
Reserve soon because sites go fast.

Spring Summer Outings

June 8 • Saturday • 7:00am - 8:30am

Bubolz Dawn Hike

Who is awake at Bubolz Nature Preserve early on a summer morning? Come take a hike with the Fox Valley Sierra Club to find out! Meet in the parking lot at Bubolz Nature Preserve, 4815 N Lynndale Dr Appleton, WI 54913 at 6:50 AM. The hike will be 1½ hours. The nature center will not be open at the time of this hike; however, there are toilets available outside the building. This activity is open to all ages; no special skills are needed. Bring a friend, your family, your partner, and a desire to enjoy the outdoors at the beginning of the day!

Equipment: Tennis or hiking shoes. Optional: binoculars, water bottle, hiking poles. Any questions and to register, please contact Marjie at marjiefendt@gmail.com, please reference Bubolz Hike. 920-951-8501 or signup at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley

June 13 • Thursday • 6:30 am - 8:30am

Evening Hike Purdy Nature Preserve - Apple Creek YMCA

Instead of our regular meeting in June we hope you will come out for a hike. This unique parcel of land features wooded hills and ravines, open fields, restored prairie, ponds and wetlands, and pine plantations – all accessed through a network of approximately 3 miles of trails. This is an intermediate hike with some hills. We will be meeting at the Apple Creek YMCA parking lot, 2851 E. Apple Creek Road, Appleton, Sign up at sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley (click on the outings/meetings link) or contact Monny Hjerstedt, 920-558-0013

July 10 • Wednesday • 7:15 am - 8:45am

Evening Loop the Lake Walk

3.5 mile walk along the Fox River as the sun goes down. The Loop the Little Lake trail meanders along the Fox River through 3 communities. It is a popular trail, easy to walk! A great number of birds can be seen on and off the water. We will meet at Fritse Park. 937 N Lake St Neenah, Wi. Let's park in the overflow lot across the street from the park. We will head south along the trail to begin and finish up by crossing the Trestle bridge into Fritse Park.

Any questions and to register, please contact Marjie at marjiefendt@gmail.com, 920-951-8501 or signup at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley

For more information or additional outings,
check out our facebook page
or our website -
sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley
Click on the Meeting and Outings Link

July 27 • Saturday

9:00am - 11:30am

Reforestation Camp Hike

Join us for a 5 mile hike The Brown County Reforestation Camp is an area of almost 1,600 acres located in Brown County, Wisconsin. We will be hiking the OAKS trail.

Meet in the parking lot of the Reforestation Camp, campground parking lot (also access to the Lodge and Adventure park), 4418 Reforestation Rd, Suamico, WI 54313 at 9 AM, Saturday July 27, 2024. The hike will be about 2 hours. Picnic tables available, bring a lunch for after the hike if you want. This activity is open to all ages and is for moderate to advanced levels. Dogs are allowed, leashed and bring waste bags. This is a rain or shine event (with exception for severe weather warnings).

Equipment: sturdy hiking footwear, water bottle, optional: lunch, rain gear, binoculars, bird guide.

Contact Peter Jobe, pjobe1@gmail.com (use Subject: Sierra Club Reforestation Camp Outing) or by phone: 920-460-5915 (leave message). Or register at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley

August 10 • Saturday

9:00am - 12:00pm

Bike Devils River State Trail

Join us for a 15 mile bicycle ride along Devil's River State Trail. This is a gravel trail, along an old railroad track from Denmark to Francis Creek, WI.

This is a good weather event (we will reschedule for rain or severe weather warnings).

Equipment: functional bicycle, water bottle, optional: lunch, rain gear, binoculars, bird guide.

We will meet at the end point, the parking lot adjacent to the trail in Francis Creek near the city park/ball fields, to leave a return vehicle before traveling to the start point in Denmark. The trailhead in Denmark features a depot-shelter building and has parking and restrooms available. The trailhead is located at the intersection of Pine Street and Railroad Avenue in Denmark. In Manitowoc County, parking is available adjacent to the trail in Francis Creek near the city park/ball fields.

A state trail pass is not needed to use the Devil's River State Trail.

Contact Peter Jobe, pjobe1@gmail.com (use Subject: Sierra Club Devil's River Bike Ride) or by phone: 920-460-5915 (leave message). Or register at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley

The Fox Valley Group has been active hiking, having fun at the holiday party, snowshoeing, being creative at our painting fundraiser and learning about some of nature's creatures.



Wisconsin's Land Trusts: A Source of Pride Dealing with Political Challenges

by Karen Van Offeren

How much do you know about Wisconsin's land trusts? I must confess that prior to writing this article, I knew very little. But what I've learned has made me aware that this is another important area of concern, both environmentally and politically.

Let's start with a little background information.

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program

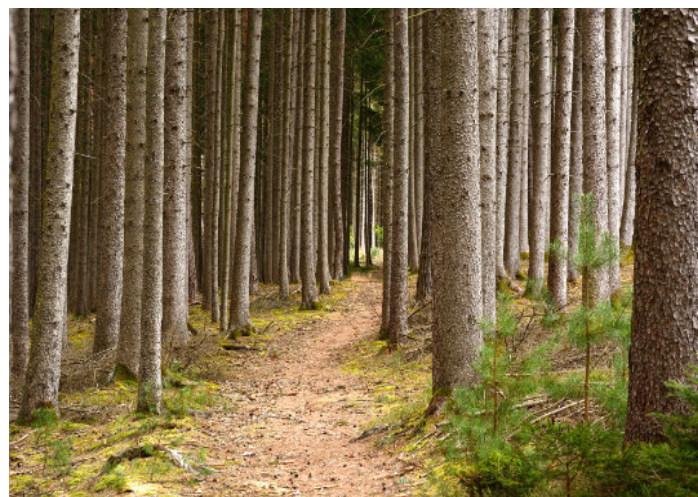
The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program is an environmental conservation program that protects lakes and streams, conserves working forests, secures critical wildlife habitats and provides important opportunities for outdoor recreation across Wisconsin.

It's a behind-the-scenes program that makes it possible for conservation organizations and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to purchase land, build trails, maintain parks and boating facilities, and take care of our shorelands.

Since 1989, the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program has awarded grants to local governments and nonprofits. These grants are matching grants, meaning that every dollar that the state invests in a conservation project through this program is matched by the same amount or more by the recipient.

To date, Wisconsin has protected over 600,000 acres and improved more than 1,000 parks, trails and waterways with the use of funds from the stewardship program. A visit to the knowlesnelson.org website confirms that "about 17% of land in Wisconsin is protected in some way."

However, this is less land than is protected in Michigan and Minnesota. It is also far from the goal of protecting at least



30% of Wisconsin's land, the percentage "scientists say we must do in order to ensure our land and water can be resilient as the climate changes." (see <https://knowlesnelson.org/impact>)

Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance for Land Trusts

Gathering Waters is the statewide alliance for land trusts. Since 1994, it has provided technical assistance, training and continuing education for member land trusts.

While serving as a unified voice for the land trust community and building capacity for permanent land protection, Gathering Waters also promotes better public understanding and support of land trusts and encourages public policies that strengthen Wisconsin's land and water conservation efforts.

(see <https://gatheringwaters.org>)

Current Political Environment

As a primary advocate for the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, Gathering Waters has voiced concerns over increased challenges in awarding grants supporting Wisconsin's land protection efforts.

One of the challenges when applying for a Knowles-Nelson grant has always been that at least half of the project costs need to be financially covered by other sources. But recently, more hurdles have been put in place by Wisconsin's legislature.

A new law now requires that all Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program grants for land purchases north of Highway 8 need to secure a vote of approval from every local government within the project area. These approvals must be granted before land conservation projects are eligible for state funding.

This means that a single town, village or county can veto funding for any conservation project, no matter how significant, for any or no reason.

Gathering Waters has also learned that funding from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program has reached a 20-year low. The program is supposed to provide \$33 million in funding each year, but only \$14 million was released to land protection projects in 2022.

Why such a reduction in funding? Anonymous objections by members of the Legislature's Joint Committee of Finance have held up individual projects and made it risky to apply for grants.



Political actions such as these severely complicate and constrain Gathering Water's ability to build capacity for permanent land protection.

Recent Successes

In January, it was announced that funding for the 70,000-acre Pelican River Forest conservation easement was approved. This is a huge success!

Back in November 2022, the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee had blocked Knowles-Nelson funding for the Pelican River. What followed was an amazing example of grassroots advocacy for the project. Many individuals, organizations and government agencies came together to finally secure this project's success.

It has also been announced that the Wisconsin Supreme Court will consider the Wisconsin Department of Justice's complaint that the Joint Finance Committee's practice of allowing a single, anonymous lawmaker to block any Knowles-Nelson grant for any reason is unconstitutional. If the court agrees with the DOJ, the Joint Finance review

process could be significantly reformed. Gathering Waters sees this as a major step forward for Wisconsin's conservation efforts. They note that arbitrary objections to worthy conservation projects have bogged down Knowles-Nelson funding for years.

Finally, two additional conservation projects have been awarded Knowles-Nelson grants. First, the Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance was awarded a \$1.5 million grant permanently protecting 330 acres of endangered bird and monarch habitat in the Koshkonong Prairie.

Second, the Town of Westport, in partnership with Groundswell Conservancy, was awarded an \$800,000 Knowles-Nelson grant to protect nearly 100 acres near the shores of Lake Mendota.

Upcoming Challenges

Gathering Waters sees the next year as critical to Wisconsin's conservation efforts.

Not only do the current political challenges need to be addressed, but the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program is only funded through June 2026.

That means working with Wisconsin's legislators to ensure the renewed funding is included in the 2025 state budget. The current goal is to secure reauthorization of the program for 10 years and to restore funding that has been cut from the program over the past decade.

There's much work to be done and much support needed!

If you'd like to better understand the importance of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, please explore the knowlesnelson.org website.

If you'd like to stay informed and/or get involved with Wisconsin's land conservation efforts, please look up Gathering Waters. You can find their website at <https://gatheringwaters.org>.

Support your Fox Valley Sierra Group

Help us Explore, Enjoy and Protect through monthly meetings, outings, service projects, education, social media and published newsletters.

Consider a Donation <http://teamsierrawi.rallybound.org/FoxValleyGroup>

**Or mail to
Fox Valley Group of the Sierra Club, 567 Oak St., Neenah, WI 54956**

Thanks to all who stepped up and donated to us. Much appreciated!

Fox Valley Sierra Group
Of the John Muir Chapter of the Sierra Club

567 Oak Street
Neenah, WI 54956

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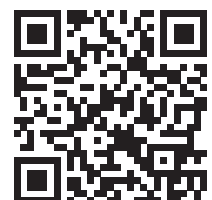
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outings, programs and events by checking out our website at
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