

# Sierra Club Moshannon Group

December 2024  
Issue 4



Penn State Professor of Climate Dynamics, Chris Forest  
at an apartment parking lot EV charging station in Gothenburg

In This Issue:

**Capitalism, the  
Election, and the  
Environment**

**The Chair Speaks:  
On Mental Mapping**

**Old Crow Wetland  
Update**

**Accumulation of  
Merit (and peace) in  
Nature**

**Moshannon Group  
Executive Committee  
Election Ballot and  
Candidate  
Statements  
(Vote by Jan. 5!!)**

## Excom Member Kelly Forest Finds Sustainable Culture in Gothenburg, Sweden

By Kelly Forest

*Editor's Note: Gothenburg, Sweden is a city of approximately 605,000 people, located mid-way up the southwest coast of Sweden on the North Sea – due east of the northern tip of Denmark.*

I have been on a sabbatical with my husband for the last four months. The first two months were spent in Gothenburg, Sweden and it has now become my inspiration city. Our dependency on fossil fuels must continue to decrease if we are to secure a future that is not fraught with intense heat events, fires, extreme u

droughts, flooding and more intense storms. Gothenburg has created a system of transportation that allows you to explore the area without the use of fossil fuels.

There are clearly marked bicycle lanes and walking paths around the city for people who like to go car-free. You can rent a bike at many different places in the city. There are green roofs over the bike racks. The bus and tram systems are all-electric and there are charging stations for the buses at two local bus stops. The trains that take you to the suburbs or to different parts of the

country are all-electric. The parking lots at all apartment complexes have at least two EV charging stations for EV owners.

We have the ability, the technology and the need to get these things for our community. And we are, slowly.

Which one of these ideas excites you? For our community to continue to move towards a fossil-free future, we need all hands on deck. Find your passion, mix in your skill set, find the cause that makes you feel empowered and go to work! Happy 2025.

# Capitalism, the Election, and the Environment

By Steven Lachman

Back when I was a political science major in college, I viewed capitalism as a complete evil, and thought either socialism or communism were the only just alternatives. It was an either/or proposition. The wisdom of age has told me that such absolutes don't reflect the human condition. The incentives of the capitalist system *can* promote innovation and human achievement. Socialist governments *can* be authoritarian and *can* destroy the environment as thoroughly as capitalist ones.

Traditional economies may have their place but are difficult to scale up to a world of eight billion people. For a humane world, we need to shed our rigid attachment to a particular ideology and adopt positions that benefit the broader good.

With that said, I'd like to discuss how capitalism resulted in a Trump win and what this version of capitalism portends for the environment. There are, of course, non-economic reasons for the election outcome – racism, sexism, the psychological need for a “strong” leader, Second Amendment rights, the loss of an outspoken and independent press, immigration, objections to President Biden's Gaza policy, and opposition to abortion. But this discussion is confined to economics.

Donald Trump's biggest constituencies are, ironically, diametrically opposed: the wealthy and the downtrodden working class. It's easy to understand why the wealthy class voted for Trump. They prosper most from capitalism. Capitalism concentrates wealth in those who can invest in capital, which is why we have billionaires while fast food workers still earn \$12.00 an hour. A Trump administration promises lower taxes for the ultra-rich and reduced regulation – which translate into short-term profit for the investor.

The reasons for the working class support of Donald Trump are more complex. Capitalism has alienated this group. The Horatio Alger myth gives everybody the hope of a bright and wealthy tomorrow. The truth of the matter is that upbringing (which includes the socioeconomic status of the family), intelligence, and personality place limits on upward mobility (as do race and gender). The failure to thrive of the working class – especially the rural working class – has made them angry Republi-



cans have seized on this discontent by blaming government as the source of working class woes. Because Democrats favor more government intervention, they are portrayed as the bad guys – even though the Democrats are more likely to support programs to help the poor and redistribute wealth. Because Democrats are afraid to criticize capitalism, they have failed to educate the poor about the true

source of their poverty.

Speaking of education, a theory suggests that capitalism only supports enough education to produce the next generation of workers. It is not interested in education that makes the most of individual potential, except for an elite few needed to innovate. Inner city and rural schools tend to be severely underfunded and that creates a vicious cycle of poverty. And while there has been a recent increase in the emphasis in school STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) programs, there has not been a similar increase in the teaching of civics and analytic thinking. Consequently, much of the working class lacks educational tools to rationally evaluate the candidates.

The education problem goes one step further. It has created emotional resentment by the less educated working class against the

*Continued on Page 3*

*Capitalism (continued from Page 2)*

more educated urban middle class. Part of Donald Trump's brilliance has been his use of simple (and often grammatically incorrect) language in his speeches. The working class identified with this manner of speech. Kamala Harris sounded Harvard educated and thus she became "the other" to working class voters.

The concentration of wealth under capitalism had another effect on the election – it enabled the wealthy to have a disproportionate influence on the outcome. Case in point, Elon Musk spent more than a quarter of a billion dollars supporting

Donald Trump's election. No wonder Trump appointed him to lead (along with Vivek Ramaswamy, whose net worth is about \$1 billion) the government "efficiency" department. The conservative Supreme Court secured the influence of big money on elections with its 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission*, in which the court ruled that corporations were "persons," for First Amendment purposes, and therefore could not have their political donations limited.

Unfortunately, the capitalism-only approach has dire consequences for the environment for the following reasons:

(1) Capitalism always seeks to increase wealth – i.e., to grow. If we had endless resources, that would be fine. But we don't. We

don't have endless oceans to absorb pollutants, endless atmosphere to absorb CO<sub>2</sub>, endless landfills to receive our waste, endless rain forests to produce the oxygen we breathe, endless minerals and petroleum to manufacture products, endless land upon which to grow crops and build houses, or endless trees from which to make our paper and cardboard. Jared Diamond wrote a book about what happens to societies who exceed their carrying capacity. Fittingly, the book is titled

*Collapse.*

(2) Capitalism focuses on the short term. If you look at the stock market, its gains and losses are based on estimates of profits for the very near future. No one is looking at impacts to society fifty years from now. And because those short-term profits determine where growth investment is made now, the market gives little or no consideration to long-term environmental consequences.

(3) Capitalism is consumptive. Capitalism could not produce all the products it does if there were no one to consume those products. From an early age,

we are inculcated to value material possessions and creature comforts that have nothing to do with our survival or advancement as human beings. Think about that this holiday season. Few of the gifts you give or receive will be recyclable or reusable. For the sake of fun and status, we thoughtlessly consume resources and returning waste to our environment.

(4) The ownership of natural resources, including land and water, means that those who don't own those resources have no say about the disposition of the Earth's future. And those most hurt by this fact are the generations not yet born, who will face severe shortages because of the rapacious greed of those who own those resources now.

Unfortunately, there is no

serious discussion these days about alternatives to free-market capitalism. It has become our state religion. We have lost sight of the purposes of an economic system. Those purposes are to produce well-being and to elevate humanity. When capitalism becomes an end in itself, we forget that purpose. The tail wags the dog.

Even before Donald Trump was re-elected we were rushing headlong toward environmental disaster. His election just means the brakes are off.



**Free market billionaire capitalists  
Donald Trump and Elon Musk**



# The Chair Speaks. . .

## on Getting Lost - and Found

By Doug Mason

Something told me last year that 2024 was going to be awful. Personally, it was worse than I could have imagined, but it is almost over now and I'm still standing. Thank you to my good friends and family. There were times I felt lost. But getting lost can be a good thing. At least when it involves Nature.

I took a class in "Tropical Ecology" when I was a student at the University of Pennsylvania. We spent a few weeks in Costa Rica, mostly at Guanacaste National Park in Spring 1986. We had to do a mini-study, and I chose to research territorial behavior of anole lizards (sometimes mistakenly called chameleons) in the deciduous tropical forest. Late one hot afternoon, I fell asleep while watching the reptiles. I awoke in total darkness.

I decided I would only get lost if I wandered in the moonless woods, and risk stepping on a venomous snake. So I decided to sit it out and wait for morning. Large things crashed through the bush around me. Probably deer, peccaries or tapirs, but I thought...Jaguar? Mountain Lion? Senses are magnified imagination runs wild when one communes with Mother Nature under such

circumstances.

I have found great solace in the Scotia Barrens of Centre County (State Gamelands 176) less than two miles from my home. Rather than mope in 2024, I head out to Scotia and bird watch, take a walk, forest bathe, whatever. One day, I headed down an unfamiliar trail, and took a few turnoffs. I soon realized I had not done a very good job of remembering my way back, so I decided to plod along I came to a familiar place.

Giuseppe Iaria, a professor of cognitive neuroscience at the University of Calgary observes that the brain might form some kind of cognitive map when "place cells" in the hippocampus fire at certain locations. But such mental maps to help recognize places also depend on other brain cells: directional cells, which help with orientation by firing when looking one way versus another; border cells that help with spatial recognition, which fire when walking around the boundaries of a space; and grid cells, which fire at regular intervals and generate a grid-like mental map to help with spatial awareness.

All these cells work together to help animals make sense of where they are. Recent research

research also points to the existence of time cells, which help us locate our memories not only in space but in time.

"The hippocampus seems to be a central clearinghouse for understanding where we are in the world," says Colin Ellard, a professor of psychology at the University of Waterloo in Ontario. "Ideally placed near the center of your brain, it receives a huge number of inputs and helps create the story of where you are and how you got there."

So that's where the magic happens. But how does it happen? The strategy we most commonly use in getting around is procedural memory. Akin to muscle memory, it lets us, say, drive to work while listening to the radio. We don't need to think - we're on autopilot. "It's a system for the brain to keep up without using higher cognitive functions and becoming exhausted," says Iaria.

The cognitive map allows us to link up locations in our minds to form spatial understanding of our surroundings. Because it's dynamic, you can still direct yourself to the target location. In the woods, "the cognitive map is what's going to save your life," Iaria says. When you rely on



A trail map of the Scotia Gamelands

procedural memory, you can go out in the dark, but as soon as you get off the trail - say there's a downed tree blocking it - suddenly you don't know your way back.

A cognitive map is more robust - and made stronger each

*Continued on Page 5*

time you move around in it. But these maps don't always keep us from getting lost, says Ellard. "Often they only have a vague resemblance to reality, the way a subway map is a boiled-down geometric map."

But whether you're walking in a forest or up a mountainside, holding course can be extremely difficult. It relies on a skill we humans aren't very good at, according to Ellard. Called path integration, it gives animals information about how far they've gone from a starting place by keeping track of and integrating their own motion over time.

Unfortunately, if we rely too much on GPS, "we are going to lose some of those (navigational) skills," Iaria says. The brain is constantly optimizing. That's useful if you want to pick up a new skill - or learn new directions. "But the bad news is that the brain does not like to waste resources, Iaria says. If you're not using those important skills, the connectivity that supports that behavior is not there anymore. "It's use it or lose it," notes Iaria. "If there's brain function, it's there for a reason. If there's no function, it gets reorganized into something else."

My journey eventually ended at the ClearWater Conservancy office in Patton Township. After a conversation with the new Director, Elizabeth Crisfield, about all the great work the Conservancy is doing, I bought the second edition Purple Lizard Map for Scotia. My 74-year-old brain depends on my iPhone for software...may as well carry hard copy too. Happy Holidays to all!



## Old Crow Wetland Update: The News Ain't Good

By Claire Holzner

On November 13, 2024 the three Smithfield township supervisors unanimously approved Rutters' plans to build a truck stop adjacent to and uphill from Old Crow Wetland in Huntingdon, at the intersection of Routes 22 and 26. Rutters now has a DEP stormwater permit and township approval for this project and could begin construction.

Members of the Coalition to Save Old Crow wetland are very disappointed in this outcome. Michael Fiorentino (a lawyer) and James Schmid (a wetlands ecology expert), both hired by the coalition, spoke at the Smithfield township meeting, describing the harm that is likely to come to the wetland from water pollutants as well as noise, light pollution, and litter from a new truck stop. After questioning four witnesses, Mr Fiorentino stated in his summary that the project does not meet all local ordinances and that by approving it, the township would abdicate its responsibility as set forth in the Pennsylvania Constitution Article I, Section 27 (the Environmental Rights Amendment). Mr. Fiorentino said that he was stunned that the township would approve this project and that we could "say goodbye to Old Crow wetland, which is a gem in this part of the state." Seven members of the coalition also spoke at the meeting, passionately describing the unique importance of this

small oasis of nature in a developed area and their fears for its fate.

The coalition is currently weighing options as far as the ongoing appeal of the DEP permit and a possible appeal of the township decision. Rutters first proposed this project in 2018, as part of general expansion plans throughout Pennsylvania. It was stalled due to community opposition and DEP's 18 month review process.

For updates on this issue, join the [Coalition to Save Old Crow wetland \(Huntingdon PA\)](#) | [Facebook](#)



Overlook at Old Crow Wetlands

### Section 201 of Smithfield Twp. Floodplain Ordinance

1. The intent of this chapter is to:
  - A. Promote the general health, safety and welfare of the community.
  - B. Encourage the utilization of appropriate construction practices in order to prevent or minimize flood damage in the future.
  - C. Minimize danger to public health by protecting water supply and natural drainage.
  - D. Reduce financial burdens imposed on the community, its governmental units, and its residents by preventing excessive development in areas subject to flooding.
  - E. Comply with federal and state floodplain management requirements.

# *Reflection: Accumulation of Merit for Nature Enthusiasts*

*By David Roberts*

Considering the inevitable setbacks President Elect Trump's administration will inflict on environmental stewardship I find myself developing plans to "keep my head down", "stop watching the news", and "just give up".

A bit of despair led me to recall fundamental precepts concerning the non-dual ultimate nature of reality and the conventional nature of reality as opposed to the "alternative facts" of the MAGA world view.

One glance at a bee buzzing on a flower or the sound of a brook's quiet babble is enough to remind me of the astoundingly complex web of existence beyond comprehension that we all share.

Eons without beginning have formed this incredibly beautiful world. The living Earth is a cherry on the top of our infinite Universe.

The long, long path of ever changing existence has had many downs, many setbacks however there have been many more ups and many, many positive actions which inevitably cause positive outcomes and a chain of cascading positive effects.

I will attempt to take the long view so difficult considering our brief lifespans and I will try to view President Elect Trump and his MAGA administration as a precious teacher showing me the importance of compassion, equanimity, and the beneficial nature of cause and effect.

The actions and support of Sierra Club members and the simple enjoyment of the outdoors by nature enthusiasts has resulted in an accumulation of goodness and positivity which provides tremendous merit returning positivity and long term benefits that are magnitudes above short term negative effects.

Take a few minutes away from negative thoughts to remember the progress we have made over the years on so many environmental issues.

There is much to gain through positive thinking and a rejection of any "us against them" mentality.

Accept a deserved moment of Accumulation of Merit while picturing a shower of rainbows, morning dew on a freshly opened flower bud, or a fragile bubble bursting in a sparkle of light.

Good thoughts and action have long term positive effects that far outweigh negative thoughts and actions.



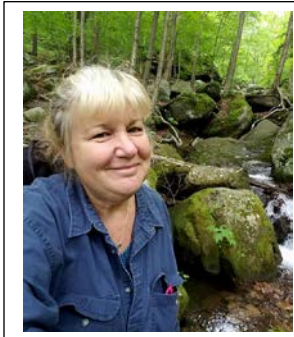
# MOSHANNON GROUP ELECTION TIME

Please  
Vote!!!

## MOSHANNON GROUP ELECTION BALLOT

Vote by placing a checkmark next to up to 4 Excom candidates. For family memberships, each member may each enter a separate checkmark. Ballots must be **received no later than January 5, 2025** at the following address: Elections, Sierra Club, P.O. Box 513, State College, PA 16804

\_\_\_\_\_ Laurie Barr    \_\_\_\_\_ Nancy Parks    \_\_\_\_\_ Doug Mason    \_\_\_\_\_ David Roberts    \_\_\_\_\_ Kelly Forest



### CANDIDATE STATEMENTS:

**Laurie Barr:** - I am a co-founder of Save Our Streams PA, Save the Allegheny and Defend Ohio. I have been working to protect the environment most of my adult life. I began my environmental advocacy work in the late 1970's as a member of Save Our Shores.

I was a member of The Allegheny Defense Project, protecting the Allegheny National Forest from commercial logging and oil and gas development.

In 2011 I turned my attention to raising awareness and promoting the plugging abandoned oil and gas wells, which contribute to climate change. My work has resulted in the plugging of over 51 abandoned Pennsylvania wells. I train citizens to find abandoned and leaking oil and gas wells. I received a Jefferson Award for my work with abandoned oil and gas wells.

**Nancy Parks** – I am a life member of Sierra Club and for 48 years have volunteered and served with Group, Chapter, Council of Club Leaders and the national Air Team. I have served as the Moshannon Group's Conservation and Air Quality Chairs and have filed comments on air quality issues like the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative,

methane controls, the Bellefonte distribution warehouse proposal and the Route 322 Transportation Corridor and revived "Short Takes on Clean Air" for the newsletter. I would be pleased to be re-elected to another 2-year term.

**Doug Mason** - I have been chair of Sierra Club Moshannon Group for five years and served on the Executive Committee for several years prior. I worked on my MA in Agronomy at Penn State, researching forages in Thailand and ran for Congress in central PA in 1980. I am board member of the Nittany Valley Environmental Coalition, State College Bird Club, Pennsylvania Native Plant Society, and the Centre County Greens. I am a retired soil scientist who worked for the U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service and the PA Dept. of Environmental Protection, and later in the nonprofit sector. I am an alternate for Patton Township on the Spring Creek Watershed Commission, and I co-chair the Commission's Education Committee. I have been involved in three nonviolent acts of civil resistance.

**David Roberts** - I have served as an Executive Committee member with the

**David Roberts** - Sierra Club Moshannon Group for several years, working on water quality and other environmental conservation issues and the fight against climate change.

In 2024 I helped Moshannon Group receive a Sierra Club Conservation Grant to conduct a survey for toxic PFAS compounds in surface waters of Centre County, a local hot spot for PFAS contamination from Aqueous Film Forming Foam used for airport fire safety training exercises.

I hope that through the accomplishments Moshannon Group has made in the area of water conservation I may gain your trust and support once again in this election. Thank you.

**Kelly Forest** – I have been on the Moshannon Group executive committee for four years and hope to continue the work I am doing for our community to help educate people and families on electrifying their homes with funds from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and to talk about our choices for living sustainably. While on the executive committee I received a grant to host a Lunch and Learn at Schlow Library in the spring of 2024. I have completed the Sierra Club training to be an Outdoor's Leader and I schedule and run trail maintenance hikes and abandoned well hikes in the area. I co-organize the Banff Film Festival at the State Theater.

Sierra Club Moshannon Group  
P. O. Box 513  
State College, PA 16804  
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
STATE COLLEGE, PA  
PERMIT NO. 21

---

<b>Chair and Programs</b>	<b>*Doug Mason</b>	<b>814 753-0598</b>	<b>ramakong1@gmail.com</b>
<b>Air Quality, Conservation</b>	<b>*Nancy Parks</b>	<b>814 349-5151</b>	<b>nancyfparks@gmail.com</b>
<b>Vice Chair, Banff Coordinator</b>	<b>Kelly Forest</b>	<b>814 441-8916</b>	<b>khforest@icloud.com</b>
<b>Tabling</b>	<b>Ernest Boyd</b>	<b>814 404-2275</b>	<b>ernestcboyd@gmail.com</b>
<b>Water Quality</b>	<b>Dave Roberts</b>	<b>814 769-0550</b>	<b>puzzlewuzzle.dr@gmail.com</b>
<b>Membership, Newsletter Editor</b>	<b>*Steve Lachman</b>	<b>814 384-7505</b>	<b>stewelachman@gmail.com</b>
<b>Oil and Gas Wells</b>	<b>*Laurie Barr</b>	<b>814-203-9772</b>	<b>lauriebarr59@yahoo.com</b>
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Ron Johnson</b>	<b>814 359-6841</b>	<b>rwjohnson1@outlook.com</b>
<b>Secretary and Chapter Delegate</b>	<b>Judy Tanner</b>	<b>814 542-8519</b>	<b>billtann@verizon.net</b>
<b>Activist</b>	<b>*Claire Holzner</b>	<b>814-907-1681</b>	<b>holzner@fastmail.fm</b>
<b>Electric Vehicles</b>	<b>*Rick McCorkle</b>	<b>302 382-0284</b>	<b>rmacsp5@gmail.com</b>
<b>Outings</b>	<b>Kevin Abbott</b>	<b>814 769-3644</b>	<b>kevingabbott@comcast.net</b>
<b>Clean Energy</b>	<b>*Ellen Foreman</b>	<b>240 418-9721</b>	<b>esforeman@yahoo.com</b>

\* Indicates Executive Committee Members

[www.sierraclub.org/pennsylvania/moshannon](http://www.sierraclub.org/pennsylvania/moshannon)