

N O R T H S T A R JOURNAL

NEWS ON OUR EFFORTS TO KEEP THE ENVIRONMENT HEALTHY FOR MINNESOTA COMMUNITIES

Summer/Fall 2024
Volume 44 Issue 2

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Illustration credit: Brian Bradshaw



SIERRA CLUB
NORTH STAR CHAPTER



From your Chapter Co-Chair:

This summer, I am filled with renewed optimism and excitement for the North Star Chapter. Serving as chapter Co-Chair alongside Tom Thompson continues to be an honor and a privilege. Our executive committee is more dedicated than ever to expanding our volunteer base and engaging more hearts and minds in our vital mission.

We are working to connect our outings and outdoor programs with our issue campaigns. We hope to cultivate a deeper sense of responsibility and get people involved while sowing the seeds for future leaders through youth leadership opportunities.

We also will increase our support of our volunteer teams. They are the lifeblood of the North Star Chapter, and we will ensure they have the support and resources to thrive.

Here's to a season of growth, engagement, and environmental stewardship.

Kamau Wilkins



Photo Credit - Constance Carlson



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The Sierra Club North Star Chapter is the Minnesota chapter of the national Sierra Club. We are a 501(c)4 organization.

The North Star Journal is published bi-annually by the North Star Chapter (Minnesota) of the Sierra Club. The North Star Journal has a circulation of 13,100 for the Summer/Fall 2024 issue.

Member subscriptions are included in annual dues to the national Sierra Club.

CHAPTER STAFF & LEADERSHIP

Find a list of chapter staff and volunteer leaders at sierraclub.org/minnesota/staff and sierraclub.org/minnesota/chapter-leadership. With any questions contact us at 612-659-9124, north.star.chapter@sierraclub.org.

POSTMASTER

Send address changes to: The North Star Journal, c/o North Star Chapter, 2300 Myrtle Avenue, Suite 260 St. Paul, MN 55114

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This publication is available on the web: sierraclub.org/minnesota/newsletter

NORTH STAR
JOURNAL

Helps our job efforts to keep the environment healthy for generations to come

Volunteers Wanted!



Youth experience the outdoors with Sanneh Foundation, in partnership with the Sierra Club North Star Chapter. Photo Credit - JR Hunte

Carol Engelhart

I recently volunteered to help JR Hunte, Sierra Club outings staff Program Coordinator, at the Sanneh Foundation in St. Paul. I think I truly received as much as I gave.

We were helping children, ages five to ten, learn directions using a compass. Starting in the gym, JR helped the children find true north. Then we took the activity outdoors to the community center grounds. Using directional degree numbers, the children searched for marker flags in trees and other areas of the park.

The children were thrilled to have a natural outdoor activity, and experienced a sense of accomplishment at being able to succeed in this task. The simple job of finding each marker filled the children with awe.

Science journalist Sandi Schwartz writes: "Awe allows us to transcend the ordinary, tests our concept of time and scale, gives us the sense of being small in a grand universe, and helps us to truly be in the moment." Awe, says Schwartz, broadens social connections, stimulates curiosity, expands creativity, and leads to more kindness and generosity.

Our outings program, led by dedicated staff and volunteers, is helping young and old to have fun, create common bonds, learn about the natural world, and experience personal power. And we're helping create new environmental stewards all over Minnesota. That's pretty awe-inspiring!

Carol Engelhart is a volunteer leader with the Sierra Club North Star Chapter's Outings Team.

JOIN A VOLUNTEER TEAM

CAPACITY TEAMS

Share your talents & skills with us.

- Communications, quarterly meetings
- Community outreach, ongoing events
- Outings, ongoing events

STEWARDS TEAMS

Research, monitor, and advocate for environmental issues.

- Forests & Wildlife, 2nd Mon. 7:00 pm
- Water & Wetlands, 2nd Mon. 7:00 pm
Campaign Teams lead grassroots advocacy campaigns on our most pressing issues.

CAMPAIGN TEAMS

Lead grassroots advocacy campaigns on our most pressing issues.

- Beyond Oil, 4th Mon. 5:00 pm
- Land Use & Transportation, 2nd Mon. 6:00 pm
- Clean Energy, 4th Tues. 6:30 pm
- Zero Waste, 1st Tues. 7:00 pm

GEOGRAPHIC TEAMS

Organize in your city for 100% Clean Energy and other local needs.

- Rochester, 2nd Mon. 6:30 pm
- Duluth, 1st Tues. 5:30 pm

OFFICE VOLUNTEERS

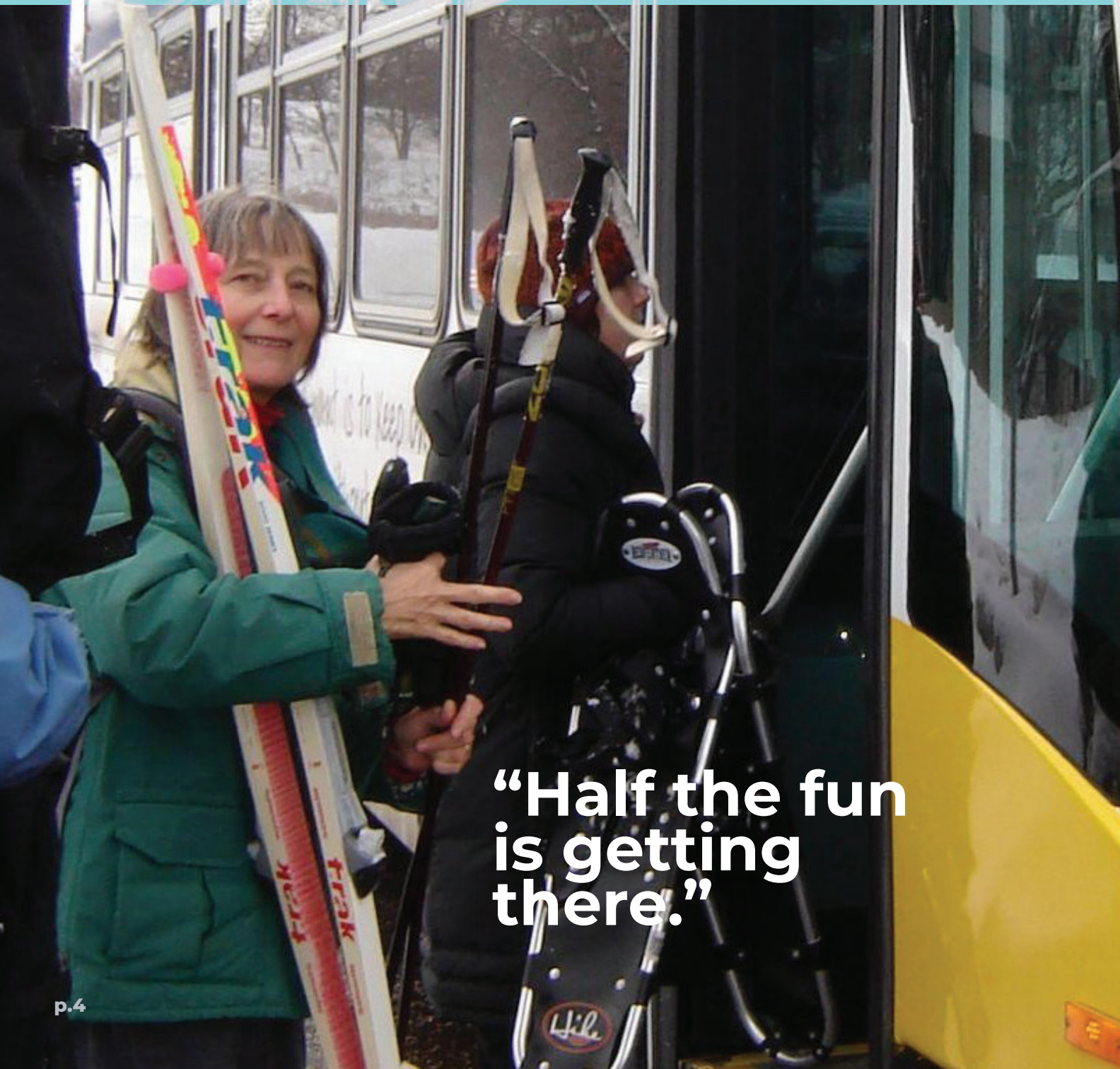
Support mailings, data entry, etc.

- Tuesday & Wednesday, 10:00 am - 1:00 pm

FOR MORE INFO ON JOINING A TEAM ABOVE AND UPCOMING MEETINGS, CONTACT US:

sierraclub.org/minnesota/volunteer-opportunities

TRANSIT TO TRAILS: THEN AND NOW



“Half the fun
is getting
there.”

Joshua Houdek

Over twenty years ago Deb Alper founded Sierra Club's Sprawl Committee, now the Land Use & Transportation (LUT) Team. Deb and others organized to protect treasured green spaces in the suburbs from sprawling development. But getting to many of these outdoor natural areas required driving. Transportation is the largest source of climate change pollution in Minnesota and the US, and a dangerous source of particulate and ozone pollution. So in 2008, committee members explored ways to reach the outdoors via transit. They called it "Transit to Green Space."

GOING GREEN

Deb and the team began organizing hiking, biking, skiing, and snowshoeing outings to regional parks with a twist. Instead of everyone driving, they arrived by bus or train. "Half the fun is getting there (and back)," said Deb. Planning these outings required a lot of detective work. Deb and other leaders quickly learned that many outdoor destinations were poorly served by transit, especially on weekends. And before smartphones, charting bus routes and transit accessible park entrances was a challenge, so they produced a handy fold out map.

Deb and others helped reveal what we now know well. Outdoor access provides numerous mental and physical health benefits. Just 20 minutes in a local park helps kids concentrate better in school. But not everyone is privileged enough to have access to a local park. People of color and low-income families in cities across Minnesota are significantly less likely to live near a park. Congress is beginning to take notice of this environmental justice issue. The Transit to Trails Act (HR 3092/S 1440) creates a grant program to fund local projects that make clean transit accessible for critically underserved communities.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Got 30 seconds? Ask your members of congress to cosponsor the Transit to Trails Act
2. "Go green" and get outside. Check the Sierra Club calendar at sc.org/mn to join a fun outing. Try getting to a park or trail by taking the bus or train. Get inspiration at sierraclub.org/minnesota/transit-green-space and share your adventure on social media using the hashtag #Transit2TrailsSeason.
3. Contact joshua.houdek@sierraclub.org or 612-259-2447 with questions or ideas.

Joshua Houdek is the Sierra Club North Star Chapter's Senior Program Manager for Land Use and Transportation. He loves getting outside and "going green" by riding his bike, a bus or a train.



A vintage Transit to Green Space map and Metro Transit GoTo card, circa 2008.
Photo: Joshua Houdek

TELL CONGRESS:

SIERRA CLUB

cosponsor the

Transit to Trails Act!

Support increased transportation access to public lands!

ASK YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS TO COSPONSOR THE TRANSIT TO TRAILS ACT:

BICYCLING AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:



AN INTERVIEW WITH THE PEDALING PASTOR

Photo Credit - Travis Norvell

Marya Hart

Travis Norvell, aka The Pedaling Pastor, presides at Judson Memorial Baptist Church in South Minneapolis. He began serious bicycling in 2013 and has since become an advocate for biking, pedestrians, and transit. His book "Church on the Move" draws on his experiences to advocate for church renewal and social ministry. We spoke in March. His remarks have been edited for brevity and clarity.

Biking puts me in touch with people and nature, and puts me in a good mood.

My job is full of death and dying, pain and frustration, but after a ride home at the end of the day, I arrive at my house clear-headed and lighter, and I can be present with my family and neighbors in ways that I couldn't if I was in a car.

I have a "Clergy" license plate on my bike and it's a great conversation starter. I love the interactions I have with other bike riders, walkers, or people on the bus. It may seem minimal but chit chat can make you more connected to your neighbor. Jesus was asking us to be more neighborly; that seems like a pretty biblical theme.



Photo Credit - Travis Norvell

Biking makes the heart softer, which enables a more authentic spiritual practice. You feel more present with someone when you are in motion with them. Most biblical stories, whether it's Abraham or Jesus, are walking stories.

People who look like me talk a great game about social justice, but how many hours do they spend with those whose backs are to the wall? We need a voluntary movement to support them. Without it, I don't understand how our beloved community ever comes to fruition. This is a call to be involved in a different way.

My hope is for people to think of houses of faith as places where they can learn to ride a bike. Our church hosts bike classes for community members, starting with the basics.

The environmental issue is so gigantic that we feel helpless. We need small joys to be able to continue the work. Biking is one small, but powerful joy.

Marya Hart is Chair of the Sierra Club North Star Chapter's Communications Team. She loves to ride her bike, garden, and make music.



Photo Credit: Mary Blitzer



Photo Credit: Melissa Wenzel

CHOOSING AN E-BIKE



Marya Hart

HOW'S BUSINESS?

This first year is going better than I anticipated. It's rewarding to resolve e-bike issues, especially for complex electrical or battery issues (my favorite to work on), as I genuinely want to see people enjoy their e-bikes.

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE WHEN BUYING AN E-BIKE?

Spending too much or not enough. The sweet spot for most e-bikes seems to be between \$1,800 and \$5,500. If you spend \$15k, there are diminishing returns, and below \$1,000 you might get a questionable battery, frame, brakes, or wheels. A good rule of thumb: Never buy a battery from Amazon, ebay or Chinese direct websites.

HOW CAN A CONSUMER EVALUATE COMPONENTS AND BUILD?

Read reviews of the components. If the bike is a good deal, with a wellbuilt and safe battery, great fitting frame and reliable motor, the cheaper components that come pre-installed could later be swapped with higher-end parts.

Interview with Cody Lettice

Cody Lettice is the founder and proprietor of Mobile e-bike Service LLC, Minnesota's first dedicated mobile ebike service center. He has years of experience in bike and e-bike repair, and offers services ranging from flat repair to rebuilding dead batteries. His website mobileebikeservice.com also features an ever-growing library of educational articles.

WHAT MARKETING TACTICS SHOULD PEOPLE BE AWARE OF WHEN SHOPPING FOR AN E-BIKE?

Proprietary electronics, since I'm a supporter of Right to Repair, as a safeguard to real environmentalism. And battery range is often exaggerated by around 10%-25%. "40 miles per charge" really means, "up to 40."

SHOULD A PERSON BUY FROM A LOCAL DEALER OR DIRECTLY FROM THE MANUFACTURER?

I lean towards physical stores. It helps local small businesses, and typically there's a level of quality involved. But not everyone will carry what you want, and sometimes that savings online is helpful, so there is a place for both.

DO YOU HAVE FAVORITE BRANDS?

I'm a fan of custom built units and choosing certain components for certain applications. Grin Technologies is my go-to for custom kits, parts, and their wonderful educational resources.

**EXPAND THE
WAY YOU GET AROUND.**



Mary Blitzer

You probably know that biking is good for you and the planet. A new meta-study found that physical activity is equal to or better than medication for treating anxiety or depression!

But maybe you haven't thought about the little joys that riding a bike can bring. Like taking in the sunshine on the water, feeling the wind in your hair, hearing birds sing, and experiencing other things you'd be missing if you were behind a windshield.

Statistics show that one-third of trips taken in vehicles are for distances of three miles or fewer. In the city you can cover three miles on a bike in about the same time it would take you to drive.



READY TO RIDE? HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED:

Check your bike. If your bike has been in the garage for the last year or more, I recommend doing the ABC check.

- **Air:** Squeeze your tires. They should feel hard. If they don't, you need air.
- **Brakes:** Check to make sure your brakes engage.
- **Chain:** Spin your chain to see if it works. If it's dirty or rusty, it might need cleaning and greasing.

Try riding around the block a few times. If something isn't working, head to your local bike shop. Be ready to pay for some repairs, as this is an investment in yourself and your environment. Purchasing a new or used bike is also an option.

- **Check yourself, bring a lock and have fun with your clothing and gear.** If you haven't been on a bike in a while, start with short rides (1 to 3 miles) and build up. Buy a good lock, such as a U lock, since many cable locks can be cut. Park your bike in a visible, high traffic location. Bring it inside whenever possible, especially overnight.

Have fun with clothing and gear. Get a new outfit, or find the perfect cup holder, phone mount, or speaker—whatever you need to make your ride enjoyable. If you need a bag, consider adding a bike rack instead of carrying a backpack. This has saved me from an achy, sweaty back.

- **Plan your ride and time.** Choose a destination that is within your comfort range. Use the cycling mode in Google Maps to find the best route and gut check it with what you know about your neighborhood. Take your first ride when you've got plenty of time and avoid rush hour.
- **Grab a friend or join a group ride or event.** If you are still feeling unsure, ask a friend who bikes to accompany you on your first ride or two. You can also look up community rides or classes, such as those hosted by Bike Minnesota or a local bike shop.

Mary Blitzer is the founder of Bike Anywhere, a bicycle commute coaching business to get you riding to more destinations. If you are looking for one-on-one support, like you might get from a personal trainer, she would love to help! Say hi at mary@bikeanywhere.org



WATER IS LIFE - LINE 5 THREATENS BAD RIVER

Photo Credit - Devon Young Cupery

Whitney Terrill

On a snowy, sunny Friday afternoon in March, we showed up to advocate for the shutdown of the Enbridge Line 5 pipeline—a crude oil pipeline running through Wisconsin and Michigan. The pipeline permitting process for Line 5 is happening locally through St. Paul’s office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. As Minnesotans, we have an important opportunity to resist Line 5 in our neighboring states.



Photo Credit - Devon Young Cupery

In Minnesota, we are familiar with the ways Enbridge approaches resistance to or opposition of an existing route. Enbridge pushes on despite concerns by people or organizations like the Sierra Club, or they offer a different route with the same problems. We see this pattern clearly in the re-route of a part of Line 3 in Minnesota as a new Line 93 crossing over 200 bodies of water and the Mississippi River.

But a pipeline is still a pipeline and we know how harmful they are to the environment. We were proud to show up and demand a shutdown and environmental review of Line 5. We hand-delivered over 8,000 petitions to a public relations specialist in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in St. Paul.

Line 5 is a 70-year-old, 645-mile continuation of a crude oil pipeline that is still operating in spite of the Bad River Band having canceled its contract over 6 years ago. The continued operations present a clear violation of tribal sovereignty of the Bad River Band and a threat to the Bad River and connected ecosystems that could be forever changed with an oil spill. The stakes are high!

In Minnesota, many of us from the Sierra Club North Star Chapter Beyond Oil team with Mn350’s Pipeline Resistance team showed up because we have been working collectively to protect water, to imagine a future without oil, and to demand a suite of needs related to shutting down Line 5. Please join us in continuing to demand accountability and a shutdown of Line 5 to avoid spills to the Bad River, and into Lake Superior at a minimum.

We invite you to join the Beyond Oil team for some upcoming actions, and try to see the movie “Bad River” to fully understand why we must remain committed to honoring treaty rights and to moving beyond oil.

For more info, visit the Beyond Oil Team on our website: www.sierraclub.org/minnesota/beyond-oil

Whitney Terrill is an Environmental Justice Organizer with the North Star Chapter. In her role with the Sierra Club, she works to strengthen and empower communities most impacted by environmental injustices.



LOCAL VICTORY! COMMUNITY FIGHTS BACK AGAINST MINNESOTA POWER'S PROPOSED NTEC GAS PLANT

Jenna Yeakle

This month, the Superior, Wisconsin City Council denied utilities' request for local permits to construct the proposed Nemadji Trail Energy Center. If built, this 625-megawatt (MW) gas plant would threaten the climate, human health, treaty rights, and a neighboring Ojibwe burial ground. It has been rewarding to be part of grassroots organizing to ensure that councilors made the right decision.

BACKGROUND

In 2017, Minnesota Power and Dairyland Power (later joined by Basin Electric Power Cooperative) jointly proposed to build a 625 MW fossil gas plant in Superior. The proposed one-billion-dollar facility would be built along the bank of the Nemadji River, only a few miles from Lake Superior, and close to homes, schools, and businesses. The Sierra Club opposes the plant because of concerns about climate change, public health, environmental justice, and the high costs of fossil gas to ratepayers.

A BIG WIN

After months of public input and strong opposition from Superior residents, Tribal leaders, and health professionals, the Superior City Council denied Minnesota Power's requests to vacate city streets, rezone land, and amend Superior's 2040 Comprehensive Plan to allow for the construction of NTEC.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The fight isn't over. There are still outstanding decisions at the federal level that could affect our campaign to stop

construction of the plant. This summer, Sierra Club and our partners will request that the Army Corps of Engineers conduct a full environmental impact statement (EIS) regarding the proposal. If built, NTEC would pose a threat to waters and wetlands critical for the ecosystem, community health, and climate change mitigation.

Additionally, Dairyland Power Cooperative applied to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for a \$350

million subsidized loan to build NTEC. Indigenous leaders have called upon federal leaders to deny the loan application. The proposed NTEC site borders the Tribal burial grounds of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa whose graves were relocated a century ago for ore docks that were never built.

The USDA has yet to issue a decision on the loan, although President Biden has pledged to end all fossil fuel subsidies in response to the climate crisis. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, NTEC alone would cause over \$2 billion in climate impacts by 2040.

The denial of permits is the first step toward stopping NTEC. As we push for the EIS and wait for a decision on the USDA loan, we're taking a moment to celebrate this win.

Jenna Yeakle is a Beyond Coal Campaign Manager with the Sierra Club in Duluth. Beyond supporting clean energy campaigns across the upper midwest, Jenna enjoys gardening, biking, and walks along the shores of Lake Superior with her dog Mags.



PASS ON GAS:

Patty O'Keefe

The fossil fuel industry really wants us to believe that “natural gas” is clean. The truth is that “natural gas” is primarily methane — a dangerous greenhouse gas and indoor air pollutant.

Hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking” for short, extracts “natural” gas from tight rock formations below the surface using fluids, gasses, and chemicals that contaminate groundwater and pollute surrounding communities. There is no fracking in Minnesota, so we spend billions each year piping in gas from other states. This gas gets refined in Minnesota plants and distributed to our homes and buildings for heating, cooling, and cooking; it accounts for 26% of all fossil fuel emissions in the state.

In 2018, burning gas in Minnesota buildings produced the equivalent of 31 million metric tons of carbon dioxide. That's equivalent to the emissions of 8 coal plants.

COSTLY...IN DOLLARS AND HEALTH

Natural gas is already a volatile fuel, cost-wise. And as more people switch from gas to electric appliances, fewer people will be on the gas system, which could result in exorbitant rate increases.

In addition to exacerbating climate change, gas-burning appliances in our homes—furnaces, water heaters, stoves, and more—emit toxic chemicals like nitrogen oxides into the air. Exposure to nitrogen causes coughing, wheezing, asthma attacks, reduced lung function, cancer, and respiratory inflammation.

12.7% of current childhood asthma cases nationwide can be attributed to the use of gas stoves.

Low-income people and communities of color are most vulnerable to climate impacts, indoor air pollution, and increasing energy bills. It is of the highest importance that the transition from gas to electrification prioritize these communities.

PROPOSED NEW GAS PLANTS

Xcel Peakers: Xcel Energy has proposed two 400-megawatt (MW) gas peaker plants—one in Lyon County, Minnesota and one in Fargo, North Dakota—that would serve Minnesota customers.

NTEC: Minnesota Power, in partnership with Dairyland Power Cooperative, has proposed the Nemadji Trail Energy Center (NTEC), a new \$1 billion dollar, 625-MW gas plant to be built in Superior, Wisconsin. The Superior Plan Commission and City Council voted no on the utility's local permit requests necessary for construction. See page 11 for full story.

RPU: Rochester Public Utilities is considering a 50-MW gas peaker plant. A final decision will be made next year. See page 14 for full story.



Graphic Credit - Devon Young Cupery

STOP POLLUTION INSIDE AND OUT

OUR DEMANDS

1. NO NEW GAS PLANTS!

We should not and cannot be building more fossil fuel plants in a climate crisis. We will oppose new gas plants in Minnesota and push for our energy needs to be met with energy efficiency, electricity, and geothermal.

2. GAS FREE HOMES!

We will support policies that replace our gas-powered appliances with electric alternatives, and weatherize our homes so we're using less energy in the first place.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

The fight to stop gas will take place at the state legislatures, in city councils, and at the Public Utilities Commission (PUC).

THE PUC

The Public Utilities Commission is a 5-member board appointed by the Governor, which regulates investor-owned monopoly utilities (like Xcel, CenterPoint, and Minnesota Power) and makes decisions on energy infrastructure in the state.

Minnesota Power and Xcel Energy must bring 15-year energy plans to the PUC, and both their plans include new gas plants. There will be opportunities to comment on the plans and show the state that their customers oppose gas plants.

As part of the Clean Heat Coalition, Sierra Club is focusing on 3 major cases at the PUC:

- Xcel and Centerpoint Innovation Plans
- Gas Utility Long Term Plans
- The "Future of Gas" Docket

Learn more about these dockets:
<https://tinyurl.com/448atvbj>

THE STATE LEGISLATURE

State policy will be another important tool in the transition away from gas. In 2023 we passed the 100% clean electricity bill. While this bill was

a huge step forward, it only applies to electric utilities, not gas utilities. Whether it's setting a similar goal for gas utilities, creating appliance standards, or new rules for gas hookups in new construction, stay tuned for state level policy pushes here in Minnesota.

CITY LEVEL ACTIONS

Cities don't need to wait for the state to take action on gas decarbonization. They can improve building performance standards to cap energy use, set emissions standards to improve indoor air quality, and create programs that incentivize residents and building owners to go electric. In Minneapolis, there is excitement building around the People's Climate and Equity Plan, which received its first year's funding from the city. In Rochester, the Sierra Club and allies are working toward similar goals.

Stay tuned; we are only beginning this struggle, and it will be epic. Sierra Club will be issuing calls to action as we watch the progress of initiatives in all three arenas. Big energy corporations have little incentive to change their business model, unless people power prevails.

Patty O'Keefe is Sierra Club's Senior Field Strategist for Minnesota. In her free time Patty loves being at the beck and call of her two cats, Bandit and Butter.



KEEP ROCHESTER 100% RENEWABLE

Kris Acuña

The Rochester Public Utility (RPU), the largest municipal utility in Minnesota, is considering options for its 2030 power plan. In 2019, Sierra Club and our partners 100% Fossil Free Rochester succeeded in winning commitments from the utility and city for 100% renewable energy by 2030. Though RPU has largely adhered to its commitment, it is currently considering a 50-megawatt “natural” gas peaker plant. Despite assurances from RPU that no final decision has been made, the utility has begun moving forward as if to build the plant, citing permitting and supply chain issues.

Rochester’s population is expected to hit 200,000 by 2050. Our community needs to plan how to reduce our current fossil fuel consumption and eliminate its future use. With billions of dollars available for energy efficiency and retrofits, clean energy, and transportation through the Inflation Reduction Act, there is no reason we can’t pass on gas and stop pollution inside and out.

This can be achieved if we enact bold policies, including:

- A building mandate that requires 100% of municipal buildings to be all-electric by 2031.
- Expanding the downtown municipal geo-thermal network, with all new construction to be included.
- Building codes that require renewable all-electric water

and space heating in new construction and major retrofits.

- Preventing the expansion of gas services by requiring “electric-ready” new homes and buildings.
- Leveraging Inflation Reduction Act incentives through robust public education and outreach to encourage the purchase of super-efficient electric technologies, including electric heat pump space- and water-heaters, electric induction stoves and convection ovens, and electric heat pump clothes dryers.
- Public education and communication efforts to demonstrate the economic, health, safety, and climate benefits of all-electric homes.
- Updating permit protocols to expedite fuel-switching/ electrification while maintaining necessary safety standards.

Kris Acuña is Sierra Club North Star Chapter’s Climate and Clean Energy Organizer in Rochester. You can find him running or biking on Rochester’s trails, or squeezing his cat, Momo.

HEALTHY FORESTS AND A HEALTHY CLIMATE

Photo Credit - Don Luce

Robert Kean

The unnaturally warm winter we recently endured brought the climate crisis home to us. It also underlined the urgency of finding solutions to the buildup of atmospheric carbon dioxide, a main driver of climate change. Sierra Club's Forest and Wildlife Stewards are advocating in the legislature for a strategy—the Lowland Carbon and Habitat Reserve—that will sequester carbon and protect ecologically unique areas: up to 1.7 million acres of lowland conifer forests and bogs.

Lowland conifer ecosystems are rare across the world, but relatively abundant in state-owned forests in northern Minnesota. Compared to most state forest lands, these areas are free from human disturbances. Protecting them will provide a significant natural climate solution, because the trees sequester and store large amounts of carbon. Many lowland forests also contain peat bogs that sequester and store carbon, often in greater amounts than that of the accompanying forest.

The Lowland Carbon and Habitat Reserve will have a further environmental benefit: protecting this habitat and its unique flora and fauna like boreal chickadees, bog copper butterflies, white spruce, and black cedar. The legislation would limit harvest of trees and apply other protections on lowland conifer forests administered by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The priority and focus will be on older growth stands and areas with the most intact native ecosystems.

In 2023, the legislature funded a U of M study of state-managed lowland conifer forests. The Sierra Club will monitor and provide input to this study while also continuing to build support in the public and in the legislature for the ultimate establishment of the LowCaHR.

Robert Kean is a volunteer leader with the Sierra Club North Star Chapter's Forests and Wildlife Stewards Team. He is an avid gardener from spring through early fall, and enjoys skating and cross country skiing in winter months.



SIERRA CLUB
NORTH STAR CHAPTER

THE BIRDING GAME

Bob Suchanek

Birding is my favorite spectator sport. It's free and the players are always on the field; an around-the-clock, action-packed display of visual and auditory virtuosity with stakes that are nothing less than life itself.

I suppose part of my attraction to the birding game is admiration and respect for a league that's been purposefully in place for over 150 million years, well before the first known bird, Archaeopteryx, was fossilized. Birds are dinosaurs, with some power players like Tyrannosaurus rex on the family tree.

These days, the male American Redstart is one of the star players. Appearing in the striking black and orange colors of the Cincinnati Bengals, this lively warbler hops from branch to branch, flashing his colors and stirring up hidden insect meals.

The redstart is a seasonal player (late spring to mid-fall) but there are plenty of other players on the field anytime and everywhere. During the winter I've often seen snowy owls sitting on top of freeway light poles, perhaps looking for exposed prey in open areas along the road. On March 12th this year I saw a small hawk, perhaps a kestrel,

descend from its high observation pole along 35E and land on the median presumably to capture a hapless rodent or rabbit. Eagles, swans and other open water-dependent birds are privileged to have power plants on the Mississippi provide warm water year round.

Birders, like other sports enthusiasts, love to photograph their favorite players in action. Redstarts are a hyperactive challenge as are most avian hunters on the move. My pick for "most photogenic player" is the great blue heron. This big wading bird is incredibly patient in its steadfast focus on a small patch of water, waiting for a careless frog or fish to come within range of her lightning-fast jab and grasp. The common egret is a beautiful photogenic wader, but tends to be skittish. Birds have various proximity tolerances that birders learn to respect.

So, welcome to birding: one of the greatest shows on earth. No tickets needed: just pull up a seat, pull out your binoculars and enjoy.

Bob Suchanek is a volunteer leader with the Sierra Club North Star Chapter's Water and Wetlands Stewards Team. Contact him at bobsuchanek@gmail.com



Great Blue Heron
Photo Credit – Bob Suchanek



Male American Redstart
Photo Credit – Steve Ring

BACK TO THE LAND: A FARMER'S DAUGHTER STORY

A close-up of Kernza. Photo Credit - Constance Carlson

Constance Carlson

Three years ago, a colleague invited me to serve on the North Star Chapter's Executive Committee. She believed, and I agreed, that my background could provide an opportunity for the chapter to enrich its experience and expertise in working with farmers and rural communities.



Connie and her siblings doing a special farm chore for Father's Day

I grew up on an organic farm in western Minnesota in the 1980's, pulling weeds, picking rocks, feeding livestock, and shoveling up after them. It was backbreaking work. I remember spending much of a day hand-trimming brush from a line of newly planted windbreak trees. On my long, hot walk back to the house I declared to myself, "I will never be a farmer."

I left the farm in the early 90's. I thought I'd left the farm behind me, but I had just taken a break.

Ten years ago, my dad and I walked the same route I had walked all those years ago to look at a new crop: Kernza. "It's a perennial small grain," Dad said. "I think it's going to change the way farmers farm."

The tall, blue-green Kernza plants looked like overgrown wheat. Its roots can grow nearly ten feet in a single season. I could easily imagine how this deep-rooted, drought tolerant grain, which keep soil and water in place and went three years without replanting, could be a game-changer.

Dad got his first Kernza seeds from a University of Minnesota scientist and for the past ten years has worked with a team of agroecologists, food scientists, breeders, agronomists, and economists to help them understand how farmers can grow and market this new crop.

This is why I said yes to my friend. I admire the Sierra Club's fierce advocacy in protecting, conserving and regenerating the environment. I get excited about what this advocacy could do for rural communities. And I see opportunities for these two worlds to come together in powerful ways.

The time for working shoulder to shoulder is now. Can we do it?

Let's find out together.

Constance Carlson has served on the North Star Chapter Executive Committee since 2022. She lives in Buffalo, MN, with her family and visits her family farm in western Minnesota as often as possible.



Connie and her dad

PEOPLE NOT POLLUTERS: EAST PHILLIPS NEIGHBORHOOD CONFRONTS SMITH FOUNDRY VIOLATIONS

Photo Credit - David Kenedy

Scott Russell

In early November 2023 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducted a surprise inspection of Smith Foundry and found multiple air quality violations. The inspection was part of the EPA's national effort to focus on environmental justice neighborhoods.

The EPA said the foundry had:

- Fine-particle pollution at roughly double its approved limits between 2018 and 2022.
- Cracks and disconnected ductwork, allowing polluted air to bypass filters.
- Failed to notify the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) about pollution levels that could endanger human health.
- Failed to keep required records.

Neighborhood residents demanded answers, and renewed requests to shut down the foundry.

Things got strange when the MPCA seemed to contradict the EPA's assessment. On November 21, 2023, the Star Tribune cited MPCA Commissioner Katrina Kessler saying the agency had no evidence Smith Foundry had violated its permits.

The EPA and MPCA never publicly explained why their assessments differed, confusing and frustrating neighborhood residents.

A third-party monitor conducted a new round of foundry air testing in December 2023. The foundry was found to be compliant with pollution standards. That's because the company had begun doing significant repairs.

Specifically, the foundry had three of its five largest filters

replaced, according to a follow-up surprise EPA inspection in mid-December. Foundry workers had patched holes in the duct work and made other fixes.

Still, the EPA reinspection found polluted air escaping through roof vents without first going through filters.

If it weren't for the EPA, who knows how long it would have taken state or local officials to identify and act on the foundry's air pollution problems, which residents have been battling for years?

Recently, the neighborhood successfully stopped the city of Minneapolis from expanding its public works yard, citing the added traffic and air pollution. Furthermore, the East Phillips Neighborhood Institute is now acquiring the property the city planned to use. It's going to rehab an old warehouse on the lot into a community hub, with affordable housing, an indoor urban farm, and a large solar array.

Although the fight isn't over, these successes have strengthened the community's sense of agency and advocacy over the health and future of their neighborhood.

UPDATE:

The EPA announced June 4, 2024 that it reached an agreement with Smith Foundry to significantly reduce emissions. Under the agreement, the company will:

- Immediately shut down two of the foundry's pouring and cooling lines.
- Shut down its furnace and casting processes within 12 months.
- Convert the facility to do metal finishing, a less polluting process.
- Pay an \$80,000 fine.

The EPA stated it has “worked closely” with the MPCA to improve air quality in the East Phillips Neighborhood, and ensure Smith Foundry’s compliance with the Clean Air Act. This is confusing. The MPCA seemed to contradict the EPA’s initial findings that Smith Foundry violated the Clean Air Act, and has yet to explain why it did not catch these violations much sooner.

EPNI, Little Earth Protectors, and Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA) applauded the settlement, but issued a joint statement that the proposed changes need to happen immediately, instead of waiting a year. The “pollution from the casting operations remains uncontrolled and poses a daily risk to the community,” it said.

Scott Russell is a volunteer leader with the Sierra Club North Star Chapter. He could win a Trivial Pursuit game if all the questions were about Enbridge Line 3.



Graphic Credit - Devon Young Cupery

Sierra Club and partner organizations recently launched a new project to hold state regulators and polluters accountable for toxic harm. People Not Polluters aims to build pressure on the state legislature to address “polluter capture” of state agencies, where corporate polluters have too much influence over how they are regulated. The project website www.peoplenotpolluters.com features a dozen examples of agency failures across the state. We are calling for summer legislative hearings on this issue. Sign our petition and stay tuned for updates.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN FROGTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD OF ST. PAUL

Communities are concerned about harmful pollution from at least two other foundries located in residential neighborhoods – St. Paul Brass and Aluminum in St. Paul’s Frogtown Neighborhood, and the Northern Iron and Machine foundry on St. Paul’s East Side. Over the last few months the Sierra Club has been directly involved in supporting local groups and residents in Frogtown.

In early 2024, neighbors, advocates and organizations began to come together after learning from the media about EPA investigations of Clean Air Act violations at the Brass Foundry in the Frogtown neighborhood, where residents suffer from some of the highest rates of asthma hospitalization and emergency department visits in the state, according to recent Minnesota Department of Health data.

Residents and local organizations, including Frogtown Neighborhood Association and Frogtown Green, and supported by the Sierra Club, have hosted public meetings and organized door knocks, soil and blood testing, and informational flyering.

Despite the EPA investigations, community members have still not received full information about the degree of pollution. The foundry is located across the street from multiple daycare centers, an urban farm and city park visited by hundreds of people per day, a mosque and religious centers, recreation centers, athletic fields as well as townhomes, multiple high-rises and multi-family homes. The lack of communication and transparency about these Clean Air Act violations and the investigation into them reflect a pattern of institutional racism, uphold a culture of impunity for polluters, and a blatant disregard for the communities who call Saint Paul home.

Residents and organizations will continue mobilizing to demand increased transparency and communication; more stringent monitoring, inspections and oversight; for regulators to incorporate cumulative impact assessments into their decisions; and that the foundry be required to apply for a new air permit.

For more information or to get involved, contact Dominique Diaddigo-Cash at dominique.diaddigo-cash@sierraclub.org.

THE 2024 LEGISLATIVE SESSION:

Peter Wagenius and Patty O'Keefe

The 2024 Minnesota legislative session ended in May. We're happy to report that as a result of our collective efforts with many partners and legislative champions, Minnesota is on the path to a more sustainable future with four major actions:

THE COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING CLARITY BILL

ALLOWS CITIES TO INCREASE HOUSING DENSITY ON ALREADY-DEVELOPED LAND WHILE PRESERVING THE INTEGRITY OF THE MINNESOTA ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS ACT.

AUTOMATIC SOLAR PERMITTING PLUS, AND SOLAR INTERCONNECTION

ACCELERATES THE STATE'S TRANSITION TO SOLAR ENERGY BY MAKING IT EASIER FOR CITIES AND INDIVIDUALS TO CONNECT TO THE GRID.

THE NETWORKED GEOTHERMAL PILOT

EXPLORES CLIMATE-FRIENDLY HEATING AND COOLING SOLUTIONS, OFFERING OPPORTUNITIES TO REDUCE CARBON FOOTPRINTS AND ENHANCE ENERGY EFFICIENCY.

CLEAN ENERGY PERMITTING REFORM

ADVANCES THE DEVELOPMENT OF CLEAN ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE, WHILE PRESERVING PUBLIC INPUT AND ENGAGEMENT.

THIS SESSION'S PRIORITIES AND RESULTS:

Land use reform to address the climate and housing crises. We supported a package of bills to address the housing problem and reduce climate pollution by stopping metropolitan sprawl. Some bills were blocked, but a bill to allow cities to increase housing density on already-developed land while preserving the integrity of the Minnesota Environmental Rights Act was passed.

Building decarbonization. The Networked Geothermal Pilot will explore climate-friendly heating and cooling solutions, reduce carbon footprints, and enhance energy efficiency. We are building a strong coalition and will continue to work on this issue in 2025.

Clean energy permitting. We worked to speed up permitting of technologies to handle more clean electricity, and to stop provisions that would have opened the door to fossil fuels and speculative technologies.

Environmental justice and clean energy. We supported the Solar Interconnection Bill which streamlines the process of connecting solar systems to the grid, and the Automatic Solar Permitting Bill (Solar APP+), which simplifies permitting procedures.

The Ratepayer Protection Act would have ensured investor owned utilities aren't spending customer's money on activities that promote the use of fossil fuels. This bill was blocked; this will be a multi-year effort.

Climate impact of highways. We supported the expansion of a 2023 bill that requires the Minnesota Department of Transportation to reduce both vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions.

Zero waste platform. The Packaging Waste and Cost Reduction Act, which will require producers to reduce upstream waste, passed. Other waste reduction bills like the 100% Electronic Waste bill that would establish electronics recycling programs will be re-introduced next year.

Ethanol, Pipelines, and "Clean Fuels." Alongside our allies, we worked to block the proposed Low Carbon Fuel Standard (referred to as a "Clean Transportation Standard"), which would have extended outdated technologies like ethanol and increased climate pollution. But Big Oil and the ethanol industry still hope to create a network of pipelines to carry carbon dioxide

MULTIPLE WINS FOR THE PLANET

“The 2024 Minnesota Legislature has improved and enhanced the many great policies and programs which were passed in 2023 to fight climate change.

Minnesota has taken a leading role in this fight and the rest of the nation needs to follow,”

John Krenn, the North Star Chapter’s Legislative Chair.

(CO2) from ethanol plants to North Dakota where the CO2 will be used to push more oil out of the ground. This fight is long from over.

Volunteer-led teams supported ongoing legislative efforts including Prove it First, which would establish a moratorium on toxic sulfide mining; a bill to reduce environmental damage from off-road vehicles; a ban on the hunting and trapping of wolves; and the establishment of a public waters inventory to protect our waterways.



Sierra Club and land use reform coalition members celebrate a successful hearing with Sen. Omar Fateh



Duluth Sierra Club leaders with Sen. Jen McEwen for Boundary Waters Day at the Capitol.

Photo Credit - Devon Young Cupery

ORGANIZING FOR OUR LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Everyone pitched in to move our agenda forward this year at the State Capitol:

- Through regular phone banks, meetings with legislators and email action alerts, members ensured legislators were hearing from their constituents about urgent environmental issues.
- Staff and volunteer leaders gave testimony at more than ten committee hearings.
- We covered our priorities through letters to the editor, opinion columns, organizational sign-on letters, and other advocacy communications.
- The Sierra Club co-sponsored and participated in lobby days and rallies throughout the session including Rise and Repair, Zero Waste, Bike/Walk Summit, Wolf Day at the Capitol, Pesticide Day on the Hill, and Prove it First.

Thank you to everyone who showed up and made their voices heard.

Patty O’Keefe is Senior Campaign Strategist with the Minnesota Sierra Club focusing on pursuing a just transition to clean energy. In her free time Patty loves being at the beck and call of her two cats, Bandit and Butter.

Peter Wagenius is the Legislative and Political Director of the North Star Chapter. When he’s not working you can find him chauffeuring his daughters around town on a longtail cargo bike.

MINNESOTA COUNTDOWN

For this issue's poetry prompt, we've condensed a nine-line form called the "nonet" into five lines that we've named "The Minnesota Countdown." In this form, each of the five lines has one fewer syllable than the one before. Down the page, the syllable count runs: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. We asked our writers to choose something in Minnesota that they look forward to in spring or summer. What is your "Minnesota Countdown"?

Months of early nights
are left behind.
The light lasts
longer
now.

— Ellen Rozek

Tight lilac clusters
clasp woody stems,
then unfurl
in spring's
warmth.

— Audrey Kletscher Helbling

Crocuses again.
Creeping Charlie.
Garden work.
Longer
naps.

— D.E. Green

Ice free comes around
Marsh frogs abide
Wetlands sing
Warming
Sun

— Bob Suchanek

The hotel retreat
scorching outside
frigid inside
writers
speak

— Stephanie Janssen

Green spears are peeking
through soft black soil—
sun warming
verdant
dreams.

— D.E. Green

Rain feeds thirsty earth
Green leaves emerge
Frogs arise
Birds call
Spring!!

— Judy Helgen

Pitch my winter coat
for birds to strip
padding and
feather
nests.

— Becky Boling

Melancholy dreams
Of beautiful
Beings such
Lovely
Themes

— Jack Jensen

Stained fingers picking
ripe blueberries
One in pail,
two in
mouth

— Maggie Jones

I'd like to come out
sit on a lawn
dangle feet
dig toes
deep.

— Becky Boling

Communications Team volunteers and community members submitted poems, which were collected by Lindsay Starck. Starck is a fiction writer, freelance editor, and English professor at Augsburg University. When she isn't collecting summer poems, she's kayaking on Lake Nokomis with her cattle dog. Her new novel, *Monsters We Have Made*, was published in March.

GIVING TO THE NORTH STAR CHAPTER

Minnesotans hold our waters and public lands dear. We take pride in our strong environmental laws. Yet polluting industries are taking hold of the agencies responsible for regulating them. From the Department of Natural Resources selling timber on lands set aside for wildlife to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency hiding federal regulators' concerns about toxic sulfide mining, too many examples show there is a problem.

Thankfully, the Sierra Club has decades of experience fighting big polluters with people power — and winning. We are fighting to make state agencies work for Minnesotans, not extractive polluting companies. Our opponents will try to buy their way into boardrooms, legislatures, offices, and courtrooms to impose their will on Minnesota. But together, we have the power to create a state where clean air, clean water, and beautiful wild places are available and accessible to all.

Together, we can hold powerful industries and governments accountable to the people. Give a gift today of \$20, \$50, \$100 or whatever you can to fuel the fight.

When you give to the North Star Chapter, 100 percent of your donation stays in Minnesota so more Minnesotans can take their place in the movement.

How to donate: Give a one-time or monthly gift online at sc.org/mn-donate or mail your contribution to Sierra Club North Star Chapter, PO Box 14267, Saint Paul MN 55114-0267.

Support Your Passion

for a Just and Sustainable World

Create a legacy that protects and restores the natural world for future generations by naming Sierra Club's North Star Chapter in your will or trust. Or, name Sierra Club Foundation as the beneficiary of your retirement plan for the benefit of your local chapter and leave less highly taxed assets to your loved ones.



To learn more about planned giving and to become a member of the Rachel Carson Society, please contact us.



SIERRA CLUB
NORTH STAR CHAPTER

Julia Curtis
(800) 932-4270 • giftplanning@sierraclub.org
myplan.sierraclub.org

Call for Executive Committee Nominations

We invite you to submit names to the chapter's Nominations Committee to be considered for election to the chapter's Executive Committee (ExCom). Any current member is eligible to run.

Members who are not nominated by the committee can petition for candidacy with the signature of 25 members.

The 15-member ExCom is responsible for chapter strategic planning and budgeting, establishing and overseeing subcommittees, electoral efforts, communications, outdoor activities, and hiring and overseeing the State Director.

Members are elected for rotating three-year terms. Those elected at the end of this year will begin their terms in January, 2025.

Names are due to the Nominating Committee by August 15th, petitions by October 1st, balloting begins November 28th, and the election closes January 3rd.

If you are interested in running, or for more information, please contact the chapter office at north.star.chapter@sierraclub.org or 612-659-9124.

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