

# Nebraska Sierran

Publication of the Nebraska Sierra Club

Spring 2015

[www.sierraclub.org/nebraska](http://www.sierraclub.org/nebraska) replacing [sierranebraska.org](http://sierranebraska.org)

*Explore, Enjoy, and Protect the Planet*

## Plastic Bags are Manmade Pox on Earth's Land, Water

### *Should Omaha Ban Plastic Bags?*

Plastic bags are everywhere in our environment-with pretty much every purchase we make, we're offered a plastic bag. We know the concerns about plastic bags: they choke wildlife, they don't break down easily in landfills or in oceans, they are made from fossil fuels, and they are not easy to recycle, which is why 90% of plastic bags in the US are not recycled. Around the country and around the world, cities (and even one state) have enacted bans on single-use plastic bags. Some Omaha city council members have expressed an interest in a possible plastic bag ban for the city of Omaha.

Dr. David Corbin, emeritus professor of health education & public health at UNO, will give a presentation on the problems with plastic bags, and will update us on laws and ordinances that have been passed in other cities and countries to ban or tax plastic bags. Corbin will show video clips from the movie Bag It along with video clips showing the problem here in Omaha.

For this presentation, bring any single-use plastic bags that you might have stashed away in your house or apartment, and we will create our own bag display. Who knows? Maybe the Bag Monster will appear. Bring your bags, bring your creativity, and bring your advocacy ideas. This presentation is suitable for all ages. Sierra Club programs are free and open to the public.

For more information, visit: [sierranebraska.org](http://sierranebraska.org).

### **Sierra Club March Program:**

#### *Too Many Plastic Bags*

with David Corbin  
Thursday, March 26  
7 p.m.

First United  
Methodist Church,  
7020 Cass St., Omaha  
(Enter north door  
Education Wing)

### **Sierra Club April Program:**

#### *Fracking*

Thursday, April 23,  
7 p.m.

First United Methodist  
Church,  
7020 Cass St., Omaha  
(Enter north door  
Education Wing)



The Bag Monster (inhabited by David Corbin) illustrates how horrific plastic bags can look if not kept under control.

## Can I recycle plastic food wrappers?

By Ask Umbra  
Grist.org

**Q.** Plastic bags, films on packaging, and things like cheese wrappers never have numbers on them. Are these bags and films recyclable with the plastic shopping bags (usually collected at point of source in my area -- grocery stores, mainly)?

Earl  
Knoxville, Tenn.

**A. Dearest Earl,**

We recently looked at the recyclability of the ubiquitous plastic shopping

bag. (The gist: YES, you can probably recycle them at drop-off locations around town. NO, you probably can't put them in the curbside bin.) Now it's time to shine a light on their even more confusing cousins, those "other" plastic bags and flexible films. Cheese wrappers, Ziploc baggies, the plastic wrap that comes around your toilet paper - what's to be done with them?

Good news, Earl: Many drop-off sites also accept these items and more.

**See Plastic, page 2**

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## Plastic Items Needs Special Handling

This stuff is made from polyethylene, just like the grocery bags, and would carry a #2 or #4 symbol if it had a symbol at all (it often doesn't). Of course - and this is a great idea whenever you have a recycling question - you can always ask the recycler exactly what is and isn't kosher to add to the stash. For example, some locations accept cereal bags, plastic shipping envelopes, and Saran wrap (Knoxville is all over that last one), some don't. Recycling policies vary from town to town, and even from store to store, so better safe than contaminating the bin.

Please also note two flexy plastics that usually aren't accepted: frozen food bags and salad mix bags. These two may have additional polymers or other ingredients, which is good for extending shelf life but complicated for recyclers.

Now that we've sorted that out, Earl, indulge me while I dig into a topic that doesn't come up often enough when we talk about those wonderful triangular arrows. Recycling is great, but just because you can drop off your baggies doesn't mean you should have baggies to begin with. In other words, let's think Reduce first, then Recycle. With a little planning, you can find alternatives to many of those bags clogging your cabinet, or at least lighten the load.

Try these tips (many of them cribbed from the comprehensive My Plastic-Free Life):

Store fruits and veggies in reusable cloth bags, or just set them free and toss them straight into your reusable shopping bag.

Shop the bulk section and tote your goodies home in your own reusable containers. You can do this with everything from flour and olive oil to shampoo and bath salts if you have a well-stocked supermarket nearby.

BYO containers for deli meats and other prepared foods.

Get your bread fresh from the bakery in a paper bag, or use your own cloth sack.

Buy items like TP in bulk to reduce the overall packaging.

Cheese is a tricky one, Earl. So much of it comes to us prewrapped in Saran-style cling or crinkly plastic. If you like shopping at specialty cheese shops (or your grocery store is sophisticated), you can procure your Cheddars and Camemberts cut to order.

But think before you ask your cheesemonger (finally, a chance to use that word!) to wrap it up in wax paper (potentially reusable with a few wipes, but not recyclable) or aluminum foil (basically the same, waste-wise, as recyclable plastic bags). Instead, pop the product straight into a reusable glass container or do it the old-fashioned way with cheesecloth; that's what it was born to do, after all, and as a cotton product, you can also compost it.

I'll bet you can come up with even more tricks, Earl. Enjoy the challenge - and may your bag hutch forever be empty.

Flexibly,  
Umbra

### Give to Our Chapter's March Fund Appeal

Members in Nebraska should have received copies of our March Fund Appeal letters this past week.

Please donate!\

Your donations help support our effective, citizen based advocacy and lobbying efforts in Nebraska!

## Get Out the Vote

By Reed McManus  
Sierra Club

Low-turnout elections are bad for the nation, and they're bad for the Sierra Club too. Just over 7 percent of eligible members voted in the Club's annual Board of Directors election in 2014; if fewer than 5 percent participate in this year's election, being held in March and April, the Club will be forced, at great expense, to redo it.

The organization's elected directors, who serve three-year terms, set the Club's national budget, priorities, and policies, the guidelines that will help carry the organization--and, we hope, the country and the planet--through what's likely to be a tough few years.

Eligible voters should receive their ballots in early March; completed ballots must be received by April 29. (Members who registered on or before February 2, 2015, to receive their ballots electronically need to meet the same deadline.) To read about the candidates, go to [sierraclub.org/board/elections](http://sierraclub.org/board/elections). Questions? Contact Membership Services at (415) 977-5653 or [membership.services@sierraclub.org](mailto:membership.services@sierraclub.org).

## Video Campaign from More than Scientists

More Than Scientists, a video campaign from the Climate Change Education Project, was recently launched, with the initial release of over 200 video clips in which climate researchers from a diversity of disciplines share their personal stories, their fears, hopes, and dreams about the future.

Who are the scientists?

"We span the fields of scientific inquiry, span the political spectrum, and the nation. We are dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge, understanding. We represent the more than 97% of scientists who believe climate change is happening, that it is due to our actions and that it is within our power to keep it from being devastating . . . But we aren't just scientists inside labs and academia. We are people like you, with hopes and dreams and loved ones."

- from the More than Scientists website [www.morethanscientists.org](http://www.morethanscientists.org)

Introductory video:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uEiD1XYA8k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uEiD1XYA8k)

## Earth Days

Omaha Earth Day, Saturday, April 18, 11 a.m. - 6 p.m. Elmwood Park, Omaha; earthdayomaha.org & info@earthdayomaha.org.

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Lincoln Earth Day: Saturday, April 18, 10 am - 2 pm, between 21st & 22nd streets and P&Q streets; lincolnearthday.org

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Bellevue Earth Day: Sunday, April 26, noon to 4 p.m., at the Lied Activity Center, 2700 Arboretum Drive

## Recreation Outdoors at Lake Manawa

By Laura Friesell  
Backwoods

Backwoods is hosting the third annual Outdoor Gala at Lake Manawa Shelter #3 (the beach area) on Saturday, June 6, from 9am to 5pm. The Gala promotes outdoor rec in and around our town and unites many outdoor organizations and affiliates, bringing greater awareness and ties, to the outdoor community.

The Gala is a full day outdoors, free to the public, with stand up paddle board and kayak demos, slack lining, yoga, a hike, potluck picnic, vendor faire, and other events. We are look-

ing to add more events to the day including bike rides (road and trail on the Lake Manawa Bike Trails), rock climbing, trail running, road running, sailing, painting, dog expo and demos, canoeing, etc.

Gala Partners include UNO, Kuhl Kayak, Driftwood Paddle Boards, and LuLu Lemon. We are looking for other partners and or vendors/ organizations. If you'd like to be a part of the event, email me at lfriesell@backwoods.com or call Backwoods at 402-515-4788.

[www.backwoods.com](http://www.backwoods.com)

# What Senator Sasse Could Do About Climate Change

By Frances Mendenhall

There is credible anecdotal evidence that increasing numbers of Republicans, including those currently in office, understand the urgency of climate change. When their numbers are large enough, we can expect them to speak out and take action. True, they will need to know that their position is supported by many and that it will not cost them the next election, but this is starting to happen. Historically, changes that seem impossible before they happen appear inevitable after the fact and can come about very quickly once things start to move. We need to look no farther than the recent expansion of the right to marry for gays and lesbians.

I do not know whether Nebraska's newly elected Sen. Ben Sasse is one of the still-silent but climate-savvy Republicans, but I do know he is a capable person. I wrote to him a few weeks ago, but am still waiting for his response.

It is clear that Sen. Sasse believes in the market for its capacity to get things done. He may also appreciate the likely effect climate change will have on Nebraska agriculture. To name two of these: extreme weather and drought will make farming more risky and less profitable, and, as temperatures rise even by small amounts, corn will not pollinate as well.

Here is what Sierra Club members could propose to Senator Sasse:

Enact a fee on carbon. Use that fee as a corrective measure only, to offset the social costs of fossil fuels, costs such as respiratory illness, the spread of insect-borne disease, the toll on fisheries from ocean acidification, death and injuries

from extreme weather, as well as habitat loss and species extinction.

A fee on carbon will give real market forces a chance to work, so that clean energy -- already close to competitive -- will become increasingly attractive.

Instead of incorporating the revenue from the carbon fees into the federal budget, return it all to households. Let people use the money however they choose. If they need it to pay for rising costs of fossil-based energy, they will have it. If they choose, they can drive more-fuel-efficient cars and insulate their homes.

Because the costs of fossil fuels will rise, utilities will look to wind, solar, geothermal, conservation, etc. Researchers will concentrate more on storing energy, so that the energy from wind and solar is available more dependably.

Because the money will be in the hands of consumers, they will be likely to spend it, giving a boost to the economy. Jobs lost in the fossil fuel industry will be replaced in industries such as services, clean energy, and infrastructure.

The concept is called Fee and Dividend. It has wide support among economists for its simplicity. It is small-government, and revenue neutral. Another name for it, one I like, is "Tax Carbon, Pay People."

There is a wealth of information on Fee and Dividend at [www.citizensclimatelobby.org](http://www.citizensclimatelobby.org)

I am a member of Citizens Climate Lobby; whose focus to enact Fee and Dividend.

But back to Sasse. In order for him to risk taking leadership on climate change, he needs to believe that Nebraskans will

support him. Sierra Club members are well placed to give him the needed encouragement. We should start now, while he is a long way from the next election.

It took a Republican president, Richard Nixon, to go to China. Nebraska's newest senator may have the vision to take bold action. But it just might depend on what he hears from us.

Sen. Sasse's Fremont address:  
1747 Laguna Drive  
Fremont, NE 68025

### How Fee and Dividend Works

## Tax Carbon, Pay People

A fee is placed on carbon-based fuels at the source (well, mine, port of entry).

This fee starts at \$15 per ton of CO2 emitted, and increases steadily each year by \$10 so that clean energy is cheaper than fossil fuels within a decade.

All of the money collected is returned to American households on an equitable basis.

Under this plan about 2/3 of all households would break even or receive more in their dividend checks than they would pay in higher prices due to the tax, thereby protecting the poor and middle class.

A predictably increasing carbon price will send a clear market signal that will unleash entrepreneurs and investors in the new clean-energy economy.

Citizens Climate Lobby, [www.citizensclimatelobby.org](http://www.citizensclimatelobby.org)

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## Spring 2015

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### Bear in mind the consequences.

The Yellowstone grizzly bear is an irreplaceable part of America's natural heritage, a symbol of the independence that defines the American character and an icon of all that is wild and free. The Bush administration set forth a proposal that would remove federal protection for the Yellowstone grizzly bear. Since it was first listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act in 1975, the grizzly bear has made a strong recover, but there is still more work to be done. Help Sierra Club protect our forest friends; they prefer the woods than being on display.

**Get grizzly and JOIN Sierra Club.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
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City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
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Check enclosed. Please make payable to Sierra Club.  
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Membership Categories	Individual	Joint
<b>Special Offer</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15	
Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> \$39	<input type="checkbox"/> \$49
Supporting	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100
Contributing	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150	<input type="checkbox"/> \$175
Life	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1250
Senior	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25	<input type="checkbox"/> \$35
Student/Limited Income	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25	<input type="checkbox"/> \$35

**Join today and receive a FREE Sierra Club Weekender Bag!**



Contributions, gifts and dues to Sierra Club are not tax deductible; they support our effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. Your dues include \$7.50 for a subscription to *Sierra* magazine and \$1 for your Chapter newsletters.



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or visit our website [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org)