



# Sierra

Newsletter of the Coulee Region Group  
**FEBRUARY 2019**

*"What's happened to our park in the last 34 day is irreparable for the next 200 to 300 years." - retired Joshua Tree National Park Superintendent Curt Sauer at the end of the government shutdown (www.desertsun.com)*

## **TUESDAY, February 5 at 7 p.m.**

**The Greener Life: Learn to Live More Sustainably with Chandra (CS) Sherin**

**Ho-Chunk Three Rivers House**  
(8th & Main, La Crosse)

*Our event was postponed on January 29 due to extremely low temperatures. You're invited to the rescheduled program!*

Explore a holistic approach to sustainable living with Chandra (CS) Sherin, author of **Recipe for a Green Life**, who will address some of the most pressing issues that impact our environment, habitat, wildlife, resources, and collective health. Learn about the importance of a holistic

approach to sustainable living, and the positive impact we can have through our daily habits, choices, and do-it-yourself recipes. Discuss the most effective sustainable living choices we can make at home and with our families.

CS Sherin, MA, has called the rare driftless region home for over 25 years - with great love for all of its bluffs, rivers, marshes, forests, trails, wildlife, and beautiful prairies. She has a decade of experience in kind, plant-based conscious eating, and exploring and creating sustainable living DIY recipes for home and family, CS is an artist, nature photographer, poet, editor, research enthusiast, and owner of Wild Clover, a multi-faced creative enterprise (WildClover.org)

Everyone is welcome to this event. You need not be a Sierra Club member to participate. We will also discuss plans for 2019 including the Ready for 100 program and other national, state, and local initiatives. Refreshments provided!

## **March: area hiking trails**

On March 26, we'll hear from local hikers and hiking advocates David Bange and Sue Knopf. They'll talk about local hiking trails - maps, challenges, news - with a special emphasis on the trails of the Mississippi Valley Conservancy. More details will be in our March newsletter.



## **HELP! Volunteers needed!**

We'll table at some events this spring and need help! **If you can help table at the La Crosse Earth Fair on Sunday, April 28 at Myrick Park OR at the May 17-18, Driftless Outdoors Show at Onalaska's Omni Center, please email us (crsierraclub@gmail.com) or call Pat (608 788-8831)** It's pretty easy - talking to people about the Sierra Club and handing out literature. Please help us spread the word!



**PROGRESSTIVAL**  
**FEB. 2 \* 1 - 5:30 PM \* CONCORDIA**  
1129 La Crosse Street (take the bus!)  
**ACTIVIST FAIR \* NETWORKING \* SPEAKERS**  
**SNACKS/DRINKS \* MUSIC**

Hosted by CouleeProgressives.org, a virtual community



The Coulee Region Sierra Club will table at this year's PROGRESSTIVAL, February 2 from 1 to 5:30 at the Concordia Ballroom. Admission is by donation. Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/Progresstival19>.

## Our Climate Resolutions

Two dozen neighbors gathered at La Crosse's South Community Library on Saturday, January 26 for a community conversation about Our Climate Resolutions. The La Crosse group joined hundreds of others across the country in envisioning a renewable energy future and identifying steps to get there. We were happy to see WKBT, Channel 8, cover the event. You can see an interview with CR Sierra Club vice chair Kathy Allen at [www.news8000.com/news/after-a-summer-of-extreme-weather-community-members-gather-to-talk-about-climate-change/991048914](http://www.news8000.com/news/after-a-summer-of-extreme-weather-community-members-gather-to-talk-about-climate-change/991048914)



The group decided to focus on communication and education including, learning effective ways to talk about these important issues; supporting educators; ensuring people know about events, groups, actions, and resources; communicating with elected leaders, neighbors, and the community; and networking with others to spread the word about the importance of working for a sustainable future.

You can read more about the event and its outcomes at [cr-sierra.blogspot.com/p/our-climate-resolutions.html](http://cr-sierra.blogspot.com/p/our-climate-resolutions.html).

**INVITE the CRSC Ready for 100 team to talk to your neighborhood, community or faith group, or at your workplace or school!**  
[crsierraclub@gmail.com](mailto:crsierraclub@gmail.com)

**JOIN US Tuesday, February 5 at 6:15 p.m.** (before our regular meeting) at Ho-Chunk Three Rivers House to brainstorm and share ideas about specific **next steps toward Our Climate Resolution**. Who should we be educating/communicating with and how? What existing resources can we use? What can we start doing right now? Anyone who is interested is welcome to attend so feel free to invite your friends and neighbors to come with you!

Finally, our **Community Energy Survey** is now up and ready! The goal is to gauge the opinions of La Crosse county residents about renewable energy and learn what concerns people might have about transitioning to renewables. If you live in La Crosse County, please take it (and share the link with others. (<https://tinyurl.com/LaXCmtyEnergySurvey>))

**CLIMATE ACTION FESTIVAL MARCH 2** La Crosse  
1st Congregational Church (Main & Losey) 1-4 pm  
Learn how you can make a difference!  
[tinyurl.com/CRCA-CAF19](http://tinyurl.com/CRCA-CAF19)

## JMC Transportation Goals

The John Muir Chapter Transportation Team has developed the following recommendations for the state budget currently being developed by Governor Evers.

- No new highway expansion projects identified for funding
- A \$36 million increase in public transit spending per year
- Increase local road spending by 35%
- Increase funding for specialized transit (for disabled and elderly riders) by 10% in the first year with ongoing increases of at least 3.5% per year
- Prevent removing transit funding from the transportation fund

These goals are based on the 2018 Wisconsin DOT report, **Keep Wisconsin Moving** (<https://wisconsindot.gov/Documents/about-wisdot/who-we-are/comm-couns/keep-wi-moving-report.pdf>) and emphasize the need for improved public transit over roads to efficiently meet our future transportation needs.

The goals also use data and conclusions found in the 2018 Sierra Club report, **Arrive Together: Transportation Access and Equity in Wisconsin** ([tinyurl.com/jmctransitrep](http://tinyurl.com/jmctransitrep))

The John Muir Chapter's Moving Beyond Oil to Clean Transportation campaign includes analyses of environmental, community, personal, and social costs of our current fossil fuel based transportation system. Besides investing more in local "complete streets" roads and public transportation systems, the Sierra Club believes that, *"expanding investments in transit, biking, walking and local roads is essential for protecting our environment, attracting businesses and young professionals, and for meeting mobility needs of low-income and disabled individuals and our state's growing senior population."*

Read more about the John Muir Chapter's comprehensive transportation policy at [sierraclub.org/wisconsin/moving-beyond-oil-clean-transportation](http://sierraclub.org/wisconsin/moving-beyond-oil-clean-transportation).

## Western Wisconsin Water

Governor Evers has declared 2019 the Year of Clean Drinking Water.

That's a critical goal for much of Wisconsin, and I hope he's going to develop programs to start responding to the many issues. The Wisconsin DNR has already developed rules to start dealing with the nitrate and bacteria levels in northeastern Wisconsin where Kewaunee County has been the poster child for contaminated wells. There, cows outnumber people five to one and 28% of wells test positive for nitrates or fecal bacteria. Unfortunately, these new rules on manure spreading don't take effect until 2020, and they only apply to that particular area of the state.

UW-Stevens Point recently released data that shows that the problems with nitrates and fecal bacteria in well water are just as much of a problem in southwestern Wisconsin counties with karst geology. Grant, Iowa, and Lafayette counties announced a two-year groundwater study which will start with a broad survey of wells for coliform and nitrates and then delve into well construction, geology, and source contamination for wells that are positive for coliform. At this point, Grant county has approved funding and Iowa and Lafayette counties are nearing final approval. Assembly leader Robin Vos has called for a task force at the request of Representatives Travis Tranel and Todd Novak to dig deeper into the problem and suggest possible solutions.

The Southwest Wisconsin Groundwater & Geology Study (SWIGG), will assess how widespread well contamination is, identify sources of any contamination, and analyze risk factors. More info can be found here: <https://iowa.uwex.edu/community-development/swigg/>. A public information meeting on the study was held Oct. 17 in Mineral Point. At a Grant County Rural Stewardship meeting January 22 in Platteville, results of the SWIGG study were discussed.

in La Crosse county's Brice Prairie and Town of Holland, 30% of tested wells showed excessive nitrates. The Coulee Region Sierra Club and the La Crosse County Board have requested that the DNR hold a Public Information Session before reissuing the Wisconsin Pollution Discharge Elimination System (WPDES) permit for the county's only CAFO, Babcock Genetics. This will be a good test of whether 2019 will be the Year of Clean Drinking Water.

For those who want to learn more about groundwater issues, here's a link to an informative series of webinars on the subject: <https://wisconsinlandwater.org/programs/groundwater-webinar-series>. *Pat Wilson, chair*

Wisconsin Conservation Voters is hosting a **Conservation Lobby Day** in Madison on **Wednesday, March 27**. A free bus will leave Eau Claire, stopping in Black River Falls, Tomah, and Wisconsin Dells, returning in the evening. **Seating is limited**. Sign up at [tinyurl.com/0327ConsLobbyBus](http://tinyurl.com/0327ConsLobbyBus) (conservationvoters.org)

World-renowned nature photographer Thomas D. Mangelsen will be the featured speaker at this year's **Aldo Leopold Day** observation, **Tuesday, Feb. 26 at 7 pm at the Viterbo Fine Arts Center**. Related activities in the community are planned for February 28 and March 2. For more information, see [tinyurl.com/ALDay19-LaX](http://tinyurl.com/ALDay19-LaX)

## JMC River Touring Section

The River Touring Section (RTS) of the John Muir Chapter offers a variety of paddling outings throughout the year from whitewater to quiet rivers, lakes and streams. RTS also provides instructional clinics. Most trips are free and all are welcome - canoeists, kayakers, and sea kayakers.

The RTS annual trip list will be available early in February at their website: [sierraclub.org/wisconsin/river-touring-section/trips](http://sierraclub.org/wisconsin/river-touring-section/trips)

CR Sierra Club chair, Pat Wilson and his wife, Bobbie, are RTS trip leaders. We will announce RTS outing opportunities in our region as they are scheduled. All outings are listed at the RTS web page.



*Black River family canoe/kayak outing - July 2018*

# Sustainability Institute MPower program: vision and action

Casey Meehan, PhD, *Sustainability Coordinator, Western Technical College & Sustainability Institute*

If the [precedent](#) of unprecedented flooding in the Coulee region over the past decade hasn't been enough to convince your neighbors that we are in a climate crisis, perhaps this number will: 408.

**Four hundred and eight is the number of consecutive months where the average monthly temperature has exceeded the 20th century monthly average.**

Said differently, no one under the age of 34 has ever experienced a month in which the average temperature was cooler than the 100 year global monthly average.

Let that soak in for a moment.

Environmental activist Bill McKibben writes about "[Eaarth](#)," a new planet we have created due to our hubris and addiction to cheap fossil fuels. *Eaarth*, while still recognizable, has a climate that behaves in fundamentally different ways than the climate on which human civilization developed.

Why is this a big deal? Think about it in terms of a computer operating system. Operating systems work largely unnoticed in the background, yet on any given computer they dictate what we do and how we do it. Those who have ever switched between the Apple iOS and Windows Operating System know the disruption this can cause in workflow.

Climate is earth's operating system. It works in the background (pending extreme weather events), yet dictates what humans do and how we do it. Indeed human civilization is built upon systems and cycles that assume particular climate givens: a reasonably known amount of rain falling within a particular time of year, temperatures that rarely go above a certain point, snow pack lasting through dry months, extreme weather events remaining within general temporal and geographic bounds, to name a few. Everything from our economy to our infrastructure to our cultural norms is connected to assumptions about how climate operates.

And herein lies the problem: **our society continues to operate as if we lived within the old climate, the one that no longer exists.**

In order to stave off the worst case-scenarios, we need immediate, [systemic changes](#) to stem greenhouse gas emissions. Simultaneously we need to help people reimagine how to live on this new planet in ways that optimize the well-being for all inhabitants, instead of maximize profits for a few.

[The Sustainability Institute](#), a not-for-profit organization housed at Western Technical College in La Crosse, Wisconsin, is taking steps toward those ends.

Borrowing from a program originating at SustainDane in Madison, Wisconsin, the Sustainability Institute runs the [MPower Business Champion](#) program. MPower is a year-long, cohort-based program that connects businesses & organizations who want to learn about, implement, build upon or showcase sustainability. Participating organizations attend ten monthly sessions around our community, network with other local organizations, and engage in eco-challenges while spearheading their own sustainability related projects.

In the four years the Sustainability Institute has offered the MPower program, we have delivered 84 hours of sustainability education over 42 separate sessions, we have worked with 16 different businesses and organizations in the Coulee Region representing about 7,000 employees, and we have inspired 77 sustainability-related projects.

It's hard to quantify the totality of the environmental and social impacts of MPower due to the wide range of sustainability projects participating organizations take on. However, we do know that participating organizations have collectively conserved over 49 million gallons of water, re-used or diverted well over 10,000 tons from various waste streams, kept 796 tons of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, and returned \$260,000 back into local communities.

We realize that our collective action still doesn't make a dent in what the world needs to do, but if the history of social movements is any indicator, **society can transform quickly once a critical mass normalizes a behavior.**

And how do we normalize a behavior? Show people compelling examples of others engaging in the desired actions. In this case, the more businesses we can encourage to take even small actions that promote sustainability and resilience and the more people we can get talking about the climate crisis and how to respond, the sooner we hit the tipping point that pushes society towards a new narrative—one that offers a better chance for all to thrive despite the challenges we face.

*Do you belong to a business or organization who values more than just the bottom line? There is still time to register for this year's MPower cohort. For more details, check us out online at [SustainInstitute.com/mpower](https://SustainInstitute.com/mpower)*