



Sierra

Newsletter of the Coulee Region Group

FEBRUARY 2021

"The Sierra Club celebrates Michael Regan's nomination to lead the EPA, and looks forward to working with him to build a just, equitable, and sustainable future." - Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune



The Community Hearing on Transit Equity: A National Conversation Wednesday, February 3 and Thursday, February 4 ONLINE

On February 4, a network of transit rider unions, community organizations, environmental groups and labor unions celebrate **Transit Equity Day**—a national day of action to commemorate the birthday of Rosa Parks by declaring that public transit is a civil right. Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus to demand an end to segregation in the Montgomery, Alabama transit system. We make the connection to this act of resistance to highlight the rights of all people to high-quality public transportation run on clean/renewable energy.

On February 3 and 4, the Community Hearing will feature testimonies from workers and riders who depend on transit. Community and labor organizers will act as hearing facilitators. We need to guarantee workers and riders from all walks of life and from all parts of the country have safe, affordable and reliable means of transportation to get to where they need to be, when they need to be there, without struggle, financial stress or prejudice. Sign up to testify or watch the proceedings at www.labor4sustainability.org/transit-equity-2021

February 3 at 7 p.m.

Wisconsin Forests at Risk

Guest: Ron Eckstein, Green Fire

Hosted by Chippewa Valley Group

More details at tiny.cc/WIForests0203

Wisconsin's forests have made a remarkable recovery since the unsustainable cutting and clearing of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Now, the state's forests are managed for ecological and social benefits in addition to economic considerations arising from timber harvest.

Ron Eckstein, chair of the Forestry Work Group for Wisconsin's Green Fire, will review the age, composition, and structure of Wisconsin's forests then examine significant threats and recommend mitigation actions. Ron

will also highlight the important work being done by Wisconsin's Green Fire, which was formed in 2017 to help local units of government, nonprofit organizations, media, decision makers and citizens get the scientific information they need to address local and regional natural resource issues.

Ron is retired from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources after 36 years as Wildlife Biologist at Rhinelander where he still resides. He worked on forest habitat and biodiversity issues as well as eagle and osprey recovery and wild rice conservation. In addition to his work for Wisconsin's Green Fire, Ron continues to work on forestry and wildlife issues in volunteer leadership positions for several Wisconsin conservation organizations.

Ready for 100 in your town

The Coulee Region Group's Ready for 100 team successfully worked to encourage passage of resolutions pledging a transition to renewable energy in the City of La Crosse (2019) and in La Crosse County (2020). That team will now work on pressing for concrete next steps to make those pledges a reality.

If you would like to bring a similar initiative to your community, please email us. We can provide help with an action plan, resources, and advice.

Vernon County R4100!

Vernon County CRSC members! We need you to help with a new initiative to bring a Ready for 100 resolution to Vernon County. Partnering with Wisconsin Conservation Voters and Citizen Action Driftless Rural-Urban Co-op, the Coulee Region Group hopes to secure a commitment to act on climate. Email us for more details: CRSierraClub@gmail.com.

New PSC, New Possibilities

In a January 28 blog post, "Distributed Generation in Wisconsin: The Policy Changes We Need," RENEW Wisconsin describes current restrictions on bringing solar-generated power to the Wisconsin energy grid. The Public Service Commission (PSC), a regulatory panel that oversees Wisconsin utilities, has the power to improve conditions for renewable generation. With new commissioner Tyler Huebner, clean energy advocates are hopeful. Read more at renewwisconsin.org

For more on what's holding solar back in the United States, watch "Jonathan Scott's Power Switch" at pbs.org/independentlens



On January 27, "Climate Day," President Biden signed his "Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis At Home and Abroad." The multi-part statement puts the climate crisis at the center of foreign policy, Department of Defense policies, international priorities, and his domestic agenda. As promised, President Biden is weaving action on climate crisis with other priorities, including his Buy American agenda and his determination to include racial justice in every part of his administration.

The Sierra Club, in celebrating these "go big" actions by the Biden Administration, notes, "*People like you are responsible for the pace and intensity of Biden's Day One actions on climate and the environment. The environmental movement called on the president to make his climate and environmental justice platform the most ambitious of any major party nominee, and it worked hard to help him win the presidency. We should feel proud to see our efforts pay off so immediately and so spectacularly.*"

To read the details of the Climate Day executive order, visit www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad

Renewable/Energy Saving Credits Extended!

Tax credits for residential energy efficiency have now been extended retroactively, through December 31, 2021. The tax credit for builders of energy efficient homes and tax deductions for energy efficient commercial buildings have also been retroactively extended, through December 31, 2021.

The tax credits for residential renewable energy products are still available through December 31, 2021. Renewable energy tax credits for fuel cells, small wind turbines, and geothermal heat pumps now feature a gradual step down in the credit value, the same as those for solar energy systems.

Use up to 30% less energy in your home by outfitting it with ENERGY STAR certified products. Learn more and find products at energystar.gov

Focus on Energy is Wisconsin's 20 year old energy efficiency and renewable resource program. Get a free energy pack to help you save energy, on lighting and heating, find rebates and incentives for purchasing and installing energy efficient appliances and systems, find an energy advisor, get a home energy audit, or learn how your business can improve its efficiency and bottom line. For program details and more ways to save energy, see focusonenergy.com

Coulee Region people

This month we talk to UW-Madison freshman, **Lily Herling**, a graduate of Central High School in La Crosse.

What got you interested in the environment?

My mom's parents lived through the Great Depression and I was raised to live frugally. Friends actually got me involved, starting Fridays for Future at Central, which then became Youth Climate Action Team. So, part of my original involvement was just doing something with friends; I wasn't driven by super powerful environmental morals. But, after getting involved, the more I learned the more I started to care. Once you learn what's going on and how much we're destroying the Earth, and how it impacts people and future generations, you can't really go back. Now I'm trying to figure out my activism with personal environmental commitments.

When did you move from participation to being more of an organizer?

I don't really think of myself as a leader. I don't like to make decisions; it scares me to be in charge. I like to have something purposeful to do, though, so getting involved showed me how fulfilling it is. I have joined a few clubs at UW-Madison, like Campus Leaders for Energy Action Now.

Do you have a main environmental concern?

We keep using fossil fuels and it shouldn't be that hard to get off by using solar, wind, and geothermal. We have renewables, but we're still investing in fossil fuels and the change isn't being made fast enough. Even though,

apparently, Shell and other energy companies are starting to transition away from fossil fuels, we are still not making changes fast enough. I definitely don't understand all the nuances of policies, but government has subsidized the fossil fuel industry and infrastructure and that should change. A big part will be relocalizing the energy supply. I don't think we should let giant corporations control renewable energy. We have to take personal responsibility and recognize environmental injustice. A small fraction of the population is responsible for producing most emissions. But those who produce the least are bearing the brunt of the harm.

What are your favorite outdoor activities?

Going on walks, hiking, and biking. Being in the natural world is very restorative. I've hear about Forest Bathing and I think what I like to do could be called "wind bathing." I love feeling the strong winds on top of the bluffs. As a Christian, to me, being in nature is like an act of worship.

How has environmentalism affected you?

I'm not sure, but if I look forward five years, I know I want to do something that makes a difference. I don't want to just maintain but improve or change the way things are--find a balance--by embracing stewardship.

Do you have a 2021 environmental wish?

That president Biden is able to follow through with his promises to start taking meaningful climate action. If we don't see a transition in the next four years, we're in trouble. Part of that needs to be rejoining the Paris agreement to push rest of world toward action.



Fridays for Future-led Climate Action March in La Crosse, September 20, 2019. Picture by Janette Dean, Caledonia, Minnesota.

February 3 - Virtual tour of Glacier National Park. tiny.cc/GWSC-Glacier

February 5-7: Becoming an Outdoors-Woman weekend at UW-SP. uwsp.edu/cnr-ap/bowWI

February 20-21 - PBS Wisconsin Garden & Landscape Expo online. wigardenexpo.com

February 24-27 - The Slumberland American Birkie! Participate from home at www.birkie.com

Help

Need help with newsletter! Can you write about what's happening in your community, submit calendar or action items, or interview local Sierra Club members or activists in your county? Help make the newsletter better and more useful! Please email CRSierraClub@gmail.com