



Sierra

Newsletter of the Coulee Region Group
JANUARY 2022

"I'm a climate scientist. Don't Look Up captures the madness I see every day." - Peter Kalmus, NASA climate scientist and author of Being the Change: Live Well and Spark a Climate Revolution (tinyurl.com/kalmus-dlu)

TUESDAY, JANUARY 25 at 7 p.m.

What is a Climate Action Plan?

Ted Redmond, co-founder, paleBLUedot, llc

ONLINE

Register: tinyurl.com/CRSC012522

The Sierra Club's Ready for 100 initiative supports local grassroots efforts to encourage governments, large, and small, to make the equitable and just transition to 100% clean, renewable energy. So far, more than 180 cities and towns have made that commitment, including La Crosse, which has pledged to reduce community carbon emissions to zero by 2050. As the next step in this process, the city has enlisted consultant paleBLUedot, llc, to help create a community climate action plan.

What is a climate action plan? Who should make one? How does the process work?

Join us as we hear from Ted Redmond, co-founder of paleBLUedot, llc. about his company's work to give individuals and communities the tools to make a positive difference and what the process with the City and community of La Crosse will involve. We can make a difference, we can reduce carbon emissions and projected temperature rises, we can work together to rethink how our systems can support a sustainable future. Register here: tinyurl.com/CRSC012522.

If you live in the city of La Crosse you can help by completing the Climate Action Survey and sharing a climate change story.

If you would like to take the survey or share your story but you do not have internet access, please call 608-315-2693 and we will send you a paper copy.

The City of La Crosse is developing its first Climate Action Plan for the community. The plan will help those who live and work in La Crosse imagine and achieve a future where the earth and all who live on it thrive.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

TWO WAYS TO GET INVOLVED NOW

1 CLIMATE ACTION SURVEY

Take the City of La Crosse's Climate Action Survey and help shape our climate action priorities. Please share the survey with your La Crosse neighbors, friends, and family. Find the survey here: <https://www.lacrosseclimateactionplan.org/survey>



2 CLIMATE STORIES PROJECT

Everyone has a climate change story and the City of La Crosse wants to hear yours! Your climate stories will help give others a better understanding of how climate change is being experienced in La Crosse.

You can share your story in writing, video, or even through art! To begin sharing your climate story go here: <https://www.lacrosseclimateactionplan.org/stories>



STAY INFORMED

Keep up to date with the City's Climate Action Plan and how you can be involved here: <https://www.lacrosseclimateactionplan.org/>



2021 Year in Review

by Kathy Allen, CRSC board president

Last year, 2021, was another year of pandemic restrictions, but our Coulee Region group still found ways to be involved in environmental advocacy in our communities. Let's hope we can see each other more in person in 2022! Here are some of our accomplishments from the past year:

January - We submitted letters of support for grant applications by the recently-formed Vernon County Energy District (VCED) and WisCorps. The VCED sought a grant from the Wisconsin Public Service Commission to facilitate more comprehensive energy planning in Vernon County by bringing a wide variety of stakeholders to the table to share best practices and lessons learned. WisCorps submitted a grant to cultivate an inclusive and equitable environment within WisCorps and in the La Crosse community, specifically in the outdoor and conservation spaces, including a series of virtual workshops focused on racial equity, inclusion, diversity, and allyship. Both grant applications were successful.

February - Our group board passed a resolution in support of Transit Equity Day, a national day of action to advocate for accessible, reliable, and affordable transit powered by renewable energy.

March - We co-sponsored a "Transit Talk" with State Senator Brad Pfaff, and also held a virtual lobby visit with Senator Pfaff to advocate for Sierra Club priorities in the state budget.

April - Three of our board members hosted a virtual presentation for La Crosse Earth Week - a recording is still available at <https://youtu.be/z8frLytzhDU>. Board members also submitted two citizen resolutions to the Conservation Congress spring hearing in La Crosse County, one to address PFAS and another asking for no new fossil fuel infrastructure construction. Both resolutions passed.

May - Our group submitted a short video for Altra's virtual employee wellness week, describing connections between environmental and personal wellness (find it on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/CRSierraClub/videos/1159634657796022). We also co-sponsored the Crawford Stewardship Project's "Farms, Factories, and the Future" virtual forum and a "Transit Talk" with La Crosse Mayor Mitch Reynolds.

July - After a hiatus in 2020, the Sierra Club's Black River family paddling and camping trip was back! Families paddled 24 miles, visited a waterfall, and camped on a sandbar.

August - We co-hosted an art and press event asking Rep. Ron Kind to support climate action, green jobs, and environmental justice in federal infrastructure and budget legislation. Attendees decorated a banner with their handprints and messages, that was delivered to Rep. Kind's La Crosse office. We also announced a new environmental stewardship award for a Coulee Region high school senior, beginning in spring 2022.

September - Our board was asked by Senator Tammy Baldwin's office for a statement in support of climate action in the Infrastructure Bill and Build Back Better. We submitted the following: "The Coulee Region Sierra Club group leadership is grateful to Senator Tammy Baldwin for her support of the bold climate initiatives in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Senate Budget Resolution. The funding for clean energy and clean transportation incentives, weatherization and electrification of buildings, clean energy manufacturing, and climate-smart agriculture in this legislation will benefit both our environment and our local economy. It will help municipalities and businesses in Western Wisconsin strengthen our communities while battling the looming climate crisis and building a healthier, more secure future for our country." We also co-sponsored and tabled at "Ask Me About My EV," a National Drive Electric Week event in La Crosse to educate about and promote electric vehicles.

October - Members participated in a socially-distanced roadside clean-up along River Valley Drive in La Crosse.

November - We're co-sponsoring a campaign asking the School District of La Crosse to set a goal to transition to 100% clean, renewable energy by 2050 and to prepare a climate action plan. An online petition went live in November and will stay active into the New Year.

December - The La Crosse County Board passed a resolution to have an advisory referendum on the spring ballot asking if the state should "establish a right to clean water to protect human health, the environment, and the diverse cultural and natural heritage of Wisconsin". The resolution, drafted by the River Alliance, was first brought to the County Board's attention by a Coulee Region group member.

Your 2022 CRSC Board

Thank you to those who participated in December voting to elect members to serve on the Coulee Region Sierra Club board of directors. Kathy Allen, Ned Gatzke, Cathy Van Maren, and Pat Wilson were elected to serve in 2022.

Jan. 5 deadline for Environmental Education Grant applications

CRSC is offering grants of up to \$200 each for **environmental education projects to schools or community organizations involving young people at the elementary and middle school level** within the CRSC region: Crawford, Grant, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Richland, Trempealeau, and Vernon counties.

Applications may be completed online, emailed or mailed. **The deadline has been extended to January 5, 2022.** For more information, visit sierraclub.org/wisconsin/coulee/Education or tinyurl.com/CRSC-Students

New for 2021-2022, CRSC will recognize the achievements of and **award \$150 to a high school senior** who demonstrates leadership, action, and environmental stewardship, and who understands the importance of

civic engagement in protecting our environment. Eligible students are those graduating from high school in 2022 who reside in the CRSC region: Crawford, Grant, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Richland, Trempealeau, and Vernon counties. The application includes essays and submission of a portfolio. The deadline for applications is March 15, 2022 with the award to be given by the end of April, 2022. For more information, visit sierraclub.org/wisconsin/coulee/Education or tinyurl.com/CRSC-Students

Funding for these environmental grants and awards is possible thanks to an annual grant from the Paul E. Stry Foundation, shared dues from Sierra Club memberships, and donations made by community members. Email us to learn more: CRSierraClub@gmail.com.

UW-La Crosse Climate Rally

On December 13, UW-L students and community members, supported by Citizen Action of Wisconsin's Driftless Co-op, gathered on campus to call on the University to hire a sustainability coordinator and prepare a climate action plan. Below is an excerpt from a speech by UW-L student activist, Abby Siakpere:

It's official: July 2021 was the hottest month on Earth in history. Intense heat, widespread drought, historic flooding and "once-in-a-lifetime" storms have become our new normal. Current infrastructure is stressed to the brink of collapse and those, especially in low-income communities and communities of color, end up suffering the worst of the consequences. On August 7, 2021, historic flooding was seen across the Driftless region as mother nature dumped 5.59 inches of rain on the City of La Crosse, making it the wettest day ever on record.

And just this past weekend, deadly tornadoes ripped through six states, creating an over 200-mile path of destruction throughout Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, Arkansas, and Mississippi. Deanne Criswell, the FEMA administrator, was quoted over the weekend as saying, "The effects we are seeing of climate change are the crisis of our generation," and that "the severity, duration and magnitude of the storms this late in the year were 'unprecedented.'"

Climate change is here, and the effects are being seen all over the Driftless region. Yet local and state politicians have done nothing to protect the citizens of Wisconsin from future disasters. Climate Action Plans should have already been drafted, approved and implemented because the research has already been done.

Here at UW-L, the brand new \$2 million dollar Prairie Springs Center was specifically built to support environmental studies and education, conservation, and ecological technology, yet UW-L administrators have yet to establish a full-time sustainability coordinator, a position that exists at EVERY OTHER UW CAMPUS EXCEPT LA CROSSE.

We are here today to say that we've had enough, and we are holding local and state officials accountable. The establishment of these things are the BARE MINIMUM foundation steps local leaders can take to help effectively combat climate change in the Driftless region, but to this very day, those steps haven't even been taken.

I'm a person of action. Anyone can say anything they want to whoever they want, it's the actions that that person takes is what matters. Actions speak louder than words, and leaders...this is your time to take action. DO SOMETHING.



UWL Rally for Climate. Photo by Ben Wilson, Citizen Action Driftless Co-op

Transit Equity Days

Since 2018, on February 4, a network of transit rider unions, community organizations, environmental groups and labor unions have organized 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 is an iconic figure of the civil rights era who chose the tactic of refusing 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.

In 2021, residents of La Crosse county will highlight the importance of public transportation with a week of events and programs, including a display at the La Crosse Public Library, ride-alongs with elected representatives, and more. Programming will also highlight the SMRT bus (Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit) that serves many CRSC counties.

Transit equity has many facets. The right to access necessary services, education, jobs, health care, entertainment, and a full life should not depend on one's ability to own or drive a private vehicle. A strong public transit system that is affordable, accessible, and that goes where people need to go when they need to go is not a luxury.



The average cost to own and operate a vehicle in 2020, according to the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics was more than \$9,500.

The League of Women Voters estimates that, in 2021, nearly 29% of Wisconsin residents were non-drivers.

According to a White House Fact Sheet, Wisconsin residents who take public transit spend an extra 62.7% of their time commuting and non-White households are 5.9 times more likely to commute via public transportation.

The EPA reports that private cars and light trucks cause more than 50% of transportation sector greenhouse gas emissions.

In a 2018 transportation equity report, the Wisconsin Sierra Club noted that most of the state's transportation budget goes to state highways, debt service, and aids to local roads. In 2015, less than 5 percent of the transportation budget went to public transit.

Switching even some trips from fossil-fuel vehicles to public transit, especially as newer hybrid and electric buses are added to fleets, can reduce individuals' carbon footprints immediately.

More details about transit equity events in the La Crosse area will be available by January 15 at tinyurl.com/TEDLaCrosse2022

January Events

January 6 at 6 p.m. ONLINE: Environmental Justice in Sierra Club - Panel Discussion. Register at tinyurl.com/WISC010622

January 7 at 6:30 p.m. ONLINE: LN3 - Seven Teachings of the Anishinaabe in Resistance film and discussion. Register at tinyurl.com/WISC010722

January 12 at 6:30 p.m. ONLINE: Wisconsin Sierra Club Virtual Volunteer Night. Learn more at tinyurl.com/WISCVolNite0122

January 17: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

January 17 at 6:30 p.m. ONLINE: Environmental Alliances with Wisconsin Indian Nations. Register at tinyurl.com/WISC011722

January 20 at 6:30 p.m. ONLINE: A Conversation on Government and the Environment in Wisconsin with State Treasurer Sarah Godlewski and Tia Nelson. Details will be at cr-sierra.blogspot.com by January 10.

January 22 at 6 p.m. ONLINE: Supporting the Indigenous-led Movement to Stop Pipelines and Other Threats. Register at tinyurl.com/WISC012222

January 25 at 7 p.m. ONLINE: What is a Climate Action Plan? Visit tinyurl.com/SRSC012522

Need Help with Newsletter!

Seeking a few people to help put the newsletter together. The current editor would like to share duties. Email crsierraclub@gmail.com

Climate Change - UWL staff view

By: Adrian Cuff

Adrian Cuff is a senior at UW-La Crosse majoring in microbiology with a minor in environmental science. As part of his coursework for the Capstone for Environmental Science class, Adrian is submitting articles about local environmental issues for our newsletter.

In my last interview, I decided to interview students on what their opinions were on the Climate Crisis at UWL. For this interview I chose a UWL employee and wanted to see if there was a difference in responses between the employee and the students. Here is some background information on the employee I chose:

Background: Steph Lowe is the Hall Director of Coate Hall, where I work as a Resident Assistant. Steph isn't originally from the area and is from the state of Kansas. Steph has a Master's degree in College Student Development and is very educated compared to most people. She just moved to Wisconsin a few months ago, and I wanted to see what she thought about climate change since she isn't from the local area. I ended up asking Steph how she feels about the climate crisis and what she recommends for students on campus here at UWL.

Adrian Cuff: Hey Steph, glad I could snag you for this interview. How do you feel about climate change, and have you learned anything about it recently?

Steph Lowe: I feel like I think about climate change all the time because I see it on the news, and I have noticed the changes in the weather. Something that about recently is about the fashion industry, and how energy consuming, and how wasteful they are because fashion only last so long. I don't participate in fast fashion, and it has made me realize that I should cut back on fashion. This also relates to consumerism, because you are buying things all the time and using resources, and you could donate items instead to be reused instead of throwing them away. This also relates in putting more resources in the landfill and that is not acceptable at this point. I feel like we don't teach a lot about this in schools, and we need to do a better job about it. I learned about it in college, but that was the first time I've heard of it in my schooling career. I want to be more informed about what's going on, and what I can do on my own part in the future to help the issue.

AC: Are you doing actions to try and limit your carbon footprint?

SL: I usually don't drive a ton; I just walk everywhere or carpool. I also try to keep my lights off as much as possible and watch my water usage as well.

AC: What is your advice to students on the climate crisis?

SL: It's good for students to be informed as well because they can have conversations, and they can educate each other about the situation. This crisis isn't ending anytime soon, and it affects everyone, so they need to care about it, and the only way to do that is learn how it effects your situation.

Overall, Steph and the students have the same opinions on the climate crisis, which is great. I do agree that educating the public about the situation will help fix the crisis in the long run, and the next couple generations coming up will hopefully be the saviors we have been looking for.

TEAMS make things happen!

Statewide Issue Teams work on a specific issue under shared volunteer and staff leadership. They meet monthly over zoom and offer opportunities to assist with strategy and planning, as well as implementation, to win environmental victories! Join the **Clean Water, Transportation Access & Equity, Clean Energy, Public Lands, Wildlife, Pipelines, or Mining** team! Each January, teams set goals, strategy, targets, tactics, and timelines for the year. We also identify ways to work better together and refresh ourselves on what tools are available to volunteers. This year, the Teams Meeting will be on January 13 at 5:30. Register at <https://tinyurl.com/WISC2022Teams> to help make 2022 a year of positive Sierra Club action!