



# Sierra

Newsletter of the Coulee Region Group

MAY 2020

*"Instructions for living a life: Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it." - from "sometimes" by Mary Oliver*

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and state Safer at Home travel and meeting restrictions, all in-person Sierra Club activities are suspended until further notice. We encourage Sierra Club members to keep themselves, their families, and their communities safe by staying home as much as possible. More details at [www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/index.htm](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/index.htm)

## Thank you, transit workers!

On April 16, National Get on Board/Sound the Horn Day, members of the Coulee Region Sierra Club joined with transit advocates across the country to express support and appreciation for public transportation programs, staff, and drivers. We appreciate public transit programs in our region including the Municipal Transit Utility in La Crosse and Onalaska, the Onalaska Holmen West Salem Shared Ride Taxi, and the Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit (SMRT) program.

## Film - Dark Waters - May 27



John Muir Chapter will host an online virtual screening of the new film DARK WATERS at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, May 27. Details are still being finalized. We will post the link to the screening and online discussion at [sierraclub.org/wisconsin/coulee](http://sierraclub.org/wisconsin/coulee) and [cr-sierra.blogspot.com](http://cr-sierra.blogspot.com) as soon as it's available.

DARK WATERS tells the shocking and heroic story of an attorney (Mark Ruffalo) who risks his career and family to uncover a dark secret hidden by one of the world's largest corporations and to bring justice to a community dangerously exposed for decades to deadly chemicals.

See the trailer and read more at the film's web site - [www.focusfeatures.com/dark-waters](http://www.focusfeatures.com/dark-waters)

## Thanks for supporting us!

April's John Muir Chapter Sierra Club fundraiser has ended. The Coulee Region Sierra Club raised \$804 from 16 donors and will keep \$402 to help fund our environmental education grants. Thanks to everyone who participated. Even though the formal fundraiser has ended, you are welcome to help fund this important grant any time! Email us to learn how. [crsierraclub@gmail.com](mailto:crsierraclub@gmail.com).

## May 9 Join the Plan to Win

You're invited to a special virtual event on Saturday, May 9, at 4 p.m. where we'll launch our 2020 strategy to protect our environment by defeating Donald Trump. In the 2020 election, voters will determine whether we act on climate change before it's too late. In addition to winning a new president, we will focus on electing environmental champions to state and local offices, protecting our House majority, and winning the Senate. The COVID-19 pandemic has only underscored the urgency of our work to unseat Trump. Sign up at [tinyurl.com/scplantowin](http://tinyurl.com/scplantowin)

## Special election on May 12

Help Sierra Club-endorsed candidate Tricia Zunker win the May 12 special election for the 7th Congressional District! Tricia is a Justice on the Supreme Court of the Ho-Chunk Nation and President of the Wausau School Board. She would be Wisconsin's first Native American member of Congress. Sign up to make GOTV calls at [tinyurl.com/call4tricia](http://tinyurl.com/call4tricia). Read more and donate at [triciaforwisconsin.com](http://triciaforwisconsin.com) and read the Sierra Club endorsement at [tinyurl.com/jmc-zunker](http://tinyurl.com/jmc-zunker).

## High capacity well permits

On Friday, May 1, Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul sent a letter to DNR Secretary Preston Cole rescinding an opinion issued by the former Attorney General that prohibited the DNR from considering the environmental impacts of high capacity wells in permitting. Read the letter here: [tinyurl.com/050120hcwltr](https://tinyurl.com/050120hcwltr)

## Upper Mississippi critical



The advocacy group American Rivers has named the Upper Mississippi River as the nation's "most endangered river of 2020." The group warns that communities along the upper Mississippi are not prepared to deal with more frequent flooding caused by climate change. "These risks are greatly exacerbated by two

centuries of shortsighted floodplain--and watershed--development decisions that are cutting the river off from hundreds of thousands of acres of its floodplain, dangerously constricting the upper Mississippi, and degrading vital fish and wildlife habitat." More at [endangeredrivers.americanrivers.org/upper-mississippi-river-2020](https://endangeredrivers.americanrivers.org/upper-mississippi-river-2020).

## New CAFO permit requested

Last December, the Crawford County Board of Supervisors passed a one year moratorium on CAFO permits to give time to study possible threats to the water, health, and safety of county residents posed by Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations. On March 27, Roth Feeder Pigs applied for a Water Discharge Elimination Permit from the DNR for a planned new Marietta Township (Crawford County) facility for 7,000 hogs. The facility plans to store nearly 7 million gallons of manure.

Meanwhile, coronavirus outbreaks at meat processing facilities have disrupted hog operations and may mean animals will be euthanized. President Trump is now requiring meat processing facilities to remain open even as the number of coronavirus cases among workers continues to rise.

### Book Club Reminder

Our Coulee Region Sierra Club book club continues ONLINE with Dahr Jamail's award-winning book, **The End of Ice**. We'll continue with this book through May and accept your suggestions for our next book. Join us at [tinyurl.com/crscbookclub](https://tinyurl.com/crscbookclub)

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## SWIGG Study Update

MADISON — The Southwest Wisconsin Groundwater and Geology Study of Grant, Iowa, and Lafayette Counties is halfway through its second phase to identify fecal sources of contamination in private wells. The study began in late 2018 with the goal of assessing the quality of drinking water sources from private wells in southwest Wisconsin and determining the probable sources of any contamination found.

The latest phase of the study found fecal contamination in 27 of the 34 private wells sampled. In November 2019, these 34 wells were selected at random after earlier sampling in this study found them to be contaminated with coliform bacteria or with levels of nitrate above the drinking water standard.

The three County Conservation Departments are thankful for the continued participation of the area residents in the study. "Without their permission to access their wells, we wouldn't be able to continue collecting valuable data for the SWIGG Study.", said Grant County Conservation, Sanitation, and Zoning Administrator Lynda Schweikert.

The SWIGG scientists analyzed the samples for specific viruses and bacteria that indicate fecal contamination from human wastewater or livestock manure. Not all of these viruses and bacteria are capable of causing illness.

They found evidence of both human and livestock sources for the contamination, including manure from cattle and swine. In 16 of the 34 sampled wells the scientists found pathogens associated with gastrointestinal illness in humans. However, researchers have not calculated the health risk for these results, which vary based on the specific pathogen, its concentration, and the health of the person that drinks the water.

The SWIGG study has been designed to sample water in all four seasons of the year since contaminant abundance can vary seasonally. The percentage of wells that test positive is also expected to differ as weather and land use change over time. Read more at [fyi.extension.wisc.edu/news/2020/04/15/swigg-study-update/](https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/news/2020/04/15/swigg-study-update/)