

## Equitable Access

What keeps you from getting outside and enjoying your local park or trail?

The Four Lakes Group Equity and Access campaign team is a group of individuals who have a passion for nature and believe that natural spaces should be accessible for all to enjoy, and who wish to improve access to parks and recreation opportunities for people in and around Dane County.

Barriers to access have many dimensions. On a recent webinar, Michael Hill expressed these barriers as ones of the head and heart: transportation - the physical act of getting to a park or public land; comfort - the state of being personally comfortable (not fearful) in that space; knowledge – being aware of the land and the recreational opportunities to want to visit; culture - feeling accepted in the space and recreational activity; leisure time - having the time to recreate. (Still often for the privileged.)

As awareness grows, efforts at the national level have emerged including both campaigns and bills to address barriers. Some examples:

- **Outdoor for All Act** - provides funds to create more open spaces in underserved communities and neighborhoods;
- **Every Kid Outdoors** - creates a free pass for federal lands available to 4th graders and their families. The program for 2020 - 2021 expires at the end of August;
- **Transit to Trails Act** - provides grant funds for public transit service from underserved communities to public lands;
- **10-Minute Walk Campaign** - ranks park systems in urban and rural communities based on whether people have a park within 10 minutes of their home.
- **Sierra Club (national) Outdoors for All Campaign** - works to expand universal access to nature for children and youth, as well as to empower veterans to continue their service in protecting the land they defend.

### Our local campaign - focus on Dane County

A starting point for this work is listening to stories about access in Dane County and looking at what we know about parks and public lands in our communities. That includes acknowledging that systemic barriers exist like redlining and deeded discrimination when neighborhoods were created. In Madison, the placement and construction of the beltline created additional physical barriers and transportation challenges for nearby south side neighborhoods, in addition to creating unhealthy air.

Dane County Parks and Open Space lands exist primarily outside the urban core of the county requiring a car to access many of the parks. Yet the parks have over 3 million visitors annually. Public transit reaches five of the sixty-six Parks properties. Bike trails access 6 of these parks.

The City of Madison parks system has over 270 public parks and ranks 12<sup>th</sup>

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## Chair's Column

*Mary Reames*

Greetings from the Sierra Club Four Lakes Group!

The daffodils and tulips are finally blooming, I've seen lots of trees and bushes in bud, and it looks like spring may finally be with us. These are signs that give me hope.

The Biden administration is also bringing us signs of hope, with, among other things, the most diverse group of cabinet nominees ever seen in this country, reversals of a number of Trump's destructive executive orders, and swift action on a COVID-19 recovery plan. Speaking of COVID-19, there is reason for hope here too, as the vaccine reaches more people worldwide.

Amid these signs of hope, there are many signs that our work is not yet done. As I am writing this, we are getting reports of another shooting in Kenosha, WI, resulting in multiple deaths. Incidences of domestic terrorism and racial violence against African Americans and Asian Americans fill our news feeds. Texas froze in February, and California is preparing for another long fire season. And while the COVID-19 vaccine makes its way around the country, the rise of variants and an ever-increasing death toll further strain our pandemic-weary nerves.

I read an article in the Washington Post about hope and the climate crisis. The author points out several signs that there is still hope amid the "relentlessly, objectively grim" climate news, including the countless individual actions that contribute to a larger result; small indications of natural resilience that we haven't seen before;

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in the country (2020 Trust for Public Lands rankings) for parks within a 10-minute walk of the home of every person in every neighborhood.

As described below, the various pieces of the access puzzle are linked. We invite you to join us to address a particular interest or amplify the needs and concerns expressed by those with limited ability or access. Please ask about or join our Equity and Access team! Contact Liz Wessel at [lizard59sc@yahoo.com](mailto:lizard59sc@yahoo.com).

### Madison Metro Redesign

Madison Metro System’s redesign in conjunction with creating Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) presents a huge opportunity to address equity and access issues. The primary redesign focus will be on linking jobs and affordable housing and providing access to health care, schools and grocery stores. But can the redesign also address other equity issues in our communities like access to public park lands? With only 5 county properties reachable by the current bus system, we can advocate for a better result as an outcome of the redesign process.

The process is still at its beginning stages with input surveys. The City’s redesign team anticipates putting out some options towards the end of summer/early fall. And the Four Lakes group is still forming its positions/priorities for this process. The team plans to amplify the access stories and needs by partnering with organizations.

What you can do:

- Join our Equity Access team!
- Take the Madison Metro **redesign survey** and provide your priorities for the bus system

### Inclusive playgrounds

Most playgrounds are not accessible for all. The Equity Access team hosted an online virtual cafe to learn more about Fitchburg’s proposed more inclusive playground. Designing inclusive playgrounds means looking broadly at abilities and culture and striving to eliminate as many barriers as possible to play and the artificial separation of children at play. Fitchburg plans to add an inclusive playground at McKee Farms Park. The City of Madison has 3 inclusive playgrounds and is planning to add more over the next few years.

Challenges for these parks are both funding as they stretch local parks budgets, and also location. How do children and their families get to these parks? Transportation, especially public transit, should be a part of the inclusive playground design and planning process. These playgrounds could benefit from the Madison Metro Redesign process to provide better and wider access.

### National Trails Day - June 5th

While plans are still being formed, the Four Lakes Group hopes to offer a day of personal/family recreation and action. We need your help to offer some options. Some possibilities include:

- Take a walk challenge to find out if you live within 10-minutes of a park.
- Let your state Representative and Senator know you support the proposal for a WI Every Kid Outdoors Pass for Wisconsin State Parks. (Conservation Congress voters recently supported this by overwhelming numbers).
- Take the Transportation and Park Access Survey. Tell us your stories about where bus transportation access to parks could be improved. **Take the survey HERE: <https://www.danecountyparks.com/survey>**

Better regional transit options are critical both for addressing climate change and equity issues in our community. Enhancing the mobility of each person empowers them. It enables them to get where they want to go and do what they want or need to do. We also know that It will take more than addressing transportation to truly create equity for all in the outdoors.

and the idea that hope is seen in our actions. He ultimately concludes hope is what happens when we accept the despair of climate grief and move beyond it.

The Sierra Club can be our place of hope. Our work on environmental issues - including responses to climate change - and on social justice issues continues to see real results. We are closing coal-fired power plants and pushing back against tar sands oil pipelines. We are seeking equal access to public lands and parks, and supporting plans for fair housing. The Chapter officially changed its name from the John Muir Chapter to the Wisconsin Chapter to better represent everyone within the state’s borders. And we are continuing our work despite the restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please join us in our work and in pursuing hope.

### Four Lakes Group Sierra Club Contacts

<http://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/four-lakes>

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## **Voit Farm Proposal**

The Sierra Club has long been supportive of smart growth (remember “Sprawl costs us all?”) and complete streets that incentivize walkable and bike-able neighborhoods and mass transit. In addition, green space, access to nature, and locally grown food are other important aspects of creating community.

Those underlying values and inclusion of those features have led us to support *Save the Farm*'s proposal for the 65-acre Voit Farm on Madison's northeast side off Milwaukee St. One of the largest remaining privately-owned open spaces in Madison, it has been eyed for development for years. However, the family has been reticent to sell to the City for 'standard' development.

This area's potential caught the attention of many neighbors and activists who are proposing a forward-looking project that will support community and provide for sustainability, equity and diversity. They envision this area as one with earth-friendly and efficient affordable housing using renewable energy, urban farming, green open spaces for community gatherings, learning and recreation, and limited roadways with good transit access. The area is already on a major thoroughfare with a bus hub and major grocery store nearby.

*Save the Farm* has been developing plans, drumming up support, working with the city, and raising funds to bring their proposal to fruition. There will be discussions regarding how this fits with Madison's comprehensive, transportation and park's plans, with review by city committees and the city council, as well as developer input, but the extent of community involvement and discussion is encouraging.

Go to <https://www.savethefarm.net> for more information. The Four Lakes Group will continue to be involved and provide input into this significant development.

Have a land use issue in your area you are concerned about or to laud? Contact Don Ferber at [d\\_ferber@sbcglobal.net](mailto:d_ferber@sbcglobal.net).

## **Beyond Coal Report**

Yes, we are indeed getting there! The last year has seen significant announcements regarding shutdowns of the South Oak Creek, Edgewater and Columbia coal plants in the next few years. That will dramatically reduce our coal burning in Wisconsin. As another a sign of real progress, Alliant, MGE and We Energies are all announcing significant amounts of new utility scale solar to replace the expensive coal plants they are shutting down.

We are celebrating those victories, but there is much more to do. The main remaining coal plant targets are Elm Road (2010), Weston (2008), and Madgett as the only older coal plant built in 1979. Dairyland Power Coop along with Minnesota Power are proposing to build a new fossil gas plant in Superior, which we are opposing. We're also challenging We Energies proposal for addition fossil gas storage rather than investing in energy efficiency.

One reason we're asking We Energies to do this is that our analysis revealed significantly high energy burdens (percent of income a household pays for utilities) for many Black and Latinx census tracts in Milwaukee. Historically redlined, these communities have also been especially strongly impacted by the pandemic, and would benefit from energy efficiency improvements – something we are working with partners in Milwaukee as advocates for.

There are also opportunities at the Public Service Commission with the “Roadmap to Zero” docket, and utility rate cases this year as opportunities to advocate for clean energy, better rate structures, and customer-friendly programs, and our team is continuing to strategize and work hard on these new opportunities.

If you're ready to help us fight climate change, consider joining our Wisconsin Beyond Coal Team.

## **Volunteer Opportunities!!!**

### **Volunteer Coordinator**

If you enjoy engaging with people, finding out more about them, and offering them opportunities to follow their passions, this is a great way to support the Sierra Club and grow our capacity. We have issues we're already working on, or there may be opportunities for individuals or groups to take leadership in a new area in line with our mission. New members as well as people who display an interest can be great audiences to talk with and find out about their interests and if they wish to become involved with our work. For more info, contact Don Ferber at [d\\_ferber@sbcglobal.net](mailto:d_ferber@sbcglobal.net).

### **Equity and Access Team**

As a Sierran, you probably have a great love of the outdoors and the many wonderful places and activities we have to explore and enjoy, and the ability to get to and make use of those places. But not everyone may be able to get to places they otherwise might enjoy. That's something our team is working on and advocating for to broaden access to those places – and their enjoyment. In particular, we are currently participating in Madison Metro's route redesign plan to ensure those in need have adequate transportation access to get to places they need or want to go. We've also been working with Dane County Parks on making some of their parks and areas more accessible. Interested in joining our team? Contact Liz Wessel at [lizardsc@yahoo.com](mailto:lizardsc@yahoo.com).



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### Newsletter Mailing

Our goal is environmentally friendly, cost effective communication with our members. Our primary modes of communication are this newsletter, the Four Lakes Enews, and our web site and Facebook page. If we don't have your email address, we mail you a hard copy – or you can request one. Otherwise, members receive an email letting you know when the newsletter is available to download.

Please consider sending your email address to [d\\_ferber@sbcglobal.net](mailto:d_ferber@sbcglobal.net) if we don't have it to save paper and the cost of mailing. Plus we can also send you our Enews to keep you better informed.

### Join our Four Lakes Board

If you're a dedicated environmentalist who has been wondering how to make a difference, joining our Four Lakes Group board is a great way to do just that. It gets you involved in the midst of the Sierra Club and you can help make decisions and set directions and priorities for our group. It allows you to apply your passions in areas that interest you, or where you have or would like to gain skills. Non-profit leadership experience can also be good for your resume.

The board generally meets once a month. Time commitment is generally an hour or two a week – more if you wish. Much of the learning is on the job, but we also provide support as needed to help you feel comfortable and find your niche.

Candidate statements of a paragraph or two regarding your interests and a photo are due August 31, and elections are held in the fall. For more information, contact Mary Reames at [mlreames@sbcglobal.net](mailto:mlreames@sbcglobal.net).

### Programs Coordinator

This is one of the most important components for our group – to have fun and informative events that attract people where they can make connections and get more involved. If you love learning and putting together fun or educational programs, this is an opportunity to be of great service. You can use your own imagination or solicit ideas. With Sierra Club audiences who love to be entertained or informed (or both!), this is a ready-made opportunity to put together Sierra Club events and help engage people on things they (and you) care about and would enjoy.

Currently our events are online, but we hope to return to doing in-person events. We provide support and can help find locations and presenters, and we do have a budget for food and other items. Programs can be as frequent as every month – or less – or they can be done on an ad hoc basis as opportunities arise. For more info, contact Don Ferber at [d\\_ferber@sbcglobal.net](mailto:d_ferber@sbcglobal.net).