



Four Lakes Sierran

Four Lakes Group Sierra Club newsletter, Winter 2021

Outdoor Access Initiative

Do you have a love for the outdoors and think access to nature is important for everyone? How about special places you wish others could enjoy? Do you wish that everyone could access those places and experience the same benefits of nature, and have ideas or are willing to work to improve access or add green space to increase equity?

If so, we would love your help to improve green space access in Dane County! Join our **Land Equity Access Team** where your ideas can help lay the foundation for this work, collaborate with other team members on what interests you, and support those in need of better access. As part of this team, your ideas and input can bolster the goal of equity in the outdoors and really benefit those in need.

To get connected with upcoming events, programs and happenings, **sign up at <http://bitly.ws/aVhw>.**

However, if you're ready to talk with someone about joining our team, **please fill out the interest form at <http://bitly.ws/aVhp>**, and we'll contact you.

We meet online on Mondays, but we also have some upcoming events and great opportunities to learn more and get involved.

Equitable & Inclusive Playgrounds Cafe!

Thursday, January 14, 5:30-6:30 pm

Sign up at <http://bitly.ws/aVhu>

Join the Sierra Club Four Lakes Group's new Land Equity Access Team to learn about equitable playground access with a discussion of current plans in the Fitchburg community. Topics will include the planning and creation of inclusive playgrounds and the HUB Community Center, and how these lessons can be utilized to address similar issues in this and other areas.

We'll be joined by Fitchburg Alders Julia Arata-Fratta and Gabriella Gerhardt, as well as Fitchburg Community Development Planner Wade Thompson, all of whom are all devoted to improving equitable parks access in Fitchburg. Want a preview? Check out the Fitchburg Star article about these projects at <http://bitly.ws/aVhx>.

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Chair's Column

Liz Wessel

It seems like everyone is saying it ...I can't wait for 2020 to be over. But as I reflect back, some good things have happened during this year which bodes well for 2021.

First, I want to introduce Laura Buska who has been brought on as an intern for the Four Lakes group to help engage volunteers. Our lead volunteers continue to wear many Sierra Club hats and often feel stretched for time, so Laura's help and presence are wonderful! She is taking the time to reach out, make people feel welcome and engage them in meaningful ways. Read about her work with our new Land Access and Equity team which we heartily invite you to join!

Our engagement in this issue and work really ramps up at the end of January with planning meetings to lay the groundwork for what we want to accomplish together in 2021. If you are interested, please fill out the information form at <http://bitly.ws/aVhp>.

And a tip of the hat to Four Lakes Group members Laura Lane and Ronda Conner. Both of these women received recognition by the Chapter this year at the virtual volunteer awards event in November.

Laura Lane received the **New Activist Award**. Laura may be a new activist but her contributions are widespread and her enthusiasm is inspirational. In addition to her leadership on our Beyond Coal Team,

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Kick off Planning Meetings

Monday, January 25, 6 - 8 PM

Thursday, January 28, 6 - 8 PM

Sign up at

<https://forms.gle/UPPf9FKZt1aepYZg7>

We're having meetings these two evenings to introduce people to our campaigns and start planning strategies for our work this year. (More info on page 4.) We are excited to get started and hope you can make it!

Again, to talk to someone about joining our team, sign up at <http://bitly.ws/aVhp>.

Four Lakes Group Sierra Club Contacts

<http://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/four-lakes>
<https://www.facebook.com/4lakesSierraClub/>

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Beyond Coal – Are we There Yet?

Not yet, but we are making great progress – and you're invited to help usher coal the rest of the way out. We had a lot of good news on that front last year when Alliant Energy announced the shutdown of the 380 MW Edgewater coal plant in Sheboygan by the end of 2022, and then We Energy announced the retirement of 1.3 GW of coal, including the older Oak Creek power plant (plus more) in 2023 and 2024.

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she serves on the Chapter Executive Committee, Fundraising Committee and Equity Committee. She and her daughter are also frequent participants in the Chapter's monthly volunteer nights. Behind her dedication and passion to stop climate change is her desire to create a better world for her children.

Ronda Conner received the **LD Rockwell Award** for her contributions to the political program. Ronda spent countless hours during the 2020 election season working with the national Sierra Club Texting Team to get out the vote and helping people learn more about our endorsed candidates. In addition to sending hundreds of texts herself, Ronda helped recruit and train other members of the team. Beyond her leadership with the National Texting Team, Ronda is also active with the Four Lakes Group Executive Committee and other projects, and with the Chapter through the Beyond Coal Campaign.

Congratulations again to both of them and to all of the award winners and to everyone who volunteers with the Sierra Club. Volunteers make it happen!

Congratulations too to Don Ferber, Erik Pettersen, Mary Reames and Liz Wessel for re-election to the Four Lakes Group Executive Committee and for their ongoing efforts. But we do have an open slot, and if you're interested in helping set directions for the Four Lakes Group, please contact me for more info.

Usually about this time of year Don Ferber would be busy recruiting volunteers for tabling at the Garden Expo, and then Canoecopia. This year will be very different. The Garden Expo will be an online event with a virtual Exhibition Hall. We will be using our theme of land access and equity to create an interactive space on the web with videos. Please contact Laura Buska (lauraannbuska@gmail.com) to get involved.

And finally a big "Thank you" to team Reid and Janine for their past work in managing our Enews and website. On behalf of the Four Lakes Group, we appreciate the time and effort you put into these important communication outlets.

If you are interested in learning how to produce the Enews for the Four Lakes Group, please contact me either by email or phone. Ideally we would have two people so they can take turns or back each other up.

I am looking forward to 2021. To the days when we can do group hikes, and meet and advocate together! Until then, we need to socially distance, wear a mask, and see people outdoors or online!

Stay safe and be kind to one another!



Volunteer Spotlight

Ronda Conner

Zane Klavina

Ronda Conner is a volunteer who has dedicated much time and energy to the Sierra Club and the Four Lakes Group. As a Group Executive Committee member, Ronda has been actively engaged in a plethora of teams and groups for the last year and a half.

She is a part of the Climate Crew and the Beyond Coal Team and helps out with the statewide digital media and texting, volunteer nights, forums, events, outings, and so much more.

“I feel like I am making a difference with the Sierra Club, since I have been concerned about climate change for quite a while,” she says. “I have finally found hope in my work with the Sierra Club. The staff and volunteers are all so welcoming that it’s a pleasure to show up and get to work. The work is what I am passionate about so it’s essential to my wellbeing to keep showing up.”

Ronda’s work does not end with the Four Lakes Group. Each year the John Muir Chapter recognizes exceptional volunteers and community leaders by celebrating their work on behalf of the environment and presenting different awards. In November, Ronda received the LD Rockwell Award for her contributions to the chapter’s political program.

“Ronda is a rockstar in every sense of the word,” says Elizabeth Ward, Chapter Director. “When she steps to do something, she does it to the nth degree. I can’t imagine how many texts she sent this election cycle, and she also trained our whole team on how to do it.”

Throughout the 2020 election period, Ronda worked with the national Sierra Club Texting Team to inform people about the endorsed candidates and encourage people to vote. She also helped recruit and train members of the team.

Katie Hogan, Volunteer Coordinator, says that Ronda is always there when the chapter needs her. “She’s been incredible to work with, and I am so grateful for everything she does with us,” she says.

Winter Fun

Liz Wessel

Bill and I stopped working at 4 PM to get a walk around the neighborhood before dark. The snow (and the holiday lights!) brings a fresh look to the houses we have walked by many times this year. It is a good reminder that there are many ways to enjoy our outdoors in winter – even during a global pandemic.

Here are some of our favorites in addition to a walk around the neighborhood:

- Try a walk or ski in the UW Arboretum. From berries still clinging to bushes, to grasses poking through the snow- and ice-covered wetland areas, the Arboretum hosts a variety of winter scenes as well as plant life and winter homes for animals and birds. If you are looking for a print of a bird or animal foot in the scavenger hunt, this is the place to go!
- Take the Four Lakes Group **Nature in My Backyard Scavenger Hunt on your next walk**. This is a fun opportunity to get out and explore your neighborhood and local parks! Like our animal friends who scavenge for treasures, use your eyes and ears (and perhaps your camera!) to discover natural phenomena and living and non-living objects in your area. This is a great COVID-safe activity for children and families! Download the scavenger hunt at <https://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/four-lakes/parks-public-lands-and-access>.
- Visit Edna Taylor Conservation Park on Madison’s east side. This gem of a park has a variety of habitats and features a glacial drumlin, several ponds, woodlands and other types of habitat. This park is ideal for enjoying nature, including walking, birdwatching and ice skating on the ponds in winter. The area actually has 3 interconnected parks - the Aldo Leopold Nature Center and Monona’s Woodland Park are also connected to Edna Taylor.

But don’t feel confined to stay in town. We have many fine county and state parks to explore and enjoy – many nearby! Many have excellent trails suitable for skiing or snowshoeing in winter. Indian Lake County Park is especially noted for its ski trails and cabin and where you can have a fire outside.



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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 pages. We mail a hard copy if we don't have your email address or you 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 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.

From the chapter: **NOW is the Time to get Active!**

The new administration brings new hope for the environment and justice. That means it's a great time to get engaged, especially with COVID limiting many other options. 2021 is also a major state budget year when the governor and legislature will determine where our tax dollars get spent for the next biennium. On January 25, 27 and 28 from 6 - 8 pm, we're going to have on-line kickoff planning meetings for many of our campaigns, and it's a great time to get involved and help determine what we'll be doing this year.

All our teams will be ready to roll, and January 25 will be devoted in part to an orientation and overview for new team members and interested volunteers. If you've wanted to do something, but not sure what, this is a great chance to hear and learn more about where you can plug in. We'll also spend some breakout time on each campaign. Then on January 27, a number of the teams will spend most of the time creating campaign plans. (The Forests and Lands, Transportation, and Tar Sands teams will meet at another time.) On the 28th, all the teams will meet to discuss state budget planning.

We'd love to see you there. For more info, contact Cassie Steiner at cassandra.steiner@sierraclub.org. Sign up at <https://forms.gle/UPpf9FKZt1aepYZg7>.

Beyond Coal – continued from page 2

We Energy also admitted that the coal plant was uneconomical to run – something the Sierra Club had previously shown. (In 2018, We Energy also shut down their Pleasant Prairie coal plant.)

We Energy also revealed plans to install 1.5 GW of solar, wind and battery storage. Alliant stated plans to put in 1 GW of solar by 2023 – far more than is being retired at Edgewater. Since the Columbia coal plant in Portage is aging and also uneconomical, which MGE, along with WPS, also owns a portion of, that's definitely on our radar, especially with more rate cases coming up this year.

Can you join us in giving these utilities more of a push? To get more involved with our MGE team or combatting coal in general, contact Don Ferber at d_ferber@sbcglobal.net. See on the left for more info on getting involved with any of our campaign efforts.