

MINNESOTA

# North Star Chapter

The leading grassroots voice to preserve and protect Minnesota's environment.



# JOURNAL

Summer 2015 • Volume 35, Issue 1

## Connecting the Dots: Transportation & Climate

Brock Berglund

Cities throughout Minnesota are creating more livable and economically vibrant communities. They realize that having safe, efficient and reliable transportation options are essential to staying competitive in today's fast-moving economy. However, an aging and deteriorating infrastructure threatens our state's economic competitiveness, as Minnesotans lack convenient and safe connections to schools and jobs.

We also know that climate change is impacting how we live, work and travel. As the Tar Sands Resistance March on June 6 illustrated, the need to move beyond dirty oil is critical - and we can only get there by addressing transportation. This is why the Sierra Club supports increasing public transit options (bus and rail) and creating safer, more walkable and bike friendly communities.



The North Star Chapter's Land Use and Transportation Committee is working to remove the political barriers blocking these improvements so that Minnesota can ensure economic prosperity and greater health for generations to come.

Andy Coldwell, Sierra Club Land Use and Transportation Committee Chair (in cardboard Light Rail Train), with William Martinez, Community Organizer, Cycles for Change, advocating for transit and transportation funding.

### Transportation Options Provide the Freedom to Choose

The 50-year driving boom is over and car trips have dramatically

"Connecting the Dots" continues on page 5



## North Star Chapter Commits to Anti-Racism

Margaret Levin and C. Scott Cooper

Throughout our 122-year history, the Sierra Club has played an important leadership role in our nation's environmental movement, and the North Star Chapter has mirrored this leadership since our founding over 45 years ago. However, despite our many accomplishments, we have so far failed to build a diverse, multicultural movement that is inclusive of people from all backgrounds.

There is growing clarity within the Sierra Club that we must make significant improvements in this area if we are to achieve our ambitious environmental goals. Further, we know that we must address this challenge not just to be more effective, but because it is the right thing to do.

In recognition of this, the North Star Chapter has committed

to transforming ourselves into a multicultural, anti-racist organization that is working to eradicate all forms of oppression. Our updated Diversity Statement describes this commitment:

As the leading grassroots voice for Minnesota's environment, the Sierra Club North Star Chapter is committed to:

1. Better serving our mission and our members by becoming an intercultural, anti-racist organization that is committed to partnering with communities and organizations to eradicate all forms of oppression;
2. Reflecting in our issue priorities the environmental concerns of all communities that call our state home;
3. Transforming our staff, leadership, membership, and organizational culture to be more reflective of Minnesota's

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MINNESOTA

# North Star Chapter

The leading grassroots voice to preserve and protect Minnesota's environment.



Dear Member,

The Sierra Club North Star Chapter needs your HELP to strengthen its voice—well okay, your voice—for clean water, healthy air, bike infrastructure, clean energy, cool outings and lots of other great initiatives. We have to grow the Chapter and you can do it!

Just sign up one more member (or as many as you like) by September 15, let us know by sending an email to north.star.chapter@sierraclub.org, and we will enter you in a drawing for a free backpack! New members can join by visiting our web site, northstar.sierraclub.org, and clicking on "Join."

Feel free to sign up your mother, partner or spouse, cat (maybe not), pastor, massage therapist, dentist, BFF...you get the idea. Do it for us, but more importantly, do it so your voice has a better chance of being heard!

Thank you!

Bruce Snyder, M.D.

North Star Chapter Executive Committee

## Monthly Volunteer Meetings

Please see northstar.sierraclub.org or call the office at 612-659-9124 for more information. It is strongly recommended that you confirm meeting dates, times and location as changes may occur.

Most meetings are held at the Chapter Office at 2327 East Franklin Ave, Minneapolis. If a regularly scheduled meeting falls on a holiday, please contact us for rescheduling information.

Refer to contact list on page 15 for more information.

**Beyond Oil and Tar Sands: 4th Monday of the month, 6:30 p.m.**

**Clean Air and Energy Committee: 4th Tuesday of the month, 6:30 p.m.**

**Executive Committee: 3rd Tuesday of the month, 7:00 p.m.**

**Forests Committee: 2nd Monday of the month, 7:00 p.m.**

**Land Use and Transportation: 1st Monday of the month, 6:00 p.m.**

**Mining Committee: 3rd Monday of the month, 7:00 p.m. – Meets by phone, contact chair.**

**Wetlands and Water Committee: 3rd Monday of the month, 6:00 p.m.**



The North Star Journal

USPS 099-070

ISSN No. 0746-1692

The Sierra Club North Star Chapter, a 501(c)4 non-profit organization, is the leading grassroots voice working to preserve and protect Minnesota's environment. Since 1968 we have involved volunteer leaders to act through environmental advocacy, community organizing and outdoor exploration. We are committed to becoming an intercultural, anti-racist organization and partnering with communities and organizations to eradicate all forms of oppression.

The North Star Journal is published bi-annually by the North Star Chapter (Minnesota) of the Sierra Club, 2327 E. Franklin Ave, Suite 1, Minneapolis MN 55406. The North Star Journal has a circulation of 11,762 for the Summer 2015 issue.

Member subscriptions are included in annual dues to the national Sierra Club.

POSTMASTER

Send address changes to: The North Star Journal, c/o North Star Chapter, 2327 E Franklin Ave, Suite 1, Minneapolis, MN 55406.

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Copy editors: Brock Berglund, Jenny Kedward, and Allyson Green.

ADVERTISING RATES (W x D)

Full	9.5w x 12h	\$1000
Half	9.5w x 7.5h	\$600
Third	3.75w x 12	\$400
Sixth	7w x 3h or 3.5w x 7h	\$200
Ninth	3.5w x 3h	\$135
Twelfth	3.5w x 2h	\$100

- All sizes measured in inches, width x height
- All ads must be camera ready

Ads and checks (made out to Sierra Club North Star Chapter) should be sent to the editor at the Chapter office. (See address above under postmaster information).

The North Star Journal welcomes submissions and photographs on environmental and related issues. Articles of less than a thousand words will be given preference. E-mail submissions only. We reserve the right to edit all copy for clarity and concision. Photos can be color and should be a jpeg format of 5x7 size at 300 dpi. Please send all submission materials and requests to the editor.

The North Star Journal is printed on recycled paper with soy-based ink.

Sierra Club – North Star Chapter  
2327 E Franklin Ave, Suite 1  
Minneapolis, MN 55406  
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This publication is available on the web  
www.northstar.sierraclub.org



# Tell Xcel: Sherco is Bad for our Health and our Climate

Stephanie Spitzer

In December, the Twin Cities had a string of bad air quality days. I've had asthma all my life, and these bad air days triggered the worst period of asthma I've ever had. Every day, I struggled to breathe with my regular daily medications - the same ones that work fine for most people. I took a lot of fast-acting inhalers. I couldn't walk to my third-floor apartment without breathing hard. My doctor and I couldn't get my breathing back under control with the most common hard-hitting medications, so in February she sent me on to an asthma specialist. Now I take four (costly) medications morning and night just to get well enough to go about my life. All of this is due to poor air quality at the wrong time of year.

Here in Minnesota, the majority of our electricity still comes from burning coal, an increasingly expensive way to power our lives, that contributes to poor air quality days like the ones that triggered my asthma. On March 16, Xcel Energy, the electric utility behind the Sherco plant in Sherburne County, the largest polluter in the state, filed its Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) outlining how it will operate for the next 10 to 15 years. Despite our efforts over the past five years urging Xcel to retire the Sherco plant the IRP shows plans to continue its operation indefinitely. For me and for all Minnesotans who deserve clean air, I urge Xcel to update its plan to transition away from the coal that makes us sick.

The Sherco coal plant is a blight on the map of Minnesota. Burning coal at Sherco drives the worst of Minnesota's carbon pollution, a main contributor to climate disruption and extreme weather. But rather than creating a transition plan for Sherco, Xcel continues to dig in its heels by operating this outdated plant. We know that soon Sherco will not be able to keep up with new pollution standards. We know that costly retrofits for old technology are wasteful and irresponsible. We know that cleaner, cheaper energy options are available. We know that people like me with asthma don't suffer the same health impacts from wind turbines or solar panels. We know that we don't have to pay to import rays from the sun or the wind, like we do with coal from North Dakota. Renewable energy can save



Stephanie Spitzer (third from left) with Sierra Club leaders and allies to highlight the true costs of Sherco at Xcel Energy headquarters in Minneapolis.

our lungs and our pocketbooks; so, why does Xcel keep pouring more money into Sherco when there are lower-cost, healthier options for the long term?

Long-term costs and health impacts aren't the only factors to consider. The local economy is also important. Its longtime presence in the community means Xcel should responsibly plan to help the people of Becker transition to a life beyond coal.

That's why Sierra Club leaders are calling on Xcel to say: It's time to choose the brighter, more responsible future. It's time to retire the remaining coal-burning units at Sherco to show that we care about the people in our present and in our future.

It's time to act on the effects of coal pollution and to decide that we're done breathing unsafe air.

Contact Alexis Boxer at [alexis.boxer@sierraclub.org](mailto:alexis.boxer@sierraclub.org) or 612-659-9124 to help.

*Stephanie Spitzer is a volunteer leader with the Clean Air and Renewable Energy Committee.*

## Chapter Executive Committee - Call for Nominations

The Executive Committee (ExCom) is the governing committee of the Sierra Club North Star Chapter. The ExCom has overall responsibility for strategic planning and budgeting. It also establishes and oversees the subcommittees that plan and implement the conservation campaigns, electoral efforts, communications, and outdoor activities of the Sierra Club in Minnesota; and hires and oversees the State Director.

### Nominations Accepted for Terms Beginning 2016

The ExCom is made up of fifteen at-large elected Sierra Club members in Minnesota. Any current member is eligible to run. Members are elected for a rotating three-year term, and those elected at the end of this year will begin their terms in January 2016. The Nominations Committee invites you to submit names for consideration for ExCom election. Members who are not nominated by the Nominations Committee can petition for candidacy with the signature of 25 members submitted by the petition deadline.

### Election timeline:

August 18, 2015 - Nominating Committee reports nominees to Executive Committee

September 11, 2015 - Deadline to submit petitions to Secretary

October 20, 2015 - Elections Committee appointed to count ballots

November 15, 2015 - Week of ballot mailing

January 4, 2016 - Closing date of election

If you are interested in running for the ExCom, contact Julie Drennen, Nominations committee at [juldrennen@gmail.com](mailto:juldrennen@gmail.com) or the Chapter office at 612-659-9124.

**List of Current ExCom Members - See photos and bios online at:** [http://northstar.sierraclub.org/about/executive\\_committee/](http://northstar.sierraclub.org/about/executive_committee/)

Name	Residence	End of Term
Louis Alemayehu	Minneapolis	2015
Jason Bender	Minneapolis	2015
Marty Cobenais	Bemidji	2015
C. Scott Cooper	St. Paul	2017
Luther Dale	Shoreview	2016
John Doberstein	Duluth	2017
Katie Eukel	Minneapolis	2015
Mat Hollinshead	St. Paul	2016
Sam Grant	St. Paul	2017
Javier Morillo-Alicea	Minneapolis	2016
Christy Newell	Minneapolis	2017
Lois Norrgard	Bloomington	2016
Bruce Snyder	Mendota Heights	2017
Tom Thompson	Duluth	2016



# A Canoe, Three Bikes, and One Million Acres

Brian Anderson



Photo Credit Ellie M. Bayrd



Photo Credit Ellie M. Bayrd

850 miles across Minnesota. From Winona to Ely to lots of places in between. Over 39 days, three bicycle riders with the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters pedaled a canoe across Minnesota. On this "adventure advocacy" ride, the Bike Tour to Save the Boundary Waters stopped at college campuses and in communities to educate and raise awareness about the threat of sulfide-ore copper mining near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). At each stop, people signed the canoe towed by the riders, adding their voice to ask for permanent protection from the pollution and destruction of sulfide mining. In little more than a month, the Bike Tour gathered 6,000 signatures for the Campaign's petition to the federal government.

In 2013, the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters was founded by Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness (NMW), a group comprised of Ely area businesses and residents, in response to an urgent threat: mining companies have proposed to build sulfide-ore copper mines a short distance from the BWCAW and within the same watershed, in the Rainy River Drainage Basin. The BWCAW is America's most visited wilderness area and contains more than 1 million acres of pristine water and woodlands, but its future is in question due to these proposals. History bears witness to a toxic track record, as no sulfide mine has ever operated without polluting nearby waters, and the Environmental Protection Agency identifies the hard rock mining industry, of which sulfide-ore mining is a part, as the largest toxic-waste producing industry in the United States.

Sulfide-ore mining has never been done in Minnesota, and currently threatens lands and waters across the Arrowhead Region. The proposed PolyMet open pit copper-nickel mine would be the state's first ever sulfide-ore mine, if approved, and threatens long term pollution of the St. Louis River watershed and Lake Superior. The Final Environmental Impact Statement for PolyMet is expected this fall.

Within the BWCAW watershed, two federal mineral leases for sulfide-ore copper mining are currently up for renewal, and applications are pending for three new federal mineral leases. If the leases are renewed or granted and mining were allowed, history suggests the mines' toxic pollution would contaminate surrounding waters. As a result, the pollution would flow into the heart of the BWCAW because of the watershed's topography. Understanding this grave threat, people came together to mobilize a response to protect this national treasure.

While the threat is real, it is comforting to know that the Campaign stands on the shoulders of success. When organizers and citizens first started the Campaign, they looked to related national campaigns as models. People from across the country, like those who worked in the 1990s to prevent acid mine drainage into

Yellowstone National Park, as well as groups like Earthjustice came to northern Minnesota to help create an effective strategy. Learning from these stories of success, organizers have combined unconventional grassroots efforts and education, like the recent Bike Tour to Save the Boundary Waters, with efforts to nationalize the issue -- like last year's "Paddle to D.C.," Amy and Dave Freeman's 101-day paddle and sail odyssey from Ely to Washington, which culminated with meetings with federal agencies and Congress in our nation's capital.

During the Bike Tour this spring, Congresswoman Betty McCollum of Minnesota introduced the National Park and Wilderness Waters Protection Forever Act. This bill would increase protections from mining-related pollution to the BWCAW and Voyageurs National Park in two ways. First, it would prohibit all future mining of federal minerals on federal lands within the BWCAW watershed area, and second, it would create tougher environmental standards for mining in the event any current rights to mine were found to exist.

Congresswoman McCollum said, "Advocating for the protection of these two American national treasures has been a priority for Minnesotans for decades, and I am proud to advocate for that priority here in Congress. Voyageurs National Park and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness are special places that belong to all Americans and Minnesotans. These are two of our nation's most precious environmental areas and we must ensure that the next generation of Americans can also enjoy their beauty." Sierra Club State Director Margaret Levin urged Congress to pass the bill. "This legislation will help ensure that the pristine waters and lands of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Voyageurs National Park are protected from the threat of toxic sulfide mining, which has never been done safely and threatens communities and waters near the BWCA, Lake Superior, and across the Arrowhead Region."

A wide-ranging group of 19 organizations make up the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters, including the Sierra Club North Star Chapter. Although the organization started as concerned local residents, through actions and events like the Bike Tour the Campaign is gaining strength. As Becky Rom, the chair of the Campaign, recently noted, "it's amazing how people around Minnesota are working on this."

To learn more about the campaign, check out [savetheboundarywaters.org](http://savetheboundarywaters.org).

*Brian Anderson is a volunteer leader with the Communications Team and Co-Chair of the Beyond Oil and Tar Sands Committee.*

"Connecting the Dots" continuation from page 1...

decreased for young Minnesotans. These days, the car no longer represents the freedom it did a generation ago. Instead, driving is associated with anxiety about traffic congestion, vulnerability to foreign oil markets, crumbling roadways, expensive trips to the gas station, and air pollution. We are working to provide Minnesotans with the freedom to choose from a variety of clean, efficient and convenient modes of transportation. Minneapolis is currently recognized as one of the most bike-friendly cities in the nation, and St. Paul has major plans to compete in the years ahead. However, Minnesota communities of all sizes want options that include safe and convenient bikeways, walkable neighborhoods, and robust public transit.

#### **Connect the Dots: Transportation Affects Climate Change**

Minnesota is seeing the effects of climate change today—more severe storms, extreme heat, sustained droughts, and the shifting habits of Minnesota's fish and wildlife support this fact. Transportation generates 24 percent of the carbon pollution in our state, second only to the power sector. At the same time, Minnesota spends billions of dollars each year importing oil from Canadian tar sands, the dirtiest and most destructive oil on earth. The good news is that over the last decade, transportation emissions have already declined in Minnesota, due in part to people driving less often, increased transit ridership and more fuel efficient vehicles. By changing our priorities from new road projects to facilitating alternative modes of transportation, we can dramatically reduce the state's oil consumption, and in turn, reduce our carbon emissions.

#### **Take our Transportation Quiz, and get involved in our important work on this issue:**

##### **Questions:**

1. Are shorter or longer car trips more polluting on a per-mile basis?
2. For the majority of Minnesotans, most trips we make are within just two miles of home. What percentage of these short trips are made by personal motor vehicles?
3. What percentage of households are and jobs are conveniently served by transit?

##### **Answers:**

1. Short car trips are more polluting than longer trips. This is because every time you start your car it creates high levels of toxic emissions, before pollution control devices can work effectively. The good news is that short trips are the easiest trips to do by walking, biking, taking the bus or train.
2. Eighty-two percent of our very short trips are made by car. A four-mile round trip by bicycle keeps about 15 pounds of pollutants out of the air we breathe! More of people walking and bicycling = cleaner air for all.
3. Currently, only 25% of metro area households and 10% of jobs are conveniently served by transit. We have a long way to go, but can get there with your help.

The green transportation movement is happening now. Get involved by signing our petition at [northstar.sierraclub.org/bikevideo](http://northstar.sierraclub.org/bikevideo) or contacting our Land Use and Transportation Program Manager at [joshua.houdek@sierraclub.org](mailto:joshua.houdek@sierraclub.org) or 612-659-9124.

*Brock Berglund is Co-Chair of the Communications Team.*

# It's Everybody's Business: White Privilege and Our Collective Role in Advancing Racial Equity

Jill Boogren

In March I had the opportunity to attend, along with several other Sierrans from Minnesota, the White Privilege Conference (WPC) held in Louisville, KY, as well as a pre-conference training by Sierra Club. I found the training to be very thought-provoking and, as a newcomer, appreciated that ALL voices and experience levels were welcome and encouraged. I came away with a strong sense that racial justice is everybody's business, and we all have a role to play.

The WPC, its 16th annual, brought together over 1500 people from around the country to talk about dismantling racism and working toward racial equity. Riveting and inspirational keynote addresses and over 120 workshops covered a wide range of topics, from understanding how white privilege impacts people of color (and maintains a system of oppression) to ways to talk about race and justice and be an effective ally for change.

Presented as a community learning opportunity, the conference was all about having the dialogue, even -- and especially -- when it yanks you out of your comfort zone.

"Is talking about race relaxing?" asked one workshop facilitator. The collective groan among the 60 or so people in the room was answer enough: "Nope." And the easiest thing in the world to do when it gets too hard is retreat. But rather than get sucked into what Keynote Speaker Chris Cass called the "socially-constructed gravitational pull" toward what's easiest (the status quo), he challenged people to instead help "build a gravitational pull towards liberation." This is where the work lies.

Sierra Club's pre-training provided a valuable framework within which to open up the dialogue. Facilitated by national leaders in the Club's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts, the training introduced us to terminology and concepts that put us all on the same conversational page. We looked at present-day instances of racism in its various forms, from the very quiet to the tragically public: everyday insults and misguided compliments; bigotry in the community and in the workplace; fraternity brothers singing a racist song on a bus in Oklahoma; and black lives lost at the hands of white police officers. All were examined with an eye toward finding ways to re-chart our course. Obviously we've got a lot of work to do.

I encourage those interested in deepening their understanding of justice, wherever you are in your own personal journey, to participate in Sierra Club or other related trainings. The North Star Chapter is also growing its list of resources that are or will be made available in the office and on our website. Your ideas, participation, and feedback are welcome.

Check out the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion page on our web site for more resources and ways to get involved! [northstar.sierraclub.org/dei](http://northstar.sierraclub.org/dei)

*Jill Boogren is a Conservation Organizer with the North Star Chapter.*



# Boundary Waters Land Swap: The Great Give-Away

Lori Andresen and Elanne Palcich



Acid Mine Drainage Photo Credit MPCA



Superior National Forest Photo Credit Lori Andresen

The U.S. Forest Service and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) are once again proposing a Boundary Waters land exchange. The land exchange proposal would trade approximately 30,000 acres of Superior National Forest land from outside the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) for state school trust lands that are within the protected boundaries of the BWCAW. Since revenue from Boundary Waters permits has not been shared with the school trust, the lands are not producing money for the schools.

The Sierra Club North Star Chapter continues to oppose a land exchange, but has supported a buy-out of the state lands. In the meantime, the state lands remain protected within the BWCAW boundaries.

Removing lands from Superior National Forest is not just a land exchange; it is also a law exchange. Under the Weeks Act, federal legislation enacted in 1911, open pit strip mining is prohibited on lands purchased for watershed and headwaters protection. Weeks Act protections would be removed if the federal land was exchanged for state ownership.

Under the current land exchange proposal, one of the trade parcels selected by DNR would facilitate a future open pit mining operation at Teck-Cominco's Mesaba Deposit, located between the proposed PolyMet and Twin Metals projects. The permitting of such mining would result in a massive open pit sulfide mine zone that would change the landscape and impact the water quality of both the Boundary Waters and the Lake Superior watershed forever.

Whether or not these proposed mine operations would contribute money to the school trust fund would depend on: fluctuating market conditions; whether they are located on trust lands; and whether the mineral rights are owned by the state or by private interests. Private mineral interests do not contribute to the school trust. PolyMet's proposed project, which involves a separate land exchange, would not contribute to the trust.

Other portions of the proposed Boundary Waters exchange could include leasing for mineral exploration or land that could be available for disposal of waste rock or tailings from existing taconite mining operations. Additional land portions could open new areas to more intense logging, new bio-mass

proposals or other types of development. These are areas that currently offer camping, hiking, canoeing and hunting opportunities, or border recreational lakes or private real-estate.

The proposed exchange could also have an impact on wildlife habitat and corridors and may affect species such as the endangered Canada lynx, and the threatened northern long-eared bat, moose, and wolf populations, along with other iconic wildlife, bird, plant, and fish species. All in all, the proposed land exchange would facilitate mining and logging operations at the expense of the Arrowhead's legacy for forests and wildlife, clean water and air.

Currently, interest money from the Permanent School Fund supplies about \$28 per Minnesota public school student per year, while state, local and federal funding provides approximately \$10,000 per student. Trust fund money will obviously never underwrite our state's educational system. More intense resource exploitation of school trust lands will only serve to destroy the natural heritage of our state's school children. In addition, perpetual mining pollution clean-up costs that fall upon the public will far exceed any contribution to the school trust fund.

The land exchange is contrary to the best interests of the citizens of Minnesota and the Nation, and to the school children of this state and area. The proposed exchange would destroy a natural public heritage in order to facilitate mine proposals that would pollute the water and air with sulfates, mercury, particulate matter and toxic heavy metals. Not only do these pollutants contaminate fish and destroy wild rice--ancestral foods that are part of treaty rights made with our Tribal predecessors--they also impact the brains and health of developing children growing up in the Arrowhead Region.

Make your voice heard on this issue. Oppose the Boundary Waters Land Exchange.

*Lori Andresen is Chair of the Mining Committee. Elanne Palcich is a volunteer leader with the Mining Committee.*

*Stop the give-away of the Superior National Forest being proposed in the name of our children!*

*The purpose of the land swap is to remove Federal Protections on Superior National Forest Lands. Lands that lie within a designated National Forest and are owned by the Federal government have a variety of critical protections – but according to Rep. David Dill, D-Crane Lake, "...we should mine, log, and lease the hell out of that land that we get in the change."*

*(Minnesota Public Radio, March 7, 2012).*

diverse communities by actively recruiting and warmly welcoming members of all communities into the Chapter's work;

4. Continually evaluating the Chapter's issue priorities and campaign plans through the lenses of equity and Environmental Justice.

We share the National Sierra Club's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity as essential to our mission because:

1. Diversity is a conservation necessity and a social imperative that will enable the Sierra Club to remain a leader of the environmental movement.
2. Inclusion fosters involvement of all persons and organizations that share our vision for a healthy planet.
3. Environmental equity ensures that everyone has the right to experience nature and access to clean water, clean air, clean soil, and a safe environment.

To pursue this ambitious goal, we have developed a chapter plan on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) that will integrate this priority into our core operating structure and processes. We invite you to review the plan on our resource page: [northstar.sierraclub.org/dei](http://northstar.sierraclub.org/dei)

Through this plan, which we adopted at the end of last year, the North Star Chapter seeks to exemplify DEI work within the national Sierra Club, setting an example we hope many other chapters will follow. For us, this will be a "living and learning"

document and we invite regular feedback from members, leaders and volunteer committees.

We know that our goal to become an inclusive, racially diverse organization is not only necessary but also broadly supported within the Chapter. But to be successful, it will also require change – to our structure, culture, norms, and leadership. We will need to leave our "comfort zones" and be open to new practices, places, ideas and allies. This change will not always be easy, but it is imperative and will bring great rewards.

We would especially appreciate your ideas for how your committee, team or campaign can help to advance these goals.

If you are interested in helping to get the word out about this effort, and in helping us plan upcoming trainings and educational opportunities, please email [margaret.levin@sierraclub.org](mailto:margaret.levin@sierraclub.org) to sign up!

On behalf of the North Star Chapter's volunteer leadership and staff, we look forward to working with all of you during this exciting transformation, and together making the Sierra Club all that it can be.

*Margaret Levin is State Director of the North Star Chapter. C. Scott Cooper is Chair of the Executive Committee.*

## Sustainability and Community: Minnesota Delegation to Bangladesh

Lara Brenner

Like many legends, the story of Ruhel Islam and his remarkable restaurant, the Gandhi Mahal, begins with a terrible flood. As a boy in Bangladesh, Islam survived the infamous flood of 1988, which inundated over 60% of the nation's land with water. Although his village was almost entirely submerged in water for nearly three weeks, Islam's salient memories of the disaster are not suffused with fear, but with an overwhelming sense of community.

"Everyone in the village came to our house," Islam explains to me in his Seward-based restaurant's community room.

Islam's family not only grew their own produce, but also maintained two fishponds and a generous stockpile of rice, allowing them to comfortably feed themselves and their less-fortunate neighbors. What by all rights should have been a traumatic experience was transformed into an opportunity to celebrate sustainability, tradition, community values and the tenacity of human will.

"In 1996, I came to the U.S. for the American dream," Islam tells me. But as we descend into the Gandhi Mahal's basement, I find out that Islam brought an important piece of his homeland with him. When we first walk into the basement, I am welcomed by the rich, dense smell of soil, then by a swift blast of humidity. Suddenly, I find myself immersed in a replica of Islam's family garden in Bangladesh. Fans circulate warm air over spice plants, tomatoes, herbs and even a small pond roiling with tilapia fish, which Islam feeds with brine shrimp—which are in turn converted into fertilizer for the plants.

Islam's food activism achievements soon garnered the attention of a Sierra Club North Star Chapter Executive Committee member, and a fellow member of Minneapolis Interfaith Power and Light (MNIPL), Louis Alemayehu.

Moved by Islam's dedication to sustainability and his community, Alemayehu was determined to learn about the roots of Islam's values and to speak with citizens of Bangladesh, one of the countries considered most vulnerable to climate change. To that end, he organized a MNIPL delegation to Bangladesh with Islam and Tobias Ten Napal, a St. Thomas student and World Citizen member.

In the month that Tobias, Louis and Ruhel stayed in Bangladesh, they attended four weddings, dedicated two peace sites, visited a girl's school founded by Islam's aunt, started a "Climate Conversation" with religious leaders and farmers and received roughly three more dinner invitations than they could possibly accept per day. The villagers' way of life had changed little since Islam left his homeland. Young boys still scaled coconut trees and tossed nets into ponds to catch fish, and villagers still both relied upon and feared the seasonal floods, which alternately made agriculture possible and threatened to one day rise and never recede.

Living in a village that was itself a closed system, it was easy to see how Islam got his idea for a restaurant that follows what he calls a "participatory business model," in which neighbors come together to invent a new way of living while also reclaiming the traditional. Just as his family welcomed neighbors into their home in Bangladesh during an environmental disaster, Islam welcomes his neighbors in Minnesota to the Gandhi Mahal to discuss attaining sustainability in the face of climate change.

"Food shortages really scare me," says Islam, as we examine a poster displayed last year's State Fair summarizing the restaurant's mission. Islam explains that when you rely on a vast and far-off system for your nutritional needs, you are at the mercy of climate-change related instability, which is why he hopes to fill in any gaps with his own garden.

Just as globalization was the predominant movement of the 20th century, Alemayehu believes that "the greatest challenge of this century will be localizing our economy." The realities of climate change in Bangladesh made it clear to Alemayehu that our abstracted methods of food production incur costs to people we may never meet in our lifetimes.

Globalization has its positive byproducts; however, we can learn from newcomers how to strengthen an international community while reclaiming our own traditions.

Islam and Alemayehu both recognize that the path to their dream is fraught with challenges, but standing in the miraculous living cellar at the Gandhi Mahal, their goals don't seem impossibly out of reach.

"This is why the restaurant invokes the name of Mohandas Gandhi—we promise to bring his message of peace to our community," says Islam. In a post-global world, he believes, peace can be found in the bud of a homegrown chili flower, or in the rosy scale of a subterranean fish flashing in the darkness.

*Lara Brenner is an Environmental Issues Blog Intern with the North Star Chapter.*



A family that lives in Ruhel's compound



# 20th ANNUAL SIERRA CLUB BIKE TOUR



Each fall, the Sierra Club organizes a bike ride like no other! We visit a different location each year, combining a scenic tour with educational rest stops where guest speakers highlight transportation and development projects that impact how people live and get around.

This year we're celebrating "20 Years of Touring the Metro by Bike," and we're heading back to St. Paul where our first tour began in 1996. See firsthand opportunities in St. Paul to protect green space, build better bikeways, restore and reuse old buildings and manufacturing sites and improve transportation options for everyone.

Sierra Club Bike Tours are leisurely paced -- not a race -- and family-friendly, with rest stops and lunch provided.

## Save the date, and come ride with us!

Be sure to look for our virtual "Tour de Tours: 20 Years of Touring the Metro by Bike," coming to the North Star Chapter website in September.

View our video from last year's Bike Tour through Minneapolis and take action at: [northstar.sierraclub.org/BikeVideo](http://northstar.sierraclub.org/BikeVideo)

For more info contact Joshua Houdek at [joshua.houdek@sierraclub.org](mailto:joshua.houdek@sierraclub.org) or 612-659-9124.

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The Sierra Club Foundation benefits from workplace contributions to the Minnesota Environmental Fund, which provides a payroll giving option to support 23 member organizations that protect, conserve and restore Minnesota's environment. To learn more about adding this giving option at your workplace, please contact Margaret Levin at 612-659-9124 or [margaret.levin@sierraclub.org](mailto:margaret.levin@sierraclub.org).



# Sierrans Organize for Clean Energy Around the State



Tabling at Harvest Fest in Duluth. Photo credit Tom Thompson



Ivan Idso - Rochester Earthfest Ecofair

## Rochester Earthfest Ecofair

Ivan and Mary Idso

The first annual Rochester Earthfest Ecofair was held on April 26 at the Mayo Civic Center in Rochester, Minnesota. The Ecofair was part of a nine-day Earthfest celebration that was created as an umbrella for Earth day activities. Events ranged from film screenings to a bike-friendly pub crawl to religious observances on the beautiful natural spaces at Assisi Heights.

The Ecofair drew about 500 attendees, with about 225 of them giving a standing ovation for keynote speaker Paul Douglas's speech, "Climate Change: Natural Cycle or Troubling Trend." The nearly 40 vendors represented green building, sustainable living and food, non-profit organizations, and electric cars, among other topics.

The Earthfest and Ecofair were organized by Ivan and Mary Idso, with the help of several local organizations, including the Sierra Club, and many volunteers. "We are deeply concerned about global warming; that's why we organized the People's Climate March last September," said Mary. "We didn't want to lose that momentum, and we wanted something that would bring local organizations and individuals together to continue that mission." The Idsos brought together a coalition decided as a group to create the Earthfest celebration.

"Mary and I would like to thank Andrea Kiepe for her help on the event, the sponsorship from the Sierra Club, and for Margaret Levin's participation in the Ecofair," said Ivan. "Be sure to join us next year!"

*Ivan and Mary Idso are volunteer leaders with the Rochester Sierra Club.*

### Duluth

Sierra Club's Clean Energy Team in Duluth has been working hard to support local clean energy projects, statewide clean energy policy, and a shift away from coal from Minnesota Power, the region's biggest energy company.

This spring, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency agreed to update the very outdated air permit for Minnesota Power's Taconite Harbor coal plant, located along the North Shore. Modeling conducted by an expert for the Sierra Club demonstrates that emissions from the plant potentially cause violations of health protections for sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) for dozens of miles around the plant along the Superior Hiking Trail, putting our health and environment at risk. Sulfur dioxide causes respiratory illnesses and increased risk of hospital admissions or emergency room visits, especially among children, older adults and people with asthma.

The team is now gearing up for a busy fall with a forum on climate change, a local hiking outing, and calling on Minnesota Power to move beyond coal to clean energy as their long term energy plan is submitted in September.

### Rochester

With billions of dollars of new development planned, the city of Rochester is at a turning point in its history. Sierra Club members and volunteers are determined to steer it in a sustainable direction and ensure that the city's air and water stay as healthy and clean as its image.

For years, Rochester has been growing more quickly than many other Minnesota cities. Now the Destination Medical Center plan, recently approved by the City Council, will undertake to focus that growth towards downtown and transform the city. Much of the planning centers on the transportation network – improvements to the existing transit network and new biking and walking routes – designed to encourage fewer people to drive into the downtown alone.

If everything goes according to plan, over \$5 billion will be invested in downtown Rochester in the next several decades. The question that local Sierra Club activists have been asking—at public hearings, letters to the editor and other venues—is can we ensure that the new housing,

offices and medical facilities are as energy efficient as possible? How can we protect our air and water with these new buildings? How can we put renewable energy into the heart of our city?

"Making this transition will be a boon for public health as it cuts harmful air pollution. It will also boost our economy as we swap spending \$400 million per year importing coal from Wyoming for creating our own clean energy jobs here in Minnesota. People in our area are ready to make the transition to a better energy future," said local Sierra Club volunteer Barbara Haynes.

### St. Cloud

In St. Cloud, our Sierra Club team has been busy! We have been building our team of volunteers and working hard on both the Beyond Coal to Clean Energy campaign as well as the Clean Energy and Jobs legislative campaign. We had an in-district meeting with Rep. Jim Knobloch on our clean energy policy initiatives and the importance of protecting our progress on climate change and clean energy. We also spent a lot of time tabling and doing outreach on campus at St. Cloud State University.

In May, we co-sponsored a forum with Fresh Energy and SCSU's Social Responsibility Student Organization entitled Minnesota's Clean Energy Progress.

We are also working on a summer kick-off and volunteer potluck at local leaders, Bill and Marlene Haider's home. All are welcome to come and learn about the work we are doing locally, enjoy some tasty food and meet other local volunteers. Date and time will be announced on the North Star Chapter's online calendar. Also stay tuned for a fun local hike being led by one of our volunteers and Master Naturalist, Greg Anderson!

We are kicking off our summer outreach efforts with a plethora of upcoming events including outreach at the St. Cloud Area Farmers Market, Summertime by George, Good Earth Food Co-op and the Downtown Art Crawl. Come join us as we work to collect petitions in support of moving beyond coal to clean energy!

*Keep up with our local efforts in St. Cloud by checking out our Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/MovingBeyondCoal](http://www.facebook.com/MovingBeyondCoal)*

# 2015 Legislative Session Report

John Hottinger



Minnesota's prospects for advancing environmental protections during the 2015 state legislative session were unfortunately predetermined last Election Day, in November of 2014. The old cliché that "elections matter" proved itself vividly this session, as environmental rollbacks and inaction on urgent funding for transit and transportation led an aggressive agenda for the new Republican

House majority. The situation was compounded by the fact that a few DFL Senators in key positions joined House leadership in anti-environment efforts. In the process, they thwarted the goals of a majority of DFL Senators and the Governor.

In the regular legislative session from January through May, there were marked contrasts between the House and the Senate on many issues. The House, behind a united Republican majority, passed a series of bills to gut clean water and environmental standards, and a massive energy bill which only utility and oil companies could love. In response, concerned DFL Representatives from all over the state raised profound questions about the bills' approaches and impacts – with veteran members and the newly-elected alike leading the charge. Their efforts helped raise the public's consciousness, educate the media, and cast sunshine on the hidden, abusive dangers of the "dirty water bills," regulatory dismantling and energy regression featured in the majority House agenda.

The attacks were especially troubling when one considers that clean water enjoys broad, bipartisan support across the state. According to a 2014 poll conducted on behalf of the Minnesota Environmental Partnership, nearly 9 in 10 residents are concerned about water pollution in our lakes and rivers.

While bills passed in the Senate were less damaging, serious problems emerged when a minority of DFL Senators teamed with House leaders to pass legislation filled with special-interest and anti-environment provisions. Then, conference committees were appointed to resolve the differences between the bills passed in each house, with members handpicked to underrepresent environmental advocates. After weeks of back room negotiations, the bills unfortunately reflected those appointments when they emerged for a final vote – with many items passed in the final hours of session, without time for any real debate – and were sent to the Governor's desk.

As a result, the Sierra Club joined allies in asking Governor Dayton to veto the Agriculture & Environment omnibus budget bill, presenting our request at a successful public gathering at the Governor's residence on May 21. The Agriculture and Environment legislation was one of three bills vetoed, leading to a Special Session.

While small improvements were made to the Agriculture & Environment bill, the Sierra Club and allies continued to vigorously oppose the version that was presented for a vote in the subsequent Special Session. When the legislature re-convened on June 12, the sustained outcry from concerned citizens resulted in a majority of DFL Senators attempting to remove the worst provisions of the bills, but they were ultimately unsuccessful. The final version of the Energy & Jobs Omnibus budget bill was also passed in Special Session. The North Star Chapter expressed our deep disappointment in a session that will be remembered for its unprecedented rollbacks of protections for clean water; missed opportunity to grow clean energy jobs and address climate disruption; and failure to address the state's urgent need for a comprehensive transportation bill. "Minnesotans deserve and expect better from their elected officials, and will hold accountable those

Sierra Club supported	Final outcome
Increase the renewable energy standard to 40% by 2030	No final action taken; passed Senate committee
Dedicate funding for a modern, statewide transportation system, including for transit, bicycling, and walking options, and infrastructure repair	No action
Create a riparian buffers program to require 50-foot buffers statewide	Increased enforcement of existing waterway buffers requirements
Establish an energy optimization goal for energy saving projects	No final action taken; passed Senate committee
Restore voting rights for individuals on probation or parole	No action
Sierra Club opposed	Final outcome
Require all environment and energy rules and standards to be approved by Legislature	Stopped in regular session, but Legislature allowed to review MPCA plan to comply with the EPA Clean Power Plan (see below)
Exempt sulfide mining waste from solid waste rules	Passed without improvements
Abolish the Citizens' Board of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, established to ensure transparency and public input	Passed without improvements
Repeal the water quality standard that protects wild rice lakes	Wild rice sulfate standard suspended until new rulemaking completed
Require any MPCA plan to comply with the EPA's Clean Power Plan to be approved by the state legislature	Improved: Legislature allowed to review, not approve
Weaken Minnesota's effective net metering law for co-op and municipal utility customers	Improved in special session: Provisions limited
Encourage reduced electric rates for some large corporations, shifting energy costs to small customers	Improved in regular session: Scope limited to certain utilities and businesses
Weaken wetlands protections by altering the Wetlands Conservation Act and Board of Soil and Water procedures for determining wetland replacement standards	Passed without improvements
Allow funding for deceptive labeling of pollinator-friendly plants; plants that are toxic to pollinators can be labelled "pollinator friendly"	Passed without improvements
Weaken the nuisance liability standards for agricultural operations	Stopped in regular session
Grant polluters amnesty from penalties and delays enforcement for companies that self-report violations of environmental regulations	Improved in special session: Deferred enforcement time reduced and required advance notice to polluters shortened
Repeal the moratorium on new nuclear power plants	Stopped in regular session
Bar the MPCA from providing enforceable policy and guidance to regulated parties	Stopped in special session
Raid dedicated environmental funds for cleanup of old landfills	Improved in special session: Repayment provision added
Break the compromise agreement among energy, agriculture, and environment stakeholders to establish a next-generation biofuel industry in Minnesota.	Passed without improvements
Require legislative approval for certain water quality rules	Stopped in regular session
Require expensive, time consuming external peer review of clean water rules	Stopped in special session
Suspend enforcement of water quality rules in the Red River until 2025	Stopped in special session

"2015 Legislative Session Report" continues on page 11...



"2015 Legislative Session Report"  
continuation from page 10...

legislators who are responsible for endangering our clean water, communities and climate," said State Director Margaret Levin.

There were strong champions in both the House and Senate whose leadership prevented even worse outcomes – along with efforts by North Star lobbyists and staff, directed by our hard-working Legislative Committee and in partnership with many allied organizations. But in the end, the biggest heroes for North Star Sierra Club goals were our members and volunteers. Because of your support, the volume and strength of those voices -- expressed through weekly "action nights" with volunteers making over thousands of phone calls to our members; via email alerts; and with members' presence at lobby days and rallies throughout the session and leading up to the Special Session – led to marked improvements in the terrible prospects presented at the beginning of the session. See the chart on page 10 for details.

With your help, we will work to bolster state environmental leadership to make 2016 a year of improvements, not rollbacks, and to set the table for the next election. . . which will matter even more.

*John Hottinger is the North Star Chapter's Legislative Advocate for the 2015 legislative session.*



Move MN Rally - Photo Credit Joshua Houdek



Gathering at Governors Residence May 21 - Photo Credit Joshua Houdek

# Unfinished Business: 2015 Energy Policies Passed in Minnesota

Michelle Rosier

What a difference a day makes (or in this case, two years). In 2013, the Minnesota legislature passed clean energy and jobs policies that have set the stage for continued success in Minnesota's growing clean energy economy and what Forbes magazine recognizes as the next gold rush for solar energy. While 2015 started with the potential to make important progress on clean energy, it ended with energy policies that primarily benefit utilities and large energy users while threatening investments in Minnesota's clean energy transition. This legislative session did not live up to what Minnesotans expect from their leaders in helping the state continue to build a strong clean energy economy and transition beyond fossil fuels, like coal.

While the Sierra Club supported the Clean Energy & Jobs clean energy package and the Department of Commerce bill, the energy package passed by the House of Representatives included policies that we strongly oppose, including but not limited to:

- Reducing the state's science-based climate reduction goals
- Counting large hydro power as renewable energy
- Eliminating the Conservation Improvement Program for energy efficiency
- Repealing the nuclear moratorium and solar energy standard

When the House and Senate bills were reconciled in conference committee and in negotiations leading up to the

special session, many of the bad provisions were removed. Here's a final version of energy policies passed this legislative session (this list is not exhaustive):

1. Co-op and municipal utilities have the authority to charge customers with distributed generation -- like solar and small wind -- a fixed fee on their energy bills;
2. Energy intensive industries, like mines, are eligible for a reduced electric rate that will be paid for by increased electric rates for smaller businesses and homes. Customers on energy assistance are exempt from this rate increase, and it only applies to Minnesota Power and Otter Tail Power customers;
3. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency must provide a draft of the state's Clean Power Plan as of March 15, 2016 to the Legislature for review and comment. The Clean Power Plan is the nation's first effort to reduce climate-disrupting carbon pollution from existing power plants and is credited with helping the United States negotiate carbon reduction commitments with China and Brazil;
4. Allocates \$150,000/year for weatherization programs to help homeowners on energy assistance purchase solar panels or other renewable technologies.

*Michelle Rosier is the Senior Campaign and Organizing Manager for the Minnesota Beyond Coal Campaign.*

# Summer 2015 Outings – Get Outdoors!

For updated listings, visit our website at [northstar.sierraclub.org](http://northstar.sierraclub.org) and click on Get Outdoors!

To subscribe to regular updates and info, please join the MN Sierra Club Outings "meetup" at [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com).

Contact the outing leader ahead of time if you would like to attend. You will be instructed as to what you need to bring, meeting location and time. As much as possible, the Sierra Club encourages carpooling, and we generally limit our group size to 12 people.

Join us to get out and explore, enjoy and protect the planet!

**Monday, July 27, 6:00 p.m.**  
**Hike 4-6 Miles**  
**Murphy Hanrehan State Park**

A brisk hike - average about 2.5 - 3 mph which means we will probably walk faster than that for much of the hike. And this part of the park has LOTS of hills. This will be a challenging hike due to hills and speed. We'll go between 4 and 6 miles over a couple of hours.

Leader: Margaret Elkins: [margaret.elkins@gmail.com](mailto:margaret.elkins@gmail.com)

**Thursday, July 30, 6:30 p.m.**  
**Hike 5-7 miles**  
**Lebanon Hills Regional Park**

Join us for a brisk 5 to 7 mile hike at Lebanon Hills. We'll average 3 mph, which is a brisk, steady walking pace. The hike should last no more than 2 hours. This is a great hike if you're looking to test yourself at a good pace and get a good workout. That said, the terrain is pretty flat. We'll be primarily walking a single track trail that goes through wooded areas. Bring plenty of water and a snack to keep you going.

Leader: Margaret Elkins: [margaret.elkins@gmail.com](mailto:margaret.elkins@gmail.com)

**Sunday, August 2**  
**Bike, 30+ miles**  
**Dakota Rail Trail**

This 13-mile paved trail offers a spectacular view of Lake Minnetonka and follows the route of the former Dakota Rail Corridor through St. Bonifacius, Minnetrista, Mound, Spring Park, Minnetonka Beach, Orono and Wayzata. In Carver County, an additional 12.5 miles of paved trail extends west of St. Bonifacius to Mayer.

Leader: Greg Allison, [greg.allison@northstar.sierraclub.org](mailto:greg.allison@northstar.sierraclub.org)

**Monday, August 3, 6:30 - 7:30 p.m.**  
**Nature walk, 1 mile – Family-friendly**  
**Brown's Creek Park Reserve, Stillwater**

Bring your little ones and join us for a little after dinner exploring. A mowed trail winds through woods and fields in the park, with plenty of opportunities to climb around and under trees, hunt for bugs, and trek in the tall grass. Bring sunscreen and bug spray. There is a playground and picnic tables near the preserve entrance if you want to come early and bring a picnic dinner, and the park is accessible from the new Brown's Creek Trail.

Leader: Angie Hong, [algoodri@hotmail.com](mailto:algoodri@hotmail.com)

**Sunday, August 16, 3:30 – 5:00 p.m.**  
**Hike 1-2 miles – Family-friendly**  
**William O'Brien State Park**

Bring your little ones and join us for hiking and river exploration along the St. Croix River. We'll poke along the river trail and spend some time down at the water's edge as well. Bring sunscreen, bug spray, and a change of pants just in case the kids' legs get wet while exploring. There is a picnic area near the trailhead.

Leader: Angie Hong, [algoodri@hotmail.com](mailto:algoodri@hotmail.com)

**Tuesday, September 8, 6:30 - 7:30 p.m.**  
**Nature walk, 1 mile – Family-friendly**  
**Barkers Alps, Bayport**

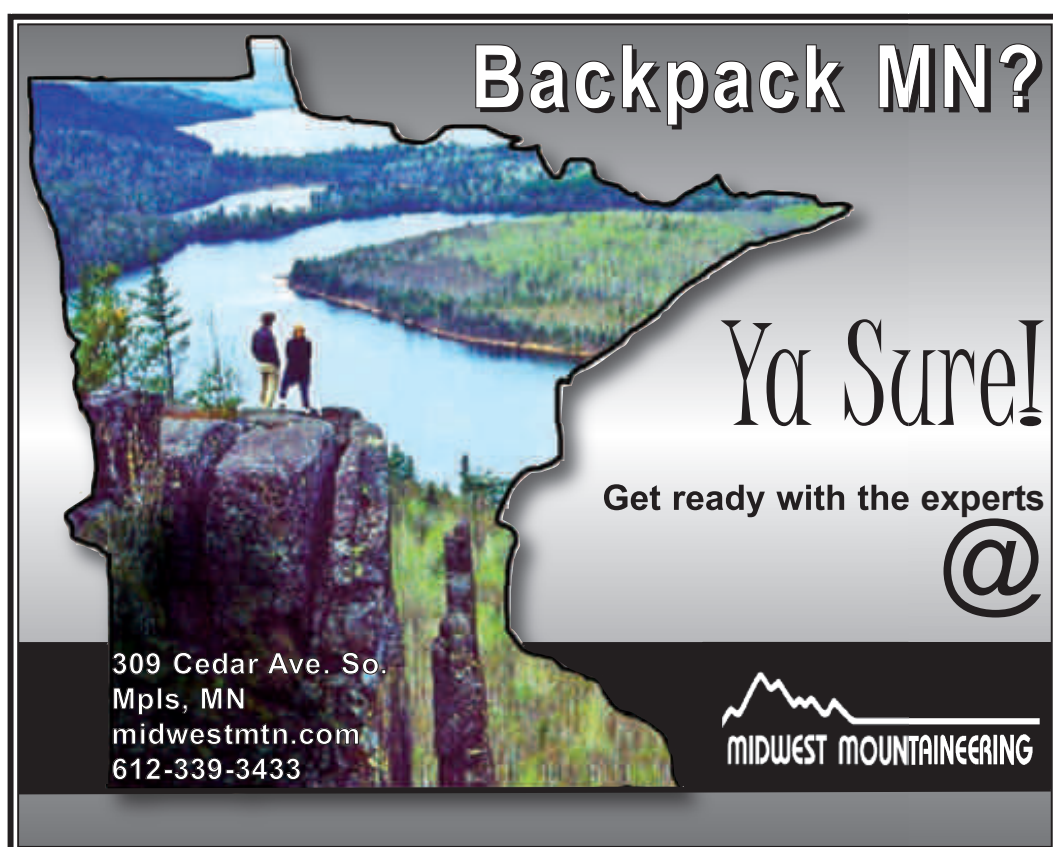
Bring your little ones and join us for a little after dinner exploring. Paved and dirt paths lead into the woods where we'll find a butterfly garden and frog pond. Bring sunscreen and bug spray. There is a playground and picnic tables near the park entrance if you want to come early and bring a picnic dinner.

Leader: Angie Hong, [algoodri@hotmail.com](mailto:algoodri@hotmail.com)

**Saturday, September 26, 10:30 - 1:00 p.m.**  
**Bike, 10-12 miles – Family-friendly**  
**Brown's Creek Trail, Stillwater**

This trip is geared for parents pulling little ones in bike trailers and bigger kids who can ride along with parents for farther distances. We'll start in Stillwater, work our way gradually uphill along the St. Croix River and through the scenic Brown's Creek Gorge, before stopping at Brown's Creek Park Preserve for a playground break. Depending on time, we'll continue along the trail as far as the intersection with the Gateway Trail and then come back (downhill all the way to town!), stopping for a picnic lunch along the way.

Leader: Angie Hong, [algoodri@hotmail.com](mailto:algoodri@hotmail.com)



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# Minnesotans Visit D.C. to Stop Polluter Payoffs, Protect Public Health

Tess Ergen

In mid-March I traveled to Washington, D.C. with Sierra Club leaders with the Beyond Coal Campaign from across the U.S. to raise awareness about the need to put people's health over polluters' profits. This trip was personal to me because of my experience with air pollution's impacts both here in Minneapolis and across the globe in New Delhi, India.

New Delhi has been declared as having the world's most toxic air this year, beating Beijing, while charting up global warming statistics and respiratory illnesses. As an environmental communications student, I have heard firsthand about the hardships of asthma – the most common chronic disease for children – physically, financially and emotionally in Minnesota.

No more could I sit idly by as preventable toxic smog and carbon emissions envelop the world. Therefore, I braved up with my college colleagues and stormed into Congress. Sierra Club volunteers and members spoke out for citizen's voices in support of the United States Environmental Protection Agency's proposals of the Clean Power Plan and smog standard.

The Clean Power Plan is the United States' first-ever standard to reduce carbon pollution from coal and natural gas power plants. Carbon pollution is the primary contributor to climate change – causing severe weather, driving up global temperatures and scattering the range of tick- and mosquito-borne illnesses like Lyme disease and West Nile virus.

A simple solution to curbing carbon output is to become more efficient with energy use and use wind and solar power instead of fossil fuels. The Clean Power Plan can be the foundation for ecological progress to clean up and modernize the way we power our country and ensure our kids, communities and workforce are healthier.

Clean air is also a matter of environmental justice right here in Minnesota. A smog standard would keep polluters accountable for harmful amounts of air contamination and help millions breathe easier with the help of the EPA's science-based smog standard proposal. In Minnesota, an estimated 90,000 children and more than 400,000 adults have asthma.

A 2010 report showed that the Sherco Coal Plant located in Becker, Minn., alone caused 91 premature deaths, 1,600 asthma attacks and 12,062 lost workdays from carbon pollution.

Sierra Club's Polluter Payoffs Fly-in and Lobby Week highlighted coal pollution nationally with a goal to support the Clean Power Plan. We kicked off the trip with a promising introduction and orientation for volunteers, successful lobby meetings and an unforgettable evening celebration. In the span of three days, our team attended seven representative meetings and one constituent breakfast with Al Franken in the fluster of a March Madness lobbying season.

Sen. Al Franken's breakfast made me feel more Minnesotan than I have ever felt in my hotdish-filled childhood. He served us Mahnomin porridge, a native Minnesotan dish made with rare wild rice that is brought in from White Earth Reservation. Anyone can attend this weekly constituent breakfast with Sen. Franken and get a mouthful of native Minnesota in one tasty bite. He

updated us on what was going on in the Senate and listened to our interests as we ate causally with one another like we were at home.

My group felt ambitious interacting with Republicans' and Democrats' offices. We met with Representatives John Kline, Keith Ellison, Betty McCollum, Tim Walz, Tom Emmer and Senators Amy Klobuchar and Al Franken. Rep.

Ellison was first runner up and gave us the inside scoop of the Progressive Caucus budget with details on the environment before it was released to the public. On the other hand, Republican Representatives Walz, Emmer and Kline in person taught us how to look at the Clean Power Plan from a different lens, giving constructive critiques to polish the bill. We saw Rep. Walz's staff show curiosity to know more on renewable energy, hungry to show their constituents the positive side.

I couldn't believe a college student such as I could impact our Capitol's policies and decisions; yet there I was a part of it.

With a team of all women we were determined to talk to Representative Betty McCollum's office. Her office took shine to us college students, offering internship opportunities. We wound up bumping into Rep. McCollum and took a picture with her before her next meeting. Her enthusiasm radiated when she heard our story and saw young students working hard for the environment. Her farewell words, "This is why we need more women in politics!" became my personal anthem and inspiration for the week.

The Polluter Payoffs Lobby Week was a political step forward. A few weeks after our meeting with Sen. Klobuchar she announced her support for the Clean Power Plan, our main goal on the trip. Our representatives listen when we voice our concerns in unity.

Let's not allow Minnesota to be known as having the most toxic air. Instead, let's keep our proud, progressive reputation and be the most innovative state in renewable, clean energy. Email, write and call your representatives, and tell them Minnesota wants to keep our 10,000 lakes clean and have pollutant-free air for the next generation to enjoy.

*Tess Ergen is a Climate Justice Intern with the North Star Chapter.*



Minnesota delegates meet with Representative Betty McCollum Photo Credit Karen Monahan



Tess Ergen, Muna Khalif and Barni Hussein at Senator Franken's Office Photo credit Karen Monahan



# Tar Sands Resistance March



The Indigenous Bloc Leads the March - Photo Credit Tom Thompson

On June 6, more than 5,000 Minnesotans, activists and organizations from across the region came together for the largest anti-tar sands event ever in the Midwest. The march was led by many indigenous leaders, including Tom Goldtooth of the Indigenous Environmental Network and Winona LaDuke of Honor the Earth, joined by U.S. Representative Keith Ellison, Sierra Club President Aaron Mair, Bill McKibben of 350.org, the Reverend Lennox Yearwood of the Hip Hop Caucus, and many other inspirational leaders.

This event demonstrated a growing movement against the expansion of tar sands, including the Alberta

Clipper pipeline, which crosses northern Minnesota, and the illegal scheme that is circumventing the Obama Administration's permit process -- giving Enbridge a free pass and allowing an increase of tar sands across the border into the Great Lakes region. Get involved with the North Star Chapter's Beyond Oil and Tar Sands Committee, and help us call for a full environmental review of the Alberta Clipper tar sands pipeline expansion, and protect land, water, climate and tribal rights!

*Get Involved! Contact Terry Houle:  
terry.houle@northstar.sierraclub.org*



IEN Executive Director Tom Goldtooth & Sierra Club President Aaron Mair - Photo Credit David Howd



Sierra Club Group - June 6 march







# A "Fast Track" to the Bottom

Elizabeth Gelderman

Recently, legislators in Congress have introduced Fast Track legislation that would have negative effects on many Americans, allowing for little debate and zero amendments to trade treaties. The President would have full authority on "free-trade" deals with no oversight from Congress. International deals could be made with countries who have little or no environmental or labor laws, creating the potential to not only support terrible working conditions for people, but also take over local markets and send jobs outside of our borders.

One current trade deal is the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Never heard of it? That's because it is being negotiated behind closed doors outside the eye of the public. TPP is an international treaty (not governed under U.S. law) that includes countries who make up 40% of the global economy and trade deals that benefit the top 1% in the U.S.

TPP would allow large corporations to send their work overseas for cheap labor in substandard conditions, undermining smaller businesses. These corporations could also use TPP to sue governments to challenge certain laws or regulations. Human rights, labor, and environmental laws could all be pushed aside to make way for large businesses.

During a recent forum at Mayflower Church in Minneapolis, people directly affected by similar trade laws spoke out about how problematic these deals are locally and internationally.

Kaela Berg from the Minnesota Fair Trade Coalition shared some shocking facts about the impact that free trade laws, such as NAFTA, have had domestically. Among the most appalling is that over 3 million jobs have been lost in the U.S. from free trade agreements thus far.

Additionally, members of the United Steelworkers have been laid off from U.S. Steel taconite mines -- a consequence, in part, of global trade deals that have facilitated imports of illegally-subsidized foreign steel products by rewarding countries that provided cheap imports with low-paid labor, business subsidies, and minimal environmental standards.

Fast Track and TPP are not in the best interest of 99% of Americans and could have grim effects on international labor and environmental standards: a fast track to the bottom.

What can you do? Write a letter or call your member of Congress to share why Fast Track and TPP is a lose-lose situation.

*Elizabeth Gelderman is a Social Media and Blog Intern with the North Star Chapter.*



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