



SOUTHEAST SIERRAN

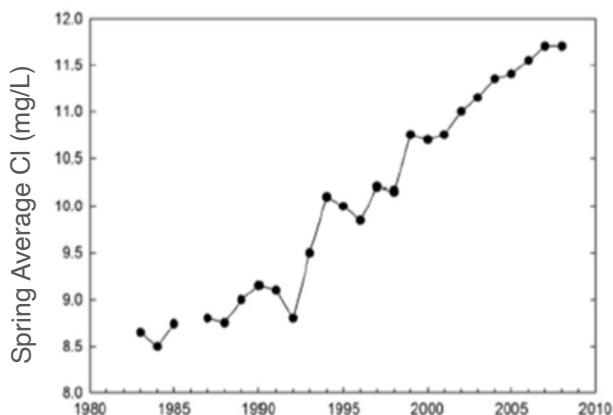
News of the
Southeast Gateway Group
of the Sierra Club

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SALTING FRESHWATER

By Laura Buska: *Respect Our Waters Program Manager / Root-Pike WTN*

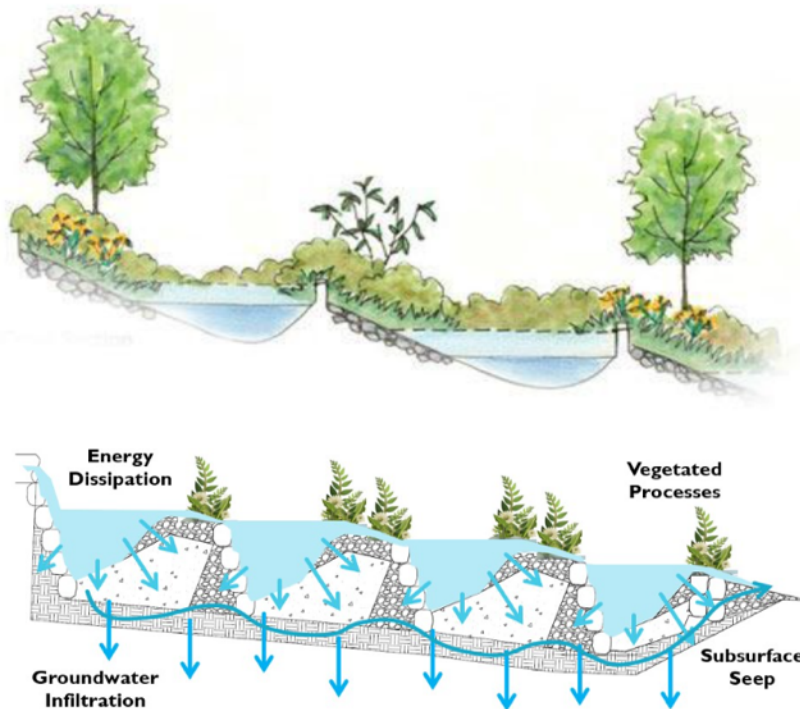
Southeastern Wisconsin resides near one of the largest bodies of freshwater in the world, Lake Michigan. Those who impact and utilize this rare and critical freshwater resource has the inherited responsibility to protect it from pollutants. Winter salt and deicers are common water pollutants. Once extracted from the safety of the earth and connected with water, chlorides persist indefinitely with only one tsp of road salt needed to *permanently* pollute 5 gallons of freshwater. This is confirmed in a 2011 EPA study in which they found chloride concentrations in Lake Michigan to steadily rise between the years of 1980 and 2010 (see table 1).



As snow melts in spring, salt will move with snowmelt into the nearest bodies of *freshwater*, effectively salting one of the world's only freshwater resources. Salt mixed into freshwater causes a variety of environmental and economic issues. High salinity is toxic to aquatic life, birds, and other organisms that make up important parts of the food chain. Additionally, it costs communities in damage to local infrastructure and vehicles, and negatively impacts water recreation activities and associated benefits.

Luckily, there is a way to work together to combat chloride contamination! Many municipalities throughout southeastern Wisconsin are actively training to learn best management practices that reduce the amount of chloride applied while ensuring public safety, lowering costs to the community, and protecting local water quality. Individuals can do their part using the following techniques:

- Shovel often and early! Preventing the bond between snow and pavement eliminates the need for deicers.
- Think TRACTION, not perfection! Use traction cleats on shoes, sand in small amounts, or bird seed on heavily used areas to prevent slipping.
- Read labels and save money! Under 15 degrees F, road salt is USELESS and ONLY pollutes.
- Don't overuse! One cup of salt with 3-inches between crystals will melt 20 ft of driveway or 10 sidewalk squares. **More salt will NOT make ice melt quicker** but instead cause it to move into and potentially harm other areas such as nearby vegetation and turfgrass.
- Don't salt unused areas! Close off unneeded areas of the patio or unused walkways to save time and money while reducing salt pollution.
- Sweep up excess! Prevent pollution while saving money.
- Request the same from contractors. Overuse of salt only increases cost for services.



GET INVOLVED → START HERE!

ANNUAL PLANNING MEETING

Saturday, January 28
10AM—Noon on Zoom

Join us for a fun morning of planning for the Sierra Club! We will discuss goals for 2023, along with Excom elections, outings, future programs, and more. Bring your ideas and goals for 2023.

ZOOM LINK will be on the SEGG website.



February Program

VIRTUAL VACATIONS:

Thursday, February 16
6:30 PM on Zoom

Like last year, we're asking members to share up to 10 digital photographs of your favorite vacation spot, nearby places or exotic locales. Prepare your favorite beverages for a virtual toast and we hope to see you there!

ZOOM LINK will be on the SEGG website.

LEASING SOLAR POWER

by Gloria Randall-Hewitt

A recent decision by the Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC) could open doors for more widespread adoption of solar power by Wisconsinites who want to install solar panels on their homes. The legal ruling is in response to a specific family's case where they wanted to lease a solar panel array from the contractor who would install them instead of purchasing the panels outright. Per an article in the Wisconsin Examiner on December 2, 2022, entitled Company may install, lease solar panels without being a utility, PSC rules, the PSC's decision determined this would be allowed by declaring that the third party solar contractor would not be regulated as an electric utility.



This is the first time such a situation has been specifically addressed by the PSC in Wisconsin though other states do explicitly allow third-party ownership as described in this case. Advocates argue that such solar financing will help Wisconsinites to afford transitioning to cleaner energy.

"Many residents and businesses cannot afford the upfront costs of solar, but would very much like to have solar to produce clean energy and lower their utility bills," wrote Elizabeth Ward, Wisconsin director for the Sierra Club, in a June 15 statement to the PSC supporting the Vote Solar petition. "The lack of legal clarity on third party solar creates a constraint for property owners to produce energy that they themselves would use."

Ward wrote that in low-income communities, "the lack of wealth has caused great disparities in adopting solar, and many who would benefit most by reducing their energy bills cannot do so."

For more details please see the Wisconsin Examiner Article:

[wisconsinexaminer.com/2022/12/02/company-may-install-lease-solar-panels-without-being-a-utility-psc-rules/](https://www.wisconsinexaminer.com/2022/12/02/company-may-install-lease-solar-panels-without-being-a-utility-psc-rules/)

Small Grants Available!!

Southeast Gateway Group has been organized to promote the national Sierra Club's goals at the local level.

The purposes of the Sierra Club are to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out these objectives.

In keeping with these goals, starting in 2023, the SEGG Excom will evaluate potential donations to other local organizations and efforts to ensure consistency with the overall Sierra Club's purpose. In addition, SEGG will review any requests for gifts or donations against current priorities within that purpose, and monitor recent gifts in an effort to reach all areas of our community and promote the Sierra Club's mission to as wide an audience as possible.

To achieve such goals, SEGG will start accepting grant applications in January 2023. Local organizations and environmental efforts may request up to \$500. Applications will be available on our website and will be accepted on a rolling basis.

Build Net-Zero Schools in Racine

By Tom Rutkowski

Schools in the United States spend almost 8 billion dollars a year on energy, a cost greater than all the money spent on textbooks and computers combined and second only to salaries. Some school districts, recognizing that this money could be better spent directly supporting educational goals, are building net-zero schools which use less energy and generate the energy they need through renewable sources. It is time for Racine Unified School District to build new schools that will eliminate the costs of energy, provide healthier indoor environments, and embody the principles of sustainability as an educational resource.



The recently passed Inflation Reduction Act includes new financial incentives for school districts to adopt energy efficiency measures and renewable energy options. The available incentives, in some cases up to 50% of the cost of implementation, will shorten the payback period for the initial investment and will relieve the school district of the energy burden for decades to follow. In addition, net-zero schools also insulate the school district from the volatility of rising energy prices.

Net-zero schools can also add resilience to the local community. Buildings that include battery storage capacity can be “islanded” in times of emergency so that they can offer heating, cooling, and electricity when surrounding infrastructure fails. As weather extremes worsen, schools can become a refuge for their neighborhoods.

Net-zero schools can also serve as living laboratories that demonstrate a number of STEM concepts for both students and the broader community. In addition, such schools have led to heightened student performance, increased average attendance, better occupant health, and improved teacher satisfaction and retention.



Forest Edge Elementary School in Fitchburg, Wisconsin's First Net-Zero Energy School

The Forest Edge Elementary School in Fitchburg is Wisconsin's first net-zero energy school. Built in 2020, the school's geothermal heating and solar energy installations along with other efficiency measures save the Oregon School District \$60,000 dollars a year. Michael Barnett, an engineering project manager for the school, believes “This project is a testament of what's possible with dedication and innovation. It's proof that a net zero-ready design is cost-comparable to a traditional school.”

Schools have always been future focused, an investment in the hope that our knowledge and our values will live on. At this critical time to mitigate climate change it is appropriate for Racine Unified School

District to build net-zero schools that will use educational and natural resources more efficiently while addressing one of the gravest threats to our future health and economic vitality.

Please visit the SEGG website or the site below to sign the petition. www.change.org/NetZeroSchoolsRacine

SEGG Conservation in Colonial Park

Restoration of the Colonial Park Floodplain After Ash Tree Removal...

by *Melissa Warner*

Your support of SEGG enables this important restoration effort! You helped make this happen.

This spring 32 volunteers invested 75 hours planting trees in Colonial Park. Fifty red maples and serviceberries were planted in Upper Colonial, while over 200 more - red oak, river birch, black cherry, red maple and serviceberry were planted in Lower Colonial. It's always fun to have the community join us for planting! Your SEGG grant purchased the trees, along with the sleeves, stakes and zipties needed to protect them from hungry deer.



AmeriCorps team members Kiernan, Francisco, Kayla and Ha dressed to plant sedges in Colonial wetland.

Spring in Colonial also brings invasives. We were delighted to discover fewer than last year; our efforts are paying off. Garlic mustard was almost hard to find! The dame's rocket and sweet clover populations are also minimal. Several workdays focused on burdock and giant ragweed. Thistles and reed canary grass will be the targets for 2023.

We were fortunate to have an AmeriCorps crew in for 11 full days! Their focus was preservation and restoration of the open water wetland. This small wetland is becoming larger and wetter, due to the loss of the ash trees that once transpired gallons of water each, per day. It is an important ecological niche that we are learning about. We know that several species of waterfowl use the wetland: toads, green frogs and bullfrogs call it home, painted turtles and snapping turtles like it, too. Herons and egrets stop in, and a pair of ospreys and a bald eagle have been observed close by. So the wetland project of 2022 and 2023 aims to preserve and improve this little gem.

The AmeriCorps team removed grape vines and raspberries, which - while native - were growing aggressively, overtopping the smaller trees and shrubs, and taking more than their fair share of sunlight and nutrients. And of course, we found honeysuckle and buckthorn hiding under the top growth, as well. After the space was cleared, the team planted 100 swamp white oaks - a species that will help recreate the Southern Wisconsin flood plain forest. They also planted sedges into the very edge of the wetland. Reed canary grass (rcg) and Phragmites have been treated; these aggressive invaders will require more treatment next year, as well. Left unchecked, they can take over the entire wetland, reducing its ability to be a functioning ecosystem. We'll sow the wetland edge with an emergent floodplain seed mix in early winter, just before the first snowfall. The seedlings will out compete the rcg, stabilize the exposed soil, and create food and shelter for native critters.



Restoration and enhancement of the wetland is a multiyear project. We'll follow up on invasives control and introduce additional native plants to increase diversity and habitats.

Your support of SEGG enables this important restoration effort; you helped make this happen. THANK YOU!!!



AmeriCorps team members planting sedges in Colonial Park wetland.

University of Wisconsin **PARKSIDE** & **THE INFLATION REDUCTION ACT** *by Ross Astoria*

The Inflation Reduction Act (Aug. 2022) and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill (Nov. 2021) invest in the reduction of greenhouse gas pollution, the updating of the country's infrastructure, and the abatement of pollutants harmful to health. These investments are focused both on environmental justice and the creation of a domestically-based advanced renewable energy economy. The ultimate success of these climate policies, however, depend upon state, local, and community led implementation.



Most of the programs funded by these bill commence operation in 2023 and the University of Wisconsin, Parkside is convening groups, officials, and individuals interested in pursuing these opportunities. Parkside's goal is to provide community members technical support for implementing these programs and forums where community members can collaborate.

In the first session (Nov. 15), Professor Astoria briefed the community on some of the IRA's legislative changes and funding opportunities. These include: changes to the renewable energy tax credits that make them available to tax-exempt entities (such as school districts), the role of the Wisconsin State Energy Office in deploying rebates for retrofits to homes that enhance energy efficiency and electrification, and the opportunities and challenges of accessing the \$27 billion that the IRA appropriated for a Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund.

Professor Astoria highlighted the environmental justice components of these programs under the Administration's Justice40 initiative. This legislation provides grant funding to municipalities and non-profits to implement greenhouse gas reduction programs. While details are forthcoming from the EPA in early 2023, we anticipate that some of this funding could be used, for instance, to fund the staffing of municipal sustainability officers. The group also discussed next steps for organizing. The second meeting (Dec. 12) looked at advanced energy economy manufacturing programs from the IRA and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill.

Parkside's Climate Convening is led by the Guskin Center for Community and Business Engagement, supported by the Department of Social Sciences and Professional Studies, and facilitated by Professor Ross Astoria. Groups or individuals interested in joining should contact Amy Garrigan at garrigan@uwp.edu.



Our October 9 Outing to Scuppernong Springs Nature Trail with Al Sommer

Join the e-news fun!

Due to some technical problems this past year, we need to revamp our email list. If you would like to be added to the list to receive notices about club events and outings in between receiving the regular newsletter, please sign up directly on the SEGG website or email Laura Schulz at schulztwin2@gmail.com.



In Remembrance

DONNA PETERSON

1934 - 2022

By John Berge

Once again, the Southeast Gateway Group has lost one of its long-time members and leaders. Donna Peterson died peacefully in her residence after a long and confining illness on November 21, 2022. She was 87. Her husband, Clarence, died over 15 years ago.

Donna joined the Sierra Club in 1981 and was a regular at meetings from the beginning until her health no longer permitted it. Although she always refused nomination to elected office in the Group, she served as Environmental Education Committee Chair for two dozen years. It

was often a committee of one. She brought to the Group a grade school program of environmental education from her previous membership in the Hoy Nature Club as shown in the accompanying photograph of her, the stuffed Bald Eagle “Old Abe”, and students of presumably fourth graders. The programs were conducted for an hour or two at schools in and near Racine, going back to some schools year after year. She was most disappointed that she never could expand the program to Kenosha, western Racine County or Walworth County.

Donna was also an organizer. She organized many of the Group’s holiday pot-lucks, the 25th anniversary party and other social occasions. She also organized unofficial trips with several other SEGG activists to the eastern United States, to the desert southwest, and to see the Bald Eagles in western Wisconsin.

By the time you read this, Donna’s name will have been added to the Sierra Club’s memorial bench on the Pike River Pathway southwest of Case High School, overlooking the south end of the big pond. If you haven’t visited our memorial, it would be a good idea to find a pleasant day and do so.



Notes from the Treasurer by Jeff Sytsma

Southeast Gateway Group, like any organization, has revenue and expenses.

Our revenue sources include:

A portion of member dues are returned to us at a rate of \$0.18 per member for general purposes. \$0.28 per member is held by Sierra Club Foundation available via reimbursement requests for 501 C(3) activities which are things such as educational programs.

Grants are available from Wisconsin Chapter for projects through an application process.

Newsletter reimbursement from SC Foundation for educational portion of the newsletter. A request form and documents detailing costs are submitted for each issue.

We have fundraising activity every year including sales of cranberries and calendars.

Chapter has a matching grant for fundraising efforts, up to \$100 for qualifying efforts.

Donations from members: Donations to SEGG go to our general fund and donations to SC Foundation are deposited into our account there to use upon request.

Our expenses include:

The cost of publishing and sending out our newsletter.

Paying guest presenters for educational programs.

Donations to other non-profits that share our mission.

Direct expenses for activities that are chosen to fulfill our mission.

Cost of cranberries and calendars.

If you ever have questions about the financial workings of our Group, you can find my contact information in every newsletter. Thank you to all for helping support us whether by renewing your membership, purchasing cranberries or calendars or sending a donation!

Thank You
FOR YOUR
SUPPORT

Save a Tree & See in Color!

Email natom@wi.rr.com to request a full-color, digital newsletter emailed instead of receiving a paper copy.

Make a Difference!
DONATE

**Your donation helps us continue to
"Explore, Enjoy and Protect" SE Wisconsin.**

Checks can be made out to *Sierra Club SEGG* to be used towards any purpose, or to *Sierra Club Foundation* to be used strictly for educational programs and activities. Mail donations to:
Jeff Sytsma, 3508 Washington Ave, Racine, WI 53405



SEGG encourages you to WRITE to your legislators on the issues you care about.
Find your representative at legis.wisconsin.gov

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2022 Southeast Gateway Group Leadership

Executive Committee

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Tom Rutkowski (*Vice Chair/Programs*).....natom@wi.rr.com
Allan Sommer (*Outings Chair*).....sommerallan4@gmail.com
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Gloria Randall-Hewitt.....evewardener@gmail.com

Kelsey Saari.....vinesgurl89@yahoo.com
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Other Group Leaders

Jeff Systema (*Treasurer*).....jeff12759@aol.com
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Jessica True (*Outings*).....jessicattrue@yahoo.com

The newsletter of the Southeast Gateway Group is published quarterly by Group members. Please send articles, event submissions, photographs, corrections and/or comments to: Nicole Reid - nreid23@wi.rr.com

Deadline for Apr-Jun Issue: Mar. 15, 2023

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An egret resting in Colonial Park



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