



SIERRA
CLUB

**GREAT WATERS GROUP
NEWSLETTER**

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Spring 2023 NO. 1



The fourth annual African American Environmental Pioneer Awards will be presented on Feb. 20. Among the honorees last year were (from left) Detaya Johnson, Danitra Jones, Lamont Smith, Rev. Michelle Townsend DeLopez, Nateya Taylor and Jalen Greenlee.

Environmental pioneers to be honored

The Great Waters Group is proud to co-sponsor the fourth annual African American Environmental Pioneer Awards on Monday, Feb. 20, at 6:30 p.m. at the Black Historical Society and Museum at 2620 W. Center St. in Milwaukee.

Held during Black History Month, the event celebrates the contributions of our community leaders and honors the rich culture and history of African Americans.

It features music, art and culture, and it aims to inspire collective responsibility to work toward the well-being of Milwaukee's African American community.

For program details and 2023 honorees, go to www.nearbynaturemke.org. Seating will be limited due to COVID-19 concerns, so please register for the in-person or live-streamed event at www.bit.ly/green-pioneers-2023.

Other programs scheduled for spring include:

Rights of Nature and Indigenous Activism

Monday, March 20, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

On Zoom

Presenters will be White Earth tribal attorney Frank Bibeau and
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Thomas Linzey, senior legal counsel for the Center for Democratic and Environmental Rights.

In 2018, the White Earth Band of Ojibwe recognized the rights of manoomin (wild rice), the first law to recognize the legal rights of a plant species. In 2021, manoomin and the White Earth Band sued the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to enforce the rights of wild rice, the first rights of nature enforcement case brought in a tribal court. Learn about the Rights of Nature movement, how it aligns with the traditional ecological knowledge of Indigenous people, and how it provides a tool for enforcing ecological health as a priority.

Make Your Home More Sustainable Using Community Resources

Monday, May 15, 6 p.m.

Wauwatosa Public Library

Presenters include Elizabeth Hittman, Jay Feiker and Mike Arney. Homeowners will learn about community resources to help them make their homes more sustainable by improving energy efficiency, storm drainage, etc.

Get updated information and register for the March and May programs at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/great-waters/calendar.

Notes from the Chair

I am writing this just a few weeks into the new year and am mindful that this is a time of multiple new ventures for the Great Waters Group. We are welcoming three new Executive Committee members — Tim Karaskiewicz, Kerstin Larson and Emily O’Neil — who have jumped right into the work of the group by taking on the roles of Membership Chair, Holiday Party/Fundraising Chair and Equity Chair, respectively.

On Jan. 22-23 we welcomed Ben Jealous, incoming director of the Sierra Club, as he made Milwaukee the first stop on his national tour of chapters and groups.

We recommit ourselves to our priorities of conservation, environmental equity, and creating opportunities for everyone in our four-county area to get outside and enjoy our natural wonders of rivers, woods and a great lake.

We look ahead with excitement to the fourth annual African American Environmental Pioneer Awards ceremony Feb. 20. We are honored to be a part of

regional initiatives that focus on building an equitable and resilient future for residents, including the Environmental Justice and Infrastructure Initiative led by Walnut Way Conservation Corp., and the Our Future Milwaukee Coalition that is asking the City of Milwaukee to adopt a comprehensive Climate Equity Plan.

We are also continuing to fight for environmental protections. Many of you have submitted comments to the state Department of Transportation asking it to halt plans to expand I-94. On the heels of Cedar Gorge Clay Bluffs receiving state funding to become a permanently protected natural area, we are hopeful that plans to build golf course infrastructure at Kohler-Andrae State Park can finally be terminated. We also continue efforts with our northwest Wisconsin colleagues to stop the rerouting of the Line 5 pipeline.

All of this work is possible thanks to your commitment to the Sierra Club. We have many ways to get more involved by joining our Volunteer Leadership Council, helping plan events or getting trained as an



Ben Jealous, the Sierra Club’s new executive director, is starting with a listening tour across the country. His first stop was Wisconsin, including two Milwaukee events Jan. 22-23. Great Waters Group Chair Jenny Abel was among the members who shared their experiences and priorities.

outings leader. If one of your new year’s resolutions includes getting more involved in environmental volunteering, please reach out to me or another VLC member. We are grateful to have you with us in 2023.

–Jenny Abel, GWG Chair

Court elections loom and your vote matters

Wisconsin will hold a primary election Feb. 21 and a general election April 4 to fill a seat vacated by retiring conservative Justice Patience Roggensack. The Feb. 21 primary is nonpartisan, and so the top two vote-getters out of the four will advance to the April general election. Your vote matters.

Conservatives currently hold a 4-3 majority. The court’s majority has issued a number of decisions that have had significant negative effects on the environment and conservation in Wisconsin. The court’s election law decisions also have left Wisconsin with what is generally recognized as one of the most gerrymandered election maps and legislative bodies in the country.

For more information on the election, go to www.ballotpedia.org/Wisconsin_elections_2023.

The election also could be a deciding factor in the preservation of Kohler-Andrae Lakeshore, an issue close to the heart of many Sierrans. Learn more about the candidates and how the election could affect a rare ecosystem that the Sierra Club-Wisconsin Chapter has been fighting to preserve at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/great-waters.

Please remember to vote in the Feb. 21 primary and the April 4 general election.

Correction

Some information was incorrect in the story about the Indian Community School in the last issue. To see the corrected story, go to www.sierraclub.org/Wisconsin/great-waters/newsletters. We regret the errors.

GWG to join in Earth Day cleanup scheduled for Hopkins Hollow area

Save the Date: Saturday, April 22, 9 a.m. to noon

For Earth day the Great Waters Group, Nearby Nature and Northwest Side CDC are again partnering to clean the Hopkins Hollow area near N. 35th and Hopkins streets during Milwaukee Riverkeeper’s annual Spring Cleanup. Look for details later at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/great-waters.

In addition, a new Lincoln Creek Workgroup is working to make sure the entire length of Lincoln Creek gets the attention it deserves, and it seeks additional site captains, adopter organizations and community outreach assistance. If you’d like to play a leadership role, reach out to contact@nearbynaturemke.org

Diaz earns environment hero honor

The Great Waters Group presented its annual Environmental Hero Award to community activist Richard Diaz at the Holiday Party.



Richard Diaz

Diaz was selected for his years of activism and outreach on behalf of Milwaukee residents to address the lead crisis, secure rights for laborers and promote environmental justice.

“In everything he does, Richard exemplifies the mission and purpose of the Great Waters Group to protect our local environment and to address Milwaukee’s history of racial inequality,” said GWG Chair Jenny Abel.

- Among his many contributions, Diaz has: Co-founded the Coalition on Lead Emergency and, in collaboration with COLE members, secured the allocation of \$26.5 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds for lead abatement efforts in Milwaukee homes.
- Worked to engage partners and allies for the BlueGreen Alliance in the Midwest.
- Partnered with Walnut Way Conservation Corp. to start its environmental justice initiatives.
- Assisted in building Amani United, a neighborhood organization in one of the America’s most disenfranchised ZIP codes (53206).
- Helped a local transit union achieve a fair worker-oriented labor contract.

Diaz and the award were later featured in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

Havenwoods holiday party warms GWG member hearts

The Great Waters Group annual Holiday Party and Fundraiser, held at Havenwoods State Forest, was a resounding success. Participants enjoyed a hike and then gathered on the patio for soup and bread from Soup Market, desserts and a silent auction.

Many thanks to the team who spearheaded this event and to everyone who donated auction items, brought desserts, helped with cleanup or just showed up on a cold December day! Thanks also to the staff at Havenwoods. You can support the park by buying your state park sticker there.

If you didn’t attend, you can still support GWG by donating at www.teamsierra.org/wisconsin/gwg.

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DNR to schedule meeting on Falls landfill project

Do you feel uninformed about what happens to your trash after Waste Management picks it up? Or the consequences of running out of space to put our waste? Or the measures a landfill should take to protect its human and environmental neighbors?

If so, you should get involved in the formation of the Community Advisory Group (CAG) to oversee the exhumation of the Boundary Road Landfill (BRL) “Superfund” site in Menomonee Falls. The Environmental Protection Agency uses the term Superfund to describe places highly polluted with toxic materials that require long-term cleanup. Wisconsin Waste Management wants to dig up the Superfund site to expand the landfill’s capacity.

The Department of Natural Resources has finally announced that it will schedule an informational meeting in early 2023 to discuss formation of a CAG, which the Great Waters Group and others have been requesting for over a year. We hope many Sierrans can attend the informational session to learn more about the project and how we can ensure it is done with as little risk to the community as possible.

Key dates and facts:

- Orchard Ridge Landfill in Menomonee Falls is a 725-acre complex that accepts waste from all four counties served by the GWG.
- BRL is a 58-acre site within the Orchard Ridge complex that operated in 1954-71, accepting significant industrial waste.
- In 1984 BRL caused local groundwater contamination, received Superfund status, and underwent a multiyear cleanup and encapsulation process.
- Exhumation and relocation of waste began in late 2022, and neighbors are reporting significant odor pollution.
- A CAG is specifically formed for a Superfund site. The group is independent but recognized by the DNR and EPA.
- BRL is known to contain chemicals implicated in increased cancer rates and other health problems. It is not clear to residents whether special monitoring or protective measures are needed in the event of a chemical release.

Follow GWG e-letters and the Waukesha County Environmental Action League’s website, www.weal.org, for final details on the information session. Please consider attending, especially if you live in the Menomonee Falls area.

Volunteers welcome

Are you interested in getting more involved with the Sierra Club? To volunteer with the Great Waters Group’s political, conservation, outings, fundraising or communication committees, email greatwatersgroupsc@gmail.com. For information on the Wisconsin Chapter’s volunteer teams and monthly volunteer Zoom nights, go to www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin.



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Enjoy educational outings

Join the Great Waters Group on an outing this spring to learn about trees, habitats and more. Go to www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/great-waters/calendar or www.facebook.com/SierraClubGWG for details and registration for these outings and more.

April 1 – Hiking Grobschmidt Park in Greenfield.

May 6 – Hiking the Forest Exploration Center in Wauwatosa.

Green Obsidian inspires

The Green Obsidian is a platform designed to acknowledge and amplify the work of African Americans in conservation, both past and present, and to share stories that will inspire readers and the next generation of environmental leaders.

This Facebook page is the brainchild of former Great Waters Group member Sierra Taliaferro. Every day during Black History Month, Sierra features the story of an environmental hero. Her choices for these daily features amaze and inspire. Check out her page at www.facebook.com/TheGreenObsidian.

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Congress scheduled for April

The annual Wisconsin Conservation Congress gives residents a chance to propose conservation measures and weigh in on those that are already collected. The format for the spring hearings in April is changing, though voting will remain online. For updates, check back at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin.