

Our Utilities are Coming for your Solar!

Fed up with high utility bills? Thinking about getting solar to lower your costs (and do the right thing about climate change!), or know someone who is? Well, if your utility is MGE or Alliant Energy, they don't like those plans, and have proposals that would make getting solar more costly – and to raise your utility bills at the same time! For MGE, that's an over 7% electricity increase by 2025, and for Alliant, a whopping 13.8% by 2025!

But the really negative move is to make solar less affordable. Currently, MGE has net metering where if a home solar owner produces more energy than they use over the course of a month, that energy is paid back at the same rate as they pay for electricity. Alliant has something similar. But now, as part of rate cases before the Public Service Commission, both utilities plan to do away with net metering for new installations, reducing the payback for solar.

What will be the impact? Not only will the payback for excess electricity production be reduced significantly, but it will be based on very short periods of time, resulting in a much lower payback for any excess solar produced, and shorter times when you'll get the full benefit of solar.

Why? Well, one answer is the Edison Electric Institute. This overarching think tank for utilities acts much like the American Legislative Exchange Council does for legislatures. They work to come up with model policies and messaging that supports utilities profits, and then share and promote them around the country.

The message EII and the utilities are selling is that solar adopters cost other non-adopters – despite that studies done elsewhere generally do not bear that out. But rather than do a study to prove their assertions, MGE continues to claim that solar customers are costing non-solar customers more. They even claim that it is especially low-income customers who are being harmed, when in fact, should third party solar (where a business installs and pays for the solar on your house, and you rent it back from them) be approved, this could especially harm opportunities for low-income customers to install solar in Wisconsin.

Continued on page 2

Chair's Column

Ronda Conner, Chair

Greetings!

I hope you are making the most of the last weeks of summer. As fall approaches, I am taking stock of how summer went. Summer is my favorite season but also my busiest season so I have been trying to plan it carefully. I am looking forward to fitting in more of what's important into the last weeks of summer. For me, festivals are probably the most important events of summer.

Luckily, a major festival still remains, the Willy Street Fair. I love volunteering at festivals because it provides the best of both worlds. I can make a difference by recycling while being social and enjoying the festival's sights and sounds. I hope that you can join us either at our table providing information or help out with the recycling efforts at the Willy St Fair. This is a great opportunity to talk to people about what the Sierra Club has been up to while doing so much good. You can find out more information and sign up in the article about reducing trash (*page 5*).

Another important opportunity to consider is volunteering to help plant trees in our local parks. Trees and shrubs provide beauty, shade

continued on page 2

In This Issue

<i>Our Utilities are Coming for your Solar</i>	1
<i>Chair's Column</i>	1
<i>Tree Planting Projects</i>	2
<i>Our Transportation Challenges</i>	3
<i>Four Lakes Group Contacts</i>	4
<i>Land Access and Equity Team</i>	4
<i>Getting Un-trashed</i>	5
<i>Volunteer Opportunities</i>	5
<i>Four Lakes Group election candidates</i>	6
<i>Four Lakes Group election ballot</i>	7
<i>2023 Sierra Club Calendars</i>	8

With the dire need to get off fossil fuels, and Governor Evers declaring our intent for Wisconsin to have carbon free electricity by 2050, you'd think our utilities would be highly supportive of renewable energy. After all, that's what they keep bragging to us they're doing. But that's not what they're supporting when it comes to new solar for homeowners or businesses.

Both MGE and Alliant understand that climate change is real, and are aware that in addition to the solar and wind they are increasingly purchasing, that there is a need to add as much solar (especially distributed) as fast as possible to forestall the worst of climate change. Since our buildings are major energy users, they are prime opportunities for adding solar to reduce greenhouse gases. Yet, MGE and Alliant want to make it more costly and difficult for you to install new solar, especially more than you use.

If they get their way, the bottom line impacts of doing away with net metering is that it would:

- Increase the cost per Kilowatt for new home solar systems
- Be a disincentive to installing a solar system, especially one that produces more electricity than you use at any time
- Increase the payback time on a home solar system
- Reduce Madison's rate of adding home solar
- Be harder for low-income customers to install solar and undermine federal low-income incentives
- Undermine third party solar, if that is approved, where businesses pay the upfront cost of solar

Post pandemic and with inflation, many families are struggling economically and have a hard time paying their bills. Energy to keep the lights on, run your refrigerator and furnace, have hot water and cook, and provide for communications is a vital need. Yet MGE and Alliant are proposing to raise your rates while shareholder profits go up, and executive salaries and bonuses continue to skyrocket. Much of those rate increases are due to continuing to operate costly, outdated, polluting coal plants.

The comment period on MGE's rate case is open and until September 26th and Alliant's until October 5th – and is when you can tell the PSC what you think. To submit comments on MGE's rate case, go to <https://tinyurl.com/mge2023>, and for Alliant go to <https://tinyurl.com/WisPL2023>. This is your opportunity to tell the Public Service Commission to reject the utility's plans for high rate increases and ending net metering, and ask them to stand up for home solar ownership and provide customers with fair and equitable energy rates.

from the sun, and help battle climate change by taking in CO2 and providing oxygen. They also help remove pollutants from the air and provide visual and noise screening. We have some fall plantings scheduled and will have more in the spring. This is a great opportunity to make a difference on climate change all while meeting new people and having fun outdoors.

We are also hoping to add some more outings and other social events on our calendar in the next couple months. I look forward to opportunities to learn new things and see new places while being social with people who are also as inspired and concerned about the environment as I am. Keep checking our event calendar on our website for more details. I hope you can join us!

Take care!

Tree Planting Projects – Volunteers Needed

Jake Johnson

Join us for a fun fall tree planting event on Saturday, October 14th! We'll be meeting at 9 am at Keller Alpine Meadows (400 East Netherwood) Park in the village of Oregon, just a few minutes south of Madison where we'll be planting 21 new trees in this beautiful park.

Meet at the parking lot off Netherwood, near Cusick Parkway. We'll start with a quick tutorial and then split up and plant trees. Bring a refillable water bottle and gloves, and wear work clothes and sturdy shoes. We will plant rain or shine, so dress for the weather. This is kid friendly – and bring friends too! Questions? Email Jake at jake@paradymeproductions.com. We hope to see you there!

Dane County is also planning a tree planting event that day on Madison's south side. We don't have time or location details, but watch our website or Facebook page for updates.

Do you have a group at work or a large family who wants to do a tree planting project this fall or next spring? Just contact Jake.

Our Transportation Challenges

We are a very car-dependent and auto-centric society. Despite that, our transportation systems often don't work nearly as well as we'd like them to – and there are at least two major side effects – and many more still significant ones. The first obviously is climate change. Even as we transition to electric cars, too much energy comes from fossil fuels, and even as we get away from that, both manufacturing vehicles, and the infrastructure required to support them, uses a lot of often very carbon intensive energy. Transportation is becoming the number one source of climate emissions in our country.

Second, not everyone has or can own and drive a car. Those without an automobile are often at a significant disadvantage, not being able to easily, or perhaps at all, go where they want to go, and when they want to go. Major disparities and inequities exist in our society around the mobility choices people have. Too often, those who are disadvantaged are low-income, communities of color, and people with disabilities – in other words, people already experiencing significant challenges in their lives. Mobility and access that is centered around individual transport only accentuates and worsens those disparities.

There are also many other negative impacts from trucks and automobiles such as safety issues, noise, pollution, heat island affects, flooding due to impervious surfaces, and the emergency services and other infrastructure required to serve our automobile centric way of life.

Madison Metro

In Madison, the Four Lakes Group reviewed Madison Metro's bus redesign proposal and provided feedback on it. We expressed concerns initially about equity regarding ridership, areas covered, and who would be impacted that still remain. The goal, while laudable, to get more car drivers on buses to lessen driving and traffic, and get more people to places faster, also meant that coverage was lessened in some areas. While some people are receiving better service to places they wanted to go, others, especially with more limited mobility options, are left with worse service.

While adjustments will be made to routes and timing, there will continue to be limitations and people left out, in part since buses cannot provide a universal solution.

Ideally, we would have examined the full range of mobility options needed for our community, and then found ways to provide services beyond what Metro buses can provide. There is paratransit service, but it is more costly and more difficult to use. However, having a recalcitrant legislature that is loath to provide adequate mass transit funding provides added challenges and limits options we might otherwise pursue.

If you are in Madison, and have comments or want changes to the bus routes, you can provide feedback to Madison Metro at MetroRedesign@cityofmadison.com. You can also fill out their feedback form at <https://www.cityofmadison.com/metro/contact/feedback>.

Beltline

Perhaps you remember when the beltline was built with traffic taken off of Broadway on the eastern section so people could sail through more quickly. That's often no longer true, especially during rush hours. Flex lanes have already been added in some places for rush hour use, but the Wisconsin Department of Transportation is now looking at further expansion that could include more flex lanes, and/or more pavement for more lanes. However, as we have seen all-too-often, that 'solution' also creates an inducement for more traffic, and perpetuates the cycle of congestion and traffic growth.

WisDOT is taking comments on the Beltline project (<https://wisconsin.gov/Pages/projects/by-region/sw/madisonbeltline/default.aspx>), which is your opportunity to provide feedback and offer suggestions that will do more than continue to serve more cars and not expand mobility options and reduce pollution. The Four Lakes Group and our chapter Transportation team will also be weighing in on this proposal, and you are invited to join us in that effort.

Stoughton Rd Reconstruction

WisDOT is also looking to reconstruct Stoughton Rd (Hwy 51). The north project area is between Hwy 30 and Hwy 19, and the south project is between Hwy 30 and the Beltline (<https://wisconsin.gov/Pages/projects/by-region/sw/us51-corridor/default.aspx>). A public hearing was held on July 20 on the south project, but comments can still be offered online, and there will be a hearing on the north project on September 27.

Continued on page 4

Transportation, continued from page 3

Especially the south area already is heavily urbanized, and the north area is moving more in that direction, although there are a fair amount of businesses close to Stoughton Rd. Proposals range from a limited interchange freeway to creating an urban boulevard, perhaps similar to East Washington. With this option, cross streets would be added for direct neighborhood access, businesses would be more connected locally, and speed limits would be kept low. The latter option would connect communities better, and mass transit could be more easily supported. While it would involve some significant changes along Stoughton Rd, the urban boulevard concept is also consistent with Madison's proposed plan for the area.

Join in

If you are affected by any of these situations, we invite you to get involved and work with us to help optimize our transportation options and our community character. If you live in some other area, and would like to see transportation improvements or get involved, our team would love to have you join. Contact Don Ferber at d_ferber@sbcglobal.net to discuss your interests.

Four Lakes Group Sierra Club Contacts

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

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(* Are on the Four Lakes Executive Committee)

Land Access and Equity Team – Movin' Forward!

We've had a busy season, and we're far from done, so if you'd like to join our team to help provide better access to nature, education and the outdoors, especially for underserved communities, we definitely have opportunities for you. In June, we had a very successful outing as part of National Trails Day at Blue Mounds State Park, complete with the Access Ability all terrain chairs. And in July, we participated in the Environmental Fun Fair at the Lussier Heritage Center, helping expose children and families to outdoor recreation skills.

We're also supporting the Neighborhood House of Milwaukee's Nature Center in Dodge County. On September 9, we're having an outing to support them and their youth in their outdoor education and restoration efforts. It's a wonderful place with diverse landscapes and you'll really enjoy learning about their programs.

We also participated in the Madison Good Neighbor Gathering where we had a table with some kid's activities as well as information about the Sierra Club. If this is the sort of event you enjoy and you have an interest or expertise in outdoor education or kid's activities, we'd love to have you join our team to provide more opportunities at more events.

We'll be doing another tree planting in Oregon at Keller Alpine Meadows on October 14, as well as another one with Dane County in south Madison (location to be determined) that same day. (See tree planting article on page 2.) Stay tuned for further updates in our Enews or on our Facebook or web page.

In some exciting news, our team is going through a transition, and we'll be bringing on a consultant to help grow our effort. Megan Severson, formerly with Wisconsin Environment, will be joining us to grow our team, which makes it a prime opportunity to get involved and help define the activities of our group.

An exciting activity that's coming up is assembling educational backpacks for One City Schools and also libraries for kids to check out and learn through activities about the outdoors. We have the funding for materials, so if you'd like to assist with the backpack program, please contact Don Ferber at d_ferber@sbcglobal.net.

Getting un-trashed!

Sometimes dealing with recycling seems like too monumental a task. We buy too much, waste too much, don't rethink, reimagine or reuse enough, and then too many recyclables don't *actually* get recycled. Yes, it feels both very daunting and frustrating. (Insert your own expletive deleted here!) So, what to do? Well, just like with any other seemingly overwhelming challenge, just like with climate change, the journey starts with one step or a single action.

One good start is educating yourself. Locally, one good City of Madison resource is the *Recyclopedia* available on their Streets and Recycling page. Want to go further? Take the Sustain Dane online Master Recycler program to learn more and start by doing some project of your own choosing.

Another step is to set a good example and educate others. There are many people who don't know what can and can't be recycled. While it is somewhat complicated, and some have good intentions, but just don't know fully, others simply don't care or can't be bothered to spend the time to find out. That's why ~ 1/6th of what's in our home recycle bins doesn't belong there. (Fortunately, Pellitteri, the company that handles Madison's recycling, has some pretty sophisticated sorting equipment.)

The Four Lakes Group has provided another opportunity for years – Recycling Away from Home (RAH) where we help keep trash and recycling properly sorted at a number of Madison east side festivals. As very public facing events, it provides an opportunity to educate people in a public setting and set a good example.

It just so happens that our biggest recycling event of the season is coming up at the Willy St Fair on September 16 and 17, and you're invited to join us to help out. Your volunteering not only reduces recycling going to the landfill, it helps earn us a free booth at the Willy St Fair for our efforts – a twofer! And in addition, you'll get a free Four Lakes t-shirt if you don't have one.

Simply **sign up at <https://signup.com/go/uMKDphk>** for the shift of your choice. We'll provide you with gloves and instructions. **If you'd like to table, sign up at <https://signup.com/go/pGrsgui>.**

Want to do more? The big step is to work on a larger community scale and with organizations that run the festivals, others who are concerned, and even alders, to implement practices and policies that will lead to more widespread and consistent recycling around the community. If you're interested in helping us take it to the next level, contact Don Ferber at d_ferber@sbcglobal.net.

Taking things one step at a time, we can reduce our waste.

Volunteering!

As a grassroots organization, volunteers are the life-blood of the Sierra Club. Getting involved with the Four Lakes Group means you can act locally on issues that directly impact you. The newsletter articles provide some opportunities, but here are a few other options, and if you have other issues, please contact us.

Programs Coordinator

If you enjoy organizing informational or social events (in person or online), this is an opportunity to offer education on environmental issues, meet interesting people, and connect other like-minded folk. We have funds to put on programs, invite speakers, or have social events. Educating and connecting people is a very valuable part of any organization's growth, and if you have interests or skills in this area, we'd love to have your help.

Outings Leader

A love for the outdoors and nature is how the Sierra Club got started with John Muir, and if you also love the outdoors, or have some special activity or place(s) you want to share with others, then becoming a Sierra Club outings leader might be for you. An online training as well as a first aid course is required, but we reimburse for any expenses. Outings are mainly one day events, but we also offer more advanced training for longer overnight excursions.

Web site/Facebook management

We're looking for someone to make occasional updates to our web site pages, add new posts to our blog, and do postings on our Facebook page. We already have a web management system, and this can be done on your own time and at your own convenience from home or wherever you're at, and we'll provide any training needed, so experience is not a requirement.

If you have any questions about these or want to inquire about other opportunities, contact Don Ferber at d_ferber@sbcglobal.net.

Four Lakes Group Executive Committee Elections 2023

Thank you for helping democratically elect your local Sierra Club representatives! The candidate statements are below. You may vote online instead of by mail by filling out the form at <https://bit.ly/3CTkYe5>. If we receive both paper and electronic ballots from the same member number, only the electronic ballot will be counted.

Your member number can be found on your Sierra Magazine label, or go to www.myaccount.sierraclub.org and log in if you have an account, or sign up if you don't, to find your member number. You can also call Member Care at 415-977-5500 or email member.care@sierraclub.org.

Candidate questions

- 1) Please describe your interest in the Sierra Club, and any leadership or volunteer activities with our organization or other non-profit groups that will help you fulfill your role as described above.
- 2) What skills, experience, or perspective from your personal or professional background (fundraising, volunteering, advocacy, legal, accounting, communications, Board, political, events) will you bring to the Sierra Club – Four Lakes Group Executive Committee?
- 3) Looking forward over the next 3 years, what do you think the Four Lakes Group needs to do, or how do we need to grow and change to be effective on local and regional conservation issues?
- 4) The Four Lakes Group covers 9 counties (Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Lafayette, Rock and Sauk) in south central Wisconsin including urban and rural areas, state and local parks, major rivers and trails. What issue(s) are you interested in working on and why? How do you see the Four Lakes Group supporting this work and how will this help build the Four Lakes Group?

Ronda Conner

1. I have been a member of the Sierra Club since 2006 and have greatly enjoyed volunteering with the Sierra Club for the past 5 years. I started volunteering with the Beyond Coal team and branched out into the Four Lakes Group Executive Committee, Land Access & Equity team, digital media team, amplify team, text team and mailing team. I also volunteered with the national texting team for the Get Out To Vote project, and trained and mentored new volunteers every week. I've been trained in leading outings and completed my first outing last September. I have also led volunteer night projects such as texting, data entry and social media posts.
2. Environmental conservation has been a consistent passion of mine as long as I can remember. As a child, I enjoyed learning about the world around me by spending countless hours camping, boating and being a student of the great outdoors. I obtained a degree from UW-Madison in the Biological Aspects of Conservation with a certificate from the Institute for Environmental Studies.
3. I envision the Four Lakes Group providing more engagement opportunities for members including hikes and outings in the 9 counties that we serve. I envision more work on climate change issues such as planting more trees and building greener, more sustainable communities. These efforts will necessitate more partnerships with other organizations in order to have a sustained, long-term impact on climate change.
4. I'm interested in hands-on projects such as outings and tree plantings because these are fun projects, engage the public and provide opportunities for hopefulness. The Four Lakes Group supports this work by organizing outings/tree plantings and can also provide some funding. These projects help build the Four Lakes Group because they bring visibility to what we are working on and provide an opportunity for people to get involved.

Ryan Olson

1. I joined the Sierra Club last year because I realized that I needed to put my money where my mouth was regarding climate change and environmental preservation. I have been working with the Beyond Coal team to help

Four Lakes Group 2022 Executive Committee Election Ballot

Please read the candidate statements for election to the Executive Committee and select your choices by putting an “X” before the name. Select up to three candidates. If your ballot is not from a Four Lakes Sierran mailed copy, please write your name and membership number on the back. Only ballots from active members will be valid, so please cut the portion of the back page with your name and number on it. Please mail ballots to: Wisconsin Chapter Sierra Club, 754 Williamson St, Madison, WI 53703 by December 1, 2023.

Voter 1: Ronda Conner Ryan Olson Jennie Watson

Write In _____

Voter 2: Ronda Conner Ryan Olson Jennie Watson

Write In _____

Ryan Olson (continued)

contribute toward reducing Wisconsin’s reliance on fossil fuels and promoting new renewable energy infrastructure. I have left a number of comments on public projects, as well as staffed conventions to collect signatures and promote awareness about the projects we are working on.

2. I work as an insurance agent and a lot of my responsibilities revolve around event planning and marketing. I am also willing to contact people/businesses to help solicit fundraising donations if needed.

3. As someone who is fairly new to all of this, I think having a few more social events (especially ones that we could invite prospective members to) would drive engagement for local meetings and activities. I would like to learn about the group’s successes in the past and how new members can make immediate contributions (if available) to existing projects.

4. I am looking to continue my work with the Beyond Coal group to advocate for fair energy rates in Dane County - working on this is to some degree personal, as I work with a number of low income populations, and myself had personal financial struggles a few years ago. I am also very interested in waste reduction efforts - I am not very knowledgeable in this area, and would like to learn about both individual and larger scale efforts we advocate for to reduce waste (such as those within industries).

Jennie Watson

1. I've been a monetary contributor to national Sierra Club for many years. When I retired I wanted to do more volunteering which led me to contacting the Sierra Club Four Lakes Group. With the Four Lakes Group, I have written postcards, made phone calls, and sent texts to Sierra Club members. I have volunteered at Atwoodfest and the Garden Expo.

2. I have been a president, president elect, treasurer and ad hoc board member for nursing and case manager organizations. Participated in election campaigns, union organizing and attend on-line sessions and meetings for Audubon Society, Food and Water Watch, Union of Concerned Scientists and Sierra Club and the Beyond Coal team.

3. Support and educate about local solar and wind energy projects, clean water and protecting wildlife and ecosystems.

4. Stopping Line 5, promoting Koshkonong Solar, moving away from fossil fuels, protecting wildlife and clean water.



Four Lakes Group Sierra Club
 754 Williamson St
 Madison, WI 53703
<http://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/four-lakes>



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Newsletter Mailing

Our goal is environmentally friendly, cost effective communication with our members. Our primary modes of communication are this newsletter, the Four Lakes Enews, and our web site and Facebook page. If we don't have your email address, we mail you a hard copy or you can request one. Otherwise, members receive an email letting you know when the newsletter is available to download. You can also visit <https://tinyurl.com/4LGnews> for our newsletters.

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

Please mail calendar requests to Dave Blouin, 3928 Paunack Ave, Madison, WI 53711. Calendars are \$1 off each for orders of two or more, and the mailing costs is \$5. Email Dave at burroak15@gmail.com with any questions.



Enjoy, explore, and protect the planet

2024 SIERRA CLUB CALENDARS



ORDER FORM

ITEM	COST	QTY	TOTAL
Wilderness Calendar	<input type="checkbox"/> \$18.95	_____	_____
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