



**SIERRA
CLUB**

**GREAT WATERS GROUP
NEWSLETTER**

www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/great-waters greatwatersgroupsc@gmail.com

Winter 2023 NO. 4



Bradford Beach was given to Milwaukee by the state to protect the bluffs and provide recreation space. Learn more about the Public Trust Doctrine that has protected Milwaukee's waterfront at the Nov. 16 program.

Photo by Virginia Small

Sign up for holiday party and fundraiser

Join us as we bring our annual Holiday Party back to its former glory. It will be Sunday, Dec. 3, from 4 to 8 p.m. at the traditional site at Wil-O-Way Underwood, 10602 Underwood Parkway, Wauwatosa.

The evening starts with a cocktail-hour ice-breaker while guests peruse our silent auction to bid on items from our generous community

partners. Then we will honor the 2023 Environmental Hero and share updates about Great Waters Group activities. Dinner comes from Aladdin, and desserts from our wonderful volunteers.

Music will be provided by DJ Andy and friends, with records ranging from jazz and Motown to holiday music, and everything in between, so wear your dancing shoes!

Tickets are \$35, and the RSVP deadline is Wednesday, Nov. 22. You can register and pay at <http://bit.ly/gwg-holiday-party>.

Or mail your check to Great Waters Group – Sierra Club, P.O. Box 26798, Wauwatosa, WI 53226-0798.

Please bring your own plate, cup and utensils for dinner, and cash or checkbook for the auction.

This is our only fundraising event of the year, so we appreciate contributions that allow us to continue our important work! If you can't attend but still want to donate, go to www.teamsierrawi.rallybound.org/gwg.

If you have questions or want to help, contact Kerstin Larson at larson.ker@gmail.com.

Winter Programs

For updates and registration for these programs, go to www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/great-waters/calendar or call (262) 236-5623.

Protecting Public Access to Waterways and Waterfronts

Thursday, Nov. 16, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

St. Rita's Square, 728 E. Pleasant St., Milwaukee

Learn about Wisconsin's Public Trust Doctrine, which is fundamental to our water commons. Enshrined in the state's

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Notes from the Chair

I was born in Milwaukee and lived here until I was 10. As a little kid I knew our city sat on the shores of one of the largest lakes in the world but somehow missed the fact that we were also home to three rivers.

Perhaps that's just as well given that at the time—the 1970s—our rivers weren't very healthy. The Milwaukee River in particular was plagued by pollution from runoff coming from surrounding industries, and a large dam prevented easy passage of fish.

Transition to the present day, and it's fortunately a different story. That dam is gone, and restoration programs led by our friends at groups like Milwaukee Riverkeeper, River Revitalization Foundation and Milwaukee Water Commons are building thriving urban wetlands.

On a recent hike led by two of our outings leaders—Dan Buckler and Dan McKinley—I learned about an example of one of these projects. A few years ago, River Revitalization Foundation purchased a 1.4-acre parking lot and devoted considerable energy to turning it back to native prairie. Walking past the area now, you would have no idea that the waving

grasses and wildflowers you see were once an expanse of concrete.

Our aptly named Great Waters Group is happy to be involved in efforts to restore the health of our rivers and streams. Several times a year we join with our sister organization, Nearby Nature, to pull trash from the Hopkins Hollow section of Lincoln Creek. Many of you join with thousands of local residents on Milwaukee Riverkeeper's annual spring river cleanup every April.

As evidenced by the many bags of trash my fellow volunteers and I pulled from Lincoln Creek on a recent cleanup, there is still a lot of work to be done. But it's encouraging to see the level of energy and enthusiasm behind efforts to build the health of our waterways.

Hopefully we'll move to a time someday soon when all little kids in our area know and love our local rivers for the recreational value, wildlife habitat, calm and beauty they provide.

Jenny Abel

Net metering at risk across Wisconsin

Madison Gas and Electric and Alliant Energy want to change how they compensate customers who generate electricity for the wider grid with rooftop solar panels, and this will probably spread to other utilities in the state.

The practice of allowing customers to reduce the cost of the electricity they consume at night with the power their solar panels generate during the day is called "net metering." Many people who install solar panels on their homes rely on net metering to help them offset the hefty upfront cost of solar panels over time.

National service outing

May 5-11, 2024

Senior (50+) Pyramid Lake Service and Fun

Spend an enchanting cultural week with the Sierra Club and Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe May 5-11. Perform service on the Paiute Reservation. Enjoy guided hikes and spend nights in a hotel in town.

Lake Tahoe drains via the Truckee River into Pyramid Lake. Learn about the importance of the Truckee River, the tribe's fisheries, and why Pyramid Lake is sacred to the Paiute. GWG member William Baurecht is the assistant leader; Claudia Hilligoss is the leader.

This is a national service trip for seniors 50+. Get details after Dec. 7 at www.sierraclub.org/outings. Search for Service, California/Nevada.

Many states have implemented policies or legislation that standardize how all utility companies must implement net metering. Doing so minimizes confusion and promotes financial stability for solar customers and the solar industry.

Wisconsin has done little to standardize net metering across the state, which leads to significant uncertainty in the solar industry. In fact, our state receives a D grade for net metering policy from the solar consumer education and reviews website SolarReviews.

For these reasons, the Sierra Club and other Wisconsin renewable energy advocates asked the Public Service Commission, our state utility regulatory agency, to define statewide expectations for net metering.

Unfortunately, before they could create such a framework (cynically one might say specifically to pre-empt them from creating it), MGE and Alliant Energy asked for significant changes to the rates they pay those who produce excess solar energy. MGE proposed cutting its rate by more than half, and Alliant's final proposal does away with net metering entirely, replacing it with a variable rate structure it is calling "Power Partnership."

In both cases, existing solar customers will continue to use the rate structures that were in place when they first received their installation. However, panels installed after MGE's new proposal is implemented will have significantly longer returns

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The snake survey team, led by Nearby Nature's Mars Patterson (center), trains for the summer survey at Hopkins Hollow.

Nearby Nature now a nonprofit

Nearby Nature Milwaukee, an environmental justice and equity initiative to build healthier and more resilient communities on the northwest side, has grown from a small program that started with a one-time grant from the Sierra Club Foundation into a full-fledged nonprofit.

Nearby Nature, which had been operating under fiscal sponsorship of the Milwaukee Environmental Consortium, was granted 501(c)3 status this fall, giving it autonomy over operations and the ability to raise tax-deductible funds on its own.

The organization, which has been led since the initial grant by longtime Great Waters Group member David Thomas, is now working on hiring an executive director to take it to the next level. Thomas has devoted countless hours as a volunteer to building ties to the community and overseeing the handful of staffers. Several other Sierrans serve on the board.

Nearby Nature and the GWG have worked together on cleanups on Lincoln Creek through Milwaukee Riverkeeper's Adopt-A-River program since 2018. Nearby Nature has nicknamed this site Hopkins Hollow. It is near N. 35th and W. Congress streets on land owned by the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District.

Now the organization is doing prairie restoration work on a section of Hopkins Hollow. Interns have removed invasive teasel and wild parsnip and planted native species such as showy goldenrod and aster. Plans are underway to begin building an extension to the hiking trail.

New this summer is a wildlife monitoring program, which included weekly snake surveys and a snapshot device from the Department of Natural Resources to capture images of deer and coyotes. Audio monitors were used to monitor birds, bats, and toads.

Nearby Nature offers youth programs as well as outings to help neighborhood residents experience the mental and physical benefits of nature without leaving the city. The group also works to celebrate environmental leadership in the African American community and fight environmental and racial injustice.

To learn more or support Nearby Nature, go to <https://nearbynaturemke.org>.

GWG becomes partner in climate coalition

The Milwaukee Climate & Equity Plan envisions a city whose residents live in energy efficient homes, and all buildings are low carbon. It is a city where walking, biking and public transit are prioritized and where woodlands, prairies and natural gardens abound for the benefit of all – especially those living in our historically underserved neighborhoods.

The plan, adopted by the Common Council in June, serves as a model for all municipalities in Milwaukee County. Growing out of the plan is an advocacy group, Our Future Milwaukee, devoted to ensuring that the vision for Milwaukee becomes reality.

Great Waters Group lent financial support to Our Future Milwaukee by obtaining a \$1,000 Sierra-sponsored Climate Action Award to help cover 2023 expenses. Now GWG is pleased to announce its formal participation as a Partner in the Our Future Milwaukee Coalition.

As a Partner, GWG will contribute dues of \$200 to the coalition, and chair Jenny Abel will represent GWG at the quarterly meetings. GWG joins Green Homeowners United, Citizen Action of Wisconsin and American Lung Association as key members of the coalition while membership recruitment continues.

To subscribe to the OFM newsletter, go to <https://tinyurl.com/2p87rn29>.

Winter 2023

Volunteer Leadership Council Contact List

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We Energies draws fire for yet another rate hike request

After an 11% increase in electric and gas bills at the start of this year, We Energies is again seeking more from its customers. This additional 3.1% rate increase to electricity and greater than 3% increase to gas was met with opposition from more than 250 public comments for the docket and hours of public testimony.

And while this docket moves forward quickly, the investigative docket about a Percentage of Income Payment Program (PIPP) for We Energies customers struggling with electric costs should also move quickly.

Bryan Rogers, Walnut Way director of environmental justice, said, “Rates need to stop increasing and the PIPP needs to be implemented as soon as possible. We Energies customers are real people facing real impacts. We need a system-wide solution to energy burden and to racial disparities.”

We Energies claimed the increase was necessary because it has been building toward more clean energy, but the company is still running expensive coal plants and investing in new fossil gas infrastructure. In October, the utility received a D grade in Sierra Club’s *Dirty Truth* report.

The Department of Natural Resources has recently proposed a modified wastewater permit for the Oak Creek and Elm Road coal plants, purportedly to bring the plants into compliance with a federal coal ash rule that nevertheless allows We Energies to discharge into Lake Michigan almost three times the amount of mercury normally permitted under state law.

Great Waters Group Conservation Chair Victoria Gillet, a physician, says: “Last year my testimony referenced two of my patients whose serious health problems were worsened by high energy burden. When I looked back on that testimony before this public hearing, I was devastated to realize that one of those patients I advocated for died this year in their home of preventable medical issues. The people of Wisconsin are literally dying while we wait for the affordability programs and renewable energy that We Energies and the PSC promised us.”

Fossil fuels costly for SWIB

The State of Wisconsin Investment Board lost \$4.3 billion by lingering in fossil fuel stocks the past 10 years. That means each Wisconsin Retirement System member lost about \$6,000.

Documentation is within a new report from the University of Waterloo and the Climate Safe Pensions Network. For more information about the report, Climate Safe Pensions for Wisconsin, and what actions you can take, go to <https://bit.ly/CSPWaterlooReport>.



Dan McKinley talks about the changes on the Milwaukee River below the former North Avenue Dam during a hike along the Milwaukee River Greenway.

Fall outing added

**Exploring the West Side of the Milwaukee River Greenway
Nov. 18, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Turtle Park, 2134 N. Riverboat Road, Milwaukee**

Hike along the Milwaukee River’s west bank from the River Revitalization Foundation’s Turtle Park to Capitol Drive, returning via Kern Park and the river trail. Discover ecologically and historically significant sites, 5 miles roundtrip. Register for this outing at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/great-waters. New ones also will be shared at www.facebook.com/SierraClubGWG.

Nearby Nature project work days scheduled

Nearby Nature Milwaukee has scheduled two November workdays to build trail to improve access to green spaces on the Lincoln Creek Greenway.

In 2021 with 150 hours of volunteer help, Nearby Nature built a 500-foot trail to a beautiful overlook in Hopkins Hollow. Now, Nearby Nature has permission from the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District to build a trail extension that will take the trail to 35th Street.

Two work days are scheduled:

- Saturday, Nov. 11, 10 a.m.
- Friday, Nov. 17, noon

Meet at 4410 N. Hopkins St., near 35th and Congress streets.

To sign up as part of the Hopkins Hollow Helpers team, go to www.facebook.com/nearbynaturemke/events.

Events call for Kohler-Andrae action

The grassroots Sheboygan County group Friends of the Black River Forest (FBRF) is joining with Sierra Club Wisconsin to increase pressure on Gov. Tony Evers to intervene in Kohler Co.'s planned takeover of key sections of Kohler-Andrae State Park.

On Nov. 16 at 1 p.m. there will be a rally at the Capitol's State Street entrance, then a meeting with Evers. Everyone who cares about the independence of Wisconsin state parks is invited to join. From 3:30 to 7 p.m., the groups will hold an educational rally and party at the Lazy Oaf Lounge, 1617 N. Stoughton Road, Madison.

State Rep. Darrin Madison (D-Milwaukee) will be on hand to discuss his support of Kohler-Andrae preservation. Unable to attend? Sign petitions to save the park aimed at Kohler Co. and Evers at:
<https://bit.ly/NoNewGolfCourse> and
<https://bit.ly/AskEvers>.

The agreement signed by former Gov. Scott Walker would allow Kohler Co. to tear out the entrance at Kohler-Andrae and replace it with a rotary. The company wants a four-lane road through the park to route traffic to land north of the park where it wants to build the golf course.

Inside the park, the company wants to build a 22,000-square-foot maintenance, pesticide and fuel-mixing complex on a wetland.

The parkland Kohler Co. wants was taken by eminent domain from landowners in the 1960s to expand the park. The Walker administration's deal with Kohler included a land swap granting the state nine acres of scrub land in exchange for parkland. The deal allows a politically connected, \$7 billion company to permanently damage a valuable natural resources.



Sierrans joined with the Friends of the Black River Forest for a birding hike in September to call attention to the threats to the Kohler-Andrae lakeshore ecosystem posed by Kohler Company's golf course plans.

Kohler-Andrae Lakeshore is a single ecosystem that includes the park and 247 acres to the north where Kohler wants to build its golf course. It contains rare interdunal wetlands and one of the last stands of old-growth forest on the western shore of Lake Michigan – a forest Kohler Co. would clear-cut. The lakeshore is home to hundreds of species of birds, amphibians, mammals and plants, some rare and threatened, as well as an annual stopover site for migrating birds.

Winter Programs

(Continued from page 1)
constitution, it legally protects public access to all "navigable" waterways, as well as all land that was formerly submerged. It has been crucial to the development of Milwaukee's public lakefront and the RiverWalk. Learn about the roles of the Department of Natural Resources and citizen advocacy in upholding this doctrine. Presenter Virginia Small writes about conservation, parks and more. Register: <https://bit.ly/Nov2023Program>

Journey Down the Gila (film)
Monday, Jan. 8, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.
Virtual screening

Journey Down the Gila is a film exploring grief, renewal and hope along the Gila River in New Mexico, telling the story of three teens who died in service to the wild places they loved, their mothers' trip down the river they sought to protect, and the struggle to keep the Gila flowing free. This documentary offers a visual journey through the Gila Wilderness, chronicles the struggle to keep the river free-flowing, and culminates with the three mothers' visit

to D.C. to advocate for legislation. Patrice Mutchnick, one of the principals in the film she co-produced, will introduce the film and give updates. Register: <https://bit.ly/Jan2024Program>

African American Environmental Pioneer Celebration
Feb. 19 (tentative)

This will be the fifth annual celebration of Milwaukee's African American Environmental Pioneers. The planners are working on creating an extra special experience for this milestone event to celebrate Milwaukee's African American community working for a better environment. Updates: <https://nearbynaturemke.org/news/>

March Program: details to come

Earth-Friendly Eating
May 20, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Terry and Bruce Wiggins will discuss how our food choices and food system affect or aggravate climate change and how climate change affects our food. They will explore how personal changes are necessary and why our food system also needs big changes.



Nearby Nature supporters plant a variety of trees at Hopkins Hollow in October. The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District purchased the trees. See more about Nearby Nature on Page 3.

Fair Future Movement uniting community

Starting in early 2021, the Great Waters Group began working with Mandi McAlister of Hummingbird to build a multiracial and multicultural environmental community through book discussion circles. Now this effort has grown into the Fair Future Movement, which is working to unite the community for environmental justice.

Through its initiatives, the Fair Future Movement connects and engages with folks who have been excluded or not involved in the traditional environmental movement, works to dismantle systemic barriers to participation, and amplifies and organizes around community initiatives.

Sell tree seeds to DNR

The Department of Natural Resources needs help to grow Wisconsin's future forests. Millions of seeds come from residents scrounging acorns and maple helicopters to send to the state nursery.

Dan Buckler's outing to McGovern Park in August looked at how to identify trees and collect tree seeds, and which varieties are easier to grow at home.

Residents also can sell certain seeds to the DNR each fall. The rate varies by species and year, depending on what the target is. For example, a bushel of properly collected and stored white oak acorns was worth \$70 in September.

For more information, go to <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/treeplanting/sellseed>.

The group, co-led by McAlister and Jasmine Roberson, has a new website and Facebook and Instagram accounts. The Great Waters Group and Sierra Club Wisconsin are among the 25 organizations that are Committed Partners.

The Community Learning Series early in the year invites people to work together through a selected book to explore systems of oppression and meet virtually once a month to discuss the readings and how they relate to current events. In early 2024, Kyla Smith will facilitate the four-part series around Leah Thomas' book *Intersectional Environmentalist*.

Past participants have read *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson and *Me and White Supremacy* by Layla Saad.

Every two weeks, community members will receive a Collective Action Alert email with three suggested actions they can take in our community. Through these alerts, the group works to act in unison, work towards environmental justice, and target collective power to support the needs of the community.

Once a quarter, the group will gather in Milwaukee to get to know one another better and be in community, celebrate successes, and connect through art, food, and music. These meetups aim to build strong relationships to better support participants and keep the movement unified.

The group is seeking support to continue organizing actions. Learn more about the initiative at <https://fairfuturemovement.com>.

Four nominated for positions on ExCom

It's time to vote for the next group of people who will serve on the Great Waters Group Executive Committee. They will help shape the work of the group over the next two years. We have four candidates for the five open slots, so you may vote for up to four candidates.



Jennifer Abel

*This year once again, you have the option of filling out and mailing back the paper ballot included with this newsletter, or you can vote electronically using the link sent to you by email in early November. **You'll need to have your member number handy.** You can find that by going to:*

<https://myaccount.sierraclub.org>.

*Before voting, please read these statements from our candidates. **The deadline to return your ballot is Dec. 16.***

Jennifer Abel

I am happy for the chance to run again for a seat on the Great Waters Group Executive Committee. Between Virginia and Wisconsin, I have served on Sierra Club group executive Winter 2023



Scott Coulthurst



Victoria Gillet



Jasmine Viges

Official Ballot: 2023: GWG Executive Committee Election

Mark an X on the line next to your selections and print your member number. Each member may vote for up to 4 candidates. *The Sierra Club member number is required for the ballot to be valid.* You can find that on your Sierra magazine label or by going to <https://myaccount.sierraclub.org>.

(The second member in a household may cast votes as Voter #2.)

Voter #1	Voter #2
<input type="checkbox"/> Jennifer Abel	<input type="checkbox"/> Jennifer Abel
<input type="checkbox"/> Scott Coulthurst	<input type="checkbox"/> Scott Coulthurst
<input type="checkbox"/> Victoria Gillet	<input type="checkbox"/> Victoria Gillet
<input type="checkbox"/> Jasmine Viges	<input type="checkbox"/> Jasmine Viges

Sierra Club member number: _____ Sierra Club member number: if different _____

Mail completed ballot to:

S.C. Great Waters Group Election Committee
PO Box 26798, Wauwatosa, WI 53226, postmarked by **Dec. 16**

committees since 2006 and have been chair for the past three years.

This is an exciting time for environmental activism in our four-county area, and GWG has contributed to some important victories this year. We were among several local groups who supported the passage of the City of Milwaukee's Climate and Equity Plan, and we continue to work with Our Future Milwaukee to monitor its implementation.

We are active participants in the energy burden work group that seeks to reduce the utility costs that low-income households pay, chiefly by finding ways to make the properties they live in more energy efficient. I look forward to the chance to contribute to these and other efforts as a member of the GWG ExCom.

Scott Coulthurst

As a current member of the Executive Committee and secretary for Sierra Club Great Waters Group, I have seen the impact a dedicated group can have in affecting the social and environmental health of a community.

My primary efforts with the GWG have been organizing membership events in Washington County. I believe reaching out to communities where the demographics are not normally associated with groups like the Sierra Club is the key to getting more citizens involved in making positive change.

I also aim to get more involved at the state level in protecting Wisconsin's wildlife and waters. I believe my background as a lifelong outdoorsman and my passion for nature will bring in important constituents like fishermen and hunters to work toward a common goal of protecting the natural beauty of this great state.

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Four nominated for Executive Committee

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Victoria Gillet

I joined the GWG ExCom nearly immediately after moving to Milwaukee two years ago, and it gave me exactly what I'd hoped for – a community that loves, protects and improves our local environment.

I have had the privilege of being your conservation chair during my last term, and I would be very grateful to continue in that role. My priorities remain the same: clean air, clean water and access to green spaces for every inhabitant of the GWG counties, aggressive implementation of climate change adaptation and mitigation policies, and improving the built environment in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty. I

am a physician and want to protect Wisconsinites' health for decades to come, and I see these as key.

Jasmine Viges

I have been with the Great Waters Group for the past two years, most of the time as the programs chair. I have enjoyed connecting with like-minded individuals to present their expertise to the group and the community, and I hope to have the opportunity to continue to do this.

I am committed to clean water and climate justice, and I contribute to these movements through my work with various environmental organizations.

Net metering practice is at risk across Wisconsin

(Continued from page 2)

on investment, and some projects will never be cost-effective.

Under Alliant's new proposal it appears that new solar customers may actually have increased reimbursement rates. However, the variable rate structure means that calculating expected payback periods for installations will be much more complicated.

Wisconsin Sierrans commented and testified and showed up to

rallies in opposition to these proposed changes, and the final PSC decisions are pending. Renewable energy advocates fear that these cases will prompt other utilities in the state to propose similar changes.

Stay tuned for future related action alerts for We Energies. And if you're considering a residential solar installation, think about doing it sooner rather than later.