



SOUTHEAST SIERRAN

News of the
Southeast Gateway Group
of the Sierra Club

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HOW WE CAN TAKE THE ELECTRIC PLUNGE

By Gloria Randall-Hewitt

Do you have an electric car? An electric heat pump HVAC system or heat pump water heater? How about solar panels? An induction range? Upgraded windows or insulation?

We've been talking about the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the incentives from the federal government that are available for all these things to help us all to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels through electrification. We've talked about how to determine approximately how much we can expect to be eligible for in rebates and incentives based on a calculator on Rewiring America's website using our annual income (rewiringamerica.org/app/ira-calculator). For this article, I want to talk about practical next steps.

While everyone's path to electrification will be different, we can all make a difference for our collective clean energy future. For most of us, the high-impact electrification changes that are incentivized in the IRA are also big dollar purchases that we may only make every few years, or every couple of decades, or even once in a lifetime. Because there are household annual aggregate limits in the IRA for tax credits, it may make sense to spread home improvements out over a few years. That gives some time to do research and make a plan now for when opportunities come up to make a decision that's right for our situation. For people who may not have an electric car, solar panels or a heat pump in their future, it's critical for all of us to push our power companies to switch to renewable energy sources to power all these new electric devices.



Change can be intimidating, financially and mentally, as when figuring out how to work with a different system. It helps to have some perspective from people we trust who have already made the change.

Have you made the plunge to one or more of these clean-energy items? If so, would you be willing to share your experience with the SEGG community?

Looking at the opportunities available to us through the IRA, now is a perfect time to share your electrification journey story. **Please contact me if you are comfortable sharing your decision making process and first-hand experiences and I'll include your story in our next newsletter.** I hope to address the most common questions and concerns regarding making the switch to electric.

Alternatively, let me know if you'd like to participate in an SEGG meeting (virtual or in-person) sometime in the next few months where our electrified friends can share their story and answer questions from those who are exploring their options.

If interested, please contact me, Gloria Randall-Hewitt, at: evgardener@gmail.com.

Rewiring America's website is a great source for questions related to rebates, but for your stories, I want to focus on actual experiences with things that are included in the incentive programs. Questions I'd like to cover in the next newsletter include:

Electric Cars & Hybrids: How is your overall driving performance? Does weather impact your driving range? Do you have a home charging system? Have you experienced driving longer distances where you've had to find a place to charge? Do you get the range that is advertised for your car?

Solar panels: Has your system generated as much electricity as you expected? Do you have battery storage at home? Do you have to clear snow from your array? Do you have to do maintenance? What wiring changes did you have to make? How did you finance your array?

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GET INVOLVED → START HERE!



Annual Planning Meeting

Saturday, January 20 at 10:30 AM at Pringle Nature Center
9800 County Hwy MB, Bristol, WI 53104

What ideas do you have for future events, programs, outings and initiatives?
How would you like to see your Sierra club chapter grow?
What important issues would you like the club to get more involved with?

Please join us for a FUN morning of brainstorming and share your exciting ideas for 2024. Feel free to bring a snack to share and hope to see you there!

Join the Sierra Club Wisconsin Book Club!

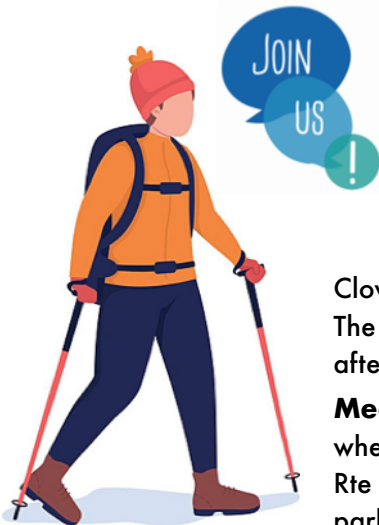
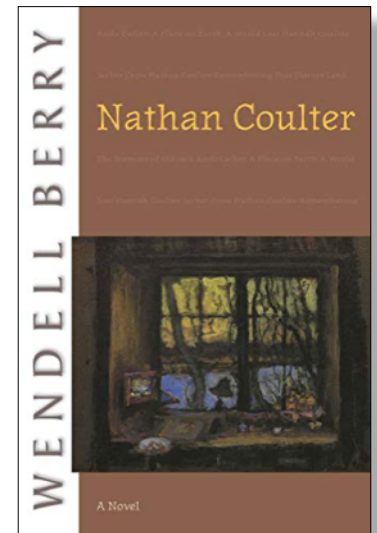
Our Book Club meets virtually every other month to discuss a book related to climate change, nature, environmental justice, or equity in the outdoors.

Our next discussion will be held on Tuesday, Jan. 2 from 7-8 PM.

We will be discussing *Nathan Coulter*, a novel by Wendell Berry.

Nathan Coulter, Wendell Berry's first book, was published in 1960 when he was 27. In his first novel, the author presents his readers with their first introduction to what would become Berry's life's work, chronicling through fiction a place where the inhabitants of Port William form what is more than community, but rather a "membership" in interrelatedness, a spiritual community, united by duty and bonds of affection for one another and for the land upon which they make their livelihood.

Find our event page by searching "Sierra Club Wisconsin Book Club" on Facebook, or on the Sierra Club Wisconsin website. Sign up to receive the Google Meet Invite or phone number to call in. Hope to see you at our next discussion!



Clover Valley Wildlife Area Hike

Sunday, January 7, 2024, at 1:00PM

What better way to start the new year than with a hike in the woods!!

Let's start the year right with a short hike in the Clover Valley Wildlife area, a 1,034-acre property consisting of wetlands, grasslands and hardwood forest.

Clover Valley Wildlife Area is located 2 miles south of Whitewater in Walworth County. The hike is under 3 miles out and back, and if desired, it can be supplemented by a short drive afterwards to the Clover Valley Flowing Well natural spring.

Meet at the parking lot on Island Road at 1PM. Island Road is about 2 miles South of where Rte 89 branches off from Rte 59 in Whitewater. The parking lot is about a quarter mile west of Taylor Rd and one

mile west of Rte 89.

Please contact me if you plan on joining us in case I need to inform you of a cancellation or bad weather. Thanks and I hope to see you there!

Allan Sommer: 262-716-6955 or sommerallan4@gmail.com



Photo from Wisconsin DNR

Virtual Presentation with
Root Pike WIN & WildOnes!
Monday, February 5 at 6:30pm

Join us for this free, virtual learning opportunity.

Learn which native plants are good for the furry and feathered friends in our backyard.

Get updates on our local water quality and hear what is being done to improve it.

Participants will also have the opportunity to win a gift certificate for native plants!



Gardening for Wildlife and Water Quality
Feb 5th | 6:30 - 7:30 pm
Virtual Event Link:
www.tinyurl.com/GWWQ23

2 CHANCES TO WIN A \$50 GIFT CARD FOR NATIVE PLANTS!

Cheers!



Vacation Night!

Thursday, February 22 at 7:00 PM

At Littleport Brewery
214 3rd St, Racine, WI 53403



Like last year, we're asking SEGG members to share up to 10 digital photographs of your favorite vacation or get-away spot, whether it be nearby places or exotic locales.

Unlike last year, this time we can meet in person to share stories together and toast to the new year!

Please email your photos ahead of time to Laura at schulztwin2@gmail.com so that she may put them into one presentation. Thanks and hope to see you there!

NOW ACCEPTING GRANT APPLICATIONS!



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, the SEGG Excom will evaluate potential donations to other local organizations and efforts to ensure consistency with the overall Sierra Club's purpose. 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. Local organizations and environmental efforts may request up to \$500. Applications are on our website and are accepted on a rolling basis.

Read about a recent recipient on page 6.

Don't miss out! Get on our e-news list!

SEGG e-news are emails with notices about club events and outings in between receiving the regular newsletter. Sign up on the SEGG website or email Laura Schulz at schulztwin2@gmail.com.

Furnace/HVAC: How does it work in the coldest weather? Does the air conditioner cool adequately? What wiring changes did you have to make? Do you have a conventional furnace as well?

Heat Pump/Water Heater: Do you have adequate hot water when needed? Since a heat pump draws heat from the surrounding area, if the heat pump water heater is in your basement, will it make the basement cooler?

Electric Stove: IRA includes incentives for electric stoves, both traditional electric resistance stoves and modern induction stoves. An electric stove sends electricity into a resistive coil that radiates heat to your pan. Induction cooking is performed on an electric stove using energy transferred through a magnetic field directly to the cooking pan. If you have an induction stove, did you have to purchase new cookware? How is the cooking time and performance compared to gas? Does the cooking surface stay hot after the stove is turned off?



The IRA includes incentives for other investment items that can make a big difference on your home energy usage, including:

Smart Thermostats: Most families spend about half their energy dollars on heating and cooling, so a programmable thermostat could make a big impact on heating and cooling costs. Focus on Energy has some rebates for Energy Star rated thermostats (focusonenergy.com/rebates).

Energy Audit & Insulation: An energy audit can provide insight on where to focus. Items that are eligible for IRA tax credits under the category of insulation include weather stripping, spray foam or caulking around doors and windows, as well as attic and wall insulation and plastic over windows. For our geographic area, an estimated 18% reduction could be achieved with home sealing and insulating (www.energystar.gov/saveathome/seal_insulate/methodology).

Windows, Doors & Skylights: The IRA includes tax credits for energy efficient windows, doors and skylights, including for installation costs.

Wiring Upgrades: To accommodate new electric appliances, solar panels or electric cars.



Tax credits or rebates are available now for items purchased in 2023 and in the future. (In 2022, this was through IRS form 5695) Upfront or point of sale discounts will be available in 2024 and are intended to be administered by each state, with each state organizing the program for their residents. There are also incentives for some of the same items in the federal program from Wisconsin's Focus on Energy. These incentives can be stacked with the federal government's IRA programs.

An easy place to start improving the energy efficiency of your home is with Wisconsin Focus on Energy's program where residents can obtain a free "Focus on Comfort" pack with items that will help make areas of your home more energy efficient. You can choose from one of three packs which include things like LED lightbulbs, night lights, high efficiency shower heads or weather stripping. Each of these packs are of no cost to you at: focusonenergymarketplace.com/free/

Fifty years after the 1970's slogan "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" was popularized as a slogan to address our waste problems, "Rewire" has joined the mantra. While we want to continue to recycle, we are shifting the emphasis from "recycle" to "reduce, reuse and repurpose" so we have less stuff to recycle and less waste to send to the landfill. Electrifying helps us to reduce our use of fossil fuels and create a healthier home environment while also reducing our long-term expenses for home cooling and heating, water heating, cooking and transportation. Now is a great time take the electric plunge and with your help we can share stories to make the transition easier for everyone. Thank you!

SOLAR FOR EVERYONE!!!



In 2022, Focus on Energy, the energy efficiency program funded by the state's investor-owned energy utilities, funded solar installations on five homes in Racine, part of a larger effort to fund installations on 65 homes statewide. This year that funding has been cut in half. Racine Habitat hopes to continue this program that will, along with other energy efficiency measures, greatly reduce the amount that low-income families will pay for energy for decades to come and spread the benefits of renewable energy to those who have previously been excluded.

In addition to Focus on Energy funding, Racine's Habitat for Humanity's solar initiative has received a donation of solar panels from the Solar for Good Foundation, plus a private donation of \$10,000 to help fill the gap in this year's funding. You, too, can help provide solar installations for those who need it most. Please consider donating to this incredible project at:

www.habitatracine.org/green-energy-program

SEGG Conservation in Colonial Park—Part 3

(Part 1 was in SEGG Newsletter Fall 2022, Part 2 was in Winter 2023)

SEGG financial support enables this important restoration effort:

You make this happen!

Work in Lower Colonial Park this season had two objectives – first, maintain progress made last year around the wetland, and second, manage the reed canary grass (RCG) in other parts of the floodplain. Wetland work was mostly removing raspberries and grapevines that were regrowing. We are stump treating some of them; otherwise the yearly regrowth will cover everything in just two seasons. We are also working on thistles in this area.

Thanks to Racine's Public Health Department, AJ Koski was able to continue treating non-native cattails, reed canary grass and some of the Phragmites on the edges of the wetland. We noticed that sedges and bullrushes planted last year are thriving, and most of the swamp white oaks put in by AmeriCorps workers last October made it nicely through the winter.

Many thanks to Root River Wild Ones! They donated 50 wet-loving plants which we planted in early June. In years to come we'll expect to see favorites like Joe-Pye weed and swamp milkweed, alongside lesser-known buttonbush and meadowsweet.

We attacked invasives in the entry area near Lincoln Park and along the Root River Pathway. Our efforts are paying off! Populations of garlic mustard and dame's rocket are much reduced. There's almost no sweet clover or queen anne's lace, and little buckthorn, bitterdock or giant ragweed. Burdock, unfortunately, was abundant. We aim to control this biennial by pulling all the flower stalks so that no new plants will grow, but it takes many hours of work to accomplish that. We are on the lookout for lesser celandine, hairy willow herb, and poison hemlock. With nearly 150 species on the DNR list, I fear we'll always be on the watch for something we don't want.



Mike on Make-A Difference Day back in October.



Caracal planting a pagoda dogwood.

With a grant from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, we were able to start a two-year project to reduce, if not eliminate, the reed canary grass. Marek Landscaping uses a combination of techniques, including mowing dense portions, and hand-spraying where there is vegetation we want to avoid. GLRI will fund this work in 2024, but we will need additional funding to continue after that.

On *Make A-Difference Day*, several community volunteers came to release young trees from their burden of overgrown raspberries and grape vines. These whips had been planted in the upstream entry area to jump start canopy growth in areas where the ash trees were doomed by the emerald ash borer.



Parks summer employees with brush pile. The City PRCS picks up and disposes of all the invasives we pull.

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

Please join us! Workdays are typically monthly on the fourth Saturday from 9-noon, April through October. Please contact Melissa at melissa.warner3@a2q.com, or call 262-639-0918 for more information.

Winter Salt: A Freshwater Pollutant

by Laura Buska



Freshwater is vital to human life. Yet only 3% of the world's water is fresh. In the spring, snow melts and moves winter salt into nearby waterways, increasing the salinity of freshwater resources. More than 1 million metric tons of salt is added to Lake Michigan each year, and concentrations of chloride in the lake have risen from 1–2 mg/L in the 1800s to more than 15 mg/L in 2020.* When salt combines with large bodies of freshwater, it is nearly impossible to remove, and treatment options are not currently feasible or affordable.

High salinity in freshwater is toxic to humans, birds, freshwater fish, and other aquatic and non-aquatic wildlife. It can damage concrete and metal infrastructure creating a financial burden on communities which can reduce recreational services. To address the issue, professionals across the state are taking classes in best management practices to reduce the amount of salt used while maintaining the same level of public safety.

Community members can do their part in preventing salt pollution with the following practices:

- Shovel snow often and early to prevent compaction and eliminate the need for deicers.
- Think traction, not perfection! Use boot cleats, sand in small amounts, and bird seed instead.
- Under 15 degrees road salt doesn't work. Switch to sand instead.
- Save money and protect resources by reading labels.
- Don't overuse! Three inches between crystals is all that is needed for effective ice control.
Using more will cause it to move and can negatively affect nearby turf and vegetation.
- Prevent pollution and save money by sweeping up excess salt for reuse.
- Request the same behaviors from contractors. Overuse increases costs.
- Tune into Winter Salt Awareness 2024 to learn more!



Winter Salt Awareness Week is going NATIONAL!



What started as a state-wide initiative has grown with organizations across the country banding together to spread awareness of the impacts winter salt has on human and environmental health. Learn how you can do your part with a week-long campaign complete with five lunchtime webinars and a variety of social media posts that share success stories of how municipalities, companies and individuals are reducing salt pollution and protecting freshwater resources.

Register for reminders at: www.wisaltwise.com/Event/Home/SignUp/1723

View daily event social posts at facebook.com/respectourwaters

Study Citation*: <https://aslopubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/lot2.10228>



Be Salt WISE!
www.wisaltwise.com

WINTER SALT AWARENESS WEEK
January 22–26, 2024



SPOTLIGHT ON AN SEGG GRANT RECIPIENT:

SEGG was proud to award the WATERshed program with a grant in Fall of 2023. This award-winning program features hands-on learning activities that aim to foster connections between local students and our Great Lakes.

Led by naturalist Nancy Carlson, the WATERshed program has been a district-wide field trip for all fourth grade students within the Racine Unified School District for the past 15 years.

Over 30,000 students have tested water quality, learned about water pollution, and studied river macroinvertebrates at the Root River Environmental Education Community Center (REC) as part of this program.

Congratulations and keep up the great work!



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.



**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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The newsletter of the Southeast Gateway Group is published quarterly by Group members. Please send articles, event submissions, photographs, corrections and/or comments to: Laura Schulz - schulztwin2@gmail.com

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It takes only
1 teaspoon
of road salt
to permanently pollute
5 gallons of water.

wisaltwise.com

SMART WINTER SALTING TIPS:

- ◆ Sweep up excess salt on dry pavement for re-use
- ◆ Scatter! Keep 3" of space between grains
- ◆ Shovel before salting
- ◆ Switch to Sand when temps are below 15°

See page 6 for more great tips!

Mark Your Calendars!

- Jan. 2 Book Club
- Jan. 7 Clover Valley Outing
- Jan. 20 Annual Planning Meeting
- Feb. 5 Gardening Presentation
- Feb. 22 Vacation Night



Photo from our Chiwaukee Prairie Outing in September.
SEGG outings are easy-going and fun. You may even learn something new.
Please join us! See page 2 for our next outing.