



SIERRA
CLUB

**GREAT WATERS GROUP
NEWSLETTER**

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Spring 2024 NO. 1



The Nefertari Dance Company performed at the African American Environmental Pioneers Ceremony at the Wisconsin Black Historical Society/Museum in 2023. The 2024 event highlighting environment-related work and African culture will be held Feb. 19.

Environmental Pioneers Celebration set

The planners for the fifth annual celebration of African American Environmental Pioneers are working on creating an extra special experience for this milestone event to honor Milwaukeeans' work for a better environment.

The celebration highlights African American community members who serve Milwaukee and the planet through their work in environmental conservation, sustainability or advocacy. The ceremony takes place during Black History Month to honor the rich cultural history of the African Diaspora while celebrating living generations of all ages for their efforts to make the world a better

place through environmental stewardship.

This year's program, which will include a call to action as well as music and spoken word artistry, will begin at 6:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 19, with doors opening at 5 p.m. The event is moving to The Ivy House, 906 S. Barclay St., Milwaukee, to accommodate a larger crowd.

The Great Waters Group is now one of numerous sponsors of this growing, inspirational event. We encourage everyone to attend in person or virtually. The event is free, but registration is required at www.bit.ly/green-pioneers-2024.

Spring Programs

Defending Wisconsin's Sacred Waters from Dangerous Mine Proposals
Monday, March 18, 6 to 8 p.m. Virtual

New plans for exploratory drilling for copper and gold deposits northwest of Medford mark the beginning of yet another round in the fight to protect Wisconsin's waters. Meanwhile, Back 40 Mine opponents remain vigilant.

Presenter **AI Gedicks**, an environmental sociologist and Indigenous rights

activist, has been instrumental in uniting Wisconsin's tribes with grassroots rural mine opponents to form winning coalitions. To get the Zoom link, go to <https://bit.ly/March2024Program>.

Earth-Friendly Eating

Monday, May 20, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
First Unitarian Society, 1342 N. Astor St., Milwaukee

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Notes from the Chair

At the beginning of January, the Great Waters Group Volunteer Leadership Council met to set priorities and make a plan of work for 2024. Here are some of the things we decided to focus on:

- GWG will continue to partner with local organizations to address the energy burden that disproportionately affects majority Black and Latinx Milwaukee neighborhoods where residents spend on average more than 6% of their monthly incomes on electricity and gas bills compared with 2% in majority white neighborhoods. One of our main objectives is for We Energies to adopt a Percentage of Income Payment Program (PIPP) that would cap residents' utility bills as a percentage of their take-home pay.
- We are excited about Milwaukee's adoption of the Climate & Equity Plan in June and will work with the Our Future Milwaukee Coalition to help the plan come to fruition. The plan's areas of focus include:
 - Energy efficiency of buildings/lead abatement
 - Transportation/mass transit, bicycle access and electrification
 - Conservation of green spaces
 - Expansion of tree coverage in the county

- After Milwaukee County passed a nonbinding Rights of Nature resolution last year, we would like to work with neighboring communities to make similar commitments.
- This year we welcome a new outings chair, Dan McKinley, who hopes to plan outings in partnership with several Milwaukee Public Schools, including the Hmong American Peace Academy.
- We are also looking forward to another series of engaging and informative monthly educational programs, summer gatherings at Milwaukee's many beer gardens, and getting to see many of you at our December holiday party.

In addition to Dan, we are excited to welcome another new member to the VLC. Janet Dietert is a recent transplant from Florida and a longtime Sierra Club member. She will serve as the volunteer chair.

We look forward to seeing you at many events over the coming year. If you are interested in helping with any of these priorities, feel free to get in touch with me at jabel209@gmail.com.

Jenny Abel

Denning GWG hero of the year



Marin (Mark) Denning

The Great Waters Group recognizes Marin "Mark" Denning as its Environmental Hero of the Year for his outstanding work in reminding us that not only is the Milwaukee area Native land, but that Indigenous wisdom is well worth our consideration.

A community organizer, he is generous with his time while working to protect Milwaukee's rivers and waters. He has been instrumental in efforts to publicize and nurture the recent resurgence of sturgeon in the Milwaukee River.

Denning organized a series of Unity Fires during COVID times, beginning in the summer of 2020. The fire circles were held on the Wgema Campus in the Concordia neighborhood, near Bolton Hall on the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee campus and in city parks. Open to all, they empowered community sharing and listening while socially distanced.

His humor, wit and spirituality combine to make him a highly skilled public speaker as well as a valued facilitator and discussion moderator. He is frequently the face of Indigenous presence to non-Native people at Milwaukee-area events.

Great Waters Chair Jenny Abel says, "We are grateful for all the work that Mark has done to protect waterways and wildlife in the Milwaukee area."

Sustainable Event funds support party

Thanks to our members and Holiday Party Chair Kerstin Larson, the Great Waters Group received Sustainable Event funding to support our 2023 holiday party costs. This grant is given to Sierra Club events that strive to decrease their climate footprint using environmentally friendly practices. Our thanks to attendees for bringing their plates and utensils and using the recycling and compost bins, and to the volunteers for supplying the beautiful decorations.

And once again, we thank all of you for attending and making the event a huge success! We could not run our year round-programming without your support. We can't wait to see you at the 2024 party. In the meantime, you can check out the list of our generous auction donors and relive the memories at <https://sc.org/GWG>.

Nearby Nature events

Our partners at Nearby Nature Milwaukee have a variety of outings and workdays planned. Go to www.facebook.com/NearbyNatureMKE for details.

Hopkins Hollow Service Day

Saturday, Feb. 17, 10 a.m. to noon 4410 N. Hopkins St.

Harriet Tubman Day Celebration

Saturday, March 10 Harriet Tubman Park, 4750 N. 48th St.
11 a.m. Walk and Talk

Followed by Community Forum: Climate Justice, Our Planet, Our Survival

You can help reduce salinity in water

By **Laura Buska**,
Root-Pike Watershed Initiative Network

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 waterways, increasing the salinity of freshwater resources. More than one million metric tons of salt are 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 nonaquatic wildlife. Additionally, it costs communities financially in damage to concrete and metal infrastructure and reduced 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 with the following practices:

- Shovel 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.
- Don't overuse salt – 3 inches between crystals is all that's needed for effective ice control. Using more will cause it to move and can affect nearby vegetation.
- Prevent pollution and save money by sweeping up excess salt for reuse.
- Read labels: Under 15 degrees F, road salt doesn't work.
- Request the same behaviors from contractors. Overuse of salt only increases the cost for their services.

Learn more at: www.wisaltwise.com and www.facebook.com/respectourwaters

Earth Day cleanup scheduled

Once again the Great Waters Group is teaming up with Nearby Nature and Northwest Side Community Development Corp. to clean up Lincoln Creek for Earth Day.

This is part of the 29th Annual Milwaukee Riverkeeper Spring Cleanup, which mobilizes thousands of volunteers across the Milwaukee River basin. The event runs from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturday, April 20.

We encourage you to join us at one of several sites in the Hopkins Hollow area near N. 35th and W. Congress streets, including 34th and Courtland, and 35th and Glendale. These are areas where lots of trash flows and blows in.

If these sites aren't convenient, Riverkeeper has 75 others to check out!

Details will be available soon at www.sc.org/GWG and www.milwaukeekeeper.org/restore/spring-cleanup.

Spring 2024

Winter 2024 Outings

Milwaukee River Greenway Hike, Part 3 (rescheduled)

Saturday, Feb. 10, 1-3 p.m.

Meet at Holiday Inn parking lot, 4700 N. Port Washington Road

Enjoy a beautiful winter hike along the west bank of the Milwaukee River with the Great Waters Group and learn about ecologically and historically significant sites along this 3-mile loop. We'll begin at the far end of the hotel parking lot, head south to Capitol Drive and return through Estabrook Park's river trail. Dress for the weather. Hiking sticks suggested. Get updates by registering via the calendar at <http://www.sc.org/GWG>. Questions? Call/text Dan McKinley at (414) 467-2911.

Snow Moon Twilight Hike (partner event)

Saturday, Feb. 24, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Fellenz Woods, 1630 Decorah Road, West Bend

Join the Ozaukee Washington Land Trust for an illuminated hike and learn about Fellenz Woods, which includes undeveloped Milwaukee River frontage in Washington County. Get details at www.owl.org.

New GWG outings also will be shared at www.facebook.com/SierraClubGWG.

Nagawicka bay threatened by pier

Help stand up for the last remaining natural and quiet area of Nagawicka Lake known as St. John's Bay.

The Department of Natural Resources surprisingly permitted a large pier to be put in beautiful St. John's Bay, disregarding its own policies for the bay's protections. This would be devastating to the area, which serves as a nursery for most of the large fish in Nagawicka and as a kayak hot spot among the turtles, birds and water lilies.

The public comment in the contested case hearing starts at 9 a.m. March 18 at City Hall, 500 Genesee Street, Delafield.

The St. John's Bay Defenders point out that the large fish come into the bay at night to feed in the summer. That muck is key to the health of the bay and the native lake plants that grow there. Boat propeller motors dig up the muck and kill the nurseries, also making way for invasive species to establish themselves.

For details, go to: <https://stjohnsbaydefenders.com/>

Spring Programs

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Learn how our food choices and food systems affect or aggravate climate change, and vice versa. Presenters **Bruce and Terry Wiggins**, Sierrans who have been involved with various food organizations, will explore how and why personal changes are necessary and why our food system also needs big changes. For example, buying organic is not the solution many think it is.

Register at <https://bit.ly/May2024Program>.



Protect America's Environment for Our Families, For Our Future

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Climate Challenge earns upgrade prize

The U.S. Department of Energy has awarded a Buildings Upgrade Prize of \$400,000 for the design and launch of the Cream City Climate Challenge.

The objective of the challenge is to accomplish carbon reduction and green infrastructure among multifamily, special-purpose and small commercial buildings in Milwaukee's disadvantaged communities with a community-scale approach.

Houses of worship in the Sherman Park neighborhood will be the initial focus, with the Sherman Park Community Association engaged in the planning.

Later work will extend to areas identified under Milwaukee's ECO Neighborhoods Initiative. Slipstream, Milwaukee's Environmental Collaboration Office, Walnut Way and other partners will undertake the work.

Put election days on your calendar

It's an election year, and all votes matter. Put these dates on your calendar:

- Feb. 20, Spring Primary, if required (Check www.MyVote.Wi.Gov to see if your area has a primary.)
- April 2, Spring Election: Municipal elections including mayor, city attorney, county executive, supervisor and other local races, as well as the presidential primaries
- Aug. 13, Fall Partisan Primary
- Nov. 5, Fall General Election

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Conservation Congress set

Each year, Wisconsin residents get a chance to weigh in on natural resource-related questions and proposed rule changes and propose resolutions of their own through the annual Conservation Congress. Some questions are directly related to hunting and fishing, but others affect our environment.

New citizen resolutions can be submitted online until Feb. 26.

Residents can vote on the survey, including citizen resolutions, in person April 8 at their county's spring hearings. Online voting will be available from April 10 to 13. Get details at <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/about/wcc>.

The Wisconsin Chapter will again put together a voting guide for the survey questions to help members provide informed feedback. For updates, check back at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin.