



News of the
Southeast Gateway Group
of the Sierra Club

JAN-MAR 2025
VOLUME 43, No. 1

SOUTHEAST SIERRAN

OUR VOICES SPEAKING UP FOR CLEAN AIR

Thank you to everyone who participated in Sierra Club's campaign to protect the quality of our air by submitting your comments to the Public Service Commission (PSC) in response to We Energies latest plans to build new gas powered electric plants, while also proposing to raise the rates for its customers.

Sierra Club works diligently to integrate social justice and environmental concerns. Partnering with the Clean Economy Coalition of Wisconsin, Sierra Club members participated with more than 300 people who submitted in person at PSC hearings or submitted written comments concerning the rate case. In October a group of advocates for clean, affordable energy rallied in front of the We Energies downtown headquarters and marched to the Drury Plaza Hotel where the Public Service Commission (PSC) was hosting a public hearing on We Energies requested rate increase.



Though the PSC approved an increase for We Energies on residential rates of 13-14%, this was less than the amount We Energies had requested (19% over two year, equivalent to an \$800 million increase). Now our focus has moved to the other requests that We Energies is making: permitting to build new gas (methane) plants in the town of Paris in Kenosha County and at the Oak Creek power plants at a cost to rate-payers of billions of dollars.

Other truly clean energy options are available to We Energies; options that will help protect our environment and ecosystems, provide healthier outdoors for us all to enjoy and are actually cheaper than building new gas plants. If WE Energies intends to reach their stated goal of an 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030, building new gas plants with an operating life of 30 years, won't help meet those goals.

We will have opportunity to express our concerns and promote the cause of clean energy instead of these proposed new gas facilities. Despite the labeling that power companies make - calling gas "clean" power - the "natural gas" is methane which is a major contributor to climate change and complicit in numerous health harms, including cardiovascular and respiratory disease, cognitive impairment in children and exasperating asthma problems.

Join us for public hearings on February 5 at 2 pm or 6 pm at the Union Grove Village Hall - Municipal Center Community Room, 925 15th Avenue or online via Zoom at <https://us02web.zoom.us/my/pschearings>

You can also get updates at www.powerwisconsinforward.com

Microsoft Data Center

Microsoft is in the process of building a huge data center in Mt. Pleasant which will require massive amounts of electricity to run. Currently, We Energies plans to meet the additional electric demand of the new data center through the proposed new methane gas plants which have a projected life span of 30 years – while Microsoft is committed to clean energy well before those 30 years are up.

Microsoft has stated that they will shift to 100% renewable energy for all its datacenters, buildings and campuses through PPA for green energy by 2025. PPAs are Power Purchase Agreements where "a company agrees to buy renewable energy from a project that is not online yet for a set period at a set price, usually between a decade and 20 years.

<https://news.microsoft.com/source/emea/features/as-the-world-goes-digital-datacenters-that-make-the-cloud-work-look-to-renewable-energy-sources/>

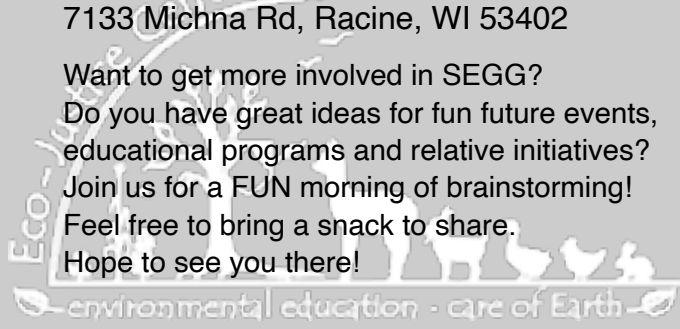
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GET INVOLVED ➡ START HERE!

Annual Planning Meeting

Saturday, January 18 from 9:30-11:30AM
Eco-Justice Center's Red Education Bldg
7133 Michna Rd, Racine, WI 53402

Want to get more involved in SEGG?
Do you have great ideas for fun future events,
educational programs and relative initiatives?
Join us for a FUN morning of brainstorming!
Feel free to bring a snack to share.
Hope to see you there!



Want to learn how to better “green-ify” your home?
Wondering how to take advantage of IRA rebates?
Looking to learn more about Focus on Energy?

Please join us for a virtual presentation by Kevin Kane,
Chief Economist and Co-founder of
Green Homeowners United,
Sustainable Home Improvements Experts.

Monday, January 13 at 6:30 PM on Zoom!

Link will be posted on the SEGG website.



Meeting ID:
912 1943 1961
Passcode:
241881

Want some *Good News* for a change???

The 2024 State of Wisconsin Clean Energy Plan Progress Report is available online and is filled with inspiring and encouraging news. Find it at <https://osce.wi.gov/pages/cleanenergyplan.aspx>

New Group Leader Needed for Adopt-a-Highway Cleanup

SEGG joined the program in 1990 in the first year as Group #32 state-wide. John Berge coordinated the cleanup until 2018 when Jeff Sytsma took over. Jeff has decided to retire from the position and we are in need of someone to step up to the plate and take over so that we may *Keep America Beautiful!*



A friend was spotted
on the Oct. cleanup!

The leader role includes:

- Choose 3 cleanup dates each year, usually early May, late July & early October and notify the newsletter editor and online content editor of these dates for publication.
- Contact previous participants prior to each event and keep contact information for any new volunteers. It is ideal to have 12 volunteers per event to cover all segments.
- Arrive early on cleanup days to put up “Workers Ahead” signs at either end of our section: Hwy 38 in Racine County from Hwy K to 5 Mile Rd.
- Meet volunteers at a central location to assign specific segments, and hand out safety vests and trash bags.
- Drop off the collected trash bags at the Adopt-a-Highway sign just north of Hwy K and call the Racine County Public Works Dept. to schedule a pick-up.
- Empty recyclables into a recycling container (Jeff would take them to his home.)

-Report the number of volunteers, hours, and bags collected to WisDOT online when completed.

Please let Jeff Sytsma know if you are willing to take on this valuable program: jeff12759@aol.com



Bald Bluff Nature Trail Hike in the Kettle Moraine

➡ Join us **Sunday, January 26 at 1:00 PM** to enjoy a brisk hike



The trip will be a good sampling of glacially formed elements like kettles and eskers. We will be hiking through rolling forest terrain, along steep narrow ridges, prairie remnants, and past a massive granite erratic boulder named The Stone Elephant. This boulder was named by early settlers because of its shape and color and is considered sacred by the native Potawatomi.

The Bald Bluff parking lot is reached by taking Rt. 12 northwest through Lauderdale Lakes to La Grange where you will go north on County Rd. H to Young Rd. Almost immediately after crossing Young Road, the sign for Bald Bluff Overlook and Natural Area parking will come into view. The hike is about four miles to another parking lot in the Palmyra Horse and Snowmobile Trails portion of the South Kettle Moraine. We will move a car to the end and do this hike just one way.

Please call or email Al Sommer to let him know to expect you: sommerallan4@gmail.com / 262-716-6955

Join the Sierra Club Wisconsin Book Club!

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

Our next discussion will be held on **Tuesday, Jan. 7 from 7-8 PM** about the book:

Crossings: How Road Ecology is Shaping the Future of Our Planet by Ben Goldfarb.

An eye-opening account of the global ecological transformations wrought by roads, from the award-winning author of *Eager*. Some 40 million miles of roadways encircle the earth, yet we tend to regard them only as infrastructure for human convenience. A million animals are killed by cars each day in the U.S. alone, but as the new science of road ecology shows, the harms of highways extend far beyond roadkill.

In *Crossings*, environmental journalist Ben Goldfarb travels throughout the United States and around the world to investigate how roads have transformed our planet. Yet road ecologists are also seeking to blunt the destruction through innovative solutions. Today, as our planet's road network continues to grow exponentially, the science of road ecology has become increasingly vital.

Please join us for this book club discussion and feel free to drop in on the virtual chat even if you haven't finished the book! 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. Books are selected from a list of recommendations from book club attendees. Contact Cassie at cassie.steiner@sierraclub.org with questions.



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.



Winter Salt Week is January 27-31



Root-Pike Watershed Initiative Network (WIN) is partnering with experts from across the country to elevate conversations around winter salt pollution. Join us daily to watch our 30-minute live stream events from ecologists, public works staff and policymakers to hear what's new in reduction solutions.

Free Livestreams are Mon-Fri at 12:30 PM on the WI Salt Wise YouTube channel.

Register at www.wintersaltweek.org

Vacation Night at Little Port Brewery

Join Us!

214 3rd St, Racine, WI 53403

Wednesday, February 19 at 6:30pm

Please join us for a night of stories, drinks, and fun!

Like last year, we're asking members to share **up to 10** digital photographs of your favorite vacation spot, nearby places or exotic locales. Please RSVP and email your pics ahead of time to Laura at schulztwin2@gmail.com.

Hope to see you there!



♥ MAKE A DONATION ♥

Your tax-deductible donation helps us continue to "Explore, Enjoy and Protect" SE Wisconsin and beyond.

Checks can be made out to *Sierra Club SEGG* to be used towards any purpose, or made to *Sierra Club Foundation* to be used strictly for educational programs and activities.

Please mail your donations to:

Jeff Sytsma
3508 Washington Ave
Racine, WI 53405

Microsoft's commitment to powering their data centers with renewable energy provides additional support for our call to We Energies to build renewable energy, not more methane plants.

The organization, Clean Wisconsin, has an open letter available on their website that we can sign which encourages Microsoft to power its data center with "clean, renewable solar and wind developed right here in Wisconsin", just as they have at some of their data centers elsewhere in the world. Just as we are challenging We Energies to build more renewable energy instead of polluting, un-healthy methane plants, so we should be encouraging Microsoft to use clean renewable energy at their data center here in Southeast Wisconsin; for the health of the air, the people and creatures who live here, to be consistent with their own clean energy goals and to prevent We Energies rate payers from having to pay increasingly high costs for more outdated, polluting electricity plants.

The letter is signed by multiple organizations concerns about our healthy climate, including Sierra Club Wisconsin, and is still available for individuals to sign at the following website: www.cleanwisconsin.org/action-network/tell-microsoft-to-support-clean-energy-in-wisconsin/?

Fall Outings Recap

By Outings Leader Al Sommer

On a gloomy day in October, Al led a hike on a short trail connecting the seven visible springs at Scuppernong Springs Trail. We were lucky that it did not rain hard enough to get us wet or cold.

The trail gets an unpromising start as the first thing one sees is a short but tall concrete wall that is almost completely covered in graffiti. It was almost certainly part of a pit for the digging and processing for marl, which was used for a soil conditioner. While we were walking this trail, it was hard to believe that at one time there was enough industry and agriculture here (cranberry bog) to support a hotel.

Soon after we crossed a mini bridge. The sparkling stream below was so clear you can see detail on the bottom. The trail continued to follow a route around what appeared to be a glacial kettle with boardwalks occasionally leading off the trail to even more springs. At one of the springs we were able to pull up some delicious watercress.



On November 17, four warmly dressed SEGG club members met for a bike ride on the White River Trail, a former railroad line built in 1854 linking the towns of Dover, Burlington, Springfield and Elkhorn. The railroad was abandoned in the 1980s, purchased by the DNR in 1999 and made into a crushed gravel trail in 2003 as part of the Rails to Trails program.

There are some some unglaciated areas on this trail where some remarkable amounts of earth had to be moved in order to make it suitable for rail transportation. This provides some very dramatic topography in areas. The group covered 27 miles of the trail and since it was late in the year views from the trail which are usually blocked with foliage were now open. The scenery was great!

Pictured Right: Paul Umbro, Al Sommer, Wayne & Renee Rathbun

Accepting 2025 Grant Applications

The Southeast Gateway Group has been organized to promote the national Sierra Club's goals, as described below, at our local level.

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.



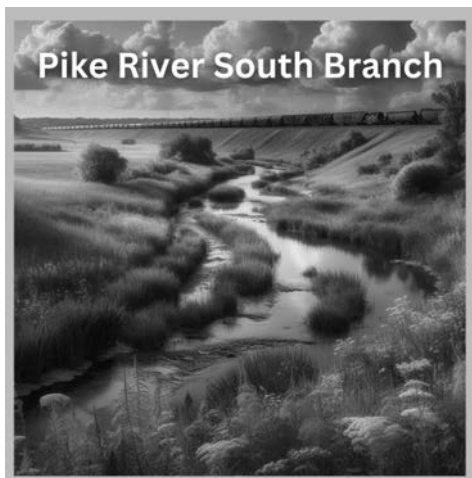
In keeping with these goals, the SEGG Excom will evaluate potential donations to other local organizations and efforts to ensure consistency with the overall Sierra Club's purpose. In addition, SEGG will review any requests for gifts or donations against current priorities within that purpose, and monitor 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.

Applications will be available on our website in January 2025. Local organizations and environmental efforts may request up to \$500. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis.



Visions for SE Wisconsin Restoration Work

Root-Pike Watershed Initiative Network (WIN) is a 501c3 non-profit that restores, protects, and sustains the Root-Pike basin by building partnerships, finding funding, and managing projects to improve some of the most impaired Lake Michigan tributaries in Wisconsin. Below is our vision for three restoration projects that are planned for progression in the new year and beyond. To view the full 2023-24 report and learn about more projects on the horizon, please visit www.rootpikewin.org/about#reports or request a mailed copy by emailing Laura Buska at laura@rootpikewin.org



Pike River South Branch in Somers/Kenosha

The Vision: Turn a landscape liability into an environmental asset

The Project: The South Branch of the Pike River is one of the most degraded tributaries of Lake Michigan. For over a century, these floodplain farmland parcels have been ditched, tiled, and bermed, making them the primary source of chronic runoff pollutants and erosion issues. Kenosha, or “Kenozia—The Place of Pike,” no longer has Pike in its waters. Restoring the river and surrounding land will create 246 acres of new public parkland. This restoration will result in 1,000 tons of sediment reduction, 1.5 miles of restored Northern Pike habitat, 200 acres of wetlands for water quality treatment and habitat, 50 million gallons of new stormwater storage, and an estimated \$98 million in ecosystem value to the Kenosha community over 50 years. Additionally, a new one-mile trail will connect existing trails, enhancing recreational opportunities. Hopefully we’ll start on this epic project in 2026.



Horlick Dam Removal

The Vision: Remove the largest impediment to fish passage and ecosystem health

The Project: Since 1834, a dam has stood in the way of a free-flowing Root River as it powered the Horlick Mill with dammed up water. Today, the dam serves no useful purpose, creates very poor water quality, and is at risk of failure. Root-Pike WIN was proud to have introduced the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to this challenge and helped secure two other grants from the DNR and Fund for Lake Michigan to further reduce removal costs. A strong partnership with Racine County was established to communicate the removal benefits. The dam creates a “very poor” (27) habitat score upstream but would jump to “exceptional” (87) when the dam is removed based on the USACE’s assessment. The dam will be removed in 2025.



Turtle Creek Restoration in the Wind Point Watershed

The Vision: Recreate fish passage and reconnect the floodplain

The Project: This is a highly impaired Lake Michigan tributary with destabilized stream corridors and severe disconnection from its riparian buffer. This has led to total suspended solids (TSS) and E. coli levels far exceeding recommended values, resulting in a “very poor” family biotic index score for downstream macro invertebrates. The completed design, now ready for construction, marks Turtle Creek as the first tributary in the Wind Point Plan to receive necessary restorations. Once complete, the project will enhance three acres of restorable wetlands, restore 3,000 linear feet of stream bank, reintroduce native species, expand riparian vegetation, rebuild the aquatic food chain, and restore a secondary environmental corridor identified by SEWRPC. This project also aims to catalyze community engagement by improving water quality, flood resilience, and habitat education in other areas of the watershed where similar projects are needed.

Colonial Park Check-in for 2024

*Great things are happening in Lower Colonial Park—
We are grateful to SEGG members who helped to make them happen!*

West High Street Entry: Crossing the Root River on the bridge from the parking lot, you'll notice hula hoops and chicken wire cages. Inside those structures are over 50 native flowering plants, generously donated by the *Root River Wild Ones*. The cages allowed us to find and weed them all summer, and kept the cottontails and deer from thinking we had brought them as snacks. Next spring you'll see seasonal blooms. Look for asters, zig-zag goldenrod, jack-in-the-pulpits, violets, baneberry, mayapples, and uvularia. They'll join the bluebells that have spread nicely since former SEGG member John Berge planted them twenty years ago! The cage materials - wire, hoops, zip ties - were purchased with your gifts, and we thank you! Thanks also to Kortendick's Ace Hardware for help with materials.



Benches: Have you ever thought, "Colonial is a great place for a nature walk, but I sure wish there was a place to sit down." ? Well, now there is! Matt Koepnick, City Forester, and AJ Koski, Public Health Researcher, designed simple benches for the park, Root River Council and Parks Staff provided supplies, and on Earth Day six rustic benches were installed by volunteers. It was such a success that four more went in for Make-A-Difference Day in October.

Kiosks: Ever wondered what you were seeing in Colonial? City Parks has installed informational kiosks along the Root River pathway, so you can be up to date on events, birds, flowers, and other neat stuff. We provided the text and images, and a *Weed Out! Racine* friend created the layout.

Current Challenges:

While buckthorn and honeysuckle are still found in the park, they are no longer the biggest problem we face. Likewise, the garlic mustard and dame's rockets populations are decreasing due to their own natural cycles paired with our incessant pulling.

On the other hand, the reed canary grass population has increased exponentially. Because of the loss of our ash tree canopy (remember the emerald ash borer?) they now have more water, and lots more sun. Because their root structure makes digging and pulling difficult and ineffective, we had a professional company spray sections of it in the lower park. We will need their services for several years, and we will do follow-up work to manage this aggressive grass.

Phragmites grass has reared its ugly plumes in the park. We have enrolled three test plots with Phragmites Adaptive Management Framework (PAMF), a multi-state non-profit group. The plots have slightly different treatment strategies. Results will be monitored and shared to PAMF in order to help determine the best way to manage this damaging invasive throughout the Great Lakes Region.



Another challenge is the changing hydrology of the floodplain, again due to the loss of the ash canopy. Instead of infiltrating into the ground water, more storm water runs off directly into the river, carrying sediments and pollutants with it. The flow also damages the Root River Pathway, making it difficult to walk or bike there. As suggested by the Restoration Plan Consultant, we will be placing small diversion structures to spread the runoff over more of the floodplain where it used to flow. Removing reed canary grass and planting more deep-rooted natives are also part of the plan to increase infiltration.



Work in 2025 will focus on intensive invasive species management. While work on the reed canary grass may be largely handled by professionals, there is a LOT of opportunity for volunteers . Please join us!!

SEGG encourages you to WRITE to your legislators on the issues you care about.
Find your representative at legis.wisconsin.gov



Southeast Gateway Group Executive Committee Elections

There are four open spots in the SEGG ExComm. Below are the candidates up for nomination. Kelsey and Laura are returning members up for re-election and Amelia is running for the first time. Should anyone have any objections or concerns for either of these candidates, please contact the co-chair, Gloria Randall-Hewitt at evewardener@gmail.com.



Kelsey Saari is a registered nurse and lifelong resident of Kenosha. She has been involved with the Sierra Club since 2019 as a member of the Southeast Gateway Group, as well as the Chapter Lands Team and Equity Committee. She enjoys hiking, backpacking, kayaking, biking, and reading.

Laura Schulz has her BS in Geosciences from UW-Parkside and an MS in Soil Science from UW-Madison. She has worked at UW-Parkside since 2016. Laura teaches courses in Environmental Studies, Geosciences, and Chemistry and is the director of the Root River Environmental Education Community Center (REC) in Racine. In her free time, Laura enjoys kayaking, camping, reading, and hanging out with her bunny, Lumpy. She has been a member of SEGG since 2018.



Amelia Ray has long had an interest in the environment and science. Growing up, she visited national parks every year with her family (it didn't hurt that her Dad was the Atmospheric Chemist for the National Park Service), and spent her time skiing, hiking, and doing other outdoor activities. She received her PhD in Physical Chemistry from the UC-San Diego working on projects related to combustion and atmospheric chemistry. She currently teaches Chemistry at UW-Parkside and loves inspiring the next generation to love science and the environment. Amelia is still an avid hiker, reader, and yarn crafter. She looks forward to getting more involved with the Sierra Club and the local community.

Save a Tree & See in Color!

Email schulztwin2@gmail.com to request a full-color, digital newsletter emailed instead of a paper copy.

2025 Southeast Gateway Group Leadership

Executive Committee

Laura Schulz (*Co-Chair/Programs*).....schulztwin2@gmail.com
Gloria Randall-Hewitt (*Co-Chair*).....evewardener@gmail.com
Kelsey Saari (*Secretary*).....saari.kelsey@gmail.com
Alex Weyenberg (*Conservation Chair*) alex.weyenber@gmail.com
Allan Sommer (*Outings Chair*).....sommerallan4@gmail.com

Keith Kohlmann.....rowdyjunction@gmail.com
Tom Rutkowskinatom@wi.rr.com

Other Group Leaders

Jeff Sytsma (*Treasurer*).....jeff12759@aol.com
Mary Schroeder (*Hospitality*)..ilovedogsandcats2@yahoo.com
Jessica True (*Outings*).....jessicatrue@yahoo.com

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

Southeast Gateway Group
of the Sierra Club
3508 Washington Ave
Racine, WI 53405-2934



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...and much more!

Mark Your Calendars!

Book Club Discussion Jan. 7
Green Homeowners United
Virtual Presentation Jan. 13
2025 Planning Meeting Jan. 18
Bald Bluff Group Hike Jan. 26
PSC Public Hearing Feb. 5
Vacation Night at Littleport Feb. 19

Smart Salting Tips



Shovel!

or brush away
snow often
and early



Sunshine!

let the sun
melt
remaining
snow



Scatter!

if needed,
3 inches
between
crystals



Switch!

to sand under
15 degrees F



Find out about Winter Salt Week, Jan 27-31, on page 3.