



It's Our Nature

Fox Valley Group of the Sierra Club - Wisconsin Chapter Vol. 26 Issue 1

Fox Valley Group Meetings

April 9, 2026 - 6:30 pm

Fox Valley Group Environmental Town Hall

Appleton Public Library
200 N. Appleton Street, Appleton

We are holding a listening session and sharing our environmental concerns with others and state representatives. Bring your friends and neighbors for a conversation with your legislators. At time of publication we have State Senator Kristin Dassler-Alfeim joining us. Possibly others.

May 14, 2026 - 7:00pm

Land Trusts in Wisconsin

Girl Scout Building (next to Bubolz Nature Preserve)
4693 N. Lynndale Drive, Appleton

Learn about the Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust and their conservation work. Learn ways we can explore and become involved. NEWLT began with a simple but important concept that emerged from the 1993 The State of the Bay: A Watershed Perspective, which stated, "We cannot clean up lower Green Bay unless we clean up Lake Winnebago. We cannot clean up Lake



Winnebago unless we clean up the Fox and Wolf Rivers. We have to attack pollution at its source, and we have to do it through the entire watershed."

June 2026 - No Meeting

July 2026 - No Meeting

August 13, 2026 - 6:00pm

Sierra Club Picnic

Plamann County Park - Chris Brandt Shelter
1375 E. Broadway Drive, Appleton

Come share your summer with fellow Sierrans. Grill will be provided. Bring a dish to pass, your own meat for grilling, beverages, and place setting.

Details and subject can change
Follow us at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley
www.facebook.com/foxvalleysierra

From the Chair

March 2026

I'm not an inherently political person. I'm a moderate, an Independent, never voted a straight party ticket until eight years ago, and generally always felt that if my candidate was not the one selected, there might be a little shift one way or another away from issues that were important to me, but the pendulum would swing eventually, and the general trajectory would be forward and upward. And yet as I sit down to write yet another note from the chair, I realize that once again, the topic of politics needs to be breached. I never imagined when I accepted the position as Fox Valley group chair that I would become as involved in politics as I am. But here we are and so here I go... Again.

In past years, Earth Day and Earth month activities centered around nature hikes and picking up trash. This April, however, the Fox Valley Sierra group is keenly focused on hosting a listening session with



our elected leaders so that they can hear firsthand from you what environmental concerns are on your mind. We are also focused on the primary election that will select a member of our judiciary that could have long lasting impacts on PFAS regulation, AI data center regulation and management of wolves and other critical species in our Wisconsin habitats. There are also several down ballot elections that will have lasting impact on zoning regulations that also affect those same issues.

Don't get me wrong, it is still critical that we make time to get out and enjoy and explore the natural gifts all around us. For me, I am never more invigorated for the fight ahead as after I spend some time out on the trails with the wildlife or on the waterways close to my home.

So in closing, get out there and enjoy all the wonderful adventures our outings team is leading. But also remember, we need you at the voting booth, at the town halls, at your computers, emailing elected officials, and volunteering wherever you can to make a difference in our precious world.

Penny Paiser Wilson
Fox Valley Sierra Group Chair

Hot Topic Update: Data Centers

by Karen Van Offeren

Let's start with a point of clarification. Data centers fall into two categories. The data centers that power the internet are nothing new. They don't require a huge amount of energy and are built using existing infrastructure. No immediate concern.

It's the hyperscale data centers serving the infrastructure for artificial intelligence (AI) that are concerning. Why? AI requires huge, purposefully built data centers. The issues surrounding these data centers include the:

- vast amount of energy needed to power AI computing,
- inevitable increase in local utility costs,
- excessive amount of water needed by their cooling systems,
- air and noise pollution,
- questionable, unsustainable job projections, and
- lowered property values.

These issues are exacerbated by the lack of communication and transparency shown by local governments, utilities, and the developers of the data centers. Local citizen input is often ignored.

And the urgency and frustration surrounding these issues continues to grow.

According to Cleanview, a nationally recognized organization dedicated to accelerating the renewable energy transition, Wisconsin has 3 operating data centers and 11 planned projects. (You can see a real-time map of these sites at <https://cleanview.co/public/data-centers/wisconsin/>.)

The current operating data centers are in Brown, Milwaukee and Dane counties.

The locations of the planned data centers include Racine (Mount Pleasant), Ozaukee (Port Washington), Rock (Janesville), Wood, Dodge (Beaver Dam), Kenosha and Grant counties.

Wisconsin legislators have taken some action to address some of the issues surrounding data centers.

On Tuesday, January 20, 2025, the Wisconsin Assembly passed Assembly Bill 840. Wisconsin Public Radio provides the following summary. The bill requires:

- the Public Service Commission to ensure customers are not responsible for "costs associated with the construction or extension of electric infrastructure" serving a data center,
- data centers to 1) recycle the water they use to cool computer equipment and 2) report their water usage to the Department of Natural Resources.

Additionally, if a data center project isn't completed, the owner must restore the land to its previous state. And, if the data center wants to rely on renewable energies, that energy source must be located on the property of the data center.

Proponents of the bill say it supports economic development in Wisconsin. Opponents believe the measure is insufficient and say it was rushed through the legislative process. (See <https://www.wpr.org/news/wisconsin-assembly-advances-bill-regulate-data-centers> for more details.)

NOTE: As reported previously, Wisconsin Senator Jodi Habush Sinykin and Representative Angela Stroud had introduced a more robust measure, The Data Center Accountability Bill (LRB 5432), but it has not advanced.

In response to this continuing debate, a group of Democratic legislators introduced the Data Center Pause Act, aka Pause to Protect Act, (LRB-6377 & LRB-6391) on February 12, 2026. These measures would place a short-term moratorium on data center construction in Wisconsin.

The co-sponsorship memorandum for this act states, "Under this proposal, no data center may operate in Wisconsin unless the Secretary of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection determines that adequate safeguards have been enacted in statute or administrative rule. These safeguards are intended to address ratepayer protection, infrastructure cost allocation, transparency in water and energy use, labor standards, and meaningful community input. The intent is not to permanently prohibit data centers, but to ensure that any future development is responsible, transparent, and does not impose additional financial burdens on Wisconsin households."

Residents of local communities have made some progress as well. Proposed data centers have been stopped in DeForest, Caledonia, Menomonie, Greenleaf, and Yorkville. Other communities, including Madison and the Manitowoc County towns of Mishicot, Two Rivers and Two Creeks, have issued moratoriums.

When working at the local level, Prescott Balch of Caledonia urges citizens to act early. "Our community group coalesced quickly with people who all came to the proposal with different perspectives, wanting to stop it for different reasons."

One approach they found successful was to identify what each of the village board members was passionate about, then tie that in with a concern related to the data center. This helped impact the decision making of at least four board members.

For more details, see <https://shepherdexpress.com/news/features/the-struggle-against-hyperscale-data-centers-across-wisconsin/>

Balch also suggests getting help. He notes that there is a statewide group that will help. You can also find resources at the Wisconsin Data Center Document Repository (<https://www.widatacenterfacts.org>).

Finally, the Sierra Club-Wisconsin Chapter, Healthy Climate Wisconsin, Midwest Environmental Advocates and Wisconsin Green Fire have also created a toolkit to help Wisconsinites understand what hyperscale data centers are, what impacts they have, and what local communities and concerned citizens can do to mitigate the worst impacts.

To download your copy of Big Tech Unchecked: A Toolkit for Community Action, go to <https://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/datacenteraction>. You will also find links to two webinars discussing the impacts of data centers and what you can do.

The Line 5 Legal Battle Continues

by Karen Van Offeren

On February 13, 2026, an Administrative Law Judge upheld the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' decision to grant permits for Enbridge's reroute of the Line 5 oil pipeline. These permits allow Enbridge Energy to build a new 41-mile segment of pipeline around the Bad River Reservation.

The Administrative Law Judge upheld the permits despite a six-week contested case hearing in which extensive

evidence was presented showing significant risks to waterways, wetlands and Ojibwe treaty-protected resources.

In response to the ruling, environmental groups have filed a petition for judicial review. They are also seeking an immediate stay on construction activities pending a final decision in the case and a brief in support of the motion.

The petition was filed by Clean Wisconsin and nonprofit law firm Midwest Environmental Advocates which is representing Sierra Club, 350 Wisconsin and League of Women Voters of Wisconsin. The Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa has also filed.

Meanwhile, Enbridge is preparing for construction. They have started clearing away forest for the reroute.

Enbridge is also promising to pay local police due to the prospect of protests over the construction. The Ashland County Board voted to accept Enbridge's proposal to fund local law enforcement. (The Bayfield County Board denied the agreement.)

Frank Vaisvilas of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reports that Enbridge will not be paying police directly but will be funding an escrow account that will be managed by the Wisconsin Counties Association. They will manage and distribute the funds to local law enforcement.

Note: Similarly, Enbridge funded police during its construction of Line 3 in Minnesota. According to Vaisvilas, the non-partisan Brennan Center said this action undermined the rights of protestors.

For more details concerning this legal battle surrounding Line 5, see:

<https://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/blog/2026/02/line-5-legal-battle-environmental-groups-file-petition-judicial-review>
<https://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/blog/2026/02/latest-line-5>

Knowles-Nelson – Now at Risk of Expiring in June 2026

by Karen Van Offeren

On Wednesday, February 18, 2026, the full Wisconsin Senate was scheduled to vote on the Republican proposal to continue sponsorship of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program.

Instead, Republican leaders pulled the bill from the floor because they didn't have enough votes to pass it.

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program is a cornerstone of Wisconsin's outdoor recreation economy. Ninety-three percent of Wisconsin's residents support the program. It protects more than 650,000 acres of forests, wetlands, farmland, and wildlife habitats.

During the Senate session, Senator Jodi Habush Sinykin offered an amendment to extend the program for one year, maintaining funding while long-term reauthorization discussions continue. Senate Republicans rejected the amendment without debate.

Senate Minority Leader Hesselbein reaffirmed that the Democratic caucus remains ready to negotiate. The two things needed for a workable compromise are 1) adequate funding for land acquisition and 2) removal of blanket geographic restrictions on protecting land.

For more details on the current status of the program, please see: <https://knowlesnelson.org/team-knowles-nelson-update-feb-19/>
<https://knowlesnelson.org/gathering-waters-statement-on-senate-inaction-and-bipartisan-path-forward-for-knowles-nelson/>

Spring Election 2026 – State Level Races

by Karen Van Offeren

On April 7, 2026, you will have an opportunity to vote for an open seat on the Wisconsin Supreme Court. The two candidates running for this position are Judge Chris Taylor and Judge Maria Lazar.

Wisconsin Conservation Voters has endorsed Judge Chris Taylor.

Deputy Director Seth Hoffmeister explains, "Judge Chris Taylor is the only candidate in this race with the experience, integrity, and independence necessary to protect our environment and uphold the Constitution."

Judge Chris Taylor – Background

Judge Taylor currently serves on the Wisconsin Court of Appeals. She previously sat on the Dane County Circuit Court. Prior to becoming a judge, she served nearly a decade in the Wisconsin State Legislature. While serving in the legislature, she earned a reputation as a skilled and effective leader who was able to pass bipartisan legislation.

Judge Maria Lazar – Background

Judge Maria Lazar has served on the Wisconsin Court of Appeals since 2022. Previously, she served seven years as an Circuit Court Judge in Waukesha. Before that she worked for five years as a Assistant Attorney General for the Wisconsin Department of Justice in Madison.

Wisconsin Conservation Voters points to Judge Taylor's rare combination of judicial experience and legislative leadership as a strong qualification.

In contrast, Judge Lazar is a member of the Federalist Society, the same organization that elevated the most conservative members of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Judge Lazar has shown her support for their philosophy of supporting corporate interests in her past rulings. While serving on the Wisconsin Court of Appeals, she ruled that the Department of Natural Resources could not hold corporate polluters accountable for contaminating Wisconsin communities with PFAS chemicals.

(Note: This ruling was later overturned by the Wisconsin Supreme Court.)

Wisconsin Conservation Voters believes a victory for Judge Chris Taylor means:

- A pro-conservation, pro-democracy majority on the Wisconsin Supreme Court until 2030.
- Stronger protections for clean water, clean air, and public health.
- Courts that defend fair elections and uphold the Constitution.
- A judiciary that serves people, not corporations or political extremism.

Related Note: In addition to a variety of local elections and referendums, some of you may also have the opportunity to vote for a seat on the Wisconsin Court of Appeals. Districts I, II and IV will have candidates on the ballot.

Please stay informed!
Please vote!

Spring Summer Outings

For more information or additional outings, check out our facebook page
or our website at sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley - Click on the Meeting and Outings Link

April 25 • Saturday • 9:00am - 1:00pm

Arbor Day - Tree Planting/Park Cleanup - High Cliff State Park

Celebrate Arbor Day by helping the park plant trees and pick up debris. Bring gloves if you can; otherwise the park will provide other needed tools. Meet at the gathering space/ upper pavilion. This event is hosted by High Cliff State Park & Friend's Group.

May 8-10 • Friday Evening

High Cliff State Park Group Camping

Join us for the first campout of the season. Group site #6 is reserved. Sit around the campfire, hike the trails and if you want, join us pulling garlic mustard. Tent camping. Meals on your own. Sign up with Monny Hjerstedt, 920-558-0013 text/call, mhjerstedt17@gmail.com Or register at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley

May 9 • Saturday • 9:30am - 2:00pm

Garlic Mustard Removal at High Cliff State Park

Join us as we pull out those nasty garlic mustard plants. Meet us at the Indian Mound Trail parking lot at 9:30. Bring a lunch, water and maybe gloves. We will work on the Indian Mound Trail in the morning, have lunch and then do some work in the afternoon on the Forest Management Trail. Easy hikes, moderate amount of work, mostly bending down to pull out the plants. • Sign up with Monny Hjerstedt, 920-558-0013 text/call, mhjerstedt17@gmail.com Or register at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley

May 16 • Saturday • 9:45am

Wescott Bike Ride, Mielke Park Shawano

Shawano Pathways Event. 6, 8 or 20 miles. Free ice cream for 20 mile ride. • details at www.Shawanopathways.org

May 23 • Saturday • 9:00am - Noon

Brillion Nature Center Hike

Meet in the parking lot of the Nature Center. Find Brillion Wildlife Area as State Highway 10 enters the city of Brillion on the north. Go approximately 1 mile south of Brillion on Highway PP, then 1 mile west on Deerview Road to the end past the waste collection facility. The 5 mile hike will be about 2 hours, on a dirt trail, no significant hills or obstacles. This activity is open to all ages and ability levels. This is a rain or shine event (with exception for severe weather warnings)

- Equipment: sturdy hiking footwear, water bottle, rain gear, insect/tick repellent; optional: lunch, binoculars, bird guide.
- Signup on the Sierra Club website or contact Peter Jobe, pjobe1@gmail.com (use Subject: Sierra Club Brillion Outing) or by phone or text: 920-460-5915 (leave message).

June 6 • Saturday • 10:00am

Point Beach Ice Age Trail Hike

8-10 mile moderate hike along the shores of Lake Michigan and the Forests of Point Beach State Park. No elevation change. Bring water, lunch and good shoes/boots. Maybe mosquito spray. One way hike with a shuttle. Any questions and to register, please contact Monny at mhjerstedt17@gmail.com 920-558-0013 or signup at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley

June 21 • Sunday Evening • 7:00pm

Summer Solstice Hike - Mosquito Hill

We will hike the trails at Mosquito and hopefully end up on the top of the hill for a beautiful sunset. Sign up with Monny at mhjerstedt17@gmail.com 920-558-0013 or signup at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley

July 7 • Tuesday Evening • 6:00pm - 8:00pm

Bike WLOWASH Trail

We will meet at Trailhead Park in the town of Larson at 5:45. Bring your own bike, water bottle, and bug spray. We will head north toward Hortonville, riding for about 50 minutes before we turn around to head back. The trail is mostly crushed limestone and flat. Bring your kids, your best buddy, or come alone and meet new friends. For more information contact marjiefendt@gmail.com or just sign up www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley.

July 14 • Tuesday • 5:00 pm

Beer Garden • DePere Voyageur Park

This community event will feature craft beer, hard seltzer, live music, food and dessert trucks, outdoor family games and activities. • We plan on meeting around 5 PM. Gather on the south side of the park up on the berm under the shade trees near the pavilion. No agenda, just hangout, enjoy a beer (or two) and listen to the live music. Bring snacks, a chair to sit on, frisbee or lawn toys, and enjoy a nice evening at the park. Any questions, contact Peter Jobe at pjobe1@gmail.com (use Subject: Sierra Club Beer Garden) or by phone or text: 920-460-5915 (leave message).

July 18 • Saturday • 3:00pm - 5:00pm

Explore Lasley Point Archaeological Site

Join us for a 2-3 mile hike in the Lasely Point Archaeological Site. This site is where a Native American village once thrived. Between 1200 and 1500 AD, its 47.7 acres supported an Oneota Indian village. • The park is located about two miles north of Winneconne, west of County Road M. We will meet at the small parking area located at 5900 Lasley Point Road. The hike will be about 2 hours, on a dirt trail, no significant hills or obstacles. This activity is open to all ages and ability levels. This is a rain or shine event (with exception for severe weather warnings). Equipment: sturdy hiking footwear, water bottle, rain gear, insect/tick repellent; optional: snacks, binoculars, bird guide. Signup on the Sierra Club website or contact Peter Jobe, pjobe1@gmail.com (use Subject: Sierra Club Lasley Outing) or by phone or text: 920-460-5915 (leave message).

August 1 • Saturday • 10:00am

Wequiok Falls Hike, Brown County Park

Join us for a nice hike by the falls and the nearby NEW Land Trust parcel. Join Penny at 10:00 at Wequiok Falls just north and east of Green Bay on Highway 57. Watch for the signs. Come and hike at 10:00, the drive from Appleton takes about an hour. • Bring water, wear good shoes with traction. We can plan to stop for a late lunch in Green Bay or DePere if attendees are interested. Sign up with Penny 920-475-5110, pennybernardschaber@athenet.com or online. Here is the link to the park: <https://www.browncountywi.gov/community/parks-department/general-information/wequiok-falls/>

August 18 • Tuesday • 5:00pm

Beer Garden • DePere Voyageur Park

See details on July 14th event

August 29 • Saturday • 9:00am - Noon

Bike Eisenbahn State Trail

A 17 mile ride along an old railroad track from Eden to Kewaskum, WI. This is a scenic ride that is near the Kettle Moraine area. This is a good

weather event (we will reschedule for rain or severe weather warnings). Equipment: functional bicycle, water bottle, optional: lunch, rain gear, binoculars, bird guide. We will meet at the end point in Kewaskum to leave vehicles in the parking on Railroad St, between Main St and 1st St. Then we will drive to Eden and ride the trail back to Kewaskum. A state trail pass is NOT needed to use the Eisenbahn State Trail. Signup on the Sierra Club website or contact Peter Jobe, pjobe1@gmail.com (use Subject: Sierra Club Eisenbahn Bike Ride) or by phone or text: 920-460-5915 (leave message).

Support Your Local Ecosystem with a Pollinator Garden!

by Karen Van Offeren

If you're looking for a way to provide important habitat and refuge for bees, butterflies, moths, hummingbirds and other pollinating species, consider adding a pollinator garden to your yard!

Start by allocating a minimal space for your garden. And plantings can be tailored to urban, suburban or rural settings. As an added bonus, you'll be adding color and natural beauty to your outdoor spaces while making a positive environmental impact.

Plan

Start by doing some planning. Consider the sunlight exposure, soil type and drainage available in your garden space. Keep in mind that most pollinator-friendly plants love full sun and good drainage.

Try to choose native plants that bloom at different times throughout the growing season. This provides a continuous food source. Incorporating a variety of plant sizes, shapes and colors will also attract a wider range of pollinator species.

Also work in space for a shallow water source such as a birdbath containing stones for pollinators to land and rest on. They need to stay hydrated too!

And finally, provide some areas of shelter. A small brush pile, some dense plantings or a bee house offers protection, resting spots and places to nest.

Follow These 4 Steps



Simple Steps to Help Pollinators



Plant
Natives



Give Water
& Shelter



Minimize
Pesticides



Monitor &
Report

Planting Native Species

Native plants are especially important because they have co-evolved with local pollinators. They typically offer more accessible nectar and pollen than non-natives.

It's equally important to plant for seasonal bloom succession. This ensures that flowers are available from early spring through late fall. By doing this, you're supporting both resident pollinators and those that migrate through your area in the spring and fall.

Need some suggestions for native plants to use?

Spring: Wild geranium, columbine or solomon's seal

Summer: Common milkweed, bee-balm, coneflower, culver's root or maidenhair fern

Fall: Heart-leaved aster, little bluestem, New England aster, stiff goldenrod

(For details, see <https://p.widencdn.net/bja4ru/NH0532> provided by the WI DNR.)

Giving Water and Shelter

Consider using a drip irrigation system or soaker hose to provide supplemental water sources for your pollinator garden. These types of systems deliver the water directly to the soil, reducing evaporation.

Shallow water features such as bird baths with stones or small dishes provide pollinators with safe places to drink and cool off. Placing mulch around plants helps to retain soil moisture, reducing the need for excess watering.

Delay major pruning of shrubs and perennial plants until late winter or early spring. This avoids disturbing insects that may overwinter in hollow stems or plant debris. And leave behind some unraked leaves. They provide shelter and nesting materials. Try to leave some bare soil as well. Ground nesting bees need access to bare earth.

Minimizing Pesticides

Using pesticides is a major contributor to insect decline. Some pesticides remain in the environment for days, weeks or even months. And even "natural" or organic pesticides can be toxic to beneficial pollinators. Even the smallest amounts may harm or kill!

What can you do to minimize pesticide usage?

- Accept some nibbling! Native plants living in the right conditions can handle some insect damage. Cosmetic damage means your plants are providing the food necessary for pollinators.
- Ensure your plants are getting the care they need. That eliminates some of the conditions that invite pests to your plants.
- Manage pest issues 'manually.' If possible, hand-pick pests from your plants, cut or remove the infected parts of your plants, and remove weeds from around your plants.
- Attract natural pest predators. Plant diversity can create a habitat for natural pest enemies such as lady beetles and syrphid flies. They'll help keep pests in check!

Monitoring and Reporting

Consider participating in pollinator counts and citizen science programs to contribute to conservation efforts beyond your own garden. Such initiatives help gather valuable data on pollinator populations and diversity. Also consider sharing resources, seeds and knowledge with neighbors. Building a local network of support helps make conservation efforts more resilient and visible.

The average pollinator garden can be home to a wide variety of species. Enjoy identifying all of those that visit your garden!

For more information on pollinator gardens, see the following resources:

<https://www.insectlore.com/blogs/pollination/tips-for-planting-a-pollinator-garden-in-your-backyard>

<https://www.xerces.org/bring-back-the-pollinators>

<https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/files/2014/11/Pollinators.pdf>

[https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/sites/default/files/topic/](https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/sites/default/files/topic/EndangeredResources/plantsformonarchs.pdf)

[EndangeredResources/plantsformonarchs.pdf](https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/sites/default/files/topic/EndangeredResources/plantsformonarchs.pdf)

Support Native Pollinator – Build a Bee House!

by Karen Van Offeren

Native bees are some of our most important pollinators, but they're in trouble! Habitat loss, pesticides and climate change are resulting in declining populations.

How can you help? Consider adding a bee house to your pollinator garden!

Why do native bees need a house? Most native bees are solitary ... they don't live in hives. They love cozy little holes to raise their families in.

Common types of native bees include mason bees, leafcutter bees and carpenter bees. They are not aggressive but are great for pollination! (Sorry, honeybees won't be attracted to this type of housing.)

So, let's look at some best practices when it comes to bee houses.

Choose the Right Design and Best Materials

The best bee houses mimic natural nesting sites. They are made of appropriate materials that create a safe, dry and functional environment.

What are the best materials to use?

- A frame of untreated wood is ideal. It provides insulation without trapping moisture. You can also use a clean, repurposed can.
- Nesting tubes should be smooth and easy to clean. Paper straws and bamboo stalks are possibilities. You can also use drilled wooden blocks. (Note: Bamboo receives mixed reviews. Some feel it retains moisture and others note that cocoons can't be removed. Definitely do not use plastic straws or treated wood!)

Size and depth of holes matter. Nesting holes should range from 3/32 to 3/8-inch wide and 4 to 6-inches in depth. Different species prefer different sizes so add some variety! Shallow or oversized holes may not be used or can expose larvae to predators.

Once you've selected your materials, fill your frame with the nesting tubes. Make sure the tubes are tightly packed ... you don't want any wiggling!

Pick a Good Location

Bees like warm, dry places to live. Place your bee house facing east to southeast so it catches the morning sun.

Keep it off the ground. Mount your bee house 3 to 6 feet high.

Make sure your bee house is securely mounted. Attach it to a sturdy post, fence or wall. No hanging chains! Bees don't like a swaying or shifting house. It needs to be stable!

Finally, place your bee house where it will be protected from heavy rain or wind. And keep it away from heavy foot traffic. (Native bees may be friendly, but they still like privacy!)

Clean and Maintain Your Bee House

If you want long-term guests in your bee house, you must care for it! A dirty or overcrowded bee house can invite pests and diseases, potentially harming your local bee population instead of supporting it.

Come fall or winter, replace used nesting tubes. If you use drilled, wooden blocks, clean them with a diluted bleach solution (one part bleach to nine parts water), thoroughly rinse them, and allow all pieces to dry completely before reinstalling them in your bee house.

All nesting materials should be stored in a dry, ventilated space over winter.

That's it! Building a bee house can be a simple way to help pollinators thrive!

A word of caution. It's easy to buy a pre-made bee house or a kit to assemble one. If you do so, please keep the best practices listed above in mind. Some 'store-bought' bee houses can actually put bees at risk due to poor design or the materials used to make them.

For more information, visit these resources:

<https://becausetees.com/blogs/articles/build-a-diy-bee-house>
<https://peecnature.org/how-to-build-and-maintain-a-bee-house-to-support-native-pollinators/>
https://www.pollinator.org/pollinator.org/assets/generalFiles/P2-Bee-House-2-pager-2024_2024-01-29-180758_wrtg.pdf



Update - Fair Maps in Wisconsin

There is some good news to share with the progress for permanent Fair Maps in Wisconsin. The Ad Hoc Committee, which has been drafting an Independent Redistricting Proposal for Wisconsin, has been working very hard. Our IRC Proposal is being reviewed in the Legislative Reference Bureau (LRB) and the Ad Hoc committee has been working with several state Senators and Representatives to set up a strong start on the formal legislative process. There is not a specific timeline yet for formal introduction of actual legislation with an LRB Reference number or Assembly Bill (AB) or Senate Bill (SB) numbers.... BUT we are getting close to that important benchmark.

The Fair Maps Coalition and their partners keep working to reach the above benchmark. You can find more details on the Independent Redistricting Commission proposal and where you can get more information is at www.fairmapswi.com.

When a formal legislative proposal for creating an Independent Redistricting Commission in Wisconsin is approved, it will be necessary for Fox Valley Sierra Group members to contact their legislators and ask them to support the IRC proposal. If we don't change how the maps are drawn here in Wisconsin, then we will continue to have little productive governing happen.

In his State of the State address on 2-17-26, Governor Evers mentioned that he is planning to call a special session of the legislature and ask them to consider a constitutional amendment that would ban gerrymandering and create permanent fair maps. Governor Evers has just [signed](#) an executive order, calling for this special session to take place on April 14th.

Fox Valley Sierra Group Donations

Each year our group has the opportunity to use funds from the Sierra Club Foundation to donate to other organizations, which promotes climate solutions, conservation and movement building through philanthropy and grassroots advocacy.

In recent years, we've donated to the following organizations:

Annually

Ice Age Trail Alliance - conserve, create, maintain, and promote the Ice Age National Scenic Trail for outdoor recreation.

One Time (last three years)

Friends of High Cliff State Park – One of the parks the FVSG group actively supports with outings and workdays. The Friends group assists in preserving and enhancing the park's natural resources via volunteer hours and funding.

Raptor Education Group, Inc. - Dedicated to the care and rehabilitation of sick, injured, or orphaned native bird species and public education of wildlife issues.

Green Lake Conservancy - They preserve, maintain and enhance the ecological integrity of lands and waters in the Green Lake Watershed by offering conservation expertise, strategies and legal tools for the benefit of humans, plants and wildlife.

Friends of the Wildlife Sanctuary - home to the largest wildlife rehabilitation program in Wisconsin, the Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary also provides wildlife education and hiking/skiing trails for recreation. The friends group supports the mission by providing funds for rehab, park beautification and educational programming.

Superior Bio-Conservancy - protects and restores the biological integrity and hydrology of the Great Lakes Region and the Laurentian Forest Province throughout Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. The conservation plan will create maps and effectively advocate for the creation of protected wildlife corridors to connect large tracts of public (Federal, State and County forests) land to avoid fragmentation.

We hope as the board, we have made some good decisions with these organizations.

Declining Bird Populations in North America – Alarming But There's Hope

by Karen Van Offeren

On February 26, 2026, a journal article in Science published the results of a recent study of North American bird populations. This study is the first to look at more than the total bird population. It also examined the trends in their decreases, where the populations are shrinking the most, and what the declines are connected to.

The study found that nearly half of the 261 species studied showed big enough losses in numbers to be statistically significant. More importantly, more than half of the species with declining populations have seen their losses accelerate since 1987.

The study's lead author, Francois Leroy, notes the only consolation is that the birds that are declining in number the fastest are also the species with populations large enough that they aren't at risk of extinction yet.

The scientists noticed that the species with the largest population declines were located in more southern locations. They statistically connected these losses to warmer temperatures resulting from human-caused climate change.

However, the locations showing acceleration of bird loss were in California and the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest regions. Co-author of the study, Marta Jarzyna, stated that this acceleration is "mostly driven by agricultural practices."

In this case, the scientists found statistical correlations between accelerated population decline rates and high fertilizer and pesticide usage as well as the amount of cropland. Leroy clarified that they couldn't tie the accelerated losses to any one of these factors specifically, but that it does indicate that agriculture in general is a major factor.

The 2025 U.S. State of the Birds report noted that one-third of U.S. bird species are of high or moderate conservation concern. It identified 112 Tipping Point species. These are species that have lost more than 50% of their populations in the last 50 years.

According to Marshall Johnson, Chief Conservation Officer at the National Audubon Society, "Birds tell us that we have a full-on emergency across all habitats."

"The rapid declines in birds signal the intensifying stressors that wildlife and people alike are experiencing around the world because of habitat loss, environmental degradation, and extreme weather events," explained Dr. Amanda Rodewald, facility director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Center for Avian Population Studies. "We need to remember that if conditions are not healthy for birds, they're unlikely to be healthy for us."

However, despite these concerning trends in bird populations, the report also emphasized that conservation efforts can succeed if adequately supported.

"Many bird populations are struggling. But a proven blueprint for success is science-based planning and collaborative investment in habitat conservation," observed Dr. Steve Adair, Ducks Unlimited chief scientist.

Michael J. Parr, President of American Bird Conservancy, confirms, "The science is solid on how to reverse the damage done, but to succeed, these issues need to be taken seriously."

For more on the study published in Science and the 2025 U.S. State of the Birds, see:

<https://apnews.com/article/birds-losses-faster-climate-change-agriculture-8cf053bda9dad4fe2dd5a1c7048b6d39>

<https://www.audubon.org/press-room/us-bird-populations-continue-alarming-decline-new-report-finds>

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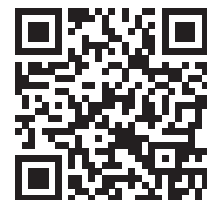
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