

Data Centers – Accountability is Coming!

Despite interest and intent, and legislators getting an earful from many citizens, including people being impacted by data center developments, it was to no avail, and legislators were unable to pass legislation to hold data centers accountable. Nor could they pass a bill that would provide safeguards against non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) by local officials who have been cutting community members out of knowing about and weighing in on data center proposals.

The Republican’s bill proposal contained some reasonable accountability measures, but required that all renewable energy be on site. Given the massive energy use of data centers, this poison pill would have severely constrained data center renewable energy use. A Democratic proposal requiring data centers be powered by at least 70% renewable energy was not brought up for a vote.

A NDA proposal did receive bipartisan support, but the Senate was unable to advance it before the Assembly adjourned. But given the bipartisan interest, it is almost certain to reappear next year, and stands a good chance of passage – which would help ensure that residents have a say in data center proposals in their community. Lack of public awareness and input enabled mega-scale data centers in Beaver Dam and Port Washington.

But the pushback is underway, and ramping up. The Village of DeForest rejected a data center proposal after strong organized community pushback. The City of Madison passed a one-year moratorium on data centers to allow themselves time to study the issue and plan ahead. The Town of Cassville also stopped a data center and passed an ordinance preventing data centers for two years. These actions help set an example and encourage other communities to consider doing likewise.

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Chair’s Column

Ronda Conner, Chair

Greetings from the Four Lakes Group of the Sierra Club!

I hope you enjoyed Earth Month! A couple of ways that I celebrated was by picking up trash and attending the Wisconsin Chapter Volunteer Night on April 21. Volunteer Night is a monthly event and is so fun and inspirational. I met people who are passionate about protecting our environment and providing opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. We also had a presence at a number of Earth week events as you can learn about. As you read the newsletter, I am hoping that you will find inspiration as well.

We are looking forward to again having a presence at events and festivals in and around Dane County, and often table at the Dane County Farmers Market. This provides a great opportunity to talk directly with current and potential members about the Sierra Club, and about making a difference.

Our Recycling Away from Home team continues to provide support to major

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The City of Menomonie likewise not only rejected a data center proposal, but also created a toolkit to help other communities proactively plan for potential developments. They accomplished this despite a short time horizon after learning about the project and that officials had signed NDAs. And the City of Port Washington, after getting stuck with a huge data center without adequate community input, passed a referendum requiring voter approval before any tax incentives can be offered for future proposals.

In part due to the efforts by the Clean Economy Coalition of Wisconsin (that the Wisconsin Chapter is part of), the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin recently revised We Energies large load tariff proposal that would have allowed data centers to only pay for part of their power costs, stating that “Existing Wisconsin customers should not pay a single cent” to subsidize data centers. In addition, they made it clear that this ruling “will shape future proceedings”. (Alliant Energy also has a data center tariff docket proposal.)

Other states are taking on the issue more directly. While many states have been offering incentives for data centers to locate there, some are having second thoughts. In addition, over 30 states have or are considering legislation – or even moratoriums or bans on data centers. In Illinois, legislation is being proposed that would incentivize data centers to bring their own 100% clean energy with them to avoid burdening other customers. And in Michigan, DTE Energy is proposing agreements with Google and Oracle to bring more clean energy and demand flexibility than their proposed data centers would require.

This indeed shows progress, but communities will have to stay vigilant until if and when our legislature responds to the public outcry and passes legislation that will protect communities and the environment. Even then, toolkits such as the Sierra Club and Menomonie have created can help provide guidance to communities.

Looking forward, we will have a new governor and revamped state legislature next year, all based on elections occurring this fall. As major an issue as data centers and their impacts have become, asking legislators and candidates what their positions are on data centers and NDAs, and what they will do to help ensure our residents, and the waters and lands we rely on, are protected, are excellent questions to raise. After all, it’s the character of our communities and the natural heritage we love that are at stake.

community events and festivals, and we’re looking to expand our efforts to reduce waste. We also educate on outdoor activities and provide kids crafts at some events. I can't wait to be a part of more of these fun and rewarding events!

In addition, we offer many great opportunities to get involved, and follow your passions. We’re continuing to plan more social events and outings so that we can get out and explore and enjoy together – as you can read about by perusing our list of activities and outings in this newsletter. I hope that you will join us at one or more of these events.

Take care!

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Birds and Migration

Jennie Watson

Oh no! I couldn't see after the light bulb went off! That's exactly how deer and other animals react to bright lights. Just like it takes us a few seconds to adjust to natural light, animals do too. That's why deer stop and stare at your car lights. In a few seconds, their vision clears up, and they move on.

We're all excited to see the birds fly into Wisconsin! Orioles are usually the first to arrive. In Wisconsin, an estimated **4,283,500** birds migrated starting in May, 2026. They fly at night when most of us are asleep. Not only do birds migrate, but quite a number of wildlife are nocturnal and also hunt during the night.

Natural darkness is very important because artificial light interferes with their migration, feeding, and mating. Our friends' survival depends on a dark sky. The Cornell Lab and <https://darksky.org> have some great tips to help pollinators, fireflies, birds, and fish survive migration.

Simple steps to help include turning off outdoor lights at night. If you need a light, it's best to use one with motion detection, with the light directed downward, and has warmer colors like amber and red. You can also use decals, outside screens, or strings to warn birds of glass. I noticed the trees reflecting in our windows, so I put decals on the windows, and bird strikes have gone down.

Hummingbirds love sugar water for energy. Mix 1 cup of cane sugar with 4 cups of water. It's best to heat it and then refrigerate it. Never use organic or brown sugar, honey, or molasses since these sugars have too much iron. Even though hummingbirds are attracted to red, red dye is bad as well, but it's a good color for feeders. Orioles are drawn to orange. They'll eat the same nectar as hummingbirds, but can't use hummingbird feeders. Orioles also enjoy oranges and grape jelly – just make sure the jelly is made from cane sugar and real grapes.

We all love spring and summer when the birds migrate, fireflies light up, and crickets sing. Bats, hummingbirds, and others eat those pesky flies, mosquitoes, and gnats.

We want to protect them and encourage feeding in our yards.

One last set of pointers: Please don't use pesticides, herbicides, or insecticides like neonicotinoids (neon's). Ask before you buy plants as to which ones our feathered friends will appreciate and use most. And clean bird feeders and change water in bird baths often to help prevent diseases.

Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund

There is sad news to pass along – but we'll close on a more hopeful note. Our legislature failed to pass legislation to renew the highly popular Knowles-Nelson Stewardship fund. With the legislative session ended for this year, it's highly unlikely anything will occur this year. This very productive program has provided millions of dollars annually for land acquisition and recreational enhancements since it was passed in 1989 – and leveraged additional public and private funds as well. Until recently, it has always had strong bipartisan support.

Governor Evers had proposed renewing the Stewardship fund at \$100 million/year for the next decade, but the Republican majority legislature balked at this, with the Assembly only proposing funding for maintenance on current lands for two years – along with increased legislative oversight. Neither the Democratic Senate proposal for funding at \$72 million/yr, nor an amendment to have an independent oversight board were accepted. The Republicans failed to reach consensus in the Senate, leaving the fund to languish as the Democrats refused to accept a bad deal.

But Knowles-Nelson is widely revered on a bipartisan basis by Wisconsin's citizens, leaving us very hopeful for the future. Gathering Waters put in an exemplary effort to see Knowles-

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Activities and Outings

Sign up for most events on our website calendar links at <https://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/four-lakes>.

Dane County Farmers Market Tabling

Saturdays, ~ 9 am – noon

Capitol Square, North Hamilton corner

We often table on Farmers Market Saturdays, and if you enjoy engaging with others about environmental issues, we invite you to join us, or stop by and say hi.

Sign up at <https://signup.com/go/FyTiNVg>, or contact d_ferber@sbcglobal.net for more information.

Tree Planting

Saturday, May 16, 9:00 - 10:30 am

Lexington Dr, Oregon

We're planting 28 native trees for the Village of Oregon and Trees of Hope in an underserved area in need of vegetation and habitat. The event cancels if there is heavy rain. Wear clothing that can get dirty, and bring work gloves. The village will provide the tools and supplies. Bring a refillable water bottle. We'll have snacks and water to refill your bottles.

Highway Cleanup

Sunday, May 17, Noon - 2 pm (repeats generally on the 2nd Sunday each month)

Riverside Rd, Ft Atkinson

We adopted a section of highway along the scenic Rock River from Rock River Park to east of Hwy 26. We're looking for people or groups to help with our efforts to clean up and beautify nature. Wear sturdy footwear and work gloves and clothes, and dress for conditions, and we'll provide the bags and tools. Cancels if wet. Possible social afterwards.

Four Lakes Social

Thursday, May 21, 4:30 - 6:30 pm

Garver Feed Mill, Madison

Hang out with your local Four Lakes Group and learn about what we're up to at the Garver Feed for an evening social event. We'll gather for some friendly conversation and to socialize – and we'll provide some food and refreshments as well.

We'll also tour our origami fish exhibit (in support of shutting down tar sands Line 5), and be adding a new origami fish hoop feature – and welcome feedback on other display opportunities.



This picture shows 7 of our 8' origami fish panels on an east wall at Garver Feed Mill that were part of our world record display in Milwaukee in July, 2025. The Garver display was set up in November, 2025, and is always open for viewing.

The origami record was set to bring attention to the need to shut down tar sands Line 5. Oil and water don't mix! Nor do tar sands oil and fish!

We'll see this and talk about our ongoing fight to shut down Line 5 at our May 21 social.

Activities, continued from page 4

Monthly Action Hour

Tuesday, May 26, 6 - 7 pm (repeats on the 4th Tuesday each month)

Online

The Wisconsin Chapter hosts an action hour to learn about an environmental issue, and then learn how you can take action or get more involved. The topic is different each month.

Sierra Club Book Club

June 2, 6:30 – 8 pm (repeats every two months)

Online

Join our book club, with books each year suggested by members of our campaign teams. It's an opportunity to read a great new book – and discuss it with other like-minded activists or readers.

UW Arboretum Walks

Wednesday, June 3, 9:30 - 11:30 am (repeats 1st Wednesday each month, but 2nd Wednesday in July and September)

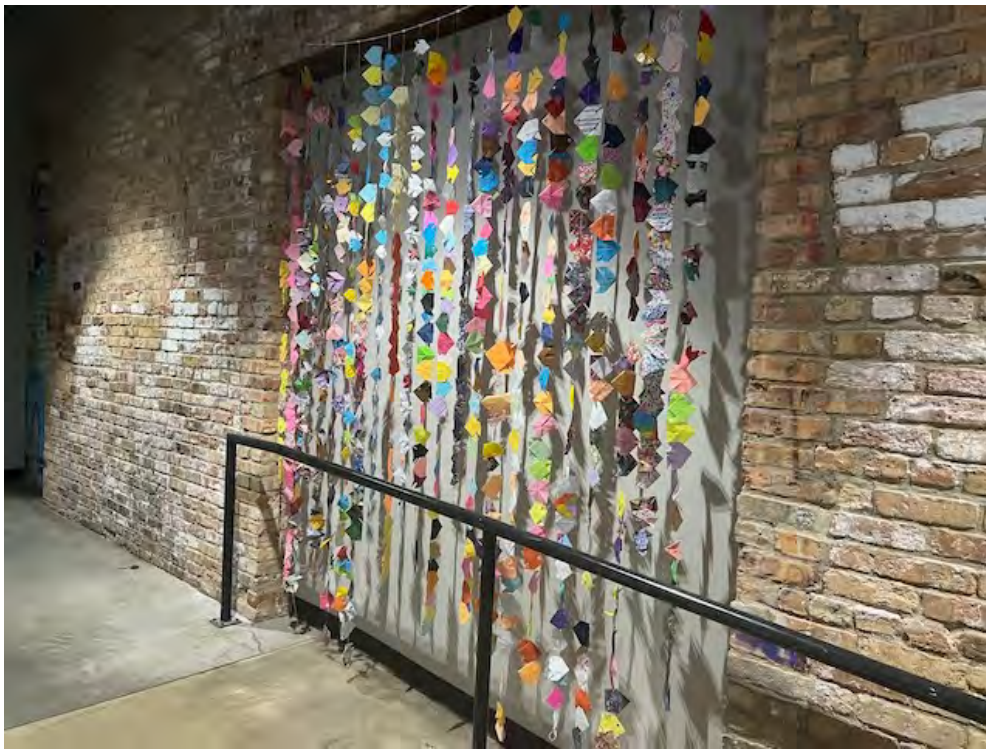
UW Madison Arboretum visitor center

Come explore, enjoy and learn about the wonderful UW Arboretum, it's diverse landscapes, habitat and wildlife, and history, while we walk through a different area each month. Some months, we may have an expert along to talk about some subject. Possible lunch afterwards. Cancels if there is heavy rain.

Recycling Away from Home

Atwoodfest, 7/25 – 26; Africafest, mid August; Laborfest, 9/7

We'll be again be looking for volunteers to help ensure trash and recyclables are sorted properly at events, and bring more attention to waste reduction and the need to cut down on throwing things away. Watch for signups on our website calendar. We're also looking at other efforts to reduce waste, and if you'd like to learn more or get involved, contact d_ferber@sbcglobal.net for more information.



This picture at Garver Feed Mill along the hallway to Sitka Salmon Shares shows some of the fish strings that were also part of our world record display in Milwaukee.

There are also pictures on the other side of this hallway of the awe-inspiring display of over 86,000 fish!

Come see this at our May 21 social, and help us install a new fish hoop in the hallway. We're also looking for ideas or thoughts on other locations you can suggest too!

Volunteer Opportunity – Four Lakes Board

If you're concerned about the environment and want to have an impact, our Four Lakes board depends on people like you. We're looking for passionate people who want to create change, and joining us gives you the opportunity to have a say on the issues we weigh in on. Contact Ronda Conner to learn more or join a meeting to see if this might be a fit.

Earth Week Recap

Earth week was sure a busy one again this year for the Four Lakes Group! (In the Sierra Club, we believe every week should be Earth Week, but Earth week offers an opportunity to bring added attention.)

It began on Tuesday, April 21 when we tabled at the UW Madison Earthfest Forum. It was a great opportunity to connect with other like-minded organizations, and also UW students, many who are looking ahead to future careers in the environment. There was also a presentation and panel on what we can each do as individuals to be more sustainable.

Wednesday, thanks to UW Rock County, we tabled in Evansville where they experienced a bad hailstorm just one year ago. There was a wonderful presentation by a meteorologist on hail (and also tornados) that fascinated kids and adults alike. Did you know the largest recorded hailstone in Illinois was 6 5/8”!

Saturday was especially busy, starting with tabling at the Dane County Farmers Market in the morning, before moving on to Janesville for their enjoyable Sustainable Living Fair that afternoon. We heard numerous concerns about the major data center proposed there from many Janesville residents.

Saturday evening, there was a music concert in support of the Bad River Band and shutting down tar sands Line 5 in northern Wisconsin. Not only was the music great, but one of the musicians wrote a special song about Line 5! While the subject was sad, it was a very nice way to end the day and gather with others concerned about indigenous rights and protecting Mother Earth.

Sunday brought the great family-oriented annual Madison Bird and Nature Festival at Warner Park in Madison. (Shout out to Paul

Noeldner who organizes Madison Friends of Urban Nature outings and this festival for inspiring so many others to appreciate and enjoy nature.)

We had a great presence at the Bird and Nature Festival, with our Chapter Wildlife team having a number of particularly beaver focused kids’ activities, including coloring beavers and making a beaver mask, and also did a presentation on beavers.

It was a highly successful week where we engaged many people in conversation, handed out a lot of literature to help inform people, had many excited kids do activities, and also got 110 signatures on our Hold Data Center Accountable petition – half at the Bird and Nature Festival. (Our data center petition is the most popular petition we’ve ever had. People can’t wait to sign it!)



Volunteers at the Bird and Nature Festival providing activities and information to adults and kids alike

Earth Week continued from page 6

We're looking forward to doing it again next year. But in the meantime, we'll be continuing our outreach and tabling at the Dane County Farmers Market, and other festivals and events. It's really fun meeting and engaging with new people – many who already know about the Sierra Club, and often have their own information or insights to share - so please consider joining us at one or more events.

Knowles-Nelson continued from page 3

Nelson continued and helped coordinate efforts among environmental organizations, did extensive lobbying, and had a post card campaign to state legislators. We had our own post cards that many people filled out at tabling events, and then were likewise sent to their legislators.

We'll be working to elect a more progressive legislature next year, along with a supportive governor, who will heed our citizens' wishes and renew the funding. Please ask legislative and gubernatorial candidates about their support for Knowles-Nelson next year, how much they will ask for for land acquisition, and for how long.

Wisconsin's citizens deserve better – and you should demand that. As our population grows, preserving our natural resources and recreational opportunities will be all the more critical.

Tightening our Beltline

They're at it again. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation wants to add more lanes to Madison's Beltline Hwy to relieve congestion. After all, that's worked so well in the past, right?

If you've been in Madison for some time, you may remember when the eastern portion of the Beltline was Broadway, and they built the new Beltline to the south to relieve congestion. They've also added more Beltline lanes, including flex lanes for rush hour. Have you driven that in rush hour lately?

If every time congestion occurs, we add more lanes, where does it end? Houston now has a 26 (yes, 26!) lane highway they built to reduce travel times, and other than temporary relief, even that hasn't worked. Yes, induced demand continues to work, but part of the DOT proposal includes possibly adding more lanes in the western section, or perhaps more areas with flex lanes.

Part of the problem with the proposal is that putting more traffic on the beltline will add more stresses to connectors. Think of the massive Verona Rd. interchange rebuild that has already resulted in traffic backups many years before projected. That will also likely occur at other intersections, especially roadways that funnel significant traffic on and off the Beltline, resulting in further problems.

As a car-centric society, we need roadways, but it's far from the sole mobility solution. Many people choose not to or cannot drive, and construction and added traffic come with significant economic and environmental costs – many of which are not fully accounted for. Adding lanes to the Beltline could also result in loss of low-income housing as well as added impacts to those along the corridor.

Fortunately, the City of Madison also has raised significant concerns with adding more lanes and is working with the DOT on options to lower traffic volumes and stress on the Beltline and provide more alternatives for more people.

If you wish to get involved or voice your concerns, search online for "Beltline PEL Study" and you'll find information about options being considered, along with opportunities to make comments and where you can get on a mailing list to be notified about future developments and hearings.

What is decided here will impact Madison and the entire region for many years to come, including how our community grows, and if we will provide equitable and environmentally friendly options. What road do you want to put us on?



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Our focus is environmentally friendly, cost-effective member communications which includes this newsletter, the Four Lakes Enews, and our web site and Facebook page. If we don't have your email, we mail you a hard copy – or you can request one. Otherwise, members get an email when the newsletter download is available. Our newsletters are posted at <https://tinyurl.com/4LGnews>. You can also set your contact preferences at <https://myaccount.sierraclub.org/>.

Please consider sending your email address to d_ferber@sbcglobal.net if we don't have it to save paper and the cost of mailing. Plus, we can also send you our Enews to keep you better informed and up to date.

Waste reduction and Recycling Away from Home

We know we're a throw away society, with way too much waste. Since we don't have a planet B, maybe we should consider plan B. Our Recycling Away from Home has helped keep trash and recycling sorted at Madison events to bring attention to waste and help educate people about how to recycle better. We'll be helping out at a number of events again this year: Atwoodfest on July 25 & 26, Africafest in mid August, and Laborfest on September 7. We also have a table at Atwoodfest and Laborfest which provides further opportunities to reach out, engage people, and let them know what the Four Lakes Group is up to. Watch our website calendar and Enews for events postings where you can join our crew and efforts.

Even though we're helping ensure that recyclables go to the recycling center, that's not enough. Plastic products are made from fossil fuels, and too much of it is not recycled. We should be refusing, reimagining, reducing and reusing before we even think about recycling – and we're not even doing enough of that.

A Zero Waste Madison Repair Fair helped people reuse rather than discard items. Madison also has a Beyond Plastics group we're planning to work with on waste reduction. Connecting with festival food vendors and restaurants could help them buy more affordable and sustainable products and reduce use of waste. There may be other avenues to pursue as well, so if you have ideas, or want to help with our efforts to reduce waste, contact Don at d_ferber@sbcglobal.net.