

Crossroads Group Sierra Club



SUMMER 2026

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Crossroads' Balloonfest Refreshment Stand

The Crossroads Group will once again have its "world famous" refreshment stand at the annual Michigan Challenge Balloonfest in Howell. The dates are Friday, Saturday and Sunday, **June 26-28, with setup on Thursday, June 25.**

For many years, we have been serving up food and drinks at the Balloon festival. This year we will have sandwiches and assorted chips, cookies and beverages. The refreshment stand raises the money that allows us to bring so much value to our community. It funds all our programs, our outings, our newsletters and our conservation and political work.

But it does not happen without our Crossroads Group supporters! Refreshment stand volunteers get a **free pass** into the event and the opportunity to meet other members of the Sierra Club and learn what friendly and dedicated people we are! We have shifts all weekend long to meet your schedule, and people often come early or stay late to enjoy the activities and spectacles surrounding the festival. One cannot say enough about the sight of dozens of hot air balloons lifting off into the summer sky...and there is no better vantage point than our booth, which overlooks the launch field. Friday night has the fireworks and Saturday night the balloon-glow.

The biggest reward is knowing that by giving only a few hours of your time you help make Crossroads Group a vital force for environmental leadership in our area. Suggested volunteer shifts are as follows but feel free to modify them as needed to fit your schedule.

- Thursday setup: Evening (usually 6:30- 8:00 PM)
- Friday: 1-4 PM, 3-7 PM, 5-9 PM, 6-10 PM
- Saturday: 10 AM-2 PM, 12-6 PM, 2-6 PM, 5-9 PM, 6-10 PM
- Sunday: 10 AM-2 PM, 2-6 PM, 5-9 PM

For more information or to volunteer: Send your preferred times along with your name and phone number to: Crossroads.Sierraclub@gmail.com. Volunteers will receive more details prior to the event.

Thanks in advance to those of you who can lend a hand with the refreshment stand and help the Crossroads Sierra Club remain a vital part of our community. We look forward to seeing you in June.



Crossroads Group Events

See our Meetup site [meetup.com/Sierra-Club-Crossroads-Group](https://www.meetup.com/Sierra-Club-Crossroads-Group) for more details about these outings and programs (including possible cancellations or changes) and to see details when we schedule future events. Meetup is free to join, and a great way to let us know who is attending each event and to allow us to communicate with our members and for you to communicate with us.

Kensington Metropark weeknight hike – Wednesday June 17, 7pm

Location: Kensington Metropark Nature Center, Milford

Join us for a 2 or 4-mile hike around Wildwing Lake and other nature trails.

Guardians of Aotearoa: Preserving New Zealand's Wild Beauty – Wednesday September 16, 7 pm

Location: Brighton District Library: 100 Library Dr, Brighton

New Zealand has an extraordinary range of plants and animals found nowhere else in the world, yet it also is the country with the highest proportion of native species trending towards extinction. Join us to hear the history of conservation in New Zealand, and learn about one of the boldest ecological restoration projects in the world: Predator Free 2050. Learn about the successes, challenges, and the unique role of Māori guardianship in shaping conservation efforts. We'll also explore what the world can learn from New Zealand's approach.

More hikes and other outings will be scheduled on our Meetup site soon.

In Memorium

This has been a tough time for us; we have lost two of our beloved Crossroads Group leaders since our last newsletter printing.

Matt Mercure was an outings leader who also helped with recruiting, welcoming new leaders, and political advocacy during his 12 years as a Crossroads volunteer. Matt was a favorite hike leader for anyone interested in learning about nature. His enthusiasm was infectious as he taught people about the trees, plants, and birds along the trails. He often stopped to pick up trash or cut invasive plants, showing his avid dedication to the environment.

Matt was a kind and caring person who will be deeply missed by everyone who knew him.



Terry Gannon, a strong activist for environmental protection and social justice, was a part of Crossroads for nearly 25 years. He was our group's treasurer, then our newsletter editor for many years. In addition, he could always be counted on to help out at many events such as our Balloonfest refreshment stand and our highway cleanups.

Terry and his wife Carole regularly opened their home for leaders' meetings. Terry and Carole were almost like parent figures to many of us. Their kindness and warmth were always present.



Data Centers in Michigan – Shirley Jackson

Data Centers is a hot topic throughout the entire country and it can be difficult to know what information currently in circulation is factual, what is mis or disinformation, what facts warrant action, and what types of actions are effective. This article was composed from the national Sierra Club website (sierraclub.org) and the Sierra Club Michigan Chapter website (sierraclub.org/Michigan). Both of these resources contain valuable additional data center information.

What are data centers? Data centers are large windowless warehouses that store large servers, hardware, networking equipment, and other computing technologies. It's important to note these facilities can range in size from smaller operations that are localized to meet specific needs to much larger ones that run cloud computing for industries such as Meta, Amazon, and Google. Data center development has surged nationwide in recent years. The increasing demand for computing power, fueled by artificial intelligence and cryptocurrency, is placing unprecedented strain on the energy grid, land, water resources and health of local communities.

What are the risks of data centers? Utilities are being pushed to build new power plants, often fueled by fossil fuels, to serve these facilities' around-the-clock electricity needs. Without strong safeguards, households and small businesses could be left paying for costly infrastructure while communities face worsening air pollution, water stress, and land-use conflicts.

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing the internet. There is also an influx of tech companies seeking to build "hyperscale" data centers that support AI. The hyperscale facilities *consume as much energy as a mid-sized city*, like Orlando. They use an enormous amount of water, and occupy hundreds or even thousands of acres.

Why are so many data centers proposed in Michigan? Big tech companies are flocking to Michigan due to an abundance of water, a cooler climate, an abundance of land near major infrastructure, and the generous tax incentives in Michigan that are aimed at attracting large-scale development. This surge in growth is driven by infrastructure and cost advantages, not by local demand, and raises questions about energy use, utility costs, and long-term public benefit.

Truths (More examples can be found on the Sierra Club websites.)

*Truth: The majority of jobs come from construction. When online, they employ fewer than McDonald's.

*Truth: While closed-water systems use less water than evaporative cooling systems, they use more power

*Truth: While they can generate property taxes, they can actually cause nearby property values to drop due to more frequent noise pollution, grid outages, light pollution, and water contamination.

Take Action!

Sierra Club is working to ensure data centers grow responsibly – without sacrificing air, affordable electricity, or climate progress. Their approach focuses on four key guardrails to ensure that utilities, and their regulators, steer data center development toward outcomes that benefit communities, workers, and the climate. Each of the four main categories have several subcategories that further highlight the on-going work, and the **Data Center State Policies, 2026** document can be read in full at sierraclub.org/sites/default/files/2026-01/policies-for-data-centers-2026.pdf, or using the QR code shown below. Supporting Sierra Club's promotion of these key areas is one action individuals can take.

Communicating with lawmakers is another way individuals can make their voices heard. To find your state rep go to www.house.mi.gov and enter your address. The following bills in the Michigan House (HB) and Senate (SB) are currently in the 103 Legislature:

*HB 5394 – 5396 a moratorium on all new data center construction through April 2027.

*HB 5396/5397 repeals the 2024 data center tax exemptions.

*HB 5362 revokes the \$100M in state funds directed to the Ypsilanti Township data center.

*HB 5399 bans NDAs between tech companies and public officials.

*HB 5777 requires data centers to register with the state, disclose impacts, and post financial security.

*SB 761 caps data center water withdrawals at 2 million gallons/day.

*SB 763 bans utilities from passing data center water infrastructure costs to ratepayers.

Additional ways concerned citizens can make a positive impact are: submit a public comment or testify at a hearing, organize your community, share information so others know what's at stake, help your community pass a local ordinance, and participate in local engagement to ensure data center development is responsible, transparent, and protective of community needs.

Scan this QR code to see the
National Sierra Club's
Data Center State Policies, 2026
document



Selecting the Right Bug Spray – Pam Bethune

A quick reminder: No insect repellent is 100% effective, so double up on protection like long-sleeved clothing and be sure to check for ticks if you travel through especially wooded areas. Fun Fact: Ticks are not bugs; they are parasitic arachnids.

DEET

Good: Highly effective, long-lasting, recommended by the CDC and World Health Organization

Bad: Non-biodegradable, can harm aquatic ecosystems, greasy, smelly

What is it? DEET is the oldest and most well-studied insect repellent. It's incredibly effective against mosquitoes, ticks, and other biting insects. It's safe for most people, including pregnant women and children older than two months. Follow the instructions to avoid overexposure and keep DEET away from your eyes or any broken skin. Skip combo sunscreen-repellent products: Sunscreens must be re-applied every two hours and this could lead to DEET overexposure.

The environmental catch? DEET doesn't break down easily. It may harm aquatic life and even drinking water. It can also damage plastics, including sunglasses, phone cases, and synthetic fabrics.

Takeaway: In tick-heavy woods a 20% to 30% DEET spray is the safest bet and should last up to 8 hours.

Picaridin

Good: Comparable protection to DEET, less toxic to aquatic life, safe for gear, not too greasy. CDC/WHO recommended

Bad: Still synthetic, not as studied as DEET for avoiding some pathogens

What is it? Picaridin is a synthetic repellent modeled after a natural compound in pepper plants for protection against most mosquitoes, ticks, flies, and fleas. Picaridin is nearly odorless, non-greasy, and won't damage plastic, rubber, or synthetic fabrics so it can be sprayed on gear. A 20% concentration of Picaridin is safe for most people to use, including pregnant individuals and children older than two months.

The environmental catch? Still synthetic, but it is less harmful to aquatic life than DEET.

Takeaway: It's ideal for daily use, travel, and outdoor activities—and lasts roughly 6-8 hours per application.

Oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE)

Good: Plant-derived, biodegradable

Bad: Shorter protection time, not effective against ticks, not safe for kids under 3

What is it? Oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE) is the most effective plant-based repellent currently available. The active ingredient in OLE-based repellents is PMD, a compound derived from the lemon eucalyptus tree (not the essential oil). It's technically a biopesticide and considered non-toxic. It should not be used in children under 3 years old—and lasts for a maximum of 6 hours. Another important caveat: OLE is effective against mosquitoes but not ticks. That's true of most plant-based repellents. At around 30%, OLE can protect against mosquitoes for about 4-6 hours.

The environmental catch? None, really. OLE is plant-derived and biodegradable.

Takeaway: OLE is a solid, natural option for low-risk activities. Just be sure to reapply every 4-6 hours and avoid using it on children under 3

Essential oils (citronella, cedarwood & more)

Good: Natural, pleasant-smelling, biodegradable.

Bad: Very short protection time, limited effectiveness, **doesn't repel ticks.**

What is it? These repellents use natural essential oils like citronella, cedarwood, lemongrass, and clove. They're commonly found in sprays and lotions and in bug-repellent bracelets. They are too unreliable for meaningful disease prevention. Most of these products provide one hour or less of protection and evaporate quickly. Best reserved for low-risk situations and not recommended when bugs or disease are a major concern.

The environmental catch? Generally safe and biodegradable, some essential oils can trigger allergic reactions or skin sensitivity. It's always smart to test on a small patch of skin before you put it everywhere.

Takeaway: Use these only when risk is low—like quick errands or casual weekend hangs. Don't rely on them for serious protection.

Permethrin

Good: Kills mosquitoes and ticks on contact; long-lasting on fabrics.

Bad: Not for skin use; synthetic; toxic to cats and aquatic life when wet; requires prep

What is it? Permethrin is a synthetic insecticide derived from chrysanthemum flowers. Unlike DEET or Picaridin, it's meant for clothing, and gear—not skin. It can last up to a year on the things that you spray it on. Permethrin-treated clothing can remain effective through six washes. It kills ticks and mosquitoes on contact, rather than just repelling them, which makes it especially useful in areas where Lyme disease is a big concern.

The environmental catch? When still wet, it is very toxic to cats and aquatic life. Once dry it is stable and poses minimal environmental risk

Takeaway: A great level of protection for adventures that you know will bring you into areas with a lot of mosquitoes and ticks. Pair it with another repellent for full-body protection.

Earth Day Festival 2026



The mill pond amphitheater in downtown Brighton was a busy place on Saturday, May 2. To celebrate Earth Day, the Crossroads Group hosted a special event from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM featuring speakers, live music, kids' activities and informational tables from environmental groups in the area.

The public was invited to browse through the offerings, enjoy the music and increase their awareness about environmental issues that affect our planet. Speakers were all high school students who through their awareness of the challenges ahead demonstrated their commitment to a better world. Hartland High School student Dean Tormey's thoughtful and well-written speech "My Window" is available on our website sierraclub.org/michigan/crossroads or using the QR code shown here.



Local organizations that joined the Crossroads Group in this event were the Huron River Watershed Council, the Huron Valley Audubon Society, the Livingston Land Conservancy, the local Wild Birds Unlimited franchise, Great Lakes Renewable Energy Association, Friends of Highland State Recreation Area, and the local Cooperative for Invasive Species Management.

In addition, St. Paul's Episcopal Church and Crossroads offered kids activities and Veg Michigan had a tent with some food samples. In past years the event attracted a good showing of Brighton area citizens who enjoyed the music, listened to the featured speakers, and learned about the many groups working to protect the health of our planet. This year was the same with so much to learn and enjoy for all ages at this special Earth Day celebration.

How does eating more plants help the planet? – Terri Wilkerson



Simplified, for one year, two football fields (2.6 acres total) can feed 1 person eating a standard American diet which includes meat and dairy - or - 14 people eating a completely plant-based or vegan diet (no meat or dairy). *source: [The Plantician Project](#)*

So, by eating more plants and eating less meat and dairy in general, we can support more people on less land.

Small changes add up quickly! Try new food combos for variety. One of my favs is this simple, scoopable salad to enjoy with tortilla chips:

Guacamole Salsa Salad

½ cup or more of your favorite salsa handful of arugula, chopped finely 1 avocado, chunked or individual guacamole serving

Mix the salsa and arugula together and then gently fold in the avocado or guacamole (so you don't get a brown mush). Dig in with your favorite tortilla chips. If you want to put a little lime and/or cilantro in the mix, that is good, too. This has become a warm weather go-to for me, though I do like it all year long!



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Good Fat Life

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