



It's Our Nature

Fox Valley Group of the Sierra Club - Wisconsin Chapter Vol. 26 Issue 2

Fox Valley Group Meetings

September 10, 2026 - 7:00 pm
***And Then There Was Time...
Adventures in Photography
With Bruce Danz***



A photographer since age 8, when I was given a Kodak Instamatic 104 camera. I have always been drawn photographically to the landscape. I developed my eye for light, form and composition from studying classic works of painted and photographic art from early childhood. My passion is to see and record the beauty of nature in its various forms and hope to convey to the viewer the

same joy and wonder that I experience. I believe nature photography should also be enlightening and revealing of the wonders that surround us. I seek to portray not only beauty, but also behavior and emotion in wildlife. I also seek to portray the beauty of the night sky in relation to the landscape.

For me, the appreciation of nature produces feelings of gratitude, and from there, a determination to preserve that which is natural for our children to enjoy. Although I love to travel, much of my photography will be from that which is most familiar to me in the upper Midwest.

I am a retired Family Physician, having practiced at Kaukauna Clinic, SC for 37 years. I live in Appleton, Wisconsin with my wife, Chris, and we have four children and two grandchildren. I am involved in local conservation through the Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust and enjoy doing local photo presentations. I am a regular photo contributor to Our Wisconsin Magazine. I recently had a photography exhibit at Capitol Lakes Gallery in Madison and currently have a photography exhibit at the Aylward Gallery in Menasha. I enjoy doing photo presentations and am interested in doing more with retirement/nursing homes.

October 8, 2026 - 7:00pm
Birds in the Winter

Winnebago Audubon encourages people to enjoy and protect birds, other wildlife, and their habitats through recreation, education, conservation, and restoration of the natural environment. The speaker will talk about winter birds in our area and how to support them until spring.

November 12, 2026 - 7:00pm
***Postcards, Desserts
and more ?***

Come for dessert while we choose topics to write about that express some of our concerns affecting us all. We will then mail out the postcards. Desserts will be provided by the Board. (Others are welcomed but not required.)

December 10, 2026 - 6:30pm
Holiday Party

Celebrate! Details coming.

**All Meetings will be at the Girl
Scout Building**
4693 N. Lynndale Drive, Appleton
(next to Bubolz Nature Preserve)

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

Sierra Club Calendars

**Stay up to date and organized with a beautiful
Sierra Club 2027 calendar!**

- All calendars must be pre-ordered
- The discounted cost is the same as last year, \$17 for Wilderness wall calendar and \$18 for Engagement calendar
- To order, email Diane Mandler - dsmandler@gmail.com by September 15.
- She will mail calendars for whatever the post office charges or you can pick up at a regular meeting.
- Questions? Email Diane at above address

Support your Fox Valley Sierra Group

Help us Explore, Enjoy and Protect
through monthly meetings, outings,
service projects, education, social media
and published newsletters.

**Mail donations to
Fox Valley Group of the Sierra Club,
567 Oak St., Neenah, WI 54956**

*Contact any board member if you would
like to join our Group Board.*

Line 5 – Some Bad News & Some Good News

by Karen Van Offeren

As of my last reporting, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' decision to grant permits for Enbridge's reroute of the Line 5 oil pipeline had been upheld in court. These permits allowed Enbridge Energy to build a new 41-mile segment of pipeline around the Bad River Reservation. That was the latest as of February 2026.

Let's fast forward to June 2026.

On June 27, 2026, work crews spilled up to 1,900 gallons of drilling fluid as they were working on the reroute in the town of Gurney in Iron County.

The spill is classified as an inadvertent return or unintentional release of drilling fluid. It is commonly called a "frac-out."

Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR) shared an update from an email they obtained. According to Elizabeth Romfoe, the DNR's northern region spill coordinator, "The estimated volume released is 1500-1900 gallons of the bentonite clay, mostly in the forested wetland. About 5-8 gallons entered Vaughn Creek."



Photos from Earthjustice via the Bad River tribe

She went on to say that the clay had been removed from the creek in roughly an hour, and that the spill was being contained within the wetland. Subsequently, a DNR spokesperson said that the amounts of the spill had been verified and that Enbridge was working to remove the drilling fluid from the wetland.

The Bad River tribe and environmental advocates are arguing that Enbridge violated the waterway and wetland permit that the DNR issued in 2024. The permit states that the company "shall not discharge drilling mud into wetlands, waterways or sensitive areas." The drilling mud being used is a combination of water and clay.

WPR also reports that the DNR has issued two notices of noncompliance to Enbridge since March, excluding this spill, and that the company has remedied two other issues identified by the DNR.

For the complete report, see "[Wisconsin regulators respond to drilling fluid spill on Enbridge's Line 5 reroute](#)" on the WPR website (updated 07-01-26).

For more information on frac-outs and the potential impacts, see "[Line 5 Reroute: Construction Concerns](#)" on the Sierra Club website (07-09-26).

In July, Line 5 news shifted to Michigan.

In mid-July, the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) approved a permit authorizing Enbridge to discharge treated construction wastewater generated as it creates a tunnel beneath the Straits of Mackinac. Michigan officials said the permit includes conditions designed to protect water quality, and that it complies with Michigan environmental regulations.

Earthjustice Managing Attorney Debbie Chizewer responded, "Our environmental laws, the looming climate crisis, and simple common sense tells us that an oil pipeline doesn't belong in the Great Lakes. ... Today's decision is a setback, but we're not giving up."

For the complete report, see "[Michigan Grants Key Permit to Enbridge for Line 5 Tunnel Project, Drawing Sharp Tribal Opposition](#)" on the Native News Online website (07-15-26).

But more hopeful news followed. **On July 31st**, Native News reported that the Michigan Supreme Court has overturned a key permit authorizing Enbridge's proposed Line 5 tunnel beneath the Straits of Mackinac. This sends the project back to the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) for a new review.

Native News explains, "In its decision, the state's highest court ruled that the MPSC violated the Michigan Environmental Protection Act and failed to fulfill its obligations under Michigan's public trust doctrine when it approved Enbridge's tunnel permit in 2023. The ruling requires the commission to reconsider the application using the legal standards outlined by the court."

They also note that "while the ruling does not permanently halt the tunnel proposal, it requires the MPSC to reconsider the permit under a more rigorous environmental review, providing Tribal Nations another opportunity to argue that the project should not move forward."

For more details, see "[Michigan Supreme Court Overturns Line 5 Tunnel Permit, Delivering Major Victory for Tribal Nations](#)" on the Native News Online website (07-31-26).

In August, we return to Wisconsin.

On August 6, 2026, Wisconsin Public Radio reported that the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals found that Enbridge has been trespassing on the Bad River tribe's reservation and must remove its oil and gas pipeline.

This decision comes seven years after the Bad River tribe sued Enbridge in federal court to shut down and remove Line 5 from its lands.

The federal appeals panel upheld a lower court's decision that Enbridge is trespassing but ordered a federal judge to revisit the amount of damages and give the company a "reasonable opportunity" to complete the Line 5 reroute.

The reroute of Line 5 is currently underway, running 41 miles around the tribe's reservation in Ashland and Iron counties.

The three-judge federal appeals panel urged "oversight and accountability" in the form of monetary penalties or reporting to ensure that Enbridge completes the reroute "as soon as possible."

For the complete report, see "[Federal appeals court finds Enbridge trespassing on tribal lands, must remove Line 5](#)" on the Wisconsin Public Radio website (08-06-26).

Knowles-Nelson – No Longer Funded But Not Dead

by Karen Van Offeren

As most of you know, funding for the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship program expired as of June 30, 2026. And as frustrating as that is, we need to remember that the program itself is not dead!

On July 3, 2026, Charles Carlin, Director of Strategic Initiatives for Gathering Waters, spoke on PBS Wisconsin's Hear & Now segment. Here are some of the key points he shared:

"Land that has been protected with Knowles-Nelson is permanently protected. Nothing is going to undo that. What it means, however, moving forward is if we need a new segment of the Ice Age Trail or the North Country Trail, there's no state money to make that happen."

"As that stuff (e.g., trailhead parking, map kiosks, boat launches) ages and needs to be repaired, we have now shot ourselves in the foot and taken away really our only significant source of funding to do that, to take care of that infrastructure."

"This doesn't have to be Knowles-Nelson is done forever. So what's happened is the money has run out, but the program stays on the books. So all of the laws that guide it are there. The DNR staff who administer the program are still there. What we need is for the Legislature to come back and invest money in the program so that it can get moving again."

However, when speaking with the Wisconsin Examiner, Carlin also voiced an important reminder. Even if a bill restarting the program was introduced, passed, sent to the governor and signed without any delays, it could still be close to a year before the program itself would be back on track. The type of land acquisitions funded through Knowles-Nelson require long-term planning and the "ripple effects go way beyond that 12-month period of time."

And what are the political proponents of Knowles-Nelson saying? The Wisconsin Examiner reports, "legislative Democrats have stated that if voters elect Democratic majorities in the Legislature and a Democratic governor, re-authorizing the program will be among the first priorities."

Senator Jodi Habush Sinykin (D-Whitefish Bay), one of the authors of the failed Democratic bill to reauthorize the program, calls the expiration just a "pause." She's working to get a Knowles-Nelson bill passed regardless of the November election results.

Team Knowles-Nelson is continuing their work as well. They're intent on growing the Team Knowles-Nelson network, and they continue to talk with lawmakers and candidates about getting the Stewardship Program funded again.

For more details, see "[Charles Carlin on Knowles-Nelson Stewardship funds expiring](#)" on the PBS Wisconsin website, News tab (07-03-26) and "[Knowles Nelson Stewardship Program dead at 37](#)" on the Wisconsin Examiner website (07-01-26).

From the Chair

September 2026

Hello Fox Valley Sierrans

I hope your summer is going well with plenty of opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors. I know many people in our community were deeply affected by the tornado last month. Whether you lost your home, property, place of employment, the place that memories were made for you or your sense of security, our hearts are with each and every one of you.

One of the beautiful things that rose from the rubble of this tragedy was the strong sense of community that exists here. Neighbors were helping neighbors clear away debris, find lost pets and providing food, water, shelter, and other essential supplies. While I was one of the lucky ones that did not sustain damage, I received numerous texts, phone calls, and Facebook messages from people that I hadn't seen in years or talk to on a regular basis offering assistance. It was a touching reminder of just how many people out there truly care about our community. I hope that knowing gives you strength in navigating whatever challenges you are currently facing.

The other elephant in the room (and I truly debated whether I should bring this up because of the strong emotions swirling around it at the present moment) is our recent Wisconsin primary election. If your candidate was a winner, congratulations! While I hope you take a moment to celebrate before rolling up your sleeves and getting to work on November's critical general election, please remember that a *sizeable* portion of the electorate did not experience a victory lap. This is certainly not the time to explain why your candidate was, in fact, the right one, to hard sell your candidate or to guilt and shame people that are processing strong feelings right now. This is your time to listen to their concerns, to find the common ground, to identify the issues that your candidate needs to politically modify in order to bring people together and work with the other side to build a coalition that offers them some hope rather than a consolation prize and a stiff upper lip.

If your candidate was not the one chosen, my sincerest condolences. Listening on social media, it is evident that many people strongly supported candidates that didn't come out victorious. Take your time to grieve, feel angry or any other emotions that come up. But remember, while it may not seem like it at the moment, your voice is extremely important. Consider writing to David Crowley's campaign, attending town halls or other rallies to express your concerns. It is important that we have a governor in November that is responsive to his entire constituency not just the ones that checked the box next to his name in August. The more he hears from all of you, including those that voted for him and also have some concerns, the more likely he is to adjust his platform to one we can all get behind, or at least feel like we're not selling a piece of our soul by voting for him.

For everyone, I don't need to tell you that November's election is of extreme importance. One candidate has a deplorable environmental record (his nickname is Toxic Tom for a reason). One candidate worked to nullify your votes in November 2020. Moving the chains in the right direction, even if it is much less movement than you hoped for, is still moving in the right direction.

Wisconsin forward. Fox Valley Strong.
See you in the fall.

Penny Paiser-Wilson
Fox Valley Sierra Group chairperson

Fall Outings

For more information and to sign up use our website at sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley (Click on the Meeting and Outings Link)
Or contact the leader.

September 13 • Sunday • 10:30am

Wequiock Falls Hike - Brown Co. Park

Meet at Wequiock Falls County Park at 10:30 to check out the short uneven staircase down to view the falls. This will be followed by a short drive to the Wequiock Creek Natural area for a hike through a restored prairie and along Wequiock Creek. Plan about an hour hike. We can have a picnic lunch at the Natural Area or return to the falls for lunch. Wear sturdy shoes and a hiking pole might be useful on the stairs. Sign up on line or with Penny at pennybernardschaber@athenet.net

The link to the park: <https://www.browncountywi.gov/community/parks-department/general-information/wequiock-falls/>

October 3 • Saturday

Ice Age Trail Hike-a-thon - Hartman Creek

Come hike the beautiful trails at Hartman Creek State Park and help support the trail with donations used locally for trail development, maintenance and outreach. 2-7 miles. Each hiker receives a free bandana. Registration: 8:30 - 11 am; \$10 per person/\$25 family • Refreshments and snacks. Water/apple stations along trail. Questions?: [facebook.com/PortageWaupacaATA](https://www.facebook.com/PortageWaupacaATA)

October 11 • Sunday • 1:00pm

Greenway Arboretum, Fond du Lac

Enjoy a pleasant hike through the Arboretum led by our hosts Laura DeGoliér and Diana Beck located at 55 W. Pioneer Rd. behind the Salvation Army Thrift store. If more hiking is wanted we can hike at Kiekhaefer Park. a short drive away. Sign up online or Contact Marjie Fendt - marjiefendt@gmail.com

October 18 • Sunday • 12:30pm

Little Chute Heesakker Park Hike

Explore Little Chutes waterfront, locks and some local parks. 2-3 mile hike. Details to come. Contact Monny Hjerstedt, mhjerstedt17@gmail.com, text 920-558-0013 or sign up online.

November 7 • Saturday • 10:00am - 1:00pm

Iola Ski Hill Ice Age Trail Hike

Meet at 10 AM in the Iola Ski Hill parking lot. We will plan to hike approximately 6 miles (approx 3 hours). Either a roundtrip on the Iola Ski Hill Segment or a thru hike of the Iola Ski Hill Segment and New Hope Segment. Hike is moderately challenging. This will be a weather dependent event so be sure to contact Peter Jobe at pjobe1@gmail.com or sign up on line.

November 15 • Sunday • 10:00am

1000 Islands Girl Scout Camp Hike Hike

An enjoyable fall hike at the 1000 Islands Girl Scout Camp in Kaukauna. Meet at 10:00 at the Girls Scout Camp parking lot on Highway Q just north of the 1000 Nature Center. There are several trails to choose from, all have hills and some stairs. We will plan to go to the observation deck to look for eagles and then continue on to Hoersch Memorial trail. Plan on about 2 hours of hiking. A link to the trail map: <https://kaukauna.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Conservancy-Zone-Map.pdf>
Sign up online or with Penny at pennybernardschaber@athenet.net

December 5 • Saturday • 10:00am

Navirino Nature Center Hike - Shiocton

Meet Navarino Nature Center parking lot. We will plan to hike approx. 4 miles (approx 2 hours) on the Nature Center Loop Trail. Hike is moderately challenging. This will be a weather dependent event so be sure to contact Peter Jobe at pjobe1@gmail.com or sign up on line.

The Mountain Bay State Trail is 30

The Shawano County Friends of the Mountain-Bay State Trail is celebrating the 30th anniversary of the trail with a series of special events throughout 2026 highlighting the trail's natural beauty, cultural heritage, outdoor recreation opportunities and community connections.

The trail is a "diamond in the rough," said Matty Mathison, who organizes the volunteer upkeep of the trail in Shawano County and is a member of the Friends group planning the anniversary celebrations. "It's one of the longest and oldest trails in the state of Wisconsin. It's open all year, allowing people to enjoy the route in every season. You can walk, bike and snowmobile, or go on horseback."

Mathison said the anniversary not only celebrates the trail but also the tremendous effort of the people who worked to create it 30 years ago. She hopes the events bring more awareness and "appreciation for something new in your backyard."

The anniversary celebration included a series of bike rides to cover the trail section-by-section, geocaching, Native American medicinal plant walk, Wild Ones Wisconsin native plant walk and talk, a self-guided poetry and photography walk, and a selfie scavenger hunt.

You can enjoy the self-guided Poetry and Photography Walk through Sept. 16 along about 1 mile of trail from Airport Road going east. The exhibit will combine poetry, photography and outdoor recreation while encouraging trail users to experience the landscape in a unique way. You can also participate in the selfie scavenger hunt through September 15 (possible prizes!)

Wrapping up the celebration, there are two final organized activities in September:

1) The last Trail section bike ride, Monday, Sept 7, 5:30 - 7:30 from MBT parking area on Ash Circle (just off Hwy 22, east of Shawano) to Bonduel, about 10 miles round trip.

2) Mountain-Bay State Trail Community Celebration on Saturday, September 26 from 10am - 2pm next to the Trailhead Info Center, 620 S. Main St., Shawano. Free food, games, family activities, trail walk/ride, artwork display, Native American plant medicine identification and great prizes. Check out the new trailhead center in an old RR depot, too.

More information can be found on the Events Calendar at friendsofthemountainbaytrailshawano.org.

Wolf Awareness Week 2026

by Karen Van Offeren

A week dedicated to wolves! Mark your calendars – Sunday, October 18th through Saturday, October 24th!

Wolves are apex predators and a keystone species. That means their presence significantly impacts the entire ecosystem. They help regulate prey populations like deer and elk, and that's important to regulating vegetation growth, river systems and biodiversity.

As important as that is, we know that the relationship between wolves and humans hasn't been good. Wolves were nearly eliminated due to predator control programs.

When the Endangered Species Act was enacted in 1973, wolves were placed at the top of the list.

In 1990, Governor Tommy Thompson signed a proclamation creating Wisconsin Wolf Awareness Week. The purpose was to educate the public about how they could assist in ensuring wolf safety.

Then in 1996, Defenders of Wildlife, the wildlife conservation organization, established every third week of October as National Wolf Awareness Week. Their focus – campaigning for wolf protection.

However, in 2020, wolves were removed from the Endangered Species list. As a result, threats to their survival have resumed, and Wolf Awareness Week provides opportunities for learning how to help provide for their protection.

Some Fun Facts About Wolves

- Wolves' howls are distinctive. Pack members use them to recognize each other.
- There are three species of wolves: gray, red, and Ethiopian. (Only gray and red wolves are found in North America.)
- Wolves live and hunt in packs of about four to ten animals.
- Wolves can smell other animals more than a mile away.
- While wolf pups' eyes are blue at birth, they turn yellow by the time they're eight months old.
- Wolves can sprint 36 to 38 miles per hour for short distances.

As Wolf Awareness Week gets closer, the Sierra Club will announce their plans for this year's celebration. Stay tuned!

Fall and Winter Tips for Your Pollinator Garden

by Karen Van Offeren

Have you accepted the challenge of integrating a pollinator garden into your outdoor living space? If you have, here are some considerations to be aware of as we head into fall and winter.

Late-Season Nectar

Pollinators that migrate (e.g., Monarch butterflies) need fuel for their travels. Keeping your garden blooming into October offers that needed source of energy! Examples of late blooming plants include asters and goldenrod.

These late-season plants provide another benefit to wildlife. Once the flowers die, their dried seed heads provide a natural food source for birds in the cold winter months.

Oh, and if you're still thinking about starting a pollinator garden, fall can be a great time to plant native pollinator-friendly perennials. The cooler weather helps roots establish before winter. (Just be sure to do your planting at least six weeks before the first hard frost.)

Preparation for Winter

Be aware that many Midwest pollinators spend the winter in your backyard. Species like queen bumblebees and various moths hide in leaf litter or inside hollow plant stems to survive our freezing temperatures. Cleaning your garden area too thoroughly in fall or too early in spring can accidentally remove these sleeping insects.

Consider raking leaves to a corner or around trees to provide a safe space for queen bumblebees, some butterfly species, and other beneficial hibernating insects to burrow in to survive the winter. You'll be protecting the next generation of pollinators!

Once spring arrives, try to leave the debris undisturbed until the ground temperature stays above 50 degrees consistently.

Throw out the DEET, there are better options.

By Peter Jobe

During a recent 4 day backwoods camping trip I had the opportunity to learn about some newer types of insect repellents and I was amazed at how well these products worked.

Thermacell is an area repellent. Turn it on and there will be no bugs within 20 feet of you. There is no odor and they work almost instantly. These units are a little expensive (around \$40), but worth every cent if you do much camping during peak bug season. Thermacell makes a large variety of different styles, using different power sources (rechargeable battery, butane, camping fuel canister) and you can find them at Fleet Farm or online.

Second is a repellent that you spray on your clothing, active ingredient is Permethrin. One brand is Sawyer, and you spray it on your clothing, tents, or gear. One application repels insects for 6 weeks or 6 washings.

Third is a spray or lotion for applying to your skin, active ingredient is Picaridin. This is non-greasy, not sticky and has no odor; lasts for 12 hours.

You can see how easy this works. Spray the couple of articles of clothing you are going to wear with Permethrin before you leave home; before heading into the woods, put your bug netting over your head, then apply some Picaridin to any exposed skin. At camp turn on a Thermacell and for 4 hours you won't see a mosquito.

Have a great summer end.

More camping and less swatting mosquitoes!

Data Centers – What's Happening and Where

By Karen Van Offeren

Large-scale data centers continue to be big news. Here are some of the latest updates.

Data Center Development in Wisconsin

Port Washington Update-

As of this writing, the news making headlines is that the Public Service Commission (PSC) voted on Thursday, August 6th to require the American Transmission Company (ATC) to resubmit its application detailing how it plans to build the power grid infrastructure needed to operate the Port Washington data center.

ATC's initial application proposed a \$1.3 billion infrastructure package that included a high-voltage transmission line and five new substations located in Fond du Lac, Ozaukee, Sheboygan and Washington counties. The project was to be completed by December 2027.

However, ATC has repeatedly adjusted its plans since they were originally presented. The company has made over 500 amendments to its original application since December.

PSC staff became increasingly concerned. Environmental Affairs Coordinator Adam Ingwell wrote, "I don't recall any other comparable cases in my experience with as many application material document revisions and ongoing design changes throughout the process."

The Wisconsin Citizens Utility Board (CUB) raised concerns that ATC's revisions make it difficult to forecast the project's cost. And not only do the proposed changes complicate the calculation, but so do questions surrounding the proposed completion date of December 2027. If ATC attempts to make that deadline, will they be paying workers double or even triple overtime rates?

On a cautionary note, PSC Chairperson Summer Strand noted, "I do want and need to be perfectly clear; revocation should not be misconstrued as a rejection of this project." She went on to explain that the PSC needs the revision to be able to properly assess the proposal's economic, environmental and public impacts.

Menomonie Update-

Plans for the proposed \$1.6 billion data center in Menomonie remain paused.

The city is currently working on a proposal to add more zoning restrictions on data center developments. These restrictions would include requiring any data center developer to follow specific requirements for water and electricity use, landscaping, wastewater, noise pollution, and more.

For details on the specifics included in the first draft of this proposed ordinance, see ["Menomonie considers new data center zoning restrictions, as \\$1.6B project remains paused"](#) on the WKOW website.

As of this article dated August 7, 2026, no land in Menomonie has been zoned for a data center.

Wisconsin Rapids Update-

Until 2020, Wisconsin Rapids was the home of one of Wisconsin's largest paper mills. Last year the physical structures were torn down. Now, developers are proposing

that a data center be built on the site.

Many residents oppose the idea. A neighborhood group, the South Wood County Neighbors for Responsible Development, has been trying to inform Wisconsin Rapids citizens of their options and talk with local community leaders.

In April, the Common Council amended the city's zoning to include definitions and standards for data centers. Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR) reports, "The city's data center ordinance requires any future data center to be inside the industrial district of the mill site. ... It limits how close the property can be to homes, water systems, discharging material and electric usage."

Alder Madalyn Palmquist has requested that the local planning commission have a meeting to review the data center zoning ordinances with the community. She believes it's important to ensure that everyone understands the possibilities and what regulations are needed specifically for this site.

Developers have submitted a conditional use permit (CUP) application. Mayor Matt Zacher explained, "This is a private entity to a private entity, so the government really doesn't have much say until they start building. ... [W]e inserted ourselves with a conditional use permit, and that was the only way that we could have some control over what was built."

Zacher also shared that he feels that without some leadership at the state level, communities have to fend for themselves regarding regulations while also listening to local citizens and developers' needs. "It really has the chance to tear apart the community," he said.

For more details, see WPR articles:

["Wisconsin Rapids' historic paper mill site could become a data center. Residents aren't happy." \(08-03-26\)](#)

["As data center debate roars in Wisconsin Rapids, mayor says lack of state rules harms cities" \(08-07-26\)](#)

Wisconsin Legislation Update – Or Lack Thereof

Unfortunately, all attempts for state-level data center legislation have stalled.

Status of key legislative proposals:

The Ratepayer and Utility Protection Bill (AB 840/SB 843)

Status: Passed the State Assembly.

Stalled in the State Senate prior to adjournment. (03-23-2026)

The Democratic Alternative Accountability Bill (AB 722/SB 729)

Status: Voted down / introduced as unsuccessful floor amendments during legislative sessions.

Bipartisan Nondisclosure Agreement (NDA) Prohibition (AB 1036/SB 969)

Status: Advanced through committee with bipartisan support, but the legislative session ended before receiving a full floor vote.

Data Center Operations Moratorium (AB 1099)

Status: Did not advance out of committee under majority leadership.

A Growing Issue – Natural Gas Plants

It takes time to develop the infrastructure needed to connect data centers to the power grid. In response, many data center developers are turning to an alternative solution ... building their own natural gas plants. This "behind-the-

meter” power source is quickly becoming a common development strategy.

Construction of two gas plants has been proposed in Southeast Wisconsin. Foundry Ridge would be in the Town of Darien and Red Oak Ridge is proposed in the Town of Paris. Both would serve as backup generators for the predicted electricity demands created by the hyperscale data center campuses.

WTMJ reports that the application for both plants is taking advantage of a loophole in state regulations. Invenenergy, a Chicago-based company, is applying to construct the plants, while We Energies is applying to purchase the power for “substantial data center load additions.”

The loophole situation comes from the fact that state law limits how the Public Service Commission can weigh public impacts when assessing applications from independent companies like Invenenergy. And it can only consider the needs of the public with We Energies’ application to purchase the power.

A University of Wisconsin-Madison study predicts that the Foundry Ridge and Red Oak Ridge gas plants could cost Wisconsin millions of dollars and dozens of lives. The nationwide impact of the two plants could result in over a billion dollars in health-related costs and over 100 lives lost over their 30-year predicted lifespan.

As proposed, Red Oak Ridge would be the second largest of Wisconsin’s 29 existing natural gas power plants, and Foundry Ridge would be the twelfth largest.

Feedback at public hearings has been overwhelmingly negative. Concerns include health impacts, water use, energy costs, and industrial development in rural communities. It is estimated that Red Oak Ridge could use 240,000 gallons of water from Lake Michigan per day when running at full capacity requiring special approval under the Great Lakes Compact.

For even more information, see “[Proposal for second-largest gas plant in Wisconsin meets growing opposition](#)” on the WTMJ website.

A new report released by the Sierra Club found: **Five new gas plants, known or assumed to be proposed for data centers, would use an average of 142 million gallons of water a year** – the equivalent of the annual drinking water for 284 million people – and the majority of it would be needed during the summer months when energy and water use has been strained by drought and heat.

The five new proposed gas plants confirmed or suspected of being proposed to solely power data centers in Wisconsin equate to 4 gigawatts of power – or enough electricity to power approximately 3 million homes. There are only 2.84 million homes in Wisconsin.

The full report, **[Thirsty Power: Coal and gas will leave us high and dry](#)**, is available on the Sierra Club website.

Fall General Election 2026 – Tuesday, November 3rd

by Karen Van Offeren

No one needs to tell you how important this year’s mid-term elections are. Our environment and our democracy both need our support! Here’s a list of dates and resources to help you as you plan for getting to the polls and decide who to vote for.

Dates to Know

October 14 th	Voter registration deadline (mail or online)
October 20 th	First day of early voting (in-person absentee)
October 29 th	Deadline (5:00 PM) to request a mail-in absentee ballot
October 30 th	Deadline to register in person at the municipal clerk’s office (You can register at the polls on Election Day.)
November 1 st	Last possible day for early voting (in-person absentee)
November 3 rd	ELECTION DAY

Election Resources - General

If you have any questions related to voting, visit the My Vote Wisconsin website (<https://myvote.wi.gov>).

The site provides your next election date and, if voting in person, a reminder of what identification you need to bring with you to receive a ballot. It also provides information about the in-person voting process.

If you enter your address, you’ll receive:

- a sample ballot specific to who and what you’ll be voting on,
- polling place details, and
- municipal clerk information.

Note: View your sample ballot before going to vote. Then you’ll be sure to know everything you’re being asked to vote on and, equally importantly, you’ll have time to research the candidates and issues so you can make informed decisions.

Election Resources – Candidate Information

There are several ways to research the candidates running for office, but if you’d like a starting place that provides one central location for all the federal and state-level offices you’ll be voting for, visit the PBS sponsored Wisconsin Vote website (<https://pbswisconsin.org/wisconsin-vote>).

Once you enter your address, you’ll receive a breakdown of who is running for each federal and state-level position on your ballot. Each office is described and each candidate for that office is displayed with a picture and party affiliation.

If you click on a candidate, you’ll be taken to a page that provides his/her email address and links to his/her campaign websites and social media accounts.

Election Resources – Environmental Perspective

Again, there are several ways to research how each candidate stands on environmental issues, but if you want a resource that evaluates how elected officials have been voting from a conservation perspective, visit League of Conservation Voters (<https://www.lcv.org>) for national-level offices and Wisconsin Conservation Voters (<https://conservationvoters.org>) for state-level offices.

These organizations create scorecards showing how each elected official has voted on key environmental issues. Wisconsin Conservation Voters has also begun providing endorsements for state-level positions. Watch their website for updates.

**And remember ... please participate in the November general election!
Your votes truly matter!**

Fox Valley Sierra Group
Of the John Muir Chapter of the Sierra Club

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Fox Valley Group of the of the Sierra Club - Wisconsin Chapter Vol. 26 Issue 2

sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley

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It's Our Nature is published three times a year
Subscription included with Sierra Club membership dues

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