

Data Centers' ups and downs

The recent news on data centers is a somewhat mixed bag, and we must always be watchful for new developments.

Good News

The good news is that the Wisconsin Public Service Commission has ruled in a We Energies docket on large load tariffs (rates), that data centers must pay all the costs of energy they use and any related infrastructure. This would not only include power sources (power plants or solar or wind farms), but all transmission, pipeline or other infrastructure costs necessary to support that power and delivery.

There will also be PSC dockets with Alliant Energy and MG&E, but MG&E has already stated that they propose that data centers pay all their energy costs. (Of course, Madison and Dane County, which comprise the majority of MGE's service territory, currently have data center moratoriums on the books.)

Along with Madison and Dane County, many other communities have also passed moratoriums on data centers, allowing them time to further be prepared, or for the state to potentially set guidelines.

Mixed News

Oracle Corporation, owner of the Vantage data center in Port Washington, sued the Public Service Commission over their requirement that data centers prove they have the financial resources available should the data center go belly up, and they wouldn't need the energy infrastructure that was being built to serve them – potentially putting the costs off on other customers. Since Oracle had a poor credit rating from being overextended financially, they would have been forced to purchase insurance to the tune of \$100 million/yr!

However, without explanation, Oracle has withdrawn that lawsuit, so the requirements for financial accountability, as well as that they have to pay all infrastructure energy costs, still stands.

The PSC has also withdrawn a permit for a major transmission line that would serve the Vantage data center in Port Washington, saying

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Chair's Column

Ronda Conner, Chair

Greetings!

I hope your summer has been going well and you have been able to get out and about. A big part of summer for me are the events and festivals in and around Dane County. Despite some event cancellations, we have continued to have a presence at many events and festivals. Our outreach provides such a great opportunity to talk about the Sierra Club while doing good.

Our Recycling Away from Home team has continued to provide support to significant community events and festivals such as Africafest by making sure that the recycling is separated from the trash. We also helped to educate and inspire kids regarding outdoor activities and provided kids crafts at some events. We continue to come up with fun and rewarding events such as highway cleanups, socials every couple of months, and pontoon boat tours just to name a few.

The cooler weather reminds me to savor every last drop of summer. There are still many fun opportunities to join us! We have a few festivals in Madison left where we will be tabling and helping with recycling, including Laborfest on September 7 and the Willy Street

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that too many changes had been made from the original permit. However, it seems likely a new permit request will be filed.

Bad News

Despite the PSC ruling that seemed to require data centers to pay all energy infrastructure costs, that might not actually be the case. Microsoft has objected to an agreement between We Energies and the PSC, saying that they were not part of the negotiations and that the agreement may not result in Microsoft fulfilling their ratepayer protection pledge, and that costs could be put off on other customers. Microsoft has filed with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission asking for a judge to resolve the disagreement. They also indicated a concern that transmission projects would be completed on a timely basis for their data center. Interestingly, We Energies is the major shareholder of American Transmission Company who builds and profits off those same transmission lines.

Future News

Vigilance and activism are necessary if we are to have the future we want. With this fall's elections, a key is not if there will be more data centers, but if communities will be aware of all impacts and can choose whether to have a data center, whether data centers will be held to high environmental standards, if they will pay all costs and potential impacts, if they will be financially liable for all costs should they abandon the project, and if they will be powered by 100% renewable energy. Question all candidates, whether it be for governor, or for a legislative seat. We need to elect officials who will protect people and the environment, and enact the legislative and regulatory changes that will protect us.

Fair on September 19 and 20. And rain or shine, we invite you to our social at the Great Dane in Fitchburg on September 15.

We also have another pontoon boat tour coming up on September 19. Check out our calendar for other events or updates at <https://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/four-lakes>. I hope you can join us in savoring what remains of summer – but we're also providing you with plenty of opportunities to learn more, get outdoors and enjoy some of our fall activities.

We also have our annual Four Lakes board elections coming up with a ballot in this newsletter, or you can vote online. Please vote, but in addition, if you have an interest in our issues and how you can contribute or get involved, please contact us.

And speaking of elections, we have critical elections coming up this fall, and who gets elected will make a great difference to the environment and our health and enjoyment of nature. We are active in supporting candidates we endorse, and we invite you to get involved and stay tuned to events that we may have.

We're Wasting Away – Reducing Waste

With all the throw away materials we have in our society, we haven't just been sitting on our duff. We all know there is no "away", right? For years, we've been doing our Recycling Away at Home activity at a number of Madison festivals and events in order to reduce recyclables going to the landfill, and to educate people. But that's not enough.

More recently, we've connected with the Zero Waste Madison (ZWM) group (see them on Facebook), and local volunteers with Beyond Plastics, and we're strategizing about what more we can do. ZWM has had some repair events to fix things and keep them from being discarded, and are planning more. Bring your stuff to repair!

Beyond Plastics focus is on eliminating single use plastics and using more sustainable and environmentally friendly materials. Recently, we had a conversation with City of Madison sustainability staff, the City Food Cart Coordinator, and Sustain Dane about options to reduce waste in our food systems at festivals, with food carts, and with restaurants. We now have some good directions and contacts, but we also have a big task ahead of us to improve waste reduction, and we're looking for volunteers who likewise want to help reduce waste in Madison.

The City of Madison now has an internal policy to reduce the use of single use plastics, but doing more community wide is a much bigger challenge. If you're interested, please contact Don at d_ferber@sbcglobal.net.

Bird Migration

Jennie Watson

You won't hear birds singing during fall migration as they do upon spring arrival, but know that they are traveling while most of us are still asleep.

Birds don't sleep at night during migration. Around 8 p.m. each night, roughly 6,000 different bird species are flying to their winter destination. By understanding their journey, we can better support these birds and help them reach their winter homes safely. After all, it takes a lot of energy for these critters to fly long distances.

Fall migration starts mid-August and peaks in September and into October. While pollinator flowers are easiest to find, birds and butterflies will also drink from a feeder. Orioles are back and could use some mealworms (dead or alive), grape jelly (I use natural products with only grapes, water, and sugar), and nectar (boil 1 cup non-organic sugar in 4 cups water). Or use premade mixtures made specifically for orioles and hummingbirds, but NEVER add orange or red dye. I also spike peeled oranges on a feeder. Providing food during migration helps birds refuel for their long journey.

Butterflies are unable to digest the very sweet bird nectar, so use less sugar for them. They will also drink from sponges (plastic-free please) made from plant cellulose or coconut fibers. Also, set out fruit such as watermelon, oranges, peaches, plums, or bananas. I mix a small bit of nectar (2 teaspoons white sugar with ¼ cup warm water) with fruit. However, I have never had any luck with overripe, mushy bananas.

Sadly, due to climate change, air and water pollution, plastic pollution, and habitat destruction, birds and other wildlife are struggling. Many bird populations are in decline due to toxics they ingest or lack of habitat. Now more than ever, it is important to keep your bird feeders clean and full of clean water.

But one of the most important actions you can take is at night, particularly from dusk until sunrise: turn off outdoor lights, turn off indoor lights, and close shades. During the daytime, if possible, add bird-strike prevention decals to your windows. Hanging fabric strands or other non-toxic, non-plastic strings from the gutters also acts as a bird strike deterrent.

The Cornell Lab website (<https://dashboard.birdcast.org>) allows you to monitor migration activity for a specific county or state. Other trustworthy sources include the Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance, Audubon.org, and The Nature Conservancy.

Utilities News

The ongoing behavior of our utilities provides more evidence that system change and regulatory reforms are needed. They see data centers as opportunities to add new energy facilities and increase their profits, including adding new gas plants and other infrastructure, and potentially keeping coal plants running longer. The rationale for utilities being given monopoly power was in order for them to better serve customers, not shareholders and profits. Did they forget that?

We Energies original large load tariffs (rates) for data centers would certainly have put some of those costs off on other, especially residential, customers. There remains concern that, even with the PSC ruling, whether data centers will pay all associated energy costs, and that we still might not be fully protected. Alliant Energy submitted a one-off rate case, but was told to come back with a proposal that would cover all future data centers. MGE has said they will submit a proposal in line with the ruling for We Energies.

A significant concern is that Invenenergy has proposed a new 1.9 GW gas plant in Calumet County that would be by far the largest in the state! Rather than getting off of fossil fuels, this would add tremendously to our greenhouse gas emissions, would likely cause health impacts to area residents, and potentially result in stranded assets other customers would end up paying for.

Many express concerns about data center's water use. Even with closed loop systems, some still have significant water use and impacts. (Closed loop systems also use far more energy for cooling.) But the dirty little secret is that the gas (or coal) plants used to power data centers use far more water. An astonishing 73% of Wisconsin's water use is for power generation! So, unless data centers are powered with clean renewable energy, the real water guzzlers are the behind-the-scenes power plants.

Another issue is that We Energies is once again asking for a 14% increase in electric rates over

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Activities and Outings

Sign up for most events via the links on our web site calendar at <https://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/four-lakes>. Watch our Four Lakes calendar for additional outings or changes.

Plastics, Water and Social Justice

Tuesday, September 8, 5 pm

Goodman Community Center, 149 Waubesa, Madison

Sign up: <https://tinyurl.com/PlasticWaterJustice>

Author Daniel Jaffee will talk about the overlooked relation between plastics, water and social justice. We often don't think much about how pervasive plastics are, and how much impact we have on the environment, both in production and when we discard it. This is being presented in conjunction with the Madison branch of Beyond Plastics.

The location is the Ironworks building at the Goodman Community Center. There will also be an option sent out to join remotely if you sign up.

Observations in Nature

Wednesday, September 9, 9:30 – 11:30 AM

(Also 10/7 and 11/4)

UW Arboretum Visitor Center, Madison

Sign up: <https://tinyurl.com/Sept26ArbON>

Use your senses while we ramble through often overlooked corners of the Arboretum – and there are many! There are also historical contexts including Aldo Leopold and the prairie restorations there. We'll escape into nature, notice things around us, and share joyful discoveries. This repeats monthly, usually on the first Wednesday.

Highway Cleanup

Sunday, September 13, Noon – 2 PM

(Also 10/10 and 11/14)

Riverside Rd, Ft Atkinson

Sign up: <https://tinyurl.com/Sept26HwyCleanup>

Our adopted section of highway is along the scenic Rock River east from Rock River Park. Come alone or bring a group to help clean up and beautify this stretch along the river. Wear sturdy footwear and work gloves and clothes, and dress for conditions. We'll provide bags and tools. Cancels if wet. Possible social afterwards. Reoccurs monthly, usually on the second Sunday.

Four Lakes Group Social

Tuesday, September 15, 4:30 – 6:30 PM

Great Dane Fitchburg, 2980 Cahill Main

Sign up: <https://tinyurl.com/FLG926social>

Come be social with other Sierrans, learn about what's going on and how you can participate, and share some good cheer. We look forward to connecting with you, hearing about what you've been up to and what matters to you. We also welcome hearing your thoughts and ideas on actions or activities you would like to see.

We'll provide some free appetizers – alcohol is on your own. The Great Dane also has an extensive menu if you want to have dinner.

Prairie Seed Collecting, Pheasant Branch Conservancy

Thursday, September 17, 9 AM – Noon

5000 Pheasant Branch Rd, Middleton

Sign up: <https://tinyurl.com/SeedColPB26>

We'll join Dane County Parks and Pheasant Branch Conservancy for a morning of prairie seed collecting. Pheasant Branch has some marvelous prairies, so it's a great learning experience if you want to know more about prairies, or are thinking of planting one.

You must also register with Dane County as a volunteer and sign up for the outing with them via the link provided on our registration page.

Pontoon Boat Ride, Lake Mendota

Saturday, September 19, 1:00 – 4:00 – PM

1215 Sherman Ave, Tenney Park

Sign up: <https://tinyurl.com/Sept26pontoon>

Join us for a 3-hour pontoon boat ride as we explore Lake Mendota. There are many features and sights you can only really see and appreciate from being out on the water. It's a great way to learn more about Madison and the influence and impacts the lakes have on our community. The boat limit is 15 people.

This tour is free, with snacks and drinks provided, but donations are appreciated. Meet at the Tenney Park MSCR boat launch. Please cancel if you can't attend, be there on time, and call if you have problems or are running late so we can help you or know to wait.

Willy St Fair – Tabling

Saturday & Sunday, September 19 & 20

800 – 1000 blocks Williamson St

Sign up: <https://tinyurl.com/WillyStFair26>

With 3 blocks worth of entertainment, vendors and all sorts of delicious food, the Willy St Fair is always great fun. Our booth is a great opportunity to engage with a very receptive audience about our issues, let people know about our activities, and see if people want to get involved. You don't need to be experienced, just have a willingness to engage with people. There will also be experienced volunteers at the booth if you have questions.

You can enjoy the fair from the comfort of our booth, or wander around too. And you don't want to miss the special Sunday parade at 11 am.!

Volunteers receive a free Four Lakes t-shirt if you don't have one. You must also sign up for a shift at the link provided on the Sierra Club registration page.

Fall Wonder and Adventure Outing

Saturday, October 17, 1 – 3:30 pm

Indian Lake County Park, 8183 State Highway 19

Sign up: <https://tinyurl.com/FallAdvIL26>

We invite you this family friendly fall event at Indian Lake County Park. Hike the beautiful trails, learn about the animals, cook s'mores over a fire, and engage in educational activities. This event is designed for school age kids. All kids must be accompanied by an adult. Dress for conditions and for walking on trails.

Madison Volunteer Night

Thursday, October 22, 5 – 8 pm

754 Williamson St, Madison

Sign up: <https://tinyurl.com/Oct26VolNight>

Learn more about the Sierra Club and what we do here in Wisconsin. We always have plenty of activity options to choose from – creating social media posts or graphics, doing data entry, addressing envelopes, doing research, compiling information, or writing letters to the editor – and more. You'll also get to meet and engage with other volunteers and our staff.

We'll even have free pizza, snacks and drinks for your enjoyment! Bring a friend and enjoy a fun evening with us!

Utility News, continued from page 3

the next 2 years. They are even asking for an *increase* on their rate of return – at a time when growing numbers of people having trouble affording their energy bills. More people would suffer from higher bills while shareholders and management garner added wealth.

It isn't just a difficulty when people have unaffordable utility bills; it's clear people are choosing between paying their utility bills and other basics such as food or medicine. We have a winter shutoff moratorium that prevents people's power from being shut off from November 15 – April 15 – but not one in summer. But a just released NPR report reveals that deaths from excessive heat are much higher than had previously been estimated. (And that doesn't account for the impacts of wildfire smoke that is becoming an increasing health problem in summer.) No such summer moratorium exists, which means that more people are being placed at added risk so We Energies can make higher profits.

There is still time to comment on We Energies proposed rate increase through September 18. But now, with election season upon us, if you want to see sweeping changes that will deal with the underlying problems, consider asking candidates what their positions are on data centers and clean energy, and what changes they will support to our systems that will provide truly clean, equitable and affordable energy for all.

Four Lakes Group Sierra Club Contacts

(* Are on the Four Lakes Executive Committee)

Dave Blouin, Political chair, Calendars,
burroak15@gmail.com

Ronda Conner *, Chair, rondaconner@hotmail.com

Don Ferber *, Conservation Chair, Outreach,
Newsletter, RAH, d_ferber@sbcglobal.net

Susan Johnson * susan.johnson072@gmail.com

Ryan Olson * rolson216@gmail.com

Erik Pettersen *, Co-treasurer
erik.pettersen14@gmail.com

Jennie Watson *, Co-treasurer k9erthlvr@icloud.com

<http://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/four-lakes>

<https://www.facebook.com/4lakesSierraClub/>

Four Lakes Group Executive Committee Elections 2026

Thank you for helping democratically elect your local Sierra Club representatives! The candidate statements are below. You may vote online instead of by mail by filling out the form at <https://tinyurl.com/FLG2026Election>. If we receive both paper and electronic ballots from the same member number, only the electronic ballot will be counted.

Your member number can be found on your Sierra Magazine label, or go to www.mysierraclub.org and log in if you have an account, or sign up if you don't, to find your member number. You can also call Member Care at 415-977-5500 or email member.care@sierraclub.org.

Candidate questions

- 1) Please describe your interest in the Sierra Club, and any leadership or volunteer activities with our organization or other non-profit groups that will help you fulfill your role as described above.
- 2) What skills, experience, or perspective from your personal or professional background (fundraising, volunteering, advocacy, legal, accounting, communications, Board, political, events) will you bring to the Sierra Club – Four Lakes Group Executive Committee?
- 3) Looking forward over the next 3 years, what do you think the Four Lakes Group needs to do, or how do we need to grow and change to be effective on local and regional conservation issues?
- 4) The Four Lakes Group covers 9 counties (Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Lafayette, Rock and Sauk) in south central Wisconsin including urban and rural areas, state and local parks, major rivers and trails. What issue(s) are you interested in working on and why? How do you see the Four Lakes Group supporting this work and how will this help build the Four Lakes Group?

Don Ferber

- 1) I am passionate about protecting people and the environment, and have volunteered for over 2 decades in many capacities including on the Four Lakes and Chapter boards, participate in several campaigns, and enjoy doing a lot of outreach and communications. I've connected with other chapters regarding the Sierra Club's structure and directions. This has given me a good understanding of the Sierra Club, and an ability to take leadership roles in setting directions.
- 2) I bring extensive experience with outreach and advocacy, with our campaigns, and for both the Four Lakes Group and Chapter. I do outreach to obtain new volunteers, and also coordinate volunteers at a many events and activities such as Recycling Away from Home. I also work on Chapter fundraising activities, write for our Four Lakes newsletter, and post on social media.
- 3) I would like to see us have more racial and geographic diversity in our leadership, attract more youth, and expand our active volunteer base. Having more active volunteers and doing more outreach and activism to the 8 Four Lakes Group counties outside of Dane County, and expand our efforts to lift up more local issues and concerns in our region.
- 4) I would like to increase energy justice and lower energy bills by providing low-income people with better access to solar and energy efficiency to aid in affordable housing, and provide well-paying jobs. By centering the needs of marginalized communities and working to lift their voices and needs, we can also become more inclusive. Our work to provide more equitable access to recreational opportunities and outdoor spaces can also increase equity.

Erik Pettersen

- 1) I'm active with the Four Lakes Group and currently serve as co-treasurer. I also volunteer with Housing Initiatives where I serve on the Board of Directors as a consumer of mental health services. I love the Sierra Club and what it stands for and have been a volunteer for over ten years. I have a wealth of experience with Sierra Club and enjoy spending time working on environmental causes and campaigns. My particular passion is mass transit such as trains and buses.
- 2) I've gained skills as Four Lakes Group co-treasurer that I use to complete QuickBooks transactions each month. I've written grants and proposals for speakers and events from Ralph Nader to Earth Day activities. I've lobbied elected officials and have worked on various political campaigns as well. I also actively participate in the Chrysalis Clubhouse – a local non-profit advocacy group for mentally ill folks striving for recovery and getting back to work.

Four Lakes Group 2024 Executive Committee Election Ballot

Please read the candidate statements for election to the Executive Committee and select your choices by putting an “X” before the name. Select up to three candidates. If your ballot is not from a Four Lakes Sierran mailed copy, please write your name and membership number on the back. Only ballots from active members will be valid, so please cut the portion of the back page with your name and number on it. Please mail ballots to: Wisconsin Chapter Sierra Club, 754 Williamson St, Madison, WI 53703 by December 1, 2026.

Voter 1: ☐ Don Ferber ☐ Erik Pettersen

Write In _____

Voter 2: ☐ Don Ferber ☐ Erik Pettersen

Write In _____

Erik Pettersen (continued)

3) I think we need to reach out to communities outside of Madison since we represent the eight counties surrounding Dane County, but have most of our members in the Madison area. We also need to get a serious effort going to build high-speed and commuter rail into the Madison area to connect with Milwaukee and other large cities around the region. Also, shutting down our remaining coal plants would be great too.

4) As part of focusing more on the counties surrounding Dane County, high-speed and commuter rail could be a bridge to begin that work. We are also working hard to get people access to county, state, and municipal parks through the Land Equity and Access Team, and I support that effort as well. The more people we get involved in these efforts, the better our outcome will be.



Willy St Fair

What really marks the end of summer in Madison is not the fall equinox – it’s the Willy St Fair in September. This spectacular street festivals is marked by three blocks of vendors, food carts, and music – and the famous Sunday parade. You haven’t truly experienced Madsion until you’ve been to the Willy St Fair!

Of course, that means we’ll once again be there with our booth, information, petitions and chachkies, and what we need is you to join us and talk with fairgoers. It will be especially important to engage with people at the fair with this year’s critical elections This is a great crowd for us, so we guarantee some good conversations – you may even make new friends.

No experience is needed to volunteer – only a willingness to engage with people. See our outings listing for the sign up, and then use the link to sign up for a shift. Volunteers get a free Four Lakes t-shirt if you don’t have one. Come on out. You’ll love it!



Four Lakes Group Sierra Club
754 Williamson St
Madison, WI 53703
<http://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/four-lakes>



Newsletter Mailing

Our goal is environmentally friendly, cost-effective communication with our members. Our primary modes of communication are this newsletter, the Four Lakes Enews, and our web site and Facebook page. If we don't have your email address, we mail you a hard copy – or you can request one. Otherwise, members receive an email letting you know when the newsletter is available to download. You can also visit <https://tinyurl.com/4LGnews> for our newsletters.

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.

2027 Calendars are here!

We have the beautiful 2027 Sierra Club calendars. They'll look great on your wall or desk, and they also make great gifts for your friends or family who will remember you each time they see it.

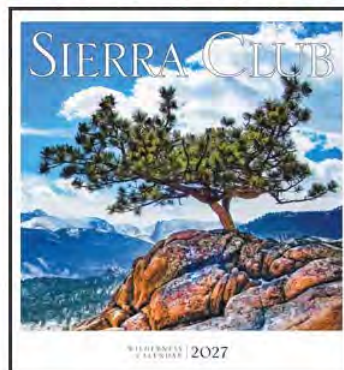
In addition, purchasing your calendars through us will help support your Four Lakes Group as well as the Sierra Club overall.

Please mail calendar requests to Dave Blouin, 3928 Paunack Ave, Madison, WI 53711. Calendars are \$1 off each for orders of two or more, and the mailing costs is \$6 for 1 or 2, or \$10 for more. We may also be able to deliver locally in the Madison area, or you may also be able to pick them up. Email Dave at burroak15@gmail.com if you wish to order any or have any questions.



Enjoy, explore, and protect the planet

2027 SIERRA CLUB CALENDARS



WILDERNESS WALL CALENDAR



ENGAGEMENT CALENDAR

CALENDAR	PRICE	QTY	TOTAL	SHIP TO:
☐ 2027 Wilderness	\$18.95	_____	_____	Name _____
☐ 2027 Engagement	\$19.95	_____	_____	Address _____
		Subtotal	_____	City _____ State _____ Zip _____
		Sales Tax	_____	Phone (_____) _____
		Shipping	_____	Email _____
Please make checks payable to "Sierra Club" and mail to the return address shown on your newsletter.				
GRAND TOTAL				_____