



## GREAT WATERS GROUP NEWSLETTER

WWW.GREATWATERSGROUP.ORG [greatwatersgroupsc@gmail.com](mailto:greatwatersgroupsc@gmail.com)

Winter 2021 NO. 4



*Nearby Nature and North-west Side Community Development Corp. cosponsored this hike to a wild “pocket paradise” along the creek adjacent to N. Hopkins Ave.*

*Photo by David Thomas*

# Nearby Nature fosters justice, equity

*By David Thomas  
Equity Chair*

**A quick history:** Nearby Nature Milwaukee was formed in 2017 with a grant from the Sierra Club foundation to foster environmental justice and equity initiatives, and it later came under the fiscal sponsorship of the Milwaukee Environmental Consortium. Since then, Nearby Nature has enjoyed great support from the Great Waters Group, co-sponsoring many events and outings.

**Autumn Celebration – Camping Expo:** This was a great example of collaboration between Nearby Nature and GWG. Sierra Club volunteers set up camp in Washington Park for the Urban Ecology Center’s Autumn Celebration on Oct. 9 and introduced

dozens of neighbors to the joys of camping out. Families with kids especially enjoyed hanging out in the tents we had set up. Nearby Nature distributed 72 metal water bottles to folks taking a “plastics free pledge.”

**Upcoming outings:** Nearby Nature staff has decided to work toward regularly scheduled weekend outings. Every month on the second Saturday, we want to offer outings, especially for families from our youth programs. But all are invited! Our second Saturday outing for November is Nov. 13. To get details, visit our Facebook page at [facebook.com/NearbyNatureMKE](https://facebook.com/NearbyNatureMKE).

**A Tale of Two Greenways:** This summer, the Milwaukee River  
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## Notes from the Chair

The Great Waters Group Executive Committee was very happy to welcome two new members in August. Victoria Gillet and Jasmine Vigés took over for two members who stepped down in the middle of their terms.

Victoria and Jasmine both have extensive experience volunteering with environmental organizations, and we are thrilled that they have chosen to devote their time and energy to the Great Waters Group ExCom.

You'll find their names, along with three others, on the ballot in this newsletter. We encourage you to make your voice heard and vote for the next round of Executive Committee members, either by mailing in the ballot in this newsletter or electronically via the link that you'll be receiving through email.

We are happy to have a committed slate of candidates

who, if elected, will contribute to outlining the next direction for GWG in the years to come.

We are also happy to return to our offerings of monthly programs featuring engaging and well-informed local experts. While we're disappointed that we're not yet able to meet indoors in-person for these events, we are encouraged that we may be able to do so in the new year.

We have also found Zoom to be a platform that allows for great information sharing, discussion, opportunities to increase knowledge, and inspiration to take action. See the articles in this edition for details for the November, January, February, and March events, and please consider signing up.

We look forward to seeing you at these events and welcome your ideas for other topics and ideas for future gatherings.

Jenny Abel

# Park defenders seek legal standing

Kohler Co. and the Department of Natural Resources are seeking to dismiss a suit that Friends of Black River Forest have filed opposing the DNR's decision to convey park land to Kohler Co. for a golf course. The Wisconsin Supreme Court heard arguments on the case challenging the organization's standing to defend state parks on Oct. 1.

Kohler received land inside Kohler-Andrae State Park in exchange for already developed acres with no conservation value. The company wants to build a 22,000-square-foot maintenance facility and a four-lane road with a rotary to route traffic to the proposed golf course.

Today the headline should read, "Citizens' rights to defend their state park is on the line in Wisconsin Supreme Court."

Citizens and users of the state parks should be able to go to court to protect what they use and enjoy," said Mary Faydash, President of Friends of Black River Forest. "In fact, our right to bring suit against the Natural Resources Board and the DNR regarding this land swap deal was affirmed by an appellate court, noting that particularly in environmental matters a citizen has standing to bring suit against a state agency."

"That four-lane road and that maintenance facility would be sitting in the park right now, if it hadn't been for the very courageous intervention of a group of neighbors from the area, the Friends of the Black River Forest," said RT Both, a member of the Sierra Club-Wisconsin Chapter Forest and Land Team. "They stepped up to do what the DNR at that time wouldn't do and held off that golf course."

"If that road and that maintenance facility are built, the character of our state park will change forever. And the people of Wisconsin will not get their resources back. The Sierra Club is here because we believe in public lands, and we believe in the rights of citizens to stand up for their public lands when the government doesn't protect them."

The Kohler Company plans to build its fifth course in Sheboygan County, which is currently home to a total of 16 golf  
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### Volunteer Leadership Council (VLC) Contact List

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# Climate movement doesn't end with Enbridge line

*Excerpted from MN350.org*

Enbridge has announced that the new Line 3 pipeline is now substantially complete and beginning to be filled with oil. While we knew this announcement was likely to come, that does not make it any less unpleasant to read. Alongside a huge and growing movement, we have been working to avoid this outcome since 2014, and today represents a major shift in the fight.

We started opposing Line 3 for many reasons. The climate consequences are equal to 50 coal power plants because of the tar sands oil the pipe is now beginning to carry, a three-foot-diameter column of one of the dirtiest petrochemical products in the world. The pipeline crosses hundreds of miles of treaty-protected territory where Anishinaabe people retain rights and the U.S. government has failed yet again to uphold its obligations.

Line 3 also crosses the headwaters of the Mississippi River and water-rich lake country where a spill could be catastrophic. The threat to manoomin (wild rice) in particular represents a present-day act of genocide against Native people. Significant damage has already been done along the corridor due to construction impacts over the past few months, including spills, and Enbridge is facing at least one set of criminal charges for damage to an aquifer.

Over the past several years, we have seen cascading failures and deliberate undermining of the systems that should have stopped this pipeline from ever reaching the point of construction. Minnesota's regulatory process antagonized the grassroots public rather than welcoming them, with too-small meeting rooms, exclusions on who could be heard, illegal use of police force against pipe-

## Party canceled

Because of the resurgence of COVID-19 and concerns about our ability to safely hold a large in-person event with a buffet, the ExCom sadly has canceled the Dec. 5 in-person event.

Since this is our only fundraiser to support activities and the costs of this newsletter, we hope to plan a hike and encourage members to donate via [www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/great-waters](http://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/great-waters). Check your e-letter and our Facebook page for updates.

line opponents, severe discounting of Indigenous knowledge, and abandonment of data in favor of Enbridge rhetoric.

We saw our Minnesota governor and lieutenant governor campaign for office with a promise to stop this pipeline, then reverse course and align once-opposed state agencies with Enbridge's priorities. Climate impacts of tar sands oil and treaty rights impacts to Anishinaabe people were explicitly written out of the state's final decision, as if doing so made them less real.

Under Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, our state militarized law enforcement against peaceful water protectors, making more than 900 arrests of people trying to preserve humanity's best shot at a livable present and future. We saw our Capitol building barricaded by state police when Native and non-Native people came together to call for change.

President Biden refused to intervene, instead using his Justice Department to bolster Enbridge's legal case instead of his own stated climate goals. Even the state and federal courts ultimately deferred to ill-founded agency decisions, holding that the short-term job impacts of halting construction outweighed the calculated \$287 billion in climate change costs to society over the next three decades. Some legal cases against the pipeline are still pending.

*(Continued on page 5)*

## Winter Programs

Because we're proceeding with caution as we face another COVID-19 surge, we'll announce the place of our February and March programs on the GWG website and in our e-Newsletter, on Facebook and Twitter.

– Bill Baurecht, Programs and Vice Chair

### **Building a Multiracial Environmental Community**

Mandi McAlister, Hummingbird, associated with Nearby Nature in Milwaukee.

*Monday, Nov. 15, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Via Zoom.*

### **Environmental alliances with Wisconsin's 11 Indian nations**

Prof. Al Gedicks, UW-La Crosse Sociology, retired.  
*Monday, Jan. 17, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Via Zoom.*

### **3rd annual African American environmental pioneer awards**

Co-sponsored event for Black History Month.  
*Monday, Feb 14, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.*

### **Experience the wealth of nature in the Milwaukee River Greenway**

Eddee Daniel, urban nature author/photographer and founder of *A Wealth of Nature* website.  
*Monday, March 21, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.*



# Nearby Nature plans outings

*(Continued from page 1)*

Greenway celebrated its fifteenth anniversary with dozens of events up and down the Greenway. The celebration was marked by the publication of a beautiful book by writer/photographer Eddee Daniel, *The Milwaukee River Greenway: A Wealth of Nature in the Heart of the City*. The book is a commemoration that includes reflections and stories from over two dozen community voices, including Nearby Nature board and staff.

**In stark contrast...** Lincoln Creek runs in an open stream for six miles from Havenwoods to Lincoln Park. In contrast to its bigger sibling, many of Lincoln Creek's segments are trash-filled, neglected and inaccessible. For this reason, Nearby Nature is hosting a series of "Lincoln Creek Conversations" to try to understand the community's relationship with the waterway and how things can improve.

This will be a series of walk-and-talk, Zoom, and in-person meetings. If you or your organization see yourselves as stakeholders in Lincoln Creek's neighborhoods, we want to have you involved. To have a place at this table, walk or Zoom, contact Steven Hunter by emailing [steven@nearbynaturemke.org](mailto:steven@nearbynaturemke.org).

**Nearby Nature and MMSD Seal Trail Agreement:** A 20-acre wild space along Lincoln Creek in Milwaukee's 30th Street railroad corridor is home to deer, coyotes, owls, and herons. Some have called it a "pocket paradise" where one can quickly get away from traffic noise and bustle. Birds and crickets are the most prominent sound. Soon residents will have a safe, level trail to reach this beautiful spot.

We proposed to MMSD, that we build a safe route to this spot, and the agency agreed. Then we invited three experienced trail builders from County Parks, Estabrook Park and the North Country Trail to lay out a trail route. Many of you are familiar with this space from Adopt-A-River cleanups and nature hikes we have held here, just north of 35th and Congress. Now you can join us and tell your grandkids you helped build this beautiful trail!

**Work dates proposed:** Work dates have been proposed and are waiting for approval. If you are interested in helping build this trail, get out your work boots and gloves and email us at [trails@nearbynaturemke.org](mailto:trails@nearbynaturemke.org).



*Milwaukee's Lincoln Creek Trail offers nature's gifts to hikers in an urban setting.*  
Photo by David Thomas

## Three from GWG win Chapter awards

*By Jenny Abel  
Chair*

Congratulations to Karen Samelson and David Thomas for winning the Chapter's Wildflower Award and to Victoria Gillet for earning the Merit Award. The Wildflower Award is given to Sierra Club leaders in the Wisconsin Chapter who inspire and promote the club and serve as mentors for other activists. The Merit award recognizes outstanding leaders within the Chapter.

Karen and David are a force without whom the Great Waters Group would struggle to keep going. Together they collaborate each month to assemble and distribute the Great Waters Group e-letter that keeps members informed of upcoming events and activism opportunities. Their brief and pithy announcements, use of photos, and listings of actions that we all can take to make a difference make it one of the few newsletters that I read all the way through.

They also provide much of the behind-the-scenes work that allows GWG to continue functioning, from updating and managing the web site and editing the quarterly newsletter to planning the annual holiday party/ fundraiser and spreading the word about upcoming programs.

I'm inspired by Karen and David both because of their commitment to GWG and because of their work with Nearby Nature. This organization started in 2017 with a grant from Sierra Club national and serves to build resilient, just, and healthy communities in Milwaukee.

Through David's leadership and Karen's work on the board of

*(Continued on page 8)*



# Climate movement is still building

*(Continued from page 3)*

Amid this hostility, we have also seen profound acts of bravery and integrity. Many of these have come from the Indigenous-led grassroots movement that has resisted this project via direct action despite state and corporate oppression, including groups like Honor the Earth, the Giniw Collective, Camp Migizi, the RISE Coalition, Red Lake Treaty Camp, and Indigenous Environmental Network.

These actions have slowed the company down, made the injustice of this project clear on an international scale, identified construction damage, built resilient community, and taken incredible personal sacrifice.

In addition, some in this movement have fought a persistent legal battle through thousands of pages of filings. Some have made stunning art. Some have organized mass mobilizations. Some have testified, written, and lobbied. Some have engaged in direct mutual aid and brought resources to the movement. The breadth of action taken to combat this black snake over the last seven years would fill volumes.

Line 3 was originally expected to go into service in 2017. Over its four years of delay, we have seen most major international companies withdraw their assets from the Canadian tar sands industry and many new extraction projects cancelled for lack of pipeline capacity. The delay has avoided about 772 million tons of atmospheric carbon emissions, a staggering sum by any measure. The right thing would be to build on this and shut down the line entirely.

President Biden can still revoke Line 3's Presidential Permit, which allows oil to flow across the international border from Canada into the United States. He could eliminate Enbridge's



*The beauty of an autumn maple is one reason why GWG nature lovers look forward to the changing of the seasons in Wisconsin.*

ability to re-export tar sands crude to global markets, removing a key demand driver for this project. And he could revoke Line 3's Army Corps of Engineers permits in order to conduct a long-sought federal environmental impact statement.

Line 3 could also be shut down at the state level. The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission can revoke its approval at any time, provided three of its five members agree. The governor appoints commissioners on a rolling basis every year. The legislature can also act powerfully against Line 3 itself as well as the loopholes and gray areas that Enbridge took advantage of.

To do any of this would take leadership. During Line 3's approval process, many decision-makers asserted that, while climate change and treaty rights conflicts were problems, they weren't THEIR problems – there must be some other agency or entity to consider these impacts. Unfortunately, a well-played game of hot potato does not address a crisis with scale and urgency.

The reasons we oppose the Line 3 pipeline are still as important today as they were yesterday, and will be just as important tomorrow. This fight has shifted but the basic facts have not. When you know something is wrong – whether by data from the docket, wisdom of prophecy, voices of people young and old, or because you feel it in your bones – the responsibility to do the right thing carries on. Today is a loss. Tomorrow is what we build. Let's rest and grieve as we must, remember how far we've come, and approach the work ahead with creativity and resolve.

For all who have shown up for this fight, whether a little or a lot, thank you. This movement exists because of you, and it's not going away. We'll write the next chapter together.

## Here's how to stay in touch

*By Karen Samelson  
Publicity Chair*

Are you not getting the monthly GWG e-letter? If you get other emails from SierraClub.org, you will see a link at the bottom to "Manage Preferences."

If you do not get any Sierra Club emails, go to your member account ([myaccount.sierraclub.org](http://myaccount.sierraclub.org)) and set up "Communications Preferences." Select "Manage email newsletters and contact preferences," scroll to the bottom and look for "Local Subscriptions" and make sure "Wisconsin Chp Great Waters Group" is included.





*Victoria Gillet*



*Jenny Abel*



*Marco Marquez*

## Five candidates seek ExCom spots

It's time to vote for the next group of people who will be joining the Great Waters Group Executive Committee. They will help shape the work of the Group over the next two years. We have five open spots and five candidates, so when you vote please be sure to vote to fill all five slots. This year, once again, you have the option of filling out and mailing back the paper ballot included with this newsletter, or you can vote electronically using the link sent to you by email. You'll need to have your member number handy. You can find that by going to <https://myaccount.sierra-club.org>. Before voting, please read through the statements from our candidates. The deadline to return your ballot is Dec. 16.



*Scott Coulthurst*



*Jasmine Vigas*

### **Victoria Gillet**

I have been a volunteer with the Sierra Club Beyond Coal team for about three years, and it was the first time I felt like I was a part of something that was effective in making the world a better place. I am a recent transplant to Milwaukee and being on the GWG ExCom is the best way I can think of to help the Sierra Club be a part of improving my new local community.

Clean air, clean water, and access to green spaces should be available to every inhabitant of the GWG counties. Climate change should be a priority until Wisconsin hits carbon neutrality goals. I'm passionate about conservation and climate change and about improving the built environment in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty. I am a physician and want to protect Wisconsinites' health for decades to come, and I see these as key.

### **Jenny Abel**

I have been a member of the Great Waters Group (GWG)

Executive Committee for two years, and I joined the Volunteer Leadership Council a year before that. I began my involvement as Programs Chair and then became Chair in 2021. Prior to volunteering with GWG, I served on the Mount Vernon Group (MVG) Executive Committee in Northern Virginia for 12 years.

I feel that climate change is the most critical issue facing humanity, and I acknowledge that if we fail to take drastic actions now, we will reach a point beyond which we will not be able to prevent the severe weather events, droughts, and wildfires that have already been the hallmark of a warming world. I also recognize that certain demographic groups, i.e., African Americans, Latinx, and tribal communities, are disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change.

Organizations like ours need to commit to working in solidarity with these groups to mitigate climate change's threats to well-being. I commit to continuing to take action on climate justice if re-elected to the GWG Executive Committee.

### **Marco Marquez**

I have joined the Great Waters Group to focus attention on

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# Five candidates stand for ExCom

(Continued from page 6)

issues of climate justice that hinder many families from enjoying all that our bodies of water and natural spaces have to offer. I believe that the GWG could focus efforts on protecting the parts of our planet that are most vulnerable (public lands being taken away, no matter how big or small), and expanding access to enjoyment of the planet and its exploration (hosting events in underserved areas, making them easier to get to and from, reducing economic barriers, etc.).

This region of Wisconsin has much to offer, and the GWG has the ability and opportunity to advocate for actions that will forward its mission and to make sure the benefits are enjoyed by underserved communities. I enjoy thinking of these opportunities with all of you and turning them into amazing experiences for so many Wisconsin families.

## Scott Coulthurst

From childhood on, appreciation of nature has been important to me. I learned to hunt and fish from my dad, and he instilled in me the concept of a humane harvest and only taking what you can use. I currently serve as chair of Germantown Park & Rec Commission.

I am proud of some of the subtle ways that I have helped to improve our parks. For example, convincing the Public Works Department that trees with leaves are not the only ones with value, leaving dead trees to help wildlife. To explore and enjoy the planet, we must save the planet by including and cooperating with diverse groups. We must embrace diversity and different thinking to find mutually beneficial solutions for climate change, biodiversity, and sustainability.

I believe working with groups not always thought to be aligned with environmentalists like hunters, skiers, and loggers is the best way to implement change. Conservation and climate change are where my passion is focused because I believe they are the most pressing issues of our time.

## Jasmine Viges

I am committed to clean water and climate justice, and I contribute to these movements through my work with various environmental organizations. I worked for the MMSD as a Fresh Coast Guardian Intern and currently with Bay Ridge Consulting as a Community Environmental Consultant promoting small scale green infrastructure. I have assisted with social media for the Milwaukee Climate Reality Project and the Wisconsin Sierra Club, and I am a point person for the GWG on the Plastic Free MKE Coalition.

Winter 2021

## Official Ballot: 2021: GWG Executive Committee Election

Mark an X on the line next to your selections. Each member may vote for up to 5 candidates (The second member in a household may cast votes as Voter #2.)

Voter #1	Voter #2
<input type="checkbox"/> Jennifer Abel	<input type="checkbox"/> Jennifer Abel
<input type="checkbox"/> Scott Coulthurst	<input type="checkbox"/> Scott Coulthurst
<input type="checkbox"/> Victoria Gillet	<input type="checkbox"/> Victoria Gillet
<input type="checkbox"/> Marco Marquez	<input type="checkbox"/> Marco Marquez
<input type="checkbox"/> Jasmine Viges	<input type="checkbox"/> Jasmine Viges

Mail completed ballot to:  
S.C. Great Waters Group Election Committee  
PO Box 26798, Wauwatosa, WI 53226, postmarked by Dec. 16

I went with the Engineers Without Borders at UWM to Guatemala to help with community engagement and building water cisterns. I attended the three-part workshop series with Nearby Nature and GWG, Building an Anti-Racist Environmental Movement. I was trained to be a Climate Reality Leader under former US Vice President Al Gore. I believe everyone should have access to nature and safe drinking water, and we all need to work together to ensure that.

## GWG will co-sponsor Justice Series events

Examples of injustice are deeply woven into environmental issues in Wisconsin, from accessibility of public lands to the health effects of burning fossil fuels. The Great Waters Group and Nearby Nature have signed on as co-sponsors of the Sierra Club Wisconsin Chapter's online Environmental Justice Event Series.

The series follows spring events on the impact of I-94 expansion and an energy burden report. The Sierra Club hopes these events provide a chance to explore the inequities rooted within environmental impacts.

To sign up for the remaining programs, go to [www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/calendar](http://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/calendar).

- **Wednesday, Nov. 3, 6:30 p.m.** Uprooting Racism, Seeding Sovereignty: Virtual keynote featuring Leah and Naima Penniman of Soul Fire Farm
- **Wednesday, Nov. 11, 7 p.m.** Indigenous Resistance to Mining in Wisconsin: Panel discussion
- **Thursday, Jan. 6, 6 p.m.** Environmental Justice in Sierra Club: Panel discussion with Sierra Club leaders



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*Protect America's Environment  
for Our Families, For Our Future*

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## Park defenders fight for legal standing

*(Continued from page 2)*

courses on acreage it owns north of the park. Kohler-Andrae State Park, the fourth most visited state park in Wisconsin, and the Kohler land comprise a single eco-system that DNR researchers call Kohler-Andrae Lakeshore.

Environmental groups including Friends of the Black River Forest have opposed this plan, citing environmental, cultural and economic concerns. Community advocates gathered in support of Friends of Black River Forest at the Supreme Court hearing.

“If my years of research on local, state, and federal public lands have told me anything, it is that public lands like Kohler Andrae State Park are not only cherished by the public and very heavily used, but they are outrageously valuable in obvious and not so obvious ways,” said Steven Davis, professor of political science at Edgewood College and author of *In Defense of Public Lands*.

“Environmental economists have been researching the economic value of public lands for quite some time using conventional tools like job creation, gate revenue and economic spin-off effects, and also by measuring the value of usually ignored ecosystem services like water retention and filtration or carbon sequestration,” Davis went on.

“What we find is that the Kohler Andrae is spectacularly valuable. UW researchers rank it as the second most profitable park in the system and one which creates nearly \$20 million annually in regional economic spin-off. And the ecosystem service value of these pristine dunes and forests is many times greater. In the end, it’s as simple as this: something super valuable and much loved is being taken from the public who owns it and given to a private business.”

## Three from GWG win Chapter awards

*(Continued from page 4)*

directors, Nearby Nature staff and volunteers clean up streams, provide outdoor education to youth, and hike, bike, and paddle trails and waterways in Milwaukee’s Lincoln Creek Greenway.

Victoria Gillet moved to Milwaukee in June and brings the energy and dedication that earned her a Merit award to the Great Waters Group. We are fortunate to have all three award winners committing their time and energy to building a better environment for local residents.