

The Lookout

Newsletter of the Sierra Club Huron Valley Group

Fall 2020



"Community engagement and activism takes many forms, from participating in group recreation that builds community and friendships, to volunteering on projects and initiatives which not only benefit the community but also provide participants an opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills. HVG is passionate about providing our members with chances to explore, enjoy and protect our environment and communities..."



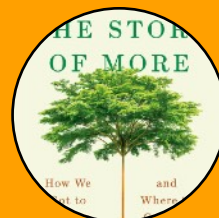
Thoughts from the Chair

2020 Successes & 2021 Priorities



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Book Club Goes Virtual



STAYING CONNECTED IN A COVID-19 WORLD

Working Towards Equitable Access and Participation

Huron Valley Group Executive Committee Election



Ballot Inside!

Thoughts from the Chair

Dan Ezekiel

HVG Executive
Committee Chair



Hopefully, by the time you read this, we will be celebrating the election and the impending easing of our national and environmental nightmare. After we celebrate, we will need to get back to work undoing the grievous harm the Trump administration and its corporate and governmental enablers has done to our country and to our environment.

The Huron Valley Group identified the election as our top priority for the year. Two actions we took were letter-writing and informal fundraising. Inspired by member Janet Kahan, many of us wrote letters to infrequent voters, through votefd.org, encouraging them to vote. As a group we created more than 1400 handwritten letters to voters in many battleground states. Many of our letters went to voters in states that flipped, including Michigan, of course, but also hundreds that went to Georgia, North Carolina, and Arizona.

Special kudos to supervolunteers Cecilia Trudeau, Judy Webster, John Metzler, Eileen Dickinson, my wife Tina, who addressed most of my envelopes, an anonymous HVG member who wrote more than 250 letters, and Janet herself, who personally wrote well over 400 letters. We were part of a nationwide effort that ended up generating more than 15,000,000 letters!



I also want to share with you that our leadership put together a fundraiser for Congresswoman Elissa Slotkin. Erica Ackerman, Richard Barron, and especially Susan Schmidt knocked themselves out on that one. Because of legal requirements, this was not an official HVG activity, but Cong. Slotkin is an environmental champion, is Sierra Club-endorsed, and we are grateful to all who took part and donated. Thanks to your generosity, we were able to raise approximately \$5000 for her campaign.

Rep. Slotkin graciously shared her time with us and told interesting and funny stories from her campaign, including “fake book groups,” made up of wives of Republican men, who were actually campaigning for Elissa at

their “book club” meetings. Happily, Elissa has been re-elected

We didn’t achieve all our goals in the election, for example we weren’t able to flip the badly-gerrymandered Michigan House to an environmental majority. But if every state had done as well by the environment as Michigan did, our country would be in fine shape. Thank you to every HVG member who voted and/or participated in a campaign. When each of us does a little, our cumulative impact is a lot!

As we look ahead, I believe two main themes will define our priorities in 2021 and for decades to come: climate mitigation and environmental justice. We environmentalists will need to press government at all levels to understand that these two issues are really two facets of the same issue.

I have had my consciousness raised by Sierra Club community organizer, Justin Onwenu, who works out of “Michigan’s most toxic Zip Code,” 48217 in Detroit. This small area contains Michigan’s only remaining oil



Justin Onwenu

refinery as well as numerous other chemical and energy-related factories that discharge their waste into the air and water where poor people and people of color live.

Justin points out that each facility in 48127 is regulated separately as far as the maximum limit of effluent they produce. However, they are all spewing these toxins into a small geographic area, so the effect on the people who live in these “sacrifice zones” is cumulative.

Justin and his community recently reached an agreement with Marathon, the owner of the refinery, to install an air filtration system on an elementary school very close to the facility. That’s such a great achievement, but the children don’t live at school; they have to go outside to play, then go home, where they will be unprotected. Imagine it was your child, skipping rope or doing their homework, in the fumes of an oil refinery! It is almost always those who have the least power in our society who pay the steepest cost for environmental fouling.

Like every child, the children of 48127 need and deserve clean air and water and a clean future. That is our task moving forward. It will be long and difficult, but we are resilient; let’s get to work!

Join us for the HVG Program Meetings

Every third Tuesday
of the month from 7:30-8:30PM

<https://www.sierraclub.org/michigan/huron-valley/virtual-meetings>

Communications

Jaime Magiera

Communications
Committee Chair



As the pandemic continues on into Winter, one of our fundamental challenges has been keeping environmentalists connected to the important issues in their communities and connected to each other. Both the HVG Executive Committee meetings and the Monthly member programs have moved online. Although moving these gatherings online has meant the loss of human contact, it has provided the benefit of increased access. People are more likely to step away from their daily tasks to log onto a conference via their computer or phone, than to commute to our in-person meeting locations. Attendance at our online meetings has been great. We're regularly seeing between 35-50 attendees. The program meetings have been recorded and I'm happy to announce that we've now posted each of them to our [YouTube channel](#). Archiving our program meetings helps members access the great information presented during these gatherings and it helps us maintain a record of all the great work activists are doing across the state.

That being said, while the changes mentioned above have made it easier for some folks to partake, we have a long way to go in making HVG gatherings and resources truly accessible to folks across the spectrum in terms of race, income, access to technology, etc. A clear theme has risen to the surface while assembling this issue of the newsletter: Equitable Access.



A variety of leaders from eastern Washtenaw County participated in our November Program Meeting

If today's environmental movement is truly going to be a movement of the people, it has to be inclusive of those who have limited time, money, education, and access to technology. It has to be inclusive of those who have been marginalized in terms of income, education, access to resources, decision-making, and the democratic process. When so many people, particularly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are struggling just to survive the gauntlet of demonization and violence they are subjected to daily, we have to do better. We need better outreach, better ways of sharing information, and better paths to participation. I'm heartened by the fact that in the last HVG election I was joined by another person of color and it looks like there will be a third after this election. Representation is crucial to solving the issues of equitable access.

The Communications Committee is all ears for suggestions on ways in which HVG can improve its outreach, making our information and our resources available across the region. Please feel free to reach with your comments and suggestions.

I wish you good health and wellbeing always.

Conservation Committee Update

Stephen C. Brown
Conservation
Committee Chair



I'll be setting up to continue our monthly meetings on Zoom, so please look for this e-mail or Facebook notification soon. Local Conservation issues remain:

- 1) **Preservation of natural features and parks.** Minimizing turfgrass and converting it to native ecosystems provides many benefits. Construction of trails such as the B2B, Treeline, and others will enhance non-motorized access to the countryside. Please help advocate for governmental support of these projects throughout the HVG domain.
- 2) **Improving Air and Water Quality.** Release of toxics remain a threat to wildlife and people. The 1,4-dioxane plume (first identified in 1987) continues its infiltration toward the Huron River, and has reached the downtown area. PFAS, other toxics, and micro plastics continue to threaten the health of the Huron River watershed. Spreading biosolids on fields in Lenawee County threaten the health of local residents, the River Raisin watershed, and contribute to the growing harmful algal blooms in western Lake Erie. DTE coal plants and ash pits in Monroe County contaminate our region with Mercury, other toxic metals, gases, and PM2.5 that fuel high respiratory disease incidence. Eliminating burning of fossil fuels will



choke the demand for pipelines, fracking, and other disasters to our shared environment.

- 3) **Improving livability of the region.** Given the existential threat of the Climate Emergency, getting our communities to Carbon Neutrality ASAP is paramount and long overdue. Achieving this goal will enable all others consistent with the Club's values. Locally, this means renewable energy, affordable housing, public transportation, biking and walking streets and trails, and enhanced local plant food production and distribution.

Statewide and Nationally, go to the Club's websites to contribute to these campaigns. Join the HVG Outings programs when they resume, and make the most of our social distancing until then. I make two phone calls a day to government representatives, based on calls for action that can be found at these websites. Please keep in mind the principles of Environmental Justice as our work goes forward. The Club is strong and getting stronger, if we are all willing and active.

Community Engagement & Activism

Anya Dale

Outings Chair

Photos by John Metzler

Community engagement and activism takes many forms, from participating in group recreation that builds community and friendships, to volunteering on projects and initiatives which not only benefit the community but also provide participants an opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills. HVG is passionate about providing our members with chances to explore, enjoy and protect our environment and communities.

In many ways, we aim to introduce new and existing members to these opportunities through our Outings Program. Unfortunately, this program is on hold during the covid-pandemic. However, there are still many opportunities to get outdoors and to be active with environmental and social sustainability in your community.

Our [HVG Sierra Club Meet-Up Group](#) posts recommendations for hikes to do on your own or with your family, providing trail maps as well as seasonal pictures so you can enjoy these spaces confidently. We encourage our members to get outside and explore, and share your favorite hikes, including pictures.

There are also ample opportunities to stay involved in your community, including volunteering with trail maintenance and



New England Aster, Whitmore Lake Preserve

invasive species removal in our parks and natural areas (resources below):

Washtenaw County Parks

City of Ann Arbor Natural Area Preservation

City of Ypsilanti Adopt a Park

Washtenaw Housing Alliance

There is also a growing recognition of the need to focus on the intersectionality between the environmental movement, equity, justice and inclusion. This time without traditional recreational outings serves as an opportunity for reflection, self-education and discussion on the ways in which we might broaden our thinking and extend our understanding and practice of sustainability to include social justice.

There is a long history of BIPOC communities being subjected to a disproportionate environmental hazard risk. This inequity may present more subtly as fewer resources allowing participation in environmental programs and initiatives, such as installing solar panels on their property. While many environmental

organizations, Sierra Club included, have not engaged with BIPOC as much as we should, those communities do have environmental concerns, activism, and utilize the great outdoors. With this in mind, HVG is currently in a period of reflection, prioritizing more focus on working with community partners to identify ways to build on this intersectionality, develop more avenues to support critical work, and extend resources beyond typical geographical and economic boundaries.

While we continue to flesh out opportunities for HVG-coordinated opportunities, we strongly encourage our membership to get active with some of the well established organizations and effective programs already doing critical social and environmental justice work locally and regionally. This work ranges from addressing food insecurity to pollution prevention. Below are just a few of example options and resources worth exploring and supporting:

Food Gatherers

Community Action Network Resource Guide

Lenawee and Monroe County food pantries

[Michigan Environmental Council](#)

These are just a few examples of the many opportunities that exist to stay involved and help build a healthy, sustainable community. If we are to create a strong and more inclusive environmental movement, it is critical for those who have the time and resources to be engaged with their community. As such, we encourage you to look into these and other opportunities, and share your ideas with us through our MeetUp and Facebook platforms as well!



Pileated Woodpecker, Matthaei Botanical Gardens



Matthaei Botanical Gardens



Huron River, Barton Nature Area



Fleming Creek, Matthaei Botanical Gardens

The HVG Book Club: Come Join Us

Nancy Shiffler



In a world where we are confronted with small bits of information – sound bites, tweets, Facebook entries – it can be rewarding to find a deeper perspective on our world by the simple act of reading a good book, and there are lots of them out there. The Huron Valley Group sponsors a book group that meets monthly from September to May (second Tuesday of the month, 7:30 pm). Normally we meet at Nicola's Books in Ann Arbor, but the current pandemic has led us to meet on-line for the time being.

Our selections include a mixture of titles covering nature, science, politics, and history as related to the environment. Join us every month or when a title intrigues you. Our list of books for November through February include:

- November 10: The Story of More: How We Got to Climate Change and Where to Go from Here, by Hope Jahren.
- December 8: Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime, by Bruno Latour.
- January 12: Troubled Water: What's Wrong with What We Drink, by Seth M. Siegel.
- February 9: Reading the Rocks: The Autobiography of the Earth, by Marcia Bjornerud.

Political Committee Update

Erica Brown Ackerman

Political Committee Chair



The Huron Valley Group has been busy getting environmentalists elected to office, starting with the president. Closer to home, the Sierra Club endorsed Debbie Dingell for the US House of Representatives, as well as Yousef Rabhi and Felicia Brabec for the Michigan House. In addition, the HVG endorsed Will Garcia in Lenawee County for Michigan's 57th District, as well as Christopher Slat in Monroe County for the 17th. We also got involved outside our region, when we assisted in publicizing a virtual fundraiser for US Rep. Elissa Slotkin in the 8th District. That event raised \$5,000 for her successful re-election campaign.

Going forward, we will be working to push for action on climate change and other environmental issues on the local, state, and national levels.

Watch recordings of HVG Program Meetings on our YouTube channel...

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaD_YavHRhXXnirP78N5WQ

Sierra Club Huron Valley Group

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HVG Executive Committee

Dan Ezekiel

Chair

Jaime Magiera

Communications Committee Chair

Jason Frenzel

Secretary & Treasurer

Erica Ackerman

Political Committee Chair

Anya Dale

Outings Committee Chair

Amanda Sweetman

Anne Brown

Are You A New Member?

Welcome to the Huron Valley Group of the Sierra Club. When you join the Sierra Club you are automatically a member of a local group, as well as a state chapter and the national organization. Membership entitles you to this newsletter as well as all editions of the state and national member publications. Check our online calendar for announcements of Monthly Public Program topics and other activities. We will be glad to see you at our next meeting or answer any questions if you care to call. Please take advantage of your membership as an opportunity to enjoy, preserve and protect our natural environment!

How to Get HVG reminders via email!

At each HVG general meeting, there is an email sign up list. For those who missed it, or haven't joined us at a meeting, you can sign up at...

<https://sierraclub.org/michigan/huron-valley/email-list>

The Lookout is published in Spring and Fall each year. Design, layout, and typesetting by Jaime Magiera



Shopping for the Earth

You can help the earth at no cost to you – through your regular shopping!

- Over the past 15 years, the Sierra Club Huron Valley Group's **Shopping for the Earth** has been a very successful program for supporting our efforts to protect parks, natural areas and local farmland, and to address local and regional environmental problems.
- For every \$20 of cards you buy, you get the full \$20 in store credit and earn from \$0.80 to as much as \$4.60, depending on the merchant, for the Sierra Club.

Great for:

- ✓ Regular purchases like grocery shopping
- ✓ Giving as gifts
- ✓ Planned purchases like appliances
- ✓ Making online purchases

There are two ways to order cards:

1. Mail-In Order Form for groceries from local stores including:

Ann Arbor People's Food Co-op, Arbor Brewing Company, Arbor Farms, Busches, Kroger, Meijers, Produce Station, Whole Foods, and more...

2. Online ordering from over 600 national merchants including:

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bath & Body Works, Best Buy, Cabela's, Chipotle Mexican Grill, CVS/pharmacy, Econo Lodge, Glen's Market, Groupon, Home Depot, iTunes, Kohl's, L.L.Bean, Lands' End, Lowe's, Noodles & Company, Office Max, REI, Rite Aid, Sears, gas stations, Starbucks, Tim Hortons, United Artist Theatres, Walgreens, Whole Foods, and more...

Visit our website for more information:

<https://www.sierraclub.org/michigan/huron-valley/shopping-for-earth>

Huron Valley Group Executive Committee Elections

Vote Paper Ballot or on-line at our Website

The Sierra Club is the largest democratically run environmental organization in the world, with direct election of leaders at the national Board, state Chapter and local Group level each year. Participation by members in the voting process is crucial for maintaining this structure. The Executive Committee (ExCom) for the Huron Valley Group is responsible for the administration and operation of the group, and does so entirely with volunteers. This fall, HVG members will be electing four ExCom members for two-year terms beginning in January 2021. The Nominations Committee has nominated four candidates for the four ExCom positions.

The Elections Committee is responsible for collecting candidate statements and for the production, mailing, receipt, and counting of ballots. All Sierra Club members within HVG territory (Washtenaw, Monroe, and Lenawee Counties) at the time the mailing list for the Fall newsletter is generated are eligible to vote. The ballot appears in the paper edition of the Fall newsletter and may be returned via mail, and received no later than the December 21, per the instructions accompanying the ballot. Vote on-line at:

<https://www.sierraclub.org/michigan/huron-valley/excom-election-2020>

Please review the candidate statements on the following page or online and submit your ballot. Voting reinforces your involvement with the Sierra Club Huron Valley Group.



HVG ExCom Election

July 21, 2020: Nominees must inform the Nominating Committee of their interest by the July ExComm Meeting

Aug 06, 2020: Nominating Committee notifies candidates and ExComm of nomination status.

Sep 15, 2020: Any candidate petitions and/or ballot issue petitions must be delivered to the Nominating Committee at the September General Meeting.

Oct 01, 2020: Candidate statements and photographs are due to Elections Committee.

Oct 01, 2020: Final candidate list given to the Executive Committee.

Nov 1, 2020: Eligible voter list is pulled from the member database. Election materials are finalized to be posted on the website and distributed through the newsletter.

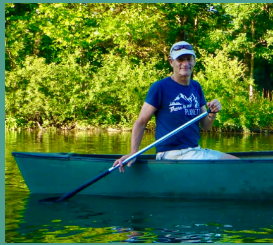
Dec, 21 2020: Ballot count process begins, completing no later than December 31. After completion, candidates are notified.

HVG Executive Committee Candidates 2020



Jessica Ankley

My name is Jessica Ankley and I am a recent graduate from the University of Michigan where I studied Environmental Science and Political Science. Currently residing in Ypsilanti, I'm learning first-hand about the importance of a strong community bond. Being a place outside of Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti oftentimes gets put on the back burner when it comes to representation among the environmental community. My apartment complex is near the Huron River which contains large, flashy signs of PFAS warnings. We lack a composting service and litter is frequent in our public parks. However, this does not mean the people that live here don't seek environmental prosperity. We simply lack the support to receive it. I believe I could provide valuable insight on an important, beautiful, resilient part of Washtenaw County to the HVG. I have experience in working with Clean Water Action, local campaigns, and the Sierra Club based in Lansing, of which I've developed the necessary skills to understand individuals in communities who believed they were left behind. If I were to join the Sierra Club Executive Committee, I'd be able to serve my community on an even greater level and represent the town that I deeply care for.



Dan Ezekiel

HVG members, I ask for your vote to continue on the Huron Valley Group Executive Committee. I'm a lifelong environmentalist, a graduate of the National Outdoor Leadership School (twice) and the U of M School of Natural Resources (now SEAS). I'm also a career science teacher, mostly in the Ann Arbor Public Schools, and I hold a Masters degree in Education Leadership. I helped found Recycle Ann Arbor, led the fight to save the Ann Arbor school district's Environmental Education Program, chaired the city's Greenbelt Commission, and currently serve on the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission.

I've had the honor to chair the Huron Valley Group's Executive Committee since being elected two years ago. My team has reinvigorated the Outings program, which should be the base of any Sierra Club group. We have advocated successfully for ambitious climate initiatives by Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County, and the Ann Arbor school district. Currently we are focused on helping elect an environmentalist President, US Congress, and Michigan legislature. We have moved toward refreshing our group into one that reflects our constituency, especially younger folks and people of color. We recently collaborated with two other Sierra Club groups to present a program about Environmental Justice, and we've held a series of meetings with opinion leaders in eastern Washtenaw County to discuss the ways we can better serve the environmental needs of citizens of color and less-affluent citizens.

I look forward to an Executive Committee that will be 3/7 people of color after this election (up from zero two years ago). We aren't perfect, and we still have much to do and learn. I'll appreciate your support and your feedback. Onward and upward, and let's keep Exploring, Enjoying, and Protecting the planet!

HVG Executive Committee Candidates 2020



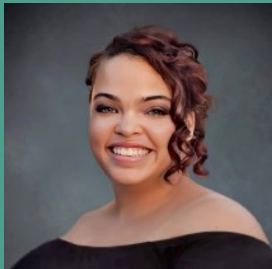
Jason Frenzel

Hello fellow HVG members. I'm honored by the potential opportunity to serve on the executive committee for another two years, thank you for taking the time to review all the candidates. For the past 23 years I've worked in the Washtenaw/SE Michigan area creating and supporting environmental initiatives. For my first years out of college, as an AmeriCorps worker, I worked with local farmers to install measures that protect environmental resources. I worked for 10 years at the City of Ann Arbor's Natural Area Preservation, drastically increasing the number of stewardship workdays, Park Stewards, and other volunteer positions. For the past 10 years I've worked at the Huron River Watershed Council. Again, my work has been to increase resident participation in promoting the health of our shared environment, mostly through citizen science.

My volunteer work over the years has included founding and serving on the HomeGrown Food Festival and Local Food Summit, long-time volunteering with the Jim Toy Community Center, and serving as the president of the national association of volunteer managers.

Over the past 2 years on HVG's executive committee, I served as Treasurer and Secretary. In this role I've worked to make the notes and books more transparent and more readily utilized by the leadership team and others. This has also meant helping Mr Ezekiel on numerous projects including outreach to eastern Washtenaw and improving our internal meeting structures. One of our greatest successes has been the increase in participation in our leadership team, allowing more voices to be present and lessening the load on each team member.

I look forward, with your support, to increasing all of these initiatives – diversity, community voice, transparency, impact, and team health – over the next two years.



Tajalli Hodge

Hello Huron Valley Group, thank you for this opportunity to be considered as a member of your executive committee. I've always been drawn to improving our green spaces. While in college, I volunteered cleaning oil off of wildlife after the 2010 Enbridge oil spill into the Kalamazoo river. I graduated with me degree in biology and environmental science. Soon after, I found a career with the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD), where I've worked over the past 6 years in two different divisions protecting both the environment and our fellow Michiganders and gained experience nagivating and interpreting a multitude of laws and regulations.

I'm also extremely passionate about our green spaces and parks in Ypsilanti township where I live. I realized that some of our neighborhood parks are under-utilized and undeveloped. Because I see and am living with the disparity in park resources, I was motivated to run for our Township Park Commission where I will strive for the change I wish to see in our community. Having won my August primary and having no opponents in November, I look forward to taking office this fall. Improvements that I am working towards in Sugarbrook Park include: pollinator plantings (which I'm hoping to work with the Sierra Club on), a community herb and Michigan native wildflower garden, a dog run, as well as additional seating and parking.

I hope to lend my experience to the Sierra Club and look forward to continuing my relationship with HVG as we work to improve the environment and work to address environmental justice issues.

Thank you



Staghorn Sumac, Greenview and Pioneer Nature Areas



Huron Valley Group
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Photos by John Metzler