



The Lookout

Newsletter of the Sierra Club Huron Valley Group

Spring-Summer 2021



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Thoughts from the Chair

Jason Frenzel

HVG Executive Committee Chair

Writing this article as I anticipate the (hopefully) deafening roar of the Brood X cicadas, I am reflecting on the Sierra Club's mission, "Explore, enjoy and protect the planet". I've lived my entire professional career and nearly my whole life working towards this amazing goal. Having a mission-driven personality, when a vision for a better world is illuminated, I'm drawn to it: hence, my volunteering with the Sierra Club.

Recently I was walking along a new section of the Border-to-Border trail near Dexter, with a young friend. When I was his age, highways were being expanded for the betterment of society – to get us to more important things, more quickly. Most of us now know that all those miles of pavement and all those gallons of gas are not good for us. But most didn't know that 40 years ago. And I thought of the cicadas that were all along the biking and walking path that we were on, sharing a safe and comfortable walk.

Two important things came to me on that walk.

First, not everyone has access to walk on that path. Certainly, we've come a long way from routinely cutting communities apart with highways. And, we're doing a better job of making accessible natural areas. But are they truly open to everyone? In the past year I hope most of us have realized the answer to this question is a resounding "No". Our society has not created safe and equitable space for all. I



am heartened that the national Sierra Club firmly came out against its own racist past ([smithsonianmag.org 06/2020](https://www.smithsonianmag.org/06/2020)). This is a critical step in the path that our organization must take, so that our mission pertains to all.

Second, if we've come "this far" (is it really very far?) in a few decades, we certainly have much to learn and adapt so we can be better stewards going forward. Looking at all the cicada emergence holes all over the park, I wondered, "what about the ones under the new pathway I'm walking on?" Our progress from gas-guzzling vehicles to multi-modal transit is certainly an improvement for the world. But we have many more lessons to learn before "exploring and enjoying" is harmonious with "protecting".

I am deeply proud to work with the HVG leadership team. Each member brings diverse strengths to the table, which I believe we honor and acknowledge. We invite each of you to participate in our outings, fundraising, stewardship, advocacy, and leadership of, what I hope to be, a healthy, evolving organization.

Communications

Jaime Magiera

HVG Executive Committee
Communications Committee Chair

Everything is green and the air is full of the sounds of life as we head into Summer. There are some important news items on the communications front since the last newsletter that I'd like to highlight.

First and foremost, the HVG Executive Committee voted to discontinue a print version of the newsletter. This was a really difficult decision. For me, there is a certain joy in holding printed material in my hands. The smell of the paper and of the ink, and the act of flipping pages, all combine to create a deeply sensual experience. Of all the technologies ever invented, the printed page remains the most immersive and most easily navigated. That being said, the HVG newsletter was by far the largest expense in our budget. Each issue cost us thousands of dollars to print and distribute. For a non-profit organization that relies on gifts from the community, that expense has a lot of implications. In short, it means less resources for the outreach, education, and outdoor experiences we provide the greater HVG community. Also, there are the obvious environmental concerns. The process of printing and distributing of the newsletter has an environmental cost. With the print version, the embedded carbon cost is quite high for something people may or may not read in any detail (we try to make the newsletter engaging!) With the digital version, the embedded carbon cost is shared amongst all the other uses of the server and network infrastructure which host it. People will only download the newsletter if they want to read it. The equation is different. So for now, the



newsletter will still come out twice a year in digital format. As usual, we'll let you know it's available via email and social media announcement. A post card was sent out to the membership notifying them of this change.

During my time as Chair of the Communications Committee, there have been many requests to share my knowledge and processes for organizing, streaming, and archiving meetings. This has been particularly true during the pandemic as other Sierra Club groups look to stay connected with their membership. To that end, I've started the Bootstrap Project to provide basic guidance on how local Sierra Club groups (and really any community groups) can organize, publicize, and manage online meetings. Videos walk the viewer through the process of organizing event information, signing up for a zoom account, and moderating the actual meeting. You can find the videos on our [YouTube Channel](#). More are on the way.

I wish you good health and wellbeing always.

Conservation Committee Update

Stephen C. Brown

Conservation Committee Chair

Regular Meetings of the committee remain on hiatus until social restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic are relaxed later this year. I'll be setting up special topical meetings on ZOOM, so please look for this e-mail or Facebook notification soon. Local Conservation issues remain:

Carbon Neutrality: The City of Ann Arbor is committed to Carbon Neutrality, city-wide, by 2030. A broad coalition of community groups and eNGO's such as the Huron Valley Group are actively supporting this initiative that is proceeding through the A2zero campaign. Moreover, the Washtenaw County Commission, Ann Arbor Public Schools, and the University of Michigan have all declared similar goals to combat the Climate Crisis. 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 food production and distribution. HVG members are actively volunteering to aid all of these campaigns. Come join us!

Preservation of Natural Features and Parks: Several invasive plants have greatly diminished local natural landscapes since 1970. The major species are Glossy Buckthorn, Amur Honeysuckle, Tree of Heaven, and others that have choked out native trees, shrubs, and prairie plants. Club members volunteer with the Ann Arbor Natural Area Preservation (NAP) program to learn and help reclaim native

habitats. Insect populations in general are down 70% since 1970 as well, so minimizing turfgrass and converting it to native ecosystems provides many benefits. Construction of trails will enhance non-motorized access to the countryside. Please help advocate for governmental support of these projects throughout the HVG domain.

Improving Air & Water Quality: Release of toxics remain a threat to wildlife and people. The 1,4-dioxane plume in Ann Arbor continues its march toward the Huron River. Congresswoman Debbie Dingell was instrumental in persuading all the stakeholders, and getting a letter of concurrence from Governor Whitmer, to request EPA Superfund status for this groundwater plume. 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.

Statewide and Nationally, go to the Club's websites to contribute to these campaigns. I contact two elected officials daily, 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 active.

Environmental Justice Update

Tajalli Hodge

HVG Executive Committee

On the east side of Ypsilanti Township, there is a small neighborhood called Sugarbrook. It sits adjacent to I-94 on one side and is filled with 600+ single family homes and a diverse population of over 3800 residents. However, Sugarbrook is home to the highest disability rate in Washtenaw County and 60% of households have a household income of \$39,999 or less according to the 2017 American Community Survey.

Along with impoverished communities comes a lack of access to resources - a lack of access to groceries stores, green spaces, and worse air quality. Sugarbrook is in a food desert, is bordered by a highway where fuel emissions affect the air quality of residents and has a park that is largely empty. Other township parks have tennis courts, horseshoe posts, trails, parking lots and more.



Now, we're working towards establishing a 3800 square foot garden with Michigan native plants at the park. The garden will include plants such as Blue Flag Iris, wild strawberry, and nodding onion, among others. The goal is to make a garden attractive to the residents who live here and deserve beautiful parks just as much as their affluent township neighbors. The garden will contain an educational component with signage on each of the different species and their benefits. A bonus is that the plants will help to offset some pollution from the highway and increase the natural biodiversity of plants and insects in the area.

The garden is being established entirely by grant funding secured from organizations and work from volunteers. If you look closely, you may even see something neat - the garden will be in the shape of the mitten state and will be coming to Sugarbrook Park this fall. If you put your mind to it, you can do it and so much more.

To get involved, contact Tajalli Hodge at tkelleygraves@gmail.com



Political Committee Update

Erica Brown Ackerman

HVG Political Committee Chair

The HVG has been working for years with state and local governments to establish a process to clean up the Gelman 1,4-dioxane plume moving under Ann Arbor towards the Huron River. This contamination threatens the drinking water supply for 150,000 people. In 2016, the HVG joined with Scio and Ann Arbor Townships in petitioning the EPA to consider the Gelman plume for Superfund designation. Earlier this year, following their rejection of yet another inadequate Consent Judgement amendment, the local communities (City of Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County, Ann Arbor Township, and Scio Township, joined by the Sierra Club) asked the State to officially request that the EPA restart the Superfund assessment process. The required letter was sent by the Michigan Department of the Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) on April 12. This is a major step forward in reaching a true clean up plan. In the meantime, parallel work will continue in the State-court proceedings to update the controlling Consent Judgment.

In other work, the HVG has participated in the Ann Arbor Climate Partnership and supported the work of A2ZERO, the city's initiative to reach carbon neutrality by 2030. In addition, since voters approved a \$1 billion school millage a year and a half ago, HVG members have been actively pressing the school district to follow through on their commitment to using solar, geothermal, and other renewable energy sources in renovated schools.



Book Club

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. For the past several years the HVG has sponsored a book group that meets monthly from September to May (2nd Tuesday of the month, 7:30 pm). This year we have been meeting virtually (via Zoom) due to club pandemic policy, and will probably continue that format in the coming year, as it worked well for attendance. 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.

We have a couple of books in mind for next fall, but haven't determined the order. If you want to get started on them over the summer, here they are:

Land: How the Hunger for Ownership Shaped the Modern World, by Simon Winchester.

The Secret Wisdom of Nature: Trees, Animals and the Extraordinary Balance of All Living Things -- Stories from Science and Observation, by Peter Wohlleben.

Dates and reminders will be posted on MeetUp and our group website. You can also sign up for our Listserv reminders by contacting me.

Outings Update

Shonda Tohm and John Metzler

Outings, like other in-person events, remain on hold until at least July 4th, as directed by Sierra Club National. As of mid-May, eight “Pilot” outings have been run as part of developing criteria for restarting Outings. Hopefully the feedback from those and additional planned Pilot outings will encourage National to re-open outings sooner. Although we are disappointed we cannot host official Sierra Club outings, stay tuned for future updates on outings and other meetings, as the SC develops further guidance.

While Outings are still closed, Nature is open! We encourage you to get out and enjoy the great outdoors during this beautiful season. As of the time of writing, the CDC and State of Michigan guidance both indicate outdoor activities like hiking are quite safe, although masks are recommended for unvaccinated people (check CDC and local health authorities for updated guidance).

Local places to go: No need to go far to enjoy the sights of spring and summer! Our [Exercise Guides](#) offer routes in many area parks and natural areas you can enjoy with friends: ()

Fauna you may see: This is a wonderful time of year to get out (but, then, we tend to think all seasons are wonderful). In June and July you can expect to see lots of ducklings and goslings anywhere there is water in our area. In many areas you will also come across colts (young Sandhill Cranes). If you are quiet and go out early in the day or near dusk, you might get the treat of seeing a doe with her new fawn

following closely behind her.

Also, remember that ticks are out enjoying the late Spring and early Summer. For some guidance on ticks, visit our [Tick Hunting!](#) exercise guide



Showy lady-slipper (mid June) Blue Lake Loop, Highland State Recreation Area

Common flowers you may see: It is also a great season for flowers, with almost too many in bloom to name, including: pond lilies (yellow), water lilies (white), blue flag iris, a variety of milkweeds (common, butterfly, swamp), showy lady-slippers, swamp rose, pickerel weed, bergamot, hairy vetch, crown vetch, blue forget-me-nots, chicory, common yarrow, vervain, pitcher plants, ghost pipe, Queen Anne’s lace, cardinal flower, St. John’s wort, and Michigan lilies. Common mullein and purple loosestrife are also signs of summer, although they are deemed invasive plants.

Several local organizations have resumed offering small group activities:

Ann Arbor Natural Area Preservation is holding [stewardship days](#)

Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation is [holding events](#)

Ypsilanti Township Parks [has events.](#))

Hoping to meet you on the trail soon!



Swamp milkweed w/Tiger swallowtail (late July) – Watkins Lake State Park and County Preserve



Butterfly weed (late June) – Hickory Ridge Trail, Island Lake State Recreation Area



Pickerel Weed (early July) – Pickerel Lake, Pinckney State Recreation Area



Bergamot (mid July) Marshall Freeman

Program Update

Dan Ezekiel

HVG Political Committee Chair

HVG Programs are held every month on the third Tuesday, 7:30-9 pm. In the before times (and hopefully soon again), they were held at the U of M Botanical Gardens. Although they were virtual, due to the pandemic, we've had amazing monthly programs at HVG lately!

November, 2020: For our annual Ypsi night, we were joined by Ypsilanti Mayor **Lois Richardson** and Ypsi Township Supervisor **Brenda Stumbo**, for a program called Environment, Equity, and Eastern Washtenaw County. Forty folks attended, and it was by far the most diverse attendance of any program we've held. The format was suggested by our Executive Committee Vice Chair, Anne Brown. We had great attendance by elected officials, including County Commissioners Ricky Jefferson, Justin Hodge and Chair Sue Shink, as well as newly-elected Judge Erane Washington, Ypsi Twp. Parks and Rec Commissioner (and HVG Executive Committee member) Tajalli Hodge, County Water Resources Commissioner Evan Pratt, and State Senator Jeff Irwin. We had an excellent discussion, including plans for the development of the environmentally-blighted Water Street project and some of the "special" environmental issues faced by these communities, such as rats in the storm sewers.

December, 2020: Following HVG tradition, our December meeting was our annual Awards and Member Trips program. This is always one of our most well-attended sessions. Some of the memorable trips included Amanda Sweetman's account of backpacking on Isle Royale, as well as Tajalli Hodge's favorite spots

around Michigan as she travels for her day job with the Department of Agriculture.

Our awards went to **Mike Garfield, Bryan Ukena, Ian Robinson, Chip Smith, and Jack Eaton**, for negotiating the deal under which Recycle Ann Arbor will repair, re-open, and operate Ann Arbor's Materials Recovery Facility for recyclables. **Christine Stead, Richard Barron, and Brenda McKinney** were honored for their service on various HVG Executive Committee Nominations and Elections committees.

Paityn Wedder was Newcomer of the Year, for starting the University of Michigan Sierra Club student group. **Missy Stults** was honored for her exceptional work developing and implementing Ann Arbor's A2Zero plan (to reduce community carbon emissions to net-zero by 2030), **Christian Cannon** was honored for his work with the City of Ypsilanti's Sustainability Commission.

Janet Kahan was honored for introducing us to the Voteforward.com program, which ultimately led to HVG members mailing around 1500 letters to encourage low-propensity voters in swing states to go to the polls. **Susan Schmidt** received an award for spearheading our fundraiser for Congresswoman Elissa Slotkin, which raised about \$5000 for her successful reelection campaign.

David Fair was recognized for his 25 years of deep reporting on environmental issues on WEMU's Issues of the Environment. **Melvin Parson** was recognized for his work with We The People Farm in Ypsi. Outgoing Executive Committee members **Amanda Sweetman and**

Anya Dale received awards for their service to HVG.

January, 2021: Entomologist **David Cappaert** presented Windows on Biodiversity, featuring his amazing macro photos of the insects all around us. Particularly memorable was a sequence showing the incredible diversity of insects who visited the flowers on one small part of Furstenberg Park on a single day.

February, 2021: U of M Law Professor **Michael Steinberg** and Flint Activist **Melissa Mays** gave us an update of Flint's water crisis. We got to experience their passion, as well as the heartbreak this environmental disaster caused for our neighbors to the north.

March, 2021: In our best-attended program in years (75+ people!), Crossroads Group Chair **Lee Burton** introduced us to the wonder of Backyard Birds. We got to see Lee's fine photos



of our feathered friends, as well as hearing some of their songs, to make us better at identifying the birds we see every year.

April, 2021: U of M Sierra Club President **Paityn Wedder** shared her environmental globetrotting adventures with us. We got to vicariously experience her semester at the Island



School in the Caribbean, as well as her wildlife studies in South Africa and Australia (including scuba diving with sharks!) This was Paityn's swan song with HVG, as she has now graduated from U of M and is heading to Northeastern U., in Boston, to continue her wildlife studies in grad school. Godspeed, Paityn!

May, 2021: City of Ann Arbor Sustainability and Innovations Manager **Dr. Missy Stults** updated us on the A2Zero Plan, which aims to make the Ann Arbor community net zero in carbon emissions by 2030. This breathtakingly ambitious plan includes detailed changes in the housing and transportation sectors, with massive investments like the 24 megawatt solar installation planned for the Ann Arbor landfill, megawatts of rooftop solar through the Solarize program, changes to building and planning codes, and massive installations of electric-vehicle charging stations, among many other initiatives.

June, 2021: Our June program will feature local veterinarian **Dr. Cathy Theisen** speaking about the delisting of the Gray Wolf from the Endangered Species List and the consequent threat of a wolf hunt in Michigan, to which Dr. Theisen is passionately opposed.

July, 2021: Our July meeting will feature two local farmers, **Malaika Whitney**, of the Whitney Farmstead, and **Amanda Sweetman**, of the Farm at St. Joe's, will relate the joys and trials of small farming.

Please join us every third Tuesday of the month at 7:30 pm. See you there!

Call for HVG Executive Committee Candidates

Jason Frenzel

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. The Executive

Committee (ExCom) of the Sierra Club Huron Valley Group (HVG) is responsible for the administration and operation of the group. HVG members will be electing three ExCom members this fall, for two-year terms beginning in January 2022. The election process starts this Summer, with the actual voting taking place in the Fall. HVG is an all-volunteer organization which needs the talents of all its members to accomplish its environmental goals.

About the Executive Committee

The HVG Executive Committee (“Excom”) consists of 7 people from the HVG membership who are elected to two-year terms by the membership. They help define rules for the group, administer the group activities, and craft position statements. There are monthly committee meetings, generally on the first Thursday of the month. Excom members are also required to participate in one or two of our smaller committees (e.g. Membership Committee, Communications Committee, Conservation Committee, etc.). The time commitment for ExCom participation is roughly 10-12 hours a month.



Becoming a Candidate

Members interested in serving on ExCom are encouraged to attend one or more ExCom meetings to get a feel for what we do. Likewise, it's helpful to reach out to current ExCom members for guidance. If you decide to make the commitment, please email Nominations Committee Chair Richard Barron (rmorleybarron@gmail.com) with your full name, phone number, member number, and a 500-word statement on why you wish to run for ExCom.

The Election Process

Members willing to serve can get on the ballot either through selection by the HVG Nominating Committee or by a petition signed by at least 15 group members. All potential candidates must be Sierra Club members at the time the Spring newsletter mailing list was extracted from the national member database.

The Nominating Committee consists of at least three HVG members, one or more of whom shall not be an ExCom member, and none of whom may be a candidate in the upcoming election. Candidates who have submitted their application materials will be notified on August 5th if they have been selected by the Nominations Committee. Interested members who did not seek or did not receive nomination from the committee can choose to submit a petition. Petitions must be submitted by the candidate to the

Nominations Committee no later than the September 21st Membership Meeting. Petitions must include the name, address, membership number and signature of the signers. No member may be nominated or elected against their will.

The HVG has a separate Election Committee that is responsible for production, mailing, receipt, and counting of ballots. It consists of at least three group members, one or more of whom shall not be an ExCom member, and none of whom may be a candidate in the upcoming election.

All Sierra Club members within the HVG territory at the time the mailing list for the Fall newsletter is generated are eligible to vote. The ballot will be included in the Fall newsletter. It can be returned via mail or at the December HVG General Meeting per the instructions in the newsletter. An online ballot will be made available on the website during the same time period.

The HVG Election Committee will set a time and place to count the ballots, which will be held after the December HVG General Meeting and before December 31. Candidates or their representatives may observe the ballot counting. Ballots and nominating petitions will be preserved until all opportunities for appeals are exhausted.

The HVG bylaws and standing rules describe the schedule of events for each election can be viewed at www.sierraclub.org/michigan/huron-valley/about-us.

HVG ExCom Election Important Dates

July 20, 2021: Nominees must inform the Nominating Committee of their interest by the July Member Meeting

Aug 05, 2021: Nominating Committee notifies candidates and ExComm of nomination status.

Sep 21, 2021: Any candidate petitions and/or ballot issue petitions must delivered to the Nominating Committee at the September General Meeting.

Oct 01, 2021: Candidate statements and photographs are due to Elections Committee.

Oct 01, 2021: Final candidate list given to the Executive Committee.

Nov 1, 2021: 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, 15 2021: Ballot count process begins, completing no later than December 31. After completion, candidates are notified.

Sierra Club Huron Valley Group

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HVG Executive Committee

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Anne Brown

Vice Chair

Jaime Magiera

Communications Committee Chair

Erica Ackerman

Political Committee Chair

Dan Ezekiel

Programs Committee Chair

Tajalli Hodge

Jessica Ankley

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 and layout by Jaime Magiera. The front covers photos were taken John Metzler



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>



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Huron Valley Group

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European Beech – Ann Arbor, photo by Jaime Magiera