



SOUTHEAST SIERRAN

News of the
Southeast Gateway Group
of the Sierra Club

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Corrective Vision

From the Chair
by Tom Rutkowski

1984 is now playing on Broadway; *A Handmaid's Tale* is streaming on Hulu. We are living in a golden age for dystopias. Many of the new dystopian novels released these days are speculative fictions set in a time of runaway climate change, giving rise to a new genre called Cli Fi. It is, sadly, easy enough to imagine a world with climate extremes; just imagine the news today, often filled with fires and floods and droughts and refugees, and then extrapolate. Add to these environmental forces all the social and economic and political pressures that will arise and you get a world gone terribly wrong. That world will be like today's...only much worse.

It might be that we're wired to pay more attention to immediate danger and that such fiction helps us to think about and avert the worst consequences of a threat that seems remote and slow moving to many. It is can be much harder to imagine the world we want to see, but this too is necessary and valuable. This is the premise of Naomi Klein's new book, *No is Not Enough*, which builds on the ideas advanced in her previous works. In *Shock Doctrine*, Klein argues that shocks - traumatic events such as natural disasters, political and economic upheavals and war - are often used as excuses to advance the neoliberal agenda of privatization, deregulation, and tax cuts. In *This Changes Everything*, Klein proposes that climate change, because it will increase the frequency and intensity of these shocks, will also be used to advance a similar agenda.

What is unique about the problem of climate change is that it is so broad and all encompassing that it can also serve to unite the world and the many groups and causes working to counter it. Klein's latest book begins where the others left off, adding that constantly reacting to and resisting a world we fear is not enough; we need a vision of the world we want to see. In short, it is a call for a utopian vision that has a pragmatic value—a vision that stands in contrast to the daily dose of dystopia. Lesser shocks come daily in these days of disruption, but what will happen when the next natural disaster occurs or war breaks out? Will we have a positive vision strong enough to counter the measures of austerity and authoritarianism sure to be imposed?

In other words, it's necessary and practical to dream, too.

So what is an environmentalist's vision of a world we want to see? These visions also form a separate genre of imaginary worlds known as ecotopias, and like dystopias, they are extensions of values and actions that already exist, in one form or another, somewhere in the world.

In a world where water will be more valuable than oil, the Great Lakes will be the envy of the world. Restored to an ecological balance, the lakes once again will provide not only fresh water but fresh fish, harvested sustainably and free of heavy metals like mercury. Both food and energy will be produced as locally as possible, often in your own backyard or on your own rooftop. Along with production, ownership too will be distributed, preventing special interests from dictating practices that distort our politics and that work against public health and the environment.

The benefits and many jobs of the clean energy revolution will be shared equitably. The \$12 billion that leaves Wisconsin yearly for fossil fuels will be spent on our own communities, bringing a welcome infusion of cash to budget strapped cities. Cars, not improved public transportation, will seem inconvenient. When necessary, you'll be able to summon a driverless, electric car that drops you off and goes on to pick up another passenger. Cities, now designed to provide four parking spaces for every car and enough streets and highways to move them around, will be more compact, providing more green space and easier access. You get the idea. There's more green and less concrete, more windmills and fewer smokestacks, more participants and fewer bystanders. Now you try...



Cli Fi: the new genre of Climate Fiction



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Join like-minded people and learn from experts as SEGG offers informative public programming on environmental issues every **third Thursday** of the month at rotating locations. Membership in the Sierra Club is *not* required to attend.

Fall speakers are still being confirmed. Please visit our website or join *Meetup* for further announcements. Thank you!



WAY TO GO, GROUP!

We now have **216** members who have joined our new Meetup Group!

Sign up today to receive reminders about all SEGG programs and events.

www.meetup.com/Southeast-Gateway-Group-Sierra-Club-Hikes-and-Activities/

SEGG/Weed Out! Racine

Colonial Park Work Days are on the fourth Saturday of each month:

September 23 & October 28
from 9:00 AM to Noon

We will be removing honeysuckle and buckthorn. Park at West High Street lot and follow the Root River pathway across the bridge. Look for signs directing you to the work area. Dress for the weather with long pants, sturdy shoes and socks.

Thursday, September 28 ~ 6:30 PM

Rick Fare from the Hoy Audubon Club will be giving a talk about birds in the AB activities room at the Southwest Kenosha library, 7979 38th Ave.

HIGHWAY 38 CLEANUP

Saturday, September 30, 9:00 AM

Meet in the parking lot of Blessed Hope Church, corner of Hwy 38 and Four Mile Rd for check in, equipment and assignments.

Wear weather-appropriate clothing, good walking shoes and insect repellent.

See article on page 5 for more.

Sign up with John Berge:
262-633-8455 or jberge35@wi.rr.com

FYI: The next SEGG Outing will take us along the walking path around **Lake Geneva**. Please check online or join Meetup for date and time announcements.



Yes! I want to make a difference.

I want to be a member of the Sierra Club and help preserve the beauty of our Earth.

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From time to time, we make our mailing list available to other worthy organizations. If you prefer your name NOT be included, please check here.

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Please check online for the most up-to-date information, daily notices and reminders.

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Beyond Coal Campaign Comes to Southeast Wisconsin



by Miranda Ehrlich, Organizing Apprentice for Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign

The Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign is one of the most successful environmental campaigns in history, working with a myriad of local groups to block the construction of new coal-fired power plants and to retire existing plants across the country.

Over the past year, the Beyond Coal Campaign in Wisconsin began a campaign primarily focused on Madison Gas & Electric (MG&E), the local Madison-area utility. Now, Sierra Club staff and volunteers are reaching out to see if they can support local efforts to stop pollution from the coal-fired power plants in Oak Creek.

Investigative reporting has uncovered significant problems at both the Oak Creek Power Plant and the Elm Road Generating Station, two coal power plants that sit side-by-side on Lake Michigan. Leakage of toxic metals from coal ash into the lake and surrounding groundwater has long been a concern of residents.

In a high-profile incident in 2011, a bluff on the property collapsed, dumping an estimated 2,300 cubic yards of ash and soil directly into Lake Michigan. Furthermore, a report in

2014 by Clean Wisconsin found that coal ash produced by the plants has been spread or buried across Southeastern Wisconsin through "reuse" projects with little oversight or regulation.

In one particularly disturbing case, water at Yorkville Elementary School was found to be contaminated with molybdenum, an element commonly found in coal ash. 856 tons of coal ash was used in a construction project at the site in 2000. Now students at the school can't drink out of the water fountains and must use bottled water instead.

Coal dust has also been a persistent problem for neighborhoods near the plant. Home videos have captured dust billowing off the plant's massive coal pile in windy weather. Uncovered train cars carrying coal have also contributed to dust in the air.

Recent tests conducted by We Energies, the utility that runs the plants, found the presence of coal dust in 19 out of 26 homes tested.

Coal dust has been shown to exacerbate asthma and other

respiratory diseases. Many families near the plant are experiencing these types of health complications.

In addition to its impact on local residents, the Oak Creek coal complex is the biggest carbon polluter in Wisconsin. When considered together, the combination of emissions from the Elm Road and Oak Creek Power Plants totals over 12.5 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent annually, according to EPA data from 2015. Transitioning plants like these from coal to clean energy is essential to prevent the worst impacts of climate change.

While We Energies is the primary owner and operator of these plants, other utilities around the state, including MG&E, receive power from the facilities. It is important that community members, leaders and environmental advocates hold all of the utilities accountable who are invested in the polluting plants.

If you are interested in getting involved in Sierra Club's efforts to hold polluters accountable and move to clean energy, please contact me at 612-998-2758 or miranda.ehrlich@sierraclub.org.

-Miranda Ehrlich



Cranberry Time!!!



Sierra Club's SEGG is again offering fresh cranberries direct from a family-owned Wisconsin farm. These are the plump variety that are rarely found in grocery stores - packed the day they are picked up from the farm. Cranberries are rich in vitamins C, B-6, Potassium and Magnesium. Use them fresh for the upcoming holidays or keep them in the freezer for up to 12 months.

Each one pound bag costs \$3.75 and helps support the Southeast Gateway Group as we work on local conservation projects.

Deadline for ordering is October 25. Delivery and pick up will begin after October 29.

Contact Jeff Sytsma at (262) 637-6845 or Jeff12759@aol.com to place your order.



bioswales - engineering nature



by Melissa Warner, SEGG Leader

Bioswales are much more than drainage ditches prettified with vegetation. They are essential components of a storm water management system.

The drainage ditch in front of my house is intended to convey storm water rapidly downstream, hurrying it to a nearby lake or stream in order to avoid water damage to my house. However, the flooding possibility is merely transferred to someone else downstream. A bioswale, on the other hand, works more like a long narrow rain garden. It holds storm water temporarily, slowing its progress downstream, and conferring several benefits. As the water sits in the swale, it drops the sediment load it has picked up from driveways, roads and parking lots – the oils, paint chips, rust flakes, and ordinary trash –ensuring that cleaner water enters the river or lake. Water sitting in the swale has time to percolate into the soil and recharge the groundwater. Finally, the plants selectively take up certain pollutants, including nutrients and some heavy metals, improving water quality.

The vegetation in the bioswale is important. Native species that tolerate or enjoy wet feet are essential. The forbs and grasses used have long roots that create infiltration channels through clayey soils. Some species are especially good at phosphate and nitrate uptake. On slopes, erosion control is a consideration. Maintenance of the vegetation is critical! Invasives and other pesky weeds that do not contribute to the function of filtration and percolation need to be removed. Just as in your home garden, a native prairie or a woodland restoration, removing invasives is required. Weedy swales become unsightly, such that residents and citizens give up on maintenance and just mow them over. *Weed Out!* Racine works with Racine Parks and River Bend on bioswale maintenance.

Important bioswales here in the Racine area include the one along Pershing Park Drive. It catches runoff from several parking lots, and from the geese that hang out on the grassy fields. Another is at River Bend Nature Center, where the runoff from the hill is slowed and the excess is transported under the driveway. One place where they ought to be used more often is in parking lot divider islands so that storm water flows into them, instead of around them.

A final benefit of vegetated bioswales is that they provide sustenance for pollinators and other wildlife. Butterflies, bees, dragonflies and other insects are regular visitors, and sometimes toads and frogs choose a swale as their home. If you are undertaking a landscaping project soon, consider a bioswale as one way you can make your landscape more sustainable.



Image: City of Racine weeding the bioswale along Pershing Park Boulevard.



BAN THE BAG



from Laura Feider, SEGG Ex Comm

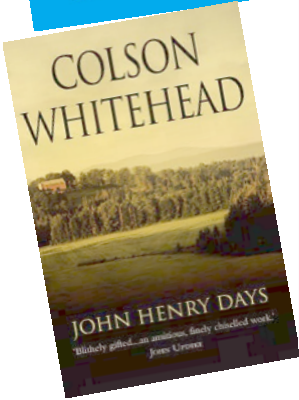
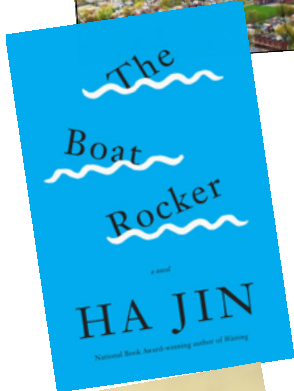
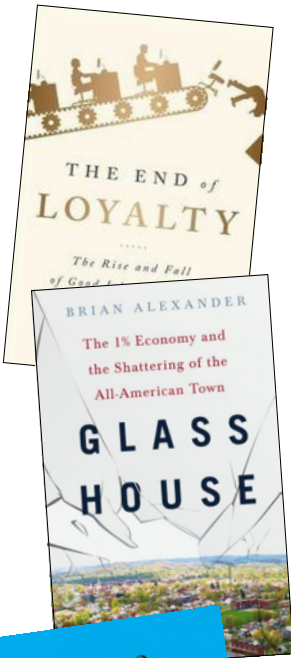
I took a hiatus from Southeast Gateway Group, as some of you know, to move to California for two and a half years. I've been back in Wisconsin for about a year and every time I see a plastic shopping bag it makes me sad. I lived in the Bay area and while I was there plastic bags were banned in stores. When I first heard about the ban, I thought it may be hard to follow. It really wasn't! I know I am preaching to the choir, but in case you need to convince your friends, here are some reasons why banning plastic bags is important, according to Conserve Energy Future (CEF).

- 1) *The amount of energy to produce nine plastic bags is the same as the amount of energy it takes a car to drive a half mile.*
- 2) *Plastic bags do not degrade.*
- 3) *They have pollutants such as PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyl) together with PAHs (Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons) which are hormone disrupting.*
- 4) *Plastic bags are difficult to recycle. Most recycling companies don't accept them, so only about 5% of plastic bags are being recycled.*

You can use reusable bags for all of your shopping needs, not just groceries. You can purchase sturdy, free-standing bags with a flat bottom in most grocery stores. Nylon bags that fold up into a compact ball can be stashed in most purses. Once you empty your bags at home, place them near your car keys or by the door so you don't forget them on your way out. And if you do forget your bag, just ask for paper and make sure to recycle it. Thank you!

Making Sense of a New America—A Reading List

by Barbara Brattin, Librarian and SEGG Ex Comm



The Internet has transformed our world in many wonderful ways and as a librarian, I am grateful for people's easy access to information. There is a down side to the information overload and shortened attention span brought on by our accelerated relationship with information, however, and it's the one that concerns me most: content without context. Short, snappy headlines with no reference points such as historical context or authority of the author are confusing, misleading, and feed the fake news epidemic. As America changes right before our eyes in new and complex ways, look to librarians to connect you with the scholars and writers whose works attempt to explain the root causes of the issues we face and human experiences shaping our world today.

The American Library Association has compiled a reading list titled "Making Sense of a New America." Annie Bostrom and Donna Seaman write: "Books help us decipher our accelerated, ever-changing world, in which many aspects of American life are in flux. All of the nonfiction and fiction titles in this list, whether they offer clarifying facts or imaginative interpretations, are sure to spark avid discussions."

Here are a few picks from the full list, available from bookcentral.org:

Nonfiction

The End of Loyalty: The Rise and Fall of Good Jobs in America, by Rick Wartzman

Our grandfathers worked for the same company for 40 years without question. Today's worker may stay for 2. In this chronicle of the eroding relationship between corporations and workers, author Rick Wartzman says that jobs offering security, decent wages and good benefits are becoming harder to find, in part because of automation, globalization and the weakening of unions.

Glass House: The 1% Economy and the Shattering of the All-American Town

by Brian Alexander

Lancaster, Ohio, in the beautiful backroads of my home state, was once a charming, thriving industrial town. Now it's a depressed, poverty stricken town that's lost its original charm and much of its population. What happened here has happened in towns across America. Alexander strives to find the root of the issue and the way back for small town America and the people determined to stay.

Fiction

The Boat Rocker by Ha Jin

A newly naturalized American citizen and fiercely principled journalist takes on China in an age of fake news and corruption in the Internet age in this funny and brilliant new work by National Book Award winner Jin.

John Henry Days by Colson Whitehead

"Masterfully composed and full of myth and magic, Whitehead's great American novel considers such dualities as nature and civilization, legend and history, black and white, and altruism and greed, while deftly skewering the absurdities of the information age." (Booklist)



HWY 38 CLEANUP CELEBRATES 27 YEARS

2017 marks the twenty-seventh year that the Southeast Gateway Group has been cleaning up a three-mile stretch of State Highway 38 between County Highway K and Five Mile Road in Racine County. The final cleanup for this year is September 30. SEGG is grateful to the Blessed Hope church which has graciously allowed us the use of their parking lot over the years. SEGG is also grateful to John Berge who has been coordinating our highway cleanups for a number of years. John is now ready to pass his baton on to the next generation of leaders and we are in need of someone to take over this small but necessary task. *"It isn't a hard job, only comes up three times a year and can be done mostly from your home on the telephone. Let's give somebody else a chance,"* John says with a tired sigh.

It is best to have at least twelve volunteers to cover the length of SEGG's assigned area in teams of two. Occasionally we have been short a couple people and that meant extra work for those who did show up. To add your name to the call-list or to take new charge, contact John Berge at 262-633-8455 or jberge35@wi.rr.com. It is only a commitment of about two hours, on one to three Saturdays a year, but a load of satisfaction!

BUT WE COULDN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU!

TWO FORMS OF DENIAL

by John Berge, SEGG Member

Sometimes (as a former Group and Chapter Chair and with a PhD in Chemistry) I find it hard to believe that any Sierra Club members deny the existence of global warming/climate change and that this is, in all probability, being caused by people and their greenhouse gas emissions. Yet I am told that this is the case. Possibly the denial is based on the belief that such a small amount of these gases, which occur naturally as well as man-made, could have such a large effect.

It should be difficult to deny that temperatures world-wide have been increasing slowly, with some irregularity, since the 1700's or the start of the industrial revolution. Of late, almost every year has been hotter than the previous one and storms, floods and droughts appear to be stronger or more frequent.

It should also be difficult to deny that the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has been increasing to levels not previously seen in human history and has grown from around 270 parts per million to over 400 ppm since the sources of our energy changed from wood and animals to coal, oil and natural gas. Trees will recapture the carbon dioxide produced in our combustion of wood in one, or a few, human life times; the amount of carbon dioxide from fossil fuels is so much greater that it will require multiple millennia to return them to their sources. Hence, the growth of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere.

The great majority of environmental and climate scientists recognize these facts. Many of those who would deny them recognize the fact that their salaries are paid by companies in the fossil fuel business.

Some people are confused by the effects of what seems a still low concentration of carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere, only 400 molecules of carbon dioxide per every million molecules of air which is almost all nitrogen and oxygen. Just one CO₂ molecule in 2,500 molecules of air!

Permit me a little physical chemistry teaching moment. Oxygen and nitrogen are diatomic molecules (two atoms per molecule). Their only vibrational modes are basically an in-and-out stretching mode that is in the infra-red or heat absorbing region of the spectrum. Carbon dioxide is a triatomic molecule (three

atoms) with more vibrational modes (symmetric and asymmetric stretching, twisting and bending) which absorb energy in the infrared region of the spectrum and thus are able to absorb more of the heat energy being re-radiated by the earth into the atmosphere. Methane is a pentatomic molecule (five atoms) and has even more vibrational modes that allow it to absorb more heat energy; it is up to 40 times more of a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.



All the molecules in our atmosphere absorb some of the heat energy radiated from the earth; without that we would be as cold as Mars. But carbon dioxide and methane are the ones that human beings have increased the most in recent centuries. In fact, carbon dioxide concentrations have not been so high since the Pliocene epoch, 5.2 to 1.64 million years ago!

The second form of denial is to accept human-caused global warming but not change our way of life, to continue the status quo, or business as usual. If we recognize that global warming is occurring and this is due to human generation of greenhouse gases, but fail to make adjustments or changes in the way we live, it has the same effect as the other deniers.



The two major, human sources of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are fossil-fueled electrical generating plants and motorized vehicles. That is why climatologists, other scientists and environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club push for renewable energy sources such as solar and wind to produce our electricity and more efficient, hybrid and electric cars, buses and trucks to slow the ever-increasing global warming/climate change and sea level rising.

Have you switched to electricity from renewable sources? Was your last car purchase a gas-guzzling SUV? Or was it (will it be) a smaller, hybrid or electric car? Do you walk or bike to the job or store and leave the gas-guzzler in the garage? Is your house as energy efficient as it can be with LED lights, highly efficient windows and optimum insulation, and readjusted thermostats?

Or are you one of the two types of deniers?

When the last tree has been cut down, the last fish caught, the last river poisoned, only then will we realize that one cannot eat money. -Native American Saying

WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE

SEGG encourages you to *WRITE* to your legislators on the issues you care about.

Find yours at legis.wisconsin.gov



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Explore, Enjoy And Protect The Planet

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Please send any articles, photographs, letters, calendar submissions, corrections and comments to:

Nicole Reid - nreid23@wi.rr.com

Please use subject line: *SEGG Newsletter*

Deadline for Nov/Dec/Jan Issue:

October 1, 2017

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In this issue:

Climate Fiction

Climate Deniers

Cranberry Time!

**Making Sense of a New
America: A Reading List**

Ban the Bag

**Bioswales:
Engineering Nature**

Beyond Coal Campaign

27 Years: Adopt-a-Highway

and more ways

You Can Get Involved!

"The first requirement of science fiction is credibility. And yet, Mr. Zooplep, here you've invented a race of creatures who systematically destroy their own environment."

JB Handelsman, 1971, New Yorker Magazine