



News of the
Southeast Gateway Group
of the Sierra Club

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SOUTHEAST SIERRAN

Toxic Inequalities

From the Chair
by Tom Rutkowski

In his *New York Times* bestseller, *Blessed Unrest*, Paul Hawken asserted that although their common causes were not yet fully recognized, the social justice and environmental movements were really one movement with overlapping objectives and common adversaries. Both movements arise in response to those old foes—ignorance and greed—and both demand a recognition that all of us, including people and other species, are connected. Once these two groups became aware of these shared goals and obstacles and joined forces, it would be the largest movement in the history of the world. As the effects of climate change and environmental degradation accelerate and become more unequally distributed, it seems that moment is due to arrive any day now.

Actually, that day came decades ago. It isn't always possible to designate a definite beginning to something as broad and dynamic as a movement, but according to Harriet A. Washington's new book, *A Terrible Thing to Waste*, the two strands of those overlapping movements converged in Afton, North Carolina, in August 1982, in the very beginning of what is now known as the environmental justice movement. Months earlier contaminated oil containing PCBs were dumped illegally along 200 miles of state highways. The cleanup, which involved removing 50,000 tons of soil soaked with toxins, required a place to dispose of the waste. Afton, a predominantly African American community was chosen, not because it was safer than any other site, but because it was a poor community that was less likely to resist...or so the authorities thought. The trucks carrying the contaminated soil were met with fierce resistance and in the end 550 people were arrested in the largest Southern act of civil disobedience since Martin Luther King marched through Alabama.

Afton is just a more prominent example of what occurs throughout the United States. Though such exposure to environmental toxins is often explained as a socioeconomic disparity, race is a more accurate predictor of such exposure. According to Robert Bullard, the founder of the EPA's Office of Environmental Equity, "Fence-line' communities that abut toxin-belching industries, secret or open toxic dump sites, Superfund waste sites, and emission-belching diesel plants are preferentially located in communities of color, both poor and middle class."

Many books have focused on such environmental racism; the focus of *A Terrible Thing to Waste* is on the consequences such unequal exposures to neurotoxins have on the brains of developing children who are much more vulnerable to such poisons, "including how toxic substances impair their brains and the manner in which their bodies metabolize chemicals". The most devastating of these toxins, the one among many that is most pervasive and tragic is lead. Washington devotes an entire chapter on the use of lead and its crippling effects. The dangers of using lead in paint, in plumbing, and in gasoline were known in the early 1920s when many cities started banning the use of lead. By manufacturing doubt and clouding the science, the Lead Industries Association fought back in a strategy later used by the tobacco industries, the chemical industries and the fossil fuel companies.

The effects of this delay continue to be devastating even now, decades after the banning of lead. Lead poisoning causes a loss of twenty-three million IQ points a year as well as "the malignant flowering of behavioral problems that destroy lives and human potential as effectively as cancer and lung disease but with far fewer alarms raised". To put this loss of IQ in perspective, Washington points out that a five point drop in individuals would lead to 3.4 million children being intellectually disabled and would reduce the number of gifted and talented students by half. Though a cost of fifty billion dollars is given as a price that we pay, how can we estimate the loss to our society of such potential? Following chapters reveal similarly devastating effects from arsenic and mercury, from air pollution, from pesticides and from exposure to some of the 60,000 chemicals that are unregulated in the United States until proven harmful.

Con't. p. 3



GET INVOLVED → START HERE!

Three Volunteer Nights

Don't Just Sit There....Do Something!

Some people feel better when they take positive steps to change a problem. That's what volunteer night is all about. There is no shortage of work to do and YOU CAN HELP! We'll find the right task for you: texting, emailing, designing, calling, entering data...no effort is too small. This is also a great way to meet like-minded people and to enjoy some refreshments while working together for a common cause. For locations check SEGG's Facebook page or contact Katie Hogan, Volunteer Coordinator at kathryn.hogan@sierraclub.org.

BECOME A VOLUNTEER - MAKE A DIFFERENCE



Thursday, January 9 from 6:30-8:30 PM

Racine Location TBA

Thursday, February 13 from 6:30-8:30 PM

Kenosha Location TBA

Thursday, March 12 from 6:30-8:30 PM

Racine Gateway, Lake Front Campus
1001 Main St, Racine, WI

Saturday, January 4 at Noon Southeast Gateway Group's Annual Planning Meeting

Note Date
Correction!

**Pringle Nature Center
9800 County Hwy MB, Bristol, WI**

With so much at stake these days, we have a big year ahead of us. Please join us at the annual planning meeting so that we can act together! The meeting usually runs about three hours long, so please bring a bag lunch or a dish to share. Also note the correct date as it was wrong in the E-news.



"It is good to understand today's situation within the context that created it. The pollution lobby would like all of us to participate in historical amnesia, and ignore the evidence of a legacy of environmental damage. I can show how energy technology has changed over the last 100 years, and how it continues to change. I hope it leads to a lively discussion."

-Keith Kohlmann, Coal Train Expert &
Guest Speaker on Jan. 23 at River Bend--See Below.



We Energies' Neighbors: A Video Premiere

Featuring Presentation on "A History of Coal & Coal Trains in Southeast Wisconsin"

Thursday, January 23 at 6:30 PM

River Bend Nature Center, 3600 N Green Bay Rd, Racine, WI

On Thursday, January 23 at the River Bend Nature Center in Racine, the Clean Power Coalition will screen a new documentary featuring interviews with those who are still neighbors to We Energies' Oak Creek and Elm Road coal plants. Though 30 homes surrounding the plant have been purchased and leveled, there are many neighbors that still live downwind of a 15-acre mountain of coal and in the shadow of the twin smokestacks. Some of those neighbors will participate in a panel discussion immediately after the screening to share their more recent difficulties as residents living in close proximity to the plant.

The second half of the program will feature a presentation on the history of coal in our area and on the coal trains themselves by local historian and train expert, Keith Kohlmann. A teacher of technical education in Racine, Kohlmann serves on the board of directors for the Racine Heritage Museum and has written over two hundred articles on trains. In addition to the historical context, Kohlmann will discuss the hazards of transporting coal over a thousand mile route and the problems that arise when trains pass through residential neighborhoods.

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From the Chair - Con't. from page 1

That connection between social justice and environmental concerns seemed to Washington to be “tangential to the life-and-death struggles of people of color whose very ability to breathe, think, and live a normal healthy lifespan...”. Her assessment of this relationship has changed; Washington gives much credit to the Sierra Club for making this issue its own. As early as 1994 the Sierra Club published “Unequal Protection: Environmental Justice and Communities of Color” and followed in 2005 with “The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution”. In 2013 The Sierra Club awarded its top honor, the John Muir Award, to Robert Bullard, the father of the environmental justice movement.

Interestingly, Washington also notes the salutary effects of exposure to natural areas. A simple walk in the woods is one of many factors “capable of turning off chronic stress”, but this too is limited by unequal access due to lack of transit options.



A Terrible Thing to Waste book graphic

Just weeks ago, Racine moved up the list of worst places to live for African Americans, second only to Milwaukee. (It is also second in the state to Milwaukee in the incidence of high lead blood levels in children, an incidence that is even greater than Flint, Michigan.) Those same factors—mortgage redlining, credit inequities, educational and employment discrimination and lower wages—that have created these racial disparities also cause unequal exposure to environmental poisons. In many ways Racine has become an environmental “sacrifice zone” and the people of color in its inner city, with its aging housing stock and schools, with coal trains passing right through the center of town, with proximity to brownfield sites, suffer the worst of these exposures.

We see the outcomes not only in unequal wealth and employment, poorer health and greater incarceration rates, but also in loss of intellectual potential and poorer educational outcomes. Over the decade the need for special education services has grown greatly and the racial disparity in educational achievement remains. Washington’s book makes clear that as a society we all pay for such outcomes, in one way or another, but that cost remains to a great extent unequal and determined by one’s race. -TR

KNOW THE FACTS

From the book, *A Terrible Thing to Waste* by Harriet A. Washington



- Nearly two out of every five African American homes are plagued by lead-based paint.
- Middle-class African American households with incomes between \$50,000 and \$60,000 live in neighborhoods that are more polluted than those where very poor white households with incomes below \$10,000 live.
- Children of color constitute almost two thirds of the 5.7 million children who live within a mile of a toxic facility.
- A lead chip no larger than a fingernail can send a toddler into a coma and possible death. One-tenth of that amount will lower her IQ.
- Children who swallow lead absorb 500 times more lead per exposure than adults.
- Flint’s water lead levels were so high that it fell into the EPA’s classification for hazardous waste.
- African American and Hispanic Americans are three to four times more likely than whites to be hospitalized or to die from asthma.
- 68% of African Americans live within thirty miles of a coal-fired power plant—the distance within which the maximum effects of the smokestack plume tend to occur.
- Pesticides alone cause a cumulative national IQ loss of 16.9 million points, the largest portion of that loss—5.7 million points—comes from prenatal exposure.



Governor Tony Evers signed an executive order in Kenosha on July 29 that created a “Lead Czar” tasked with coordinating efforts among state agencies to address the problem of lead contamination.

Photo by Tom Rutkowski

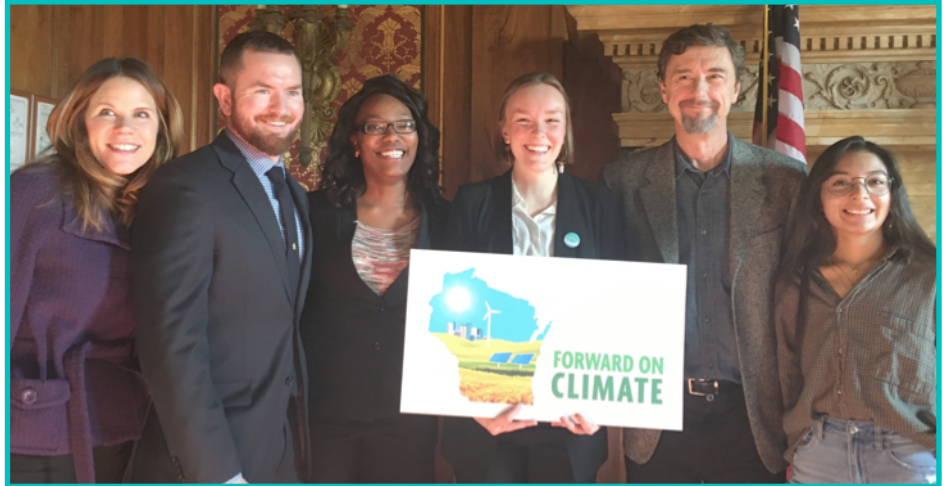
FORWARD ON CLIMATE

On December 3, Wisconsin State Representative Greta Neubauer (D-Racine) hosted a press conference announcing her “Forward on Climate” bill package supporting the development of a resilient, sustainable, and equitable economy in Wisconsin.

“Right now, Wisconsinites are picking up the bill for every ton of carbon we burn, while the fossil fuel industry continues to profit. Wisconsinites send over \$14 billion each year out of our state to pay for the fossil fuels that power our communities. That’s money that could be kept right here in Wisconsin,” Neubauer said.

“These bills were designed with input from people across Wisconsin to meet our priorities and invest in our shared future. From supporting our farmers, to building the clean-energy manufacturing sector, to investing in our kids and our schools, these bills build up our communities and bring new opportunities to Wisconsin. We have a lot of work to do, but I’m so honored to be able to do it alongside all of these incredible advocates,” Neubauer concluded.

Representative David Crowley (D-Milwaukee), who co-authored LRB-3971 on Green Banks, said: “Everyone in this room knows that climate change is real, and that it qualifies as an emergency that requires our immediate attention. Clean energy means new jobs, less pollution, and better outcomes for this generation and the next, especially in communities that need it most.”



Left to Right: Representative Chris Taylor, Tommy Enright, Lateria Shaw, Representative Greta Neubauer, Tom Rutkowski, & Stephanie Salgado

The four bills included in the initial “Forward on Climate” package include:

- LRB 3848, creating a \$1.5 million annual appropriation for a grant program supporting weatherization and energy efficiency updates in public school buildings and providing funds to support student education surrounding the importance of energy efficiency.
- LRB 3971, creating a study on Green Banks in Wisconsin, including how the State of Wisconsin can partner with private entities to invest in emerging technologies and infrastructure supporting clean energy, sustainability, and energy efficiency, with a focus on supporting under-resourced communities across the state.
- LRB 4201, creating a \$1.5 million annual appropriation for a grant program supporting farmers who use certain sustainable practices, including sustainable farming, growing carbon-sequestering crops, and reducing fossil fuel usage.
- LRB 4811, requiring the Wisconsin Public Service Commission to consider the social cost of carbon emissions in determining the siting of new utility-scale power infrastructure in Wisconsin.



Clean Power Coalition (CPC) of SE WI

Join us on the 3rd Tuesday of every month to develop and implement strategies to move We Energies to renewables.

Jan. 21 / Feb. 18 / Mar. 17

6:30 PM at the Eco-Justice Center, 7133 Michna Rd, Caledonia, WI 53402
Questions? Email Tom Rutkowski at natom@wi.rr.com

cleanpowerwi.org

Clean Power Update: *New Leadership!*

Let's Extend a Warm Welcome & a Hearty Congratulations

We welcome **Jess Haven**, who has joined the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal team in Wisconsin as an Organizing Representative in the Madison office. She replaces Miranda Ehrlich who left in August to work for the Sierra Club in Washington D.C. Part of Jess's responsibilities will be working with the Clean Power Coalition of SE Wisconsin (CPC) in fighting the Oak Creek power plant.

Said Jess, "I am happy and feeling fortunate to introduce myself as the new Organizing Representative for Wisconsin's Beyond Coal Campaign. I can't wait to work alongside and support the whole team in its dedicated efforts to achieve 100% clean energy here in Wisconsin and beyond. I've heard such great things already.

"I bring a background in social justice, public policy and direct social work practice to this new role, and I'm enthusiastic about the opportunity to

formalize my passion for advocacy in the context of environmental justice in my home state. I appreciate everyone's grace and shared wisdom through this learning curve period, and I hold myself to a high standard to becoming an effective support and team member."

Jess's hobbies and interests include: freelance writing; kitchen experimenting; vintage fashion resaling; documentary photography and filmmaking; exploring the incredible US landscape near and far; and making seasonal visits to beloved Lake Michigan to satisfy a deeply rooted need to be awestruck on a regular basis (the Mississippi River ranks up there, too).

Jess encourages everyone to reach out with any curiosities they have and/or to introduce themselves and say "hello".



Elizabeth Ward, who has worked closely with the CPC over the past few months, has been named the Sierra Club John Muir Chapter's new Director. Elizabeth has been with the John Muir Chapter as Conservation Programs Coordinator for over nine years. Under her guidance, programs expanded and became more strategic. She helped build strong alliances and has celebrated many successes.

Additionally, she has much experience in grant writing, event planning, fundraising and team management. Her expertise and passion make her a perfect fit to take the chapter into the next decade. Plans are underway for a welcome reception in early 2020. Please tentatively save the date for Friday, January 24.

In the meantime, if you would like to welcome Elizabeth to her new role, please send your congratulations to her at elizabeth.ward@sierraclub.org or call 608-256-0565.

ICE AGE TRAIL HIKE

Milton & Storrs Lake Segment

Sunday, January 19 at 1:00 PM

Start the new decade with a hike encompassing two parts of the Ice Age Trail. First, we will hike through the historic town of Milton, Wis., past the Milton House, which was a stagecoach inn and a station on the Underground Railroad.

The Storrs Lake segment will be dependent on the weather. If the weeks previous to the hike are rainy it is likely that this part of the trail will be too wet to hike. If the weather cooperates we will be hiking beside Storrs Lake and Bowers Lake.

On July 1, 1832, Abraham Lincoln camped beside Storrs Lake as one of 4500 soldiers in pursuit of Sauk Chief Black Hawk.



A standard Sierra Club liability waiver is required to participate in all SEGG Outings.

For questions, reservations and carpool info, please contact SEGG Outings Chair, Allan Sommer:

Sommerallan4@gmail.com Or 262-716-6955

This will be just a one-way trip of about 6 to 7 miles. If it is too wet to complete the Storrs Lake segment the hike will be about 5 miles.

Meet at 1:00 PM at the Ice Age Trail Alliance (IATA) Parking Lot on Townline Rd between Kennedy Rd and County Y (also called John Paul Rd) in the town of Milton. We will then transfer enough cars to the IATA parking lot on Bowers Rd, northeast of Milton.

From the Racine/Kenosha area, I recommend driving through Lake Geneva and Delavan, almost to Janesville to catch US 90 north to State Hwy 26 which will take you to Townline Rd.

Ripe for Restoration

by Bernard Osborne, SEGG Member



My environmental journey probably started like yours, as a calling felt from deep within. This summer that call led me to read the Sand County Almanac, and to visit the Leopold Center and the restored prairie in Baraboo. Thereafter, I discovered Hawthorn Hollow Nature Sanctuary and Arboretum and its original Wisconsin prairie in Somers. These events inspired me to start my own small prairie, but being new to native plants, I first attended a wildflower walk at Hawthorn for some help.



The Rusty Patch Bumble Bee

After the walk, Hawthorn's restoration ecologist lent me a copy of the Prairie Nursery catalog. This native plant encyclopedia helped me navigate the local plant selections comparing the scientific names to the catalog's names. It was disappointing to see the large variety of non-native and hybrid-native plants, and only a small assortment of native plants. I purchased seven plants that day and planted them proudly.



Filipendula rubra: Queen of the Prairie

The next weekend I returned to Hawthorn's prairie to walk its paths. The prairie was alive with fauna, flora, butterflies, and bees. I imagined myself in times past when the Wisconsin prairie was widespread and undisturbed. My fantasy was quickly destroyed by a motorcycle's thunderous pipes echoing from the nearby highway, silencing the bird calls and shattering my daydream.

Further down the path, I found the restoration ecologist pulling Buckthorn. I asked her thoughts on how to get more people to experience the wonders of this prairie. Insightfully, she replied that if the sanctuary had the traffic of the county park across the highway, the prairie would soon be ruined. Her statement defined the paradox of the environmentalist's plight, as written by Leopold who asked why "we cannot have both progress and plants?" Leopold's wisdom came with me on my way home as I passed the many idle medians and roadside strips where only grass and weeds exist.



The next month I attended the Leopold Education Project where I was shown a poster that depicted the blooming dates of native plants. The poster entitled, "Jewels of the Prairie", was created by the Iowa Living Roadway Trust Fund (LRTF). Since 1990, the LRTF has been carrying out Leopold's vision of keeping cow, plow, and mower out of these idle strips. According to the LRTF website, the Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management program (IRVM) has planted "more than 50,000 acres...(of) native grasses, wildflowers, and other vegetation."



Restored Prairie and Historic Building at Hawthorn Hollow

Leopold created the land ethic about strengthening the relationship between people and the land and our moral responsibility to the natural world. A program like Iowa's in Wisconsin would benefit our environment, create opportunities for education, and help restore Wisconsin's fauna, flora, soil, and wildlife for future generations. I then thought why stop at idle roadsides, what about the many sterile industrial grounds, backyards, and parkways?

While watering my small prairie I observed bees visiting the Filipendula rubra plant. My small change from grass to prairie, from a sterile environment to a living one, provided food for bees and my own reward of planting for a higher purpose. An LRTF video commented "if the only thing moving in your lawn is a lawn mower, it's time for a change." My small change helped bring life where there was none; what change could we accomplish together to help restore these areas ripe for restoration?

If this change is calling you too, please contact me via email at

bernard.l.osborne@gmail.com

Photos courtesy of Hawthorn Hollow's website: hawthornhollow.org



Your donation helps us continue to "Explore, Enjoy and Protect" SE Wisconsin. Checks can be made out to *Sierra Club SEGG* to be used towards any purpose, or to *Sierra Club Foundation* to be used strictly for educational programs and activities. Please mail donations to our treasurer:
Jeff Sytsma, 3508 Washington Ave, Racine WI 53405

SEGG encourages you to *WRITE* to your legislators on the issues you care about.
 Find your representative at **legis.wisconsin.gov**

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- Laura Feider (Secretary).....Lmflowerpower@hotmail.com
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The newsletter of the Southeast Gateway Group is published quarterly by Group members.



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 Apr-Jun Issue:

Friday, March 6, 2020

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One of the many coal trains that passes through our community on its way to the Oak Creek Power Plant. Join us January 23 for a video premier and talk on the history of these trains and how they affect our health. See page 2 for details.

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...and more ways You Can Get Involved!

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