



# SOUTHEAST SIERRAN

News of the  
Southeast Gateway Group  
of the Sierra Club

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## SEGG HISTORY — 40 YEARS!

by Gloria Randall-Hewitt

The Racine-Kenosha-Walworth county group of the Sierra Club marks its 40th anniversary in 2022. While the Sierra Club is a national organization, local groups not only participate in the overall mission of the Sierra Club but are actively involved in implementing the organization’s policies on the local level. In essence, local groups are, as sub-divisions of the state chapters, the real-life, near to home, grassroots face of the Sierra Club.

The Kenosha News described the first organizational meeting of the local “Racine-Kenosha” group of the Sierra club in the following paragraph taken from an article dated Tuesday, January 19, 1982:

*Some 50 Sierra Club members met in Racine last week to organize the group. Until then, local Sierrans were part of the Southeast Wisconsin Sierra club, based in Milwaukee. The Racine-Kenosha group will become the sixth local group in Wisconsin’s John Muir chapter named after the Wisconsin resident who founded the Sierra Club in 1892.*



For those who attended those first organizational meetings, Mary Ellen Johnson, Professor of Philosophy at UW Parkside and long-term environmentalist in her own right, was the driving force behind the efforts to



Mary Ellen Johnson, Founder

start a local Sierra Club group. She organized meetings, completed the applications and helped motivate the group with her enthusiasm and energy. In 1982 the Sierra Club had 265,000 members nationally and had just seen a 35% increase in membership over the last year, with the Wisconsin chapter having grown to 4,500 members from 2,200 a year and a half prior. The time was right for a local group, focusing on local issues.

At the local group’s organizational meeting, Jonathon Ela, Sierra Club’s Midwest representative attributed both the Sierra Club’s national growth and the formation of the new local group to concerns raised with the election of Ronald Reagan, stating:

“Since the election of President Reagan, people who thought that the environmental problems would take care of themselves realized that was not true. The break (from the Milwaukee group) gives people an opportunity to organize more effectively for local concerns”.

Ela further explained that the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, a separate but parallel organization, provided legal support and assistance to local groups involved in environmental litigation. In 1982, highest priorities for the Sierra Club were protecting the Clean Air Act and public land management. As such, the Sierra Club stated its purpose as two-fold:

1. To promote enjoyment of nature and wilderness areas through organized non-motorized outings;
2. To engage in political activism.

In keeping with this purpose, Ela encouraged the new “Racine-Kenosha group”, as it was officially known, to formally join in the fight to respond to attacks that were being made in the Kenosha area against local residents and the Nature Conservancy’s efforts to acquire and preserve Chiwaukee Prairie in Kenosha and to support other local park and natural areas in Racine.

The “Racine-Kenosha group” of Wisconsin’s John Muir chapter of Sierra Club was formalized with the application for certification, submitted March 16, 1982.

### Original officers included:

Co-chairs: Mary Ellen Johnson and Richard Marciniak  
Conservation Co-chairs: David Hewitt and Charles Erwin  
Secretary-Treasurer: Elma Chapman

Outings Chair: Joe Matesa  
Program Chair: Joan Bennett  
Environmental Education Chair: Donna Peterson  
Political Action Chair: James Piojda

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# GET INVOLVED → START HERE!

Sign up to receive our Monthly SEGG E-News filled with upcoming SEGG programs, meetings & other local happenings. Email: Laura Schulz - [schulz@uwp.edu](mailto:schulz@uwp.edu)



## ***In Case You Missed It...***

On May 2, Alex Weyenberg made a presentation on the “Homegrown National Park” movement. Though we can’t recreate the magnificence of the Grand Canyon or the wonders of Yosemite, in his presentation Alex explained how we can each join the movement to build the “Homegrown National Park” in our own backyards. Details on page 4.

## **CANOE FOR SALE!**



Melissa and Jay Warner have generously donated a 1988 We-No-Nah canoe, 17ft. Sundowner model. Also included are two adult PFDs, four paddles, and a set of LLBean portage trailer wheels.

Suggested price is \$700 or best offer.

All proceeds go to SEGG.

Interested parties should contact Amy Macemon at [amymacemon@gmail.com](mailto:amymacemon@gmail.com).

## **HIGHWAY CLEANUP DAYS**

For a couple of decades now, SEGG has picked up trash on Hwy 38 in Racine County from Hwy K to 5 Mile Rd.

### **Please Join Us: July 30 & Oct. 1**

Meet at 9:00 AM at Blessed Hope Church, on the corner of Hwy 38 and 4 Mile Rd.

Sturdy footwear & long pants recommended. All other supplies and safety vests provided.

Contact Jeff Sytsma to sign up or to get more info

**Jeff12759@aol.com or 262 497-4761**

## Join the Sierra Club Wisconsin **Book Club!**

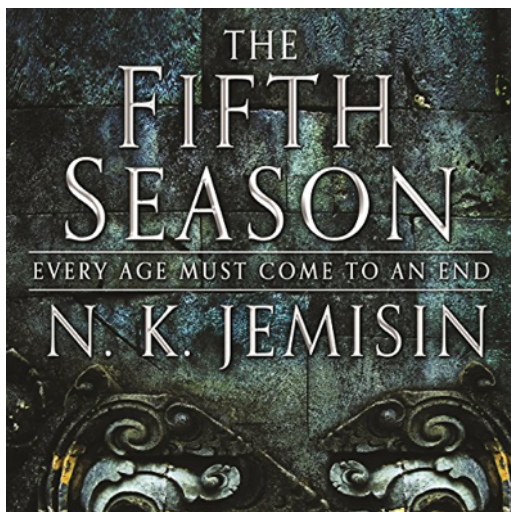
Virtual meetings are held via phone or video chat every other month. Get to know fellow Sierra Club members while engaging in discussion about the best environmental and social justice related books.

The July book is *The Fifth Season* by N.K. Jemisin

Join the discussion on

**Tuesday, July 12 at 7:00 PM**

*“The first novel in the Broken Earth trilogy, this book introduces an apocalyptic world and a civilization deeply divided. After an extinction-level event, three individuals belonging to an oppressed class called the ‘orogene’ must navigate unique hardships while the world around them descends into chaos.”*



Find our event page by searching “Sierra Club Wisconsin Book Club” on Facebook, or on the Sierra Club Wisconsin website. From there you can sign up to receive the Google Meet Invite or phone number to call in.

## SEGG HISTORY *Con't. from page 1*

The new group enthusiastically joined in the efforts to preserve the Chiwaukee Prairie and immediately set up an ad hoc committee to focus on the issue, eventually forming as the Chiwaukee Prairie Rescue Coalition (CPRC). The group worked closely with the Kenosha preservation committee spearheaded by residents Al Krampert and Phil Sander—which had gained the initial support of the Nature Conservancy, Hoy Nature Club, Milwaukee Audubon Club, Wisconsin Wetlands Association, and Four Seasons Garden Club. University of Wisconsin and political advisors such as Kathy Falk, Wisconsin Public Intervener and Sierra Club lobbyist Caryl Tarrell also advocated towards the preservation of this rare natural prairie.



Work continued for years, requiring fund-raising to purchase land, lobbying of the local and state officials, legal support and participation of local residents.<sup>1</sup> In the end the Chiwaukee Prairie was preserved as the last unbroken stretch of prairie of its kind in the state and home to more than 400 plant species, including 26 rare plants plus numerous other types of wildlife.<sup>2</sup> This unique area is open for hiking and exploration and has regular volunteer events cleaning up and preserving its natural beauty.

Since this first heroic effort, the two pronged goal to enjoy the great outdoors and engage in political activism has continued. Our local club still promotes enjoyment of our natural world by sponsoring many different types of outings, as well as informational and work sessions such as removing invasive species of plants, and cleaning up highway litter. We also take political action on issues ranging from protecting our public lands and waters to opposing coal at the Oak Creek WE Energies power plant to encouraging voters to vote for candidates who support the environmental movement. While every point in history has critical issues, 2022 presents challenges that can truthfully be described as historic.



When our local group started forty years ago it had been just 12 years since President Nixon signed the Clean Air Act describing 1970 as "... the year of the beginning, in which we really began to move on the problems of clean air and clean water and open spaces for the future generations of America". Yet by 1982, James Watt, Secretary of the Interior under Ronald Reagan was regarded as "public enemy #1" by the Sierra Club for his opposition to the environmental movement by cutting funding for programs, loosening regulations on oil and gas and comparing environmentalists to Nazis. Just as the first members of our local group recognized the dangers that Watt and the Reagan administration presented to efforts to preserve and protect our air, water and land, our current group is very aware of the critical issues that we now face in regard to pivotal issues such as climate change.

Some things change. The state chapter of the Sierra Club is now known as the Wisconsin Chapter instead of the John Muir chapter. Our local group is the Southeast Gateway Group (SEGG) instead of the Racine-Kenosha group. There are 18,000 members in the Wisconsin chapter of the Sierra Club and 3.8 million nationwide.

But we continue to be mindful, especially after recent years of environmental rollbacks, that we are still fighting the same battles from 40 years ago. Even as the UN has released its most recent report sounding yet another alarm about climate change, the US Supreme Court has heard arguments from coal companies who are attempting to gut the Clean Air Act.

There has never been a more critical time for our local group to be involved in protecting our environment and our future. Considering that John Muir, who is known as the father of the National Parks, emigrated with his family from Scotland to Marquette County Wisconsin when he was a boy, our state shares a special link to our parks and the conservation movement. With thanks to John Muir, environmentalists who have paved the way and the people who founded our local group 40 years ago, the next generation has taken up the torch. As we think about local priorities, we are reminded of national priorities such as passing the For the People Act to guarantee voting rights and expanding equitable access to the outdoors, while we focus on moving into a clean climate future for all of us. As the national Sierra Club states:

"We need you in our fight for a liveable future. In order to create a world where all of us can survive and thrive, it's going to take all of us -- people of all backgrounds and with varied skill sets, with the energy and networks and resources we each have -- to make this vision a reality."

***Thank you for being part of the good fight.***



Caroline Brehman/CQ Roll/AP from Rollingstone.com

1. [Chiwaukee.org/about/chiwaukee-prairie-memories/](http://Chiwaukee.org/about/chiwaukee-prairie-memories/)  
2. [Nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/chiwaukee-prairie](http://Nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/chiwaukee-prairie)

## Racine Has Electric Buses! *Article and pictures by Keith Kolhmann*



Governor Evers was in Racine on April 27 to cut the ribbon on Racine's new battery electric bus fleet. The City of Racine purchased nine Proterra buses with a state grant from the VW pollution settlement. Racine now has the largest electric fleet in the state (by percentage) with 25% of the fleet being all-electric.

The buses can operate in extreme heat and cold because the batteries are maintained at a constant temperature of 70°. They are quiet, energy efficient and will significantly reduce air pollution.



The City of Racine will

save at least \$60,000.00 on diesel fuel costs each year. Other grants covered the purchase of additional batteries, charging stations at the bus garage, and an on-site mechanic/trainer from Proterra for one year.

Both Governor Evers and Racine Mayor Cory Mason told the audience that converting bus fleets to run on renewable energy is part of their commitment to meeting the carbon reductions outlined in the Paris Climate Agreement. Governor Evers said, "The conversion to electric vehicles is here, and it's going to happen a lot faster than you might think." **Fun Facts:** Racine has a long history of innovation in electric transportation technology.

**1895** Nation's first electric interurban service operating between Milwaukee and Kenosha (M-R-K Line.)

**1915** Nation's first gas-electric (hybrid) passenger train operating between Racine and Sturtevant.

**1940** Nation's fastest scheduled electric interurban passenger, the Electroliner, operating between Milwaukee and the Loop in Chicago.

On March 20 we lost a longtime SEGG club member and leader, Barry Thomas. Barry was Director of the Pringle Nature Center, now an important environmental education resource thanks to his many efforts.



He also wrote and administered several grants from SEGG ensuring that local and state funds would benefit Kenosha County parks. Additionally, Barry had a role in establishing the Kenosha Green Congregations faith-based group.

With a Bachelor's Degree in Biology and a Master's Degree in Education, Barry was a strong and effective environmental leader who cared deeply for nature and loved teaching science to children. He will be missed.

### ***In Case You Missed It...***

On May 2, Alex Weyenberg made a presentation on the "Homegrown National Park" movement. Considered one of the United States greatest ideas, our 63 National Parks are not only an inspirational experience for many people, they also help combat climate change by sequestering carbon and protecting the diverse population of plant and animal life who live in these protected areas. In fact, the Sierra Club sees the parks as so critically important for our climate future, that it has proposed the expansion of national parks, not only so more people can have access to these beautiful natural spaces but also to expand efforts to preserve critical ecosystems and life species.

[.sierraclub.org/sierra/modest-proposal-we-need-more-national-parks](https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/modest-proposal-we-need-more-national-parks)

Expanding the national parks enough to impact our climate crisis is a worthy goal. Wouldn't it be great if we could each do something to help with this effort? Though we can't recreate the magnificence of the Grand Canyon or the wonders of Yosemite, in his presentation Alex explained how we can each join the movement to build the "Homegrown National Park" in our own backyards.

As Alex explained, Doug Tallamy has inspired this movement to think about conservation in a personal way, namely that it starts with each of us wherever we are. Instead of leaving conservation efforts to the

professionals, we have a critically important role to play to help restore and preserve the natural environment, biodiversity and ecosystems which support native plants, insects, birds and animals necessary for a healthier planet. And not only can we make changes in on our own backyards to help support a healthy planet, we can also register our yard and plantings to be counted toward the goal of 20 million acres dispersed throughout the US as the “Homegrown National Park”. Alex’s presentation is available on the Sierra Club website, but here are a few pointers to help you think about changes you can make to help the effort.

- 1.Reduce your lawn – lawns are ecologically useless and lots of work to maintain.
- 2.Remove invasive species – check [sewisc.org](http://sewisc.org) for a list.
3. Plant keystone species – not all native plants are created equal!  
Find your local keystone plant species at [www.nwf.org/nativeplantfinder](http://www.nwf.org/nativeplantfinder)
4. Choose carefully what natives to plant.
5. Plant for specialist pollinators
6. Network with neighbors – create a mini-ecosystem!
7. Create pupation sites under trees
8. Hardscape for conservation
9. Eliminate pesticides and fertilizers
10. Educate

It’s exciting to think about how we can make a difference in our neighborhood and for the overall health of our planet through what we plant in our yards and at the same time be part of the “Homegrown National Park” movement!

## Create your own Monarch Waystation!



### Plants in the Garden

**A** - Swamp Milkweed *Asclepias incarnata*

**B** - Butterfly Weed *Asclepias tuberosa*

**C** - Wild Blue Indigo *Baptisia australis*

**D** - Pale Purple Coneflower *Echinacea pallida*

**E** - Joe Pye Weed *Eupatorium purpureum*

**F** - Prairie Blazing Star *Liatris pycnostachya*

**G** - Wild Bergamot *Monarda fistulosa*

**H** - Showy Black-eyed Susan *Rudbeckia fulgida var. speciosa*

**I** - Prairie Dropseed *Sporobolus heterolepis*

**J** - Little Bluestem *Schizachyrium scoparium*

**K** - Mountain Mint *Pycnanthemum virginianum*

**L** - Rattlesnake Master *Eryngium yuccifolium*

Artwork provided by:

**fingers**  
LANDSCAPE SERVICES, INC.

# Grow Your Own!

by Amy Macemon

## Gardening as an Act of Environmental and Economic Activism

*"Stop! It's [growing] time!"*

You may have missed the timeframe to start your own seeds from the Solanaceae family (tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, tomatillos, ground cherries, and potatoes to name a few) but growing season in Southeast Wisconsin, generally Zone 5 in gardening terms, has just begun, so don't fret. There is still plenty of time to direct sow seeds in the garden such as beans, pumpkins, sweet corn, cucumbers and more. You can also purchase seedlings.

### Gardening As A Radical Act for Our Planet

Growing your own food is one measure you can take to reduce your impact on our planet, sometimes referred to as a carbon footprint. These impacts include:

**Organic Gardening Methods** When you are planting in your garden, you control what inputs are used. Gardening organically not only reduces the amount of inorganic pesticides and herbicides that go into and onto your food, as well as your beneficial insect garden friends, but can help reduce waste.

Composting, the process of turning otherwise disregarded food scraps and yard waste into plant fertilizer, is a great organic gardening practice. You can turn spicy peppers and vinegar into insect and rabbit repellent. You can practice companion planting which helps deter garden pests. You can plant native flowers to attract pollinators! Visit your local library for other resources on organic gardening ideas.

**Eating More Vegetables** When you grow your own produce, you eat your own produce. Whether fresh, shared with neighbors, or preserved, studies show that people with gardens are more likely to consume the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables each day, compared with the 90% of Americans who do not consume the recommended amount.

**Reduced Travel** Growing food in your yard or at a community garden greatly reduces the required amount of vehicle transportation of your produce. It is estimated that the meals in the United States travel about 1,500 miles to get from farm to plate. That mileage is substantially greater than the 15 steps to your backyard or the few miles to your local community garden.

**Reduced Packaging** Growing your own food reduces packing as long as you're eating things picked right from the garden or using preservation techniques that use reusable containers, such as canning, drying, dehydrating or freezing and storing in glass.

### Gardening On A Budget for Your Health

If cost is a prohibitive factor for you or others you know to start gardening, consider visiting **Racine Public Library's new Seed Library**, started by the work of Sierra Club's board members Tom Rutkowski and Amy Macemon. There are also seed libraries at MATC, Greenfield Public Library, outside of The Cactus Club in Milwaukee, among others. If you know of one in your area that wasn't listed, please reach out so we can share it on our Facebook page. And if you don't have one near you but want one, work to be the change you want to see and reach out to your local library or other organization that would host one.



Also, did you know that individuals can use their EBT or food stamp card to purchase food producing plants and seeds anywhere EBT is accepted? Please help to spread the news by sharing these posters! [snapgardens.org/posters/](http://snapgardens.org/posters/)

Another option to reduce the cost of gardening is joining a local community garden. Many community gardens offer the tools, compost and seeds needed to get started at no-to-low cost!

For good measure, and for inspiration, consider viewing Ron Finley's TED talk where he talks about gardening as an act of activism for our health and for our planet (with a little cursing-you've been warned!).



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. Mail donations to Jeff Sytsma, 3508 Washington Ave, Racine, WI 53405

Save a Tree & See in Color!  
Email [natom@wi.rr.com](mailto:natom@wi.rr.com)  
to request a full-color, digital  
newsletter instead of a paper copy.



Please Vote!



SEGG encourages you to WRITE to your legislators on the issues you care about.  
Find your representative at [legis.wisconsin.gov](http://legis.wisconsin.gov)

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The newsletter of the Southeast Gateway Group is published quarterly by Group members. Please send articles, event submissions, photographs, corrections and/or comments to: Nicole Reid - [nreid23@wi.rr.com](mailto:nreid23@wi.rr.com)

**Deadline for Aug-Oct Issue: July 15, 2022**

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## It all started in Wisconsin... *by Jeff Sytsma*

The practice of No Mow May, where you stop or minimize mowing the turf in May, has really caught on. As Rob Mentzer of Wisconsin Public Radio reported in April, "Two years ago, Appleton became the first city in the U.S. to adopt No-Mow May, an initiative designed to boost the population of bees and other pollinators... And like dandelions on an unmown lawn, this year the idea has spread even farther. No-Mow May will be observed in De Pere, Wisconsin Rapids, La Crosse and other Wisconsin communities, as well as more distant places such as Ann Arbor, Michigan; Bangor, Maine; and New York's Hudson Valley."

Plants are budding, grass is growing and pollinators are emerging from the long winter and they are hungry for life-sustaining nectar. Perfectly kept turf grass provides no benefits for wildlife. However, we can help the bees and butterflies by letting "weeds" co-exist in our lawns. May is a critical month for pollinators and also when the early bloomers appear. Dandelions, clover, violets and Creeping Charlie (ground ivy) are among the earliest to bloom and provide vital food for the critters.

When it's time to get back to regular mowing, reduce the height in stages, trying not to remove more than one third at a time. And, for the good of critters and the environment in general, please consider avoiding spraying your lawn. Thank You!

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### IN THIS ISSUE:

#### **CHEERS TO 40 YEARS! SEGG HISTORY**

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**JULY BOOK CLUB    CANOE FUNDRAISER    MONARCH WAYSTATIONS**  
**ELECTRIC BUSES IN RACINE & MORE!**