

Susquehanna *Sierran*

September 2020



Founded 1892

EXPLORE, ENJOY, PROTECT THE PLANET

Election Endorsements 2020

– Allan Hochberg, Susquehanna Group Political Chair

The Sierra Club Susquehanna Group has endorsed the following candidates for the November 2020 general election:

NYS Assembly District #123
Broome County Executive
Broome County Legislature

Johnson City Trustee
Town of Union Board

Donna Lupardo
Jason Garnar

Barb Mullen, Matt Wahila, Karen Beebe, Jason Shaw,
Mary Kaminsky, Suzy Ryan, Kim Myers, Teresa Farrell
under consideration
under consideration

Endorsements are based on: reviews of candidate backgrounds including voting records; questionnaire responses; interviews when deemed necessary. Endorsements must be approved by both the local Susquehanna Group and the Atlantic (New York) Chapter Political Committee. The Susquehanna Group hopes for environmentally-friendly county executives, and majorities in county legislatures.

We have outstanding candidates. Karen Beebe lost a very close race in 2018. Matt Wahila is running for the first time. Barb Mullen lost a close race in a very conservative district to Majority Leader Daniel J. Reynolds. Reynolds for nearly 2 years had obstructed a vote on Broome County becoming a NYS Climate Smart Community. After the close vote acquiesced and the bill passed. Broome then qualified for grants for flood monitoring and mitigation planning.

Endorsed candidates may use the accompanying Sierra Club logo on campaign material. Susquehanna Group members have contributed to endorsed candidates and volunteered to go door-to-door and/or phone bank. Susquehanna Group may convene press conferences and organize events for endorsed candidates. A 2018 Meet-the-Candidates event was well-received. Pandemic-related restrictions on gatherings are forcing us to be inventive in 2020. These activities may be critical in the 2020 elections which will impact local decision-making on energy, flood mitigation, air and water quality, and many other environmental issues.



The Not Quite Dead American Chestnut

– Mary Cronk



Image NYC Public Library

The American chestnut tree (*Castanea dentata*) was a keystone species in the eastern United States, particularly in the Appalachian region. It was estimated that 1 of 4 trees in the eastern forests were American chestnuts. Human activities, including logging and introducing invasive organisms, functionally removed the chestnut from U.S. forests.

American chestnut was among the fastest growing, tallest (100 or more feet), and widest-trunked trees (4-7 feet) in the eastern United States. The strength, straight grain, and decay resistance of its wood made it ideal for framing, finished lumber, and fencing. Its nuts provided abundant food for people, domestic livestock, and diverse

wildlife. Before colonization they lived 400-600 years. Chestnuts housed and fed innumerable birds and insects. Their leaves, bark and decaying wood enriched the soil. Stumps from dead chestnuts re-sprouted into new trees. Chestnut wood is still recovered from old barns and buildings for reuse.

Chestnut blight fungus (*Cryphonectria parasitica*) was accidentally introduced into the U.S. on Japanese chestnuts (*Castanea crenata*) imported beginning in 1876 by a nurseryman in Flushing, New York. They were then widely distributed. Nurseries distributed blight-carrying *Castanea c.* throughout the east and the west coasts. The blight fungus moves locally from tree to tree as spores on the feet, fur, and feathers of the many creatures that contact its cankers. The blight spread 25 or more miles per year. In the first half of the 20th

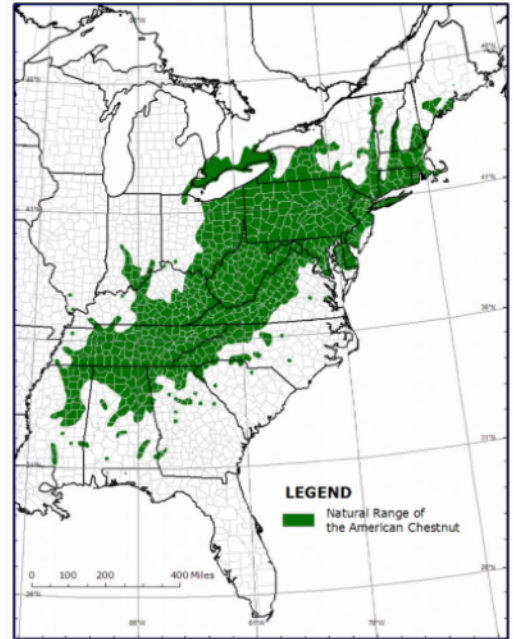


century it killed an estimated four billion trees.

By 1950, the American chestnut was essentially eliminated as a forest tree. It no longer plays an ecological or economic role in Eastern forests.

Blight fungus girdles the cambium (growth) layer of the infected tree, which dies above the infection. The roots however often survive and continue to send up vigorous stump sprouts which eventually succumb to blight and die back to the ground. A USDA Forest Service survey indicates there may be as many as 60 million sprout clumps in New York State, a rich gene pool for restoration efforts. Smaller American chestnut trees may be encountered; one in Chenango Valley State Park appeared in the June 2020 *Sierran*. Some isolated trees in remote areas remain uninfected.

The chestnut blight led to the 1912 Plant Quarantine Act which was intended to prevent similar catastrophes. The law, still in effect, failed to prevent Emerald Ash Borer and Hemlock Woolly Adelgid from wiping out additional important forest species.



Historic chestnut range

source: American Chestnut FDN

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Susquehanna Group

(All of Broome, & most of Chenango,
Delaware, Otsego, Tioga Counties)

Chair	*Scott Lauffer 607-341-3746
Vice Chair	*Valdi Weiderpass
Secretary	*Karen Boba
Treasurer	*Joan Lettis
Conservation Co-Chairs	*Douglas Gausman
	*Mary Cronk
Political Chair	*Allan Hochberg
Chapter Delegate	*Jim Taft
Alt. Chapter Delegate	*Joann Lettis
Newsletter Editor	*Jim Taft
Membership Chair	*Chris Harasta
Outings Chair	*Chris Harasta
	* Member Executive Committee

To become a candidate for the
Susquehanna Group's Executive
Committee, mail by November 20,
2020 a candidate statement of 150
words or less to:

Susquehanna Group
PO Box 572
Endicott NY 13760

The Nominating Committee will create
a slate of candidates, and ballots will be
mailed with the December *Sierran*.

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For more information about the American chestnut:

American Chestnut Foundation <http://www.acf.org/>

Video: history and importance of American chestnut https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1636&v=-xgbedXnbfw&feature=emb_logo

Video: The Chestnut Tree: Bringing Back an American Icon | William Powell (SUNY ESF) Templeton Foundation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-mhMdUryolU&feature=youtu.be>

TedX talk De-Extinction <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYHQDLCmggy>

Public Comment for Chestnut Restoration: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/08/19/2020-18135/state-university-of-new-york-college-of-environmental-science-and-forestry-petition-for-open-comment>

Covid-19 Advisement from Sierra Club National

From Ramon Cruz, Sierra Club President:

We decided to extend the current [COVID-19 response](#) until February 28, 2021, meaning that all physical offices (national and chapter) will remain closed, and travel and in-person meetings will remain on pause. We will be working on additional guidance surrounding exceptions for events, outings, and other organizing/campaign activities and will distribute them when available, likely in mid-September.

Feed the Bugs

Group member and pollinator specialist Colleen Wolpert submits 2 ideas:

- Resist the temptation to tidy up the yard and garden. Lots of activity occurs in debris to create the next generation of pollinators.
- Check this Cornell University Botanic Garden site on native pollinators:

https://cornellbotanicgardens.org/the-wonder-of-native-pollinator-plants/?fbclid=IwAR3VCDnWQG9T8lgyCNP8MN9O84SoqpA3_ztcFBS-oe_g06VZL2EoOIVIFP8

Atlantic Chapter Farm and Food Committee Seeks Members

– Michael Frys

The Chapter's Farm & Food Committee promotes regenerative, organic, sustainable agriculture through education, policy, and supportive legislation. Continuously introduced legislation may allow us to impact policy. Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo (Binghamton-area) heads the Assembly Agriculture Committee which is also involved with climate. Senator Jen Metzger (Catskill-area) chairs the Senate Agriculture Committee. Senator Rachel May (central NY) leads the Senate Commission on Rural Resources, and Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara (Mohawk Valley) leads his chamber's Rural Commission.

We meet monthly via conference call or Zoom. To get involved, contact Michael Frys at mhfrys17@yahoo.com or Abby Scher, committee chair at mindspring.com. We look forward to your participation.

COMING EVENTS

MOTHER NATURE

– Bob Wright

Oh, the magnificent wonders of nature,
With beautiful scenes to see.
Rocks, trees, and creatures abound,
A blessing for you and me.

Scenes of serenity and grandeur
Provide us with wonder and awe,
With experiences almost mystical,
And feelings we'll long recall.

But the shame, of our human activities,
That destroy our precious inheritance.
We dig, chop, pollute and ruin
Just to make civilization advance.

Our wild world is called Mother Nature.
We revere her as no other,
Then heap our abuse upon her.
That's no way to treat your mother.

Susquehanna Group meetings will be on Zoom until further notice. To join, click <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4751233928>. Please be sure to login by 7:30 as late attendees may not be allowed in.

September 15, 7:30pm

Zero Fossil Footprint Chris Burger, Chemical Engineer, Resource Management Consultant, College Science Instructor. Chris discusses the importance of reducing fossil fuel use and strategies on how to do so. He shares his family's journey on reducing its fossil footprint to nearly zero. Community reduction of fossil fuel dependency is also discussed.

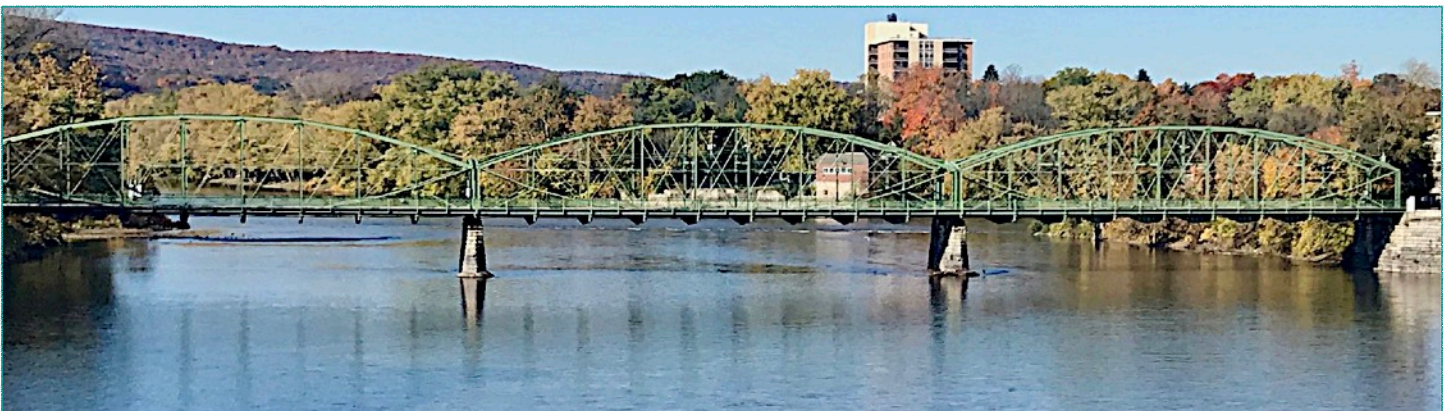
October 20, 7:30pm

Impact of Climate Change on Natural Ecosystems

Professor Julian Shepherd. How much can we expect different organisms to adapt or move to accommodate climate change? I will also talk about projections of ecosystem changes and species extinctions.

November 17, 7:30pm

Chris Rounds leads discussion of "**Natural Rivals: John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, and the Creation of America's Public Lands**" by John Clayton. All are encouraged to read in advance.



HELP! Dear Reader – Please send to *Sierran* editor Jim Taft (jimtaft7@gmail.com) any photos we might use in publications to represent Susquehanna Group geography (Broome, Chenango, Delaware, Otsego, Tioga Counties). You'll get credit!

They Fly By Night

– Mary Cronk

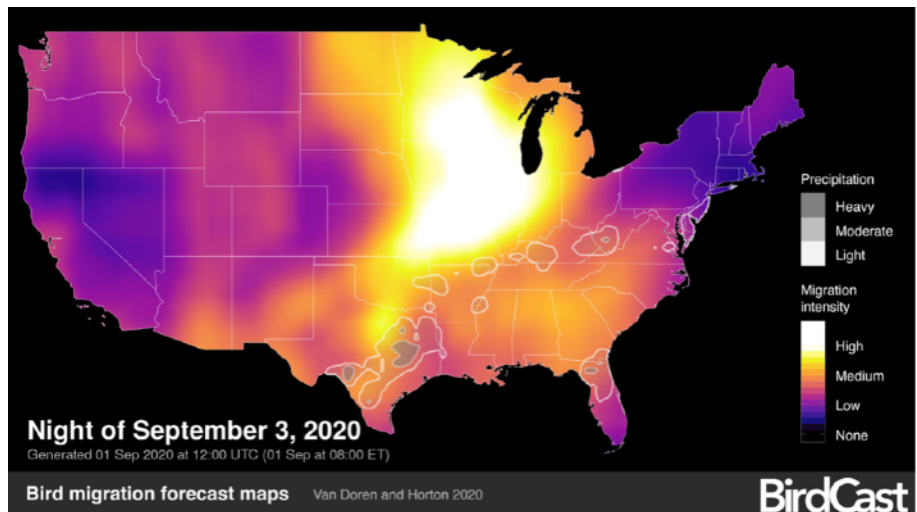
Many of us, pandemic-bound, are learning about amazing bird migrations, many of which are right overhead and generally at night. Most birds in our area are migrants, arriving in the spring and flying south in the fall. On August 31, 2020 the Cornell Lab of Ornithology unveiled its updated bird migration web site <https://birdcast.info/>. I participated in the Lab's Zoom presentation, organized in large part by the Lab's Chelsea Benson, and learned about the site's data, maps, and many tools.

Birdcast shows migration predictions for the U.S., and for specific localities throughout the country. Predictions appear as the number of birds in a cubic kilometer of airspace. Nexrad radar, via the U.S. Weather Service, is used to track them, just as it is used to track precipitation and swarms of insects. The Birdcast project is working to include differently-formatted Canadian data.

Discover forecasts for birds moving south overhead. Most of the birds will continue flying, but some will alight for a day of rest and eating. Flying in darkness, birds use the night sky for direction. They generally fly all night and prefer clear and windless nights.

My first question as a new birder was: 'Might one see birds flying over?' Well, maybe, but you might want magnification and a very clear night. But you may hear them flying overhead. A friend enjoys camping during migration time as she can listen to them fly over all night as they make chips and other noises. Some people record the sounds attempting to identify the birds. The Cornell Lab is working on a sound recognition system for identifying night-flying species.

My second question was: 'How many birds fly over at night?' The answer depends on location, date, wind and weather. 3-5 billion birds migrate over the U.S. For each locality there is an optimal 2-week period. I just checked Birdcast which revealed that Chicago will likely have heavy migratory traffic on September 3. Maybe that will be the start of the City's two-week period. It helps to check the web site daily. Weather and wind affect birds' travel, and Birdcast uses these factors in predictions. In April or May you may check locations and predictions for returning birds. They will then prefer a south wind or no wind. Warm temperatures also help spring migrants.



This site is both an educational tool and a conservation effort. Migration is a dangerous event for birds. City and town lights attract migrating birds and they may lose their way. Perhaps 340 million birds die annually from building collisions. Birdcast data can be used to protect migrating flocks by, for example, reducing night lighting. See <https://birdcast.info/science-to-action/lights-out/lights-out-texas/>. See Birdcast's 2019 prediction for the 9/11 memorial lighting: <https://birdcast.info/news/monitoring-at-the-national-9-11-memorial-museum-tribute-in-light-2019/>. Many studies use Birdcast to monitor summer reproduction and winter survival rates. One is <https://abcbirds.org/3-billion-birds/>.

To learn more visit the above web sites, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology birds.cornell.edu, or view this webinar just posted by the Lab <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3DK7KGoIYQ>.

Transitioning USA to 90% Clean Electricity by 2035 – Feasible and Money Saving

– Valdi Weiderpass

The US can save 10% of electricity generation costs by transitioning to 90% carbon-free sources by 2035. Detailed analyses in a June 2020 report by University of California, Berkeley: *2035 Report: Plummeting Solar, Wind, and Battery Costs Can Accelerate Our Clean Energy Future*. It factors in rapidly dropping prices of both renewable energy and energy storage, modeling with an improved electric grid, and emerging renewable electricity generation and storage technologies. It reveals that with appropriate public policies the US can, without any new fossil fuel-powered generation, retire all its coal-fired plants and reduce gas-fired generation by 70 percent. The transition can be achieved without raising consumer bills or decreasing grid reliability. Achieving this transition by 2035 would set the stage for transitioning the rest of the economy (transportation, buildings, industry) to renewable energy by 2050.

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that global carbon emissions must be cut in half by 2030, and that global greenhouse gas emissions must be net zero by 2050, in order to limit Global Warming to 1.5°C and save a habitable climate.

The UC Berkeley report contrasts current generation (1,000 GW) with two potential scenarios: 1) A No New Policy Case assuming continuation of current state and federal policies; and 2) a 90% Clean Case requiring 90% carbon-free electricity by 2035. It finds that the 90% Clean Case can be achieved by keeping existing hydropower and nuclear generating capacity (accounting for planned retirements) and much of existing natural gas

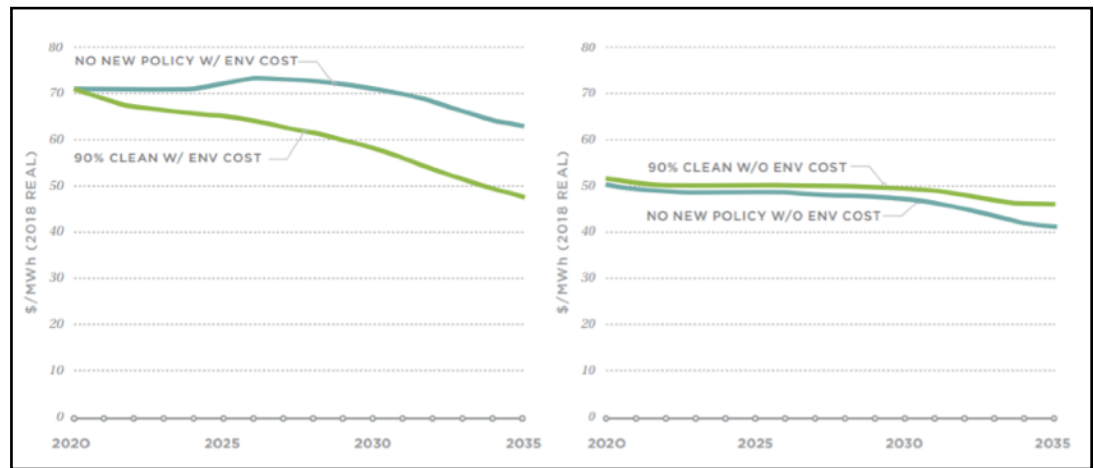


Figure 9 of The 2035 Report, UC Berkeley Goldman School of Public Policy, June 2020

capacity, while building 70 GW per year of renewable energy generation. There would be 1,100 GW of new wind and solar plus 600 GW-hours of energy storage (150 GW of power for 4-hour average periods). To demonstrate the feasibility of the construction rate the Report states that in 2016 15 GW of solar was installed and the independent US Energy Information Administration suggests that 19.4 GW of wind power will be installed in 2020. In the 90% Clean Case, electricity from natural gas-fired plants would be reduced by 70 percent by 2035. The 2035 Report release was accompanied by policy recommendations from nonpartisan policy firm Energy Innovation, which serve to guide policy makers through the 15-year transition.

The 90% Clean Case would require at least 500,000 more jobs each year than the No New Policy case. The 90% Clean Case would reduce economy-wide emissions by 27 percent thereby preventing, through the year 2050, up to 85,000 unnecessary premature air pollution-related deaths, and avoiding \$1.2 trillion in health and environmental damages. The Report is welcome good news because it shows that a transition to a 90% clean electricity grid (1) is technically and economically feasible, (2) would stimulate the economy, and (3) would demonstrate a feasible path toward saving a habitable climate. The only thing needed to make it happen is political will!

Billionaire Wilderness: The Ultra-Wealthy and the Remaking of the American West

by Justin Farrell –Princeton University Press, 2020

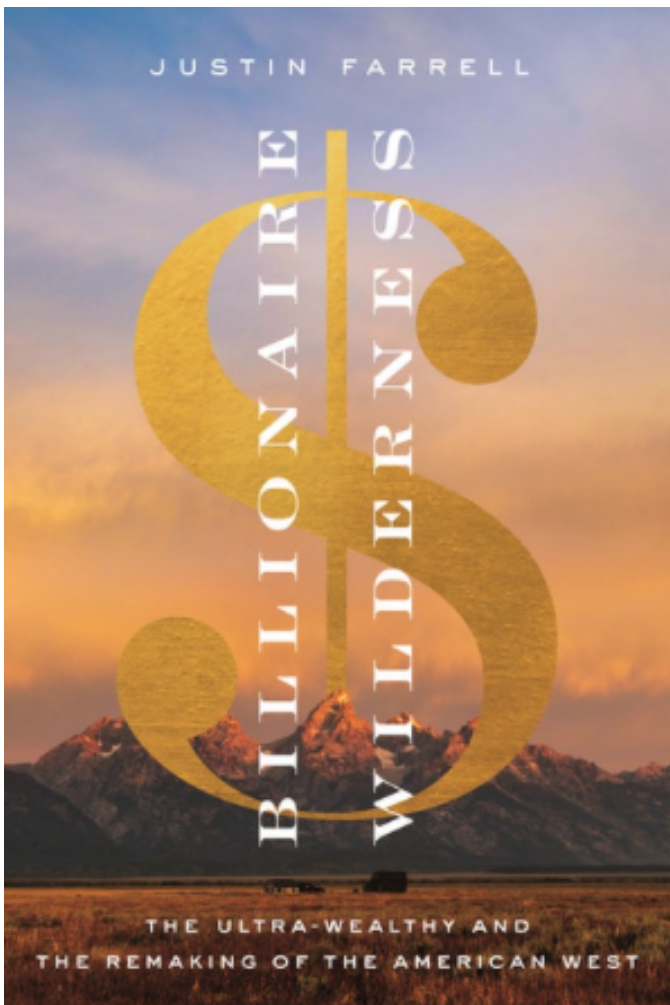
– Review by Chris Rounds



Northwest Wyoming's Teton County contains two national park gems: Yellowstone and Grand Teton. Attracted by their wonders, I looked forward to Justin Farrell's book. A native of Wyoming and Associate Professor at Yale's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Farrell would make an excellent guide.

Yet *Billionaire Wilderness* does not focus on natural wonders as one might expect. Instead, he explores the 'invasion' of Teton County by some of this country's wealthiest families. Attracted by its amazing natural setting, of course, but also by state laws designed to attract and coddle the rich, Teton County is "the richest county in the United States, and the county with the nation's highest level of income inequality." [p. 4]

Extended interviews with both rich and poor County inhabitants reveal what drew the wealthy, the lives they've created for themselves there, and the lives of those drawn there to serve them. In many respects it is not a pretty picture, but should provide Sierra Club members food for thought.

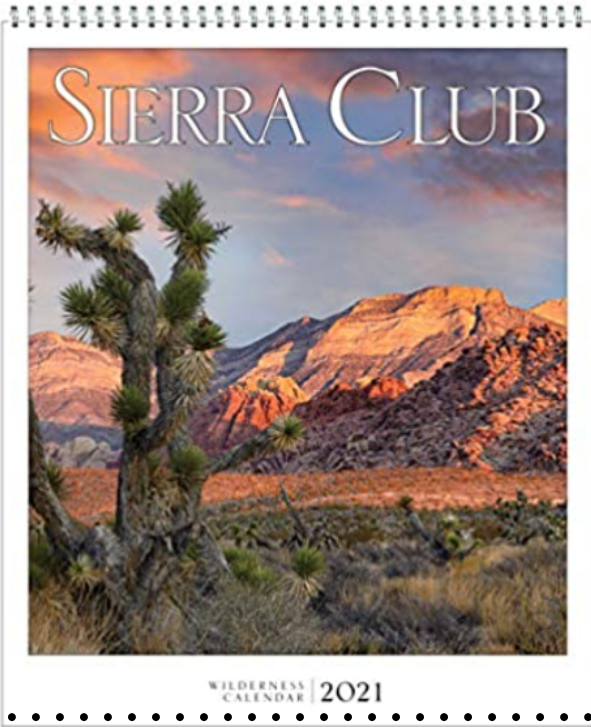


The wealthy of Teton County are passionate defenders of wilderness, giving generously to environmental organizations and leaping to the defense of the region's wild animal life. Conscientious stewards of their own lands, they fight to keep 'their' county free of the plagues besetting the cities they come from: low-income housing, urban blight, that sort of thing.

You can see where the author is going, right? These people have not built their own houses. They don't make their own beds or do their own laundry. You won't see them out mowing the lawn or feeding the horses. No. That work is done by poor people who, as it turns out, are mostly Mexican immigrants. The servant class provides the secondary focus of Farrell's research. The questions he explores are: How do these people survive in the hostile challenging environment created by the rich?; What do they think of the people they serve?; How do these two strata of Teton County society get along?

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Mexican underclass is largely invisible to the wealthy who do not concern themselves with where servants go after work, or the quality of the schools their children attend. The dominant class, attracted to the area's very low taxes, does not care to dwell on the fact that those tax rates guarantee meager services for the poor. These topics are, in Farrell's phrasing a "buzz-kill" in elite gatherings where the foci are the wonders of bountiful nature, the excitement of rugged individualism, and the pleasures of their carefully protected existences.

American environmentalists have long been vulnerable to accusations that they care more about animals than people, and that, indeed, they see their task as protecting nature from people (other than themselves). The original protectors of New York's beloved Adirondacks were, after all, the super wealthy in the age of robber barons. What Farrell gives us is a glimpse into the reality of modern robber barons escaping the developed world they have created to find their "true selves" in the Wild West.



Calendar time!

Good bye 2020!

Please pre-order calendars and we'll mail them to you when they come in. This is a small fundraiser for Susquehanna Group.

Orders must be received by October 31, 2020.

Order full size calendars and/or the desk appointment version. \$15 each plus \$4.00 postage.

Mail the order form below and a check to the address below. Questions? Please contact Treasurer, Joann Lettis, at Jomom83589@aol.com.

Calendar Type	Each	Quantity	Cost
Wall	\$15.00		
Appointment	\$15.00		
Shipping			\$4.00
TOTAL DUE			

Ship to:

Name _____

Street or PO Box _____

City, State Zip _____

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Our mailing address:

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