



**GREAT WATERS GROUP
NEWSLETTER**

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Summer 2023 NO. 2



Community members shared their concerns at We Energies’ West North Avenue site on April 13 before the ban on power shutoffs expired. A variety of energy insecurity remedies have been advanced, but We Energies has opposed them.

Tim Karaskiewicz photo

Members confront power shutoffs

Sierra Club co-hosted a rally with the Milwaukee Energy Burden Coalition on April 13 at We Energies’ site on West North Avenue to share the effects of looming power shutoffs. Wisconsin’s ban on

utility shutoffs expired April 15, and now residents who have fallen behind on payments are at risk of having their power shut off while We Energies had an 11% rate hike last year.

Summer Programs

Join us for our last monthly program before the summer break. Look for information in future newsletters about the fall programs, which resume in September.

Make Your Home More Sustainable Using Community Resources

Monday, May 15, 6 to 8 p.m.
Wauwatosa Public Library, Firefly Room, 7635 W. North Ave.

Homeowners will learn about community resources to help them make their homes more sustainable by improving energy efficiency, storm drainage, etc.

The presenters are Elizabeth Hittman, board president for Reflo and an advisory board member for the Midwest Renewable Energy Association; Jay Feiker, a project manager in MMSD’s

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Multiple community members shared their fears about the pending shutoffs. Among them were that their medical devices would stop working, that food bought in bulk to mitigate inflation prices would rot in their freezers, that shutoffs would trigger evictions from public housing, and that reconnection fees would put electricity out of reach even when bills are paid.

Coalition members have proposed a variety of solutions. Income-based utility rates would improve the energy burden for low-income households. Investments in renewable electricity generation would decrease the costs of energy production. Investments in energy efficiency for our aging Milwaukee homes would decrease energy need.

Allowing on-bill or third-party financing for solar panels would make it easier for families to generate their own electricity and be less affected by rate changes. Decreasing the astonishingly high 10% guaranteed profits for We Energies would decrease consumer

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Notes from the Chair

According to the March report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, “Climate change is a threat to human well-being and planetary health. There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a livable and sustainable future for all (*very high confidence*).”

Statements like this can feel overwhelming and can cause us to think that as individuals there’s little we can do to slow the march toward climate catastrophe.

Fortunately, the Sierra Club offers several ways we can take action at the local, state and national levels. Here are a few examples:

- Gov. Tony Evers’ proposed biennial budget includes bold initiatives to address climate change, including \$14 million in investments in the clean energy economy. His proposal focuses on creating clean energy jobs, improving the lives of Wisconsin residents and combating climate change. The Joint Finance Committee is considering the governor’s budget. The official comment period is over, but you can still email Joint Finance members and your own lawmakers directly. You can learn more about Evers’ budget here: <https://bit.ly/budgetwi>.
- Our Future Milwaukee Coalition consists of a group of citizens who worked with Milwaukee city government to craft the Climate and Equity Plan, a 10-point plan for addressing climate change and creating jobs in the city. They are tracking the plan as it moves through the approval process by the Milwaukee Common Council

and will also help with implementation once the plan is adopted. The coalition is looking for volunteers to help with social media, website design, research and community outreach. If you would like to get involved, please email them at OurFutureMilwaukee@gmail.com.

- Join the Energy Burden work group. This collection of staff and volunteers from several local organizations (e.g., Clean Wisconsin, Citizen Action and Faith in Place) is working to address the fact that majority Black and Latinx Milwaukee households spend a disproportionate amount of their incomes on utility payments. We ask We Energies to 1) fund weatherization and energy efficiency programs targeted at customers with high energy burdens, 2) improve low-income assistance programs, 3) make sure its rate structures will provide for an equitable future for their customers, and 4) make forward-thinking and cost-effective choices in power generation. The work group meets at 4:30 p.m. the first Thursday of the month. To join, email me at jabel209@gmail.com.
- Join a Chapter issue team. At the Wisconsin chapter level, the Beyond Coal, Pipelines and Transportation teams are all working to advocate for equitable, just and environmentally sound policies across the state. To join a team, go to www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/volunteer and click on Join an Issue Team.

These are only some of the many ways to contribute to positive and lasting results around climate change. It’s not too late to shift the direction of our climate future, as long as we work fast and work together.

– Jenny Abel, GWG chair

Camaraderie is brewing at beer gardens

Beer garden season is returning! We’re working on our summer lineup of beer garden events where we can share what the Great Waters Group is up to and compare notes on places to explore this summer while also supporting our county parks. If you haven’t attended a GWG event before, this is a good way to meet people in a relaxed, small group setting.

A GWG host will have a sign or green tablecloth from 5:30 to at least 7:30 p.m. on the date listed.

This schedule is tentative, so please register at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/great-waters/calendar or check our Facebook page at facebook.com/SierraClubGWG for any late changes in weather or beer garden schedules.

Buy a beer or soda and drop by. Bring your own parks glass for a discount at many of the sites.

Thursday, May 11 – Estabrook Beer Garden, Shorewood.

Thursday, June 15 – Whitnall Beer Garden, Greendale.

Thursday, July 20 – The Landing at Hoyt Park, Wauwatosa.

Thursday, Aug. 24 – South Shore Terrace, Milwaukee.

Wednesday, Sept. 13 – Hubbard Park Beer Garden, Shorewood.

Thursday, October 12 – Estabrook Beer Garden, Shorewood.

GWG visiting Germantown, too

Do you live near Germantown and want a chance to connect with and support the Great Waters Group? Or do you just want to hear live music and support the GWG?

Members of the GWG Volunteer Leadership Council will head to Germantown on Thursday, July 6, to staff the beer garden as a fundraiser and membership recruitment effort, especially for Washington and Waukesha County residents.

The Park and Recreation Department’s Music in the Pavilion series takes place at the Gehl’s Performing Arts Pavilion in Firemen’s Park, W162-N11870 Park Ave., Germantown. The beer garden opens at 6 p.m., and music by the cover band The Playlist, with special guest Matt Schmidt, runs from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Learning, fun to be featured at Havenwoods

Nearby Nature Milwaukee and its partners in freshwater conservation are planning a day of fun, food and educational activities on Saturday, June 17, at Havenwoods State Forest to celebrate the work along the Lincoln Creek Greenway, including Havenwoods.

The event is expected to include hikes, a scavenger hunt, community resource tables and displays, as well as an auditorium program featuring short environmental films and presentations. The event runs from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the state forest, 6141 N. Hopkins St., just north of Silver Spring Drive in Milwaukee.

In addition to Nearby Nature, organizers include the Public Allies of Wisconsin's Water Justice Cohort, sponsored by Fund for Lake Michigan, which has two team service projects coming together to support this event.

Nearby Nature and Public Allies joined forces this spring to boost participation in the Milwaukee Riverkeeper Spring Cleanup along Lincoln Creek and have planned this as their day of community celebration.

The Milwaukee Waterway Restoration Partnership and its Community Advisory Committee, along with another team of Public Allies, are celebrating a forest rehabilitation project focused on Havenwoods.

Members confront shutoffs

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bills, ideally by leading to reductions in multimillion-dollar executive compensation packages. Changing how utilities generate income in Wisconsin would stop the current incentive to build expensive, centralized fossil fuel energy projects.

We Energies continues to raise rates and ranks fourth among the 36 large investor-owned utilities in the country in how aggressively it resists the clean energy transition, according to the think tank InfluenceMap.

Summer Programs

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sustainability department; Mike Arney, a Wauwatosa Sustainability Committee member and Citizens' Climate Lobby activist; and Kevin Kane, co-founder of Green Homeowners United, where he works with lenders, Realtors and homeowners to understand the benefits of green homes.

Learn more and register at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/great-waters.



A Sierra Club volunteer and a Marquette University student bring up a muffler found in Hopkins Hollow along Lincoln Creek.

Club volunteers take out the trash

Sierra Club members teamed up with Nearby Nature supporters and other community members to fill more than 170 bags of trash on Lincoln Creek for the 28th annual Milwaukee Riverkeeper Spring Cleanup on Earth Day.

Even though Nearby Nature and the Great Waters Group hold cleanups on Lincoln Creek near 35th and Congress streets at least three times a year, there is always plenty of trash that washes downstream, blows in and gets dumped. The trash then washes into the Milwaukee River and ultimately Lake Michigan.

More than 130 volunteers, including 27 students from Marquette University, turned out at just the four sites that were led by GWG, Nearby Nature and Northwest Side Community Development Corp. The sites included Harriet Tubman Park, which is on a Lincoln Creek tributary at N. 48th St. and Hampton Ave.

Plastic bags and fast-food, snack and Swisher Sweets cigarillo packaging were ubiquitous, and bottles and cans were plentiful. Volunteers pulled a shopping cart and a number of bicycles out of the creek. Tires, a muffler, house doors and other debris had been dumped on the sites. The most disturbing find was a collection of jugs of used motor oil.

Volunteers reported the oil to Riverkeeper as well as the Department of Natural Resources, which sent a warden out to inspect. Unfortunately, dumping is a serious problem on Milwaukee's north side, and it is difficult to stop or to find the perpetrators.

Report environmental abusers

To report oil or other environmental abuse on area waterways, go to www.milwaukeeiverkeeper.org/report-pollution.

To report suspected environmental, wildlife or recreation violations to the Department of Natural Resources, call or text the hotline at (800) 847-9367.

To report dumping in Milwaukee, call (414) 286-CITY or report it online.



Protect America's Environment for Our Families, For Our Future

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Hike and learn at summer outings

Join us on a summer outing. Please register at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/great-waters/calendar. Updates and additional outings will also be in the monthly e-letter and at facebook.com/SierraClubGWG.

Variety and Camaraderie at Retzer Nature Center

Date: Sunday, July 30.

Time: 1 – 3 p.m.

Location: Retzer Nature Center, S14-W28167
Madison St., Waukesha

Join us for a 4-mile hike through the beautiful grounds of the Retzer Nature Center. Learn about and enjoy restored prairies, an oak opening, wetlands and forests. Entrance to the park is free.

Tree Seed Collecting: Step One for Wisconsin's Future Forests

Date: Saturday, Aug. 26.

Time: 10 a.m. – noon

Location: McGovern Park, 5400 N. 51 Blvd., Milwaukee

Did you know that you can collect seeds and grow trees yourself? Or that many of the millions of seeds the Department of Natural Resources needs to help grow Wisconsin's future forests come from people like you, scrounging acorns and maple helicopters to send to the state nursery? Join us as we take a leisurely walk around McGovern Park and learn how to find, collect, store, ship or grow seeds. We will focus on oak trees but also discuss other kinds of trees found in the park, such as maples, hickories and beeches.

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