Sierra Club Water Sentinels Leadership Team
2017 Report

The Sierra Club envisions a world where the quality and quantity of water in our rivers, streams, lakes, wetlands and aquifers are protected and managed to sustain the ecosystems on which all life depends. Clean water is precious. Clean water is easily contaminated or affected by pollution and continues to grow in value and scarcity. Half the world's major rivers are being seriously polluted and/or depleted. About 40 percent of rivers and lakes in the U.S. surveyed by the EPA are too polluted for swimming or fishing. Water however is also cleansing and rejuvenating. Waterways can be restored and bounce back from pollution relatively quickly. By working together we can achieve the promise of the Clean Water Act and have waterways that are swimmable, fishable, and drinkable once again.

The Sierra Club has invested many years and significant resources to create a strong effective model for engaging activists around water issues through its Water Sentinels Program. The Water Sentinels Leadership team has built on this foundation to bring together leaders from across the country to learn, share and fight for clean and abundant water. We are engaged on a wide range of water issues at the group and chapter level across the country because waterways are easily impacted by pollution, climate, industry and development. These issues are not isolated to one or two locales but affect communities and people from coast to coast.
2017 Water Sentinels Leadership Grassroot Network Team

Chair: Elaine Packard (Washington)  Staff Support:  Matt Trokan, Elissa Yoder Mann (Ohio)
Core Team Members:  Eric Weck (Illinois), Ross Vincent (Colorado), Elaine Giessel (Kansas), George Cunningham (Nebraska), Debbie Neustadt (Iowa), Eric Patterson (New Mexico)
Supporting Members:  Fran Caffe (Illinois), Hank Graddy (Kentucky), Doris Cellarius (Oregon)

The Water Sentinels Leadership Team is recruiting, training, and empowering Sierra Club members and allies to:

- Protect and fully implement the Clean Water Act
- Advocate for access to clean and affordable drinking water
- Advocate for responsible ecological management of our surface and ground waters
- Advocate for clean water and hold polluters accountable
- Connect people with their waterways by conducting local water quality monitoring
- Expose and oppose activities that damage the integrity of our Nation’s waters
- Inform and educate the public and influence decision makers
- Engage in grassroots activism for sound local and national water policies

In 2017, we worked to achieve our objectives of recruiting two new Core Leadership Team members, maintaining a web/social media presence, organizing club-wide water calls and collecting and reporting on the gamut of water work being done by the Sierra Club.

A dozen Sierra Club leaders participated on the Team, and we welcomed two new core members George Cunningham and Eric Weck, a new staff supporter Elissa Yoder Mann and sub-team leader Hank Graddy. The Water Sentinels Leadership team facilitated four club-wide calls with the goal of facilitating connections between Sierra Club leaders working on water issues. We had a total of 197 registered participants from all across the country.

In addition, core team members participated with the Food and Agriculture Team, Land Use Team, Marine Action Team, WILD Team and the Clean Water Working Group. We also helped resist federal rule changes and legislation. The repeal of the Clean Water Rule is a disappointment but we are hopeful that our efforts against HR 848 will be successful. A sub-team was also created to restart the Mississippi River Team. This group is dedicated to reducing the deadzone in the Gulf of Mexico and to addressing nutrient issues within the Mississippi River Basin.

What did we learn about the water issues the Sierra Club is working on?
An important objective of the Water Sentinels Leadership Team is to report on the gamut of water work being done in the Club, including water monitoring, policy/regulatory work, and general water advocacy. In addition, we attempt to track the numbers of activists, participants, and leaders engaged on water issues. We were able to conduct a census of Water Sentinels monitoring groups and collect surveys from CCL leaders in 2017.

The Water Sentinels census had twelve respondents from different groups and chapters including Ohio, Illinois, Nebraska Colorado, Montana and Hoosier Chapters and Sangre de Cristo, Fountain Creek and Chicago Groups. In total, they had 309 water events including cleanups, trainings, lobbying and regular meetings reaching over 2,500 people in 2016. (link to spreadsheet). We hope to do another census in 2018 and have more respondents.

Thirty-five Chapter leaders also completed surveys at the CCL meeting in September. Delegates were asked which water issues their chapters were working on. The Sierra Club is active on a wide range of water issues at the group and chapter level. Groundwater withdrawal has moved into the top issue the Sierra Club is engaged on, with 25 leaders responding that their chapters are working on the issue. Agricultural pollution, fracking, toxic contamination and wetlands were in the top tier of responses with over 20 chapters engaged on these issues. Over a dozen chapters are working on water quality monitoring, concentrated animal feeding operations, drought/in-stream flows, flooding, bottled water and other issues. It is evident from the data collected that the Sierra Club should make a greater effort to help activists nationwide address water quantity issues and conservation of healthy aquatic habitats in the future.
2017 Sierra Club local and state Water Victories.
Together we are a voice for clean, safe, and protected waterways across the Country. Here are just a few examples of local water protection accomplishments.

Eagleview Water Sentinels
Illinois Chapter
The program recruits and trains activists to take regular water samples from rivers and tributaries in their communities. Data collected is summarized, analyzed and submitted to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) and used by the Sierra Club for reports and factsheets which allows the organization to educate community leaders, local officials, state agencies and schools about water quality.

Restore Streams Revitalize Native Communities
Maui Group, Sierra Club of Hawaii
The Maui Group is fighting for the protection of our native ecosystem and the rights of traditional taro farmers to the public water in our streams. For decades, a private corporation, Alexander & Baldwin has diverted public water from streams in East Maui, causing streams to run dry and taro patches to crack. This is a form of cultural genocide and ecological destruction that should no longer be tolerated.

Charles County Watershed Conservation District
Maryland Chapter
The establishment of the Watershed Conservation District (WCD), rezoned 36,000 acres of land in the Mattawoman Creek and Port Tobacco River watersheds to protect the undeveloped areas. The passage of these zoning amendments is a major victory in the Sierra Club’s almost 25 year-long campaign to save Mattawoman Creek. Although this is great win for conservation efforts, the development lobby has already started their counter campaign by threatening a referendum.

Protecting Water Resources
John Muir Chapter
The John Muir Chapter is working to ensure that Wisconsin's waters remain clean and safe for current and future generations. Our waters are threatened by irresponsible practices such as mining and unsustainable agriculture. The Chapter created white papers on both water quality and water quantity issues that are affecting their water resources.

Fountain Creek Water Sentinels
Pikes Peak and Sangre de Cristo groups
The Sierra Club is working to protect, improve, and restore the Fountain Creek Watershed by promoting water quality monitoring, public education and public action for clean water. The Fountain Creek Water Sentinels held dozens of outings, cleanups and monitoring events in 2017.

Southeast Iowa
Iowa Chapter
Iowa still has not fully implemented the provisions of the Clean Water Act (signed into law more than 40 years ago), and, therefore, is out of compliance. The Iowa Chapter collaborates with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the Environmental Protection Agency to resolve barriers preventing implementation of the Act’s various provisions. We have prepared rule-making petitions, filed federal court cases and attended countless meetings with public officials. We are dedicated to continuing our efforts in bringing Iowa into compliance with the federal Clean Water Act.

Centennial Group
Georgia Chapter
Sierra Group members continue to lead the way in protecting our natural resource. Several Adopt-A-Stream volunteers have been recognized in recent years by both Cobb County (Cobb’s A-A-S program) and Georgia’s Environmental Protection Division (“Rivers Alive” program) for their dedicated service in monitoring and protecting our local waterways. We work with the Cobb County Water Department on training and follow-up and report our results directly to the State EPD.

Water Monitoring in Columbus, Bloomington and Indianapolis
Hoosier Chapter
The Hoosier Chapter was fortunate to have an intern this summer from the new Indiana Sustainability Development Program at IU Bloomington. Lauren Travis, worked with water monitoring volunteers in Bloomington, Columbus, and Indianapolis, and held community meetings in each of those cities to explain and discuss state water policy and local water issues.