MOVING FORWARD ON CONSERVATION PRIORITIES IN WISCONSIN

A look back at 2009, and what to watch for in the New Year.

By Caryl Terrell, Legislative Committee Chair, Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter.

After years of partisan deadlock at the State Capitol, 2009 has been productive. Already, our accomplishments have been considerable.

We have worked to reduce unhealthy air pollution and demonstrate clean energy alternatives by removing existing and proposed coal plants. Sierra Club was a key player in the Madison Gas and Electric Company decision to remove coal from the Blount St. plant and the Governor’s pledge to remove coal from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Charter St. plant. The Public Service Commission’s rejection of the Cassville coal power plant resulted from thousands of activists turning out at PSC hearings and Sierra Club expert testimony on utility-scale solar. The “No More Coal” campaign to remove coal from all remaining state-owned power plants includes an analysis of fifteen plants at UW campuses and state health facilities around the state.

Our efforts helped secure $475 million in federal funding to restore the Great Lakes. Wisconsin’s own Representative David Obey was instrumental in securing Great Lakes restoration funding as Chair of the Appropriations Committee. During Sierra-Club-organized events this summer, we called for full funding to restore this precious source of fresh surface water. The funds, which will be used for cleaning up toxic sediments, managing invasive species, and restoring habitats, will not only improve our environment, but will also provide jobs and stimulate economic investment in the Great Lakes region.

We won a settlement requiring the state to re-evaluate the permit for the Columbia coal plant. The EPA agreed with the Sierra Club who petitioned that Columbia’s replacement of an economizer/superheater violated Title V of the Clean Air Act because it resulted in a significant net increase in sulfur dioxide emissions. This coal plant will now need to decide whether to install pollution controls or invest in cleaner alternative energy sources.

We worked to pass statewide policies that will improve water quality, including restrictions on phosphorus in lawn fertilizer and household cleaning products that contribute to excess algal blooms in our waterways. Impaired water quality seriously threatens Wisconsin’s $2.75-billion-per-year sport fishing industry and $13-billion-per-year tourism industry.

We have helped pass legislation that will lead to safer, smarter waste and recycling policies. Sierra Club helped pass legislation that will protect our groundwater by requiring electronics to be recycled instead of dumped in landfills and banning toxic mercury from household products. We also pushed to pass state budget provisions that increased landfill tipping fees to $13 per ton, restored funding for the Clean Sweep program, and restored the statutory authority for community recycling grants.

And it is not over yet! Over the months remaining in the 2009-10 legislative session, we will be working to pass strong clean energy legislation, improve transit service, restore independence to the office of the Department of Natural Resources Secretary and update legislation to protect Wisconsin’s groundwater. We will be working to override Governor Doyle’s November 13th veto in order to restore the independent DNR Secretary, and it is likely to be a close vote. You can read about our efforts to protect groundwater and expand transit on pages 3 and 9 (respectively) in this current issue of the Muir View.

Continued on Page 6
FROM THE CHAIR
by Jim Steffens, Chair
John Muir Chapter

I want to use my last Muir View column as chapter Chair to acknowledge the work of me dedicated individuals who have served the John Muir Chapter well over several years. We shall miss three valued at-large members of the Executive Committee. Sarah Streed resigned earlier this year in order to devote her full energies to the Fundraising Committee. We miss her vision but continue to benefit from her contribution to the Chapter. Barb Thomas has been a steady contributor from situation, who also helped create a memorable Autumn Assembly this year. Eric Uram has been Vice Chair and Conservation Chair and his leadership and experience have been irreplaceable. Thank you very much.

Nich Wentzel served as delegate from the Wisconsin River Country Group for many years. That group has been dissolved. Rich has been a dedicated and knowledgeable contributor to the executive Committee. Try as I might, I could not convince Rich to run for an at-large position. We shall greatly miss him.

heri Briscoe has been an outstanding delegate from the Great Waters Group and has reformed wonderfully as the Chapter Secretary over the past year. She knows the Chapter well and has ably represented her constituency. We shall miss her greatly.

We have three new people who will be joining the Executive Committee this year. Brian Ewing has worked for the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the US Department of Agriculture, and the US Army Corps of Engineers. He brings a wealth of knowledge of water issues, one of main conservation issues of the John Muir Chapter. Jim Kerler has been active in the Chapter for a number of years, both in conservation issues and in outings, and serves on the newly formed Chapter Water Team. Like Brian, Liz Wessel is new to active leadership in the Club but has long been active in conservation issues. She chairs the city of Madison’s Commission on the Environment, helped judge the Wisconsin Governor’s Award for Excellence in Hazardous Waste Reduction, and serves on the Board of Green America, a national organization whose aim is to utilize economic power to create a socially just and environmentally sustainable society. She also serves on the Board of Community Shares of Wisconsin. We welcome these new members and will benefit from their experience.

I want to thank the people who have been the drivers behind the Muir View over the past few years. Carol Hardin has been wonderful to work with as the editor of our Chapter newsletter. Kelly Krupka has handled the layout for the Muir View. They have worked with reluctant contributors to meet publication deadlines and created a magnificent publication. In their place we welcome Zahir Karp as editor and Laura Anderton who will handle layout.

DEADLINE FOR APRIL-JUNE 2010 ISSUE IS FEBRUARY 15.
CAPITOL CONSERVATION
PRESERVING WISCONSIN’S GROUND WATER
By Rep. Spencer Black, Chair of the Assembly Natural Resources Committee, and Sen. Mark Miller, Chair of the Senate Committee on Environment

“Whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting over” is reputed to be Mark Twain’s summary of what he found on a trip out west. In the arid western states, it’s not surprising that competition for water is an endless source of conflict.

In Wisconsin, we’re blessed with a plentiful supply of water. Our state borders two Great Lakes and is home to more than 15,000 lakes and 7,000 streams. The water we see on the surface is only the start—underground, Wisconsin boasts 1.2 quadrillion gallons of groundwater.

Groundwater is rightfully called Wisconsin’s buried treasure. More than 70% of our drinking water is supplied from groundwater sources. The health of our natural resources is also tied to our groundwater. Most of our lakes, streams and wetlands are directly connected to groundwater.

While our supply of water is plentiful, it’s not unlimited, and in parts of our state we are starting to run up against those limits. In central Wisconsin the Little Flower River, a Class 1 trout stream, has dried up several times including this year. The river dried up not due to a lack of rainfall, but because wells in the area were pumping too much groundwater. A number of lakes in that part of the state also experienced dramatically lower water levels due to groundwater overuse.

In Waukesha, excessive withdrawals lowered groundwater levels as much as 150 feet, resulting in dangerous levels of radium in local drinking water supplies. The urbanized areas of Dane County and the Fox Valley have also experienced significant lowering of groundwater levels.

While our supply of water is plentiful, it’s not unlimited, and in parts of our state we are starting to run up against those limits.

In 1999, Perrier announced plans for a water bottling plant at Mecan Springs, the source of the Mecan River. Perrier planned to pump nearly 3/4 of a million gallons of water each day. The proposal demonstrated that state laws protecting our groundwater supply were virtually nonexistent.

Following a joint hearing of the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and the Senate Committee on Environment, we formed a bipartisan legislative working group to review the current law and recommend improvements. Legislators from both parties and houses are seeking valuable input from scientific experts and conservationists, and groundwater users. Our aim is to enact a comprehensive, statewide law to better protect our groundwater supplies during this legislative session. We hope to have a bill introduced by the end of 2009.

Our outdoors and our economy are both dependent on wise stewardship of our water. Conservationists now have a chance to protect and secure our groundwater resources for generations to come.

Representative Spencer Black is Chair of the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources. Senator Mark Miller is Chair of the Senate Committee on Environment.

CONSERVATION LOBBY DAY 2010
On January 26, 2010, join citizens from across Wisconsin at the State Capitol to tell legislators that you expect them to vote well on natural resource issues. Since the first Lobby Day in 2005, it's grown from 100 citizens to more than 500!

Each year, representatives from nearly 100 conservation groups from across Wisconsin descend on the Capitol to share their conservation values with their legislators. When hundreds of citizens speak with a unified voice, legislators simply cannot ignore the tremendous support that exists for conservation.

On Conservation Lobby Day, you will speak to both your state Representative and state Senator about key conservation issues. In addition, you will receive skill and issue trainings that you can apply when advocating at home. You will also have the opportunity to meet and network with others who share your conservation values. This year, the conservation community will be fighting to make sure:

- Wisconsin adopts a strong statewide plan to tackle global warming.
- Wisconsin returns to an Independent DNR Secretary and has timely voices on Natural Resources Board Appointments.
- Wisconsin has clean, abundant drinking water and a statewide water conservation plan.
- Wisconsin protects drinking water supplies by making sure we safely spread agricultural, municipal, and industrial waste.

Legislators need to continue to hear from you! Keep the conservation momentum going!

Join us for Conservation Lobby Day 2010, January 26 at the Wisconsin State Capitol.

To learn more and register for Conservation Lobby Day, visit www.conservationvoters.org where you’ll find details on each of the four Conservation Priorities, or contact info@conservationvoters.org.
A WONDERFUL AUTUMN ASSEMBLY

AT THE BEAVER CREEK RESERVE

by Shahla Werner

If you were lucky enough to attend, you know that Sierra Club’s Chippewa Valley and St. Croix Valley Interstate Groups held an inspiring Autumn Assembly October 9-11 at the Beaver Creek Reserve. Over one hundred people attended and enjoyed all the speakers, workshops, and entertainment that the weekend event had to offer.

Attendees got a chance to camp onsite and attend early morning hikes through the 360-acre Beaver Creek Reserve. They also watched the banding of a Northern Saw-whet Owl and enjoyed an evening presentation at Hobbs Observatory. Warm clothing was essential, however, as temperatures dropped and a few snowflakes fell during the evenings.

Just a few highlights of the 2009 Autumn Assembly included the keynote speech by Dr. Michael Osterholm on the urgent need to take action on climate change, a talk by children’s author Marybeth Lorbiecki on the writings of Aldo Leopold, and a talk from Wisconsin Democracy Campaign Executive Director Mike McCabe about the many reasons we need to get the money out of political elections and decisions made about natural resources. Exciting workshops were held on a range of topics from Green Charter Schools to Duke Welker, who discussed his work on the Natural Resources Board.

Some of the best times that attendees had were the informal social hours, which provided snacks and unstructured time for people to reflect and enjoy each other’s company. One of the attendees mentioned that he loved coming to our Autumn Assembly because it really emphasized the club aspect of the Sierra Club. The food and snacks were organized and sometimes prepared by volunteers (including Carol Hardin, Caryn Treiber, and Margo Miller), and they were delicious.

On Saturday evening, Chapter Chair Jim Steffens presented awards to several of the exceptional volunteers who make a difference in the John Muir Chapter’s efforts to protect Wisconsin’s natural resources. Jim Olson, from our Chippewa Valley Group, who has worked for years on wolf issues, received the JJ & Pat Werner award, which is given to someone who shows an undying commitment to the goals and missions of the chapter. Ron Carlson from our St. Croix Valley Interstate Group, and Dale Olen from our Great Waters Group, shared the Merit Award, for their dedicated efforts to protect the St. Croix River and the Great Lakes, respectively.

A Special Thank You to

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Please keep these generous businesses in mind as you shop throughout the year!
Diane Dagelei received the New Activist Award for her efforts to protect the Monarch Butterfly habitat and Milwaukee area green space. Janet Anderson from our Great Waters Group earned the Wildflower Award for her tireless work in designing inspiring educational programs. Jan & Jim Erdman from the Chippewa Valley Group received the Good Citizen Award, which is given to organizations or individuals championing innovative programs or processes that protect the environment. Last but not least, Transit NOW was given the Torchbearer Award for all the work they have done to secure a regional transit authority in southeastern Wisconsin.

The John Muir Chapter is extremely fortunate to have so many talented volunteers who are committed to our conservation work!

Our silent auction was a resounding success, with bidders trying their best to win the wonderful, eco-friendly items donated by dozens of local businesses. The Chapter earned over $3,000 to support our upcoming conservation work. Thanks to donors and bidders, alike, for their support and enthusiasm.

On Sunday, attendees heard about Chapter conservation campaigns before heading off to tour the Joseph Leinenkugel historic brewery in Chippewa Falls. Members of the Chapter's Water Protection and Global Warming Teams and regional and Chapter staff talked about our recent accomplishments and future plans to reduce the threat of global warming and protect water resources in Wisconsin. I hope you will make plans now to join us for next year's Autumn Assembly, to be hosted by our Coulee Region Group. It will take place from October 8-10, 2010 near La Crosse - don’t miss it!

Shahla Werner is Director of the Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter.

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MOVING FORWARD ON CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

Our top legislative priority is passing a strong bill known as the Wisconsin Clean Energy Jobs Act to implement Governor Doyle’s Global Warming Task Force recommendations. These recommendations were created by a diverse group of stakeholders from Sierra Club to electric utilities as a compromise that will provide tremendous, urgently-needed benefits to our environment and our economy.

Environmental leaders Rep. Spencer Black and Sen. Mark Miller, both of Dane County, worked throughout 2009 with Assembly Energy & Utilities Committee Chair, Rep. James Soeltski of Green Bay and Senate Commerce, Energy, Utilities, & Rail Committee Chair, Sen. Jeff Plale of South Milwaukee to draft the Wisconsin Clean Energy Jobs Act. The draft, identified as LRB-3883/1, was released in December of 2009.

The full text of the Clean Energy Jobs Act, along with text on renewable energy, energy efficiency and nuclear power provisions in the bill may be found at: http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lc/publications/climate/index.htm We also have information on the Clean Energy Jobs Act on the Sierra Club- John Muir Chapter’s website at http://wisconsin.sierraclub.org. We will post periodic updates on this bill on the Legislative Tracker and Clean Energy pages.

We need to pass the WI Clean Energy Jobs Act before it’s too late to reduce the threat of climate change. But we can’t do it without your help. Please contact your state legislators http://www.legis.wisconsin.gov/w3asp/waml/waml.aspx and let them know that we need to pass the Clean Energy Jobs Act that will protect Wisconsin’s natural resources and build a strong economy with local clean energy jobs. Always include your full name and address and ask them to respond to you with their position on these bills. We also hope you will take time out of your busy schedule to attend upcoming public hearings where you can voice your concerns about climate change and how it will affect your life.

The legislative session is not over yet!! You still have time to help pass strong clean energy legislation and our other conservation priorities to benefit Wisconsin’s future.

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Volunteer Stories - Caryl Terrell

TRUE ENVIRONMENTAL
GRIT

By Linda Linssen

She exhibits a deep and abiding commitment to Sierra Club values and an unswerving loyalty to the John Muir Chapter. She works tirelessly as an environmental advocate in the Wisconsin State Legislature and beyond. And from all accounts, she faces each new challenge with fearless determination. Meet Caryl Terrell — former Chapter Director and current Global Warming Team and Legislative Committee Chair.

Caryl was born in New York City, but her earliest memories are set in Oregon, where her family moved when she was a preschooler. She recalls many childhood trips throughout the Northwest — to Mt. Hood, Mt. St. Helens, Mt. Rainier, and other “gorgeous places with spectacular vistas” — and vacations that helped her learn the history of the U.S., including visits to battlegrounds, state capitals, and Washington, DC. As a Girl Scout Brownie, she learned to camp and to feel the joy of “just being out of doors.”

Caryl’s early travels throughout the U.S. fueled her passion for protecting natural areas and may have eventually, and perhaps inevitably, led her to the Sierra Club. A long-time member of the John Muir Chapter, Caryl continues to be involved with a number of conservation issues in Wisconsin. However, the issue she considers the most critical is global warming, and it’s with a palpable urgency that she discusses it. “It will have an enormous impact on our state, as well as the whole planet,” she says. “It’s going to turn us into an incredibly hot planet with violent weather forces that are going to wreck our agricultural base, and therefore our economy.”

Despite scientists’ dire predictions about global warming, Caryl remains passionately optimistic about Americans’ ability and willingness to help reduce the impact. “We can do it,” she contends. “The U.S. has always been a can-do country. My husband and I put solar collectors on our house when we built it in 1976, in the middle of an oil embargo. Today we need to continue developing both solar and wind technologies. That’s essentially free energy to power our economy and personal lives.”

If Caryl could enact one new law, it would address campaign finance reform. “It doesn’t sound like a conservation issue,” she says, “but money is at the root of who has influence and power over whether we invest in wise energy policy. If we can’t elect responsive politicians, we’ve lost the game.”

Caryl acknowledges that money can also influence individuals to change environmentally destructive behaviors. “Sometimes there’s an ‘ahah’ moment,” she says, “This past year, it was $4 gasoline. It was amazing how many people quickly traded in their gas guzzlers for more efficient cars.” Other times, according to Caryl, behavior change results from the education of parents by their children. She uses recycling as an example, “Kids at school learned about it, then went home and taught their parents. Today, kids are learning about global warming, alternative energy, wind, solar, and local food.”

That gives Caryl hope, and so do Sierra Club members. She says the organization is unique because “It attracts people who want to get things done … who know they’ll be called upon to use their time, money, and voices to ensure our goals are achieved.” She appreciates that many members are technically knowledgeable so they can speak to decision makers directly about issues, and that others can testify from personal experience about why a specific issue is important to them and their families. “We welcome all members to get involved at whatever level works for them. There are so many opportunities in the Sierra Club, and we value our members so much that they can’t help but become committed to the organization.”

When Caryl wrote her will recently, she left some money to the Sierra Club. “I designated it for things that are hard to pay for, such as rent, plus salaries for lobbyists and for the people who send information to our members.” She says the Sierra Club is strong because of members’ contributions — monetary and otherwise. “We may work in coalitions, but we all stand up for the same values.”

She adds, “I can’t control what happens with money I leave family members, but I can control the portion I will leave to help advocate for Wisconsin, and essentially the planet … because that’s what the Sierra Club does. I feel good about that.”

Linda Linssen is a Madison-based writer who writes about everything under the sun. She can be reached at linda@greenwriter-4u.com.
REPORT FROM THE
WISCONSIN CONSERVATION HALL OF FAME

By Peter Muto

The Wisconsin Hall of Fame Foundation (WCHOF) Board of Directors met in Stevens Point on November 7, 2009. 16 members of the board participated in the selection process. We elected Emily H. Early, George C. Becker, and Ruth Hine to be inducted in the WCHOF. WCHOF will induct these Heroes of Conservation on Saturday, April 24, in 2010.

EMILY EARLY NÉE HORN BLOWER

Emily was born in New York City in 1916. She went to Bennington College in Vermont. Emily moved to Wisconsin to the university in Madison and attended graduate school in labor economics. She married James Early who was working on a doctoral degree there. Mrs. Early completed her master's degree and became a homemaker and the mother of three children.

Mrs. Early distinguished herself as a volunteer in the Wisconsin Chapter of the Nature Conservancy since 1964. Her major contribution was to lead Nature Conservancy to become more active in the stewardship of the lands it bought to preserve for the future. I close this segment with a nice thought from Emily, "If we want to see birds or butterflies, owls or trees, we have to work to make sure we preserved places for them. It's all about love of the land."

GEORGE C. BECKER

Our second hero of conservation is George C. Becker. Prof. Becker was born in Milwaukee to immigrant parents, Peter and Theresa Becker in 1917. His education started in Milwaukee with a bachelor's degree at Downer College. George earned a master's degree in German and both botany and zoology. He married Sylvia Helen Kleck in 1941, and in 1942 he served in the Signal Corps and achieved the rank of Master Sergeant. (To our civilians: this represents six promotions! Personal note: in the same era, yours truly received only two promotions!)

George has served our public schools, Fort Edwards High School, Clintonville High School, and West Division High School in Madison. He was a Professor of Biology at U.W.-Stevens Point. In later years he earned a Ph.D. at U.W.-Madison. Professor Becker has authored a comprehensive book, Fishes of Wisconsin, 1983, U.W. Press--a monumental achievement.

He took a profound interest in the Wisconsin River and was instrumental in securing a cleanup of that stream. George was a courageous battler for unpopular causes. One of our favorite agencies that received blasts from him was Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources (Editorial: He may have started a trend!). George stated, "...from Lac Vieux Desert to Prairie du Chien... this great [Wisconsin River] valley must become a model of cleanliness."

RUTH HINE

Our third selection for induction in WCHOF is Ruth Hine. Ruth was born in 1923 in Columbus, Ohio. She moved with her family to New England where she went to Connecticut College. She earned a bachelor's degree, with a major in Zoology while there. She was attracted to U.W.-Madison by the fame of Aldo Leopold, and she did her graduate studies there, earning a Master's Degree in Zoology and a Ph.D. in Zoology and Wildlife Management.

Dr. Hine was a very competent zoologist with great skill in written expression. She worked in the WI-DNR (and the earlier Conservation Department) for 35 years as a technical editor. The documents published by the Department won numerous honors, but Ruth remained in the background, seeking neither publicity nor fame. She wrote, "It's only after being aware of what's around us that we develop an understanding of what nature is like. This understanding brings love, which in turn makes one realize that each of us can help take care of the earth."

This reporter has taken freely from biographical sketches compiled by our conservation historian Bill Berry of Stevens Point. We are all indebted to Mr. Berry for the excellence of his work. (Personal note: I have completed almost a decade as your representative from Sierra Club the WCHOF. Thank you for a wonderful learning opportunity!)

Peter Muto, lifelong educator, lives in River Falls and is the St. Croix Valley Interstate Group's secretary pro tem. He is a former JMC Chair.

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ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITIES

By Caryl Terrell & Rachel Murray

Under Wisconsin’s cumbersome and antiquated rules, cities that provide transit must contract with one another and squeeze transit funding out of their general revenues, mainly from property taxes. The resulting unstable, underfunded transit entities cannot compete for federal construction dollars, and cannot provide sustainable service to its communities.

Sierra Club is working with our allies to ensure that this will no longer be necessary in the near future, thanks to policies that will allow communities to form Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs). Regional Transit Authorities allow communities to work together across municipal boundaries to determine which transit solutions work best in their area including commuter rail, express and local bus service, park-and-ride facilities, shared-ride taxi and or van services, paratransit, and other specialized transit services. RTAs also allow communities to raise crucial dedicated funds to sustain transit service. RTAs also put areas in a much better position to receive federal dollars to expand and maintain their transit networks.

RTAs are a huge boon to both local and regional economies. With the inevitable expansion of communities, access to jobs, customers, and employees is crucial to economic development. RTAs offer an expanded labor pool to companies which find it tough to recruit and retain employees. In tough economic times, access to workforce is extremely attractive to major corporations looking to relocate. For example, developers in cities such as St. Louis and Dallas have invested millions in corporate buildings, sports facilities, and entertainment complexes around their transit centers. At an individual level, one family member commuting to work can save $3,000 - $8,000 a year using transit compared to the cost of traveling in a single passenger automobile. In fact, about 18 cents to every dollar the average American household spends is used for buying, maintaining and operating cars.

In Kansas City, the Urban Mobility Report found that the region’s labor force is losing $570 million in productivity each year while sitting in traffic. And they’re not only wasting time but compromising safety, as public transit is nearly 170 times safer than automobile travel. Regional transit reduces the ever-growing problems of traffic congestion and parking while increasing property values. In an area the size of Kansas City, for example, a driver will lose around 17 hours a year to congestion, translating to an overall cost of $235 million dollars in excess fuel consumption.

From a conservation standpoint, the benefits of an RTA are clear. A person who commutes 60 miles a day can save an estimated 1,888 gallons of gas each year by using public transportation. RTAs promote cleaner air by reducing smog-producing pollutants, greenhouse gases and runoff from paved surfaces. For each mile traveled, fewer pollutants are emitted by transit vehicles than by single-passenger automobiles, including significantly less carbon monoxide, volatile organic compounds, and nitrogen oxides. Finally, RTAs are often linked to regional greenways and bikeways and are an affordable, relaxing and convenient way to save green space from parking lot development.

In 2009, Wisconsin took an important step forward for transit when we passed a state budget that included long-anticipated language allowing local governments to create Regional Transit Authorities in several areas, including Dane County, Southeastern Wisconsin (excluding Milwaukee County), Chippewa Valley, and the Chequamegon Bay. Then in November 2009, Dane County Supervisors voted 20-16 to create an RTA Board. This newly formed entity will work over the coming months to devise optimal transit solutions, and voters will get to decide on funding the RTA through a local referendum expected next fall. Unfortunately, some areas of the state still desperately need sensible transportation policies. Most notably, southeastern Wisconsin’s Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee rail line and Milwaukee’s bus system are jeopardized by a budget that leaves out Milwaukee County and inadequately funds their needs. Governor Doyle’s office has been working on follow-up legislation, known as RTA II that will remedy this situation for southeastern Wisconsin and other areas of the state that also need practical transit solutions.

Citizens throughout Wisconsin have been recently raising their voices in support of RTAIL. A broad coalition of over 300 labor, environmental, disability, and elderly advocates attended a pro-RTA rally spearheaded by Transit NOW in Milwaukee in December 2009. Diverse groups of supporters have also attended Sierra Club’s Communities on the Move discussions in various locations throughout Dane County.

RTA II authorizes a two-phase process for reliably financing the Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee (KRM) rail line. Importantly, RTA II allows additional surrounding counties to join the KRM system to form a WI SE Regional Transit Authority. The Great Waters and Southeast Gateway Groups have worked for this outcome for many years. There foresight and persistent will payoff for passage of RTA II.

RTA II will also authorize a new framework and reliable funding source for the Fox Cities regional bus system. Sierra Club’s former Chapter chair, Assembly Representative Penny Bernard Schaber is the leader of this effort. Working with Republican Rep. Al Ott of Forest Junction, Bernard Schaber has built a bipartisan coalition in support of the Fox Cities RTA amendment to RTA II.

RTA II strengthens eastern Wisconsin, where the majority of the state’s heavy industry, manufacturing and financial sectors are located. Restoring a thriving statewide economy depends on improving the cost-efficient flow of workers, business leaders and freight in this key area of the state.

For all these reasons and more, it is high time that Wisconsin gets on board with a vast majority of other states in allowing more of our communities to form RTAs. Not only will we expand transit options and reduce pollution, we will also spur economic development and increase our access to much-needed federal transit funds. We urge our Sierra Club members statewide to work to pass RTA II.
Thank You to Our Donors!

Your generous contributions – above and beyond your membership dues – provided crucial support for our local grassroots campaigns to protect Wisconsin’s air, water, and wild places for future generations.

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Michael Feldman, Don Ferber, Curry First, Carol Fleishauer, Maria Flores, Michael D Flynn, Dr Wesley K Foell, Charles Foote Jr, Robert E Forbess, Russ & Linda Forbess, Bill & Nancy Fowler, Robert Fraune, D J & Mary Freeman, Charles & Anne Frithart, Michael Frone, George B Fulford

G

H

I-J
Harriet Iwamoto, George Jacklin, Mrs J W Jacobson, Darlene Jakusz, Mary Jansen, Christine R Jenkins, Jane K Jumaleh, Amy Johnson, Mr G Alex Johnson, Peter Johnson

K

L
Ken Laboski, Meg & Richard Labrie, Richard & Margaret Labrie, Jack Ladinsky, Jill D Ladwig, Elizabeth Lahm, Lakeland Lutheran Church, Andrew Lane, Marion Lang, George & Barbara Larsen, Eugene & Gwen Lavin, Timothy Leahy, Rose Marie Lefebvre, Oliver H Leine, Cynthia Lessard, Mary J Lewandowski, Deborah Lindsey, Darlene Ruth Lipke, Ron Liskay, Katherine Liu, Barbara Loftus, Melanie Lord, Vilja Lormo-Lonszyn, Dr W H & Anne M Love, Ann M Luckert, Steven Luecke

M

N
Janna O'Connell, Katharine H O'Dell, Vince O'Herr, Joelyn Olen, James & Margaret Olson, Mary Ann Ortmaier, Douglas Otto, Gerald Ottone, Janine Overeem, Sarah L Overholt

P

Q-R

S

T
Mazuku B Tanaka, George & Peg Tanner, Edward Taylor, James Taylor, Hedy R Telfer, Mary Terranova, Caryl & Bob Terrell, Ann Terwilliger, Mr & Mrs Donald E Thompson, Eric Thompson, James D Trent, Kristine Troy, Susan Twiggs, Darlene Tymn, Jill M Tynan

U-V
Barbara Unrath, Moira Uriuch, Tom W Van Der Paard, Gail Van Haren, Stephen J Ventura, John Viglietti, Walter L Vogl, Robert & Jean Volkman, Karen & Martin Voss

W-X

Y-Z
David Young, Russell Yttri, Christine M Zapf, Richard & Andrea Zietko, Eric Zillgitt, Joanne & Jim Zipperer, Aaron M Zittelberger, Karen Zweigiz

These donations were made from November 1, 2008 through October 31, 2009. Workplace giving donors from 2008 are included as well. Thanks also go out to our many contributors who prefer to remain anonymous. We try to acknowledge every donor; if your name is not listed, please know that we greatly appreciate your support.

PLEASE SUPPORT THE JOHN MUIR CHAPTER DURING THIS YEAR'S MARCH APPEAL

Help the John Muir Chapter of the Sierra Club in protecting Wisconsin's air, water, and wild places. Each year, the Fundraising Committee sends out letters to our donors, members, and partners in hopes of raising money to support the chapter's work. Please look over your letter, which describes our recent accomplishments and plans for 2010, and consider donating to support the John Muir Chapter.

These contributions really do make a difference to the Sierra Club. They are a key part of our Chapter's budget, and they are becoming more and more important as support from National Sierra Club is decreasing. When you make a donation to the Chapter, you support the Sierra Club's work in your own backyard. You allow us to continue our work to protect wilderness and wildlife, to improve the sustainability of our cities, and to promote the enjoyment of nature.

Please be as generous as you can; and remember, those funds directly affect your way of life in your neighborhood. You can also donate online at wisconsin.sierrachart.org or by sending a contribution to us at the address below. Thanks in advance for your support of the Sierra Club and for all you do for Wisconsin's natural resources.

Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter
222 South Hamilton Street, Suite 1
Madison, WI 53703
JOURNAL OF A PRAIRIE YEAR
by Paul Gruchow, Milkweed Editions, 2009

One of the richest landscapes in the world, the tallgrass prairie, once filled 240 million acres in the heart of America. From the 1830's to 1900, ninety-nine percent of the once dominant landscape was transformed into farmland and pavement. The country hardly noticed and few books celebrate this missing landscape. Perhaps celebration is impossible as the prairies most conspicuous feature is its absence. Less than one percent of the original prairie survives.

In the 2009 re-release of Paul Gruchow's 1985 book, Journal of a Prairie Year, Scott Russell Sanders' new introduction animates the vision of a luxuriant thousand-mile long swath of Indian grass, coneflowers, blazing stars, goldenrods, big bluestem, indigo, immense herds of bison, deer, rabbits, geese, ducks, birds, and more stretching from Chicago to the Rockies. Moving to Gruchow's prose, the wide-angle lens narrows and the experience becomes personal. Paul Gruchow wrote, "To live on the prairie is to dream. It is the only conceivable response to such immensity. It is when we are smallest that our daydreams come quickest."

The prairie year begins as all North American years begin, with winter. Iowa's Cayler prairie is one of the few places in the world where the prairie remnant is big enough to simulate the pioneer landscape of relentless openness. In Gruchow's prairie, the snow sings under his boots and each sound fills the winter landscape with an immensity that defies any description of barrenness. In a beautiful metaphor of abundance, he brings a slab of cottonwood tree bark into his study and lets it sit and warm for a few days. When he pulls out his hand lens and begins to look for life, he finds a teeming universe of life beyond his scientific capacity to classify. Seeds, eggs, lichens, spiders, jumping specks, and thousands of names he could not tell emerged from the bark. He could neither classify nor possess the diversity of life in even one scrap of the cottonwood's coat.

Like Walden's and Leopold's year, the seasons bring new flourishing of life to stir ruminations in the form of flowers, tadpoles, toads, dragonflies, minks, and more. He sees kinship in shared experiences of play and joy as he watches a badger sliding down a grassy slope. The fertility of the prairie, and nearly every wild space, rival the harsh realities of death. As Gruchow explores, observes, experiences, and studies the science and natural history of his land, his lens for making sense of the world both magnifies and illuminates his view of wonder and meaning.

Gruchow died in 2004, after a drug overdose. He battled depression and bipolar disease his entire life and his aesthetic comprehension of loneliness seeps into his chronicle of seasons. Despite his nascent revelations about the fecundity of life and cycles of the prairie, he felt the madness endemic in a landscape so open that it fails to contain or limit the experience of living. It does not offer security. Scott Russell Sanders has said that the book is "the testament of a man who simultaneously aches and rejoices over the land he calls home."

However, the text also reflects a struggle for meaning and understanding in the parallel landscape of the human mind. This is a battle that Gruchow fought for most of his life. As we read Journal of a Prairie Year, we trace the thoughts of a man searching for meaning within a fractured landscape. Because the human story is awash in brokenness, Gruchow's voice honors the complexity of truth.

Amy Lou Jenkins is the author of Every Natural Fact Five Seasons of Open-Air Parenting to be released in May 2010. Her essays are also forthcoming in the anthologies A Cup of Comfort for Mothers and Travelers' Tale Wild with Child. The review copy was provided by Milkweed Editions.
WISCONSIN NATIVE SPECIES
WINTER BIRDS

By Matthew Rothschild

"How do you stand the winter?"

That's what people who aren't from Wisconsin often ask us.

Those of us who manage to survive with a smile on our face have found a way to take pleasure in the season.

Some cross country ski or snowboard.

Some skate.

Some ice fish.

Some go snowmobiling.

I birdwatch.

While the number of birds dwindles way down alongside the mercury in the thermometer, the kinds of birds that venture into Wisconsin can be spectacular.

Rough-legged hawks, with patches of black on the underside of their wings, fly across snow-covered fields or land atop flagpoles.

Snow buntings and longspurs gather in flocks along roadsides and in pastures.

Tree sparrows come into our yards.

Red-breasted nuthatches will take suet and peanuts if you offer it to them.

Pine siskins will gather on your thistle feeders, if you're lucky, as I have been. And occasionally a common redpoll will accompany them.

And those are just the regulars.

But what makes winter really interesting is the irruption of Canadian species.

Last winter, it was the white-winged crossbills. I've been birdwatching 45 years now, but I'd never seen one before. Flocks gathered in subzero weather at Roselawn Cemetery in Monona. You could tell where they'd been by the pinecones that littered the snow at the base of the trees. And you could find them by their trills at the top, or while flying. But they weren't only in the cemetery. I saw them in the pines across the street in my neighborhood on the near west side of Madison, and I even had a female outside my kitchen window one morning.

In 2004, great gray owls descended into Minnesota and then into Wisconsin in numbers that were unheard of. I got in my car and went up 75 miles north of St. Paul and saw 10 of them in one hour on a two-mile stretch of county road. My dad laughed at me, though, for driving so far when I told him a month later that a couple of great gray's had come all the way down to Columbia and Dane County. I saw one, several times, that was hanging out just two or three miles south of Goose Pond, near the county line, in one farmer's field.

But the winter bird that excites me the most is the snowy owl. I saw my first one 23 years ago. It was in the Goose Pond area, on a telephone pole overlooking the University of Wisconsin field station. I was mesmerized by its yellow eyes. And then when it flew, like some cotton moth, it made my whole year. I've seen snowy owls in that area a couple times since then. Once I brought my kids, and we were not successful right away, and they were getting fussy. And then I saw the owl on top of a mound. The next thing I knew it was flying right at us, and the kids were almost as thrilled as I was. Almost.

More recently, I saw a snowy owl in rural Waunakee, and he hung around for days until some overzealous birdwatchers scared it away, I'm afraid. (Note: Please stay in your car if you see a snowy owl. You're likely to frighten it if you get out.)

This winter I'll be looking again for the pine siskins and the red-breasted nuthatches at my feeders, and for the rough-legged hawks when I'm on the road.

But I'll drop everything if there's a report of a snowy owl nearby.

And I'm keeping my fingers crossed for something new: red crossbills, maybe, or better yet, evening grosbeaks.

It's the hope that gets me through winter, too.

Matthew Rothschild is the editor of The Progressive magazine, one of the leading voices for peace and social justice in this country.
BISPHENOL-A (BPA)

AND YOUR FAMILY’S SAFETY

By Shahla M. Werner

Bisphenol-A (BPA), an industrial chemical first formulated in 1891 and widely used since the 1950's, is commonly found in many clear plastic, polycarbonate containers and other household products, from compact discs to tin can liners. Unfortunately, BPA is an estrogen mimic that has been shown to leach out of these containers and into the food and drinks we consume. BPA exposure has become disturbingly universal – it has been detected in over 90% of Americans tested. BPA can disrupt human development, and numerous peer-reviewed research studies have linked this chemical to breast cancer, testicular cancer, low sperm count, miscarriage and other serious health conditions.

State legislators are currently considering a bill (SB 271 / AB 405), introduced by Sen. Lassa and Rep. Roys, that would ensure that children’s bottles or cups made or sold in Wisconsin are BPA-free, and that products are clearly labeled as such. If passed, this legislation would provide the same penalties for these manufacturers and retailers as those in Wisconsin’s current Hazardous Substances Act and allow a 50% surcharge from the fines that DATCP would collect from negligent manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers to be used to administer the program.

BACKGROUND

> Despite numerous published, peer-reviewed studies that have found that BPA leaches into the bodies of people who use products that contain it and that links BPA to health problems, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration ruled in September of 2008 that BPA is safe. The FDA based the decision on studies sponsored by the American Plastics Council, while ignoring other scientific studies. The finding is currently being reviewed, with a decision expected soon.

> Canada, Minnesota, California, Connecticut, the City of Chicago and Long Island have all passed laws banning the use of BPA in children's products.

> Enacting a BPA ban on children’s bottles in cups in Wisconsin will ensure that our children are protected from this toxic chemical and send the message to manufacturers about the use of potentially hazardous chemicals in other products.

The Sierra Club testified at a hearing last November in support of SB 271, and a hearing in the Assembly is expected in early 2010. Supporters of this important bill include WISPIRG, WLCV, the WI Public Health Association, AARP, WI Breast Cancer Coalition, and university professors who have researched the health effects of endocrine disruptors like BPA for years. Opponents included the well-funded American Chemistry Council and Kraft Foods Global. Please check our website to find out more about this issue. Also, please read the excellent investigative series in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on BPA: http://www.jsonline.com/watchdog/34405049.html
UPCOMING WINTER OUTINGS

The Sierra Club, as an organization, serves a dual purpose. John Muir’s vision for an environmental group was not just one of education and legislation. He felt very strongly that the best way to empower people to want to protect the wild places of the earth was to get them out to enjoy them. Therefore the Sierra Club has always fostered a strong outings program to go along with our conservation ethic. To that end, there are many local events available to hike, bike, camp, ski etc. To see the latest information, visit http://wiscosin.sierraclub.org/Events/outings.aspx

Outings are open to all members of the John Muir chapter and to the general public. Note that all outings are subject to change. PLEASE contact trip leaders ahead of time so they know you are coming and can contact you in case of cancellation or other changes.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 12 : CRUISIN’ FOR CUISINE
Note: December dinner was snowed out, so we moved it to January.
Cruisin’ for Cuisine is an informal social dinner gathering for Sierraans of all ages. Dinners will always be the second Tuesday of each month at 6:30. This month we will be dining at a fairly new (and tasty!) restaurant on Monroe Street called Jac’s (www.jacsofmadison.com). Please RSVP at least 2 days in advance by contacting Lacinda Athen at lacinda.athen@gmail.com or 608-274-7870. [4L]

SATURDAY, FEB 6 : WINTER CAMPING AND CANDLELIGHT SKI
Join Bill for a great time skiing, snowshoeing and camping at Blue Mound State Park. We’ll begin by meeting in the campground parking lot at 4:00 PM and then select a campsite at the park and set up our tents (all sites are walk-in only). A bonfire will quickly follow. I’ll supply chili (spicy) for the camper’s evening meal. Please bring along a dish to pass and your own hot (non-alcoholic) beverage. We’ll participate in the candlelight ski or snowshoe hike put on by the Friends of Blue Mound State Park. Hot beverages are also available from the Friends Group. Please bring your own food for breakfast Sunday morning. We’ll ski, snowshoe, and/or hike on Sunday after breakfast. All vehicles must have a State Park Sticker. Camping fees are $10.00 - $14.00 per campsite. Please RSVP to Bill by January 28th at duh.guru@att.net. [4L]

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 9 : CRUISIN’ FOR CUISINE
Cruisin’ for Cuisine is an informal social dinner gathering for Sierraans of all ages. Dinners will always be the second Tuesday of each month at 6:30. As each attending dinner group selects the next restaurant, please check back for this month’s destination. Please RSVP at least 2 days in advance by contacting Lacinda Athen at lacinda.athen@gmail.com or 608-274-7870. [4L]

TUESDAY, MARCH 9 : CRUISIN’ FOR CUISINE
Cruisin’ for Cuisine is an informal social dinner gathering for Sierraans of all ages. Dinners will always be the second Tuesday of each month at 6:30. As each attending dinner group selects the next restaurant, please check back for this month’s destination. Please RSVP at least 2 days in advance by contacting Lacinda Athen at lacinda.athen@gmail.com or 608-274-7870. [4L]

OUTING INFORMATION
Host group is indicated in brackets
[CV] Chippewa Valley Group [GW] Great Waters Group
[CR] Coulee Region Group [SEG] Southeast Gateway Group

Liability Waiver & Carpooling
In order to participate in a Sierra Club outing, you will need to sign a liability waiver. In the interests of facilitating the logistics of some outings, it is customary that participants make carpooling arrangements. The Sierra Club does not have insurance for carpooling arrangements and assumes no liability for them. Carpooling, ride sharing or anything similar is strictly a private arrangement among the participants. Participants assume the risks associated with this travel. CST 2067766-40. Registration as a seller of travel does not constitute approval by the State of California.

NATIONAL OUTING SPOTLIGHT
ISLAND HOPPING IN THE CHANNEL ISLANDS
May 7-9; July 16-19; August 6-9; or September 10-12

California’s Channel Islands are Galapagos USA! Marvel at the sight of whales, seals, sea lions, rare birds & blazing wildflowers. Hike the wild, windswept trails. Kayak rugged coastlines. Snorkel in pristine waters. Discover remnants of the Chumash people who lived on these islands for thousands of years. Or just relax at sea. These 3 & 4-day “live aboard” fundraiser cruises depart from Santa Barbara aboard the 68’ Truth. The fee ($590 for May and Sep; $765 for Jul & Aug) includes an assigned bunk, all meals, snacks & beverages, plus the services of a ranger/naturalist who will travel with us to lead hikes on each island and point out interesting features. To make a reservation mail a $100 check payable to Sierra Club to leaders: Joan Jones Holtz & Don Holtz, 11826 The Wye St, El Monte, CA 91732. Contact leaders for more information (626-443-0706; jholtzhln@aol.com)

More National and international outings which are listed in “Sierra” magazine on the website: www.sierraclub.org/outings/national/
JOHN MUIR CHAPTER CALENDAR

2010 EXCOM MEETINGS
January 9    Executive Committee meeting, 10:00am, Methodist Church, Baraboo

2010 EVENTS
January 9    River Touring Section annual planning meeting, 11:00am
Summit Town Hall, Oconomowoc

January 26   Conservation Lobby Day, Madison: http://www.conservationvoters.org/Public/

April 6      Spring Election

April 22     Earth Day (40th Anniversary)

October 8-10 Autumn Assembly, La Crosse

Check the John Muir Chapter website, or e-mail or call the Chapter office for updated information.

Website:    http://wisconsin.sierraclub.org
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