Dear Supporter,

As we emerge from the pandemic, we want to say how deeply grateful we are for your support. You have kept us strong and financially secure, despite an incredibly difficult year. Staff and volunteers have led us through engaging virtual forums and hosted hundreds of events from volunteer team meetings to legislator town halls. Our activism has continued remotely, together.

Now that we are envisioning a world post-COVID, we are hoping to bring the best of remote life with us. That includes continued opportunities for our supporters to participate in chapter activities, regardless of where you live in Minnesota. And we’ve really missed seeing you face-to-face at outings, rallies, and volunteer events! We look forward to getting together soon as we resume in-person gatherings.

But when it comes to staying focused on the connections between racial justice and environmental advocacy, there is no going back to “normal.” We know that the extractive corporations and anti-environment politicians win, if we accept that it’s okay for some people to breathe dirty air, drink dirty water, and bear disproportionate impacts of the climate crisis. Across our campaigns, we are committed to centering equity and justice for all — regardless of what you look like or where you live.

Despite the year’s challenges, we’ve had some big wins. In May, Minnesota became the first state in the Midwest to adopt Clean Cars emission standards to expand the availability of clean, electric cars and trucks and require all new cars to emit less pollution. With partners, the Sierra Club is supporting legal challenges to PolyMet; and we celebrated recent court victories that will send this troubled and toxic mine plan back to the Department of Natural Resources for a contested case hearing.

Our strategic investments in legislative lobbying and political power building are paying off. The Minnesota House passed historic climate and transportation legislation, including clean electricity by 2040, but electricity only accounts for a quarter of our climate pollution. What about the other three quarters?

To invert the worst impacts of the climate crisis and to respond to an already changing climate, we need to eliminate air pollution from vehicles. We are working on solutions, Senate Republicans are still denying that climate change is even real. Republicans are still denying that climate change is even real. Meanwhile over in the Senate, all Republicans voted that climate change is not caused by human activity.

That’s right — while House Democrats are working on solutions, Senate Republicans are still denying that climate change is even real.

Checking in on Governor Walz, we see he is not meeting his climate commitments. He’s truly leading in some areas like supporting a policy for 100% clean electricity by 2040, but electricity only accounts for a quarter of our climate pollution. What about the other three quarters?

To invert the worst impacts of the climate crisis and to respond to an already changing climate, we need to eliminate all carbon emissions by 2050. This requires taking action across sectors — not just in electricity but transportation, agriculture, moving away from natural gas, and more. Unfortunately, Governor Walz seems to be caving to pressure from industry. He has permitted Enbridge’s Line 3 pipeline to move forward, even though legal challenges haven’t been heard in the courts. Unlike his predecessor Mark Dayton, Governor Walz proposed no new ongoing funding for transit, although emissions from vehicles are the biggest source of climate pollution. To his credit, Walz has proposed making Minnesota the 15th “Clean Cars” state in the nation (and the first in the Midwest). Unfortunately he drastically undercut that action by pushing outdated and fake climate “solutions” like ethanol. Worse, his budget invests far more in biofuels like ethanol than in more beneficial electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure.

We knew going into this session that Senate Republicans were going to be the biggest obstacle, but we were expecting Governor Walz to keep his promises of bold action on the climate crisis. Governor Walz is now well into his term of bold action on the climate crisis. We can trace the obstruction of serious climate action to corporate and anti-environment politicians win, if we accept that it’s okay for some people to breathe dirty air, drink dirty water, and bear disproportionate impacts of the climate crisis.

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View the report card, including explanations on the grades, and learn how you can help online at www.walzclimateresportcard.org.

Voters have changed more than many elected officials have realized. Public support for climate action has continually and dramatically increased over the past six years. Democrats in swing districts can really go on the offensive on climate in their elections. So can Governor Walz. Republicans in swing districts, by contrast, are trapped between base voters still invested in climate denial and swing voters who do not tolerate denial anymore. The data are clear: swing voters want climate action and we are bringing this message to leaders.

Peter Wagenius is the Political and Legislative Director at the North Star Chapter, and a “transportation omnivore” who rides buses, an electric train, an electric car and an electric-assist cargo bike.

HOLDING LEADERS ACCOUNTABLE
State Legislature Update
**Zabelle Stodola**

When my husband, Bob, and I were deciding where to retire, one of our primary considerations was water: both proximity to it and purity of it. When we tell locals here that we retired to Duluth even though we didn’t know a soul and had never experienced a winter this far north, they usually smile. But we haven’t regretted our decision. From the time we first arrived, we’ve loved the water and been involved with various initiatives concerning threats to water quality. We began to suspect that, despite being “The Land of 10,000 Lakes,” Minnesota did not adequately protect its water heritage. Laws and regulations might be on the books, yet they are not consistently monitored or enforced. And we were surprised by how they are not consistently monitored or enforced. And we were surprised by how many politicians on both sides, and at all levels, failed to envision innovative job creation apart from extractive industries. As Duluthians, we quickly learned about new threats to water quality, especially proposed sulfide ore mining developments like PolyMet. There are no sulfide mines in Minnesota now, but in water-rich environments elsewhere, they have had potentially devastating effects. Recently, we have been heartened to read that the two mines furthest along in the permitting process, PolyMet and Twin Metals, have met with challenges thanks to the courts and new Biden administration officials’ decisions to stand up for the law, people, and water quality.

**WINS IN THE COURTS**

For many decades Native American tribes in Minnesota have issued warnings about water quality. They have legal and cultural interests because water pollution affects tribal waterways as well as traditional food sources. In March 2021, the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa won a big court victory in its ongoing effort to stop multinational corporate giant Glencore from building the PolyMet copper mine upstream from their reservation. The Band had significant and legitimate concerns that the PolyMet mine would worsen an already bad problem of mercury-contaminated fish and water for the community. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) knew of the problem and was supposed to notify the Fond du Lac Band so it could participate in the permitting process. But the EPA failed to follow the law. As a result, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has suspended PolyMet’s permit to fill or dredge a large area of wetlands for its mine. “It also means that five major permits for the $1 billion PolyMet project are now stayed or under review,” according to the Star Tribune. “The move spotlights the Band’s groundbreaking effort to assert Indigenous water quality standards as a ‘downstream state’ under the Clean Water Act,” the newspaper reported.

This latest victory builds on a myriad of legal challenges to PolyMet and Twin Metals led by advocacy groups such as the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness, Water Legacy, Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters, Duluth Clean Water, Center for Biological Diversity, Northeastern Minnesota for Wilderness and others to both PolyMet and Twin Metals. Recent good news around Twin Metals, another proposed sulfide mine which risks polluting our beloved Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, includes:

- Prospective permits have been sent back to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service for additional analysis.
- Senator Tina Smith — echoing repeated requests from Rep. Betty McCollum and others — urged the Biden administration to reinstate a moratorium on mining in the Rainy River watershed. The Sierra Club is proud to join a diverse, statewide coalition advocating for progressive causes, and spending time at the family cabin near Brule Lake.

**MAKE THEM PROVE IT FIRST**

As water becomes an even more valuable resource, northeastern Minnesota is well-positioned to see a boom in its economic fortunes. So what can we do to safeguard our water? First, Minnesota should adopt a Prove It First Law requiring independent scientific proof that a copper sulfide mine elsewhere in the United States has operated for 10 years or more and been closed for 10 years or more without causing pollution. The Sierra Club is supporting this work—challenging the PolyMet air permit as a co-plaintiff, challenging the PolyMet dam safety permit as an amicus curiae, engaging in the administrative process on Twin Metals, and continuing to organize and advocate—because all Minnesotans, including the downstream communities of the Fond Du Lac Band, and Duluth, deserve clean water.

The Sierra Club is supporting this work—challenging the PolyMet air permit as a co-plaintiff, challenging the PolyMet dam safety permit as an amicus curiae, engaging in the administrative process on Twin Metals, and continuing to organize and advocate—because all Minnesotans, including the downstream communities of the Fond Du Lac Band, and Duluth, deserve clean water.

**PROVE IT FIRST’ LAWS TO PROTECT WATER — AND LIFE**

**CELEBRATING WINS IN THE ONGOING FIGHT TO STOP SULFIDE MINING**
Najma Mohamed

I’m proud to support Minnesotans in directly connecting with their elected leaders through the SierraAction Team. SierraAction is a team of volunteers striving to build power and develop leaders who can help achieve a more just and clean environment for Minnesotans.

One of the team’s important activities is to host in-district meetings with elected officials, where constituents meet with their representatives and express their concerns about climate solutions. These meetings encourage constituents to build personal relationships with the elected officials, adding a familiar tone to the political representation and power while helping others do the same. Our representatives should be influenced by the public opinion on significant issues. More than ever, I recognize the importance of political representation and holding my representatives accountable.

Najma Mohamed is an intern with the Sierra Club SierraAction Team and a student at the University of St. Thomas, graduating Political Science and Sociology in 2021. She grew up in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, with her parents, younger sisters, and brother. Najma loves to be in the sun, cook Somali food, listen to true crime podcasts, spend time with her parents, younger sisters, and brother. Najma loves to be in the sun, listen to true crime podcasts, and cook Somali food.

Hosting in-district meetings has been a learning experience for me. Thirty minutes fly by when there’s so much discussion to be had and so many questions to be answered. The most rewarding part of this experience for me was building my political relationships and power while helping others do the same. Our representatives should be influenced by the public opinion on significant issues.

GETTING STARTED

A zero waste lifestyle takes training. Don’t be hard on yourself. Allow yourself to learn gradually. First off, you’ll have to be able to say no to little things and deals. Figure out what you truly like. Focus on what you really need and start buying according to your tastes.

To avoid giving in to all the little items that fill up your cart, create a plan before you go grocery shopping. And never go shopping while you’re hungry! Make a list. A shopping list negates the tempting deals and desires you might encounter. But it’s not just what you buy; it’s how you buy it. Abandoning your dependency on plastic can be intimidating, and there’s a bit of planning required for your zero-waste journey.

Pay attention to the types of packaging that food and other goods come in. Some waste packaging is unavoidable, but try to choose items that come in easily recyclable or reusable materials. The bulk section may seem daunting, but each time it gets easier until you notice you’ve adopted a new habit. This section is exceptional because it benefits a circular economy — where you take, make, return and reuse over and over again. Shopping this way not only supports the environmental movement and a circular economy, but it often supports independently-owned stores and puts money back into your local economy.

While working toward a zero-waste goal, focus on organizing and labeling your pantry. It’s your best friend from here on out. When you’re able to see what food is waiting for you to eat instead of plastic containers or cardboard boxes, you’re able to hold yourself accountable to utilize food before the expiration date.

Finally, don’t think you’re going it alone. There are zero waste communities to join for support, including the Sierra Club North Star Chapter’s Zero Waste Task Force. Remember: there’s always a way to help improve the environment and quality of life. Sustainability is a thousand small choices you make every day.

Neely Atha

My zero waste lifestyle began after I heard the statement, “There may be a plan B but there is not a planet B.” I was in awe of a reality I hadn’t yet processed. Since then, I watched the documentary “COWSPIRACY: The Sustainability Secret” only to learn more about the destruction agriculture causes. Soon after, I became a vegetarian.

Abandoning my dependency on plastic was hard. At first, I used the excuse that food and other goods come in plastic packaging, that food and other goods come in plastic packaging. Some waste packaging is unavoidable, but try to choose items that come in easily recyclable or reusable materials. The bulk section may seem daunting, but each time it gets easier until you notice you’ve adopted a new habit. This section is exceptional because it benefits a circular economy — where you take, make, return and reuse over and over again. Shopping this way not only supports the environmental movement and a circular economy, but it often supports independently-owned stores and puts money back into your local economy.

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Neely Atha is a member of the Communications Team and Zero Waste Task Force. She has worked towards a zero waste lifestyle since 2019 and is an avid vegetarian. Her time is best spent landscaping, with animals or helping others around her.

Join the Sierra Club’s Zero Waste Task Force!

In addition to supporting each other in living sustainably, we work to educate the community on ways to reuse, reduce, recycle and compost effectively. We lobby the legislature to reduce waste and minimize the impact on our natural resources. In 2021, we supported legislation to limit or remove PFAS from food packaging sold in Minnesota.
Delaney Russell

In Minnesota, climate change might not be as extreme as other parts of the world, but we are still experiencing hotter weather, more severe storms, worse allergy seasons, air quality alerts, the shrinking of the boreal forest, invasive species, and more. Climate change and environmental destruction continue to accelerate, despite our work. What will it take to turn the tide and start making meaningful progress toward a sustainable future? Here at the

Sierra Club, building on the leadership of Hop Hopkins and his article Racism is Killing the Planet, we’ve come to the conclusion that we need to go deeper and shift our mindset. A sustainable future depends on creating systems of mutually regenerative relationships with the earth and each other. This is in contrast to the current extractive and racist mindset in which it is acceptable to treat some places and some people as disposable. Lawmakers typically support corporate power over people empowerment, cementing the disposable mindset and reducing people’s ability to insist on power over people empowerment, treating people and places as disposable. To make this our reality we must elect leaders who share our values and insist these leaders enact laws that

uplifting their message and adding our own perspective on why this legislation is universally important, even to those of us living in neighborhoods with clean air and water. And we’ve used our grassroots lobbying power to urge our members to call their legislators in support of this bill. Other examples consistent with this new vision of regenerative relationships include advocating for:

• A just transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy, in which BIPOC people are included in the new energy economy from the ground up
• A public safety system that protects the lives of low-income and BIPOC communities and ends police brutality.

Changing our mindset isn’t easy. But it’s essential. We do it because it’s right. We do it because our humanity, our well-being and our fights are interconnected. We do it because this is what it will take to reach a sustainable future.

Together we can make Minnesota a place where all, regardless of zip code or race, have clean air, water, lands and a healthy climate. No more will corporations, and the lawmakers who enable them, treat people and places as disposable. To make this our reality we must elect leaders who share our values and insist these leaders enact laws that

FROM EXTRACTION TO REGENERATION

Lawmakers typically support corporate power over people empowerment, cementing the disposable mindset and reducing people’s ability to insist on mutually regenerative relationships. Here are some examples of extraction, based on the mindset of disposable places and people:

• Northern Metal Recycling was allowed by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) to operate in North Minneapolis for years. The company benefited, while residents of North Minneapolis paid the costs: polluted air that contributed to extremely high asthma rates, poor childhood health, and more.
• U.S. Steel was allowed by the MPCA to continue violating water quality standards at its Minntac mine for years. U.S. Steel’s shareholders got the benefits, while degraded water quality harmed wild rice: an important food staple for the Anishinaabe people.
• Hennepin County Energy Recovery Center (HERC) is a trash incinerator that is operated by Great River Energy on behalf of Hennepin County. Hennepin County residents and corporations get the benefit of trash disposal and energy. The residents of North Minneapolis living near the HERC bear the costs: air pollution and lower quality of life. Read more about these examples on the Healing Minnesota Stories blog; and from indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) perspective, read The Circle: Native American News, and Arts and Minnesota Speaker-Recorder.

Making it personal

Taking this to the personal level, as an upper-middle class white person, I get short term gains from the systemic shifting of costs towards others. In fact, I am shielded from even seeing the impacts of my life choices on, typically, Black, Indigenous, other people of color and low-income people. For example, I am but one degree of separation from the person who made my artificially inexpensive jeans, but, until seeing the movie RiverBlue at a chapter

environmental justice movie night, had no idea about how unbeficial this transaction was to them (predominantly people of color) and to their immediate environment. But my gains are short term and shallow, cheap jeans vs. health of people and our waters. I would gain much more if we collectively had a mindset and government committed to the well-being of all people and places.

REGENERATING WITH SACRED PEOPLE AND PLACES

It doesn’t have to be this way. We can and must build a new way of relating to each other and the earth that is mutually generative and renewing. We can start to see every person as sacred and every place as sacred, by being actively anti-racist and insisting on environmental repair. We can insist upon equitable sharing of costs and benefits. We can insist that companies bear the cost of repairing any damage they cause to the environment, and pass that cost on to those who buy the goods. We can insist on conditions that value BIPOC lives, including good wages, low pollution, and an end to police brutality. At the Sierra Club, we’re committed to doing this. We’re pushing ourselves and our leaders to enact pro-people, pro-environment policies.

Of course, this starts with doing some significant work on ourselves. We’re working to overcome patterns of white supremacy and adopt an active stance of equity and anti-racism. We’re learning how to stand as an ally when injustice occurs, to use our platform and power to amplify — not replace — the voices of BIPOC and low-income communities.

Our advocacy looks and feels different now. We’re deepening relationships with other organizations in the community who have been more from the mindset of regenerative relationships with each other. For example, we are actively supporting the Frontline Communities Protection Act, legislation championed and led by Communities Organizing Latinx Power and Action (COPAL). This legislation seeks to

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uplifting their message and adding our own perspective on why this legislation is universally important, even to those of us living in neighborhoods with clean air and water. And we’ve used our grassroots lobbying power to urge our members to call their legislators in support of this bill.

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5 TIPS FOR CAMPING WITH A BABY

Alec Olson

Introducing my son to nature has been a high priority for me since my wife and I first discussed parenthood, but it’s trickier than it sounds. Parenthood is still new. I’m discovering what it means to be a dad, while chasing down my soon-to-be-walking – but exceptionally fast-crawling – baby boy, August.

He’s busy and curious, much like myself, which makes me all the more eager to get him into nature. But not so fast, I tell myself. (I also have a Post-It Note on my desk that says “Rome wasn’t built in a day.”)

Making that initial introduction to the outdoors must be positive, so he can experience the enjoyment and wonder that nature can bring. Otherwise, he could be left with a poor experience that nature can bring. Otherwise, he could be left with a poor experience.

Believe me, I’ve been there.

My wife, Ashley, who would not describe herself as outdoorsy, faced a perilous journey with me into one of Itasca State Park’s backpack-in sites for my birthday.

Alec Olson is a volunteer editor with the North Star Journal and proud survivor of his first camping trip with a baby.

As you set expectations and make goals for the trip, it’ll help to keep things simple. From your packing list to the itinerary, a simpler trip will make it easier to remain flexible when the unexpected happens and to chart a new course.

Here are three areas to focus your attention on when packing up the family car.

Sleeping: We invested in a mesh travel crib with a shade. This will better reflect August’s normal sleeping conditions, while adapting to tent life. It will also help keep him contained during the night. It’s important to always follow guidelines set by the manufacturer of sleeping pads, bags and gear, and to check in with your pediatrician about safe sleeping practices.

Eating: When August eats solids (he still nurses too), we give him fruits or vegetables, scrambled eggs, and other low-mess foods. Less time doing dishes means more time hiking.

For those bottle feeding, bring along enough gear to set up a dish station at camp to organize and sanitize bottles, including a larger stove with plenty of fuel, a large pot, and portable wash basins.

Hiking: Consider EPA and CDC guidelines for applying sunscreen and bug repellent. Dress yourself and the baby in layers. Long sleeves, shoes, sunglasses and a hat will help shield your little one from bugs and the sun.

Choose a baby carrier wisely. Not all are created (or priced) equally. Base your purchase on your hiking level, goals, and budget.

1. Set achievable expectations and goals for the trip.

The tasks I’ve had at home with Ashley don’t focus on what to bring as much as they do on August’s nap schedule and stroller-friendly hiking trails. It’s important to set realistic expectations early on so everyone is in agreement.

Ultimately, for me, it’s about getting out and enjoying time with family, just like the old fishing adage, “any day on the lake is better than a day at work.”

While I enjoy hiking off the beaten path, sticking to paved trails will make traveling with my semi-outdoorsy wife and young baby easier, which will make the experience more positive.

Our expectations are to get (some) sleep in a tent, see Lake Superior, and get home safe. If done right, it’ll be a great camping trip.

2. Make a plan, but remain flexible.

Winging it with a baby sounds terrible. At least it does for me. I’m the type who packs a week before the trip, carries the map and compass and the first-aid kit. Having a plan is second nature. Admittedly, I can be a little high strung. Bringing family along requires you to go with the flow. I still make a plan, but I know things change – just like diapers. Reacting appropriately to the needs of your baby will demand that some activities get canceled or delayed to prioritize feedings, diaper changes, or naps.

Many factors will require that the plan you make accounts for the unexpected – or at least respects it.

3. Keep camping and packing simple.

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4. Bend (or break) the rules.

No, I’m not advocating for burning garbage or littering diapers. Always follow Leave No Trace rules when venturing outdoors.

What I mean by bending the rules has more to do with thinking outside the box and parting ways with a purist’s idea of camping.

When I think of camping, I imagine us staying in the state park nearly the whole time, hiking the trails, visiting the nature center (COVID permitting). Not sitting down at a restaurant in town. Not sheltering in the car from mosquitoes or taking in some screen time while the little ones nap. These activities don’t scream “camping.”

But being a parent is a full-time job, requiring superhuman abilities to forego sleep while powering through the day and caring for your kiddo. If the conditions are dire, consider visiting an ice cream shop or sitting in your car to catch a breath.

5. Stay positive — no matter what.

Taking others into the outdoors can be a challenge. It takes planning, preparation, and the grit to follow through. With the added challenge of a diaper bag, stroller and restless baby, our preparenthood camping trips are a thing of the past.

But that doesn’t mean they can’t be enjoyable. By right-sizing expectations and goals at the very beginning, you set yourself up for a successful camping trip. While it’s important to challenge yourself and your child to grow and learn his or her abilities, it’s also important to do so incrementally to ensure it’s not too much, too fast.

Like it says on my desk, “Rome wasn’t built in a day.” The best tip I can offer is to stay positive, no matter what, and enjoy camping with your family.

Alec Olson is a volunteer editor with the North Star Journal and proud survivor of his first camping trip with a baby.
Patty O’Keefe

Climate justice and just transition are terms that have been used by environmental justice groups for decades. As they become more widespread, we thought that providing basic definitions and examples of both would be helpful, while keeping our eyes on the prize: a new system where everyone enjoys a healthy climate, clean air, clean water, and a safe place to call home.

“Climate justice” refers to the growing movement that puts justice in the center of the fight for a decarbonized world. Fossil fuel corporations, and the politicians they pay for, created and continue to exacerbate the climate crisis. Racism and classism help them get away with it by putting the burden of fossil fuel consumption primarily in Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) and lower-income neighborhoods. In these areas, people have been most impacted by pollution, as well as ensuring support for workers in fossil fuel industries. Transition to a lower carbon world can make society more equal if those most burdened by our energy system experience the benefits of the transition.

CO-OPTING CLIMATE JUSTICE

Lately we’ve noticed the terms climate justice and just transition are being co-opted by utilities, non-profits, and state agencies as a new form of green-washing. They’re doing this to appear as though they value environmental justice. But their actions don’t always line up.

For example, Minnesota Power, an investor-owned utility in Northeast Minnesota, claims they are committed to a “just transition” while simultaneously planning to build a new fossil gas plant that will perpetuate climate injustices.

North Minneapolis suffers some of the worst environmental injustices in Minnesota, with high rates of asthma and lead poisoning, due to an oversaturation of asphalt roof shingle plants and metal recycling facilities. Residents deserve an opportunity to choose where their power comes from and the ability to divest from practices that further pollute their environment.

MN Renewable Now: Creating Environmental Justice Through Solar Ownership

Kristel Porter

2020 was a crazy year for everyone. We planned to throw North Minneapolis’ first Renewable Energy & Conservation Fair, and a Youth Leadership Conference in Renewable Energy. Due to the pandemic, we had to cancel both. Quickly, we pivoted. Our goal was to address the issue of climate change and connect our community with the resources needed to make the switch to renewable energy as soon as possible. We wanted to do something big. Through our Power North Project, we were able to work with over 200 households to move their electric bills to renewable sources and/or sign them up for energy efficiency audits and installations, thus reducing North Minneapolis’ carbon footprint by over 1,000 pounds annually.

Although this was an amazing accomplishment, we can keep running into the issue of equity. The neighborhood has a high renter population and a low median income. Property owners mentioned time and time again that they could not get financing for solar installations on their homes, typically because of their debt-to-income ratio.

The Solstar Project

The Solstar Project is currently funded at 90%. If you are interested in supporting this project, or want to find out more, go to www.mnrenewablenow.org

North Minneapolis's carbon footprint by 288 tons a year and will reinvest over $20k from utility bills back into the community annually. It will also create over $300k in wages and will increase equity in these North Minneapolis properties by over

The Solstar Project is an Environmental Justice Lobbyist and board member at Fresh Energy. She also Executive Director of MN Renewable Now, Kristel Porter is the Founder and Executive Director of MN Renewable Now: creating the Solstar Project to address racial equity through renewable energy ownership. Kristel Porter was a member of the Sierra Club North Star Chapter’s Executive Committee, and a board member at Fresh Energy. She also is an Environmental Justice Lobbyist and North Minneapolis Community “Earth” Activist.
COMMUNITY SOLAR OFFERS EVERYONE AN OPPORTUNITY TO SAVE THE PLANET

A rural community solar garden using pollinator-friendly landscaping outside Faribault Minnesota and operated by Cooperative Energy Futures.

Photo Credit: Cooperative Energy Futures

John Krenn

The more electricity we generate from solar, the better for the planet. If you have a house and an unshaded roof, you can install solar panels. (For more information, see the “Solar Energy Company” link on the website of the Minnesota Solar Energy Industry Association.)

But if you are like many of us, you do not own a house, your roof is shaded, you are concerned about up-front costs, or you would prefer not to have panels on your roof. If one of those situations applies to you, you can get your electricity by subscribing to community solar, especially if you are an Xcel Energy customer.

The community solar garden process was established in Minnesota in 2013. (The Sierra Club and Minnesotans across the state played a major role in making this happen.) With community solar, a large “garden” of solar panels generates electricity. You “subscribe” to a portion of that electricity and pay the garden operator (not your electric utility) for the solar power generated. Although the law required only Xcel Energy, Minnesota’s largest electric utility, to create a community solar program for customers, some other electricity providers offer similar programs. For the Xcel program, there mostly are no up-front charges.

The electricity generated by the garden is delivered into Xcel’s grid. As a community solar customer, you will still get your electricity from Xcel’s grid. But, instead of paying Xcel for the solar-generated power, you get a credit for that power on your Xcel bill.

If you subscribe to a solar share equal to your likely electricity usage, you will pay much less to Xcel and instead pay the garden operator. If the credits from Xcel exceed the value of the electricity generated by your garden subscription, Xcel will pay you cash at the end of the plan year.

As a community solar subscriber, you will continue to get your electricity delivered to your residence by Xcel, regardless of how much solar power is generated at your garden. Typically, summertime credits from Xcel exceed your electricity usage and wintertime credits are less than your electricity usage, because the garden will produce much more in the summer.

A GOOD DEAL FOR CONSUMERS AND THE EARTH

Monetary savings to community solar subscribers are likely and the benefit to the planet is guaranteed.

You will shift the source of the electricity you use to renewable sunlight and away from fossil fuels like gas and coal. It’s as though you are helping to create your own renewable power plant. Community solar’s capacity in Minnesota is now close to 800 megawatts, which is a huge contribution to the state’s electrical production.

By statute, you can sign up for gardens located in the county where you live or contiguous counties. Depending on your location, there likely are one or more garden operators to which you can subscribe. Contact the community solar operators in your county or an adjacent county on Xcel’s website on their SolarRewards Community (mn.myxcelenergymy/x/renewable-solar- rewards-community) and then go to the spreadsheet at “View the MN Solar Gardens in Progress”.

HOW TO SIGN UP FOR SOLAR

The state has provided guidance on the factors you should consider in entering into a community solar subscription agreement, which can be found at the Minnesota Department of Commerce’s Tips About Community Solar page. Another good source of information is the Clean Energy Resource Team. Operators require subscribers to sign a long-term agreement, but most operators allow you to transfer or exit the agreement if your situation changes. Be sure to read the subscriber agreement on this issue before you sign.

Garden operators typically will check the credit scores of prospective subscribers. Even if you have a lower score, you may be able to convince an operator that your situation merits allowing you to subscribe.

And there are developers working to increase access to community solar by not requiring credit checks.

If you are not an Xcel electricity customer your utility company may have its own community solar program. You will need to contact your provider directly to understand how their program works, as many are different from Xcel’s.

NOT AN XCEL CUSTOMER?

In these non-Xcel programs, the electricity provider itself typically operates the solar garden, and each subscriber pays for the solar power he or she uses. Credit is issued for the power generated by your garden subscription and paid directly to the provider.

WHEREVER YOU LIVE, CHECK INTO WHETHER YOU QUALIFY FOR COMMUNITY SOLAR AND HELP US ALL SAVE THE PLANET.

Beyond Coal & Fossil Gas to 100% Clean Energy

Minnesotans across the state are calling for bold action on climate justice and our teams have been working to advocate for a transition from coal and fossil gas to 100% clean and equitable energy. As of this year, all major coal plants in Minnesota have proposed retirement dates (although not all those dates come soon enough) but Minnesota still imports a significant amount of coal from North and South Dakota, and Minnesota utilities are still proposing to build new fossil gas plants and pipelines, despite the risk for our climate and the risk for customers given the decreasing costs of clean energy and energy storage.

We proposed an alternative to Xcel Energy’s long term energy plan. Sierra Club’s “Clean Energy for All!” plan would save customers $2.2 billion, reduce more carbon emissions, does not include building a new 800 megawatt fossil gas plant and pipeline in Becker, and instead replaces retiring coal plants with clean energy like wind, solar and energy storage. Our plan also maximizes community and rooftop solar to ensure customers can share in the benefits of the clean energy transition.

In Northeastern Minnesota, we are mobilizing to call on Minnesota Power to stop its plans to build a new fossil gas plant in Superior. While that our analysis found is not needed. Similarly, to our alternative to Xcel’s plan, we’re calling for a more rapid transition to 100% clean energy, more support for community and rooftop solar, and more action to ensure the energy transition benefits those most impacted by our energy system.

In Rochester, we’ve successfully organized to secure a plan for net 100% renewable energy by 2031. Now we are pushing Rochester Public Utilities to commit to fossil-free electricity by 2031 including no new gas, and 100% electric municipal buildings—and establishing all-electric residential and commercial pilot and demonstration projects.

In Hennepin County, we have advocated for a climate plan grounded in climate justice. We are calling on the County to phase out the Hennepin Energy Resource Recovery Center (HERC), a trash incinerator that’s an environmental injustice and carbon polluter.

At the state legislature, we continue to push for legislation requiring that 100% of Minnesota’s electricity be generated from fully renewable sources by 2040 or sooner; expanding access to community and rooftop solar and energy efficiency; and other supporting policies.
OSPREYS RETURN TO THE BALLFIELD

Bob Suchanek

HOME IS WHERE THE FISH ARE

The osprey family that I watched in a nearby ballfield last year left Minnesota in the fall before fishing waters froze. Mom, dad, and youngsters all headed for open water and good fishing south of here, perhaps as far away as South America. Last year’s brood won’t be returning this spring for this year’s family. This is a good nest, inaccessible to raccoons and predators but near lakes and streams that offer plenty of fish. Ospreys are all about fish. Their diet is almost entirely fish, and they live near fresh or saltwater locations where fish can be seen at shallow depths.

The scientific name for the local osprey is Pandion haliaetus, or Pandion’s sea eagle; a fanciful reference to an ancient Greek king and the bird’s aggressive pursuit of fish. Ospreys are hawks, but with wingspans of up to six feet and a regal demeanor, they are certainly eagle-like.

Ospreys attack fish from above, diving at high speed with legs first and claws open. Ospreys are about fish. Their diet is almost entirely fish, and they live near fresh or saltwater locations where fish can be seen at shallow depths.

Once they settle in their ballfield nest, the mother osprey will lay up to four eggs. She’ll do most of the sitting but dad will take over at times to allow her to stretch her wings and fish for herself. Dad will do most of the fishing for the entire family while the eggs are incubating and will fish for the young until they can manage on their own. Young ospreys will attempt flight at two weeks of age but won’t succeed until they’ve logged weeks of wing exercise time. They’ll start flying and hunting after seven or eight weeks of age. Their first trip south, possibly as far as South America, will be five or six weeks later.

A CONSERVATION SUCCESS

Osprey numbers crashed during the middle of the 20th century. The pesticide DDT poisoned ospreys and caused a thinning of eggshells that proved fatal to baby birds. One survey of east coast osprey populations showed a 90% loss of breeding pairs.

When the United States Environmental Protection Agency banned DDT in 1972, osprey populations rebounded. The osprey is no longer an endangered species but protection challenges remain, including continued use of DDT in some countries and habitat destruction worldwide.

The osprey is one of the most widely distributed birds in the world. I’ve seen ospreys in many states, and I am never surprised to see them wherever fishing is good. I’ve even seen nesting ospreys in the desert. They’re also one of the most traveled migratory birds; some ospreys may travel as much as 160,000 miles in their lifetime.

You can see migrating ospreys in the spring and fall; one of the best places in North America to watch the migrations is Hawk Ridge in Duluth, Minnesota. Hawk Ridge observers keep careful counts of individual bird species on the move over the city, and hundreds of ospreys are seen every year.

The fall migration count at Hawk Ridge is amazing — over 60,000 raptors and more than 200,000 other birds. According to the Hawk Ridge website, hawks begin migrating in mid-August and continue through November. Naturalists are on site from the first of September through the end of October.

Watching ospreys is one of the joys in my life; it inspires me to volunteer with the Sierra Club’s Stewards group, which seeks to ensure our state agencies live up to their missions to protect our environment.

Bob Suchanek is a member of the Waters and Wetlands Stewards and an active naturalist. Learn more about our natural wonders by reading Bob’s blogs online at sierraclub.org/minnesota/north-star-blog.

Research indicates an impressive catch rate, perhaps as high as seven fish for every 10 dives. These anglers don’t waste much time staring at the water; the average hunting time before snatching a fish is just 12 minutes.

Once an osprey catches a fish it stays caught. According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, osprey feet “are unusual among hawks in possessing a reversible outer toe that allows them to grasp with two toes in front and two behind. Barbed pads on the soles of the bird’s feet help them grasp slippery fish. When flying with prey, an osprey lines up its catch head first for less wind resistance.”

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RACIST IMPACTS OF HIGHWAYS — CAN WE FIX THEM?

Steph Larsen
Transportation projects are racially neutral, and roads need to go where they need to go, right? Wrong.

Take the example of Brooklyn Center, Minnesota. This suburb north of Minneapolis has been impacted by several expansions of Interstate 94 over the years in attempts to reduce traffic congestion. The irony is that highway expansions actually increase traffic and congestion (a phenomenon called “induced demand”). Now, there’s a proposal to expand the highway even further, which would double traffic in Brooklyn Center from 60,000 vehicles per day to 120,000 vehicles per day. The plan would divert traffic from more affluent communities to low-income communities and communities of color.

For years, Brooklyn Center residents have been trying to get some answers to basic questions:

How many homes will be destroyed?
How many families and businesses will be affected? How will the increase in the already high rates of childhood asthma? How will the highway expansion affect the community’s access to green spaces? Why has bus service to Brooklyn Center decreased? Why is public transit not being used more heavily to reduce congestion?

Incredibly, the community is being pressured to endorse the project without having answers to these critical questions.

When I asked Brooklyn Center Mayor Mike Elliott what solutions he would like to see for his community regarding the highway expansion, he proposed that highway planners follow these practices:

• Reducing pollution, as well as social and environmental impacts on communities of color, should be part of any highway project. All alternatives that decrease vehicle traffic should be fully explored before a project is approved.

• Transportation planners and engineers must work directly with local communities and residents to ensure that traffic between communities is fairly distributed. Affected communities should be enhanced, not harmed.

• Alternatives to highway expansion that actually relieve traffic congestion — like public transit access, safe bicycle and pedestrian traffic — should be prioritized. Increased high-speed internet access and work-from-home policies should be explored.

• When spending funds that have already been allocated, residents should not be rushed into hasty decisions.

• President Biden’s executive order to ensure that 40% of federal climate investments benefit low-income communities and communities of color should be fulfilled.

TAKE ACTION NOW AT: sc.org/highways
You can support Mayor Mike by sending a quick message to Transportation Secretary Buttigieg. Urge him to not expand I-94 and Highway 252.

Steph Larsen is a senior online organizer with the Sierra Club’s Clean Transportation for All campaign. A version of this article originally appeared in Sierra Club’s national blog.

EQUITY AND ICO: WORKING TOWARD OUTDOOR ADVENTURES FOR ALL

Courtney Gildersleeve
As members of Inspiring Connections Outdoors (ICO), we take joy in facilitating outdoor adventures for youth from community groups in the Twin Cities. Seeing young people delight in encountering a squirrel along the trail, learning a new found skill, and gaining confidence in their own abilities make this work meaningful.

This past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has made our outings impossible, so our group has taken a step inward to look at our own commitments and principles, while trying to find new ways to connect with community partners.

While most of the volunteers in ICO are white people, the majority of youth who participate in outings are youth of color. As a group, we’ve been concerned about disparities of privilege and opportunity and wanted to address the ways racism can show up in our interactions.

Developing a statement condemning the murder of George Floyd pushed us to explicitly confront the ways that anti-Blackness, erasure of Indigenous communities, threats to the safety of people of color, and various other forms of oppression persist in outdoor culture. This led us to look carefully at many of our assumptions about our work and to commit to a new level of intentionality in our outings.

Since then, we’ve spent time in conversation with each other. Most of our monthly meetings have begun with an environmental justice topic, often focused on a particular reading.

One of our early meetings of this type was grounded in a discussion of the troubling dimensions of the history of the Sierra Club, “Pulling Down Our Monuments,” which was published online in the Sierra Club blog. Another reading was “When Green is Blue,” published in the Parks Stewardship Forum, which critically addresses the role of law enforcement in state and national parks.

Additionally, we have spent time reflecting on particular outings and identifying areas that require transformation. We’ve been sharing resources, having honest conversations, and trying to develop a respectful form of exchange among members of our group.
Above we are showcasing some of the amazing artwork contributed for the February 17th “art storm” led by our allies at MN350 and Stop Line 3. On the day of the art storm, we flooded social media with posts featuring homemade artworks and tagging President Joe Biden. This was one piece of a broader effort to increase pressure on decision-makers at the federal level.

Contributions came from professional artists, activists, and volunteers of all ages and backgrounds. Posts from all over the state, nation, and world highlighted the environmental impacts, treaty violations, and other concerns that Line 3 represents.

In a time when our options for coming together were limited, the art storm brought together a diverse group of remote contributors, united in message: President Biden must #StopLine3 now.

Sophia Pechaty is a former Sierra Club intern and current communications liaison with the Stop Line 3 Team. She enjoyed curating the art for this piece and in her free time she loves crocheting, hanging out with her family, and breaking in her hiking boots.
DONATIONS MATTER

Everything you read about in this Journal is made possible with the support of your dollars. The North Star Chapter is proud to be supported by folks across Minnesota. From large gifts to small, each one makes a difference. Thank you!

“I donate to the North Star Chapter of the Sierra Club because it helps fuel the grassroots power we’re building in Minnesota,” said Erik Hillesheim. “As a 25 year old, I feel financial pressures, but a small monthly contribution helps make sure I’m aligning my actions and dollars with my values.”

“I have been a volunteer with the North Star Chapter for over 20 years,” said Brett Smith. “I have seen first hand the effectiveness of the Chapter’s strategy of volunteer-led grassroots organizing. Talented and committed volunteers, who can work on issues that concern them most, leverage the work of an excellent staff. This strategy, along with a strong commitment to political action and to issues of environmental and social justice, has created a powerful organization that is unique in Minnesota. I am proud to give it my financial support.”

“When I came into a small inheritance from my father, I wanted to honor his environmental activism by donating to an effective organization. Sierra Club fit the bill: responsive, responsible, local, powerful,” said Marya Hart.

WAYS TO DONATE

ONLINE
Donations made directly to the Minnesota North Star Chapter are especially meaningful because 100% of your gift will stay in Minnesota for work on local and state issues you care about.
To donate online please visit sc.org/mn-donate! There you may make a one-time donation! There you may make a one-time donation. To learn more about adding this giving option at your workplace, please contact Margaret Levin at 612-259-2446 or margaret.levin@sierraclub.org.

VIA CHECK
If you would prefer to mail in your donation, please make your check payable to North Star Sierra Club and mail to: Sierra Club North Star Chapter 2300 Myrtle Avenue, Suite 260 St. Paul, MN 55114

Contributions, donations, gifts, and dues to the Sierra Club support our effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. These contributions are not tax-deductible.

AND MORE
To give a tax-deductible contribution, a charitable IRA distribution, gift of stock, or to include the Sierra Club North Star Chapter in your estate plan, please contact State Director Margaret Levin at margaret.levin@sierraclub.org or: 612-259-2446.

PASSION FOR THE OUTDOORS
& VALUES INSPIRE DONATION

John Hottinger

John Yackel makes gift in lasting memory of his wife Eleanor Yackel

John Yackel grew up in Sanborn in southwestern Minnesota (“a small town with community spirit”). Living there sparked his life-long love of hunting and fishing and also triggered his passion for environmental protection. Spending so much time in the woods and open spaces, he learned to be an observer of nature. Over time, he began to notice damage caused by humans and signs of climate change.

He married his wife Eleanor in their early twenties and Eleanor added her spirited support for social and racial justice to their list of important family values. She continually put others first and worked tirelessly to stand up and speak out in protest when she saw injustice and oppression, doing so with grace and a heart for reconciliation.

At age 89, John continues to be an avid advocate of environmental protection and wilderness preservation. His loss of Eleanor on May 30, 2020, moved John to dedicate his most recent large contribution to the Sierra Club North Star Chapter in her memory.

John has continued to enjoy pheasant hunting in South Dakota and trout fishing in Montana and believes in the big trends that continue to emerge. To identify what is happening, to assess whether it is an integrated, and they supported organizations that recognize this intersection.

In Minnesota, John is especially concerned about sulfide mining, and how international corporations could destroy our water with no fear of consequences. He values the need to battle unchecked capitalism that enables a small elite to ignore the human consequences of their economic decisions.

During his lifetime of supporting the work of Sierra Club and other environmental organizations, John Yackel has come to recognize and incorporate one test for his activities: “You have to have the environment deep in your heart. Having children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, you think about [their future] a lot... What is their environment going to be like?...What is going to happen to them?”

This attitude will help each of us make the right decisions as we travel the road forward with him and his beloved Eleanor toward a just and sustainable Minnesota.

John Hottinger is a lawyer and volunteer with the Communications Team who is eagerly reengaging in Sierra Club volunteer duties.
Volunteers Wanted!
Contribute your time to protect the air, water, lands and climate we all depend on.

CAMPAIGN TEAMS: Lead grassroots advocacy campaigns on our most pressing issues.

Stop Line 3, 3rd Wednesday at 6:30 PM
nancy.vezner@northstar.sierraclub.org
marcy.leussler@northstar.sierraclub.org

Land Use & Transportation, 1st Monday at 6:00 PM
alex.burns@northstar.sierraclub.org

Zero Waste, 3rd Tuesday at 7:00 PM
lori.olingr@northstar.sierraclub.org

100% Clean Energy, 4th Tuesday at 6:30 PM
john.krenn@northstar.sierraclub.org

STEWARDS TEAMS: Research, monitor and advocate for environmental issues.

Forests and Wildlife Stewards, 2nd Monday at 7:00 PM
bob.graves@northstar.sierraclub.org

Waters and Wetlands Stewards, 2nd Monday at 7:00 PM
steve.ring@northstar.sierraclub.org

GEOGRAPHIC TEAMS: Organize in your city for 100% Clean Energy.

Rochester, 2nd Monday at 6:30 PM
rick.morris@sierraclub.org

Duluth, 1st Tuesday at 5:30 PM
jenna.yeakle@sierraclub.org

Minnetonka/Wayzata, meeting times vary.
patty.okeefe@sierraclub.org

100% Clean Energy, 4th Tuesday at 6:30 PM
john.krenn@northstar.sierraclub.org

CAPACITY TEAMS: Share your talents and skills with us.

SierraAction: Use our grassroots power to impact legislation.
4th Wednesday, satish.desai@northstar.sierraclub.org;
erik.hillesheim@northstar.sierraclub.org

Communications: Hone your photography, design, and writing skills.
Quarterly meetings, mary.blitzer@sierraclub.org

Equity Outreach: Spread the word about protecting our planet.
Ongoing events, charles.frempong-longdon@sierraclub.org

Outings: Find new friends and explore Minnesota parks.
Events restarting, greg.allison@northstar.sierraclub.org

Inspiring Connections Outdoors: 2nd Sunday at 4:00 PM
Help plan activities and events that provide access to and inspire new connections to the outdoors, among individuals, and between communities mnico@northstar.sierraclub.org

For the most up-to-date information and many more events visit sc.org/mn. Email north.star.chapter@sierraclub.org or call 612-659-9124 with any volunteer questions.