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Justice in Sustainability

The past few months have been instructive for many Americans, as first the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated recession, and then the killing of George Floyd, have brought renewed national attention to the ways in which people of color in our communities, particularly Black Americans, are still negatively impacted by an unjust system on a daily basis.

As Dane County looks to contain the impacts of the pandemic and begin a recovery that focuses on more equitable health and economic systems, and as many in our communities protest for a reformed state and country that fully uphold the promise of “peace, liberty, and justice for all,” those of us working in the environmental and sustainability spheres must engage in deep introspection as well. While our criminal justice and political systems are in the spotlight right now, it is also worth considering that the organized environmental movement has for much of its existence amplified the voices of primarily white Americans, both failing to create space for more diverse representation and also overlooking the immense contributions of non-white environmentalists, upon whose shoulders we also stand, and who frequently have called attention to the intersectional issues of racial and class justice.

While those of us who haven’t experienced this inequity personally must be part of pushing for positive changes that demand equity and representation, two of the first key steps are to listen to and amplify the voices of those who best understand our current failings and their impacts, and to become familiar with the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) writers who have built so much of our current environmental justice and sustainability architecture:

- Julian Brave-NoiseCat, a writer of many titles including Vice President, fellow, and contributing editor, wrote an [article for Vice’s “Tipping Point” series](#) on the racist past the environmental movement must reckon with if we are to truly make progress on climate change and so many other crucial issues.

- Sustainable living blogger Leah Thomas wrote for Vogue on [Intersectional Environmentalism](#) and why it's essential for environmentalists to also be anti-racist.
- University of Michigan professor Dorceta Taylor led the 2014 creation of [a report on the lack of diversity](#) in green organizations around the country.
- Brentin Mock, now a writer with Bloomberg's city-focused CityLab project, used Dr. Taylor's report as a jumping-off point in this [Mother Jones "Climate Desk" article](#) on whether American environmentalism has two distinct versions, one "white" and one "black."

To learn more, look for these books:

-Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality -Robert D. Bullard (2000)

-Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World -Ed. Julian Agyeman, Robert D. Bullard, and Bob Evans (2003)

-Planetwalker: How to Change Your World One Step at a Time -John Francis (2005)

-Unbowed: A Memoir -Wangari Maathai (2008)

-Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry -Ed. Camille T. Dungy (2009)

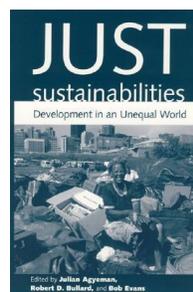
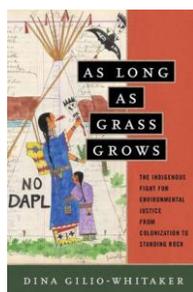
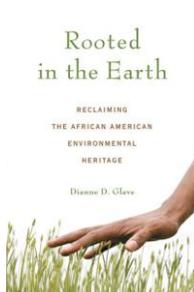
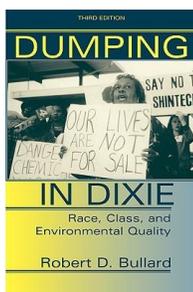
-Speaking for Ourselves: Environmental Justice in Canada -Ed. Julian Agyeman, Peter Cole, Randolph Haluza-DeLay, Pat O'Riley (2009)

-Rooted in the Earth: Reclaiming the African-American Environmental Heritage -Dianne D. Glave (2010)

-Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors -Carolyn Finney (2014)

-The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection -Dorceta E. Taylor (2016)

-As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock -Dina Gilio-Whitaker (2019)



- REI also [shared a list](#) of organizations they partner with that promote equity in outdoor access and recreation; consider adding some of those to the groups you support.

Celebrate Pride Month

<https://out4s.org/>

June is a global celebration of Pride Month, promoting the importance, visibility, and dignity of the LGBTQ+ community. This is the first year that Fitchburg has raised the Pride flag in front of City Hall, to be flown beneath the City flag for all of June.



As with so many other aspects of our society, the sustainability movement has benefited greatly from the contributions of LGBTQ+ members, from the social justice and neighborhood-strengthening ideals championed by Harvey Milk, to the public lands and environmental protections advocated for by Patagonia's former CEO and President Rose Marcario, to the organization Out4Sustainability that works to bridge the LGBTQ+ and sustainability movements based on shared principles and values. This and every month, we celebrate those contributions and the many LGBTQ+ individuals who are part of our communities.

June is Great Outdoors Month

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/great-outdoors-month.htm>

It's always a great time to get outside and enjoy the world around you, but with COVID-19-related restrictions easing slightly and the weather turning solidly into that of spring and summer, Wisconsinites still have plenty of opportunities to celebrate Great Outdoors Month this June. The observance began over 20 years ago with President Clinton setting aside a week for this event, and since 2008 governors across the country have joined the President in establishing the entirety of June as a month to celebrate the outdoors. This year, [Governor Evers' proclamation](#) recognizes not just the tremendous resources available to Wisconsinites for recreating, but also the economic and cultural importance of our outdoor spaces.

A variety of parks, conservation lands, trails, recreation areas, fishing grounds, and more are available throughout Fitchburg (<https://www.fitchburgwi.gov/619/Parks-Forestry>) Dane County (<https://parks-lwr.dane.com/ParkSystem/List>); and all of Wisconsin (<https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks/>), depending on your interests and needs. Take some time this month (and every month) and go enjoy the great outdoors!

TAKE ACTION

This month, the U.S. Senate is considering the Great American Outdoors Act ([S.3422](#)), a bill that would ensure permanent funding for the [Land and Water Conservation Fund](#), first established in 1964, to complete deferred maintenance projects.

Reach out to your elected officials in Washington (click [here](#) for the Senate directory, and [here](#) for the House) to let them know if you support this bill.



What Does COVID-19 Mean for Climate Change?

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/27/opinion/sunday/coronavirus-climate-change.html>

Unsurprisingly, most of the focus on the novel coronavirus since March has been on the economic and health ramifications of the pandemic threatening the entire world. We've all read or heard new items on a weekly, daily, or perhaps even hourly basis, regarding steps we can take to slow the spread and protect ourselves from contracting or transmitting the virus; as well as how to sustain ourselves during, and plan a recovery from, the economic recession.

What has received less attention from many outlets is the impact this pandemic could have on another existential threat: the global climate crisis. Early reports after many states and countries implemented stay-at-home orders touted the [cleaner air](#) some large cities were experiencing as a direct result of decreased emissions from vehicles and some factories. While this is a positive in the short-term, we've also seen a dramatic increase in packaging materials and disposable wipes/utensils/etc., as more consumers make their purchases online and fears of spreading virus via shared contact lead to greater reliance on single-use items. Climate research has been slowed down by funding decreases and institutional shutdowns, and the clean-energy sector has not been spared the widespread job losses affecting many industries, but economic stimulus, regulations and oversight, and infrastructure spending can be targeted at a clean-energy recovery and prioritizing a more sustainable economy.

What our recovery looks like is yet to be determined, and we have an opportunity to ensure some of our behavioral changes are long-lasting and consistent with efforts to combat the climate crisis. We can have a recovery consistent with building a more climate-friendly and sustainable society, but it will take coordinated, consistent work to ensure. Here are a few ways you can contribute on an individual level:

Earth-Friendly Habits to Maintain After the Pandemic

Ideas adapted from [Washington Post](#)

1. **Keep those cars parked** – Whether because we're working from home, skipping long road trips in favor of "stay-cations," or opting for video chats with friends instead of traveling to see them, most Americans have been driving many fewer miles since pandemic-inspired distancing efforts began in March. That decrease in miles driven has not only resulted in a significant reduction in year-over-year emissions, it has also reduced our time in the stressful position of sitting behind a steering wheel. Continuing to minimize vehicle miles traveled can have positive impacts on your stress, your schedule, your budget, and the climate.
2. **Stay on the ground** – Among the most significant changes over the past few months has been the decrease in trips taken by plane, with Airlines for America reporting an 80% decrease in domestic passengers and 96%

decrease in international passengers. While airline miles don't contribute nearly as much to global emissions as power plants, factories, and cars and trucks, our increased comfort with virtual alternatives to in-person gatherings could carry over and lead to greater reliance on remote options, reducing our trips by plane and also saving individuals and organizations money.

3. **Go meat-less, not meat-more** – Due to grocery store supplies, limited fridge/freezer space, and other causes, many Americans have been consuming less meat and dairy the past few months, seeking their protein from other sources. For a variety of reasons, shifting to a fully vegetarian diet may not be right for everyone. But livestock production remains one of the most climate-intensive activities we engage in as a species, so cutting down on the amount of meat and dairy in our diets can also be one of the most impactful behaviors we engage in for reducing our carbon footprints.
4. **Limit your consumption** – Much of our personal shopping has translated nearly seamlessly to the internet, but consumption has decreased overall due to more limited personal finances, difficulty replicating certain purchases in an online environment, and re-thinking what items in our lives are truly essential. This re-consideration of what material goods we need in our lives is something to carry forward with us, and it can cut down on emissions from shipping, natural resource extraction for raw materials, and waste entering the landfill at end-of-life.
5. **Make grocery lists** – As much as 40% of the food we buy in the United States ends up being thrown out; at least, that was the case before lockdowns began, and before families and organizations were forced to be more conscious of the food they were purchasing and letting go to landfills. By planning shopping trips more carefully and making efforts to “buy what you’ll eat and eat what you buy,” we’ve learned a great deal in recent months about less wasteful food habits, lessons we can carry with us moving forward.
6. **Trust science** – If we’ve learned anything from this pandemic, we’ve learned that we fare better when we base decisions on the best science available to us whenever possible. And just as we’ve heard cautions and recommendations from many top epidemiologists and viral pathologists in the past few months, even when they don’t yet have all the answers, so we’ve also heard warnings and recommendations from climate scientists for years as research in the field has provided more and clearer information. As Sergio Peçanha writes in the Washington Post article linked above, “If nothing else, this pandemic has made us understand that there are real risks we sometimes can’t see or don’t credit until it’s too late. That’s a lesson we can apply to climate change, too.”

Madison Bike Week Postponed to September

<https://bikeweek.madisonbikes.org/>

Given the many delays and stay-at-home orders we've experienced in the past couple months, Madison Bikes has joined with the League of American Bicyclists in postponing their week-long celebrations of bicycling until September. This year, Madison Bike Week will take place the week of September 12-19; look out for more details later this summer.



MadiSUN Free Solar Group-Buy Info Session

<https://madisunsolar.com/group-buy-for-homes/>

Through the MadiSUN program, Renew Wisconsin creates opportunities for homeowners in Dane County to purchase solar panels through a group-buy program that can yield costs below what any individual homeowner would spend to outfit their home with solar power. By installing solar panels in 2020, homeowners can receive a Federal Investment Tax Credit for 26% of the cost of their system (decreasing to 22% in 2021 and phasing out in 2022).

Due to the difficulties of meeting in person during the COVID-19 pandemic, MadiSUN has scheduled their informational sessions to take place online, with the final session for this year set for next Thursday, June 25. Check out the MadiSUN website to learn more about putting solar on your home and working with this program, and [follow this link](#) for information and to register for the June 25 public education session.

National Pollinator Week

<https://www.pollinator.org/pollinator-week>

This year, the week of June 22-28 has been designated National Pollinator Week in the United States and internationally. Bees and butterflies may come immediately to mind, but pollinators can be other insects, birds, and even bats and other mammals.

These critters are invaluable contributors to our gardens, prairies, forests, and food production, and from planting pollinator-friendly gardens to letting your clover grow, building bee houses to encouraging local organizations to show their support, there are many actions you can take to get involved next week.



See the "pollination fast facts" below, and check out the [Pollinator Week Toolkit](#) on the Pollinator Partnership's website to learn more.



Pollination Fast Facts

What is pollination?

Pollination is a vital stage in the life cycle of all flowering plants. When pollen is moved within a flower or carried from one flower to another of the same species it leads to fertilization. This transfer of pollen is necessary for healthy and productive native & agricultural ecosystems.



- About 75% of all flowering plant species need the help of animals to move their heavy pollen grains from plant to plant for fertilization.
- About 1,000 of all pollinators are vertebrates such as birds, bats, and small mammals.
- Most pollinators (about 200,000 species) are beneficial insects such as flies, beetles, wasps, ants, butterflies, moths, and bees.

Why are pollinators important?

Pollinators are often keystone species, meaning that they are critical to an ecosystem. The work of pollinators ensures full harvests of crops and contributes to healthy plants everywhere.

- An estimated 1/3 of all foods and beverages is delivered by pollinators.
- In the U.S., pollination produces nearly \$20 billion worth of products annually.



How you can help.

- **Reduce your impact.** Reduce or eliminate your pesticide use, increase green spaces, and minimize urbanization. Pollution and climate change affect pollinators, too!
- **Plant for pollinators.** Create pollinator-friendly habitat with native flowering plants that supply pollinators with nectar, pollen, and homes. For information on what to plant in your area, download a free eco-regional guide online at www.pollinator.org.
- **Tell a friend.** Educate your neighbors, schools, and community groups about the importance of pollinators. Host a dinner, a pollinated food cook-off or other event and invite your friends.
- **Join the Pollinator Partnership** Go to www.pollinator.org and click on "Get Involved." Be part of a growing community of pollinator supporters.

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Please contact Phil Grupe, Sustainability Specialist, at phil.grupe@fitchburgwi.gov or 270-4259, if you have any questions, comments, and/or suggestions for future Green E-News topics.

