



FEBRUARY 2021

KENT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

Making a difference in Kent, Portage County and beyond since 1970

I Have Always Loved Ohio's Native Plants and Trees

I have loved Ohio's native plants for a long time. From the southern border of Ohio to Lake Erie and east to west, there are a huge variety of beautiful native trees, plants and shrubs. Recently, I became interested in planting these in my yard because of a plant that invaded my yard from the vacant lot next door. It is called lesser celandine. It was brought to Ohio from Europe because it is an attractive ground cover with pretty yellow flowers. It is dormant now but will emerge in February or March with increased vigor.

Andrew Perneti, a plant specialist at Haymaker Farmers' Market, told me that the only thing that would outcompete an invasive plant like the **lesser celandine** are native plants. They have been here thousands of years and have withstood drought, flood and other disasters. Lesser celandine, although very aggressive, is not adapted to our climate and will not survive. My only other alternative was to treat my yard with pesticide, which I will not do because it would kill the birds, bees, butterflies and small creatures in my yard. So, I started on a new adventure, discovering the variety and beauty of native plants. I did not remove several non-native plants such as hydrangea, forsythia and Rose of Sharon because they do not tend to invade my yard. I will leave them there to enjoy.



The invasive lesser celandine--the flowering plant you *don't* want in your yard or garden.

I already have many Ohio native plants in my yard. There are 20 huge oak trees and several dogwoods. Most of the yard is shaded. There are azaleas and rhododendrons that bloom in the spring. There is a large Redosier dogwood that is about six-feet tall. Its branches turn bright red in the winter. Under a blue spruce tree is a bed of ferns.

In the front garden bed is a mountain-laurel that had beautiful pink blossoms last spring. Under it, with the help of my family, we planted two holly plants—one male and one female. Nearby, we planted low-growing holly berry for a ground cover and some Helleborus, which will bloom in many colors next year. Under a pink dogwood tree, we planted a variegated Jacob's ladder. There is also a rhododendron and wild ginger.



I had some other gardeners come to weed and mulch last spring. I decided I wanted a **Japanese maple**, as I admired the one in my neighbor's yard. These gardeners dug a new bed in my front yard and planted the Japanese maple there. On either side, they planted dwarf junipers that turn yellow in the fall. For ground cover, they planted phlox. In the rear garden bed by the house, there is a snowball bush that had big, round white blossoms in June, in a bed of pachysandra. At the other end, we planted two blueberries

A young Japanese maple.

In the backyard under four huge oak trees, I had a hosta garden. Although I hated to lose its lovely leaves and white flowers, the deer chose to eat most of it. Then the invasive lesser celandine moved in. In May, with the help of my family, we dug the area down about four inches to try to get rid of the lesser celandine and laid down heavy cardboard. On top of that, we put a 12-inch layer of mulch. We left the area to decompose until October, when the area was ready to be planted.

I had let the grass grow in my far backyard. Volunteer sassafras trees sprouted up all over. With Andrew's input, I choose a few to keep in place, gave two to a friend to plant at her house, and gave the rest to Andrew. When Andrew pulled up one of the sassafras trees, he offered it to me to smell it. It smelled like licorice! He told me I could boil the roots and make a delicious tea. Near the back edge of my yard, Andrew planted four **serviceberry shrubs**. They will bloom with a white blossom in the spring and offer the birds berries to eat in the fall.



Serviceberry shrub.



Northern spicebush.

Close to a tall oak tree and the young sassafras trees, Andrew planted three **Northern spicebushes**. Their leaves smell like a lovely spice when you crush them. You can also make a tea from them. Adjacent to the spicebushes, he planted four ferns. They are companion plants to spicebush. They help each other grow. The spicebush is one plant that will be most beneficial to all the forest dwellers because it nourishes the bugs in the soil. All living things in a natural setting depend on the bugs in the soil to live. Purple asters bring color to the area.

My side garden by the wooden fence is the sunniest site in my yard. It already had a good-sized purple azalea plant, a middle-sized dogwood tree, lilies of the valley, sweet woodruff and various types of Solomon's seal. To this, Andrew added Rudbeckia (coneflower), sunflowers (native), black-eyed Susans, Digema, which will grow to a fair height and have bright red flowers), bee balm (Monarda) because the bees love it, **butterfly weed** for the butterflies, and sneezeweed (which does not make you sneeze). To climb up the fence, Andrew planted variegated Virginia creeper and wisteria. The Virginia creeper's leaves turn colors in the fall. The wisteria will have lovely white blossoms in August that have a heavenly smell.



Butterfly weed.

In October, the old hosta garden was ready to be planted. Andrew designed a winding path through it with plantings on either side. It has become the fall garden. At the front of the area where there is more sun, he planted **coral bells** (Heuchella) in various colors. They were blooming when he planted them, and their color lit up the space. Also blooming were anemones in delicate pink



Coral bells.

Andrew also planted summersweet (Clethra) which produces heavenly scented flowers in August. I will have to wait until next year to see the blooms from the wild geraniums, phlox, black bugbane, and lobelias. On the ground, Andrew planted wild ginger and Solomon's Seal. On the other side Andrew planted an **oak leaf hydrangea**. It will bloom with bright pink flowers next year. It is the only hydrangea that will bloom in the shade. He also planted an ostrich fern. In the spring, Andrew will plant daffodils for color.



Oak leaf hydrangea.

The winter garden, at the bottom of the hill next to my driveway, was the last to be planted. The two American hollies had been planted earlier by the other gardeners. Andrew put cardboard and a heavy layer of mulch behind the hollies to discourage the lesser celandine from coming back into the area. Into that area he planted twisted juniper, yellow and red twig dogwoods, pussy willows, switchgrass and male and female holly berry. They made a colorful winter scene that will be even better next year. Behind in the vacant lot next door, the wild cherry trees and pachysandra will form a nice green setting for the area.

I'm anxious to see everything in bloom next year—and whether the lesser celandine is controlled. Please come and visit my garden!

Two books by Douglas Tallamy that are very helpful for understanding and appreciating Ohio native trees, plants and flowers are:

- *Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in our Gardens*
- *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard*

—Swanny Voneida

What's New with Recycling in Portage County

The Portage County Solid Waste Management District enters 2021 with a few challenges, including a contamination rate of more than 21% and a projected revenue shortfall of \$400,000. The district's processing costs have risen from \$58.48 per ton to \$77 per ton in 2021 and are expected to increase to \$93 per ton for 2022.

The district is raising rates with the goal of standardizing them across the county based on the level of service. Communities

with weekly service will be charged one rate, and communities with service every other week will be charged a different rate. Franklin and Brimfield townships have begun the conversion process. Rootstown Township will be next community to do so. Service every other week reduces the amount of truck traffic on roads by 50% and ensures the carts will be at capacity. Communities still have the right to contract with a private hauler for recycling services if they choose to do so.



The conversion decision also was based on the difficulty the district has encountered with finding drivers. While the district's benefits and retirement program are superior to what drivers can expect to receive in the private sector, private haulers can offer a higher wage than the district is able to afford. The pay differential can be from \$2 per hour to \$8 per hour more, and they offer a signing bonus up to \$5,000.

The recycling markets, while on the rebound, still does not generate enough revenue to offset the cost of processing the materials. This extra cost now must be factored into the new rates. The district would like to make the recycling service cost neutral. The recycling fees would be adjusted annually, based on the cost of providing the service.

The processing facilities are starting to invest in the use of robots for sorting the recyclable materials. The processors also have labor shortages. Their buildings are not heated, which makes for very difficult working conditions for employees on cold nights. Robots can perform the work faster and more efficiently. This results in cleaner bales of material to sell. But it also requires a larger capital investment by the processor and these costs are passed on to the entities that use their facility.

—Lorraine McCarty

Kent State Holding E-Cycle Drive in March for Students, Faculty, Staff and Community

The Kent State E-Cycle Drive is set for March 3, 10, 17 and 24 from 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the Kent State University R-17 Parking lot behind Starbucks, between South Willow Street and South Lincoln Street. Materials permitted include flat-screen TVs, personal computers, laptop computers, servers and storage devices, monitors (CRT, LCD), flat-screen TV docking stations, floppy drives, DVD/CD burners, VCRs, circuit boards, scanners, copiers, printers, cables, wires, extension cords, digital cameras, cellular phones, DVD players, network and telecom equipment and small kitchen appliances. Kitchen appliances larger than a microwave will *not* be accepted. See the flyer below for more information. For a printable version of the flyer, click [here](#).



E-CYCLE DRIVE

AT KENT STATE UNIVERSITY
POWERED BY UNIVERSITY FACILITIES MANAGEMENT & OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY
RECYCLED BY INFINITE ELECTRONICS RECYCLING, LLC

JUST ABOUT ANYTHING WITH A CORD

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| FLAT SCREEN TVS | CIRCUIT BOARDS |
| PERSONAL COMPUTERS | SCANNERS |
| LAPTOP COMPUTERS | COPIERS & PRINTERS |
| SERVERS & STORAGE DEVICES | CABLES, WIRES, EXTENSION CORDS |
| MAINFRAME EQUIPMENT | DIGITAL CAMERAS |
| MONITORS (CRT, LCD) | CELLULAR PHONES |
| DOCKING STATIONS | VCRS, DVD PLAYERS |
| FLOPPY DRIVES | NETWORK & TELECOM EQUIPMENT |
| DVD/CD BURNERS | SMALL KITCHEN APPLIANCES* |

***KITCHEN APPLIANCES LARGER THAN A MICROWAVE
ARE NOT ACCEPTED**

EVENT IS OPEN TO STUDENTS, FACULTY, STAFF, AND COMMUNITY OF KENT

**COLLECTION POINT:
PARKING LOT BEHIND STARBUCKS
R-17 LOT BETWEEN S. LINCOLN ST.
& S. WILLOW ST.**

**MARCH 3, 10, 17, 24
7:30 A.M. TO 3:00 P.M.**



Reminiscence Leads to New Understanding

KEC recently received a note from Mark Skinner, who now lives in Columbus but grew up in Kent. Not long ago, he contributed to and re-engaged with KEC. In his note, Skinner mentioned a yellowed newspaper clipping from 1971 that brought back memories for him about helping to organize and participate in a KEC activity on his street that meant so much to him, even as young child. He went on:

"I recently wrote Lis [Regula, past president of KEC] . . . about KEC not being bold enough, not taking on the really important systemic issues that I feel collapsing over us in my frequent moments of despair over seemingly little progress. And now, while thinking back 50 years to my childhood, I realize it is those seemingly little tasks that build the commitment, the strength, the endurance and the resolve to do all that we can do, individually and collectively, to heal



the planet.”

He said that “as a nine-year-old reading ‘first editions’ of Doctor Seuss’s the Lorax and excitedly turning loose newspapers into tight bundles of recyclables . . . my mother helped me . . . develop environmental interests and sense of belonging to a larger space than myself.” He also reflected on his “naive effort to save the (now knowing doomed) uninterrupted forest lining the Appalachian foothills that whizzed by the rear seat window for that 9-year old kid as he rode in his parents’ car to his paternal Grandparents’ house—in farmed/logged/coaled/fracked/raped Belmont County with dirt-poor people who saw natural resources that God put here for their benefit—while the child saw a much bigger, everything-is-connected scene in ways he could not explain.”

Skinner continued, saying, “That same kid is now having a chance, in a small way, to help influence legislation to possibly influence billions of dollars of federal investment toward better infrastructure improvements, better economic opportunities, better futures—all with a greener lens because of the early influences etched into his ethics and mores and beliefs by his parent and influencing role models. KEC was one of these, I realize, at an earlier age than I recalled.”

He concluded: “I realize, Lis, that I was terribly wrong to criticize KEC’s current efforts toward backyard native landscaping and invasive species and even recycling. I only ask, as the annual meeting approaches, that EVERY effort is made to involve the current crop of nine-year-olds running around Kent (and their obliging parents willing to haul the newspaper recycling equivalents in their station wagons across town) in ALL projects resulting from the world cafe groups you’ve identified for the annual meeting. Instilling a lifelong commitment to improving the planet, even a little bit, might be all we can ask on our way to the larger, more systemic change we all want.”

—Mark Skinner

Recommended Listening and Reading

Check out these audio and print recommendations by KEC members.

TED Talk by Luisa Neubauer: “Why you Should Be a Climate Activist”

Neubauer hopes that future geography classes will teach that climate change is a challenge that was won by people like you and me because they started acting in time and understood that they had nothing to lose and everything to win. Neubauer offered her ideas about how to win. To listen to the talk, click [here](#).



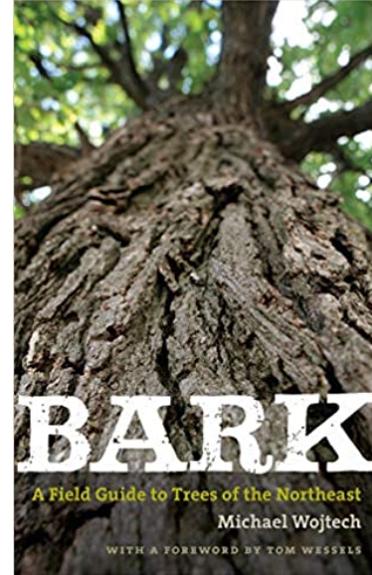
—Recommended by Lorraine McCarty

Bark: A Field Guide to Trees of the Northeast, by Michael Wojtec

Whether you’re a naturalist or a parent leading kids on a hike, this is an essential book to learn about nature and trees. The book includes detailed information and illustrations covering each phase of a tree’s lifecycle and explains how to identify trees by their bark alone. Chapters cover the structure and ecology of tree bark and include descriptions of bark appearance, an easy-to-use

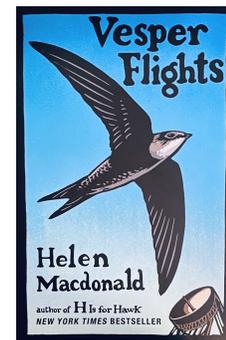
identification key, and supplemental information on non-bark characteristics. The more than 450 photographs, illustrations, and maps in the book will show you how to distinguish the textures, shapes, and colors of bark so you can recognize various tree species and understand why these traits evolved.

—Recommended by Renee Rehtzoke



Vesper Flights, by Helen Macdonald

This *New York Times* Book of the Year cautions us to avoid hopelessness. It's a stunning book that urges us to reconsider our relationship with the natural world and fight to preserve it. The collection of essays includes meditations on the notions of captivity and freedom, immigration and flight as the author observes the massive migration of songbirds from the top of the Empire State Building, watches tens of thousands of cranes in Hungary, and seeks the last golden orioles in Suffolk's poplar forests.



—Recommended by Swanny Voneida

Environmentally Focused Best Inventions of 2020

Time magazine's list of 100 Best Inventions of 2020 (November 30/December 7, 2020) included these environmentally focused items:

The Climate Cop: *Climate TRACK*

This environmental analytics tool uses a combination of machine learning, infrared satellite imagery and advanced computer modeling to track polluters in real time. It will use a new data-rich portal that will be released in 2021 and is backed by a coalition of seven environmental nonprofits and former Vice President Al Gore. The coalition wants to verify that governments are honoring their pledges to cut greenhouse gasses. Climate TRACK also will enable companies to better judge the cleanliness of their—and inform the public about what they're doing to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Artificial Intelligence Built for the Climate: *BrainBox AI*

BrainBox AI creates "autonomous buildings" by using data such as weather forecasts to predict a building's thermal needs and then adjust the building's air conditioning and heating to meet those needs. Since its launch 2019, BrainBox AI already controls 40

million square feet of building space, reducing the buildings' carbon footprints by as much as 20% to 40%.



The Sustainable Smartphone: *Fairphone 3+*

The Fairphone 3+ smartphone (roughly \$554), made by a Dutch company, uses minerals from conflict-free zones and is sourced from more-responsible supply chains. The phone uses 40% recycled plastic and has replaceable parts, which allows the user to swap out the battery or screen or upgrade the camera with just a screwdriver. The phone's repair friendliness leads to an expected lifespan of five years. Given that 50 million tons of electronic waste is created each year, this model for smartphones could encourage users to hold on to their devices longer, which would be good for their pocketbooks and the good for society.

Clothes Made Out of Clothes: *Renewcell Circulose*

Produced by a Swedish company, Renewcell Circulose is a natural and biodegradable raw material made by recovering cotton from worn-out clothing. Every year, 85% of textiles are sent to landfills. The process the company invented is powered by renewable energy and uses eco-friendly chemicals to break down and strip the color from discarded fabrics. Synthetic fibers are removed, and the sheet of cellulose pulp that is left behind can be turned into fibers that are ready to be woven into fresh fabrics. H & M and Levi started selling clothing made from Circulose in the spring of 2020.

Composting Made Easy: *Sepura*

This device fits under your sink and replaces your garbage disposal. It separates and collects the solids and, instead of grinding them, directs them to a stink-free 2.6-gallon bin that can be removed when full and added to your composting pile or a collection box. Right now, the vast majority of 40 million tons of food waste end up in landfills or down the drain. The first 2,000 preordered units will ship in early 2021.

A Refuge for Bees: *Beeswise Beehome*

This beehive powered by artificial intelligence uses precision robotics, computer vision, and AI to monitor up to 2 million bees, 24/7, all for \$15 a month. It can detect exposure to parasites, irregular temperatures and more, and its systems can immediately apply the remedy—pesticides, for example. This smart technology can double pollination capacity and honey production while decreasing colony mortality rates, helping the bees to



thrive.

Industry Powered by the Sun: *Hellogen HelioHeat*

This device cleans up the process used to create steel and concrete by using the power of the sun instead of dirty fossil fuels. Hellogen HelioHeat uses a field of 100,000 motorized computer-controlled mirrors to concentrate sunlight in the direction of a 40-meter-tall tower. This giant magnifying glass gets up to 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit, where it must be to melt steel or concrete or make electricity. In the future, it also could be used to create hydrogen for zero-powered automobiles.

Water, Water Anywhere: *Skysource WEDEW*

This mobile generator produces water from the air. Users dump discarded plant materials, such as wood chips or nutshells, into the machine, which heats us and produces water vapor. The generator then condenses the vapor into drinkable water. In 2020, the company formed a partnership with the World Food Program to bring the generator to a refugee camp in Uganda and to communities in Tanzania. The whole system fits into a single 40-foot transport container. This technology is very important for the world as climate change makes water a scarcer and scarcer resource in many places.



The Future of Farming: *FarmWise: Titan ET-35*

The Titan ET-35 is a driverless tractor with computer vision that can eradicate weeds organically rather than using harmful pesticides. It can identify the crops as well as the weeds and reach for the weeds within 1 centimeter of precision and pull them out. The FT-35 tractors are being used in California and Arizona, with more to come in 2021.

Hydrogen Power for Airplanes: *ZeroAvia*

ZeroAvia is a zero-emission hydrogen-electric power train that substitutes hydrogen fuel cells and electric motors for conventional engines powered by fossil fuels. A small M-class six-seater Piper Cub was recently flown on a test flight north of London. The company predicts that the technology will be able to power a 20-seat aircraft with a range of 500 miles within three years and a 100-passenger seat jet within 10 years. Bluer skies ahead!

A Sustainable Substitute: *Impossible Pork*

This plant-based product is made from soy but tastes uncannily like pork, which is the most consumed animal protein in the world. After its 2020 preview, a commercial rollout is in the works.

—Summarized by Lorraine McCarty

EPA and Environmental Watch

Well. Joe Biden's inauguration as president and his policy platform are a breath of fresh air after the past administration—both literally and figuratively. Biden is again pursuing a climate-friendly agenda for the country by appointing competent people to lead the fight, by listening to the scientists, and by setting an agenda to undo some of the worst damage from the Trump administration. Biden's overall climate strategy is to treat it as the existential emergency it is and to eliminate carbon dioxide from the U.S. economy by 2050.



On his first day in office, Biden signed executive orders to:

- Reenter the Paris Climate Agreement.
- Cancel the Keystone Pipeline permit.
- Direct agencies to consider revising vehicle fuel standards and emissions standards.
- Direct all agencies and departments to review and take actions to address/rewrite federal regulations. (There are more than 100 regulations, so it won't happen overnight.)
- Place a temporary moratorium on all oil and fracking activities in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.
- Reestablish the Interagency Working Group to find the social cost of greenhouse gasses. (The cost was \$50 in the Obama administration, and Trump slashed it to \$2 or \$3; however, this number was rejected by the courts, partly because it did not capture the global costs.)
- Reestablish racial equity, with every agency told to review their actions to ensure racial equity, and overturning Trump's orders to stop such training on the subject.
- Reverse rollbacks on vehicle emission standards.

The following week, Biden issued sweeping executive orders to confront global climate change and other environmental crises. He has stated that to him, this means creating green jobs—not losing jobs, as some opponents claim. These orders did the following:

- Elevated climate change to a foreign policy and national security priority.
- Temporarily paused new oil and gas leasing on federal lands and in offshore waters and kicked off a rigorous review of all existing leasing and permitting practices related to fossil fuel development on public lands and waters. (Note: The order does not affect current leases.)
- Eliminated fossil fuel subsidies and identified new opportunities to spur innovation, commercialization, and deployment of clean technologies and infrastructure and then use the subsidy money to invest in clean energy jobs in America. (The order covers \$15 billion and requires decisions to be made about what to cut and what to fund, meaning that the process will be slow. In addition, the order is vague.)
- Set a national goal of protecting 30% of America's land and water by 2030, a move that scientists *at home and abroad* say will go a long way toward combating the dual climate and extinction crises. The order established a process for engaging with a broad range of stakeholders, including states, tribes, farmers, and anglers, and it fulfills a campaign promise.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer also has instructed every committee in the senate to move on climate legislation, saying it's long past time for senators to do so. The House has already passed such legislation.

The Washington Post has launched a website that will help all of us track Biden's environmental actions as he moves his own agenda forward and tackles undoing Trump's rollback of environmental protections (there were more than 200 of them). To view the Biden administration's progress, click [here](#).

And check back regularly because it is being kept up to date.

On February 14, 15 *new protections* were *added*, 15 were *overturned*, 59 were *targeted*, and 137 *still need to be targeted*

The website also shows more detail by categories and explains which rollbacks of protections are easy, medium, or difficult to overturn. The categories are (1) air pollution and greenhouse gases, (2) chemical safety, (3) drilling and extraction, (4) infrastructure and permitting, (5) transparency, (6) water pollution and (7) wildlife.

Lastly, I need to tell you about a good thing Trump did for the environment in 2020 before he left office: He signed the COVID aid bill that was attached to a \$1.4 trillion spending bill to fund the government (which had bipartisan support). While many people may not realize it, this bill authorized \$35 billion in spending over the next five years on solar, wind and other clean power sources. It also included new regulations aimed at phasing out hydrofluorocarbon, a planet-warming coolant that is often used in refrigerators and air conditioners. It also extends (for two years) tax credits for solar and wind power companies. Those credits originally were set to expire at the end of 2020. The bill also put money toward research on new "grid technology" to store energy and to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. And let's not forget about the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which was reauthorized for another five years and will receive incremental funding increases (pending yearly authorization) from \$300 million annually in 2021 to \$475 million by 2026. I am sure Biden will need more funds to accomplish his goals, but this is a hopeful start.

There were several more regulation rollbacks that Trump threw in at the last minute that Biden will have to add to his fix-it list. But a federal judge did block one last-minute rule that would have limited the health studies that the Environmental Protection Agency could use in developing regulations. The judge apparently listened to the hundreds of thousands of objections from scientists, public-health and environmental advocates and regulators at hearings and in written testimony in ruling against the Trump administration. The judge also ruled that the Trump administration had finalized the rule without the required 30-day notice.

I look forward to more positive developments for the environment, public health and science in the months to come.

Sources: *The Washington Post*, January 3, 2021; *The Washington Post*, February 9, 2021; "The Week with Joshua Johnson, January 21, 2021; HuffPost, January 21, 2021; HuffPost, January 27, 2021; *Akron Beacon Journal*, December 24, 2020; "The Rachel Maddow Show," February 3, 2021; *Record-Courier*, January 28, 2021; NBC.com, December 28, 2020.

—Lorraine McCarty

'Giving Up on Democracy' Intersects with Racial Injustice, Water and Health: A Cautionary Tale

Most of us have heard about the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, that came to light several years ago. Well, in January of this year, two ex-health officials were in court on charges of involuntary manslaughter for nine deaths from Legionnaires' Disease, and former governor Rick Snyder was in court facing charges of willful neglect of duty to protect the citizens of Michigan in its manmade disaster that poisoned the entire city of nearly 100,000 residents with lead and caused an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease.

On the January 14 "Rachel Maddow Show," Maddow called the Flint water crisis the story of the state of Michigan "*giving up on democracy*." In 2007 during his first term as governor, Snyder signed into law a process where the governor could call an emergency and bypass the elected officials by appointing an emergency manager who would have the power to unilaterally overrule local citizens and elected officials. The citizens of Michigan did not like this system and voted to overturn it. In the next legislative session, however, a new law that was almost impossible to overturn was passed and then signed by the governor. Over the next several years, the placement of emergency managers became common practice in Michigan and, in many instances, these managers just stayed, even after the emergency was over. Many of the emergency managers were placed in predominately minority communities



Rick Snyder, former governor of Michigan

where the governor did not like the local leaders' ideas or thought they were too slow to act or, in some cases, the thought he knew better than the local leaders about what would be good for the community. A study by Eclectablog (which reports on Michigan politics) has shown that by 2013, one-half of Black voters had no local democracy because their elected officials had no real authority.

In an effort to save money, the emergency manager in Flint decided that Flint would no longer get its water from the Great Lakes and instead would purchase water, at a lower price, from the Flint River. Rivers, however, are more corrosive than lake water, and the switch to the new source was done improperly—that is, without treating the water so it would not corrode the pipes that bring water to Flint residents. Residents noticed the pollution of the water, they complained, and they even got the city council to vote 7-1 to restore the city to lake water; however, the emergency manager appointed by Snyder autocratically overruled the residents' request and ignored scientists and medical personnel until much national pressure was brought to bear. In the meantime, all the children in Flint will live the rest of their lives with diminished capacities because of lead poisoning, and others are dead after succumbing to Legionnaires' disease related to the water situation.

Those charged (including six other officials not enumerated here) have pled not guilty and are innocent until proven guilty. In these charges, however, we are seeing what accountability can look like—with Snyder having to face being the first Michigan governor to be criminally charged for what he did in office and having to answer to the changes in a court of law—even if it did take years. This attempt to override democracy has reverberations that are relevant to what is occurring now in several states and in Washington, D.C., where populist activists are trying to bypass our democratic processes, which we all need to work very hard to protect.

Sources: *Akron Beacon Journal*, January 15, 2021; "The Rachel Maddow Show," January 14, 2021.

—Summarized by Lorraine McCarty

Did You Know . . .

Chemicals in food add up. After analyzing nearly 300 safety reviews sent to the Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Defense Fund found that only one even considered the cumulative impact of chemical additives. The EDF and partners filed a petition demanding that the FDA follow the law that requires a study of the cumulative impacts on health before allowing chemicals in food. Current practice leaves consumers at risk of chronic disease. (Environmental Defense Fund, Winter 2021)

Fracked gas caverns nixed in Ohio. Earthjustice and partners successfully got drilling permits canceled for a project that would have created underground storage for dangerous fracked gas liquids in the Ohio River Valley. The permits did not have a public comment period, and a draft permit had not been prepared. The chemicals could have polluted drinking water of five million people. (Earthjustice, Winter 2020)

Coalition fighting for clean transportation. Working with a large coalition of partners, Earthjustice helped secure the nation's first electric truck standard to help clean up air pollution near ports, freeways and warehouses. The rule mandates that the majority of all new trucks sold in California be zero-emissions vehicles. (Earthjustice, *2020 Victory Report*)

What's Changed in the Past Two Months. Bottle-fed infants ingest 1,580 plastic particles each day. . . . California's energy storage capacity passes Australia's, making the state the storage capacity in California the largest in the world. . . . Record temperatures and winds sparked more than 90 major wildfires across the West though, for the most part, major news media outlets failed to make a connection between the fires and climate disruption. . . . Leaked documents from ExxonMobil showed a plan to massively increase the company's emission to



143 million tons of carbon dioxide per year by 2025. (Sierra magazine, January/February 2021)

Bold climate action taken. Michigan joined California, New York, Hawaii and Maine in taking bold steps to reduce carbon pollution. Similar to those states, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed an executive order will dramatically cut carbon pollution and achieve carbon neutrality across the entire state by 2050. (Natural Resources Defense Council, Winter 2021)

NRDC head resigns. Gina McCarthy, former head of the Environmental Protection Agency under President Barack Obama, resigned from the National Resources Defense Council to accept the position of national climate advisor in the Biden administration. (Natural Resources Defense Council letter, December 17, 2020)

—Summarized by Lorraine McCarty

Environment in the News

General Motors to Eliminate Gas and Diesel Light Duty Cars and SUVs by 2035

The Washington Post - January 28, 2021

The iconic American car company will stop making cars, vans and SUVs by 2035 and move toward a promising future of new electric vehicles for American motorists by investing \$27 billion in electric vehicles and associated products from 2020 through 2025, including refurbishing factories and investing in battery production. The company also pledged to make its factories and other facilities carbon neutral by 2040. These actions show the industry realizes that climate change is real and that action on the part of the industry is needed. Aside from the plans announced by President Joe Biden to decrease carbon emissions, California will stop selling gas-powered cars within 15 years, while the United Kingdom will stop selling gas- and diesel-powered vehicles by 2030. Other automakers also are focusing on increasing production of their electric vehicles.



Pandemic Pushes Exxon to Historic Annual Loss, \$20 Billion Cut in Shale Value

Reuters - February 2, 2021

Exxon slashed spending by nearly a third and plans to cut up to 15% of its workforce and add \$21 billion to its debt to cover spending and restructuring. The company stated that its turnaround will take some time. Its willingness to cut costs to pay a dividend will sit well with investors, although environmentalists and activist investors are pushing the company toward clean energy.

Pandemic Adds Sting to Ohio's Weak Coal Output

Akron Beacon Journal - February 12, 2021

Coal production levels continued their steep downward trajectory each year in Ohio. Then the overall use of energy decreased considerably due to the pandemic. There was a 33.2% decrease in production in January 2021 compared with January 2020. Companies continue to shift to cheaper fuels such as natural gas and renewable energy, moves that President Joe Biden is promoting. The money put into reclamation by the coal companies is falling as their earnings fall, and the fear is that as more companies either go bankrupt or consolidate, funds for reclaiming mining sites will be insufficient. That outcome would leave the state of Ohio to pick up the tab. In addition, if federal officials revive the Obama administration's policies on stream regulation, coal industry profitability will continue to erode.

Mexico Ousts Glyphosate and GM Corn

PAN (Pesticide Action Network) Blog - January 14, 2021

Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador closed out 2020 by issuing a decree that will phase out the use of the herbicide glyphosate and genetically modified (GM) corn in the country by 2024, giving companies time to replace glyphosate with sustainable, culturally appropriate alternatives to safeguard human health and the country's bicultural diversity and

the environment. Small farmers, organic growers and opponents of GM crops celebrated this win, saying that GM corn contaminates native varieties of corn and encourages the use of pesticides. Proponents of safer methods say that simultaneously phasing out these tools of corporate-controlled agriculture is highly encouraging.

Winner of 2020 Photo Contest

Wildones.org (Native Plants and Natural Landscapes - December 11, 2020)

Joan Brandwein, a member of Wild Ones' Big River Big Woods Chapter, won the Best of Show award in the Minnesota organization's 2020 photo contest. The [winning photo](#) is titled "Native Bee on Native Aster." For more information about Wild Ones, click [here](#).

B & W Raises \$283 Million for Clean Projects

Akron Beacon Journal - February 17, 2021

The global energy manufacturer B &W will use this new capital to support clean-energy growth initiatives and pay down a significant amount of debt. The company plans to continue growing its renewable and environmental segments, including deploying their waste-to-energy carbon-capture technology to help meet critical climate goals.

Mahoning Valley Invests in Future

Record-Courier - February 17, 2021

General Motors has reached a settlement with Ohio to pay back the tax breaks it received but invalidated when the company broke its commitment to job-creation and job-retention requirements by closing its plant in Lordstown. GM committed to paying \$5 million to Youngstown State University for workforce development in partnership with Eastern Gateway Community College and providing funding to create a YSU Energy Storage and Innovation Training Center, which will support emerging technology industries in the Mahoning Valley by helping provide a capable workforce for the valley. GM also will invest in programs and services that focus on inclusion and equality with the goal of serving the unemployed and underemployed, and it will give \$3 million to Lordstown Village for a new water tower to add capacity for future growth; \$2.5 million to the Eastgate Regional Council of Governments for infrastructure improvements to prepare for economic growth and new jobs, including the new Smart Transit Corridor along State Route 45 into Warren; and \$1.5 million to the Mahoning Manufactures Coalition for workforce skills development in the community to support the industries that will develop there.

FirstEnergy to Forgo \$102 Million 'Decoupling' Provision in Scandal-Ridden House Bill 6

Columbus Dispatch - February 6, 2021

FirstEnergy will forego the \$102 million in fees due the company under the controversial House Bill 6. Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost agreed in turn to [pause further proceedings in lawsuits](#) seeking to block portions of HB 6 from taking effect, pending the outcome of federal criminal proceedings against former Republican House Speaker Larry Householder and others indicted in a \$61 million bribery probe connected to the bill. The criminal process will go first, and then all remaining claims will be decided in the future.

Fracking in Ohio Didn't Produce Economic Boom

Akron Beacon Journal - February 11, 2021

A new report by The Ohio River Valley Institute, and independent think tank, shows that 22 counties in Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia should have benefited the most from the Marcellus and Utica shale region—but they did not. All three states saw an economic decline, and Ohio did the worst. Seven eastern Ohio counties had a net job loss of more than 8% and a population loss of more than 3%. People did find jobs, and some are getting \$5,000 to \$7,000 an acre to lease their properties; however, job numbers may not tell the whole story. Many landowners who made money from leasing their rights to frackers created family foundations so they could reinvest their money, some moved away, some saved about half of what they received for other purposes (such as leaving the money to their children, reinvesting the money their small farm, building a new barn or purchasing a pickup truck or tractor).

Anti-Fracking Criticism and Comments Flood Akron City Council

Akron wants to sell mineral rights for the fracking of 475 acres of watershed land the city owns around La Due Reservoir in Geauga County—land that is part of Akron’s water supply. After receiving more than 100 emails and voicemails against the plan, the legislation was removed from council’s legislative agenda. (KEC editor’s note: KEC has been assured that because of the strong feelings against the measure, this is not just a temporary referral back to a committee as the newspaper stated but is off the table.)

Strategy to Rid Lake Erie of Grass Carp 'Humming'

Akron Beacon Journal - January 29, 2021

Grass carp, which can grow up to 70 pounds, were originally brought to the United States in the 1960s to control vegetation in small ponds without the use of pesticides. Only sterile fish were used at first. A few years ago, however, officials began finding in the Sandusky and Maumee rivers fertile fish that could reproduce. The sheer size of Lake Erie makes it hard to control the carp, and the inability to see the fish by looking at the surface of the lake makes controlling the fish even more difficult. The carp, however, are susceptible when they move to the two rivers to spawn. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources and its partners developed the Lake Erie Grass Carp Strategy: 2019-2023 to keep the carp from spreading outside Western Lake Erie and the Maumee and Sandusky rivers. The scientists are researching where the fertile and non-fertile fish are located and where they spawn and hatch. The scientists also are engaged in vegetation mapping, the tagging 50 fish to send scientists early warning data, and other activities that can help their efforts. For example, they have developed strike teams to respond to warnings and remove fish, and they are developing biological barriers to prevent the carp from spawning. So far, so good.

2020 Could Be Earth's Hottest Year

Akron Beacon Journal - January 1, 2021

Climate scientists are pouring over data to decide if this past year will surpass 2016 as the hottest year on record or if it will be in second place, where NASA’s November data places it.

Earth's Carbon Emissions Show Big Drop

Record-Courier - December 14, 2020

Carbon dioxide emissions fell by 7%, according to the Global Carbon Project (GCP). The decline represents the biggest yearly drop on record, with transportation accounting for the largest share of the decline. The GCP attributes the decline to the pandemic and COVID-10 lockdowns. Emissions fell 12% in the United States and 11% in Europe but only 1.7% in China, according to the GCP.

Research Trip to Study Impact of Giant Floating Iceberg

Akron Beacon Journal - December 12, 2020

Scientists are embarking on a mission to discover what impact an Antarctic floating iceberg the size of Delaware will have on wildlife and marine life. The iceberg broke away from the Larsen C ice shelf in 2017 and is now 47 miles away from the island of South Georgia. The iceberg is breaking up, and scientists are concerned about the impact its melting will have on freshwater.

Make the Corn Belt a Carbon Belt

Record-Courier - December 14, 2020

U.S. federal farm subsidies tripled, reaching \$46 billion, during the Trump presidency. That increase, say experts, is neither protecting the future of agriculture or the family farm. Climate is scorching the American west, and a machinery-intensive system of industrial agriculture that is based on continual land cultivation combined with fertilizer use and livestock emissions do nothing to help the climate threat. Neither did the country’s failed trade war with China, the fall-out from the coronavirus pandemic, or super windstorms, one of which impacted half of the Iowa corn crop this summer. Despite all the subsidies, farm bankruptcies in 2020 were up 8% compared with 2019. Farmers certainly need help, but the author of this editorial, Daniel Imhoff, sees the need for the modern-day equivalent of an agricultural moonshot. That “moonshot” would require a plan to transition hundreds of

millions of acres from corn and soybean production to a year-round ground cover with permanent plantings that could pull carbon out of the atmosphere and store it in deep-rooted plants in the soil. Imhoff notes that the United States could sell the majority of its excess corn and soybeans overseas. He also urges scientists to conduct research into perennial grain crops that do not need annual tilling of the soil, a process that helps to deplete the soil of nutrients. Emhoff stressed the need to ensure the long-term habitability of our one and only planet, which, he said, is a big challenge before us.

—Summarized by Lorraine McCarty

KEC Membership: Join Today!

We welcome anyone who wants to join the Kent Environmental Council and support our efforts. If you are already a member, you will be receiving a reminder of renewal by mail the month before the expiration date for your dues. Remember, dues are the main source of income for KEC.



Basic memberships help us maintain communication among our members for many of our activities. Sustaining, Organizational and Lifetime memberships enhance our ability to implement our education and advocacy responsibilities and to have a grant program to encourage innovative environmental projects.

Membership levels are **Student:** \$5; **Golden Buckeye:** \$15; **First-Year Member Special:** \$25; **Individual:** \$35; **Household:** \$50; **Sustaining:** \$100; **Organization:** \$100; **Lifetime:** \$500

To join or renew, send your name, address, phone number, email address and check made payable to Kent Environmental Council, P.O. Box 395, Kent, OH 44240.

To join or renew online with PayPal, click [here](#).

*KEC dues are **not** tax deductible because the organization has a 501(c)(4) status.*

Informal Breakfast and Discussion Every Friday

Join us for an informal breakfast discussion of environmental issues at Little City Grill every Friday at 8 a.m. No reservations are necessary. Until further notice, we will be gathering for breakfast and discussion via Zoom. To access Zoom for the breakfast, click [here](#).



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