



This Earth Month, Sierra Club Illinois' Three Rivers Project And Piasa Palisades Group Celebrate Environmental Progress In The Metro East

April 20 2023 9:03 AM



**SIERRA
CLUB**

FOUNDATION

ALTON - In honor of Earth Month, the Three Rivers Project and Piasa Palisades Group of Sierra Club Illinois are celebrating significant conservation and clean energy progress in the Metro East. As the leading grassroots voice to explore, enjoy, and protect the

planet, Sierra Club Illinois has worked on conservation and energy issues in the region for over 50 years and has made significant headway thanks to ongoing community participation and advocacy.

After three years of advocacy from volunteers in the Metro East and across the state, Governor Pritzker signed the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) into law in 2021. In the eighteen months since, community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and governmental agencies have worked together to inform the public about the benefits of the bill and work strategically to implement CEJA's programs equitably. State agencies like the Illinois Commerce Commission and the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity continue to build out the staff necessary to implement this legislation.

"Implementing a law as massive as CEJA takes time, and it's critical that we get this right," said Three Rivers Project co-Coordinator Virginia Woulfe-Beile. "Two major pieces of federal climate legislation—the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act—were passed shortly after CEJA, so a lot of our implementation work has been grounded in figuring out how to maximize the benefits of CEJA while also taking advantage of funding from these new federal laws. These conversations and plans are all grounded in the spirit of CEJA—equity."

Alton and East St. Louis are two of the thirteen communities slated to house workforce hubs designed to provide clean energy job training, hiring, and new business opportunities in BIPOC, low-income, and environmental justice communities. Sierra Club Illinois continues to work with local governments and community partners to ensure the community knows what to expect and which agencies to turn to when the workforce hub opens.

"While we work toward Illinois' just transition to clean energy, there are several key ways Illinoisans in the Metro East can take advantage of CEJA and do their part to protect the environment," says Virginia Woulfe-Beile. "Practicing energy efficiency and investing in rooftop or community solar through CEJA incentives is a great start. But there are countless ways to honor and protect the Earth, and some of them start in our own backyards."

In addition to its work to advocate for a just transition to renewable energy, the Three Rivers Project also works to protect the region through conservation efforts. In Earth Month alone, the Three Rivers Project and Piasa Palisades Group are hosting litter clean-ups, invasive species removal days, controlled prescribed burns, native tree, flower and grass planting days, and educational events.

“The intersection of our conservation and clean energy work is what makes the Three Rivers Project’s work unique,” says Three Rivers Project co-Coordinator Christine Favilla. “Without strong public demand for the protection of this area’s remaining natural resources and a transition away from polluting fossil fuels, the Metro East region will face intensified air and water pollution, increased flooding, and devastating biodiversity loss. Conservation work like invasive species removal must go hand in hand with our clean energy advocacy if we’re going to protect the Metro East’s unique ecosystem.”

The Three Rivers Project and Piasa Palisades Groups’ conservation and clean energy work wouldn’t be possible without the dedication of the Piasa Palisades Group’s leadership, partners in the business and environmental sectors, and the work of countless volunteers. To get involved with Sierra Club Illinois, visit sierraclub.org/illinois/piasa-palisades.