

Green Sanctuary Committee Annual Report, FY 2022–2023

The past year kept FUUSM's Green Sanctuary Committee members busy, as usual, with learning, watchdogging, community activism, manual labor, and writing. Co-chairs are Dawn Hewitt, Debra Miller, and Jim Grecni, and active members include Adeline Bailey, Mike Bailey, Dave Ballantyne, Shari Ballantyne, George Banziger, Vic Elam, Chris Jacobs, Kelcey Jacobs, Mark Krivchenia, Ginnie McNeil, Maggie Meyer, Rebecca Phillips, and Cindy Taylor. Throughout the year we met in person and simultaneously via Zoom, and we plan to continue that to accommodate those who live distant from Marietta. We are grateful for the dozens of others who are on the GSC's email list who help us out when we need it and support our activities and events.

Earth Day 2022

Last April during Earth Week we conducted a Sunday Service, with Ginnie McNeil providing the reflection on brine education. We had a table at the 2022 Earth Day Marietta event that we shared with the local chapter of Citizen's Climate Lobby (CCL), Faith Communities Together for a Sustainable Future (FaCT Ohio), and Mid-Ohio Valley Climate Action (MOVCA). We also staffed a table to register new voters.

Honoring Indigenous People

In May, we screened the film *The Condor and the Eagle*, which is about environmental efforts of Indigenous People in North America working with Indigenous South American environmental activists. Inspired by their examples, we began an ongoing adventure into exploring the mindset and culture of North American Indigenous People in an attempt to honor them. We formed an unofficial subcommittee dubbed Honoring Indigenous People (aka the HIP team), and many of us read *Braiding Sweetgrass*, by Robin Wall Kimmerer. We met (in person and via Zoom) to discuss the book several times, and many of us found the book and the discussions to be powerful, moving, and inspiring. At our booth at Parkersburg's multicultural festival, we spotlighted indigenous people. In July, we held an event we called the Three Sisters Dinner to raise money for indigenous environmental activists. We served foods inspired by native North American cuisine, featuring the three sisters (squash, beans, and corn), buffalo, venison, and more. Cindy Taylor's feature presentation of indigenous basketry was mesmerizing and extremely well received. We exceeded our fundraising goal and sent more than \$1,300 to Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth, earmarking it for their Indigenous Solidarity Fund. Some of us traveled to a Pow-Wow at Hannibal Locks, and the HIP group contributed to the water ceremony service in September, sharing our insights from what we had learned about indigenous ways. We screened two other films focusing on Indigenous People: *First Daughter* and *the Black Snake*, about indigenous leader, activist, and former vice-presidential candidate Winona

LaDuke—and the black snake of an oil pipeline; and *The Territory*, about competing claims on the Amazon rainforest in Brazil, from the indigenous people who reside and sustainably subsist there, to illegal squatters, land grabbers, and agribusiness. Whenever we screen films, discussions invariably follow to the benefit of all.

DuPont Clear Into the Future Grant Projects

In 2020, we were awarded a Clear Into the Future Grant from DuPont that funded two local projects: installation of a solar-powered charging bench; and the creation of a pollinator garden on a steep bank on the Harmar side of the Muskingum River. Rebecca Phillips was the capable and persistent leader on both projects. After much foot-dragging from the city, in the fall of '22 the solar bench was finally installed behind the Armory along the River Trail. It works! It will charge a cell phone! (BYO USB charging cable.) A router that came with the bench will allow a wifi signal to reach it, but was broken upon delivery and will be replaced. Installing an informational sign inside the bench's display window—to credit DuPont's environmental grant, the City of Marietta, and FUUSM's GSC—remains an obstacle, and the bench manufacturer is providing no help. But as we attempt to figure it out, we realize: FUUSM Green Sanctuary Committee needs a logo! We plan to have news on that front in next year's annual report!

The Fort Street pollinator plot is the opposite of a one-and-done project. Not only has the physical scope of the planting expanded, including a heritage bed of flowers long cultivated by its neighbors, but the participation has grown to include Harmar neighbors, the Rotary Club, and Marietta Main Street. We have had lots of help and support from the City of Marietta, and the generous donations of mulch, bricks, a dripline watering system, hoses, and other materials have been as important as the labor of weeding, digging, hauling, planting, mulching, etc., and that labor will continue for years to come. Interfaith Power and Light recognized this project with a \$500 award, which we used to purchase more native and/or pollinator friendly plants. Meanwhile, this pollinator plot is “on the map” of Homegrown National Parks, the first in Washington County. We staffed a well-attended information table during Harmar Days to explain this unconventional garden. We installed a brick mowing edge at the top of the bank, and a native shrub border at the bottom of the slope. There is pending news on this project, which we will report on next year!

Watchdogging

Watchdogging is an important component of GSC activism. We attempt to stay abreast of area events and programs that support our goals, as well as policies, practices, and events that threaten or harm the environment. We share this information with the congregation and the public.

The GSC is deeply concerned about the number and volume of brine (fracking waste) injection wells in Washington County. According to 2021 data, our county leads the state in amount of brine pumped underground—more than five million barrels. We have attended and spoken out at several community meetings opposing the permitting of new wells, pointing out the threat they pose to surface and ground water, and that they offer no real benefit to our community. George Banziger has tried to convince our county commissioners of the threat and worked with ReImagine Appalachia to urge them to encourage green manufacturing in our area—jobs for the future that would improve rather than threaten or harm—our air, water, and health. We hope to find common ground with state legislators and agencies on capping orphaned oil and gas wells. We made contact with the Earthjustice legal services office in Chicago, who, like GSC, is interested in the environmental threat injection wells pose. That nonprofit also works with Buckeye Environmental Network and Ohio Sierra Club, whom we consider allies. The GSC signed a petition directed to the U.S. EPA to revoke the primacy of the Ohio DNR to administer the permitting and monitoring of Class II injection wells.

The Ohio Legislature and Gov. DeWine signed into law a bill permitting fracking on state public lands and recognizing natural gas as a “green” energy. We aim to be vigilant in commenting on lease applications.

We are keeping our ears to the ground regarding toxic spills, including brine spills, in the area. When they happen, they are not well publicized, and we appreciate all the little birdies who have informed us.

Various GSC members have put pressure on the city of Marietta to protect our drinking water from contamination from cars parking on top of our shallow aquifer. Success seems to be short-lived.

Many of us were outraged by the wanton and unannounced removal of trees behind the armory—and for no good reason. We appealed to City Hall, but the damage had been done. Maybe it was in recompense that the city finally installed the solar bench at a prime location!

Local Allies

Many members of the GSC are also involved with allied groups, including Citizen’s Climate Lobby, FaCT Ohio, and MOVCA. We keep tabs on their projects and support them in their events, as they do ours. For CCL, George Banziger, Dave Ballantyne, and/or Rebecca Phillips met with Congressman Bill Johnson’s legislative aide Sam Hattrup regularly through the year to have civil discourse about climate change, renewable energy, and a sustainable future. They attempt to find elusive common ground with our congressman whenever

possible. Progress is slow, but we are grateful to have developed a relationship with this legislator's right-hand aide.

Ginnie McNeill serves as our liaison with FaCT Ohio, informing of us their many activities and programs. She recently proposed that FUUSM be the southeastern Ohio anchor congregation for FaCT Ohio, with Ginnie being the leader and coordinator. We are studying the proposal within GSC before we propose this to FUUSM board.

Because of cross-involvement with CCL, FaCT Ohio, and MOVCA, and our relationships with Interfaith Power and Light, and UU Ministry for Earth, many members of the GSC have contributed letters to the editor, op-eds, Climate Corner columns, letters to state administrators and to governmental officials, and countless signatures on various petitions.

Ecologic Restoration

Mark Krivchenia joined our group in August, introducing us to the importance of ecological restoration—and involving several GSC members in new projects. What an asset he is to our group and to the community with his expertise in controlling exotic invasive plants and restoring native ecosystems! He has been active at the Broughton Nature area and at the Ohio River Islands NWR, enlisting many helpers, including several GSC members.

Other events

Several GSC members attended a kick-off meeting for citizen input for ReImagine Marietta.

GSC members dominated the participant list at an Ohio River Listening Session in July, sponsored by The Ohio River Basin Alliance.

GSC co-sponsored a FUUSM Social Justice Forum on water protectors, capped by a “toxic tour” of C-6 contaminated sites, led by Callie Lyons.

Several members of GSC participated in UUMFE's “Ecology as Scripture” online course.

Ongoing Projects

Six GS teams continue to sweep the East Muskingum Park segment of River Trail twice a month, every month.

Several GSC members participated in sending postcards encouraging voters, in efforts sponsored by CCL and local voting advocates.

FUUSM Allies

We appreciate that FUUSM's Building & Grounds committee consulted GSC regarding up-lighting to be installed on the sanctuary. We approved the LED lighting—with the caveat that it be turned off during bird migration season, and B&G agreed. We are grateful that the GSC's liaison to the Board of Trustees, Vic Elam, is also the Buildings & Grounds Committee's liaison. That is working well. We also appreciate being informed of the decision on replacement of the FUUSM kitchen stoves, and B&G members working with us on our concern about FUUSM's high electric bills.

For the record, the GSC does not have a line in the annual budget. We do, however, have money in the bank because we collect aluminum cat food and beverage cans. Mike Bailey stores them for us, and when he has a trailer load, sells them for us, usually generating a couple hundred dollars per year. This provides us pocket change to pay for events when necessary.

We haven't done a good job providing information about recycling in the FUUSM kitchen. It's hard. Understanding recycling in Washington County is more challenging than it should be, and it's hard to explain, with a whole lot of if-then-elses. We hope to make progress on this soon and will report our success in next year's annual report.

We are grateful for the ongoing support of FUUSM's Board of Trustees, as well as our supportive and encouraging members and friends.

Respectfully submitted,

Dawn Hewitt, co-chair