

**Cathy Becker**

**Ohio Sierra Club Annual Retreat**

Saturday, January 28 through Sunday, January 29, 2017

Maumee Bay State Park Lodge and Conference Center

1750 State Park Road #2

Oregon, OH 43616

This was the two-day [annual retreat](#) for the Sierra Club, and my third year going. Each year I have been more and more involved in the activities, and this year was the most productive yet.

The retreat started with a session on how to handle environmental issues in the Trump era, with Ohio chapter director Jen Miller and Aaron Mair, the national board president for the Sierra Club. To be honest, I don't remember a lot of what was said because we didn't arrive at Maumee Bay until around 1 a.m. the night before, and I was running on very little sleep. But I do remember that it was a very full room of about 100 people, and Jen pointing out the work of a lot of people including me, who she called out for getting the climate message into a rally on health care (see writeup of the Our First Stand rally for details).

Next, the chairs of each of the Ohio Sierra Club's conservation committees talked about their activities in the previous year. It was pretty amazing to see all of it lined up in one place. Only six of the committee chairs spoke – for water, energy, nuclear, fracking, transportation, and forests - yet there were 120 slides, each with various campaigns and events they had done in 2016. Some of the highlights included:

- Over 8500 public comments on water issues such as removal of Ballville Dam, Cowan Lake speed limit, and protecting Sawmill Wetlands
- Ready for 100 program in Cleveland
- Kasich's veto of bill to refreeze renewable energy standards
- Creation of a pipeline task force
- Passing a 3-foot rule for bicycles on the road
- Plans to counter fracking in Wayne National Forest

After a quick lunch was a hike at 1 p.m., but I got cornered by a young woman who is extremely interested and motivated to take action on fracking in Wayne National Forest, so I ended up spending that time period talking with her and the Forest committee chair about possible plans. She has since basically taken charge of this campaign, which I don't have time to give justice to.

After the hike were two breakout sessions on pipelines or transportation, and I chose pipelines. This was a presentation by the Methane campaign lead Cheryl Johncox. Cheryl discussed three pipelines slated in Ohio – Rover, Nexus, and Duke. Rover and Nexus are national pipelines. Rover is slated to cross 18 Ohio counties and Nexus to impact 13 counties. Duke is slated to go through heavily residential areas of Cincinnati, so has generated a lot of resistance.

Pipeline approvals are very complicated, and each one is a little bit different. Duke is inside Ohio, so the decision maker is the Ohio Power Siting Board, plus it needs to get 401 water discharge permits from the Ohio EPA and air permits for the compressor station. Rover and Nexus must be approved by FERC. Rover, owned by Energy Transfer Partners (owner of the Dakota Access Pipeline) has gotten that approval, but Nexus has not, and right now the FERC commission that approves pipelines is inactive due to having too many unfilled seats.

After the pipeline session, I decided to do the hike I had missed because I really needed the exercise. My husband and I walked the two-mile boardwalk near the lodge. Last year we had walked this trail, and he got a photo of deer that won a photography contest. This year we saw six deer in the same location and got some more photos. We also ran into a huge flock of birds.

Back at the lodge we went to the dinner and evening program starting at 6 p.m. The featured speaker was Aaron Mair, who talked about his background and how he got into the environmental movement. Mair, who is African American, was a public health professional in New York who moved to a neighborhood where an incinerator was in operation. Everyone in the area was subject to air pollution and incinerator ash. Mair fought successfully to get the incinerator shut down, and he discussed the racism he encountered during his campaign.

At one point Mair approached the local Sierra Club asking them to support this campaign. This was a citizen coming to an environmental group to talk about an environment issue, but they told him to go talk to the NAACP. Later a few people from the group met with Mair separately, apologized for what happened, and agreed to take on his cause. Had they not done that, he would have never have joined the Sierra Club. Instead he joined and became president, and now the club is making intersectionality and environmental justice a major part of its agenda.

Also at the dinner was the [annual awards](#), voted on by retreat attendees. I got an award for Best Communicator, which was very nice. It was the third year in a row I have gotten an award at the chapter retreat, so hopefully next year they will find some new people to give awards to! Also that night was a [slideshow of travel pictures](#) submitted by members. I didn't have time to go through all my photos, so I sent a link to my blog to the staff member putting the show together. She had two interns pick out photos from Standing Rock and Iceland, so it was interesting to see what they picked out! About 10 people submitted photos from some very adventurous places.

The next morning was breakout sessions for the six major conservation committees to brainstorm activities for the coming year. I had a hard time choosing which committee to join, but ended up in Pipelines, since that was the breakout session I had been to the day before. It was a good choice. Only six people attended the pipelines breakout, but the others were some of the most experienced and knowledgeable activists there who I was able to get to know at that session.

We did a very structured session discussing first who the targets of our actions would be, then brainstorming different kinds of actions – some of what we came up with was incredibly creative and interesting, such as a 50 foot pipe made from building materials that people could carry at a protest with whatever slogans we wanted written on the side. Then we classified these activities into three categories – those designed to raise awareness among people, those designed to raise money, and those designed to sway decision makers. Several actions fit more than one category.

Among other things, I learned that the reason Sherrod Brown, who we normally consider very progressive, won't speak out against fracking is the union support. The pipefitters and other construction unions like fracking and pipelines because they think it creates jobs. It doesn't – most jobs are temporary and go to people from out of state, while local people are left with the pollution and mess. This is one thing we will have to address to get more public support.

**Ohio Chapter Annual Retreat  
Maumee Bay State Park  
January 28th - 29th, 2017**



**Saturday, January 28**

**8:00 - 9:00 AM Registration** (Dawn McBain and Fellowship Students)

[-link to registration](#)

**8:00 - 9:00 Breakfast** (continental buffet)

**9:00 - 9:10 Welcome** (Philip Crume & David Roseman)

**9:10 - 10:15 Winning on Environmental Issues in the Trump Era** (Jen Miller & Aaron Mair)

**10:15 - 10:30 Break** (15 min.)

**10:30 - 12:00 2016 [Conservation Victories](#)** (David Roseman, Committee Chairs)

*-energy, nuclear, forests & public lands, water, fracking, transportation committees*

*\*15 minutes for each committee to address the whole group*

**Noon - 12:45 PM Lunch** (*buffet*)

**1:00 - 2:00 Hike** *-dress appropriately for outdoor walk* (David Ackerman)

**2:00-2:35 Sierra Student Coalition Presentation** (Elissa Yoder Mann & Jack Turner)

**2:35 - 2:45 Break** (10 min.)

**2:45 - 3:45 Conservation Breakout Session I** (2 concurrent)

- [No Pipelines!](#) (Cheryl Johncox)
- Equity in Transportation (Nathan Alley)

**3:45 - 4:00 Break** (15 min.)

**4:00 - 5:00 Conservation Breakout Session 2** (2 concurrent)

- [Water Alert Reporting Network](#) (Elissa Yoder Mann/Matt Trokan)
- Communicating Climate (Climate Action Lab/Kristen Kubitza)

**Ohio Chapter Annual Retreat  
Maumee Bay State Park  
January 28th - 29th, 2017**



**Saturday, January 28**

**5:00 - 6:00 PM Evening Break**

**6:00 - 9:30 Dinner & Evening Program**

KeyNote Speaker (The Sierra Club President, Aaron Mair)

Awards & Recognition (Philip Crume & Jen Miller)

[Photo Slideshow](#) (Elissa Yoder Mann)

**9:30 - 11:30 Social Time in the Retreat Center Bar**

**Sunday, January 29th**

**8:00 - 9:00 AM Breakfast, Pack, and Check Out**

**9:00 Conservation Committees - 2017 Planning Preview** (David Roseman)

**9:15 - 11:00 Break-Out sessions by committees Select 1 from below:**

- Energy
- Forests/Public Lands
- Transportation
- Water
- Fracking/Pipelines
- Nuclear

**11:00 -11:30 Reconvene - report out** (David Roseman, others)

**11:30- Noon Closing** (Philip Crume, Jen Miller, and others)

**Ohio Chapter Executive Committee sessions**

**Noon** Lunch (Chapter Executive Committee members & invited guests only)

**1:00 PM - 4:00 Ohio Chapter Executive Committee meetings**

- 2016 outgoing board
- 2017 incoming board