



# Virginia Chapter Annual Report 2023

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**SIERRA CLUB**  
VIRGINIA CHAPTER



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## Acknowledgements

**Robert Ullman**  
Graphic Design

**Ann Creasy**  
Content Creation and Editing

**Connor Kish**  
Content Creation and Editing

*All of our staff, members, leaders, donors and volunteers!*

## Photography and Design Credits

**Front Cover, Page 1**  
Courtesy of Sierra Club

**Page 7**  
Janet Rigoni

**Page 2, 9**  
Robert Ullman

**Back Cover**  
Cynthia Wanschura

# Chapter Director's Note

## In 2023, the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter remained strong, visible, and effective.

We delivered on our mission to oppose projects and policies that put the interests of polluters above the needs of communities through an inclusive, justice-centered movement.

With Joe Biden as President, we began to see the fruits of our labor in the form of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The IRA led to the most significant climate investment in U.S. history and will decrease pollution. We are engaged in efforts to help Virginians take advantage of this incredible new law, and all of the tax credits associated with it.

Closer to home, in the Virginia General Assembly, we continued to deal with divided government between the Republican and Democratic parties, which hampered major progress and made defense of our hard fought climate and environmental victories the cornerstone to our legislative work.

2023 brought continued effectiveness in sharing our work and the opportunity to be involved in it. We were featured in over 100 news stories and sent

195 action opportunities to our members including legislative updates, exciting outings and events, newsletters, and more.

2023 brought critical grassroots engagement across a number of key priorities for climate action and environmental protection. Grassroots was everywhere! For example, we: (1) ramped up our grassroots efforts to oppose the Virginia "Reliability Project" gas pipeline expansion, (2) delivered a major petition to the EPA calling for the end of open-top coal train cars and their spewing of pollution into communities, (3) saw the first 'monopiles' delivered to anchor Virginia's offshore wind farm - the largest in the country!, (4) saw major cities across Virginia commit to electrify their transit fleets and drive away from pollution, (5) organized events involving thousands of Virginians to educate them on needed changes to Virginia laws related to data center expansion, and (6) began work to push back and oppose Dominion's dirty fossil fuel buildout, including the proposed Chesterfield Gas Peaker Plant. So much more incredible grassroots engagement occurred across many more topics, and much of the work continues in 2024!

Toward the end of 2023, critical elections showed that Virginia was in line to make continued climate and environmental policy progress. The majority in both the State Senate and Virginia House of Delegates was won by a pro-climate majority.

2023 ended with planning for the 2024 Virginia General Assembly Session, and a staff retreat in Richmond that brought together our entire team for two days of learning and quality time as we got ready to launch 2024! Onward!

Thank you for your support!




Connor Kish  
Director



Connor Kish is the Director of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter, and can be reached by email at [connor.kish@sierraclub.org](mailto:connor.kish@sierraclub.org).


# 2023 By the Numbers

 2023 Total  
c3 Raise:  
\$1,131,018

 2023 Total  
c4 Raise:  
\$318,097

 2023 Total  
Fundraising:  
\$1,449,116



 20,000  
members

 131  
monthly donors


 926  
lifetime members

 1,439 = total  
number of  
donations

 3 new issue  
chair leads  
appointed

 75+  
festivals and  
community  
events attended

 100+  
meetings with  
legislators


 153 bills  
the Legislative  
Committee took  
a position on



 100+  
press hits

 46 years  
since the  
founding of the  
Virginia Chapter!

 25+ virtual  
events

 47 letters  
to the editor,  
published in  
2023 in defense of climate  
policies and protection  
of land and water

 12 total staff  
members at the  
Virginia Chapter



# 2023 Victories and Accomplishments

## Offshore Wind

In late 2023, the Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind project cleared its final regulatory approval to bring over 2,600 megawatts - enough to power over 660,000 homes - of clean energy. The project stands as a proud testament to the Chapter's decade-long campaign for this massive renewable energy resource that not only helps us confront the climate crisis, but also supports tremendous job creation and economic opportunities for so many Virginians, especially in disadvantaged communities.

## Pipelines

VRP (Virginia Reliability Project) and CEC (Commonwealth Energy Connection) are segmented fracked gas interstate projects from Columbia Gas Transmission, LLC (Columbia) and Williams Transco Co. (Transco), respectively. The Chapter continues to work with community members to address the air pollution from the VRP and CEC fracked gas pipeline projects in Petersburg, VA and target VADEQ for full cumulative impact study of the development on the community's health. A CAMP program is being devised and the Chapter secured a grant to train the community to plan and implement the program through the RISE Communities Program and Purple Air Monitors. One pollutant gas of concern is NOx levels, which seems to already be outside of the current NAAQS for a criteria pollutant for one or more of the reporting periods. FERC (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission) processes these two projects together, with both receiving the Certificate of Public Notice and Necessity (CPCN) in November, 2023. The Chapter continues engagement on all areas of these projects.

## Clean Buildings and Homes

In 2023, the Sierra Club achieved significant advancements in building electrification and energy efficiency, reinforcing our commitment to a sustainable future. Through quarterly Building Electrification (BE) and

Weatherization programs with Concerned Citizens in Charles City County (C5), we supported the development of a workforce preparedness program focused on solar and electrification efforts at Charles City County High School. Furthermore, we have supported Flipp Inc.'s CREED project that recognizes the urgency of addressing climate change by building a robust green energy workforce. CREED's focus on diversity and inclusion, tapping into underrepresented workforce groups—women, veterans, LGBTQI+, and justice-impacted individuals—enriches the green energy sector with diverse perspectives. We also developed a strategy for IRA Community Clinics in 2024, aiming to educate low- to moderate-income households on the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and provide resources on consumer tax credits for energy upgrades.

## Environmental Justice

VRP (Virginia Reliability Project) and CEC (Commonwealth Energy Connection) are segmented fracked gas interstate projects from Columbia Gas Transmission, LLC (Columbia) and Williams Transco Co. (Transco), respectively. The Chapter continues to work with community members to address the air pollution from the VRP and CEC fracked gas pipeline projects in Petersburg, VA and target VADEQ for full cumulative impact study of the development on the community's health. A CAMP program is being devised and the Chapter secured a grant to train the community to plan and implement the program through the RISE Communities Program and Purple Air Monitors. One pollutant gas of concern is NOx levels, which seems to already be outside of the current NAAQS for a criteria pollutant for one or more of the reporting periods. FERC (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission) processes these two projects together, with both receiving the Certificate of Public Notice and Necessity (CPCN) in November, 2023. The Chapter continues engagement on all areas of these projects. Chapter continues providing help and guidance to directly

impacted communities in their different campaigns (in 2023 there was a high priority on landfills). In addition, we share funding opportunities with these organizations to solidify the group's existence and diversify their work on other local campaigns. After working with impacted communities for over 5 years creating a structure and having recurrent meetings, these groups are stable and functioning on their own. This is a testament that we have created a long and lasting relationship with these communities and not a transactional one. Some of these groups continue fighting the original issue for which they formed, while others have moved to tackle different campaigns. These groups are actively participating at their local level. A few examples of the work done by these groups include, a candidate forum for members of the Board of Supervisors, a public meeting with DEQ and EPA on ethylene oxide pollution, and visits with EPA to protect wetlands in development processes.

## Coal Dust

The chapter worked with impacted community members, partner organizations, community leaders, water scientists, and lawyers from across the country to document water pollution from coal trains. This involved documenting coal falling into waterways from open-top rail cars and culminated in the submission of the petition for rulemaking to the EPA to bring coal trains into compliance with the Clean Water Act. Over the course of 2023, Chapter staff in partnership with the University of Virginia Repair lab and community leaders were able to record and document over 20 stories of residents impacted by coal pollution, in addition to confirmed evidence of coal in waterways alongside the petition to EPA.

## Chesterfield Gas Plant Proposal

VRP (Virginia Reliability Project) and CEC (Commonwealth Energy Connection) are segmented fracked gas interstate projects from Columbia Gas

# 2023 Victories and Accomplishments

Transmission, LLC (Columbia) and Williams Transco Co. (Transco), respectively. The Chapter continues to work with community members to address the air pollution from the VRP and CEC fracked gas pipeline projects in Petersburg, VA and target VADEQ for full cumulative impact study of the development on the community's health. A CAMP program is being devised and the Chapter secured a grant to train the community to plan and implement the program through the RISE Communities Program and Purple Air Monitors. One pollutant gas of concern is NOx levels, which seems to already be outside of the current NAAQS for a criteria pollutant for one or more of the reporting periods. FERC (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission) processes these two projects together, with both receiving the Certificate of Public Notice and Necessity (CPCN) in November, 2023. The Chapter continues engagement on all areas of these projects. Chapter has supported coalition and community efforts to resist Dominion's proposal for the Chesterfield Energy Reliability Center, a fracked-gas fueled power plant that would be cited in Chesterfield County, Virginia. As the Department of Environmental Quality and the Chesterfield Board of supervisors consider this proposal, the chapter has supported community education and awareness on this plant and its consequences via several in-person meetings, virtual action workshops, and support of advocacy meetings and public comments to decision makers. Additionally, the work has garnered media via letters to the editor, opinion editorials, and news coverage on the environmental justice, economic justice, and climate justice issues with the proposal.

## Unchecked Data Center Development

The Chapter has increased engagement and mobilization in the data center reform campaign in 2023. In addition to joining the data center reform coalition – a group made up of partner organizations and grassroots community members – the chapter sent out four action alerts related to data centers in

four counties, acquiring more than 200 action takers. The Chapter received six press hits on the issue, and staff made speeches about the potential dangers of unchecked data center expansion to over 400 Virginians. This is in addition to mobilizing over 100 community members to voice opposition to reckless data center proposals in Caroline, Loudoun, Henrico, Prince William, Louisa, and Fairfax Counties.

## Clean Transportation for All

**Vehicle Legislation:** Successfully opposed bills to repeal Advanced Clean Cars Standards. **SmartScale:** The Chapter worked with partners and drove public comments to the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) to advocate for keeping best land use practices as a factor in deciding which transportation projects receive funding, as the CTB considered removing the land use factor from its SmartScale process which is used to determine which transportation projects will be funded. In December the CTB voted to entirely eliminate land use as a factor, but decided to reverse its decision in January 2024, gaining a win for smart transportation planning. **Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA):** A multi-year coalition campaign to pressure WMATA to accelerate its bus electrification schedule and eschew compressed natural gas (CNG) models resulted in WMATA's 2023 announcement that WMATA had expedited its target bus electrification date by 3 years, to 2042; and reopened its Northern Bus Garage to accommodate 100% battery electric buses, despite having considered CNG models. **National Drive Electric Week (NDEW):** The Potomac River Group/Chapter's 3rd annual National Drive Electric Week (NDEW) EV Showcase garnered over 50 exhibitors and EV owners who displayed their vehicles to hundreds of attendees looking to make the switch from a fossil fuel vehicle to an EV. In addition, Chapter staff participated in a National webinar on how to host NDEW events. **Transit Equity Day:** The Chapter

produced a video and campaign to raise awareness of transit equity issues such as the need for accessible and abundant bus service; clean, battery electric buses; and equitable treatment of transit workers. The short film was shot and edited by a nationally distinguished filmmaker and was also used by National Sierra Club for its Transit Equity Day campaign. Transit Equity Day is celebrated nationwide on February 4, in honor of civil rights activist Rosa Parks' birthday.

## Legislative Success

In 2023, the Chapter's Legislative Committee took positions on 152 bills introduced in the General Assembly. We achieved major successes in our efforts to defend our critical climate laws: the Virginia Clean Economy Act, the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, and the Clean Cars Standard all survived attempts to weaken or dismantle them. For the second year in a row, the Chapter played a critical role in ensuring that Virginia sustained its progress on addressing climate change. The Chapter also celebrated a bill to move the Virginia state government vehicle fleet toward EVs, cleaning up our air and saving taxpayers money. The Chapter sent action alerts throughout the session that resulted in 1,000+ Virginians writing to their legislators about one or more of our key priorities.

## Political Victories

In 2023,, the Chapter celebrated a record number of endorsed candidates winning election to the Virginia General Assembly and critical local offices all across Virginia. In collaboration with the National Sierra Club Political Team, we executed largescale phone-banking campaigns in key State Senate districts that helped to ensure the protection of a pro-climate majority in the General Assembly. In total, the Virginia Chapter team made over 10,000 phone calls in 3 State Senate districts. Sierra Club members were mobilized and engaged to assist our endorsed candidates.

# 2023 Ongoing Work

## Clean Battery Electric Buses

The Chapter raises awareness for, promotes, and supports opportunities for school districts and transit providers to transition to zero-emissions battery electric buses, including an outreach campaign directed at high priority school districts throughout the state; and provides letters of support for transit agencies that are applying for federal funding for electric buses, and educates decision makers on the importance of purchasing battery electric buses as opposed to alternative fossil fuel models.

## Go EVirginia

In conjunction with Earth Month, the Chapter publicly launched its Go Virginia page on its website to be used as a tool for transportation decision makers and electrification advocates to help municipalities transition their bus fleets to clean battery electric models. The webpage features a digital dashboard which details transit authorities' bus electrification efforts and plans throughout the Commonwealth, as well as a toolkit for policy makers.

## Data Center Growth

The rapid and unchecked expansion of and proposals for data centers in Virginia is a threat to climate progress and environmental protection. The Virginia Chapter continues its work to press for critical policy safeguards to protect Virginia's families and environment from this status quo. The Chapter is educating, organizing, and mobilizing grassroots leaders in communities across Virginia to make a statement to elected officials that we need to protect Virginia's air, water, and land, and that it is up to them to do so. Data centers must meet more stringent standards for electricity, energy efficiency, siting, and the consumption of water and the Virginia Chapter is leading the way to bring the information needed for policymakers to take action.

## Water Quality and Conservation

The Chapter continues its efforts to stand up for water quality and pollution reduction across Virginia's land and waters. Virginia's waterways and wetlands need our protection now more than ever, and the Virginia Chapter is going to continue fighting for pollution reduction and clean water, especially at a time when weakened federal rules and regulations make the threat even greater. The Chapter will continue mobilizing and educating grassroots voices for clean water.

## Landfills

The Virginia Chapter continues to provide assistance and support to communities across Virginia that are facing proposals by industry to construct and operate massive toxic landfills. From Russell County in Southwest Virginia, to Cumberland County in Central Virginia, the landfill industry wants more space. What we know is landfills leak toxic fluids, release methane gas, and usually, an odor in the air. Communities deserve better than landfills being disguised as economic development. The Virginia Chapter is standing with the communities in these fights, and will continue to provide assistance, advice, and organizing support to protect communities from being taken advantage of by landfills.

## Outings and the Great Outdoors

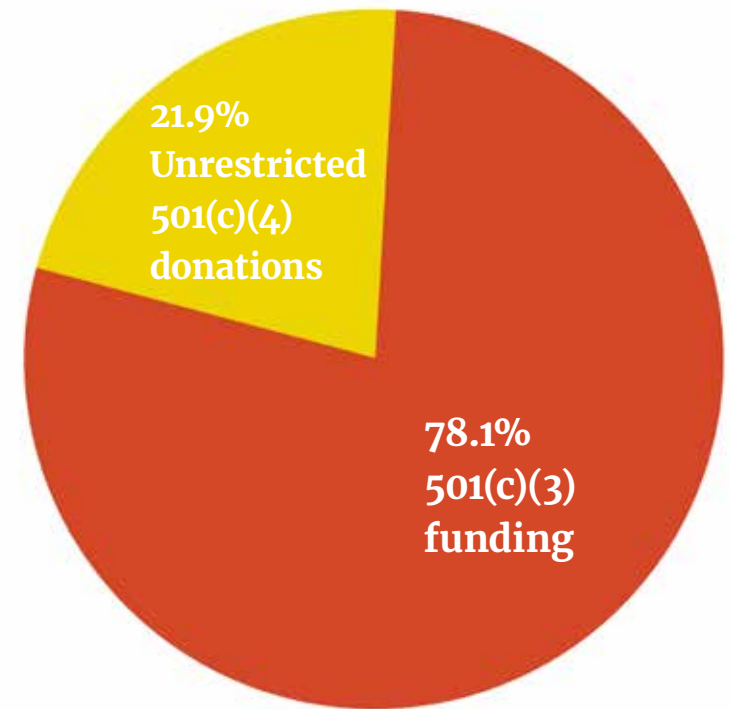
The Virginia Chapter and the Potomac Region Outings will continue to provide safe, enjoyable opportunities to get outdoors! With over one hundred outing opportunities in 2023, this momentum will continue. Getting outside for a hike, a paddle, a walk, a jog, or more can only inspire more people to protect the sacred natural treasures of Virginia. The Virginia Chapter will keep expanding these awesome and necessary opportunities to explore and enjoy the planet. You can always see where we are headed outdoors next at [vasierra.club/outdoors](https://vasierra.club/outdoors)



# Your Critical Support

We are proud of how much we achieve with such a low proportion of c4 funding. Your c4 support sustains our advocacy work and our operations. The Sierra Club Foundation is our fiscal sponsor of c3 funding, which supports our campaign work that educates, recruits, and mobilizes grassroots power to achieve big victories in local, state, and federal policies that protect our environment. We can't do one without the other; we can't do any of this without you!

Your generous contribution to the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter makes this work possible. And remember that when you give, 100% of your gift stays in Virginia to support our local work. For this reason, contributing to the Virginia Chapter is a long-term investment to protect the environmental health of our state for future generations.



Give today at  
[vasierra.club/donate](https://vasierra.club/donate)



# Behind the Scenes

We are committed to informing, empowering and engaging activists in implementing strategic climate solutions in and for Virginia.

## Staff



**Connor Kish**  
Legislative & Political Director



**Eileen Woll**  
Offshore Energy Program Director



**Tim Cywinski**  
Communications Manager



**Lynn Godfrey**  
Just Transition Program Manager



**Gustavo Angeles**  
Acting Chapter Director



**Hunter Noffsinger**  
Community Outreach Coordinator



**Ann Creasy**  
Acting Deputy Chapter Director



**Paige Wesselink**  
Digital Outreach Coordinator - 100% Virginia



**Cheri Conca**  
Transportation and Smart Growth Program Manager



**McKenna Dunbar**  
Community Engagement Coordinator



**Bea Truman**  
Community Engagement Coordinator



**Barb Adams**  
Finance & Operations Coordinator

## Leadership



**Ralph Grove**  
Chair



**Judy Gayer**  
Vice Chair



**Matt Summey**  
Treasurer



**Bill Johnson**  
Secretary

## 2023 Executive Committee

**Robin van Tine,**  
At-Large

**Ann Bennett**  
At-Large

**Amory Fisher**  
At-Large

**Susan Stillman**  
At-Large

**Bob Shippee**  
At-Large

**Ralph Grove**  
At-Large

**Matt Summey**  
At-Large

**Daryl Downing**  
Council of Club Leaders Delegate

**David Grochmal**  
Chesapeake Bay Group Ex-Com Rep

**Joe Brancoli**  
Falls of the James Ex-Com Rep

**Judy Gayer**  
Great Falls Group Ex-Com Rep

**Rick Keller**  
Potomac River Group Ex-Com Rep

**Rick Shingles**  
New River Valley Group Ex-Com Rep

**John Cruickshank**  
Piedmont Group Ex-Com Rep

**Bill Johnson**  
Rappahannock Group Ex-Com Rep

**Dan Crawford**  
Roanoke Group Ex-Com Rep

**Pete Bsumek**  
Shenandoah Group Ex-Com Rep

**Gary Kosciusko**  
Potomac Region Outings Ex-Com Rep

**Tyla Matteson**  
York River Group Ex-Com Rep

## Issue Chairs

**Judy Gayer,**  
Legal Chair

**Chandler Pridgen,**  
Conservation Chair

**Ana Prados, Air**  
Quality Chair

**Ivy Main,**  
Conservation Chair

**Dan Crawford,**  
Onshore Wind Chair

**Sherman Bamford,**  
Forests Chair

**Jim Lynch,** Group Boundaries Chair

**Bob Shippee,**  
Legislative Chair

**Steve Banashek,**  
Electric Vehicles (EV) Chair

**Robin van Tine,**  
Environmental Justice Chair

**Susan Stillman,**  
Renewable Energy Chair

**Ralph Grove,**  
Outings Chair

**Andrew Densmore,**  
Political Chair

**Bill Penniman,**  
Sustainability Chair

**Karen Campblin,**  
Transportation and Smart Growth Co-Chair

**Douglas Stewart,**  
Transportation and Smart Growth Co-Chair

**Dean Amel,** Solid Waste Chair

**Pete Bsumek,**  
Wilderness Chair

# 2023 Awards and Recognition

## 2023 Volunteer Appreciation Awards

Each year, the Virginia Chapter recognizes contributions made by some of our many committed and talented volunteers. Award nominations for 2023 were solicited in the fall, and announcements made in December. Awards are given in two categories. The Volunteer Appreciation Award recognizes outstanding service at the group or chapter level; The Glen Besa Lifetime Achievement Award, named for our former Chapter Director, recognizes long-term service to the Virginia Chapter in multiple leadership roles.

## 2023 Volunteer Appreciation Awards Recipients

### Ann Bennett

For leadership in organizing a response to the growing environmental risk associated with the growth of data centers throughout the state

### Victoria Gallaway

For work in leadership of the Rappahannock Group and helping to carry out its mission

### Zoe Hanrahan

For work in leadership of the Rappahannock Group and helping to carry out its mission

### Natalie Loeffler

For work in leadership of the Rappahannock Group and helping to carry out its mission

### Bill Penniman

For efforts to strengthen Virginia's Statewide Energy Code and for participation in numerous other efforts over several years related to energy efficiency

## 2023 Glen Besa Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient

### Susan Stillman

For long-term and ongoing service to the Chapter through efforts in multiple roles, for willingness to take on the jobs that need doing, for the positive energy brought to the organization, and for the inspiration given to others





The Sierra Club is the most enduring and influential grassroots environmental organization in the United States. We amplify the power of our 3.8 million members and activists to defend everyone's right to a healthy world.

We know actions speak louder than words. That's why we've built a national community of volunteers, advocates, and grassroots activists who show up when and where it counts. Our supporters have the tools and resources to make themselves heard in nearly every district in every state across the country.

From securing protection for 439 parks and monuments, to winning passage of the Clean Air and Endangered Species Acts, to putting over 281 coal plants on the path to replacement with clean energy, to securing the right of every kid in America to visit a national park, we have an unmatched record of success and impact.

The Sierra Club Virginia Chapter is over 20,000 members strong. We coordinate action to promote climate solutions and oppose projects and policies that put the interests of corporate polluters above the needs of communities.



**SIERRA CLUB**  
VIRGINIA CHAPTER

Explore, Enjoy and Protect the Planet

Virginia Chapter

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