



Virginia Sierran

The Official Newsletter of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter
Spring 2023

Virginia Chapter practices Sierra Club Core Values by Robin van Tine

The first value listed under Sierra Club Values on Sierra Club's national webpage is Anti-Racism: "We commit to shifting power away from white supremacy, repairing harm, and ending structural racism." It goes on to state that racism is "the single most critical barrier to building effective coalitions for social change."

Hop Hopkins, Sierra Club's director of organizational transformation, proclaims that "you can't have climate change without sacrifice zones, and you can't have sacrifice zones without disposable people, and you can't have disposable people without racism." In a recent NPR interview, our new national executive director, Ben Jealous, says, "For the



Sierra Club right now, the reality is that the urgency of the work on the ground has required people to really shift, I'd say, in many ways, from Hurricane Katrina forward, to figure out how to work across all lines of division." He also is quoted as stating,

"If you are comfortable with your coalition than your coalition is too small."

Here is a short YouTube video explaining our values: youtu.be/f1zbnMFul_w

In that spirit and in agreement with the rest of Sierra Club's stated values, the

Chapter first employed Virginia Community Voice in the Spring of 2022 to provide Equitable Decision-Making & Community Engagement training for some 30 volunteers and staff. This spring a "Coaching Team" composed of individuals who completed the training is working with VACV to evaluate and strengthen both our internal equity practices and our external equitable community engagement plans and capabilities.

Members of our coaching team include Ralph Grove, Dean Amel, Glen Besa, Gustavo Angeles, Hunter Noffsinger, Kate West, Lee Williams, Lynn Godfrey, Richard Shingles and Rob-

See Core values on page 5.

Some Core Values of Sierra Club (See sierraclub.org/sierra-club-values):

Practicing anti-racism at Sierra Club includes:

- **Maintaining Accountability:** To practice anti-racism we must constantly and consistently be accountable to the communities struggling with racist oppression.
- **Committing Ourselves:** Recognizing, naming, and rejecting the norms of internalized racial oppression in ourselves, our work, our organization, and our communities.
- **Transformation:** We commit to changing our relationships to power, privilege, and oppression—for ourselves and for the organization.

Practicing transformation at Sierra Club includes:

- **Self-awareness:** We work continually to understand ourselves and how we are shaped by systems of power, privilege, and oppression; how we participate in these systems; how we may be both harmed by and benefit from inequity; and how we may contribute to inequity.
- **Questioning the Status Quo:** Many systems in which we operate were built on harmful and outdated foundations that require us to question, challenge, and change. We are open to new ways of thinking and operating.
- **Allyship:** We recognize when inequity is present, take immediate action to interrupt business-as-usual, and work for long-term solutions. We act in support of marginalized people, in accordance with their goals, and work to advance equity in our spheres of influence.

From the chair

by Ralph Grove



Happy Spring everyone! The vernal equinox is always a time for joy since it comes with the sunshine, warmth and rebirth of nature that lifts our spirits. I hope that you'll get a chance to enjoy outdoor time soon in the parks and neighborhoods around you.

I've been practicing the Japanese art of "shinrin-yoku," or forest-bathing, which is another way to focus on being in nature for the improved health of mind and body. If you're looking for an opportunity to get out into nature, be sure to check out the outings program of the Sierra Club groups near you.

We have a few new volunteer appointments that I'd like to share with you. Judy Gayer was elected executive committee vice-chair, and retains her position as legal chair as well. Chandler Pridgen has replaced Judy as conservation chair. Anna Gosling has been confirmed as a new co-chair for Transportation and Smart Growth. And finally, Dean Amel and Chandler Pridgen have been elected to fill the remaining

seats on our chapter Nominations and Elections Committee. Many thanks to all of these volunteers for supporting the work of the Virginia Chapter.

We are nearing the end of the hiring process for three staff positions currently being filled within the Virginia Chapter. We hope to have a new field organizer hired soon, possibly by the time you read this. We've reposted the finance and operations position, since the first round did not result in a hire, and we hope to fill that position this quarter. We are now accepting the last applications for the chapter director position and hope to process those within the next few weeks so that we can get to final interviews soon. All three hiring committees, our

Personnel Committee and our acting staff leaders, Gustavo and Ann, have contributed an enormous effort to the hiring process and they all deserve our gratitude.

Be sure to read Gary's great article on Sierra Club outings in this issue. We're always looking for new outings leaders who would like to help organize hikes and other outdoor events. Contact Gary or me if you're interested. Enjoy the beautiful weather and hope to see you on the trail!

Ralph Grove is the executive committee chair of the Virginia Chapter.

Sierra Club Core Value, Transformation:

We commit to changing our relationships to power, privilege, and oppression—for ourselves and for the organization.

Virginia Sierran

Virginia Sierran is the official newsletter of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter and is published quarterly.
100 West Franklin St., Mezzanine, Richmond, Virginia 23220
<https://sierraclub.org/virginia>

The Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club is over 20,000 members strong. We are your friends and neighbors working to build healthy, livable communities and to conserve and protect our climate and environment. The Virginia Chapter is part of the national Sierra Club, the nation's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization.

Information about our staff, executive committee and environmental action chairs can be found on the Virginia Chapter website under "About."

Virginia Sierran Editor: Sevim Kalyoncu, editorvirginiasieran@gmail.com

The editor welcomes editorial contributions, photographs and art work. Submissions should pertain to Virginia's environment and/or climate change. Email the editor with questions on submissions.

Please contact member.care@sierraclub.org for membership and mailing issues and address.changes@sierraclub.org to change your mailing address.

Dominion Energy looks to the future and sees renewable energy

by Ivy Main

In a remarkable turnaround, Virginia's largest utility has decided that renewable energy, especially solar, is the future. Dominion Energy's just-released Climate Report 2022 projects that under every set of assumptions modeled, solar energy will become the mainstay of its electricity generation fleet no later than 2040.

Coal disappears from the energy mix by 2030 even in a scenario that assumes no change from present policy. As for fracked gas, it hangs on longer but in ever-smaller amounts, mostly to help meet winter peak demand.

Dominion modeled three scenarios for this report. The "current policy" scenario assumes the policy landscape and technology options stay the same as at present, and Dominion does its part in driving a global temperature increase of 2.1°C by 2050. That's in keeping with Virginia's climate law and also with Dominion's internal commitment to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. Under this scenario, Dominion's model predicts solar energy will provide 40% of the electricity supply by 2040, followed by nuclear at 30% and (offshore) wind at 19%.

The "emerging technologies" scenario also assumes a temperature increase of 2.1°C by 2050, but adjusts for the likelihood that technological change will lead to "advanced dispatchable zero-carbon technology" options that could displace much of the need for energy storage. These might include hydrogen, carbon sequestration and storage, and methane gas produced as the result of poor animal waste disposal practices at factory farms—what Dominion calls

renewable natural gas, or RNG.

Small modular reactors are not included in this scenario (and are hardly mentioned at all in the report), perhaps because operating them as peaker plants would be crazy expensive. Even without SMRs, though, the report says overall cost savings would be slight for this scenario, and solar would still be the leading source of electricity by 2040.

Finally, the report models an "accelerated transition" scenario that reduces emissions more aggressively in line with an effort to keep the global temperature increase to 1.5°C by 2050. This is the upper bound of warming considered tolerable by many climate scientists, but it would require Dominion's electricity business to reach net zero by 2035. Dominion's model shows solar would make up nearly two-thirds of the electric supply in that scenario. Offshore wind would be held to just 17%, apparently because at that point more wouldn't be needed.

I'd argue that offshore wind should carry more of the load to create a more balanced portfolio, but it's a moot point: the report writers clearly think this scenario is just a thought exercise. The scenario consistent with keeping global warming to 1.5°C is described in a way that seems intended to discourage anyone from pursuing the matter.

"The heavier reliance on renewable capacity in this scenario," it warns, "would require significantly greater capital investment at a much more rapid pace in preparation for a net zero mix by 2035. These signifi-

cantly greater cost outlays, especially in the near-term, would place notably heavier cost burdens on customers and present significant regulatory and permitting challenges. Achieving such a rapid pace of emissions reductions would require predictable, dependable, and rapid wholesale shifts in public policy and technology advancements capable of maintaining system reliability and customer affordability. Also necessary would be supportive regulatory treatment and timely permitting for significant near-term zero-carbon infrastructure development and transmission system enhancements."

In other words, the report seems to say, fuggedaboutit. It's just too hard.

If that feels defeatist, it's worth remembering how far Dominion has come to reach a point where it is even writing climate reports, not to mention declaring on page 1 that "Climate change presents one of the greatest challenges of our time, and we take seriously our leadership role in helping to mitigate it."

Ivy Main is a renewable energy co-chair of the Virginia Chapter.

The power of digital tools

by Page Wesselink

The Sierra Club Virginia Chapter continues to garner new members, supporters and partners through the expansion of our digital tools. Whether it's a post on our Instagram of Tim Cywinski, our communications lead, educating our base about a proposed fossil fuel project or an action alert signed by Gustavo Angeles, our acting director, in your email inbox, it's important. Every outreach effort we do online builds our brand and when you have a solidified brand it makes it easier for like-minded people to find you and get involved.

One video we posed last year on our Instagram was viewed by 10k people. We've had action alerts successfully send over 1,500 comments to decision-makers. During the General Assembly session of 2022, we saw a 10% increase in online action-takers when we

posted them to Instagram alongside our short-form videos. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and our website are the first things many people see. We know we are doing something right when we continue to see an exponential gain in followers, interactions, likes, comments and reposts across all of our digital platforms.

Each online platform we have plays an essential role in branding our organization and gaining new supporters in our network. We know that when we have numbers, we have power and when we have power, we win.

Please continue to support us online by taking action and following us on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

Paige Wesselink is the digital outreach coordinator of the Virginia Chapter.

Piedmont Group update

by Donna Shaunesey



UVA students received the Earth Flag for their sustainability efforts (photo courtesy of Donna Shaunesey).

Sierra Club awards Earth Flag to UVA students

UVA's Sustainability Advocates deploy nearly 60 students each semester to engage in a wide variety of amazing activities. They reach out to their fellow students to educate them on what they can do to support sustainability (and to recruit them to join the effort), as well as host speakers on a wide variety of topics and create events to draw folks in.

Some very impressive statistics: their work at Green (football) Games collected 12,759 pounds of compostable material and 74,475 pounds of recycling. At each game this semester, 14,537 pounds of waste was diverted from the landfill. Sports can be a great place to educate AND be useful.

This semester the students have organized Corner cleanups; held Student Garden workdays; delivered food to the UVA Community

Food Pantry; and kicked off the Amphitheater composting program, sorting five TONS of waste and introducing composting programs throughout UVA. Even student athletes are leading their teammates into sustainability with education and plant-based snacks.

Seeing this enthusiastic group makes us all feel a little more optimistic for the future.

caterpillars. Courtney, formerly of The Caterpillar Lab in New Hampshire, is an educator, master naturalist and shameless insect enthusiast who loves discovering the smaller, secret stories of the natural world and then being able to share them with others. This is going to be fun! This event is on April 23, 2 to 4 pm at Ivy Creek Natural Area and is free and open to the public.

Caterpillar Walk

Join caterpillar expert Courtney McLaughlin for a walk exploring the world of

Donna Shaunesey is the chair of the Piedmont Group.



Group Directory

Groups are organized to conduct the work of Sierra Club in local areas, cities and towns. The information listed below is for the chair of each group. Information regarding groups' geographical area can be found on our website under Find a Group Near You.

Chesapeake Bay:

John Luker
757-337-4092
4solar+SC@gmail.com

New River Valley:

Rick Shingles
540-921-7324
shingles@vt.edu

Rappahannock:

Bill Johnson
540-657-1733
billatthelake@comcast.net

Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings (SCPRO):

Gary Kosciusko
703-946-8111
novahiker@cox.net

Falls of the James:

Joe Brancoli
804-502-9502
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Piedmont:

Donna Shaunesey
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Please join us on a Sierra Club outing

by Gary Kosciusko

With the arrival of spring, we've entered one of two seasonal "sweet spots" for going outdoors (the other being autumn), as the days tend to be not too hot and not too cold. To take advantage of these conditions, the number and frequency of Sierra Club outings tend to increase. At the same time, more people are attracted to outdoor activities when the temperatures moderate.

There are multiple benefits from participating in outings. First, it's healthy. Walking is a low-impact activity that can ease joint pain. Brisk walking has been shown to counteract the effects of weight-promoting genes. And all exercise will boost circulation and immune function; furthermore, it will reduce stress, thereby improving mood.

Second, outings are rewarding and can even be fun. They stimulate a person with sights and sounds that are generally pleasant. They provide an opportunity for social interaction. And completing an outing gives one



Hikers on the trail in Laurel Hills Park, Lorton, Virginia (photo courtesy of Gary Kosciusko).

a sense of accomplishment, as well as improves sleep.

Third, outings are educational. They expose a person to the natural environment, with plenty of opportunities to learn new things about plants, animals, birds, the land and waters. Outings leaders are generally more knowledgeable about these things than the average person, and leaders are eager to share their knowledge. For the participants, the

more they know about the environment, the more likely they are to care about it and the more likely they'll be willing to defend against threats to it.

The most common type of Sierra Club outing in Virginia is hiking. Other types are nature walks, kayaking, bicycling, social events and service outings (typically trash or invasive plant removal). Sierra Club outings primarily in the Northern Virginia area

are conducted by Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings, or SCPRO, while the Virginia Chapter conducts outings in the rest of the state. All outings leaders are volunteers who freely give of their time to show members of the general public the great outdoors. Outings are listed on the Chapter's Events Calendar, which may be accessed via the events calendar at sierraclub.org/virginia/. Besides that calendar, SCPRO also lists events at meetup.com/sierrapotomac/. We invite you to join us on an outing of your choice.

Finally, we're always on the lookout for people who would make good outings leaders. If that's something that appeals to you, please contact either Chapter Chair Ralph Grove (rfgrove@icloud.com) or SCPRO Chair Gary Kosciusko (NOVAHIKER@cox.net).

Gary Kosciusko is the chair of Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings.

Core values

continued from page 1

in van Tine. Once hired, our new Director will join the team.

Virginia Community Voice, using its Community Voice Blueprint process (see [Blueprint at vacommunityvoice.org](http://vacommunityvoice.org)), will prepare us to both become a more equitable organization and to be able to better engage and make decisions regarding historically marginalized communities in accordance with our Sierra Club values. Currently the Coaching Team and VACV are collaboratively develop-

ing separate questionnaires for our staff, volunteers and both current and prospective community allies to assess our organizational strengths and weaknesses and determine next steps towards achieving the twin goals of creating an inclusive and equitable workplace and collaborating with local leaders in the identification and remediation of environmental injustices.

Virginia Community Voice will work with our coaching team to develop improvement goals for more equita-

ble community engagement and decision making. The Assessment Analysis will guide our Development of Improvement Goals. VACV will then collaborate with the Coaching Team as it develops an implementation process. The Chapter will then begin implementing the transformation to those goals, with assistance from VACV if needed. The Coaching Team will then evaluate how the process is proceeding through reflection and troubleshooting, with help from VACV as needed.

We look forward to continuing the transformation process with everyone in the Chapter. If you receive a questionnaire, please complete it thoughtfully to help us in this important work. Together we will learn how to become more equitable internally and in our allyships with community organizations, becoming the more equitable organization that our Sierra Club Values point us toward.

Robin van Tine is the environmental justice chair of the Virginia Chapter.

Dominion still needs to move its ash by Ann Creasy

Possum Point Power Plant, along the Potomac River near Dumfries, burned coal to generate electricity between 1947 and 2003. Dominion Energy intends to leave behind over 4 million tons of coal ash, a toxic slurry of heavy metals, that has contaminated groundwater and drinking wells and continues to pollute Quantico Creek and the Potomac River.

Dominion Energy says it plans to build a \$347 million double-lined landfill to hold this toxic coal ash along Possum Point Road and adjacent to the Potomac Shores Community. It recently acknowledged coal ash contamination in residential drinking wells but is intent on moving forward with its plan to build a new coal ash landfill while failing to address massive ground water contamination.

The remediation and disposal of coal ash waste at Possum Point is, in part, governed by legislation passed in Virginia in 2019, which requires Dominion to safely

dispose of, or recycle, approximately 28 million tons of coal ash at four of its power plants in the Chesapeake Bay watershed in Virginia, including Possum Point. The legislation gives Dominion the flexibility to recycle the ash at two locations, dispose of it offsite or dispose of it onsite in a lined landfill. In January 2022, Dominion announced that it would apply for permits to construct a new lined landfill at Possum Point to hold the toxic ash that is currently in Pond D.

Dominion appears intent on moving forward while failing to address legacy contamination from its unlined ponds that continues to pollute the site and the Potomac River. Dominion's track record of complying with environmental safeguards at Possum Point is far from stellar. In March 2020, it agreed to pay a \$1.4 million fine for multiple violations of federal and state law, stemming from its illegal draining and dumping of 27.5 million gallons of polluted coal ash wastewater into Quantico

Creek and the Potomac River. Dominion's own monitoring shows that metals from coal ash such as arsenic, boron, cobalt and radium 226 have all been detected at levels that exceed groundwater quality standards set by the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Dominion has so far failed to develop a corrective action plan to address the contamination beyond relying on "natural recovery," a euphemism for merely waiting to see if the levels of pollution diminish naturally over time. Dominion is currently providing bottled water to nearby residents due to drinking well contamination linked to coal ash nearly four years after Virginia lawmakers required Dominion to provide an alternate drinking water supply to coal ash-impacted communities.

Dominion's most recent reports completely fail to assess the impact that construction of a new landfill will have on the contamination onsite or any future efforts to clean up the groundwa-

ter pollution. Dominion has also failed to develop any clear timeline for proposing corrective actions, as required by law, that must be implemented to address the groundwater standard exceedances.

Yet, Dominion sent a letter to Prince William County on March 7 to request a determination if the new coal ash dump would require a review process to proceed. Community members and partners are pushing to ensure that Dominion's coal ash landfill is subject to public input. Prince William County must ensure environmental damages and public health issues linked to coal ash are adequately addressed and that recommendations from the Possum Point Coal Ash Task Force, which Supervisor Andrea Bailey leads, are considered.

Potomac River Keepers, Sierra Club Virginia Chapter

See Dominion ash on page 11.

Introducing the 2023 Young Leaders Council by Hunter Noffsinger

In the fall of 2021, we launched the Youth Leadership Council of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter. We had such a great team of young folks talking about issues in Virginia and learning new advocacy skills we decided to bring on a new class of the council, now called the Young Leaders Council.

This year we have a team of 10 young leaders from all across Virginia on the council. The 2023 Young Lead-

ers Council is already off to an amazing start, attending and participating in advocacy events in Richmond. In January council members participated in a Rally for a Livable Future to advocate for climate justice initiatives in Virginia and oppose Youngkin's rollbacks on climate progress. In February council members participated in a Student Advocacy Day with the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy. This

advocacy day gave council members the opportunity to attend breakouts on various topics, talk with their legislators and meet other young leaders in Virginia.

During their time on the council, members will spend their time learning new skills through advocacy, social media and communications committees. They will also have the opportunity to plan their own actions, events and more.

Keep an eye on our Instagram (@vasierraclub) for our introduction of the full Young Leaders Council. While the 2023 YLC is just getting started, we can't wait to work with them and see what exciting ideas they have.

Hunter Noffsinger is the Hampton Roads community outreach coordinator of the Virginia Chapter.

The road to clean transportation in Virginia

by Cheri Conca

In the battle against climate change, much attention is understandably focused on replacing dirty energy from coal and fracked gas with renewable power from wind and solar. But emissions from cars, trucks and buses are the No. 1 source of climate change pollution in Virginia, accounting for almost half of the state's greenhouse gas emissions. People with respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, and low-income folks who live next to congested roads particularly suffer. In a land that worships the car, it is going to take a lot of grassroots power from people like you to push local, regional and state decision makers to adopt policies and actions that prioritize clean transportation.

Communities need to rethink not only how to move people from point A to point B without getting into a car but also what points A and

B will look like in the future. Bus rapid transit, connected systems of bicycle/pedestrian paths, improved Metro and bus service at affordable prices, electric vehicle infrastructure and fleet vehicles are all options that go a long way toward decreasing the fossil fuel pollution that warms the planet and negatively affects people's health.

Additional strategies for greenhouse gas reduction involve land use planning, such as smart growth and transit-oriented development. Smart growth is a way to build communities that are economically prosperous, socially equitable and environmentally sustainable. Transit-oriented development allows communities to develop or redevelop in a way that tosses aside the typical one-person-per-car scenario in favor of development that plans residential, business and recreation areas all within walking dis-

tance of public transport, such as a metro station.

New state legislation nudges localities to incorporate transit-oriented development into their planning processes. House Bill 585, sponsored by Del. Elizabeth Guzmán, requires certain Virginia cities and counties to consider incorporating strategies into their comprehensive plans that focus development around transit, with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions through coordination of transportation, housing and land use planning. "Localities and cities are asked to do their part to fight climate change by considering options related to affordable housing, public transportation and land use planning when preparing their comprehensive plans," said Del. Guzmán. "By working together, we can drastically reduce Virginia's carbon footprint." Upon signing the bill, Gov.

Ralph Northam pointed out that transit-oriented development helps create walkable, accessible communities with smaller carbon footprints.

Many groups and individuals in Northern Virginia join the Sierra Club in advocating for transportation-related climate solutions, from smart growth to electrification of school buses. All of these transportation pieces fit into a bigger picture, one that must be fleshed out in community plans to provide direction and measurable results for years to come.

It is critical that all of Fairfax County's voices are heard for clean transportation, for example:

- commuters who would use transit if it were convenient;
- bus riders who are negatively impacted by fees and fumes;

See Clean transportation on page 12.

Virginia Chapter email lists

Virginia Climate Movement: Join this list of people active in the Virginia climate movement to receive and send emails on climate-related news, events, webinars and actions going on across the state. *Monthly call on the fourth Tuesday at 12 p.m. and 7 p.m.* **Contact Mary-Stuart Torbeck at mary-stuart.torbeck@sierraclub.org**

Virginia Environmental Justice: Join this list to work towards achieving environmental justice in Virginia. Our purpose is to identify environmental justice communities across the state, to develop EJ leadership, to provide room at the table for these organizations in statewide policy discussions and to share resources. *Monthly call on the second Wednesday at 11 a.m. and the second Thursday at 5:30 p.m.* **Contact Gustavo Angeles at gustavo.angeles@sierraclub.org**

Sierra Club Virginia Chapter Equity, Inclusion and Justice: This space is for asking questions, voicing concerns and sharing ideas as we move forward in our work to create a more equitable environment and chapter. **Contact Gustavo Angeles at gustavo.angeles@sierraclub.org**

Hampton Roads: Join this list to get updates about actions, events and ways to get involved in Hampton Roads. **Contact Ann Creasy at Ann.Creasy@sierraclub.org** or visit <https://vasierra.club/hr>

Richmond: Join this list to get updates about actions, events and ways to get involved in the Richmond metropolitan area. **Contact Tim Cywinski at tim.cywinski@sierraclub.org** or visit <https://vasierra.club/rva>

Northern Virginia: Join this list to get updates about actions, events and ways to get involved in Northern Virginia. **Contact Cheri Conca at cheri.conca@sierraclub.org** or visit <https://vasierra.club/nova>

Legislature holds line against climate attacks

by Connor Kish and Bob Shippee

The Virginia General Assembly met in January and February for its annual legislative session. This year, the dynamics of divided government dominated the storylines again. Republicans in control of the executive branch and House of Delegates had policy debates and disagreements with the Democratic-controlled Senate of Virginia.

This year, the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter Legislative Committee, composed of dedicated volunteers managing over a dozen issue categories, tracked and lobbied for or against over 150 bills. We set out in early January to defend Virginia's climate, environmental and justice progress. At the end of the legislative session, we have tremendous success to point to.

First, we defended Virginia's participation in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative program for the second year in a row. We succeeded in defeating the proposed bill to end participation in this critical greenhouse gas reduction program and maintained our stance, RGGI is law in Virginia.

Second, we defended Virginia's adoption of advanced clean car standards. This law, passed in 2021, is the largest and most comprehensive plan to reduce emissions from Virginia's top pollution sector, vehicles. Despite the governor's and House Republican attempts to vilify this program with falsehoods and scare tactics, the Senate Democratic Caucus, led by Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources Committee Chair

Chap Petersen (D-Fairfax) defended this critical pollution reduction program that not only makes environmental sense but economic sense by positioning Virginia to put more electric vehicles on the road as they roll off assembly lines instead of losing out to other states.

Third, we defended the landmark Virginia Clean Economy Act against dozens of bills introduced to dismantle our path to a clean energy future. Our lobbying team worked hundreds of hours to strategize, combat and organize opposition to these bills. We are proud that because of this dedicated work involving staff and dozens of volunteers, Virginia remains on target to completely eliminate emissions from our power sector by 2050.

In coalition, we also worked with partner organizations to express our opposition to legislation that would have rolled back the Virginia Voting Rights Act by eliminating absentee voting, eliminating dropboxes and putting up additional barriers to the ballot box. Thanks to the pushback from these organizations, Virginia will not go backwards on ballot access for all. Without free and fair elections, where everyone has access to the ballot, we cannot make progress on climate, clean energy or environmental protection. We are proud to support the Virginia Voting Rights Act and will always defend it.

Legislation to move Virginia forward on our priorities was hard to come by. The divided General Assembly agreed on very few policies to make progress this year, not even non-controversial

proposals such as a ban on use of cyanide in mining and a measure to facilitate solar on schools. Forced into a defensive posture, we did defeat several attempts to force modular nuclear costs onto Virginia ratepayers and also achieved a major win when Dominion Energy failed in its bid to increase its profit ratio.

Additionally, a landmark utility regulation bill sponsored by Sen. Jennifer McClellan and Del. Lee Ware passed, restoring State Corporation Commission oversight of investor-owned utility profits and rates.

See *Legislative successes* on page 10.

Disaster / Travel / Wilderness First Aid Education

For adults and teenagers with solid attention spans. Learn how to save life and limb. Empower yourself to care for others, potentially reducing demand on rescue teams and freeing up hospital beds.

Online and In-Person Options Available!

Option I: Online-only. View course videos at your own pace, interspersed with self-guided hands-on practice sessions. \$115. Earn a Certificate of Completion.

Option II: Blended Learning=Option I above, plus a three-year credit to attend an in-person class. \$245.

Option III: In-person with strict safety measures, including symptoms screening for the 14 days prior to class, masks required indoors, and more. \$245. Earn the internationally-renowned two-year SOLO WFA certification.

Apr 15-16 ... Charlottesville, VA

Apr 29-30 ... Richmond, VA

Apr 29-30 ... Women-only retreat near Front Royal, VA

May 27-29 ... Forest retreat near Blacksburg, VA

Jun 3-4 ... Washington, DC area

Jun 10-11 ... Charlottesville area, VA

Jun 10-11 ... Norfolk, VA

Sep 2 - 4 ... Mountain-top retreat near Blacksburg, VA

Brought to you by Matthew Rosefsky, Geo Medic, street medic, SOLO Instructor-Trainer, Sierra Club Outings leader and volunteer strategist for Sierra Club National "Outdoors for All" campaign. See <https://solowfa.com> for more information and online registration.

The warehouses are coming!

by Lynn Godfrey



A Southern California scene of the endless truck traffic and pollution that comes with warehouse sitings (photo from Guardian stock photos).

A national phenomenon is threatening neighborhoods near and far—the rezoning of land from residential to industrial to construct warehouses. In many cases, mega warehouses are taking shape in communities across the country, including right here in our backyard. Whether in neighborhoods as far as California or here in Virginia, communities are organizing to save their culture, heritage rights and health from pollution posed by the construction of industrial parks and warehouses. In Hampton Roads, several communities are fighting local political and economic powers to preserve what they have identified as valuable—clean air, clean water and greenspaces.

Chesapeake and Suffolk residents are organizing to prevent two mega industrial areas and warehouses threatening their lifestyle, landscape and health. Citizens have established a petition to take the matter to a referendum and filed lawsuits against the cities, respectively. Additionally, Chesapeake and Suffolk residents are also organizing to oppose the Virginia Reliability (aka Ripoff) Project pipeline development. A common thread among the

gas industry’s justification for fracked gas infrastructure buildout is business growth and jobs. In the Chesapeake case, the city has explicitly stated the need for natural gas infrastructure development to accommodate this massive industrial buildout. Grassroots activists led by the Conservation Chesapeake Group have created a petition to garner 32,000 signatures from registered Chesapeake voters to sign to bring the matter to a referendum.

Suffolk residents are up against powers wanting to develop a mega warehouse along the Route 460 corridor. They are suing the city over the project to build nearly five million square feet of warehouse space along Route 460. Just a mere couple of months ago, this challenge may have been insurmountable. However, now it has great precedence. Per Protect Hanover and Waterkeepers Chesapeake, “Hanover County residents brought a challenge to local zoning decisions related to the siting of the 1.7 million square foot Wegmans distribution center on a 217-acre property that includes forested wetlands, located in the historic Brown Grove community.” The circuit court

found they had no grounds to challenge the county’s zoning decisions and no grounds for illustrating the direct impact they would experience from this development. They appealed and the State’s Supreme Court sided with the residents of Brown Grove that they indeed have a right to challenge the county’s decision because of the harm their community (Brown Grove) would experience because of the warehouse construction.

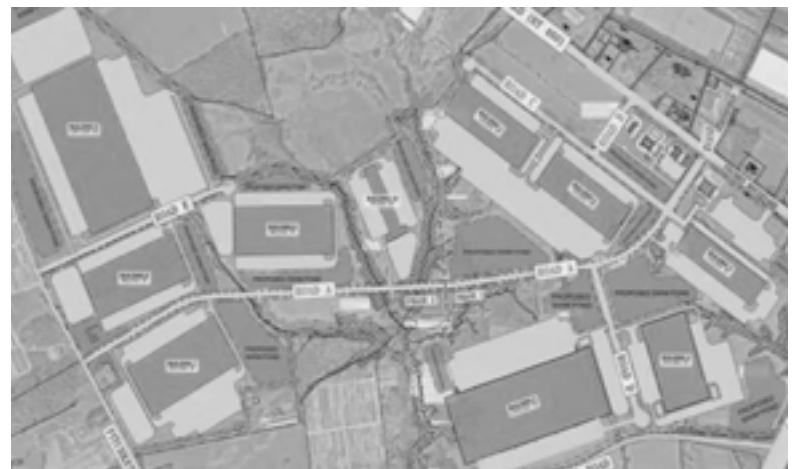
The historical Wythe neighborhood in Hampton is facing off with its city council over rezoning the site of the old school for the blind and deaf from residential to industrial to make room for the Northpoint Warehouse project. The site is of historical significance because of the role it played during segregation to provide an education to disadvantaged blind and deaf children of color in Virginia. Black people donated their land to build the school and maintained meaningful relationships with the school and its students until its closing in 2008. The Wythe community wants to maintain the residential integrity of their neighborhood and cites the many sources illustrating the

pollution and other degradation industrial zoning and warehouses bring to communities affecting health, livelihood, cultural heritage and other valued aspects of community.

The Brown Grove community in *Morgan et al. v. Board of Supervisors of Hanover County* “argued they would be directly impacted by, among other things, increased traffic, noise, and light pollution stemming from the construction and operation of the new facility.” The endless truck traffic illustrated in the California community is what Hampton Roads communities would be looking forward to.

Southern California residents lament their warehouse encroachment as a “slow death” according to a December 29, 2022 article in a Guardian special report on the phenomena (“Revealed: how warehouses took over southern California ‘like a slow death’”). According to the article, over 9,000 warehouses, many near schools, cloud the area with constant pollution. Let’s hope Hampton Roads doesn’t experience this “slow death.”

Lynn Godfrey is the Just Transition program manager of the Virginia Chapter.



Warehouse sketches from Suffolk, Virginia (photo from Suffolk City Government slideshow).

Ben Jealous, Sierra Club's new executive director: Walking the talk for local communities

by Eileen Woll



Eileen Woll with Sierra Club Executive Director Ben Jealous at his book talk in Hampton (photo courtesy of Eileen Woll).

Offshore wind development is a fast moving train that has left the station. Virginia will see at least 5200 megawatts of OSW online by 2035, if not sooner. The feds will be auctioning off six additional areas in the mid-Atlantic come 2024, and Dominion Energy has already started talking about plans for the

second phase of Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind, CVOW 2. CVOW 1 is 196 turbines 27 miles off Virginia Beach, online in 2026 with 2600 MW power—enough to power over 650k homes. And there will be no problem meeting Biden's "30 by 30" goal (30 gigawatts of OSW by 2030) as the feds plan lease sales

off almost every East Coast state, as well as the West Coast, Gulf Coast, the Great Lakes and Hawaii.

So, with that train out of the station, we must now center our work on ensuring equitable offshore wind, meaning that the benefits of OSW development (jobs, economic investment, etc.) are delivered to the communities that need them most. In Hampton Roads, it is the communities most impacted by flooding and sea level rise that are also most in need of the family-supporting, wealthy building associated with offshore wind development.

At his Never Forget Our People Were Always Free book talk/signing event in Hampton recently, Ben Jealous was asked about what he was looking forward to as the Sierra Club's new executive director. In response, he first gave a shout-out to Rep. Bobby Scott who was in the audience and then mentioned his excitement for the Inflation Reduction Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the "carrots" that the Sierra Club could bring to the work as organizers, coalition-builders and master prodders in building sustainable local economies.

Music to my ears. We have in Ben Jealous a lead-

er focused on not just getting legislation over the finish line but also engaging directly in the work that the legislation set up in the first place. Also, I note his excitement for focusing on local economies, which he reiterated in interviews with both the Nation and the LA Times. Asked by the Nation's Danielle Renwick, "Can you talk about the transition from civil rights to environmental work? What's the through line from the NAACP and the Sierra Club?" Jealous responded, "At the Sierra Club, that means elevating our local fights—for land preservation, for more parks, [defending] communities that have been poisoned—and having national leaders aggressively back up local chapters and local allies in a way that's similar to what people expect from the civil rights movement."

Amen, brother. And thank you in advance for committing the attention and resources of our powerful nationwide organization to winning local campaigns. It's how we get that clean energy future we envision.

Eileen Woll is the offshore energy program director of the Virginia Chapter.

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Lastly, by the session's end, no budget agreement was reached between the Republican House and Democratic Senate. General Assembly budget negotiators continue dialogue as of this

writing, attempting to iron out differences in priorities.

The Legislative Committee will meet this summer to identify 2024 legislative session priorities. Since all 140 seats in the Virginia General

Assembly are on the ballot in November, unlike most years, detailed planning by the Committee will wait until after November 7.

Connor Kish is the legislative and political director and Bob Shippee is the legislative committee chair of the Virginia Chapter.

Dominion's electricity bills are keeping consumers in the dark

by Ivy Main

A seemingly simple question came across my desk a few weeks ago: what does Dominion Energy Virginia charge residents per kilowatt-hour? Given how frequently I write about Dominion, I was embarrassed not to have a quick answer. In my own defense though, Dominion makes it hard to find out. And when you do find out, the answer is: it depends.

Examine a recent bill, and you will see the number of kilowatt-hours you used in the preceding month, a confusing list of charges, and the dollar amount that you owe. You can do the math to figure out what you paid this month per kilowatt-hour, but that's more of a snapshot than the whole story.

I asked colleagues to send me their utility bills to see what people were actually paying, and I got out my calculator. Everyone's rate was different, and the more electricity they used, the less they paid per kWh. Even after I removed state and local taxes from the equation, rates ranged from a low of 12.2 cents per kWh for a home that used 2930 kWh in February to a high of

17.3 cents for a home that, thanks to solar panels, drew just 179 kWh from the grid.

As that solar home shows, the flat rate of the basic customer charge skews the average price higher. That basic charge is currently \$6.58 per month, according to Dominion's residential rate schedule, but you won't see it on your bill.

The rate schedule reveals other information your bill doesn't tell you, and that's where the real impact lies: you pay less per kWh in both generation and distribution charges for the electricity you use in excess of 800 kilowatts per month from October through May. From June to September, you pay less in distribution charges for every kilowatt over 800 but more in generation charges.

You're also charged a single rate year-round for transmission, which is different from distribution. Plus, every kilowatt-hour is subject to a list of riders and non-by-passable charges. The rate schedule doesn't identify these charges, but the bill does, albeit with no explanation for how the amounts are determined. Your bill

also lists fuel as a separate charge under Electricity Supply, though fuel does not appear in the rate schedule.

Still with me? No? All of this must make sense to the State Corporation Commission, which approved the rate schedule, but it is thoroughly opaque to customers.

The sufficiently dogged can find a worksheet on Dominion's website that breaks out all these costs. If you plug in the month and a number of kWh you used, it will calculate a bill. You still need to do the math yourself to arrive at the price per kWh, but you can then play with numbers to see how usage affects rates.

Doing that confirms what I saw in my colleagues' bills. Assuming 1,000 kWh, the number Dominion uses to represent the "typical" customer, the price works out to 14 cents in winter. Change that to a frugal 500 kWh and you get 15 cents. Raise it to 2,000 kWh, and it goes down to about 13 cents.

When challenged about this in the past, Dominion justified its buy-more, pay-less winter rate structure by arguing it was needed to make bills affordable for

customers with electric heating, whose use can double or triple in the winter time. The company didn't mention that it also benefits wealthier people with large homes, and decreases the incentive for customers to conserve energy.

It also turns out that large homes do well in summer as well. According to the worksheet, a customer using 1000 kWh in June would pay 14.6 cents per kWh. For 2,000 kWh, it rises just barely to 14.7 cents. The customer who uses only 500 kWh pays the highest rate, at 15 cents. Energy efficiency, alas, is not rewarded.

So Dominion's bills aren't just confusing, they mask a perverse incentive in the rate structure that rewards people who use more electricity. Lower rates for using more electricity undercut the value of investments in energy efficiency and solar and send the wrong message to consumers.

Ivy Main is a renewable energy co-chair of the Virginia Chapter.

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and community members are asking Prince William County Potomac District Supervisor Andrea Bailey and Chairperson Anne Wheeler to ensure that Dominion's Possum Point Coal Ash Landfill is subject to a public facility review process that requires Dominion to pump

and treat millions of gallons of coal ash-contaminated groundwater at Possum Point to prevent additional drinking-well contamination and stop discharges to the Potomac River. We are asking the Board of Supervisors to support recommendations from the citizen-led Possum

Point Coal Ash Task Force to remove coal ash by barge or rail to recycle or landfill ash away from the Potomac Shores Community and residents negatively impacted from decades of coal ash pollution.

To learn more or get involved on this issue, please

reach out at ann.creasy@sierraclub.org

Ann Creasy is the acting deputy director of the Virginia Chapter.

Inside Virginia Sierran



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Please Mail Immediately

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- people who travel by foot or bicycle who find it difficult or impossible to get from point A to point B;
- business owners who know that well-connected, healthy communities draw more customers;
- neighborhoods that suffer from health and respiratory problems caused by congestion-clogged roads.

If you live in Fairfax County, you have some important upcoming opportunities to join us in advocating for actions that will reduce transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions. Fairfax County has drafted its first-ever strategic plan, and community input meetings are scheduled for March and April. A Community-Wide Energy and Climate Action Plan, or CECAP, is also in the works, and it will include

a greenhouse gas inventory and target dates for greenhouse gas reduction.

Actions and strategies to help mitigate climate change and reduce the impact of climate-related events on county residents and businesses will also be part of the plan. The plan will be primarily developed by a task force composed of leaders from the business community; local and regional non-profits, including Sierra Club members; and residents from each of the nine Fairfax County supervisor districts. Each district has a focus group composed of community members with experience or interest in climate, energy and environmental issues. Community input is critical to the success of the CECAP, and all county residents will have the opportu-

nity to provide input at community meetings later this year.

Your voice is important. Share these opportunities with friends, neighbors and especially people who might not otherwise hear about them. Climate change affects everyone. Your stories are the spark for transition to cleaner, more equitable transportation in Fairfax County. Together we build power to effect the policies and actions needed to fight climate change.

Cheri Conca is the conservation program coordinator of the Virginia Chapter.