



SIERRA CLUB

VIRGINIA CHAPTER

Virginia Sierran

The Official Newsletter of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter
Summer 2022

Right here, right now and done right: Sierra Club gains in offshore wind by Eileen Woll

It's hard to believe that it was 2009—13 years ago—when the federal government first gathered various stakeholders to see if there was any interest in developing wind energy off the coast of Virginia. The answer, of course, was a resounding “Yes, we are interested!”

In 2013, after four years of bureaucratic wrangling (it is a brand new US industry after all), the feds leased to Dominion an area for what is now known as the Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind project. And again we waited. It wasn't until 2019—six anxious years later—when Dominion finally publicly committed to developing CVOW's 2600 megawatts. They did so by filing plans with PJM, our huge regional grid operator, to connect the project to the grid by 2026.

Dominion's hesitation for both the commercial CVOW project and the pilot project was fear of the State Corporation Commission's rejection of their applications for rate recovery. Without it, Dominion would not move forward.

In 2018, the SCC very begrudgingly approved the pilot project, saying they felt the law—specifically the Grid Transformation and Security Act—forced them to it. For SCC approval of the larger CVOW project, all eyes are now on the SCC's interpretation of the 2020 Virginia Clean Economy Act, which put 5200 MW of OSW in the public interest. The CVOW

hearing before the SCC occurred in May and the penultimate decision is due in August 2022.

Very interestingly, the act also called on Dominion to submit an economic development plan for the CVOW project that included provisions for diverse hiring. The Sierra Club hired Cale Jaffe and the UVA Environmental Law Center to represent us as a participant in the case, arguing that Dominion's hir-

ing plan was inadequate and lacking in specific goals. We hired an expert, Dr. Mark Gabriel Little with the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, to make recommendations and most were adopted via a stipulation agreement with Dominion. Assuming approval by the SCC, here's what we are getting:

- Dominion will update the Economic Development Plan semi-annually to include reporting on racial and

ethnic demographics, veteran status and geographic location of Dominion employees as well as contractors and suppliers.

- It commits to increasing its diverse workforce representation by 1% point each year with a goal of reaching at least 40% diverse workforce representation by the end of 2026.

- It must create an advisory group to meet semi-annually to review and consider Dr. Little's testimony and recommendations related to supplier diversity and access to capital strategies.

- It will hold and participate in at least 10 clean-energy career events, no fewer than 5 of which will be held in collaboration with minority serving institutions.

- It will hold and participate in at least 10 business opportunity expositions with at least 5 in collaboration with diverse or small business/trade organizations.

This is a huge win on two fronts!

One, the agreement helps to ensure that the communities bearing the brunt of environmental injustice are specifically included in the benefits of CVOW. Climate change threatens our coastal communities and disproportionately affects people of color and low-income communities.

Two, the agreement also sets precedent for the equitable development of the

See OSW on page 3.



Eileen Woll was invited by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Action to join a US offshore wind expert delegation (above) in June 2022. The US delegation was treated with a flight over Alpha Ventus, Germany's first offshore wind farm (photos courtesy of Eileen Woll).

From the chair

by Ralph Grove



Greetings Virginia Sierrans!

I hope you're enjoying the early summer weather and are finding time to get out for hiking, biking, paddling or whatever way you enjoy nature. Personally, I'm trying to get out as much as possible before the summer heat ramps up.

My summer started with a six-week stay in Turkiye. I visited several beautiful places, but the highlight was several days hiking the Lycean Way, a popular trail along the Aegean coast. This was not an easy trail, and the weather was already warm, but it was so worth the effort—the views from the mountains were spectacular, and the accommodations in villages along the way were charm-

ing. I owe many thanks to Judy Gayer and Joe Brancoli who covered chair duties in my absence.

But I really wanted to focus in this column on our ongoing summer fundraiser, 10 Wild Weekends. In case you haven't heard yet, the Chapter has organized 10 differently themed weekends with various outings that are the basis for a fundraising challenge. Each fundraiser has a goal of raising \$1,000 in donations from sponsors. In all we hope to raise up to \$100,000 this summer to close the gap in our chapter budget and enable us to fulfill our 2022 goals.

Visit the 10WW home page at <http://teamsierra.org/virginia> to see what it's all about.

We need all hands on deck to make 10WW a roaring success! Here's how you can help:

- Become a fundraiser: You can take part in one of the scheduled events, or organize your own personal activity, and then invite friends and family to sponsor you. You can sign up and create your own fundraising page at the home page mentioned above. Here's the link

to my fundraising page, for example: teamsierra.org/virginia/grover

- Contribute to the campaigns of other fundraisers: Follow the links from the home page (above) to find out about the various teams and the fundraisers on each team. Whether you contribute a few dollars or a lot, every donation will help to support the Virginia Chapter's

OSW

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country's nascent offshore wind industry going forward. Atlantic OSW leasing is huge. Lease areas like the six in the New York Bight ended up being auctioned off for over six billion dollars. We are quickly realizing that developers need to come to the auction block with more than big wads of cash. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, which administers all US OSW, is now starting to insert stipulations for hiring and supply chain into lease terms.

What a long, bumpy, yet very exciting road it's been, from 2009 to 2022. We worked to get OSW done (i.e., electrons on the grid)

work in 2022.

Whatever you can do to support 10WW will help the Virginia Chapter staff and volunteers to continue doing what we do best: promoting conservation and fighting for a healthy climate for all.

Have a great summer!

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

and then done right (i.e., benefiting Virginians via wealth-building jobs).

A huge round of applause to our legal team, including Cale Jaffe, Stephen Wald, the UVA Environmental Law Center, Dori Jaffe, our brilliant Sierra Club attorney and the visionary that is Dr. Mark Little. We took what was just a vague mention in the Virginia Clean Economy Act and made it an actual set of goals and deliverables for Dominion. Offshore wind done right in Virginia!

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

Virginia Sierran

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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."

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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.

Let's keep proving them wrong

by Kate West

I can't think about our theme for this quarter's Virginia Sierran, "proving them wrong," without thinking about our coalition's victory in defeating the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. I remember I had worked with Hannah Wiegard of Appalachian Voices (at the time) to organize an all-day climate action training at the Ecovillage in Charlottesville in January 2015 and some of the activists who attended came up to me afterward asking if I'd heard about the massive dirty fuel project, what we were doing to fight it and whether I thought it was possible to defeat it. At the time, I didn't see how we could possibly win. So, I was honest in sharing my concern and uncertainty even though it was hard not to be able to give them hope.

When I got the call on July 5, 2020, telling me that Dominion was canceling plans to build the ACP, I wept. Fortunately, in the

midst of the pandemic, no one was around to see me cry. I couldn't control the emotion that washed over me after five and a half years of intensive fighting and many moments I thought we had been defeated. Truth is, I am weeping now, just recalling it.

Proving them wrong is why I'm here. I recently heard a man who was making a new life after being released from prison say, "I love haters. They make me want to prove them wrong" (more in *Writing Our Way Out*). I share this drive. The more someone tells me I can't do something, the more I want to make it happen. A quote that has always spurred me on is attributable to Mahatma Gandhi: "First they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. Then you win."

This work—movement building, activism, advocacy, community organizing—is a labor of love that many, like

me, throw ourselves into. No matter how much of our time and energy it consumes, we give ourselves to the cause and the people who we are fighting alongside because we know that together we can make an impact far beyond what we ever could do alone.

All of us share a passion for protecting nature and our communities—not just the people we love, but the people we don't even know, too—because we believe deeply that everyone has a right to clean air and water and because we know that a thriving planet cannot protect itself.

As stewards of the lands we occupy, it is our responsibility to sustain them and help them and all life that depends on them to thrive. We can not back down, despite how intimidating the odds and adversity are that we face. And, when we are victorious, the joy and fulfillment of dedicating ourselves

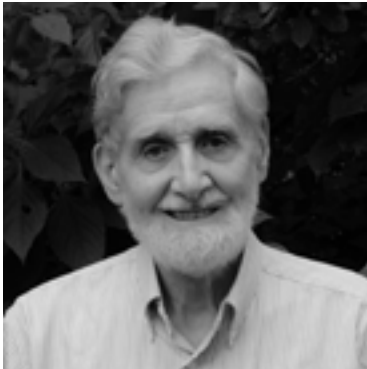
to this cause is more overwhelming than the threat ever was.

This victory continues to propel me forward in some of my darkest moments. We are in the midst of many ongoing battles: we're still fighting to defeat the Mountain Valley Pipeline (and we WILL WIN) and other dirty fuel infrastructure; and we're fighting for clean energy freedom, clean transit for all, equitable climate solutions and many more virtuous issues. Not only that, we're fighting the fight differently. We're proving the patriarchal, racist, colonial, exploitative, dominant culture wrong by refusing to perpetuate systems of oppression in the way we work, modeling equitable collective action and sustaining ourselves for the long road ahead. We can win on all of these fronts if we continue to work together.

Kate West is the director of the Virginia Chapter.

In memoriam: Richard "Dick" Ball

by Ivy Main



Sierra Club volunteers get to know each other in a way that's different from the way we know other friends, neighbors and co-workers. Our mission to protect the planet draws people together whose paths otherwise might never cross: scientists, tradespeople, lawyers, educators, artists, homemakers engineers. Lucky us,

because some of these fellow volunteers turn out to be among the people who teach and inspire us the most.

Dick Ball was such a person. Dick passed away in his sleep on April 9 at age 86. Dick held a PhD in physics and spent much of his career in government, including the Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency. His years at DOE included serving as lead author of the IPCC First and Second Assessments on climate change, which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007.

Dick's time with the Virginia Sierra Club began after he retired from government in 2000. Charles Price, then

the Chapter chair, named Dick energy chair, a commitment Dick kept for the next two decades. Dick's deep knowledge of climate science and his growing alarm over society's failure to act on mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions helped focus the Chapter's work on the climate crisis and ensured our advocacy was always based on rigorous science and sound analysis.

Equally as important, Dick understood that when it comes to fighting climate pollution, getting the science right is only the beginning, so he could always be counted on to show up when asked, whether it was to serve on a stakeholder group or

march at a protest. And even while growing increasingly alarmed by the acceleration of climate change, he remained even-tempered, collegial and good-humored.

Last year the Chapter awarded Dick the first-ever Glen Besa Lifetime Achievement Award, as reported in the Fall 2021 edition of the Virginia Sierran.

Dick's wife, Anita, and his daughter, Alisa, will be holding a memorial service to celebrate Dick's life at 2 pm on July 14 at John Calvin Presbyterian Church, 6531 Columbia Pike, in Annandale.

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

Rappahannock Group at Fredericksburg's Earth Day Festival

by Paula Chow



Rappahannock Group's Earth Day Festival climate action call (photo courtesy of Paula Chow).

Perfect weather conditions and the ability to hold public events helped make Fredericksburg's Earth Day Festival the largest and most attended in the 19 years since the Rappahannock Group first co-created the festival with Fredericksburg's Parks and Recreation Department (<https://earthdayfred.com>). The estimated attendance was between 6,000 and 7,000.

RGSC's two-tent booth had display sections for kids where they could write a letter "Dear Mother Earth . . .," which was immediately displayed. Other sections had signups for Outings with info on past and future outings; a large poster with details of the phthalates in beauty products, especially those in hair straightening; a poster on "Advanced Recycling" and the NRDC "Issue with Tissue" scorecard

(<https://nrdc.org/tissue>) with the three top toilet tissues for display (#1 Who Gives a Crap). The tip on hand helped dismiss the myths that environmentally friendly tp is rough and weak.

We had a self-survey where 31 people participated. The questions included asking if you would make the following changes away from using plastic:

- shampoo bar vs. shampoo from a plastic bottle
- bar soap vs. soap pump in a plastic bottle
- reusable coffee/tea mug to go vs. paper/polystyrene cup
- BYO containers for restaurant leftovers vs. using restaurant-provided containers
- reusable containers of all kinds vs. zip lock bags
- keeping a sack of reusable utensils in purse, backpack, or car vs. using the plastic utensils restaurants provide.

On the average, less than half of the people surveyed would make a change for eco-friendly products.

Living Green Award

RG created its Living Green Award in 2010 to acknowledge businesses and organizations what are environmental stewards. It is awarded on the stage at every Fredericksburg Earth Day festival. This year's recipients are Grapewood Farm in Montross (grapewoodfarm.com) and Botanical Bites & Provisions, LLC in Fredericksburg (botanicalbitesandprovisions-llc.com).

RG also established an annual program to involve students at the Earth Day Festival where they volunteer to be judges of the vendors for the categories of Most Interactive, Most Educational and Most Creative.

A Department of Energy employee attended (as a visitor) and commented that the event was "very impressive."

Photos can be seen on Rappahannock Group's Facebook page.

Paula Chow is the program chair of the Rappahannock 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:

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Lessons learned from the DC Chapter by Gary Kosciusko



Matt Gravatt, DC Chapter chair, makes a presentation to SCPRO members at Seneca Creek State Park, in Maryland (photo courtesy of Gary Kosciusko).

What can we learn from the Sierra Club's DC Chapter? A lot, it turns out. On May 1, Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings held its first in-person general meeting since the fall of 2019. Due to COVID concerns, we held the meeting, free and open to the public, at an outdoor pavilion.

Our featured guest speaker was Matt Gravatt, chair of the DC Chapter. Currently the managing director for Campaigns at Climate Power, Matt previously served as PAC director and deputy legislative director for the Sierra Club.

Matt gave us a stimulating presentation of what is going on in his chapter. As a totally urban chapter, DC faces a host of climate- and pollution-related challenges that other major cities also face. These include general urban decay, plastic and other solid wastes, lead in tap water, water pollution, air pollution, noise pollution and light pollution.

For example, the DC Chapter worked with the DC Council to obtain a landmark "zero waste" law, which establishes a donation and re-

use program with the city's Department of Energy and Environment, calls for reduction in single-use items (especially disposable food service ware), requires large generators of food waste to separate their back-of-house waste and improves the city's recycling program (including battery recycling).

The DC Chapter is also working with like-minded partners and the Council to get the city's Metrobus fleet converted from diesel fuel to electric.

For a whole year, DC Chapter volunteers worked with volunteers mostly from the District's faith communities to check for methane gas leaks in the city's natural gas pipeline system. Methane is a climate super-pollutant, much more harmful than carbon dioxide, despite industry claims that it is a "clean fuel." What the volunteer investigators found was shocking: 389 leaks, including 14 with methane concentrations high enough to explode!

Even when it is burned as designed in kitchen stoves and heating systems, natural gas creates toxic byproducts similar to car exhaust. A re-

port on the findings garnered significant media coverage when it was released.

As a final example, the DC Chapter urged the DC Council to have the city's 75,000 streetlights converted to energy efficient light-emitting diode technology. The council approved a 15-year contract to accomplish this. While this conversion will reduce the total light emitted from the streetlights, the council did not adopt further measures urged by the DC Chapter to mitigate LED's negative impacts, such as disrupting the circa-

dian rhythms of humans and wildlife, as well as continued excessive light emitted skyward.

Although the DC Chapter has its own Inspiring Connections Outdoors program for youth, it relies on SCPRO to conduct local outings available to the general public. For our part, we in SCPRO look forward to continuing our complementary relationship with the DC Chapter, and continuing to learn from them.

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

Kidvention: An annual celebration of everything science by Donna Shaunesey



In April the Virginia Discovery Museum in Charlottesville brought back this annual family science festival at the Ting Pavilion on the downtown mall. For many years the Piedmont Group has had a booth at this event, encouraging children to "protect, explore, and enjoy" the natural world. This year we helped young naturalists plant wildflower seeds in compostable planting pots that they can plant in their gardens. We selected varieties that will attract and provide nourishment for pollinators, such as bees and butterflies. Our members working at this event were encouraged by the enthusiasm of the children and their parents. Let's hope that this is a sign that future generations will take better care of our planet. (Photo courtesy of Donna Shaunesey.)

Donna Shaunesey is the chair of the Piedmont Group.

Who to believe? Electric versus propane school buses

by Cheri Conca

\$500 million in federal funding for clean school buses is flowing down to the states with a grant application deadline of August 19. This is an exciting opportunity for Virginia, where over one-third of greenhouse gases are produced by transportation-related emissions. But what exactly is a “clean” school bus? The definition differs, depending on your perspective.

There is a lot of convincing content out there touting propane as a “clean” alternative to diesel, but propane is still a fossil fuel that exacerbates climate change. As school districts replace their old buses, switching to battery electric models is the best way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Because the EPA consid-

ers propane a “clean” alternative fuel, school districts may use federal funding to purchase propane school buses. Given the amount of pro-propane content on the internet, it is no wonder some school districts are choosing propane. Where does the pro-propane content originate? With the propane industry, of course. The industry is very effective with its messaging, reaching media outlets across the country with arguments that sound great on paper but omit the fact that, while propane may be somewhat cleaner than diesel, it is still a fossil fuel.

Try web-searching “electric vs. propane buses.” The first page of a recent search turned up several opinion pieces that were published in Richmond, Buffalo, Des

Moines, Park City and beyond. Written by a representative of the Propane Research and Education Council, which consists of an executive committee and councilors board that are heavily populated by members of the gas, oil and propane industry, the letters to the editor and op-eds contain persuasive nuggets such as these:

“With propane buses, school districts get all the cost- and emission-reducing benefits for less money. Electric school buses are one opportunity for emission reductions, but I encourage Maryland school districts and contractors take a hard look at propane.” (Baltimore Sun)

“Loudoun County Public Schools’ \$200,000 share

of the state’s \$1.5 million in federal aid to replace diesel school buses would have been better spent on propane school buses rather than electric... Just like electric buses, propane buses eliminate the harmful black smoke that comes out of a diesel tailpipe, while drastically reducing emissions like nitrogen oxides. At the same time, they take the pressure off our fragile electric grid...” (Loudoun Times Mirror)

Readers of these opinion pieces, including elected officials, school district transportation directors and county budget staff are being urged to consider cost over environmental health.

See School buses on page 12.

Toward a plastic bag tax in Charlottesville and Albemarle County

by Michael Pillow



Michael Pillow and Spencer Phillips distribute cloth reusable bags outside the Loaves & Fishes food pantry in Charlottesville, Virginia, in May (photo courtesy of Michael Pillow).

Since the Virginia General Assembly authorized cities and counties to adopt a \$.05 tax on disposable plastic bags in 2019, several municipalities have enacted plastic bag tax ordinances. The Piedmont Group of the Virginia Chapter has been working since the summer of

2021 to get such a tax adopted in the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County.

So far, we have succeeded with Albemarle County, which passed an ordinance in early May. We continue to prod the City of Charlottesville.

Our endeavor began by

assembling an ad hoc committee, with the help of a University of Virginia class looking at plastic bag pollution and measures. Using mostly online resources (including great work done in Northern Virginia municipalities), we developed a set of frequently asked questions to send to representatives of the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors and the Charlottesville City Council.

In response to representatives’ concerns about the potential impact of a bag tax on lower income residents, the Piedmont Group ExCom also authorized the purchase of reusable bags to distribute to such residents. Other efforts included communication with various environmental organizations and persons involved with other municipalities developing a plastic bag tax.

Members of the committee made presentations to both City Council and the County Board of Supervisors, urging passage of an ordinance and ensuring our support for implementation. As indicated above, Albemarle County reacted favorably, with an ordinance effective January 1, 2023. We remain hopeful that the City will follow suit shortly.

Meanwhile, we distributed approximately 40 cloth reusable bags to clients at the local Loaves & Fishes food pantry in early May. Additional bags were distributed at a Charlottesville Farmers Market on June 11, and more distributions will be scheduled soon.

Michael Pillow is a member of the Piedmont Group.

Legislature sends compromise budget to governor

by Connor Kish

With just a few precious weeks to go before the start of the new fiscal year, the General Assembly sent a compromise budget to Gov. Youngkin on June 1. When the 2022 Assembly session adjourned back in March, it did so with the state's budget unfinished. This situation set up high-stakes negotiations between Republican House leaders and Democratic Senate leaders to craft a budget that would pass in both chambers.

The months of April and May came and went, and the public was largely in the dark as the negotiations continued. Complaints about the transparency of the budget process have been growing in recent years. The months-long delay in delivering the public an opportunity to view their state's budget only exacerbated these complaints.

No compromise budget

will ever be viewed as perfect by any party, and this was certainly the case with this budget. The Chapter advocated for months to protect Virginia's membership in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, and we succeeded. The Chapter was extremely disappointed to see that the budget includes a five-year delay in the implementation of a phase-out of single-use styrofoam containers; this unnecessary delay will slow efforts to remove styrofoam from waterways, fields and roadways.

The Chapter advocated fiercely against repeal or suspension of Virginia's gas tax, and thankfully, the budget does not include either. We know that people are feeling the crunch at the pump, but a gas tax suspension would only drive up profits for oil companies, and Virginians won't see a reduction in pric-

es on their corner. Without any enforcement mechanism, profit-seeking oil companies will soak up the tax savings on their bottom line and pass no relief onto the consumer whatsoever. Not only that, a repeal or suspension of this tax would have resulted in devastating cuts to mass transit and rail funding, at a time when we know we must reduce transportation sector emissions from cars and trucks to meet our climate goals.

We were glad to see the budget contain an increase in funding for Virginia state parks and a historic amount of capital funding for new multi-use trails. We must continue to prioritize our collective and treasured outdoor spaces and expand access to them.

As of this writing, Gov. Youngkin is reviewing the budget the Assembly

passed. The governor has line-item veto power within the budget and could also choose to make amendments. If vetoes or amendments occur within the budget, the General Assembly will reconvene in Richmond for another series of votes in the coming weeks.

As we look toward the fall, the Chapter will begin preparing its legislative priorities for the 2023 General Assembly session and organize our grassroots power.

Reach out to Connor Kish, legislative and political director for the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter, at connor.kish@sierraclub.org

Connor Kish is the legislative and political director of the Virginia Chapter.

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>

Increasing the availability and affordability of heat pump technologies

by McKenna Dunbar and Nikki May

As clean energy advocates and organizations seek to make the built environment of the commonwealth more energy efficient and less reliant on fossil fuels, heat pump technologies can help answer that call.

On June 6, the Biden Administration announced an executive order granting the Department of Energy authorization to expand the manufacturing of clean technologies. Under this executive order, Biden prioritizes the expansion of Distributed Energy Resources to help American families lower their energy costs, improve public health and create sustainable jobs. A central priority of the expanded manufacturing of these resources includes strengthening the resiliency

of the nation's supply chain with regard to heat pumps and other critical clean energy technologies.

Furthermore, the Heating Efficiency and Affordability through Tax Relief Act (S. 4139), or HEATR, has the potential to dramatically scale the adoption of electrification measures across American households. A central provision of this act encourages manufacturers to shift to high efficiency consumer, commercial and industrial heat pumps and heat pump water heaters by establishing a tax credit through 2031, an action that will amend the IRS Code of 1986.

For lower-income and rural communities who already face higher energy burdens, upstream incentives of this

nature lower the cost of such technologies at the time of sale, making it easier for households in these demographics to afford the upfront cost. This act would drive heat-pump prices to the same prices as traditional air conditioner prices, scaling the electrification movement that is already underway.

Heat pumps are an alternative to gas heaters that provide an efficient method to heating and cooling buildings. An air source heat pump uses air from outside the house as either a heat source or a heat sink. Heat pumps operate like traditional air conditioners when operating in cooling mode. In heating mode, they use outside air to heat a refrigerant and then compress the

refrigerant to create a hotter gas. This heat is released inside the building through ductwork or an interior unit. Even when it is quite cold outside, there is enough heat to capture and concentrate in order to heat a home.

Fundamentally, misconceptions about heat pumps are barriers to their wide scale adoption. The early history of heat pumps have painted a dismal view of the efficient capacities of this form of space heating and cooling technology. Due to first wave heat pumps from the 1980s struggling to heat homes when temperatures dipped below freezing, they received a reputation for not

See Heat pumps on page 10.

RGGI is making a difference

by Amory Fischer

Collapsed floors, busted sewage pipes, cracked oil furnaces emitting carbon monoxide and leaking roofs—these are all things I see on a weekly basis.

I am an energy auditor for a nonprofit that implements home weatherization programs for income-qualified families across Virginia. I'm usually the first person on our team to visit a client's home and scope out the situation. Our main goal is to lower the client's utility bills by sealing air leaks and adding insulation, but we are often thwarted by the high-cost repairs common in Virginia's roughest housing stock. Or at least we were commonly thwarted until the passage of the Clean Energy and Community Flood Preparedness Act, which allowed Virginia to join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.

RGGI raises money for a program called Weatherization Deferral Repair, or WDR, that now allows us to fix these problems and prepare a house for energy efficiency work.

While we do lower utility bills, the benefits of WDR go way beyond this. Environmentally, we are switching more and more homes off fossil fuels, lowering overall fuel use and repairing housing stock that otherwise would become obsolete. Socially, we are working to correct historical injustices of inequality and poverty. Economically, CHP and our sister nonprofits across the state have hired dozens of new employees, and, as of this spring, over 150 HVAC, carpentry, electrical, plumbing and other contractors are supported by this work.

So thank you. Virginia

joining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative has been a long and difficult battle and one that is still being fought with the current governor. This is a shout-out to all the work Sierrans like you have put in to getting us here. It is making a world of

difference.

Find the weatherization nonprofit that works in your area of the state:

<https://dhcd.virginia.gov/wx>

Amory Fischer is an Ex-Com member of the Virginia Chapter.



A busted sewage pipe causing a toilet to sink through the floor, being held up by cinderblocks (photo courtesy of Amory Fisher).

Remembering the LGBTQ+ fight by Hunter Noffsinger

Every year, June 1 marks the beginning of Pride Month, a time where the LGBTQ+ community celebrates our history and who we are. It's my favorite time of year because I get to be with my community members in dedicated spaces that are made for us and by us. But while we are celebrating, we also must always remember that the first pride started as a riot and a fight for LGBTQ+ people to exist. A fight that still goes on today.

In 2022, hundreds of legislative attacks on the LGBTQ+ community were introduced in states all across the country; a number of those were right here in Virginia. There were attempts to strip our rights to housing and participation in sports and to ban or remove transgender-inclusive policies in education. I'm grateful that none of this legislation ended up passing in Virginia, but that is just the tip of the iceberg. All of these policies and pieces of legislation attempt to chip away more and more at one thing: our right to exist and live our lives to the fullest.

And so we keep fight-

ing. We keep fighting to be able to live in a world that seems hell-bent on trying to tear queer people, especially trans people, down. We continue to challenge those in power who continue to try and strip us of our rights. I am constantly amazed by and proud of the LGBTQ+ community and how hard we fight everyday despite grappling with "leaders" who would rather shut us down and deny our existence than allow us to live freely as our true selves.

Continuing to show up and fight for our community proves that we cannot be shoved back into the closet or a little box tucked neatly away where we can't be seen or heard. And it is all thanks to those who have come before us and put themselves at risk to fight for LGBTQ+ people across the world, people like Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, Stormé DeLarverie, Harvey Milk and many, many more. It is because of people like them that I am able to be out at work, out to my family and married to my wife. I am eternally grateful for them.

It is clear as day to me

the intersections between LGBTQ+ rights, human rights and the environmental movement. You can't fight for one without fighting for the others as well because in the end, we are all fighting for the same thing: a livable future. A future where trans kids can be fully themselves, where queer couples can hold each other's hands in public without fear, where we can truly be alive and happy.

We don't just deserve to exist, we deserve to thrive.

We've always been here and we don't need anyone's permission. We are here, we are queer and we certainly aren't going anywhere.

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

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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.



A Pride flag with "I am HerShee Bar" written on it hangs in the HerShee bar, the oldest lesbian bar on the East Coast, on one of its last days before being closed and demolished by Norfolk City Council (photo by Sarah Noffsinger).

Volunteer Spotlight: Charles Gerena

by Cheri Conca



A Sierra Club member since 2017, Charles Gerena focuses his advocacy efforts on transportation electrifi-

cation and renewable energy. Charles is a member of the Chapter's Electrification Workgroup and was a key

advocate for the passage of 2022 Virginia legislation to impose fines on the owners of fossil fuel vehicles who park in electric vehicle charging spots.

Charles founded Drive Electric RVA, the Richmond, Virginia-based chapter of the Electric Vehicle Association, in 2014. This growing community of EV owners and enthusiasts has promoted electric vehicle technology through a variety of education and outreach activities in Central Virginia, from big events like the Richmond Home and Garden Show and the Virginia International Auto Show to community events like the Chamberlayne Little League's open-

ing day in northern Henrico and the Harvest Festival in Louisa.

In addition, Charles has partnered with state and local nonprofits to expand the reach of his organization—including Virginia Clean Cities and Solar United Neighbors of Virginia—as well as with business owners who share in his vision of a sustainable model for transportation. For him, it's "people power" that makes the difference.

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

Heat pumps

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performing well in colder climates. In the present day, heat pumps can work effectively in temperatures as low as 13 degrees below zero. In the Southeastern United States, where winters are milder, heat pumps have been shown to increase cost savings and be more efficient than a gas furnace.

Critics have also stated that because the heated air these technologies produce is not as hot as furnace air, one's home might pose to be uncomfortable. While a furnace provides short bursts of extremely hot air, a heat pump provides warm air to a house for longer periods of time. The total measure of heat is the same, however, and heat pumps produce this heat in a more efficient manner. Due to their more continuous heating times, they also create even com-

fort throughout the house without uneven patches of warmth.

While heat pumps are growing in popularity for new construction, market growth still remains stagnant. In the US alone, heat pump installation in newly constructed buildings exceeds 40% for single-family homes and approximately 50% for new multi-family buildings. Internationally, heat pumps continue to meet only a small share of residential heat demand (7%) even though nearly 180 million heat pumps were used for heating in 2020. Researchers at the International Energy Agency concluded that 90% of global heating needs could be satisfied through the installation of heat pumps, all while operating at a lower carbon footprint compared to gas-fired boilers.

LEAP, the Local Energy Alliance Program, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit headquartered in Charlottesville, Virginia. Recently, the organization has launched their Thermalize campaign, a program that seeks to bridge the gap between energy efficiency and electrification for Virginia residents. Along with advocating and assisting families with information surrounding heat pumps, they inform households how they can improve their homes from an energy standpoint as well as from a health and safety view.

Programs like Thermalize, coupled with legislative mandates, will expand market adoption of electrification infrastructure and increase the knowledge base of American families and businesses alike to adopt more clean energy measures for

their communities.

As the electric grid moves toward adopting more electrification measures, heat pumps are considered vital to a clean energy future and national security. If you would like to learn more and be a part of our work advocating for developments in the electrification sphere, equitable energy distribution and renewable grid technologies, please contact McKenna at mckenna.dunbar@sierraclub.org or reach out via LinkedIn.

McKenna Dunbar is the building electrification lead and Nikki May is an Environmental Justice and Civic Fellow of the Virginia Chapter.

Bristol Landfill: Hope, but not relief

by Dan Firth

After the conclusion of the expert panel evaluating the operation and conditions at the Bristol, Virginia, landfill, the twin communities of Bristol, Tennessee and Virginia were on pins and needles waiting for the recommendations. Not knowing whether to be hopeful or not, the communities waited.

On April 25, the panel's report was released. Included were technical recommendations to minimize emissions from the landfill test and construct a sidewall mitigation system; improve the gas collection system; monitor surface settlement; install a dedicated monitoring system for landfill temperatures; and install a geotextile membrane to capture emissions and collect stormwater. In addition, the panel recommended that the city have an "active community outreach program to communicate strategies, provide status and progress reports, and receive citizen feedback."

Much to the surprise of the communities, the panel recommended the cessation of disposal of waste and a permanent cap. While this brings hope for relief from the suffering to the community, the end to the nightmare is nowhere in sight.

Since the release of the expert panel report weeks ago, the city of Bristol, Virginia, had been mostly silent. Prompted by the filing of a lawsuit by the City of Bristol, Tennessee, they have now agreed to a preliminary injunction order to implement the panel's recommendations, beginning immediately with the following milestones: a sidewall odor mitigation system complete in 365

days; cessation of waste disposal, improved cover and additional monitoring in 90 days; and report on how the remaining recommendations will be implemented within 60 days. Missing is an estimate of the costs.

Throughout the life of the landfill, the city has failed to adequately fund its maintenance and operation as demonstrated by delays in purchasing and repairs of critical equipment. A recent inspection by Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, prompted by resident complaints, revealed that the city is unable to comply with even the basic requirements for operating a landfill, maintaining a small working face and adequate cover. Without outside help, the city cannot afford to implement the fixes necessary to bring relief in a timely manner.

To help the cash-strapped city, the Virginia Legisla-

ture—with the largest surplus in history, \$2.6 billion—budgeted just \$2 million while giving larger amounts to other projects that do not have ongoing environmental and health impacts. This funding is a small step in the right direction but not nearly enough to even reduce the emissions let alone close the landfill and protect the communities. All estimates indicate that solving this disaster will require tens of millions of dollars. Increasing the total cost—as was pointed out in the panel's report—is the fact that "both groundwater and stormwater will need to be managed forever."

The Bristol Area Ministerial Alliance, Virginia Interfaith Power and Light, Virginia Chapter Sierra Club and the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club are working together to ensure the recommendation for an "active community outreach

program" for the Bristol communities is fulfilled; communicate to those in power at the local, state and federal levels the impacts and urgency needed; and to bring pressure to bear on them to obtain the resources needed to urgently bring relief.

Meanwhile, the twin communities of Bristol, Tennessee and Virginia continue to suffer the onslaught of pollution emitted from the Bristol, Virginia, landfill on a near-daily basis.

If you would like to join the effort to help the Bristol communities obtain relief, or if you are in the Bristol area and are interested in forming a group to impact this and other local issues, please contact Dan Firth at dwfirth@gmail.com

Dan Firth is the chair of the Solid Waste and Mining Committee of the Tennessee Chapter.



Inadequate cover and large working face at the Bristol, Virginia, landfill, as cited in the Virginia DEQ report detailing the April 21, 2022 onsite inspection. The quarry walls, seen along the sides, serve to direct stormwater into the landfill. Water mixed with the trash results in accelerated decomposition, elevated temperatures and increased gas emissions (photo courtesy of Virginia Department of Environmental Quality).

Inside Virginia Sierran



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EV buses

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Making sure the case for fossil fuel-free electric buses is heard is not always easy. For example, Steve Banashek, the Chapter's electric vehicles chair, recently wrote a rebuttal to the Perkins' letter to the Loudoun Times Mirror editor, quoted above, that went unpublished. In his letter, Banashek responded, "The March 31 column by Tucker Perkins of the Propane Education and Research Council would have the reader believe that reducing nitrogen oxide emissions would be enough to make the lower price of a propane school bus a better choice over an electric school bus but omitted a few inconvenient truths. Propane school buses come with a dependence on fuel that is more than twice as expensive as electricity in dollars per gasoline gallon equiv-

alent. They also get one-third the fuel economy of an electric school bus because most of the propane burned is wasted as heat. A propane school bus requires regular changes of oil, oil filters, and spark plugs which are not required for an electric school bus because electric motors do not use them or need them. Claiming a propane school bus is cleaner than a diesel school bus is a low bar to clear and hardly something to brag about. In addition to still emitting some nitrogen oxide, a propane school bus also emits a lot more carbon monoxide compared to a diesel school bus whereas an electric school bus does not emit nitrogen oxide or carbon monoxide. And the minimal reduction in carbon dioxide emissions from a propane school bus is next to meaningless because

an electric school bus emits none at all. Electric school buses are more efficient, require less maintenance, and eliminate tailpipe emissions making them the best choice for the students, the community, and the planet. "

Unfortunately, Steve's well thought out response went unpublished.

The bottom line is that propane is a fossil fuel. Sierra Club's official position is that vehicle electrification is the cleanest type of investment and the wisest choice. If we truly want to combat climate change, battery electric school buses are the way to go. Propane is just a dirty detour from the goal of zero emissions for a healthier planet.

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