



**SIERRA
CLUB**

VIRGINIA CHAPTER

Virginia Sierran

The Official Newsletter of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter
Summer 2023

Mountain Valley Pipeline, the final injustice: An interview with Kirk Bowers by Lynn Godfrey



June 8 rally outside the White House to protest the Mountain Valley Pipeline (photo courtesy of Lynn Godfrey).

The mountains and hollows of West Virginia and Virginia cry out for justice. Justice for their land and culture and justice for their lives, cries heard around the nation, in the highest level of government, the White House.

After the final insult from the Biden administration and West Virginia senator Joe Manchin to garner favor to one fossil fuel project in the debt ceiling negotiations, the Mountain Valley Pipeline has been restored to life by an “act of congress” as noted by one community activist. It is identified by name in the Fiscal Responsibility Act as part of the administration’s negotiations with Republicans to increase the nation’s debt ceiling to avoid a global financial catastrophe.

Again, Appalachia has become the sacrifice. The act calls for all MVP’s outstanding permits to be granted with no judicial review. The people of Appalachia have been making “good trouble” for very close to a

decade to defeat the Mountain Valley Pipeline and have kept it from completion. They have fought to maintain their heritage and cultural integrity.

The MVP is a 303-mile fracked gas pipeline currently under construction crossing West Virginia and Virginia with a proposed connector line into North Carolina. Although its initial permit from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to commence construction was not granted until 2017, the people of Virginia and West Virginia got wind of it in 2014, and they have been fighting ever since to keep this dangerous fracked gas pipeline from marring the beautiful mountains, streams, creeks and trails they’ve known all their lives and causing gas explosions well known throughout the country and more probable in a mountainous region and, since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, to keep their community healthy.

I thought at this juncture,

when it seems the fight is over and the pipeline has prevailed by an act of Congress no less, it would be appropriate to get the thoughts of one of the stalwarts of this struggle. Kirk Bowers, former Sierra Club Virginia Chapter pipeline chair and former staff pipeline organizer, has been involved with the MVP since the beginning and I had some questions for him:

SC: “Tell us about your connection to the land and people in Southwest Virginia along the MVP route.”

Bowers: “My ancestors were part of the first wave of European settlers to southwest Virginia three centuries ago, where tales [were told] of men once riding through the virgin forests amongst tall trees without undergrowth blocking their trails. It was a hardscrabble, hand-to-mouth existence in those mountains and dark hollows. There were no conveniences. Hardships unimaginable in current historical context. Land previously stewarded by indigenous people

before European settlers came. Steep valleys and high mountainous terrain were clear cut and plowed for fields to grow crops and raise farm animals. Land heavily deforested for iron furnaces used to produce metal at the end of and beginning of the 19th and 20th centuries, respectively.

“During the height of the industrial revolution, when the impacts of these environmental desecrations were not widely known, land disturbances and disrespect for the mountains, rivers and streams were widespread. Restoration efforts started almost a century ago are still ongoing.

“[In the] 1950s and 60s Roanoke County was an idyllic place to live until the power lines and I81 were built across the valley and mountains. After years of unintentional restoration of the forests, development began in the 1960s with clear-
See MVP injustice on page 9.

From the chair

by Ralph Grove



Big changes are afoot throughout the Sierra Club this year! A significant restructuring effort is underway at the national level that will streamline the organization and push more control out to new regional organizations. As with all reorganization efforts, this will result in some

upheaval and many changes in the short term but should give our chapter increased support when it's complete.

Locally, we're making progress in filling vacant positions. We've hired a new organizer who will work with the national Beyond Coal Campaign; we've hired a new finance/operations specialist who will provide much-needed office support; and we are almost finished with the hiring process for a new chapter director, who should be starting in July. Watch for a general announcement about our new director in the weeks to come.

You may have heard about our (relatively) new national executive director, Ben Jealous. Among other accomplishments, Ben is a

former president of the national NAACP and ran as a candidate for the governorship of Maryland. Ben paid a visit to Washington, DC, and Virginia in June, and those of us who could attend were happy to have the chance to meet him. Ben spoke to us about his priorities for the Sierra Club and took the time to have an extended dialog with staff and with volunteers. I'm excited about the leadership and new ideas that Ben is bringing to the Sierra Club, and I look forward to great things to come.

My other role in the Virginia Chapter is that of outings chair. I was happy to hear from Ben Jealous that one of his priorities is to grow the Club's outings programs by providing additional sup-

port, including technical support for outings leaders and participants. Outings have always been an important part of how we accomplish our mission, and I'm happy that our national leaders value the outings program. We're always looking for new outings leaders, by the way, and if you like to hike, bike, paddle or otherwise enjoy the outdoors and would like to share that enthusiasm, I'll be happy to talk with you about how you can become a Sierra Club outings leader.

I hope you have a great summer, wherever you may be going or staying!

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

Welcoming Bea Trumann to the Virginia Chapter!

by Ann Creasy

I am excited to welcome the newest team member to the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter staff, Bea Trumann! Bea is our new community engagement coordinator based in the Richmond area.

She started in early May and has been getting familiar and diving in! Recently, she helped with the Falls of the James Big Yard Sale and coordinated our table for the Richmond Multicultural Fest!

She is working on engaging communities and decision makers on clean energy and dangers of gas and recruiting/supporting community involvement in our work in the Richmond area.

Bea Trumann hails from Maine, where she grew up collecting rocks, saving

See Welcoming Bea Trumann on page 3.

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.

Seeking candidates for the executive committee!

by John Cruickshank

Would you like to have more influence over Sierra Club policies and actions? Here is your opportunity!

We are now accepting nominations for the at-large delegates to the Chapter executive committee, or Ex-Com.

Goal setting and policy decisions for the Sierra Club are made by volunteer leaders. The Virginia Chapter ExCom has eight elected at-large delegates and one delegate from each of our eleven groups. The at-large members are elected by the general membership and serve two-year terms.

The nominating committee is seeking candidates for four at-large delegate positions. Responsibilities include attending four meet-

ings a year, participating in online voting when important issues arise and maintaining an understanding of the environmental issues in our state. The Sierra Club is committed to diversity and equity, working to have its leadership look like the communities it serves.

September 10 is the deadline for submitting a nomination. If you would like to learn more about becoming a member of the Virginia Chapter ExCom, please contact me at jcruickshank4@gmail.com or (434)973-0373. I will be more than happy to answer your questions.

John Cruickshank is the nominating and election committee chair of the Virginia Chapter.

Welcoming Bea Trumann continued from page 2

worms after heavy rains and constantly playing in the water. She created a youth climate program called the Changemakers Network, receiving awards for it from the Maine Environmental Education Association as well as a 2018 30 Under 30 for the North American Association for Environmental Education.

An AmeriCorps Community HealthCorps alum, a Goddard College Sustainability Program alum and two-time commencement address speaker, Bea was first associated with the Sierra Club through its Global Population and Environment Program, where she volunteered with an education foundation and group of Bayclayan weavers in Oriental Mindoro, Philippines.

Bea was a participant in SHIFT Jackson Hole's Emerging Leaders Program, a panelist with PGM ONE (People of the Global Majority in the Outdoors, Nature, and Environment) and the first plus-sized model to walk for Outdoor Retailers' Fashion Show in Red Rocks. Prior to joining the Sierra Club, she worked with the State of California's EPA in the Department of Toxic Substances Control, focusing on Environmental Justice and Tribal Affairs.

Needing a break from the corruption and seeking to put her newfound state policy and process information to direct work, she's hoping to positively support existing efforts in Virginia for energy equity, uplift and celebrate impacted communities and

Membership chair needed!

The Sierra Club Virginia Chapter is seeking a volunteer for the position of membership chair. All Sierra Club members residing in Virginia are welcome to apply.

The membership chair leads the membership committee in organizing efforts across the Chapter to recruit, welcome and engage new members in a way that advances the Chapter's mission.

Responsibilities:

- Organize and chair Chapter membership committee, including representatives from groups; hold committee meetings regularly (currently meets once a month)
- Lead committee efforts to devise and execute recruiting strategies and activities and to welcome and engage new members
- Ensure membership chairs in groups and activity sections are aware of Sierra Club resources available to support effective recruitment

and retention

- Work with volunteers, staff and partner organizations as needed to advance organizational membership and recruitment goals
- Report to the Chapter Ex-Com on membership figures and changes

Desired skills/abilities:

- Enjoy meeting new people and participating in social events
- Interact and communicate effectively with people from diverse backgrounds
- Interest in recruitment and strong teamwork skills
- Understand and espouse Sierra Club's values of equity, inclusion and justice
- Ability to stay well-organized
- Sierra Club member in good standing with primary residence in Virginia

Time Commitment:

About two to five hours per week



continue to fight for water rights. She'll love you forever if you bring native plant clippings or volunteer with her!

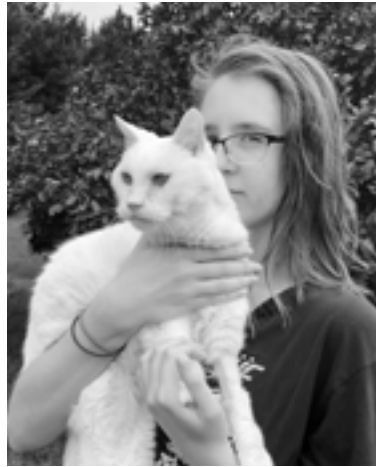
If you are interested in getting involved in our work around Richmond, please reach out to Bea to join in!

Her email is bea.trumann@sierraclub.org

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

Piedmont Group updates

by Donna Shaunesey and John Cruickshank



Piedmont Group interns, Kaleb Notari (L) and Alexis Jones (R) (photos courtesy of Kaleb and Alexis).

Piedmont Virginia Community College held an Earth Week celebration with door prizes, yummy vegan food and climate trivia. The Piedmont Group collaborated with the Community Climate Collaborative in helping students and faculty learn more about what we're trying to protect.

The Piedmont Group was part of an Earth Day celebration on Charlottesville's Downtown Mall, along with Charlottesville Tree Stewards, Charlottesville Center for Peace and Justice and Charlottesville's Climate Team. There were free trees and lots of great giveaways.

We're so excited that two college interns will be joining us this summer to help spread the word about what the Sierra Club does and how other folks can help. Kaleb Notari and Alexis Jones, both current PVCC students, will represent our group at events as well as help get signatures on our upcoming petition to protect the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.

Alexis is an active member of the school's Geology Club and has done cleanups and invasive plant removals. Kaleb is working toward being an environmental science major at a four-year

college and is a member of the Environmental and Horticulture Club.

Each spring members of the Piedmont Group bring an activity to the annual KidVention that is sponsored by the Virginia Discovery Museum in Charlottesville. This is an annual celebration of everything science that inspires children to explore the world around them with all their senses. Local exhibitors help

the youngsters investigate biology, chemistry, environmental science, engineering, physics, zoology and more through fun, hands-on demonstrations, experiments and games.

This year the event, which is free and open to the public, was held at the Ting Pavilion on the Charlottesville downtown mall and attracted hundreds of children and their parents and grandparents. At our table we helped the young naturalists plant wildflower seeds in

bio-degradable planting pots that can be replanted in their gardens. We explained that these native plants will attract pollinators such as butterflies and bees. We were encouraged by the enthusiasm of these children and their families.

Donna Shaunesey is the chair and John Cruickshank is the executive committee representative of the Piedmont Group.



John Cruickshank helped kids plant seeds at the Piedmont Group table at KidVention (photo courtesy of Donna Shaunesey).

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
omethid@hotmail.com

Piedmont:

Donna Shaunesey
434-996-0392
shaunesey@hotmail.com

Roanoke:

Daniel Crawford
540-343-5080
dbcrawford@cox.net

York River:

Tyla Matteson
804-275-6476
tmatteson1@mindspring.com

Great Falls:

Susan Bonney
703-402-9292
sbonney001@aol.com

Potomac River Group:

John Bloom
703-389-4920
johnlbloom@gmail.com

Shenandoah:

Pete Bsumek
540-421-4105
pkbsumek@gmail.com

Falls of the James Group updates

by Shavon Peacock



BioBlitz members looking at toads engaging in amplexus (photo courtesy of Shavon Peacock).

BioBlitz Outing

On April 29 the Falls of the James Group and the Capital Region Land Conservancy partnered in a BioBlitz, or citizen science data collection, of the flora and fauna at CRLC's Varina LandLab in Henrico County, west of Richmond City. We used the free Seek and iNaturalist apps on our phones to make the identifications as part of the global City Nature Challenge. The group of 10 volunteers collected 154 observations and identified 86 species in a two-hour time period.

The Varina LandLab is

now open to the public and will be managed with controlled burns and restoration projects that will involve volunteer plantings and clean ups.

Dragonfly Foray

FOJG had a fun outing with Dr. Richard Groover on May 27 capturing, identifying and releasing dragonflies at Courthouse Park in Hanover, Virginia. Despite the wind, we captured around 20 dragonflies along the pond and identified 3 different species. Did you know that dragonflies can zip around at 50-60 mph? Until the fe-

males are ready to mate, they avoid water and feed in the surrounding fields. Thus, the dragonflies we captured were males.

FOJG 2023 program lineup

We will be meeting in-person at the Congregation Or Ami at 9400 W. Huguenot Rd., Richmond, VA, 7-8:30pm on the second Tuesday of each month beginning in September. Virtual attendance will also be an option via Zoom. Attendance is free and open to the public.

September 12: "Guardians of the Valley: John Muir and the Friendship That Saved Yosemite," with Dean King. Richmond author Dean King will talk about his new book. Following his presentation, Dean will sign books sold by Fountain Books at Congregation Or Ami, our new FOJG program venue. This book is the dramatic and uplifting story of legendary outdoorsman and conservationist John Muir's journey to become the man who saved

Yosemite—from the author of the bestselling "Skeletons on the Zahara: A True Story of Survival." To participate via Zoom, register at sierra.club/fojgdeanking

October 10: Mark Deutsch will discuss the book "Carbon Almanac: It's Not Too Late."

November 14: Parker Agelasto, executive director of the Capital Region Land Conservancy, will present updates on what CRLC is doing in the Richmond area to conserve land and water resources.

December 12: Holiday Dinner and Travel Program. This program will only be an in-person program.

Shavon Peacock is the outings leader and newsletter editor of the Falls of the James Group.

Highlights from SCPRO's spring meeting

by Gary Kosciusko

On May 7, Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings held its spring semi-annual meeting at Glen Echo Park, Maryland. Two special guests were Shruti Bhatnagar, newly elected member of the Sierra Club's board of directors, and Cliff Noyes, our most senior Leader Emeritus, whose 93rd birthday it was.

After lunch we had cake to celebrate Shruti's election and Cliff's birthday. Then we turned things over to our featured guest speaker, David Shilton. David had served

as an appellate attorney and Senior Litigation Counsel in the U.S. Justice Department from 1979-2017. In 2013, David was the recipient of an award from the DOJ's Environment and Natural Resource Division for having "profoundly influenced the growth and development of environmental law" and for successfully defending the constitutionality of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 against multiple challenges.

David gave us a stimulating presentation entitled

"National Monuments: A Heritage in Jeopardy?" He explained that the Antiquities Act of 1906 has usually provided the basis for the creation of national monuments, which are established by executive orders of the president of the U.S. The advantages of national monument designation are that it can be done more quickly than other forms of protection and it can protect a wide variety of assets. Many of our national parks began as national monuments.

A number of challenges

to the existence of our national monuments have arisen, however. Although up until 2017, it was generally thought that only Congress could change a national monument designation, we now know that a new president can revoke a prior president's designation or reduce its size. The size of certain national monuments has also been challenged in court. Other legal challenges have asserted the absence of "proper objects" of pro-

See SCPRO on page 7.

Big Yard Sale returns to the University of Richmond

by Joe Brancoli

“Mac the Finger said to Lou-
is the King/ ‘I got forty red,
white & blue shoestrings/
And a thousand telephones
that don’t ring/ Do you know
where I can get rid of these
things?” (Bob Dylan)

On May 20, the sale of items left by students at University of Richmond (Big Yard Sale) returned at full scale for the first time since 2019. In this previously annual event, volunteers from Falls of the James Group and other organizations work with staff of the University to collect, organize and sell large amounts of practically anything you might imagine. Popular items include small refrigerators, microwaves, clothes, costumes, electronics and kitchen supplies.

This year, furniture was donated before the sale to local nonprofits, bedding to the animal shelter and foam



Shoppers checking out the merchandise at the 2023 Big Yard Sale (photo courtesy of Shavon Peacock).

bed-toppers to a company which reuses them, while Goodwill Industries received leftover unsold things.

Organizers from Falls of the James Group included Joe Brancoli, Daryl Downing, Shavon Peacock, Andrew Peacock, Lydia Pittman, Linda Redmond, Gill Sigmon, Tamara Smith and Lisa Thompson.

Approximately 70 volunteers worked on the project; most being Sierra Club members, plus some university-connected volunteers and the newest staff person at the Virginia Chapter, Bea Trumann.

One thousand one customers were served in six hours, and after splitting the proceeds with the Re-

think Waste department of the University, the FOJG will keep approximately \$7,000.

For this, as with last summer’s impromptu smaller version of the sale, we received amazing and invaluable efforts from David, Mauricio and the Rethink Waste team, rather than the Sustainability Office, which formerly coordinated the sale and continues its other excellent work on campus.

The return of this event, which just three years ago seemed doomed to never happen again, was a blessing, with challenges, opportunities and connection with friends old and new. What a time we had!

Joe Brancoli is the ExCom representative of the Falls of the James Group.

Rappahannock Group presents 2023 Living Green Award

by Paula Chow

The Rappahannock Group created the annual Living Green Award in 2010 to recognize organizations and businesses in its membership area who embody eco-friendly policies and practices, who essentially live green. We encourage the public to support and patronize the Living Green Award recipients. This year’s recipient is special as it is one of the most deserving.

Congratulations to Tree Fredericksburg, Rappahannock Group’s 2023 Living Green Award recipient! Fredericksburg’s foremost activist who makes both the city and the planet a better place to live is Anne Little. The tree canopy in Fredericksburg is the work of Anne

and her husband, Carl Little, the founders of Tree Fredericksburg.

Tree Fredericksburg is a nonprofit organization dedicated to education, advocacy and tree planting for Fredericksburg parks, schools and other public spaces. Anne and Carl Little started their environmental journey with the Bluebird Society, which quickly grew into a love and passion for protecting plants and wildlife in the city of Fredericksburg. They realized that the park behind their house lacked the protections that native wildlife could provide. This was the place to start.

What started as 17 trees in their neighborhood park, turned into 9,000 around the

city. Through various tabling events and fundraisers, they have given away 30,000 trees for people to plant in their own backyards. The Earth Day festival is when they offer 3,000 native trees to give away each year. They partner with Friends of the Rappahannock, Sierra Club and Clean and Green Commission to make the city a more beautiful and eco-friendly space, with the hopes of being a model for similar programs outside of Fredericksburg.

Tree Fredericksburg also provides educational classes to help expand local knowledge about the importance of tree planting as well as other sustainability techniques. We are very honored

to award Anne and Carl Little with the 2023 Living Green Award for their invaluable work for the community and beyond. Future generations will continue to realize the benefits from their work.

Planting trees for today and the future is one of the most effective mitigation actions for the climate crisis one can take. To get involved in the wonderful work they do please check out their website at treefredericksburg.org as well as their Facebook page.

Paula Chow is the programs chair of the Rappahannock Group.

Get involved with the Potomac River Group's social events

by John Bloom

On May 9, the Potomac River Group held an in-person social event in at the historic Barcroft Community House in Arlington. It was built in 1908 and has served as a church and a school before becoming the community center of the Barcroft neighborhood.

Our featured guest was the first Arlington Chief Climate Policy and Coordination Officer, Bill Eger, who moved from Alexandria to take this position in March. He spoke about his goals

for integrating policies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions into all aspects of county government. He took questions from the audience, many of whom were concerned how we could teach and involve Arlington County students in these efforts.

Also in attendance were two candidates for the June 20 county board primary who were endorsed by the PRG, Maureen Coffey and JD Spain; seven members of the PRG executive committee, led by John Bloom; and

members of allied local environmental organizations, including EcoAction Arlington.

We provided healthy Middle Eastern food from Lebanese Taverna and reusable plates and utensils to keep the event eco-friendly. We were excited that we had 45 people in attendance. A nice addition to a fine event was a tour of the gardens around the house by Scott Brinitzer, a neighbor who has for many years volunteered to improve and maintain the gardens and has added and

removed many plants as he has figured out what grows best on the grounds.

If you are in the Potomac River Group and looking for more ways to get involved with your community, sign up for local emails at vasierra.club/updates and look at the Potomac River Group's upcoming events at vasierra.club/prgevents

John Bloom is the ExCom representative of the Potomac River Group.

SCPRO

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tection, as well as improper restrictions on particular activities within national monuments. One recent challenge is based on an 1866 law (called Revised Statute 2477) that simply says, "the right-of-way for the construction of highways across public lands not otherwise

reserved for public purposes is hereby granted." The state of Utah is therefore claiming hundreds of rights of way across federal lands, including proposed wilderness areas and national monuments. If Utah's suit is successful, it would be very difficult to protect federal lands

from widespread road building and from ATV use on the alleged rights of way. A win by Utah would also likely stimulate similar litigation by other states.

David's final message was that protecting national monuments for future generations will require constant

vigilance, and the Sierra Club can promote this by continuing to introduce people to the wonders of our national monuments.

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

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>

The Affordable Energy Act: Virginia's response to rising electricity costs

by Jake Barnet, Kiki Shahida, and McKenna Dunbar

Virginia has an energy problem, but this time state government has intervened and implemented what many hope is a step in the right direction. In recent years, Virginians have faced increasing electricity costs due to the rising price of fuel and a monopoly of the energy market in the state. In 2019, a report conducted by the U.S. Energy Information Agency found that Virginians were burdened with the sixth highest energy bills in the country. Furthermore, an additional EIA study reported that, on average, Virginians paid 20% more for their electricity from December 2021 to December 2022. This aforementioned inflation of energy costs presents a multifaceted issue of energy injustice and inefficiency for the state of Virginia.

In response to the growing energy crisis, the Virginia state legislature unanimously enacted Senate Bill 1321 and House Bill 1604 in February 2023. The cooperative energy bills, often referred to as the Affordable Energy Act seek to promote more equitable energy pricing for the residents of Virginia. The legislative acts grant the State Corporation Commission the authority to establish base rates and monitor the revenue of the prominent Virginia electric utilities, Dominion Energy and Appalachian Electric Power.

More specifically, the bill mandates the SCC to alter base rates to maintain fair energy pricing while ensuring providers can cover production costs and “earn a fair rate of return.” According to Will Cleveland, a senior attorney with the Environmental Law Center, the bill “should save customers hopefully around



\$300 million every year.” The Affordable Energy Act aims to promote future economic success in support of energy justice and efficiency.

Historically, Dominion Energy and Appalachian Electric Power have faced little to no government oversight regarding the pricing of their energy distribution. Critics of the companies have long cited legislative intervention as a necessary tool to curb corporate greed and alleviate inequitable energy costs. Senate Bill 1349 enabled this exploitative behavior when it was passed in 2015, limiting the SCC's constitutional authority to regulate rates. The decision enabled Dominion to determine its base rates, unregulated, for the next seven years. At the time, this legislation was estimated to generate an additional \$1 billion in profits for Dominion, at the expense of local communities.

While deregulation supports a select few corporate executives, other members of society are inequitably affected by higher energy prices. Energy justice is the concept of equitable and equal access to the energy system, commonly viewed through a socio-economic lens. Underprivileged communities, often forgotten in the decision-making process, expe-

rience the greatest burden of increased costs, as higher electricity prices make up a greater portion of their income.

Another layer of the energy burden, which has remained largely overlooked, is the racial disparity in the distribution of energy costs. According to a comprehensive study by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, communities of color are disproportionately burdened by high energy expenses, a reality that is a stark reminder of Virginia's longstanding racial inequalities. The report unveiled that, on average, African American families in Virginia pay a higher percentage of their income towards energy costs than their white counterparts. These communities, already grappling with systemic socio-economic challenges, find it difficult to cope with skyrocketing energy bills. Furthermore, these neighborhoods, predominantly inhabited by communities of color, are more likely to be located near harmful power plants, adding to the environmental injustice they face. The implications of these disparities are far-reaching, from limiting the capacity to invest in energy efficiency measures such as insulation or modern heating systems,

to forcing trade-offs between essential needs such as groceries and paying energy bills. Championing more affordable electricity prices is, therefore, not only an issue of economic justice but also a vital step toward addressing racial inequities.

Furthermore, the deregulation of Dominion and Appalachian Electric Power not only increased electricity costs for Virginian ratepayers and deepened issues of environmental racism but also promoted energy inefficiency. Dominion Energy tends to employ a buy-more, pay-less rate structure. According to the company, this means that electric heating in colder months is more affordable to customers; however, in reality, this pricing mechanism benefits wealthier customers with larger homes, hurts consumers who use less energy, and ultimately punishes energy efficiency.

The passage of the Affordable Energy Act is a result of Dominion Energy and Appalachian Electric Power acting without regulation and consistently overcharging customers in recent years. While this legislative action does not solve the systemic issues associated with energy production, many hope that a more fair pricing structure will ease the economic burden placed on all Virginia residents but especially on the communities of greatest need.

Jake Barnet is the Sustainable Development and Electrification Civic Fellow, Kiki Shahidi is the Clean Energy Transition and Social Impact Fellow, and McKenna Dunbar is community engagement coordinator of the Virginia Chapter.

MVP injustice continued from page 1

ing swaths of land for power lines on the mountains. This was followed by construction of Interstate 81, which split Roanoke Valley and my community into two.”

SC: “Tell us about your involvement with the MVP?”

Bowers: “In 2014, the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter began a campaign to Stop the Pipelines, which included the MVP, the ACP and two other pipelines that were proposed to cross Virginia. The MVP announced plans to build the MVP in the fall of 2014 and began the pre-filing application process with public meetings intended to display information about the MVP route options. Public meetings were held by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in Virginia and West Virginia with many meetings well attended.

“In October 2015, a meeting was held at Roanoke College with local groups who were beginning their campaigns to oppose the MVP. Local groups from Virginia and West Virginia attended this meeting to discuss collaboration and organizing group efforts. This meeting resulted in the beginning of a statewide/local campaign to oppose the MVP. The attendees decided to work together and named the group, the Coalition Opposing Pipelines, or COPS. This was the precursor to the current organization known as Protect Our Water Heritage and Resources, POWHR.”

SC: “The MVP has been [criticized] by subject matter water, soil, and karst terrain experts as a dangerous project. Notwithstanding the climate crisis and an unneeded pipeline, this is the last place to construct a high pressured 42” pipeline. Can you



Construction on the Mountain Valley Pipeline.

address the dangers of the MVP?”

Bowers: “If you travel south on I81 near Ironto, you can see the scars from the construction of the MVP on Fort Lewis Mountain. It is a tremendous disrespect to those who live there, to those who honor and work to preserve the local environment and our culture. The MVP is an intrusion into people’s properties and lives. It stole the land from landowners without adequate compensation or their permission.

The MVP has a tremendous impact on our environment. In a report commissioned by the Chapter, Dr. Ernst Kastning reported that ‘...multiple geological hazards (karst, very steep slopes, poor soils and relatively frequent moderate ground shaking from seismic activity) will likely impair the construction and integrity of a gas pipeline of this size and the topography, soils and water systems through which it is buried.’

“In 2016, a report was co-authored by the late Richard Ball and Bill Penniman, Chapter committee chairs and subject matter experts, of the total volumes of green-

house gas emissions produced by the MVP. With a daily throughput of 2.0 billion cubic feet/day natural gas, the Mountain Valley Pipeline would emit as much as 91 million tons per year. In comparison, the retired power plants at Chesterfield and Clover emitted 7.22 MMT and 5.67 MMT, respectively. In an era where climate change mitigation requires reducing greenhouse gas emissions sharply, the MVP has an immediate impact on climate change. It is estimated that the MVP would produce as much as 1% of the total GHG emissions in this country per year.”

SC: “Thank you.”

Recently, the MVP became a blatant display of corruption and a violation of the principles of democratic governance. During the debt ceiling negotiations, in which the country was held hostage by extreme Republicans, Sen. Manchin used the MVP as a bargaining tool and convinced President Biden to restore it as part of the Fiscal Responsibility Act. The act calls for all MVP’s outstanding permits to be granted with no judicial review. The MVP was restored to life by

an “act of Congress.”

Prior to this act of Congress, the MVP lacked crucial and critical water and air permits in Virginia, West Virginia and North Carolina, namely the Forest Service’s permit to construct in the Jefferson National Forest and Fish and Wildlife Service’s biological opinion and incidental take permit. Both permits were issued three times because the first two were vacated by the 4th Circuit.

The MVP was originally scheduled for service by the end of 2019. It is four years behind schedule and has exceeded original cost estimates by \$3.5 billion. In 2018, less than one year after construction started, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality issued over 300 erosion control violations resulting in \$2.2 million in fines—the largest fine in the history of the DEQ. The West Virginia DCR has issued numerous citations for violation of erosion control regulations, including consent orders.

Although the people are weary, they fight on. A rally in front of the White House on June 8 underscored the people’s resolve to keep fracked gas pipelines out of their community. Fracked gas is not part of a clean energy future, and we cannot prevent the worst effects of climate change if we allow the fossil fuel industry to lock the United States into decades more of gas production. Opposition continues—the struggle continues.

Lynn Godfrey is the pipeline organizer of the Virginia Chapter.

Virginia Chapter's new report: Offshore Wind's Footprint on Virginia

by Eileen Woll

The Sierra Club Virginia Chapter recently released an "Offshore Wind Footprint on Virginia" report. Read the full report at

vasierra.club/OSW_Footprint.pdf

Offshore wind has not only the obvious footprint offshore with its turbines, substations and export cable located in waters near Virginia's shoreline but also a large onshore footprint with facilities and infrastructure located nearby to support Virginia's offshore development.

The report details offshore wind's current and pending footprint on Virginia, highlighting offshore wind's physical presence in Virginia with both offshore projects and onshore support including ports, manufacturing facilities, offices, transmission routing and substations.

Before offering the offshore and onshore footprint, the report goes over a quick lay of the land. The lay of the land includes the national footprint of current and proposed OSW projects, maps illustrating the many other users of offshore areas and

the various technologies for OSW foundations. Onshore lay of land looks at the PJM transmission grid and onshore hubs along the Atlantic.

The report is a snapshot in time. Virginia's offshore wind footprint will continue to be fast growing, and updates to this report will be necessary. It also doesn't

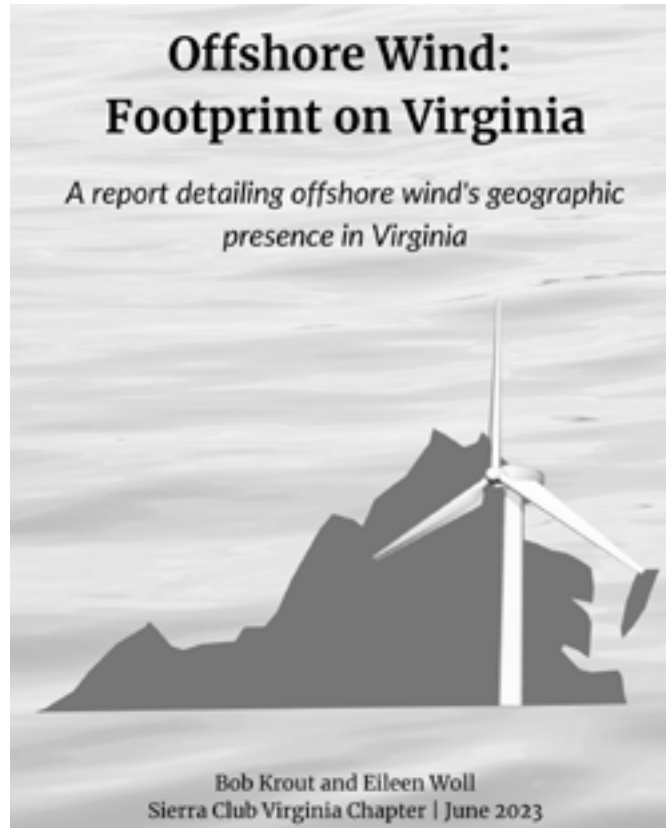
cover the physical presence of every entity supporting the industry. For instance, each offshore wind turbine will contain an elevator that could be manufactured and/or installed by a Virginia business. That business is not included in this report.

There is also a degree of overlap between onshore and offshore activities.

Three entities, Dominion Energy, Avangrid Renewables and Siemens Gamesa, have a footprint both offshore and onshore. Dominion and Avangrid have projects under development offshore as well as facilities (substations, transmission lines, control centers) onshore. Dominion's Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind will site 176 Siemens Gamesa wind turbines 27 to 42 miles offshore, with its blades being finished at their onshore facility on leased land at the Portsmouth Marine Terminal.

The report is written by Eileen Woll, offshore energy program director with the Virginia Chapter, and Bob Krout, a professional engineer in Virginia, LEED accredited professional with over 40 years of facility and plant engineering experience and active member of the Virginia Chapter's OSW Team.

Eileen Woll is the offshore energy program director 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.

Air pollution and other environmental hazards from “advanced recycling”

by Natalie Loeffler

The American Chemical Industry has worked to craft legislation that has been adopted by multiple states to facilitate creating plastic and other products from plastic waste in response to public outcry over the amount of plastic littering around the world. In fact, their lobbying group has managed to pass legislation in 24 states, including Virginia, reregulating this process as manufacturing rather than waste management. Despite recycling not being effective for plastic, industry coined the term to justify their processes, knowing that the general public believes in recycling things.

Only 5-9% of plastic produced by the United States ends up getting properly recycled. In 2020, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed an “industry friend-

ly” solution to the roadblocks that chemical recycling was facing. They called it “advanced recycling.”

Advanced recycling is the process of using pyrolysis and gasification to convert recycled plastics into other products. Pyrolysis is the first step in gasification. What separates this process from combustion is simply the fact that the products are heated in the absence of oxygen, melting the plastic. Pyrolysis creates noncondensable gas, a solid carbon/ash component and tar. The latter of the two is what the final product is typically made from.

The final step is gasification, a process that turns the residual materials into synthetic gas. Unfortunately, most of this industry is using this incineration process to turn plastics into an unus-

tainable fuels and oils, rather than other plastic products that can be reused, as it is far cheaper to use fossil fuels to create new plastic. The toxic waste is landfilled.


In order to get this more commercially cost effective, the legislation allows “advanced recycling” to regulate pyrolysis and gasification units under manufacturing, not waste management regulations. Waste management regulations have far more stringent federal Clean Air Act requirements. The chemical industry prefers the much weaker clean air and toxic byproducts regulations under manufacturing.

From a physical science standpoint, one could argue that incineration does have some positive impacts. The American Chemistry Council states that it shares the EPA’s goal to increase the


use of recycled plastic by at least 30% by 2030. From the point of view of a chemist, pyrolysis would seem like a great way to reduce the contents of landfills and reduce carbon dioxide emitted from plastics in landfills. One problem that this argument faces is that, although the carbon dioxide levels may be decreased, burning plastics releases a whole new set of toxins, including methane, lead, arsenic and mercury. It also uses a lot of power during the conversion process. And there are toxic materials created that can leach into the gas/fuel being produced at a higher concentration than before incineration.

Successful conversion of plastics into new plastics

See Advanced recycling on page 12.



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- How it works:** This can be as simple as including a sentence in your will or living trust (see example below).

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- How it works:** Simply update the beneficiary designation form provided by your account administrator with the following information: Sierra Club Foundation, FBO Sierra Club’s Virginia Chapter, tax-ID number 94-6069490.

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SAMPLE BEQUEST LANGUAGE TO USE

If you are ready to leave a gift to support your Sierra Club chapter in your will, ask your attorney to add this suggested wording to the document:

I give _____ [amount or percentage] to Sierra Club, tax ID number 94-1153307, a California nonprofit corporation, currently located at 2101 Webster Street, Suite 1300, Oakland, CA 94612 (Attention: Gift Planning Program), to be used to support the activities of Sierra Club’s Virginia Chapter. In the event that the Virginia Chapter (or its successor) ceases to exist as a Sierra Club entity, then the Board of Directors of Sierra Club shall have sole authority in administering the funds.

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under this process, without severe climate impacts, has not been achieved anywhere in the U.S. and has only been attempted a few times outside. In their attempts to make this process seem as environmentally friendly as possible, the incineration industry has wasted over \$2 million in public funds alone.

In 2020, former governor Northam’s administration partnered with Braven Environmental to invest over \$30 million into a new plant in Cumberland, Virginia, that eventually got shut down. From a political viewpoint, these plants create job opportunities and a “sounds-good” environmental platform for politicians to leverage in future campaigns. However, it does not make for a strong economic rationale when you consider the damage it causes to the

environment and the health of citizens and the actual costs to “recycle” plastic. Think of it this way: instead of simply burning the plastics to produce energy under strict waste management regulations, this process uses energy to create fuels for burning under less strict manufacturing regulations.

Incineration started gaining more traction in Virginia in 2021 when legislators made a deal with environmentalists that would implement a state-wide ban of Styrofoam in exchange for changing the regulations for these processes from waste management to manufacturing. This changed how this type of incineration was evaluated under EPA and DEQ standards, making it easier to hide the amount of toxins that were being released into the air through the process

and the quality of fuel being created. However, in 2022, Virginia delayed the ban until 2028, making the signatures of all participating environmental groups pointless.

In 2023, the EPA reversed its decision on reducing incineration regulations after receiving requests from 35 Virginia lawmakers urging them to reregulate chemical recycling as waste combustion. This will move these processes back to where they belong, under waste management regulations. While it’s not a perfect solution, it is clearly better for residents’ health to prevent toxic air pollution and waste products from spewing out under lax regulations.

Natalie Loeffler is an intern with the Rappahannock Group.