



**SIERRA
CLUB**

VIRGINIA CHAPTER

Virginia Sierran

The Official Newsletter of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter
Spring 2022

Emerging from the dark: The future of fossil fuel buildout in Virginia by Lynn Godfrey

In less than two years, Virginians have seen the cancellation of one major interstate fossil fuel pipeline, the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, and three intrastate projects, the VNG Header Improvement Project, the C4GT gas plant and the Chickahominy gas plant and pipeline. Contributing to this emergence from fossil fuel development in the state is the grassroots efforts put forth by citizen researchers and scientist activists to protect their communities from senseless poisonous developments.

Communities in central, southern and southwestern Virginia fought and, in the case of the Mountain Valley Pipeline, continue to fight Goliath fossil fuel industry giants. And they have won. Dedicated and passionate activists and concerned citizens, along with progressive legislators, courageously fought from all angles to protect their communities and Mother Earth. Nonetheless, four more new fossil fuel development projects are on the horizon, awaiting Federal Energy Regulatory Commission certification in the state.

The Chickahominy gas plant and pipeline project is the latest to die and haul-tail out of the state for what they hope is friendlier fossil fuel territory. The Chickahominy, LLC, stated in their cancellation statement that, "Unfortunately, opposition from outside interests and regulations, largely advanced



by the renewable energy industry and state legislators that supported them, made it impossible to deliver natural gas to the site."

Well, this is partially correct, but it was not "outside interest" it was inside interest. It was old-fashioned grassroots organizing from the start. In the case of Charles City County and Concerned Citizens of Charles City County, or C5, it started with a very small group of about five people who partnered with the SAVE Coalition to develop strategies and tactics to attack at pivotal points to bring down this unnecessary fossil fuel development. Chickahominy, along with the C4GT, would have been two of only five gas plants in the nation totaling more than 2,500 MW of fossil-fired generating capacity located within a mile of one another

From Buckingham County and Pittsylvania County to Charles City County, every day people are standing up against federal and state regulatory bodies who often rubber stamp fossil fuel projects without any consideration for

the climate or environmental justice concerns. In Buckingham County, the Union Hill community organized against the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and won. In Charles City County, the community organized and took down two proposed gas plants and two would-be pipelines that would have provided the gas to them—the Virginia Natural Gas Header Improvement Project and the Chickahominy Gas Pipeline, LLC. And in Pittsylvania County, the Chatham community with the leadership of the local NAACP defeated the Mountain Valley Pipeline in its effort to obtain a necessary air permit to build a compressor station in an environmental justice neighborhood already impacted by two existing compressor stations.

The Mountain Valley Pipeline, although not canceled, faces steep challenges with the air permit denial, including two federal court vacated permits and, most recently, a denial by the courts for an en banc request for a Jefferson National Forest permit decision, vacating

that permit. While these developments are impressive, we are not completely out of the dark.

The opposition is not resting. Just as this article comes to press, progress made with Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to factor climate change and environmental justice concerns in the agency's fossil fuel permitting process was pulled back: "Amid pushback from industry groups and lawmakers in both parties, federal energy regulators are scaling back plans to consider how natural gas projects affect climate change and environmental justice," per an article in the Washington Post on March 25 by Mathew Daly of the AP.

So, while we have much to be grateful for, we are not out of the dark completely. Therefore, the drum beat of energy justice continues. Also, with a new state administration extremely friendly to the fossil fuel industry and the geopolitical realities in eastern Europe creating a false gas and oil shortage narrative, the need for policies supporting a just energy transition recognizing our greatest existential threat, climate change, and the populations most burdened by its impacts is a human imperative we cannot be blind to, no matter the dark days of fossil fuels.

Lynn Godfrey is the community outreach coordinator of the Stop the Pipelines campaign of the Virginia Chapter.

From the chair by Ralph Grove



Greetings Virginia Sierra Club members. This is my first column as the 2022 Chapter executive committee chair, and I'm happy to wish you a happy spring! I'm personally looking forward to the change of seasons and the opportunity to get outdoors more without having to wear multiple layers of insulation.

I've been involved with the Sierra Club since the early 1980s, originally in Kentucky, and for the last 20 years here in Virginia. I've been fortunate to meet a good many club members in the state, though nowhere near all 20,000 or so of you, and I look forward to meeting more in the year to come.

Currently I'm a member of the Falls of the James Group, in Richmond, and I have lived previously in the Shenandoah Valley and Chesapeake Bay areas.

The other hat I wear in the Chapter is outings chair, which is the role I enjoy the most.

Though it's only March, we've had a busy year so far with many successes, including our continuing work to stop pipeline and fossil fuel power plant construction, our promotion of wind energy, our work to promote solar energy development, and a busy legislative agenda. The legislative session was a particular challenge this year, with the introduction of many anti-environmental bills that threatened to undo much of the progress made in the last several years. With hard work and talent, our staff and volunteers rose to the challenge though, and most of the bad legislation was defeated. There is much more good work to be proud of, too much to mention here, and I look forward to a busy and successful rest of the year.

See From the chair on page 3.

Emerging stronger by Kate West

Last year was hard. Our organization went through a lot, as did many of us as individuals. Sierra Club will never be the same again following the significant changes that occurred. Now, we are seeing the benefits of a shift in national leadership, the first full year of union-represented chapter staff and, of course, year two of a pandemic fraught with challenges behind us.

Yes, changes are still underway, but there is no doubt that we are already navigating forward in a new paradigm. And, while change can be hard, it can also be really good. The direction we are going now—rooted in positive, well-defined values (anti-racism, balance, collaboration, justice and transformation) and a chapter-forward strategic framework—feels intentional, sustainable, and full of potential.

Sierra Club's strategic framework advances our mission of enlisting humanity to create a healthy, thriving planet; provides a cohesive narrative about our vision and priorities; and creates a clear shared purpose for our staff, volunteers and part-

ners. Our chapter is already ahead of the curve, thanks to the strategic plan we've been implementing since 2019. The national framework and our chapter's strategy are well-aligned.

This March through May, we will provide a training series for leaders and staff on inclusiveness and equitably engaging with historically marginalized communities. We have contracted with Virginia Community Voice (vacommunityvoice.org) to share their expertise and facilitate brave spaces for learning. This training will launch a new phase of our chapter's transformation, and we hope you will join us.

Together, we can help deepen the movement for a livable planet, safe and healthy communities and a democracy that works for everyone.

In Richmond, last year's tough election has been followed by an exceedingly difficult and disappointing legislative session. The three-month-long onslaught was punctuated by attacks on climate action and social

See Emerging stronger 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.

Delayed delivery for newsletters

Like so many other organizations, our chapter has been impacted by pandemic-induced disruptions like supply chain issues and business closures. As we continue to wait for our society to return to some sense of normalcy, we are continuing to find new solutions.

You may have noticed that the Winter newsletter did not arrive on time, and I want to apologize for that. Our previous vendor went out of business, and we have struggled to find a reliable replacement. The newsletter is important to us. Not only because it includes campaign and issue updates, but also because it is a medium to showcase our collective voice from staff and volunteers alike.

We are hopeful that everything will be back on track by the time you receive this newsletter. Remember to log in to <https://myaccount.sierraclub.org/MyAccountLogin> to choose whether to receive digital or paper copies of the Virginia Sierran. If you are not sure how to check or sign up for our digital communications, please reference the document found at <https://vasierra.club/emailprefs> for more information.

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justice after years of progress on our issues and quieted climate change denial. Even as I write this, one of our top climate priorities for the 2022 Virginia General Assembly session remains at risk. Virginia's participation in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative could be gutted via the state budget, despite the fact that it is bringing in millions in revenue from corporate polluters. Thanks to our dedicated activists, we have demonstrated enormous power that this administration and our state representatives know they cannot ignore. Hundreds of Virginians called for the rejection of Andrew Wheeler as our state Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, and nearly four thousand contacted their legislators, successfully defending against attacks on the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, Clean Economy Act, Clean Car Standards and so much

more!

Now we're emerging into the spring knowing the realities we face with Gov. Youngkin's four-year term. We know that the governor is going to continue the relentless attacks on our environmental progress and will try to restore corporate polluters' ability to wreak havoc on our natural resources and communities.

But we are not backing down. This is what Sierra Club was built for. To unite, organize and speak out in the face of injustice and desecration of our environment. To fight for and protect those without voice—our ecosystems and those most marginalized in our communities.

Let's get out there and take on the challenges ahead. Thanks for being a part of our community.

Kate West is the director of the Virginia Chapter.

From the chair continued from page 2

One of the projects that is coming to fruition this year is the Equitable Community Engagement series, which begins soon for Chapter leaders. This series of sessions, led by some very experienced local consultants, will help us on our quest to become more open and welcoming to a diverse community of staff and volunteers and to engage more effectively with a variety of partner organizations throughout the state with a focus on environmental justice. I hope that all Club leaders will take part in as many of these sessions as possible so that we can reach our goal of becoming an effective multicultural environmental organization.

Many people have asked whether we will have an

Annual Gathering in 2022, something we were not able to do last year because of the pandemic. The Club's COVID-19 protocols are now effective through the end of May, and we don't know what will happen through the summer, but we are tentatively planning to hold a one-day gathering on September 17 at Pocahontas State Park. Watch for more information later in the year. We will need help organizing the day's agenda, so let me know if you'd like to be part of the 2022 Annual Gathering Team.

See you on the trail, I hope!

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

Virginia Chapter executive committee elections

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 (ExCom).

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 meetings a year, participating in online voting when important issues arise, and maintaining an understanding of the environmental issues in our state. August 30 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 jcruckshank4@gmail.com or (434)973-0373. I will be more than happy to answer your questions.

John Cruickshank is the chair of the Nominating and Election Committee of the Virginia Chapter.

Increasing Sierra Club outings in 2022

by Gary Kosciusko



Hiking along the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Towpath in early March (photo courtesy of Gary Kosciusko).

Virginia outings leaders are greatly encouraged by recent developments that will allow us to increase our offerings to the public.

January and February, of course, were a particularly rough period, due to the surge in cases caused by the Omicron variant and the

threat that posed to public health generally. Now, as of this writing in March, all key metrics for the pandemic are in marked decline, with the test positivity rate in Virginia down below 4%. That development has provided solid encouragement for the first time since the resumption of in-person outings last July.

Challenges remain, however, as we've lost some active leaders due to normal attrition, we've not yet been able to recruit and train replacements, and some of our leaders still need to be recertified. Further, the Club at the national level has extended the existing COVID-related outings protocols through May, but those protocols only

have a significant impact on indoor and multi-day events.

While the worldwide pandemic is not over and there's no guarantee there won't be another surge, we're eager to take advantage of the current window of opportunity that the decline in COVID cases presents. We in SC-PRO are especially delighted to be able to resume the **One Day Hike on April 23** after a two-year hiatus. We should have more on that particular event soon, so stay tuned.

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

Falls of the James Group upcoming events!

by Shavon Peacock

All FOJG events listed below are free and open to the public. Check out our events calendar on the Falls of the James Group page at <https://sierraclub.org/virginia> for registration and more information.

• **April 12, 7-8pm, Wetlands - What Are They and What Value do They Contain?** Dr. Scott Neubauer, Associate Professor of Biology at VCU and wetlands specialist speaks about wetlands and their value and importance. We've all heard the term, but do you really know what wetlands are? Do they serve a purpose? How do they fit into the larger ecological picture? Is it ok to build on a wetland and create another somewhere else? Is it fine to use them for recreational use?

• **April 16, 9:30-11:30am, Hike Garland Dodd Park Point of Rocks Center,** with FOJG member Shavon Peacock. Dodd Park offers

2.7 miles of trails providing access to several habitats, including eastern deciduous forest, the banks of the Appomattox River and tidal freshwater marsh. The trails through the forest offer viewing access for a variety of typical eastern birds. As the forest trails yield to the freshwaters of Ashton Creek Marsh, the trail continues as a floating boardwalk with an overlook at each end. The boardwalk provides an excellent place to study a number of wetland birds and dragonflies. Watch the marsh for wetland songbirds such as swamp sparrows and common yellowthroat in addition to the waders and bald eagles. Bring your binoculars!

• **April 19, 10:30-12:00pm, TFC Recycling Plant Tour.** Join us for a walking tour of the Tidewater Fibre Corp Recycling Material Recovery Facility. See where your recyclables go

after pick up from your home. The tour begins with an overview of who TFC Recycling is, from their simple, humble beginnings to the state-of-the-art facility. While in the Educational Room, you will get a better understanding of what can and cannot be recycled. Tour guests are then guided through the plant to watch as recyclables are received, sorted and baled.

• **April 30, 9am-3pm, Native Plant Festival at Dorey Park** in Richmond, hosted by Root 5 Family Farms and Keep Henrico Beautiful. Shereen Hughs, Bill Shanabruch and Dr. Doug Tallamy will present, and FOJG will be tabling at this event.

• **May 22, 5-8pm, FOJG Members Picnic and Plant Swap** at Byrd Park-Carillon Shelter. Bring a potluck dish to share and plants (preferably native ones) to swap.

• **June 17, 8:30-9:30pm, Firefly Foray** in the Pony

Pasture Rapids Park Wetlands with Ralph White. Learn about the different species of fireflies as they fly around you in this magical setting with Ralph, retired former manager of the James River Park System. The light show is amazing; it looks like there are millions of flashing green Christmas lights in the tree canopies around the Wetlands meadow. You will also see yellow, white, blue, and red lights, all with different trajectories and blinking patterns. Rain reschedule for June 18. Twenty-person limit.

• **June 24, 8:30-9:30pm, Firefly Foray** in the Pony Pasture Rapids Park Wetlands with Ralph White. Learn about the different species of fireflies as they fly around you in this magical setting with Ralph, retired former manager of the James River Park System. See FOJG events on page 5.

National Sierra Club elections are underway - VOTE!



The annual election for Sierra Club's Board of Directors is now underway. Those eligible to vote in the national Sierra Club election received in the mail (or by Internet if you chose the electronic delivery option) your national Sierra Club ballot in early March.

Your participation is critical for a Strong Sierra Club. The Sierra Club is a democratically structured organization at all levels. Sierra Club requires the regular flow of views on policy and priorities from its grassroots membership in order to function well. Yearly participation in elections at all Sierra Club levels is a major membership obligation.

In a typical year less than 10% of eligible members vote in the Board elections. A minimum of 5% is required for the elections to be valid. Our grassroots structure is strengthened when our participation is high. That means your participation is needed in the voting process.

Each candidate provides a statement about themselves and their views on the issues on the official election ballot. You can learn more by asking questions of your group and chapter leadership and other experienced members you know. You can also visit the Sierra Club's election web site for additional information about candidates:

<http://www.sierraclub.org/board/election>

Even if you receive your election materials in the mail, we encourage you to use the user-friendly Internet voting site to save time and postage. If sending via ground mail, please note your ballots must be received by no later than noon EST Election Day, April 27, 2022.

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

Rappahannock:

Bill Johnson
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Falls of the James:

Joe Brancoli
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Roanoke:

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Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings (SCPRO):

Gary Kosciusko
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novahiker@cox.net

New River Valley:

Rick Shingles
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Piedmont:

Donna Shaunese
434-996-0392
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York River:

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804-275-6476
tmatteson1@mindspring.com

Potomac River Group:

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

FOJG events

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Rain reschedule for June 25. Twenty-person limit.

The FOJG Membership Engagement Committee meets virtually the last Thursday of the month, 7-8:30pm, August-May. Contact Shavon Peacock, chair of this committee, at shavonandrew@verizon.net if you are interested in participating in this committee and helping to plan programs and outings or click Get Involved on our website.

Recent programs include fundraising, through the sale of shirts and tote bags, to support targeted environmental groups; a working group study of Richmond's

budget to help encourage the phasing out of its gas utility and the funding the position of Urban Forester and reconstituting the Urban Forestry Commission; attending a rally at the U.S. Supreme Court on February 28 to show support for the EPA and the 2015 Clean Power Plan, threatened in the case of West Virginia vs. EPA.

Monthly rallies are being held on first Fridays at the bell tower on the state capitol grounds to focus attention on the climate emergency.

Shavon Peacock is the Membership Engagement Committee chair of the Falls of the James Group.

The adverse impacts of gas stoves on youth

by McKenna Dunbar

It is imperative that the Commonwealth of Virginia be concerned about indoor air pollution brought forth by gas-powered stoves. There is no denying that cooking with gas stoves is deeply ingrained in American society. For decades, spanning both the 20th and 21st centuries, the fossil fuel industry has continuously pushed for the extensive use of natural gas in kitchens even though it has been scientifically proven that gas stoves make American families sick.

In examining the health impacts of gas stoves, it is evident that there are several key pollutants that are emitted when using this form of a fossil fuel-powered appliance. Such primary toxins include nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide and ultra-fine particulate matter (PM2.5), which pose a great risk to the health of Virginia residents, particularly in the development of children.

As investigated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Physicians for Social Responsibility, nitrogen dioxide contributes to the development of asthma and increased respiratory conditions, and it is associated with negative cognitive functioning. The Rocky Mountain Institute, a leading organization that trans-

forms global energy systems through market-driven solutions, reports that homes that contain gas stoves have nitrogen dioxide concentrations 50–400% higher than homes with electric stoves.

The health ramifications that are commonly associated with carbon monoxide emissions further paint the dismal narrative of the harms that gas stoves present to the nation. Exposure to toxic levels of carbon monoxide leads to reduced brain function, nausea, confusion and impaired vision. Carbon monoxide is particularly harmful for children and those with heart conditions as the emissions stunt youth neurological development and exacerbate pain in cardiac patients. Not only do the emissions from PM 2.5 contribute to irregular heartbeats and premature deaths in people with lung disorders, they also have significant neurological effects on individuals that lead to memory disturbance and loss of concentration.

In the era of the great energy transition, it is time for the 35% of remaining Americans who use gas stoves to electrify such outdated and dangerous appliances. Making the active shift to cooking with electric stoves and adopting other electri-

fication measures mitigates such harmful impacts on the health and safety of you and your loved ones. According to a 2017 study produced by Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, unventilated gas stove use exceeds EPA ambient air standards 83% of the time in households under 1500 sq. ft. and 100% of the time in residences under 1000 sq. ft. Furthermore, the widespread adoption of electric stoves has the great potential to significantly reduce total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions in the commercial and residential economic sectors as defined by the EPA.

Do not wait until it is too late. Children cannot protect themselves from the harm that gas stoves pose to indoor air quality, so it is up to us as civilians, advocates, business leaders and policy makers to act now on regulating and enforcing measures that protect indoor air quality since there are no federal standards governing indoor pollution. Since it has been investigated by the two-year National Human Activity Pattern Survey that those residing in the United States typically spend 90% of their time indoors, it is especially important that the air we breathe be clean and safe.

At Sierra Club, we are propelling a building electrification movement that centers on clean energy equity in both process and outcome. Navigating the esoteric challenges of energy infrastructure today and reimagining the future effects of electrification policy and codes is not an easy task. Expanding access to such technologies and decarbonization strategies for schools historically underserved and marginalized is at the heart of our mission. Through sound relationship building and electrification advocacy for school facilities at regional, statewide and national levels, we will drive the just transition of fossil fuel infrastructure to renewable energy.

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 me at mckenna.dunbar@sierraclub.org or reach out via LinkedIn.

McKenna Dunbar is the community engagement coordinator and building electrification lead of the Virginia Chapter.

Defense and determination yield wins in challenging 2022 legislative session

by Connor Kish and Bob Shippee

The Virginia General Assembly adjourned its 60-day 2022 legislative session on March 12. After eight long and treacherous weeks, we succeeded in defending the climate progress we'd made the past two years. To enable this success, Virginia Chapter staff, volunteers and Legislative Committee members had to lobby for or against

even more bills than in 2021. The volume and complexity of legislative attacks on our recent progress increased the workload and stress as we tried to keep Virginia from going backwards on climate, energy and justice.

The General Assembly was conducted in-person at the capitol for the first time since 2020, when the legis-

lature adjourned days before the COVID-19 lockdown. While we were happy to have in-person access to legislators and fellow stakeholders, we somewhat limited on-site presence to ensure the health and safety of staff and volunteers. Thankfully, even while largely in virtual mode, our Legislative Committee provided Bob and Connor

with the support needed to fight the 2022 battles.

Despite these challenges, we achieved important wins. Notably, thanks to a massive grassroots campaign powered by the Chapter and its allies, former Trump EPA chief Andrew

See Legislative session on page 7.

Legislative session continued from page 6

Wheeler had his nomination to be Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources defeated. This serves as a major signal to the governor that we won't allow the commonwealth to go backward on climate and energy policy. And, in a significant victory in efforts to reduce tailpipe pollution in the transportation sector, Senate Bill 575 (Senator Mason) passed both chambers unanimously. This economics-driven bill requires the state government to consider the "total cost of ownership" (not just up-front price) when it purchases new fleet vehicles. This new policy will result in electric vehicles becoming the predominant state fleet vehicles because cost of ownership over time is lower for EVs due to fuel and maintenance cost savings.

We attempted to make progress on other priorities, but we were stymied due to a combination of industry lobby strength and the partisan makeup of the

chambers. SB29 (Sen. Favola) would have required that public entities that construct or renovate a building ensure it has a solar-ready roof. This would have been particularly helpful for school districts, as they could more easily take advantage of power purchase agreements to go solar and save money. Additionally, SB452 (Sen. Boysko)/HB701 (Del. Kory) would have allowed localities to adopt the International Green Construction Code instead of the weaker state-wide Virginia code, but it met fierce industry opposition and poor committee support.

Despite our opposition, two bills that greatly concerned the Chapter's legislative committee did pass. SB565 (Sen. Surovell) is a bill about methane and its use as an energy source; we had many concerns with the bill that were ultimately unresolved. The methane emissions problem does need to be addressed, but the Chapter opposed the bill's

approach because it incentivizes construction of gas infrastructure and does not require that specific methane emissions reductions occur.

SB657 (Sen. Stuart) repealed the authority of the state air and water control boards to issue or deny permits, ceding authority to the Department of Environmental Quality. This was industry retaliation for last year's board denial of a Mountain Valley Pipeline compressor station. Senate Democrats were weak on this issue and let the bill pass. Importantly, however, we successfully lobbied to amend the original bill to retain the public comment and public participation portions of the permitting process.

On our top priority, defending the landmark legislative successes of 2020 and 2021, we ultimately prevailed. The Senate majority helped ensure that 2020's Virginia Clean Economy Act and Virginia's membership in the Regional Greenhouse

Gas Initiative and 2021's move to adopt Clean Car Standards held in their entirety. The House budget proposal still contains an attack on RGGI, to be resolved this spring (see below). Overall, the Chapter helped orchestrate the defeat of more than 20 bills that would have gutted or damaged these key priorities!

The General Assembly will need to return in the coming weeks to finalize the state budget in a special session. The main area of disagreement between Republicans and Democrats is the size of proposed tax cuts and other tax relief.

The Chapter Legislative Committee will meet in the weeks ahead to review the results of the session and develop legislative priorities and strategy for the 2023 Session.

Connor Kish is the legislative and political director and Bob Shippee is the legislative chair 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>

Upcoming webinar: “Introduction to Energy Burden and Energy Justice” by Ann Creasy

“An Introduction to Energy Burden and Energy Justice” Virtual Webinar on May 11 at 6pm

Everyone deserves access to clean, affordable energy, but here in Virginia, many households struggle to afford their energy costs each month. Because energy burdens are made worse by more extreme weather events and temperatures, energy burden is a climate change issue as much as it is a discrimination and redlining issue.

Historic discriminatory housing policies in the United States have led to Black households being more likely to experience high energy burden than white households. We cannot fully address climate change and systemic injustices like

redlining without addressing and alleviating energy cost burdens to move towards energy justice.

In part one of an ongoing series on energy equity, speakers Sharonda Williams Tack, associate director of the Healthy Communities Campaign at the Sierra Club, and impacted community members discuss what energy burden is and what it looks like for many households in Virginia.

You're invited! Please register to learn more about this key issue. This virtual event is free and open to the public. To register, visit vasierra.club/energyequity1

Ann Creasy is the Hampton Roads conservation program manager of the Virginia Chapter.

Bristol Landfill by Gustavo Angeles


During the last two months, in coordination with Virginia Interfaith Power and Light and our volunteers from the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club, we have been supporting local efforts to fight several problems that the local landfill has created for the people of Bristol. The community is experiencing odor problems and respiratory tract irritations as well as eye burning sensations, headaches and nausea.

The city of Bristol, Virginia owns a landfill that was built in a limestone quarry. The landfill opened in 1998. Since last year, more neighbors on the Virginia and Tennessee site started complaining to local and state officials. The landfill, due to

the lack of maintenance, an increase in precipitation and climate change, has been emitting high levels of volatile organic compounds, in particular, benzene.

Several community members have air purifiers in their houses that were donated by fundraising events held by local groups. If you are living in Bristol, you will have to have more than one air purifier in your house, that is “the new standard.”


On March 15, the community had a press conference that was covered by the local TV station and the local newspaper. Directly impacted community members shared their stories and the problems that they and their families are facing by living



**AN INTRODUCTION TO ENERGY
BURDEN AND ENERGY JUSTICE**

Everyone deserves access to clean, affordable energy, but here in Virginia, many households struggle to afford their energy costs each month. Learn more in a virtual discussion on energy burden and how it affects Virginians

May 11th, 2022
6:00pm
vasierra.club/energyequity1



near a landfill.

On March 21 and 22, the Department of Environmental Quality had an expert panel offer solutions to the odor problems. These meetings were in Bristol, but neither were they open to the public nor did the panel have a time for public comments. Having a panel in the town of Bristol and not letting impacted communities listen to what the panel is evaluating is not right. It defeats the purpose of transparency, equity and meaningful involvement. The panel did not include a public health expert.

On March 29, Virginia Interfaith Power and Light will have a fact-finding visit with community and faith leaders from around the state. There

will be a visit to the landfill and a panel that includes community members. The bus will leave from Richmond early in the morning of the 29th.

If you are interested in participating please contact me at gustavo.angeles@sierraclub.org for more information. There is also a petition to which I encourage you to add your name.

Gustavo Angeles is the environmental justice program coordinator of the Virginia Chapter.

Youth Leadership Council engagement by Hunter Noffsinger

Ever wondered how we engage with youth at the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter? Maybe you've heard rumors of our Youth Leadership Council but are itching to learn more about who they are and what they do. Well, you're about to see and hear a whole lot more from the Youth Leadership Council as they take on titles and different advocacy projects.

The Youth Leadership Council is a unique oppor-

tunity for young people to get involved in a large, well-known environmental organization and have their voices heard. Their ideas and drive to center youth voices in every aspect of their work have been nothing short of inspiring. Recently council members decided on their roles and titles, selecting to be chairs of various issues and activities. The council now has chairs of social media, outreach, event plan-

ning, advocacy, educational resources, graphic design and public health.

If you're interested in meeting the members of the Youth Leadership Council, they will be releasing a short introductory video in the next few weeks. While I don't want to spill all the beans about upcoming plans, you can expect a variety of things from the council, from engaging with youth through social media to planning educational webinars on youth advocacy. The best part? These will be great resources for people of all ages to learn more about the priorities of

the Youth Leadership Council and how we can continue to center youth voices in our work as environmental advocates.

In the weeks to come you can follow along with the Youth Leadership Council on Instagram, TikTok and more! Keep an eye on our social media pages @vasierraclub for their introductory video and information on where you can follow the Youth Leadership Council.

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

Communications Symposium invite by Tim Cywinski

You may have noticed that the Sierra Club is not short on communications resources. In addition to communications staff and a large contact base, the Virginia Chapter has access to a robust network of digital tools. We offer tools for mass communication as well as small gatherings. We have access to data about who is engaging with our content, and we have information about what messaging works. It's a lot. While our chapter is one of the national leaders in terms of volunteers taking advantage of our communications tools, the fact of the matter is that many of our grassroots leaders are still not using—or underutilizing—our communications tools. Why is that? Probably because it's a lot to take in.

Taking advantage of our immense list of resources may seem a daunting task, but it is a worthwhile one. Members of the Sierra Club care about protecting our planet, natural spaces and communities. We are on the right side of history. But what good can being right accomplish if no one is listening? Communication is paramount to our poten-

tial success, and leaving any tool at our disposal unused is a missed opportunity. That's why the Virginia Chapter communications staff is hosting a communications symposium in late spring. The date is TBA, but we do know that this symposium will cover all tools and processes employed by our chapter so you—volunteer leaders and groups—can be that much more effective. If you are curious about the best tools and strategies to use and when (and let's be honest, that is practically everyone), the communication symposium is for you. This event will be held online and is free!

The Virginia Chapter is driven by the notion that people can be powerful when they are equipped with the right knowledge and tools. Our communications staff strives to remember this and is actively looking for ways to empower advocates like you. We hope that you will take advantage of this opportunity so we can continue to make a difference together.

Tim Cywinski is the communications manager 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.

Star power could help boost Virginia's offshore wind efforts

by Eileen Woll

Pharrell Williams named his Virginia Beach music festival “Something In The Water” in reference to the abundance of musical talent in our area. But there is literally something in the water that the super star visionary should take note of—offshore wind turbines.

In a recent interview with Virginia Business, Williams was asked what his hopes were for Virginia within the next 5-10 years. His response: that “[w]e figure out a way to make wealth more common.”

Offshore wind in Virginia alone is predicted to employ thousands and provide wealth-building career opportunities to Virginians with varying skill sets and education levels, i.e., advanced degrees, GEDs, high school diplomas or no diplomas. These are good, family-supporting career-length jobs in a huge new U.S. industry that is predicted to employ 83,000 Americans by 2030 and support a supply chain worth more than \$190 billion within the next 10 years.

These are also jobs that inspire young people thirsty for self-actualization, i.e., achieving one's full potential,

and protecting the planet at the same time. According to multiple public opinion polls, more than any other age group, millennials (age 18-38) are concerned about climate change and want to do their part to combat it. Employment in the clean energy industry checks all their boxes: good, wealth-building paychecks and a good night's rest knowing they are doing good by Mother Earth.

This industry also brings with it an opportunity for our region to reinvent its image by confronting the climate crisis with an even bigger solution. No longer are we to remain emblematic for its despair with sea-level rise and flooding.

Williams should know too that literally hundreds of organizations are working together to make Hampton Roads the hub for this exciting new offshore wind industry. It is amazing how quickly and thoughtfully all the job-training programs and the wrap-around support services are lining up, especially in Norfolk and Portsmouth, both ground-zero communities for the industry and jobs and both in need of these wealth-building oppor-

tunities.

All are committed to the tenets outlined in the Hampton Roads Workforce Council's 2021 report on clean energy workforce development: 1) recruit talent, no matter who they are, where they live or what barriers they may face; and 2) ensure that the workforce reflects the communities served.

We are all committed to building a diverse and inclusive workforce for good reason. According to a 2020 McKinsey Diversity Report, diverse workforces typically outperform their less diverse counterparts, regardless of the industry in which they work.

The transition toward 100% clean energy also offers an unprecedented opportunity for wealth creation in low-income communities and communities of color. As Shalanda Baker writes in her book “Revolutionary Power: An Activist's Guide to the Energy Transition,” “states seeking to make the most dramatic cuts in emissions and generate more of their electricity using renewable energy are best positioned to engage in this system redesign work, and place equity

and the economic empowerment of low-income communities at the center.”

The real trick now is getting the word out about these wonderful wealth-building opportunities. One particularly difficult audience to reach is the un/under-employed 20- and 30-somethings who aren't in school systems. This is where Williams could come in.

If only he could lend his star power to offshore wind's promotion. It could be as simple as including offshore wind turbines in “Something In The Water” promotional graphics. Like him, offshore wind is cool, it's sexy, it's something that could very successfully trend on social media.

But most importantly, it's Hampton Roads' best ticket to a healthy, wealthy community.

(This article was originally published in the *Virginian-Pilot* on March 10, 2022.)

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

Digital wins

by Paige Wesselink

We've been caught in uncertainty for over two years, and while we still face overwhelming challenges, we're finding that we can create good, when we come together. As the 2022 legislative session comes to an end, I would like to acknowledge the incredible volume of action takers that took part in the larger movement to protect our climate progress and the health of our

communities.

Prior to this session, we elected a governor who made it clear he values the profits of polluters and himself over the health of Virginians and, in particular, communities of color in Virginia. Despite this huge setback, our supporters showed up. We kicked off the session with Andrew Wheeler's nomination for Secretary of Natural Resources.

Wheeler was a coal lobbyist and rolled back massive clean air and water protections as head of the EPA under the Trump administration. In coordination with other groups, we came up with talking points, frames and social media plans to craft a cohesive movement to reject his nomination. The message was clear from every part of our coalition, this is urgent and we need all of you.

Our action alert email that we sent out received over 1,000 action takers. The video we posted on our social media to promote that action alert reached thousands of viewers and was promoted by new folks, young folks, new organizations and organizations we've worked with for years.

See Digital wins on page 11.

EV versus CNG buses: the future is electric

by Cheri Conca



Shuttle buses at LAX run on compressed natural gas (photo courtesy of lawa.org).

Exhaust fumes clogged my throat and sinuses as I waited for the shuttle bus outside of Los Angeles International Airport on a recent long weekend trip to visit family. The bus from LAX to Union Station runs every 30 minutes, and I had just missed the previous shuttle. For half an hour, I stood in the line of tailpipe fire as dozens of other shuttles stopped to pick up passengers. Curious as to why the

fumes were so profound when I knew that L.A. has been transitioning to cleaner fuels, I looked closely at the buses to see how each was fueled.

A little “CNG” bumper sticker on nearly every bus revealed that most of the buses are fueled by “clean” compressed natural gas, or CNG. I’ve read the stats on how CNG is cleaner than diesel, as well as dubious information on why it is con-

sidered a “clean” source of fuel. But it is still a fossil fuel. Armed with empirical data, I now had personal proof of how dirty CNG actually is.

Should we be excited when our local and regional transit authorities announce a transition from diesel to CNG buses? No, we should not. In areas where residents are dependent on public transit, air quality is often already degraded. CNG offers minimal pollutant reduction, emitting only 12% less greenhouse gases than diesel buses. An electric bus, however, ranges from 29% to 87% lower emissions than diesel and 19% to 85% lower emissions than CNG buses. Any rationale to purchase CNG fossil fuel buses because they are cleaner than diesel buses would be an environmental injustice. The clear choice for all new transit bus purchases is battery electric.

Climate change activists can help localities transition to clean transit by asking lo-

cal decision makers to electrify their fleets and bypass CNG in favor of electric buses. Members of the Chapter’s Electrification Workgroup are doing just that, by tracking bus electrification efforts, contacting decision makers, providing resources for electric bus purchases and asking transit operators to drop plans to purchase CNG buses.

For example, Sierrans are working with a coalition of partners to urge The Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority to accelerate the transition of its approximately 1,600 buses to battery electric well ahead of its current target date of 2045. This should not be an unattainable request. For contrast, Los Angeles, which has the second-largest bus fleet in the nation, plans to convert all of its 2,300 buses to electric by 2028.

Even Alexandria’s local

See EV buses on page 12.

Digital wins

continued from page 10

Legislators heard the message loud and clear, and the nomination was rejected. Here’s what we know based off of this massive win: we are incredibly strong when we work together across a variety of platforms.

Starting with something as huge as Wheeler’s nomination is tough because it takes an incredible amount of energy from everyone involved. But you continued to take action throughout the entire session and the energy never left. There was a total of roughly 3,500 action takers for the seven action alerts that were sent through-

out the session—an incredible number, especially given that two of the seven action alerts were sent only to Virginia’s Senate and Labor Committee members. The Virginia Senate and Labor list is a significantly smaller number of people than our normal statewide list with 15,000 constituents versus the 66,000 for our statewide supporter’s list.

The engagement that we saw this past session was incredible. You protected crucial climate legislation, supported the rejection of a former coal lobbyist as head of Natural Resources and

made a whole lot of noise. As someone with dyslexia, I normally hate numbers. This was one of the very few moments when I actually enjoyed doing math because the numbers represented something bigger, people power.

Thank you to those who took action this past session. I hope you can enjoy some sunshine, soak in the wins and prepare to continue to put in the work. It’s a marathon, not a sprint, but marathon runners take water breaks too, I think. I have no idea I don’t run.

I would also love to give

a special thank you to those on staff that I had the opportunity to work with and be supported by from beginning to end, Tim Cywinski, Mary-Stuart Torbeck, Mckenna Dunbar, Hunter Noffsinger, Kate West, Gustavo Angeles and Connor Kish. You’re all amazing at what you do.

Follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @vasierraclub!

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

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Time Sensitive Information

Please Mail Immediately

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DASH bus system is on target to be 100% electric by 2035. As the sixth largest bus transit operator in the country, WMATA should step up its schedule and set an example for other transit authorities in the region.

In addition to dragging its feet on electrification, WMATA plans to invest millions of dollars in CNG infrastructure and buses over the next few years. Considering that WMATA's future is 100% electric, it does not make sense to keep investing in CNG when they will be buying only electric buses just two to three years after the CNG fueling infrastructure is complete.

Even more mind bog-
gling is that the expensive

new CNG infrastructure will be discarded before the end of its lifecycle. Steve Banashek, who leads the Chapter's Electrification Workgroup and also serves as the Chapter's EV Chair, has been instrumental in advocating for WMATA to drop plans for the purchase of any new CNG buses.

You can help advance Virginia's transition to clean electric buses and bypass CNG bus purchases by contacting your local board of supervisors' member or your city or town council member as well as the local transit authority board members and directors in your area. Urge your school district to electrify its bus fleet by contacting your school board

members and school transportation staff, who may be found in the Virginia Public School Division Staff Listing.

If you are interested in joining the Chapter's Electrification Workgroup, please contact me at cheri.conca@sierraclub.org

As diesel continues to drop below our environmental horizon, let's not cloud the transit landscape with more fossil fuel options. Skip the CNG and go straight to electric.

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