



SIERRA
CLUB

VIRGINIA CHAPTER

Virginia Sierran

The Official Newsletter of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter
Winter 2023

Virginia has a data center problem by Ivy Main

Northern Virginia hosts the largest concentration of data centers in the world. To drive through Data Center Alley is to witness suburban sprawl on steroids, with its attendant deforestation, loss of farmland and loss of wildlife habitat. The environmental destruction continues offsite; a data center building can cover acres of land, causing massive rainwater runoff problems impacting streams and drinking water resources miles downstream.

A single data center consumes as much water as a city of 30,000-50,000 people; giant fans make the buildings surprisingly noisy day and night; and the average data center has so many backup diesel generators onsite that it requires a major air source permit from the Department of Environmental Quality.

Moreover, data centers require astonishing amounts of energy to power their operations and cool their servers. The industry uses over 20% of Dominion Energy Virginia's total electricity supply. Feeding ever more of these energy hogs requires utilities to build new electric generation and transmission lines, with costs and impacts borne by all ratepayers.

Many data center operators have pledged to run their operations on renewable energy, but only a few major tech companies have followed through on building solar facilities in Virginia. In-



Data Center Build Out (photo by skreuzer, courtesy of Creative Commons).

deed, their energy appetite is so great that if all Virginia data centers ran on solar energy with battery backup, meeting their current demand would require all the solar currently installed in Virginia, Maryland, DC, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Delaware put together.

Why are data centers so keen to locate in Northern Virginia? Historically the draws were the fiber optic network in Northern Virginia, proximity to DC and relatively low-cost energy. In addition, Loudoun County made a calculated early effort to attract data centers—and the local tax revenue they provide.

State subsidies also draw data centers. A state audit shows that Virginia's data center sales and use tax exemption has cost tax-

payers over a billion dollars since 2010, while returning little revenue.

Thus far, opposition to data centers has tended to be local and focused on land use issues. Preservationists have been at the forefront of opposition to Prince William County's proposed Digital Gateway, a data center development across more than 2,100 acres in an area known as the "rural crescent." The development would abut parkland and Manassas Battlefield, leading opponents to call this a new Battle of Manassas. Citizens have sued the board of supervisors for approving an amendment to the county's Comprehensive Plan that allows the data center expansion.

The battle has spilled

across the border into Fairfax County, whose leaders worry that stormwater runoff from the development will pollute the county's main drinking water source, the Occoquan Reservoir.

The divide on data center siting is polarizing, but it isn't partisan. The Democratic majority on the Prince William Board of County Supervisors approved the Gateway project over opposition from Republican supervisor Yesli Vega and state delegate Danica Roem, a Democrat.

Data centers provide essential services, and they do have to locate somewhere, so the answer isn't to ban them from the state. A better approach would be for Virginia to guide development away from overburdened areas to parts of the state that are desperate for new businesses and to use the carrot of tax incentives to set high standards for efficiency, renewable energy and use of reclaimed water.

Sierra Club has raised these concerns with legislators, and we expect to see bills filed in the 2023 session to address some of these siting and energy issues.

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

From the chair

by Ralph Grove



I hope you have had a very happy holiday season, and I wish you a happy and fortunate year in 2023. I spent part of the holidays visiting family in Louisville, where it was so cold and icy that we didn't leave the house for two days! I'm fortunate that my travel plans weren't disrupted as they were for so many of us. And I have to say I was happy to come home to warmer weather in Virginia.

Our chapter is starting the year with two new elected at-large members on the

chapter Executive Committee. Amy Noffsinger from Hampton Roads is a former teacher at Grassfield H.S., where she sponsored the Environmental Club. She has also trained as a Master Gardener and has volunteered as an outdoor instructor with the Girl Scouts. Amy brings valuable experience that will be welcome on the ExCom.

Tiffany Garner from Northern Virginia works as a policy advocate for Futures without Violence and has experience as a community organizer. She has a strong interest in environmental protection and environmental justice that will help to inspire our work. We're very happy to have Amy Noffsinger and Tiffany Garner serving on the ExCom in 2023, and I hope you'll join me in welcoming them.

You may know that we have several personnel changes underway, which we hope to complete soon. The Virginia Chapter is in the process of hiring a new chap-

ter director to replace Kate West, who has moved on to a more senior position in the Club, as well as a new office administrator and a new organizer for the Beyond Coal Campaign. There are three separate hiring committees managing these hires, led by Ann Creasy and Gustavo Angeles. Each process has its own timeline, though we hope to have all three completed in the first quarter of 2023. You'll hear more about the outcome in subsequent newsletters.

In 2022 I became more involved with the National Sierra Club food and agriculture team. Much of the Club's climate-related work is focused on energy and transportation, but not everyone is aware that a huge part of global greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture. Factory farms that produce meat and dairy produce significant amounts of methane, which is a highly potent greenhouse gas. Animal manure also pollutes our rivers and oceans. De-

forestation for cattle ranching is driving the destruction of the Amazon rainforest. Much of the world's farmland is devoted to raising animal food, contributing to both regional food scarcity and water shortages. For all of these reasons, there's growing interest within the Club in advocating for food policies and practices that are better for the environment, for consumers and for farmers.

One of my goals for 2023 is to put together a food and agriculture team that can look into environmental and equity impacts of food and agriculture in Virginia and that can connect to the national movement in order to inform our membership and to advocate for better policies. If you have an interest in this area and would like to join the team, let's talk (rfgrove@icloud.com).

Happy New Year everyone!

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

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.

Ivy Main receives Glen Besa Lifetime Achievement Award

by Susan Stillman and Bill Penniman



In September 2022, at the Virginia Chapter Annual Gathering, Ivy Main was awarded the Glen Besa Lifetime Achievement Award because of her long-term successful environmental advocacy.

Ivy has been a leader in the Sierra Club for many years. In Virginia, she has served as, among other things, the chapter chair, the conservation chair or

co-chair, an executive committee member and an issue chair or co-chair for renewable energy. Ivy has also been a leader on the Legislative Committee, successfully working with legislators to improve energy regulation, combat climate change and enhance use of renewable energy. She has also contributed to the Great Falls Group and worked on National Sierra Club committees. And, Ivy recruits new volunteer leaders to the Club with great success. She does all of this while maintaining a contagiously positive attitude.

Ivy's advocacy for the Club and the environment is broad and deep. She is an energy lawyer and a writer who can write successful legislation and explain energy policy to lay people, a rare skill set indeed. Through her blog

PowerForThePeopleVA.com and her columns for the Virginia Mercury, Ivy explains energy policy in a manner that is easily understood by professionals in the field and the uninitiated. The readership includes advocates, legislators and regular folk interested in energy in Virginia.

One of Ivy's legislative creations was the critically important Solar Freedom bill, which significantly broadened access to solar in Virginia with ideas that appealed to progressives and conservatives alike. The bill was incorporated into the Virginia Clean Energy Act, putting Virginia in a leadership position.

Offshore wind is another renewable energy that Ivy illuminated for Virginians. Ivy started working, more than 10 years ago, on bringing offshore wind to the commonwealth, organizing

a high level conference to bring all the stakeholders together. Virginia is now on the cusp of deploying significant offshore wind, creating well-paying jobs and putting Virginia in the running to be the East Coast center for manufacturing and deployment of offshore wind.

Most recently Ivy has been the driving force for legislation that would have Virginia's school systems build and renovate their schools to high efficiency with roofs that would support solar.

This recognition is well deserved for an inspiring and effective Sierra Club volunteer. Her volunteer service should be a model for all of us.

Susan Stillman is the renewable energy co-chair and Bill Penniman is the sustainability chair of the Virginia Chapter.

Logging on public lands

by Sherman Bamford

Many people do not know that logging takes place on public lands. In recent years, public lands agencies have dramatically decreased the rates loggers would have to pay as part of some timber sale contracts. In several recent timber sales in George Washington and Jefferson National Forests in Virginia, rates on specified volumes of timber have been approximately halved. Unable, to sell the timber, the Forest Service is taking a further step, resorting to a non-competitive bid process in several cases.

Also, as part of the federal Infrastructure Act, the Forest Service is offering \$10,000—\$1 million grants to loggers who log on federal

lands in Virginia.

According to promotional materials for the program, "funds can be used for engineering, permitting, or design costs, as well as to purchase stationary wood processing and manufacturing equipment."

Many people wonder what incentive is there for the agency to offer cut-rate timber sales and grant program giveaways that reduce the forested habitat needed to safeguard against climate change. The cut-rate logging may well be below-cost logging subsidized by the US taxpayers, but Forest Service financial reporting is murky and almost nonexistent.

Tell your US representa-

tives and senators that you do not believe the public should pay for cut-rate logging schemes.

Sherman Bamford is the forests chair of the Virginia Chapter.



Old growth forest in the Hematite area, George Washington National Forest (photo courtesy of Sherman Bamford).

Democracy Days 2022

by Kirk Bower



On September 7 a proclamation requesting adoption of September 15, 2022 as Democracy Day was presented by the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors (photo courtesy of Kirk Bower).

In March 2022, the Piedmont Group ExCom and our allies began a campaign to renew and advance our democratic values. We learned that the United Nations proclaims September 15 of every year as International Day of Democracy. The groups decided to adopt September 15 as an opportunity to review the state of our democracy. Several events took place with the engagement of local nonprofit and UVA student groups during Sep-

tember and October.

In September, the Piedmont Group and partners submitted proclamations to City Council and Albemarle County Board of Supervisors requesting adoption of September 15, 2022 as Democracy Day. Both governing bodies enthusiastically adopted the proclamation. Proclamations were made during City Council and Board of Supervisors meetings and presented to the Piedmont Group.

On September 27, 2022, the Piedmont Group hosted a virtual meeting with Del. Sally Hudson (D-57). She gave a great presentation on election reform in Virginia. Del. Hudson is an active advocate for election reform, and she has worked hard to make Virginia a leader in safe, convenient ballot access.

The third Democracy Days event was held at Newcomb Hall on UVA grounds on October 22, 2022, from noon to 3 p.m. The theme for the event was Protect Our Democracy. This event was part of the ongoing celebration of the International Day of Democracy. It was co-sponsored by a coalition of 13 local nonprofit and university student groups.

During the first part of the democracy forum, five speakers presented their views on the state of our democracy. Speakers included the following:

- Del. Sally Hudson
- UVA Professor Bruce

- Williams, Media Studies
- Clay Jones, nationally syndicated cartoonist
- UVA Professor William Hitchcock, History
- David Pepper, author Laboratories of Autocracy

The second hour of the meeting included a very engaging group breakout discussion about the future of American democracy. More than 60 people were in the diverse audience of students and community members. Local news gave the democracy forum extensive news coverage on NBC 29. The link can be found here: vasierra.club/democracy

Advancing democracy should be a priority for the Sierra Club in 2023. Democracy is an essential element for our environmental legislative agenda.

Kirk Bower is the conservation chair of the Piedmont Group.

Group Directory

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

Chesapeake Bay:

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

New River Valley:

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

Rappahannock:

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

Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings (SCPRO):

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

Falls of the James:

Joe Brancoli
804-502-9502
omethid@hotmail.com

Piedmont:

Donna Shaunese
434-996-0392
shaunese@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

Rappahannock Group update

by Paula Chow



RGSC's outing to the Spotsylvania Solar Farm, lead by Outings Chair Geoff Johnson (photo courtesy of Linda Muller.)

Looking back at 2022, the Rappahannock Group has been quite active considering the circumstances of COVID, the flu and other maladies.

Outings Chair Geoff Johnson had lined up impressive and successful tours and activities: a tour

of Grapewood Farm in Montross (RG's Living Green Award 2022 recipient), a tour of Fredericksburg's Downtown Greens Expansion Project property (the last living farm and greenspace in Fredericksburg), a litter cleanup at Widewater State Park along the Potomac and

a tour of Spotsylvania Solar Center (the largest solar farm east of the Rockies).

Two University of Mary Washington students are interning with us. They have many interests, so they will delve into a number of projects. RG has been working with a few UMW professors on projects that will result in research presentations this spring. Among them are issues of coal ash affecting water quality in the Potomac and heat island effects. RG is once again sponsoring the break session for the 3rd Annual Fredericksburg Regional Youth Conference on Climate, scheduled for March 26, 2023.

The 20th annual Earth Day on the Rappahannock will occur on the actual Earth Day, April 22, 2023. RG continues to be a sponsor and

co-organizer for this event which draws over 7,000 attendees. Of note is the presentation of the 12th annual Living Green Award and the program of student judges of the vendors' booths.

In November, RG lost one our most ardent supporters and activists, Ruth Carlone. She was a warrior for environmental and wildlife education for youth. Her creativity in bringing kids to the table was remarkable. If she was unable to be present, she found a way to engage in that activity or event from her home. A wonderful tribute to Ruth Carlone can be found in the Free-Lance Star. See vasierra.club/ruthcarlone

Paula Chow is the program chair of the Rappahannock Group.

Outings Leader Training at Bear's Den

by Gary Kosciusko



Group photo of the SCPRO trainees and trainers at the Bear's Den Hostel in Bluemont (photo courtesy of Gary Kosciusko.)

In an effort to restore further normalcy for our outings program, Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings held a two-day training session at the Bear's Den Hostel in Bluemont, Virginia, in early December. (The hostel has

a long and colorful history, which we'll not get into here.) The Outings Leader Training curriculum, paired with training in Basic First Aid, was designed to provide each new leader candidate everything they need to become a

qualified Sierra Club outings leader except for two outings under the guidance of an experienced mentor. This was the first such training held by SCPRO since before the pandemic.

Prior to the training, each candidate went through a screening process to determine how serious they were about their commitment. This included a written summary of their outings experience and an explanation as to why they wanted to become an outings leader for SCPRO. This was followed by an interview on Zoom. Eight people successfully completed the screening and arrived at the hostel. This rural venue provided a conducive environment for both trainees and trainers, away from most of the distractions

of daily life.

For the seven trainers, this was not "business as usual" either, since they had to scramble to familiarize themselves with the training material. The newly revised OLT curriculum now combines into one what had previously been separate OLT (Basic) and OLT (Advanced) courses and adds quite a bit of new content. In the end, all participants felt that this was a positive experience that could not be matched by online training. We now look forward to the day when our provisional leader graduates complete the rest of their qualifications.

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

Virginia's building code falls further behind national standards

by Bill Penniman

Despite the hard work of many Sierra Club members and allies, the Virginia Board of Housing and Community Development voted in December to drag Virginia's building code even further behind national standards than it had been in the past.

Based on its proposed final rule, Virginia will remain more than a decade behind the 2009 International Energy Conservation Code with respect to wall insulation and air leakage—two critical standards for home efficiency and comfort. It will fall further behind because the 2021 IECC calls for further tightening of wall insulation standards. And, Virginia's code will fall still further behind because the board majority accepted, without evidence or explanation, a proposal by commercial

builders to move backward from the 2018 IECC standards to the 2006 IECC standards for three broad categories of buildings covering more than 120 specific types of buildings.

The Board of Housing and Community Development's action is more disturbing because the Sierra Club was instrumental in getting legislation (H2227) passed in 2021 to make Virginia's code "at least as stringent" as the latest IECC. The BHCD is required by that legislation to consider adopting standards "at least as stringent" as the latest IECC based upon a comparison of the savings and other benefits to residents and the public over time versus the incremental cost of construction. Our submissions and US Department of Energy

findings clearly showed that residents would save money every year from making housing at least as efficient as the IECC (even after considering incremental mortgage costs for new homes) and the public would benefit from lower pollution and climate impacts and from fewer defaults and evictions.

Our proposals to ready new dwellings for EVs, solar and electrification (including installing heat pumps when air conditioning will be installed anyway) would also save residents money and cut pollution. By saving energy, our proposals would enhance affordability and benefit the public over the 70-plus-year lifetimes of new buildings. Unfortunately, the BHCD majority simply deferred to builders' wishes while ignoring applicable le-

gal standards and benefits to others.

The BHCD is expected to publish its proposed final rule in January giving the public roughly 60 days to file written comment and to speak briefly at a BHCD meeting. Once the proposal is published, comments can be submitted through the Virginia Town Hall website, townhall.virginia.gov

Interested Virginians should submit comments supporting adoption of efficiency standards at least as stringent as the latest IECC, more use of heat pumps and readiness for EV charging and other beneficial electrification.

Bill Penniman is the sustainability chair of the Virginia Chapter.

The Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail: A step forward

by Jim Lynch



A family group out for a ride on the Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail (photo courtesy of Jim Lynch).

The Dahlgren Junction Line was constructed in 1942 by the US Navy to bring munitions and supplies to the Dahlgren Navy Base in King George County. In 2006 the eastern 16 miles of the rail line, having been abandoned for rail use and come into private hands, was turned into a trail for recreation and commuting. An active

friends group maintains the trail. The goal has always been to have it become a part of Caledon State Park. This goal is supported by the county.

The trail is well used. Some of the most popular public events, trail runs, are held on the Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail, including a half-marathon in Febru-

ary (yes it does get cold!), a 14-miler in March (sometimes cold, last year was an epic snow and ice storm!) and a 50K in August (hot, but the tree cover keeps things comfortable!). And, of course, many folks use the trail for recreation on an every day basis. Bicycle commuters are starting to use it to get to work. As one of our trail neighbors notes, the trail is "well used"!

Last fall, the Department of Conservation and Recreation completed a study to determine whether the trail is suitable to become part of Caledon. The public input was supportive, and there were several visits by DCR personnel to the trail. The conclusion of the study was that the trail is suitable to become part of Caledon. The

study proposed a list of improvements to the trail.

The Friends of the Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail propose that an initial acquisition and minimum improvements be accomplished first, followed by public involvement in writing a new Master Plan for Caledon. The master plan process will give the public a chance to weigh in on what further improvements they would like to see. We're hoping to find a sponsor this year to patron a budget amendment. The trail will be a great addition to the state park system as part of Caledon.

See vasierra.club/lisva for the above-mentioned suitability study.

Jim Lynch is the group boundaries chair of the Virginia Chapter.

The coyote, a common resident in Virginia

by Richard Groover

In the last 50 years, Virginia has had a new wildlife resident appear and flourish, the coyote, *Canis latrans*. As we continue our love for wildlife, this creature may result in some difficult thought. Coyotes are a remarkable case of survival and adaptability, but they are a hated species for some pet and livestock owners.

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources reports that a conservative estimate of coyotes in Virginia is 50,000. Some people have seen them for brief moments. Many citizens report the disappearance of small pets. Farmers have seen small livestock like chicken and geese killed, and one goat farmer in Hanover County had a dozen of his herd killed by coyotes. In 2017, it was reported that they killed over \$1 million worth of livestock. Coyotes are present and thriving, even with hundreds



A coyote blending in with its environment in Hanover County (photo courtesy of Richard Groover).

of coyotes being killed by fur hunters in Virginia each year.

Dr. Richard Groover secured two project grants from the Virginia Academy of Science to try to scientifically verify coyotes are present in his county and maybe determine how many are in Hanover County, Virginia, and where they might be most abundant. Some behavioral characteristics regarding their travel and movement were also revealed in his study.

Several methods were

undertaken, including nighttime observations with calls and night vision equipment. One successful method of getting images was the deployment of a game camera placed about 10 meters from a fake fox hole, complete with the lure of fox urine. Coyotes don't like fox and will kill them. Over 30 locations were surveyed for this study over two years. The results show their wide distribution in Hanover County, especially in the more rural western area.

Groover's results did find some coyotes in residential areas but not as often. Coyotes were observed at all hours of the day but more often at night when they may be more active. Another behavior he uncovered was their patterns of movement. Based on his camera data, the coyotes move along trails and farm roads and do not wander through the woods as you might find deer doing.

In statistics he ran, they occupied 76.8% of the county but their detection probability was only 16.8% of the time. This lower detection number is based on several factors, but one may be the distance of their movement per day. Depending on the availability of food, they may move as much as five miles per day. Their vast diet also supports their survival success; they eat fruit, insects,

See Coyotes on page 11.

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>

Virginia's imaginary EV rebate

by Cheri Conca

People were pretty excited when Virginia's General Assembly passed legislation that established an electric vehicle rebate program that went into effect on October 1, 2021 and runs through January 1, 2027. Not only would it help make electric vehicles more affordable to a wider range of Virginians, it would help incentivize automakers to stock more EVs in the state, reducing the need for buyers to spend their dollars across the state border to get their desired choice of vehicle.

Plus, the rebate was constructed with a focus on equity: it would be paid to the dealer so the customer would not have to come up with extra money up front; there is an extra \$2,000 available based on income for a total rebate amount of \$4500 for qualifying individuals; and the rebate can be used to purchase lower-priced used vehicles. The rebate seemed like a great

start toward increasing the number of EVs on Virginia's roads, thereby reducing tailpipe pollution, which is the biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions.

There's just one problem: although the rebate is legislated, it doesn't actually exist. In order to exist, the rebate has to be funded. And it wasn't funded in 2022. This is confusing because many people unsurprisingly think that if a piece of legislation has passed, it is good to go. At least one Virginia auto dealer is also confused, as its webpage entices car buyers with the following promises:

- Beginning January 1, 2022, any Virginia resident who purchases or leases a new electric or hybrid vehicle is eligible for a rebate of \$2,500.

- Beginning January 1, 2022, any Virginia resident who purchases a used electric or hybrid vehicle for \$25,000 or less is eligible for

a rebate of \$2,500.

- Anyone who meets the above eligibility criteria may also be eligible for an additional \$2,000 in enhanced rebates (depending on income level).

It's too bad that the \$5M that was initially approved by the House of Delegates to fund the program was cut from the final 2022 budget. It would have provided a modest but tangible launch to the program that has been touted as a good example of a rebate that gives disadvantaged folks a chance to own an EV.

The used vehicle market is key to the future of an equitable transition to electric vehicles, and Virginia was wise to craft a rebate program that applies to used vehicles. As more people buy EVs, more will become available for resale. Given that two-thirds of Americans typically buy used rather than new cars, offering rebates on used cars is an effective tool for in-

creasing the number of EVs on the road. Of course, making EV charging accessible and affordable is also a key component of an equitable transition, but that is another discussion in and of itself.

I hear it all the time: EVs are for rich people. And right now, they kind of are. Forty-three percent of people cite vehicle cost as a barrier to buying an EV. But that doesn't mean we can't find ways to make them more accessible to everyone. Next year when the governor prepares the proposed budget bill, it should include adequate funding for the EV rebate program. Paired with the \$4,000 federal tax credit for used cars for qualifying buyers, Virginia's rebate could make EV ownership a reality for a diverse array of people and help Virginia meet its climate goals.

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

Progress is made in promoting safety at North Anna

by John Cruickshank

The Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club is currently working with Beyond Nuclear to ensure the North Anna Power Station in Louisa County operates safely in the years to come.

The North Anna nuclear generating station is operated by Dominion Generation Company and is jointly owned by the Dominion Virginia Power Corporation (88.4%) and by the Old Dominion Electric Cooperative (11.6%). The plant first went online in 1978. It has two reactors that generate 1.79 gigawatts of power, which is distributed mainly to the

greater Richmond area and to Northern Virginia. The facility was shut down briefly in 2011 to enable the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to assess the impact on the reactors of an earthquake in nearby Mineral, Virginia, that exceeded the strength that the reactors were designed to handle.

In March 2003, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission approved 20-year license extensions for North Anna Units 1 and 2. On August 20, 2020, Dominion Energy applied for a subsequent license renewal for the two units that would permit

the reactors to operate for up to an additional 20 years, for a total of 80 years from the date they came online.

The Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club has been working with Beyond Nuclear to require Dominion and the NRC to complete a thorough environmental review before approving this license renewal. In the normal course of a license or renewal request, the site operator prepares an environmental report on the site in question, which NRC staff then uses as the basis for preparing its own Environmental Impact Statement, as required by

the National Environmental Policy Act.

We believe the environmental report prepared by Dominion as part of its request for subsequent license renewal was woefully inadequate because, among other things, it improperly relied on a Generic Environmental Impact Statement, or GEIS, previously published by the NRC as a basis for avoiding a site-specific analysis of a number of issues with the proposed license renewal.

The attorney representing the Sierra Club and Be-

See North Anna on page 12.

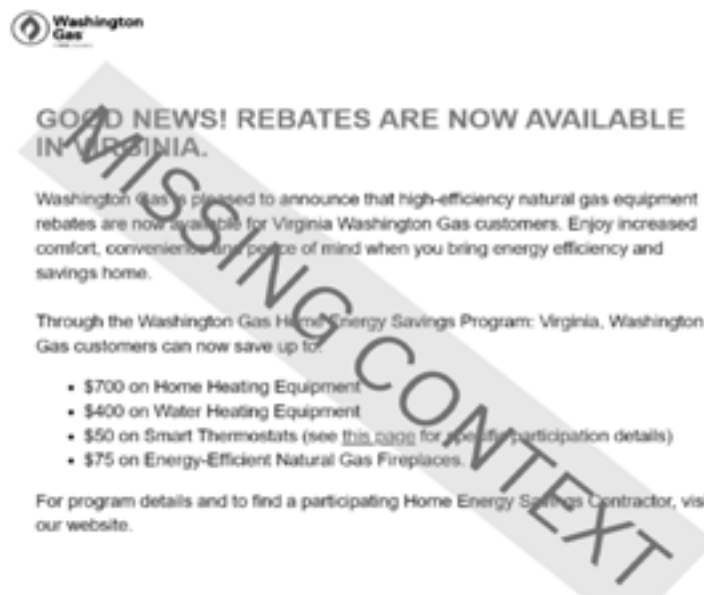
A study in gaslighting: Washington Gas

by Tim Cywinski

Industry gaslighting campaigns are nothing new. Polluters usually rely on this tactic to persuade people in power and the public to depend on antiquated technology and energy or fall for an empty environmentally friendly promise. The most egregious example of this is natural gas, a fossil fuel that releases pollution with more heat-trapping power than coal.

Natural gas was sold to us as a cleaner alternative (it's not) as well as a cheap fuel source (it isn't), but that's not stopping the industry from attempting to gaslight us to think otherwise. Bottomline, clean energy like solar and wind is more affordable than fossil fuels, and the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act makes ditching gas in our households more affordable than ever.

Polluters know they can no longer compete with the affordability benefits of clean energy and electrification, but that hasn't stopped them from trying to convince cus-



tomers otherwise.

Case study: Washington Gas(lightning) Marketing

A gas utility company, Washington Gas, has launched a marketing campaign claiming customers can save hundreds on their electric bills by upgrading or buying new gas powered appliances like stoves and furnaces.

This marketing campaign is misleading because they

offer cost “savings” that pale in comparison to what electric appliances (same type of appliance but powered by electricity instead of fossil fuels) can offer to households. Electric appliances tend to be more efficient than gas, reduce pollution outside and inside your home, and can be powered by clean energy sources like solar. Not only are they far more environmentally friendly than anything the natural gas utility provides, the Inflation Re-

duction Act creates rebates and tax incentives that can save customers thousands when they switch to electric appliances. Despite the half-truths peddled by companies like Washington Gas, it is cheaper to both buy electric appliances as well as operate them in our homes.

So why does Washington Gas care what appliances you get? Why isn't Washington Gas letting their current and potential customers know about the real cost savings options? The answer is that their business model—as is true for gas providers like them—is dependent on acquiring more customers. For Washington Gas, more customers equals more profits. They have a financial incentive to distract the public from substantive cost savings.

Tim Cywinski is the communications manager of the Virginia Chapter.

Distributed Legislative Advocacy Teams

by Gustavo Angeles

During the last months, our chapter staff and members have been preparing for the legislative session. This year we will be prioritizing the defense of policies that are in place to make sure Virginia reduces carbon emissions and provides access to energy saving opportunities to low-income families.

The work also continues in other areas; this year we are continuing to collaborate with Virginia Community Voice to further our progress on equity and inclusion. We are learning how to build trust with impacted commu-

nities as well as make sure that our priorities are not causing harm to them.

In the final quarter of last year, we got a grant from our national office to work on creating Distributed Legislative Advocacy Teams, or DLATs. These teams are formed by members that would like to engage with elected officials. Currently, we are conducting training for our members that are interested in DLATs. We are starting with a small group of volunteers, but our goal is to have these teams available in all of our groups.

The purpose of the DLATs

is to increase the presence and engagement of local Sierra Club members with their elected members of the General Assembly in small and local settings, to familiarize members of the General Assembly with Sierra Club members that live in their district, to increase Sierra Club volunteers' knowledge and understanding of legislative processes and processes for equitable and just community engagement and to prepare the Sierra Club's local groups to engage legislatively in the years to come.

I would like to invite our

members to engage and get involved, if you are not already, with your local groups.

This is our core, our center of strength that helps drive local movements, which are then reflected in our statewide campaigns. Our work is inspired by local efforts and the work that our groups do. I would like to invite you to be part of that.

Gustavo Angeles is the acting director of the Virginia Chapter.

Coal Dust Caroling in Lamberts Point, Norfolk

by Ann Creasy

Lamberts Point Community members, in partnership with New Virginia Majority and Sierra Club, have formed a community group to address priority concerns for people in Norfolk and Lamberts Point, including coal dust pollution from the transport of coal by Norfolk Southern Railway. This is not a new issue; there is a history of organizing around coal dust in Hampton Roads that's been led by dedicated community members like the late Joe Cook, Anna Jeng, Charles Corbett, Kim Williams, LaFeetah Byrum, Angela Harris, Tyla Matteson, Carl Poole and more. Volunteers and community groups have been working for years to address coal dust.

This winter we decided to get creative and jingle up some public awareness and recruit other concerned community members to ask Norfolk Southern to cover their coal! We sang "Coal Dust Carols" in the Lamberts Point community on Dec 8, 2022, with flyers and petitions. We changed the lyrics of carols to be about Norfolk Southern Polluting Lamberts



Community group members singing "Coal Dust Carols" (photo courtesy of Ann Creasy).

Point with Coal! Children and adults alike laughed and agreed with us as they heard us singing. We enjoyed hot chocolate and had a great time. We then performed our carols before Norfolk City Council at their meeting on Dec 13. Five community members made public verbal comments to Norfolk City Council requesting that they pressure Norfolk Southern to pursue ways to cover its coal rail cars and dumpers.

Following our caroling activities, the community group is currently working to develop relationships with more neighbors and Old Do-

minion University students to organize on a larger scale to get Norfolk Southern to start covering the coal! If you have questions or are interested in getting involved with this work, please email me at ann.creasy@sierraclub.org

I am including two sample carols we sang for readers to enjoy. Singing or humming the carols to yourself is highly encouraged!

Deck The Halls:
Tis the season to spread knowledge

Coal is in the air, Norfolk Southern doesn't care
Harming Lamberts Point and

students at college
Coal is in the air, Norfolk Southern doesn't care
Bronchitis, asthma and respiratory problem
Coal is in the air, Norfolk Southern doesn't care
Norfolk Southern is who's responsible
Coal is in the air, Norfolk Southern doesn't care
(coughing)

Jingle Bells:
Dashing through the coal
Can't breath out of my nose
Norfolk Southern said let's go (to Atlanta)
Laughing all the way (HA, HA, HA)
We asked them to cover their cars
But they don't care what we say
Our health is not important to them
As long as they get paid
Oh, Jingle bells, Jingle bells,
That's the Norfolk Way
Ever since the piers were built
Our health plummets every day

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

Strengthening the EPA's rules for public health and pollutants

by Hunter Noffsinger

Every day, people all across the country are exposed to harmful pollutants from fossil fuels. Living close to facilities releasing pollutants into the air can have serious health effects, including increased risk of cardiovascular disease, impaired lung function, anxiety, depression, preterm birth and impaired fetal growth. But we have a chance to influence and strengthen the rules and safeguards regarding the release of pollutants and toxins

as the Environmental Protection Agency releases new proposed rules.

In November, President Biden issued an updated draft rule to cut methane and other harmful pollutants from new and existing oil and gas operations. The updated rule builds on the draft rule released by the EPA in 2021; incorporates much of the feedback offered by communities in the past year; and is an important step towards addressing the climate crisis,

safeguarding public health and creating new jobs in the methane mitigation industry.

The updated draft rule improves upon many of the standards in the original draft rule released by the EPA in 2021 identified by climate, public health and environmental justice advocates by doing the following:

- Closing a loophole in the leak detection and repair, or LDAR, standards by requiring routine inspections at all wells with equipment

known to malfunction, such as tanks and flares, using gas imaging cameras;

- Moving away from production-based LDAR requirements and requiring all low-producing wells, which are responsible for half of all methane emissions nationwide, to be routinely inspected for leaks;

- Maintaining the zero-emitting pneumatic equipment requirements for

See EPA rules on page 11.

EPA rules

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pneumatic controllers and expanding this requirement to include pneumatic pumps;

- Creating a program to more quickly address super-emitters through third-party monitoring; and
- Requiring that abandoned wells are subject to inspections until closure and that oil and gas companies submit a closure plan and conduct a post-closure survey of these wells to ensure they are not leaking.

To ensure the strongest possible methane safeguards, community members have advocated to the EPA by sending letters to the editor, submitting written comments and signing up to testify at the EPA's public hearings on the rule. As of January 4, 2023 we do not yet have a final decision from the EPA on the methane rule and continue to work with advocates across Virginia and the United States to ensure the EPA protects the health of our communities.

In addition to the proposed methane rule, the EPA (as of January 4, 2023) is expected to release a proposed fine particulate matter, or soot, rule. Fine particulate matter is an extremely dangerous pollutant. It's a deadly mix of metals, organic chemicals and acidic substances that are so small they can be inhaled deeply into the lungs and enter the bloodstream.

Coyotes

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rodents, deer and, sadly, cats and small dogs.

Coyotes may be seen occasionally in pairs, but most often they hunt and travel as solitary animals. They do not hunt in packs like wolves do. Mating occurs in the winter, and the puppies are born in

The current standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency are outdated and insufficient. Setting tighter limits for particulate matter in line with the levels recommended by a scientific advisory committee earlier this year will protect millions of people, including vulnerable populations like children, the elderly and people with asthma and other respiratory and heart conditions.

A similar commenting process is expected for the fine particulate matter proposed rule. In collaboration with New Virginia Majority, we will be releasing a comment writing toolkit and working with community members to tell the EPA to strengthen the standards for fine particulate matter.

The more pressure we put through written comments and public hearings, the more likely our government officials will enact the strongest pollution limits to improve the health of communities, advance racial justice and protect the climate.

If you are interested in learning more about these rules, getting updates or getting involved, contact Hunter Noffsinger at hunter.noffsinger@sierraclub.org

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

the spring when food is more abundant. Both parents will feed the young puppies when they are in the den, but that ends as they get older, usually in early summer.

Coyotes do possess an interesting population characteristic like wolves. If the

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- Feb 4 - 5** ... Farmville, VA
- Feb 4 - 5** ... Harrisonburg/Staunton area, VA
- Feb 25-26** ... Lexington, VA
- Feb 25-26** ... Richmond, VA
- Mar 4 - 5** ... Washington DC area
- Mar 25-26** ... Blacksburg, VA
- Apr 15-16** ... Charlottesville, VA
- Apr 29-30** ... Richmond, VA
- Apr 29-30** ... Women-only retreat in VA
- May 27-29** ... Forest retreat near Blacksburg, VA
- Jun 10-11** ... Charlottesville area, VA
- Jun 10-11** ... Norfolk, VA
- Sep 2 - 4** ... Mountain-top retreat near Blacksburg, VA

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

local population drops below 60%, the females start ovulating more eggs and the litter sizes will increase to 4-5 puppies instead of 2-3. This is one reason why selected hunting of them is not successful in locally extirpating them.

Coyotes in Virginia are here to stay.

Dr. Richard Groover is a professor at George Mason University and a member of the Falls of the James Group.

Inside Virginia Sierran



Sierra Club Virginia Chapter
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yond Nuclear petitioned the NRC board asking that Dominion not be permitted to rely on the old GEIS in lieu of analyzing risks specific to the site and that additional risks be analyzed in Dominion's environmental report. In February 2022, the NRC board agreed and initiated a 24-month rulemaking for the GEIS that, once completed, would allow operators to rely on the GEIS for subsequent license renewal requests like North Anna.

Dominion, however, has chosen to move forward with its license renewal application by submitting its own supplemental site-specific environmental report instead of waiting for the NRC to issue an updated GEIS. If this is approved by the NRC,

there will be a public hearing and Beyond Nuclear and the Sierra Club will be able to send experts to testify. (We are looking for a seismic expert who would be interested in reviewing Dominion's submission.)

On September 28, Dominion issued an Environmental Report Supplement as part of its application for the Subsequent License Renewal. On December 15, our attorney submitted comments on this report that focused on a number of shortcomings:

- The report does not consider the effects of climate change.
- The significance of the 2011 earthquake in Mineral, Virginia, and the need for

seismic safety upgrades are not examined.

- The safety impact of relying on up-to-80-year-old equipment is not adequately addressed.

- The need to harvest and examine components from decommissioned reactors to determine their reliability after 60 years of operation is not considered.

To date, our efforts have paid off in increased scrutiny for this license renewal. We will continue to promote safety at the North Anna nuclear power station.

John Cruickshank is the Piedmont Group ExCom representative of the Virginia Chapter.