



**SIERRA CLUB**

VIRGINIA CHAPTER

# Virginia Sierran

The Official Newsletter of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter  
Summer 2024

## Rooftop Solar is Under Attack Again Ivy Main

**S**olar advocates won a huge victory when the Virginia Clean Economy Act and Solar Freedom (VCEA) became law in 2020. Among the new provisions were some that strengthened net metering, the program that allows residents, businesses and local governments—that install solar onsite—to get credited for excess electricity they feed back to the grid.

Currently, the law requires that customers of Dominion Energy and Appalachian Power (AEP) be credited for the electricity they supply to the grid at the full retail rate for electricity. The credit is applied against the cost of the electricity they draw from the grid at night. The policy makes solar affordable and supports small businesses across Virginia.

However, the VCEA came with a ticking time bomb. It provided that in 2024 for Appalachian Power, and 2025 for Dominion, the State Corporation Commission (SCC) would hold proceedings to determine the fate of net metering, and in particular, the terms for compensating new net metering customers.

It's 2024, and the bomb just went off. On May 6, the SCC issued an order directing the two utilities to file their suggested changes. AEP's proposal is due by September 2. Dominion's is due by May 1, 2025. The SCC will establish a schedule for each case that will include provisions for the public and interested parties to participate.



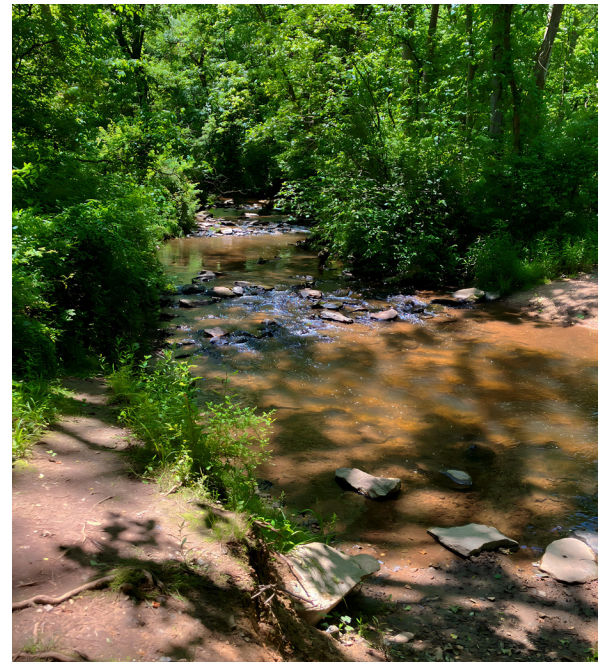
There are two important protections to note. First, low-income customers will have their choice of installing solar under either the existing rules or the new ones. Second, customers who install solar panels and interconnect to the grid before the SCC issues its final order will continue to be covered by the existing provisions for retail net metering.

Anyone who's been on the fence about installing solar should act now. Non-profits Solar United Neighbors and Solarize Virginia can help you get the best deal. Also check out the excellent advice and sample quotes from HR Climate Hub.

SEE ROOFTOP SOLAR ON PAGE 3 ➡➡

## Virginia's Newest State Parks Glen Gillis

**A**s one of America's most historic and beautiful states, Virginia is well known for its outstanding system of state parks. From the Atlantic Coast to the Appalachian Mountains, many of Virginia's historic and scenic highlights are preserved within its state park system. First created on June 5, 1936 at the height of the Great Depression and built by the Civilian Conservation Corps, the system has grown from six state parks to forty-two, covering every corner of Virginia.



VICKY HSU

The newest addition to the park system is **Sweet Run State Park** (above) in western Loudoun County. Located directly below the Appalachian Trail at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the nearly 900-acre Sweet Run State Park was dedicated in October 2023. First protected in 1999 by the Robert and Dee Leggett Foundation, the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship welcomed the public for more than twenty years. Its privately owned nature preserve with beautiful landscapes of forest, meadows, streams, and excellent views of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Eleven miles of hiking and nine miles of equestrian trails also made the Blue Ridge Center a popular destination.

SEE PARKS ON PAGE 9 ➡➡



## FROM THE CHAIR Summer 2024

**H**ello again! I hope you've been taking advantage of the lovely spring and early summer we've been enjoying here in Virginia.

The budget allocation decisions recently released by National, and undue delays in rolling out these decisions, have made the past few months challenging for the Chapter and its staff. The upcoming months may prove even more challenging, as our Executive Director and his team work through what this will mean for our wonderful employees and volunteers and the many important projects in which we are involved.

In the middle of this, I find it helpful to remind myself of the great work being done in our Chapter and the progress, large and small, we make along the way. I keep a "Wow List," and I'd

## Virginia Sierran

Virginia Sierran is the official newsletter of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter and is published quarterly.

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

Please contact [member.care@sierraclub.org](mailto:member.care@sierraclub.org) for membership and mailing issues and [address.changes@sierraclub.org](mailto:address.changes@sierraclub.org) to change your mailing address.

like to share a few of the items on that list with you in this column. I hope this column makes you feel as proud of our Chapter and all we accomplish as it does me.

**Coal Dust:** In October, 2023, the Sierra Club joined other environmental and public health organizations to file a petition for rule making with the EPA, calling upon the agency to stop harmful pollution from open-top trains carrying coal by requiring operators to obtain a permit for their discharges. Exposure to coal dust from the trains increases the risk of bronchitis, asthma, heart disease, and other serious health conditions. Coal dust and particles also contaminate drinking water and aquatic life, threatening public health and the livelihood of fishing communities. The EPA has authority to regulate pollution from point sources like rail cars, and the petition calls upon EPA to do so.

Ann Creasy and the Environmental Law program have been working with local community groups and members to develop a solution to this problem. We have been collecting information about the impacts of coal dust on communities along routes where trains carry coal in open-top cars. In the months leading to the petition submission, the chapter helped collect community testimony and submitted more than 20 testimonies with the petition.

In early May, the EPA met with the Sierra Club and our partners. The EPA thanked us for our work in raising and explaining the issue. Currently, we are working on letters of support for the petition to ensure that the EPA hears about it regularly and understands that the public and elected officials want to see progress toward resolution of the issue. Here is a link to our action alert.

**Data Center Protest:** Virginia continues to see enormous growth in data center activity. There are at least 28 counties and several cities with data centers or with major projects in the pipeline. To date, the industry has been given free rein and seems to have limited interest in addressing our concerns. On June 2, the Chapter and the Great Falls Group held a rally/press event in Reston to bring state and local issues associated with data centers to the fore. The event attracted over 100 participants and significant press coverage, including from Annandale Today, Channel 7 News, and Fairfax County Times. Speakers included Del. Rip Sullivan, Del. Josh Thomas, Tyler Ray (an advocate against the Plaza 500 "by right" data center), Rev. Jean Wright, Julie Bolthouse of PEC and our own Tim Cywinski and Connor Kish. We even had an ice cream truck! Fairfax County is also considering a Data Center Zoning Ordinance Amendment, but to date the draft language is far too weak to mitigate the actual impacts of data centers on residents and ratepayers.

**Russell County Landfill:** Russell County faced the threat of becoming the site for the country's largest private landfill. The site in question is a former coal mine known as Moss 3, which was abandoned by its operator when it was no longer financially viable. The proposed landfill activated concerned residents to fight, gaining a following of more than 4,000 residents on the "We Way No to Moss 3 Landfill" Facebook group. Tim Cywinski spoke at a community meeting and two Board of Supervisors meetings regarding the proposal, each of which attracted more than 200 County residents. The Chapter is proud of Russell County for proving, once again, that people can be powerful when they believe they can act as their own champions, and we are proud of the role we were able to play in that fight.

Keep up the good work, everyone! And going forward, please let me know if there is any work you want to add to our Wow List!

My warmest regards to you all,

**Judy Gayer**





## Advocating for a Better Farm Bill

Ralph Grove

**T**his is the year for renewal of the Farm Bill, a major piece of federal legislation that is renewed every five years, accounting for \$1.5 trillion of federal spending. The Farm Bill affects every aspect of agriculture—what food is grown, how it is grown, how it gets to market, and who has access to it. The bill also has significance for environmental conservation because of the enormous impact of agriculture on the environment.

Agriculture is an often overlooked driver of global climate change. The industrial agriculture systems that produce most of our food have an extensive impact on the environment, causing about one fifth of all Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, extensive water pollution, air pollution, and wide-ranging deforestation. The bulk of environmental damage is due to industrial-scale production of meat and dairy products in concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs).

### The industrial agriculture systems that produce most of our food have an extensive impact on the environment.

As the Farm Bill is being shaped, there are numerous conflicts between the interests of corporate agriculture, and the interests of smaller farmers, including those who practice regenerative and organic agriculture. The Senate version of the bill is generally more environment-positive and progressive than the House version, which caters to corporate interests. Key issues include:

**Protecting \$20B for conservation that originated with the Inflation Reduction Act:** This funding will help to protect the environment by supporting regenerative agriculture, including practices that improve soil health through carbon sequestration. Storing more carbon in the soil not only reduces GHG emissions, but it helps improve biodiversity and retain water to alleviate drought. The House version of the bill would reorient this funding for more general purposes, including supporting factory farms.

**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):** SNAP provides food security for millions of families with limited income. Progressive leaders want to extend allocations to match inflationary cost increases, while conservatives want to freeze or reduce allocations. There's also a push to make benefits usable at community kitchens, which are non-profits that can provide hot meals to help working parents. This option is often healthier than packaged processed foods.

SEE FARM BILL ON PAGE 7 →

## Rooftop Solar (cont'd from page 1)

Make no mistake, utilities hate net metering and will destroy it if they can. The more customers who install solar, the less control the utility can exercise over them—and the less money the company makes for its shareholders from building new generation and transmission.

That's not what our utilities tell legislators and the SCC. Instead, they promote a narrative that net metering customers impose extra costs on other ratepayers, creating a "cost shift." The idea is that residents who go solar are making everyone else pay more of the costs of the grid while they themselves rake in money with their free electricity from the sun.

This argument has raged across the country for years. Utilities often argue that solar customers should be paid for their surplus electricity only the amount of money the utility would otherwise have had to spend to generate or buy that same amount of electricity from somewhere else. This "avoided cost" can be less than one-third of the retail rate for residential electricity.

With a payback period of 9-15 years in Virginia, residential solar is a reasonable investment with retail rate net metering, but it's hardly a get-rich-quick scheme. Industry members say a compensation level that's less than retail could derail the residential market. The changes will also affect the economics of on-site solar for businesses, nonprofits and government.

Yet the "cost shift" argument doesn't actually depend on whether rooftop solar is affordable for customers or profitable for installers. The way utilities think about net metering, a homeowner could even lose money on solar and still be guilty of shifting the costs of maintaining the grid onto other customers.

Net metering supporters counter that rooftop solar provides valuable benefits to the grid and to other customers that the utilities overlook, like relieving grid congestion and lessening the need for utility investments in new generation and transmission. Solar also has larger societal benefits like increased energy security, local resilience, clean air and carbon reduction. With skyrocketing demand for electricity from data centers, we need all the clean energy we can generate.

The SCC will now have to navigate these opposing positions in what are certain to be contentious proceedings. Meanwhile, residents and businesses would be well advised to get their solar panels up this year.

Ivy Main



EMILY LUEBKE

## Dragonflies Program

We had a special virtual program about Dragonflies with expert and photographer Emily Luebke. We had more folks attend than for any other program in recent memory!

## All We Can Save Community Read

The Piedmont Group was an integral part of the Community Read of the Book “All We Can Save” with essays about the climate crisis and how we can help.

Spearheaded by Albemarle County’s Office of Equity and Inclusion, the coalition included Charlottesville NOW, the League of Women Voters, Charlottesville’s Office of Human Rights, Jefferson-Madison Library and others.

The books were free throughout the library’s five county area and the project culminated in a panel discussion on some of the topics in the book.

## Elections

Here are the results of our recent elections:

- 🌲 Chair Donna Shaunesey (also Membership Chair),
- 🌲 Vice Chair Audrey Dannenberg (also Fundraising Chair)
- 🌲 Secretary John Cruickshank (also Communications Chair)
- 🌲 Treasurer Roxanne White
- 🌲 Conservation Chair Kirk Bowers
- 🌲 Political Chair Wren Olivier
- 🌲 Legal Chair Beth Hodsdon
- 🌲 Energy Chair Scott Ziemer

## PIEDMONT

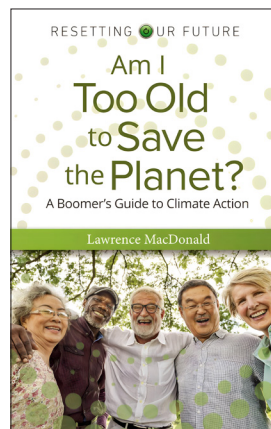
Cville ReLeaf and Rivanna Master Naturalists zoomed in to present a great program in January about their organizations. You can find their presentations on our webpage

[www.sierraclub.org/virginia/piedmont/environmental\\_agenda](http://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/piedmont/environmental_agenda)



## Earth Flag Presentation

We recognized another great local group with an Earth Flag. **Dark Skies Piedmont** has done amazing work educating the public and the local governments about the impacts of light pollution. We were delighted to recognize them at a meeting of the Nelson County Master Gardeners after their presentation to the group.



## You're Never Too Old to Save the Planet

Our next program will be held at Ivy Creek Natural Area on July 28th at 2:00pm. The author of “Am I Too Old to Save the Planet? A Boomer’s Guide to Climate Action” will be on hand to share his thoughts and start a community conversation about what folks can do at any age. Lawrence MacDonald is former foreign correspondent who has been fighting for a livable planet with Third Act and more.

## 5th District Congressional Environmental Forum

We had a great 5th District Congressional Environmental Forum in Nelson County on June 5th! The Nelson County Sierrans just became part of our Group, and they turned out in force to hear from presenters Gloria Witt and Paul Riley as they answered some hard-hitting questions about environmental issues.

We all learned a great deal about climate change, sustainable agriculture and environmental justice. It was a great experience to meet in this beautifully repurposed old school. It was clear the candidates had done their research (and we’re happy to have been the reason they learned more).





## Sierrans Meet Young Naturalists at KidVention John Cruickshank

**E**ach year members of the Piedmont Group of the Sierra Club participate in the KidVention that is organized by the Virginia Discovery Museum in Charlottesville. This is an annual celebration of everything science. This event inspires children to explore the world around them with all their senses. Local exhibitors present activities involving biology, chemistry, environmental science, engineering, physics, and zoology through hands-on demonstrations, experiments, and games.

Our Sierra Club members helped young naturalists learn about pollinators and how to create a wildlife habitat in their own backyards. The children planted wildflowers and oak seedlings in compostable planting pots which can be replanted in their gardens later in the Spring. This was a wonderful opportunity to interact with families and discuss the importance of protecting the natural environment.

John Cruickshank



## 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. Bi-weekly call on Thursdays at 10am. 🐦  
**Contact Ann Creasy at [Ann.Creasy@sierraclub.org](mailto:Ann.Creasy@sierraclub.org)**

**Sierra Club Virginia Chapter Equity, Inclusion and 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. This space is also 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:cheri.conca@sierraclub.org)** or visit <https://vasierra.club/nova>



## 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 for each groups' geographical area can be found on our website under Find a Group Near You.

### Chesapeake Bay

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### Falls of the James

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### Great Falls

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### New River Valley

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### Piedmont

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### Potomac River Group

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### Rappahannock

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### Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings (SCPRO)

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## Sierra Club Establishes a New Policy on E-bike Use on Trails Vicky Hoover

**E**-bikes—bicycles powered by electric motors—are increasingly popular. With an electric motor, bikes travel faster, farther and higher. E-bikes share the world with walkers, cars, buses, bicyclists, horses, and wildlife. They are great for urban transportation, but may lead to serious conflicts and impacts on backcountry trails.

The increasing presence of e-bikes necessitated the Sierra Club weigh in on their use while honoring our mission to protect the environment and encourage people to enjoy nature. Recently, Club volunteers revised our initial Off-road use of motorized vehicles policy from 2022 to include e-bikes. The updated policy promotes the use of electric motorized bicycles in urban and developed areas. For trails on public lands, the policy emphasizes that e-bikes should be prohibited where motorized vehicles are prohibited.

### E-bikes are motor vehicles

Who would question they are motorized? Here's where Industry advocacy comes in:

When e-bikes first appeared, they had to meet requirements for motorcycles. Because these limitations could hurt sales, e-bike distributors and manufacturers organized to change federal and state laws and policies to favor e-bikes. In 2022, their organization, PeopleForBikes, had 27 full time employees and a yearly budget of \$4.1 million. The PeopleForBikes Coalition campaigned to convince the public that electric motorized bikes should go anywhere conventional bikes go.

To increase e-bike access, the industry invented a three-tier system that ranks e-bikes as Class 1, 2, and 3. Class 1 claimed to be pedaled like traditional bicycles. Class 2 and 3 e-bikes are faster and more powerful. This "Class" system is impractical, because it's nearly impossible for a bicyclist or an enforcement officer to look at an e-bike and determine its "class". There is no distinctive marking. Many e-bike models can be configured as Class 1, 2, or 3 and look identical. Also, e-bike owners can easily modify the bike's motor to boost power and speed.

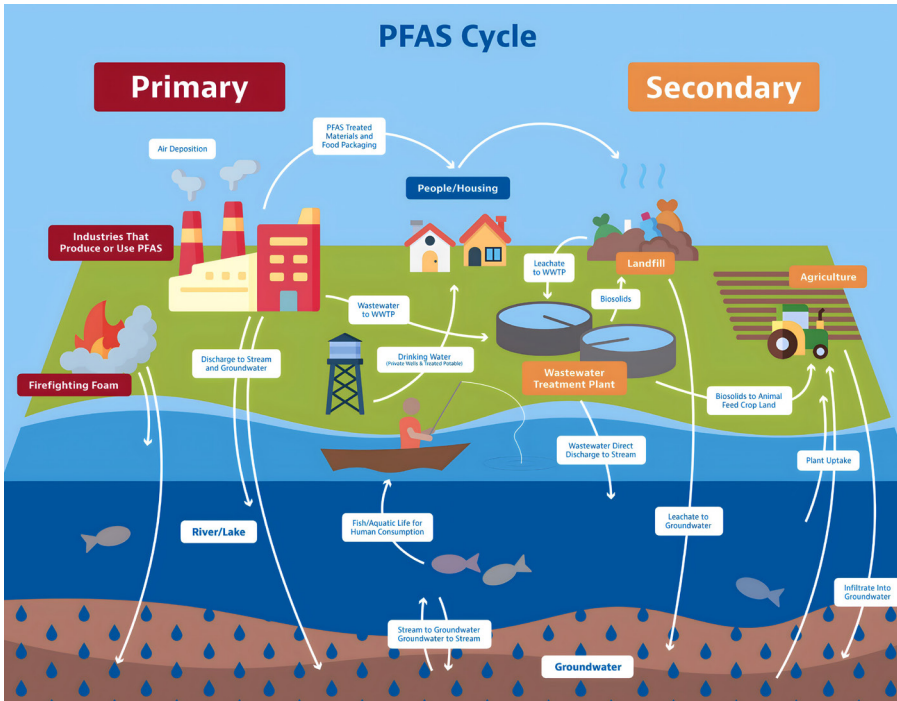
The classification system is an industry lobbying ploy to expand e-bike use. The artificial distinction is unenforceable by land managers, and if allowed, would open any trail to any motorized bike. All classes of e-bikes have similar negative effects on wildlife and other trail users.

SEE E-BIKES ON NEXT PAGE →

# Polyfluoroalkyl Substances Regulation Update

Zoe Hanrahan

**P**olyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a group of synthetic chemicals that are used in everyday products ranging from tampons to tap water and have been found in the blood of every American. They have earned the nickname forever chemicals because of how slowly they break down, some lasting thousands of years. This slow breakdown allows PFAS to build up in humans and our environment and can result in a large range of health problems, including but not limited to decreased fertility, increased risk of cancer, and reduced ability of people’s immune systems.



It’s not just humans who are at risk from PFAs. They also impact wildlife in negative ways. PFAS can change the PH levels of the soil, harming native plants. PFAS also reduce the reproduction rate and increase disease rates in animals.

Recognizing the harm PFAS can cause, in 2021 the Biden-Harris Administration announced that they would launching accelerated efforts to help protect against their negative impacts.

As part of this initiative, in 2021, the EPA announced the PFAS Strategic Roadmap. This roadmap includes timelines and specific actions that the EPA plans to commit to protect people’s health, protect the environment, and hold polluters accountable. The timeline depicted on the PFAS Strategic Roadmap spans from 2021 to 2024.

## PFAS have earned the nickname forever chemicals because of how slowly they break down, some lasting thousands of years

In April of this year there were two big wins with the PFAS Strategic Roadmap when it comes to managing PFAS and protecting both ourselves and our environment. The first came in the form of the PFAS National

**SEE PFAS ON PAGE 8** ➡



FEEDING INDIANA'S HUNGRY

### Farm Bill (cont'd from page 3)

These are only two of the many important issues relating to this bill. You can help by letting your elected representatives know that we want a Farm Bill that promotes conservation and food security, at <http://sc.org/farm-bill> (QR code below.) For more information, visit the Food and Agriculture Activist Team website at [www.sierraclub.org/grassroots-network/food-agriculture](http://www.sierraclub.org/grassroots-network/food-agriculture).

Ralph Grove, VA Chapter Food & Agriculture Issue Chair



### E-Bikes (cont'd from page 4)

PeopleForBikes Coalition has been very successful. 43 states have passed e-bike legislation that mimics their recommendations.

### 30X30, Wildlife, Hikers, and Equestrians

Human recreation disturbs wildlife behavior and health and prompts wildlife to avoid otherwise suitable habitats. Studies show that because e-bikes go faster and farther, they impact some wildlife more than do hikers, cyclists, and horseback riders. As part of the Club’s mission to protect wild Nature, we must keep motorized vehicles off of quiet hiking and horseback riding trails.

In response to climate change and biodiversity loss, the Club champions the 30x30 campaign to protect 30% of natural habitat by 2030. Allowing e-bikes in wild areas may prevent protection needed to achieve our 30X30 goals.

E-bikes are here and may benefit many. Our challenge is to promote these where appropriate and still respect other trail users, and, of course, protect wild lands. For more information, request a copy of the Sierra Club’s Recreation Issues Team e-bike background paper from Vicky Hoover ([vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org](mailto:vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org)).

Vicky Hoover



## PFAS (cont'd from page 7)

Primary Drinking Water Regulation, which is the first legally enforceable drinking water standard involving six different types of PFAS. Under this new regulation, drinking water was given a Maximum Contaminant Level for each type of the six PFAS that fall under the regulation. Following this, public water systems will have three years to complete their initial monitoring of PFAS. Afterward, they will have to continue monitoring PFAS levels and provide the public with information on the levels of PFAS in their drinking water beginning in 2027. In five years, they must implement solutions to reduce PFAS levels if they exceed the Maximum Contaminant Levels and if these levels are violated, they must alert the public to it.

In addition, on April 19, perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS), two of the most common types of PFAS, were classified as hazardous substances under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act. This new classification will enable investigation, cleanup, and reports if there are any leaks involving these two PFAS and ensure that polluters pay to clean up the contamination they caused.

Even with these two excellent announcements, there is still plenty of work to be done when it comes to mitigating the harm that PFAS can cause. To learn more about the EPA's progress in following their roadmap the EPA posts their latest updates on their website.

Meanwhile, while new rules and regulations are created to help fight against the negative effects of PFAS, you might be wondering what you can do. You can avoid exposure by not eating food in grease-resistant packaging, replacing your non-stick pans, helping advocate for regulations surrounding PFAS, joining organizations that help fight against PFAS, and helping to educate people about the harm that PFAS can cause.

Zoe Hanrahan



## Youngkin Pulls the Plug on Clean Cars Cheri Conca

**W**hat do you do when you don't like a law? Do you ignore it and do whatever you want? That's what Governor Youngkin did when he declared on June 5 that Virginia will not participate in Advanced Clean Cars II (ACCII), despite the standards being adopted and twice reaffirmed by the Virginia General Assembly. The governor cited an opinion from Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares, who suddenly reversed his earlier decision that Virginia is bound by law to comply with updated standards that are set to take effect on January 1, 2025. ACCII requires that all new car sales must be electric beginning in 2035. Used fossil fuel cars will still be available for sale.

**The transportation sector accounts for at least 48% of heat-trapping gases emitted in Virginia. More than two-thirds of those emissions come from the tailpipes of personal vehicles.**

The governor's action exhibits blatant disregard for not only the law, but also Virginians' health, consumer choice, and residents' wishes. Clean Cars Standards would enable Virginians to avoid nearly \$30 billion in healthcare costs and 2,700 premature deaths due to tailpipe pollution, particularly for people who live in communities located near busy roadways. If the standards are repealed, residents will have restricted choice of vehicles, because automakers prioritize delivery of electric vehicles to 17 states and the District of Columbia that have adopted Clean Cars Standards.

Governor Youngkin has repeatedly—and unsuccessfully—urged the Virginia General Assembly to repeal Clean Cars legislation, because that is the only legal way to remove the standards. In fact, a 2022 press statement from the Governor's office lamented that the law bound Virginia to the regulations and noted that Attorney General Miyares was hopeful the General Assembly would repeal it. Miyares' flip flop on interpretation of the law and Youngkin's hubristic decision to single-handedly dismantle it are a terrifying nose thumb to democracy.

ACCII is not the first legislative effort to protect the public from the toxic effects of tailpipe pollution. In the 1980s, the Reagan administration



SEE CLEAN CARS ON PAGE 11 →



## Virginia’s Newest State Parks (cont’d from page 1)

The property was sold to the state of Virginia in 2017 and designated **Sweet Run State Park** in 2023, named after the stream which runs through the park. Staff improved the trail system with new signage, opened a children’s nature learning center. Future projects include constructing a new entrance road, a visitor center, and Loudoun County’s first public campground. A prime location for outdoor enthusiasts, the new park is located directly below the Appalachian Trail and just a few miles south of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, the C&O Canal, Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, and the water gap of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers. Sweet Run State Park will further enhance the reputation of the area as one of the most popular outdoor recreation centers in eastern America.



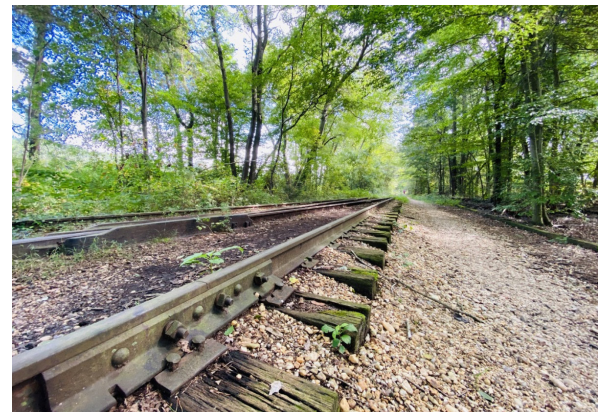
Sweet Run Entrance

The state of Virginia opened the new **Culpeper County Battlefields State Park** on July 1st. During the American Civil War, several battles were fought on the site in Culpeper County, including the largest cavalry battle in American history on the eve of the decisive battle at Gettysburg. Occupying land originally purchased by the Civil War Trust—now the American Battlefields Trust—the new park covers almost 2,000 acres at five different locations. These locations include Brandy Station, Cedar Mountain, Hansbrough Ridge, and Kelly’s Ford and Rappahannock Station on the banks of the free-flowing Rappahannock State Scenic River. The sites will include a visitor center at Brandy Station, trails, interpretive signage, and canoe and kayak launch sites on the Rappahannock. With the opening of the Culpeper County Battlefields State Park, Virginia will once again be expanding its park system.



Culpeper Battlefields Ribbon Cutting

The **Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail** in King George County is another possible—and much-anticipated—addition to the Park system. Constructed during the Second World War to connect a railroad to the Dahlgren Naval Base on the Potomac River, the 1940s Dahlgren Branch Rail Line ceased operations in the 1950s. Seizing an opportunity to create a scenic 16-mile-long rail trail through a beautiful hardwood forest, King George County Sierra Club members encouraged David Brickley, former Virginia Delegate and Director of Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, to purchase the railroad in 2006.



The Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail in King George County

Volunteers partnered with the organization Friends of the Dahlgren Trail to transform the abandoned railroad into a hiking and biking trail and open the route to the public. After spending years advocating to have the privately owned trail turned over to Virginia State Parks, Dave Brickley and Friends of the Dahlgren Trail President Jim Lynch may realize their long-awaited goal.

In recent years, the Trail has been recognized as an official park in King George County and added as a new section of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail. In the future, it is a strong possibility that the trail will be added to the nearby **Caledon State Park**. Located on the shore of the Potomac River, Caledon State Park offers miles of trails—including the Potomac Heritage Trail—and a large bald eagle population. There are also canoeing and kayaking camps along the Potomac River.

Adding the Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail to Caledon State Park would make the latter an even more attractive destination.



**Glenn Gillis is the Parks & Trails Adviser for Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings (SCPRO), an activities section of the Virginia Chapter**



## THE FRACKED GAS MOUNTAIN VALLEY PIPELINE

*by the numbers:*

-  **2+** years behind schedule
-  **300+** water protection violations
-  **1,000+** waterways threatened
-  **\$2,000,000+** in fines
-  **\$2,700,000,000+** over budget

## New Award Program from the Virginia Academy of Science

The Virginia Academy of Science will give two new awards this year, one for a special wildlife person and one to an environmentalist. The awards are:

### Wildlife and Biodiversity Award

The awardee shall be a person who in the last five years has worked in Virginia and the science community accomplishing outstanding research or wildlife management that has benefited the wildlife and biodiversity within the Commonwealth of Virginia.

### Environmental Science Award

The awardee shall be a person who in the last five years has worked in Virginia and the science community accomplishing outstanding research or environmental science practice that has benefited the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Nomination will be collected in September and the awardees will be recognized in November at a special ceremony at the Science Museum of Virginia.

For more information contact Dr. Richard Groover at [rgroover33@gmail.com](mailto:rgroover33@gmail.com).

## FERC Grants Mountain Valley Pipeline In-service Status Lynn Godfrey

“The people of Appalachia have been making ‘good trouble’ for six years in their struggle to defeat what is hopefully the last bastion of fossil fuel infrastructure buildout of its magnitude in the state.” This is an excerpt from my first article in the newsletter four years ago. The Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) now has in-service status, and seven active fossil fuel infrastructure projects are underway in the Commonwealth.

On Tuesday, June 11, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) approved the pipeline’s in-service authorization and status request, granting permission to run high-pressure fracked gas through the mountains and slopes of Appalachia. An exhale moment for the MVP owners, a breathless one for the people. For a decade, the people of Appalachia in Virginia and North Carolina fought hard a formidable foe that only an act of Congress could save when the Biden Administration caved to West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin’s demands to include the project by name into the debt ceiling negotiations bill, the Fiscal Responsibility Act.



MAURY JOHNSON

The People persist in their activism to challenge the assertions of the MVP that it has met all the safety and regulatory conditions to be placed in operation. Activists and stalwarts of the movement have kept meticulous recordings of the numerous violations, including the one of the ruptured pipe segment on May 1st failing hydro-testing before being placed in operations. Many are the complaints of the fence and frontline communities shouldering the burden of this environmental injustice. Complaints found justified for Virginia Department Environmental Quality (VADEQ) to impose a \$34,000 fine on MVP in March for various water violations including; dirt and rocks being thrown into a stream from blasting, a wetland that was damaged by improper installation of a construction bridge, and failures to maintain earthen mounds, sandbags, and other devices designed to curb muddy runoff from the pipeline right-of-way according to VADEQ records.

For a decade, the people of Appalachia in Virginia and North Carolina challenged the \$7.85 billion project, which has now doubled in cost. Now the Southgate portion of the pipeline that crosses into NC must fight Transco’s massive mega pipeline project proposed for Virginia where the MVP terminates in Pittsylvania County, NC, Georgia, and ultimately terminating in Alabama. The MVP line into NC, known as MVP Southgate, now must hitch a ride on Transco’s proposed massive compressor station

**SEE FERC GRANTS ON BACK PAGE →**



## Rappahannock Group Natalie Loeffler

The Rappahannock Group (RG) has been very active this year. Spring activities kept the RG ExCom and volunteers busy. We continued our sponsorship for the Earth Day festival along the Rappahannock. Our booth focused on three topics:

- 🌲 “Issue with Tissue” which focused on sanitary napkins that negatively affect the boreal forests and suggested alternatives;
- 🌲 “Dear Mother Earth” which allowed kids to say thank you to Mother Earth and pledge to do actions that would help her; and
- 🌲 “We are Drowning in Plastics” that highlighted reusable alternatives for plastic products.

We awarded Friends of the Rappahannock (FOR) our 12th Annual Living Green Award for their excellent environmental stewardship for the river so many of us call home. We also participated at Ft. Walker’s two day Earth Day event where we talked about the harm of plastics and useful alternatives. The high school kids made very thoughtful pledges to start using reusable products in their day-to-day lives. More pledges came with the D.A.R.E. student graduation along with learning about birds.

This year, we are off to a great start with outings and activities. Our Outings Chair, Geoff Johnson, planned many great activities, events, and hikes. We hiked part of the Virginia Central Railway Trail and we volunteered to help with the Spotsylvania Spring Community Cleanup. Our group enjoyed a wonderful and educational tour of Grapewood farms.



Our most recent trip was to the Rappahannock Regional Landfill (above), where we learned how our community handles recycling and waste management. Geoff also organized a group lunch after each outing, for our members to get better acquainted.

Upcoming events include RG supporting NAACP at a July 13th education event about the pipeline running through the Mayfield neighborhood, a predominantly Black neighborhood in Fredericksburg. The Fire Marshall and Kinder Morgan, pipeline operators, will discuss safety and evacuation as part of the requirements in the regulations. Finally, teaming with FOR, RG will offer a data center issues program on **July 24th from 6:00-7:30pm**. VA SC staff Tim Cywinski and FOR Brent Hunsinger will present.

**Natalie Loeffler, Co-Chair Rappahannock Group Sierra Club**

## Pulling the Plug (cont'd from page 8)

phased out leaded gasoline to safeguard public health. At the time, leaded gasoline was the main source of lead emissions, which are linked to cognitive impairment, behavioral issues, and other health problems, particularly in children. The phase-out of leaded gasoline led to a dramatic decrease in human blood lead levels, illustrating the profound impact of targeted environmental regulations. ACCII’s phase-out of new fossil fuel vehicle sales, much like the ban on leaded gasoline, represents a crucial policy decision to ensure a healthier future for everyone.

Looking back at past successful regulatory actions, it is clear that ACCII clean air standards are not only feasible but essential. The Youngkin administration should prioritize the health of Virginians and the environment by continuing to follow ACCII in order to reduce tailpipe pollution. Please take a moment to send a message to your state legislators, urging them to demand that the governor keeps Virginia’s Clean Cars Standards to ensure a cleaner, healthier future for everyone.

**Cheri Conca**

## Great News!

**Falls of the James Sierra Club (FoJG)** announces a new location and date, starting this September.

FoJG Sierra Club monthly meetings have moved to the Second Thursday of the month from 7:00pm-8:00pm at our new location:

**Science Museum of VA**  
2500 West Broad Street  
Richmond, VA 23220

The RF&P Forum room is located adjacent to the Rotunda:

[smv.org/visit/specialevents/rfp-forum-special-events-venue](https://smv.org/visit/specialevents/rfp-forum-special-events-venue)

Join us for a brand new season of events, speakers, outings, and lots of learning opportunities while having fun!

For more information visit our page:  
[www.sierraclub.org/virginia/falls-james](https://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/falls-james)

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

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

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**Sierra Club Virginia Chapter**  
100 W. Franklin St, Mezzanine  
Richmond, Virginia 23220

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## FERC Grants (cont'd from page 10)

168 under the Southeast Supply Enhancement Reliability Project currently before FERC for approval to transmit gas into NC. It also lacks a water permit from the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ), twice denied. MVP is interconnecting with Transco's proposed Southeast Supply Enhancement in Pittsylvania (SESP) to accomplish moving gas into NC because it has no compressor station at its terminus in Pittsylvania after its application for an air permit was denied by the VADEQ Air Board in December 2021, to push the gas into NC.

Virginia is confronting seven active fossil fuel infrastructure projects amid a worsening climate crisis: the MVP, Southeast Supply Enhancement (SSE) Reliability Project, the Southside Enhancement Reliability Project, the Commonwealth Energy Connector Project, the Virginia Electrification Project, the Virginia Reliability Project, and the proposed Dominion Chesterfield Gas Plant Project. All segmented projects are connected by complex gas transmission lines owned by Williams Transco and T.C. Energy/Columbia Gas Transmission, LLC. Gas from Transco's Compressor Station 165 in Pittsylvania is the point from which all the projects will receive transmitted gas.

The integrity of the pipes' safety is a major concern to front- and fenceline communities living near it. In addition, the contribution to the climate crisis is enormous for all the proposed projects. Scientists and the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Meteorologist group issued a red alert that 2023 was recorded as the hottest year on earth. Our window of opportunity to maintain global warming at no more than 1.5c is diminishing. It is long past the time to consider renewable energy alternatives.

Salute to the People of Appalachia and Virginians—our fight continues and we need to unite to defeat all fossil fuel projects harming our communities and climate for profit.

Lynn A. Godfrey