



**SIERRA
CLUB**

VIRGINIA CHAPTER

Virginia Sierran

The Official Newsletter of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter
Winter 2021-2022

The faces of victory and defeat: State citizen boards deny and issue MVP permits

by Lynn Godfrey



Supporters gather in Chatham, Virginia, after the Air Pollution Control Board win on December 3 (photo courtesy of Tim Cywinski).

Some months ago, I wrote an article on the ups and downs of the Mountain Valley Pipeline and the toll it has taken on the people most impacted by its development. This unstable nature of the fossil fuel infrastructure development could not have been clearer than on December 3, when the state Air Pollution Control Board denied the pipeline a critical permit, and less than two weeks later, on December 14, when it was granted a water permit to cross over 200 water bodies, including streams, in Virginia.

On the afternoon of Friday, December 3, the collective environmental movement in Virginia and its surrounding sister states, North Carolina and West Virginia, could not have been happier when the state Air Pollution Control Board voted 6-1 to deny the MVP an air permit for the Lambert Compressor Station in Chatham, Virginia. The Lambert Compressor station would have pushed fracked gas from Virginia to the proposed Southgate pipeline into North Carolina. The collective hope was that the water board would follow suit less than

two weeks later when it met on December 14.

The Pittsylvania County NAACP, with the support of a body of environmental groups and its state NAACP office, mounted a formidable fight against the MVP to keep its community free of pollutants that would poison the air and negatively impact people's health. From February until December 3, the Pittsylvania NAACP held public webinar forums, conducted radio interviews, prepared petitions for the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and the air and water boards, conducted door-to-door canvassing and prepared and made public comments to let the state know that people were not having this poison in their backyards.

A strategic effort to illustrate environmental justice had not been accomplished by the MVP or the DEQ. At the center of the environmental justice concerns were the health impacts on communities and the lack of meaningful engagement by the MVP and DEQ.

In a 6-1 vote, the air board

denied the approval of the air permit, citing inadequate environmental justice processes related to the lack of meaningful engagement and site suitability as required by the Virginia Environmental Justice Act.

Although, the community and environmental groups knew a good case had been made against the permit, they were cautiously optimistic that the board would deny the permit, with the 2020 Fourth Circuit of Appeal's ruling in the Union Hill, Buckingham County case as a precedent for environmental justice. This case marked the first time that any citizen board in Virginia had ruled against a permit based on environmental justice. A week and half later, environmentalists and impacted community members hoped for the same fate at the water permit meeting. It would not be the case.

In a 3-2 vote, with two state Water Control Board members absent, that board delivered a very different outcome, approving the state water permit. While anticipated, the hope was that maybe, just maybe, this time,

with the constant adverse weather patterns and the example of every other board in Virginia and North Carolina, this board might follow suit and deny the permit.

In a strange twist of events, on the very next day, December 15, one of the board members who voted for the permit, Lou Ann Jessee-Wallace, wrote an article in the Roanoke Times with the title, "Reclaiming Southwest Virginia for a cleaner environment and a brighter day."

Lamenting, she stated, "Throughout the years of coal mining, tons of gob have been piling up, leading to heavy metals and acids seeping into our creeks and streams, the poisoning of our water supply, and emission of gases such as methane and carbon monoxide into the air. As a member of the Virginia Water Control Board and Russell County Board of Supervisors, I take pride in my town and ensuring that my neighbors, friends, and family have a beautiful and prosperous community to call home, both environmentally and economically, and am dedicated to improving this issue."

We can only guess what the outcome would have been if the community had been allowed to comment, but they had not been allowed to do so at this water permit meeting. Or, what if the other two members had been present? Perhaps Ms. Jessee-Wallace would have been able to reconcile her ideals of "ensuring" that her "neighbors, friends, and family have a beautiful...community to call home, both environmentally and economically" and would have voted those values. She did not.

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

From the chair: “Seasons will end in tumbled rhyme” (Grateful Dead, “The Weather Report Suite”)

by Joe Brancoli



Greetings and thanks to all you committed Sierra Club member activists.

From where the chair sits, the outlook seems more nuanced than it did a year ago. In December 2020, I placed my hope in two things: Joe Biden and vaccines. Both have made or led to great accomplishments, while both the political and health arenas completely flummoxed my expectations.

2021 began with an attempt by one of the two major parties to overturn the presidential election result and ended with the OTHER party being thrown out of leadership in Virginia.

On the COVID front, Sierra Club looks wise in its consistent stance of emphasizing caution and safety as a new variant spreads widely.

I am left looking to 2022 cer-

tain only in uncertainty, not knowing even what to hope for but retaining hope nevertheless. I am hopeful because of unexpected victories like that provided by the courage of the state air board, who just weeks ago voted down a compressor station in Pennsylvania on Environmental justice grounds.

I am hopeful because of our staff and volunteers from whom I gained enlightenment while working with them as chair this year and vice chair the two previous years.

I am given hope by the creation this year of an eight member Youth Leadership Council at the state level and by our recent election in which our treasurer, Matt Summey, and Legislative Chair Bob Shippee were returned for another term on our chapter executive committee.

In that same election two new members joined the ExCom: Meagan Clark and Amory Fischer; we welcome these new members.

I am tremendously hopeful for incoming Chapter Chair Ralph Grove, who has deep experience in past roles as a group chair, our chapter treasurer and a group ExCom member.

My plea to you is the same as this past Summer—to offer the Sierra Club your greatest gift, your time and effort as you feel

possible and safe in doing. We have numerous important offices that need filling.

In case Santa is reading this, I will list them specifically:

- Chapter Vice Chair
- Equity & Inclusion Chair
- Fundraising Chair
- Membership Chair

Then we have openings for Issue Chairs, who have expertise in a particular area and advise and assist in actions taken in that area:

- Agriculture

- Air Quality
- Pipelines
- Public Lands & Parks
- Solid Waste
- Water Quality

You may also become the chair of the issue that you are most passionate about.

I plan to stay engaged at the group and chapter levels, and I thank you for what you have done and will do going forward.

Joe Brancoli

Joe Brancoli is the chair of the Virginia Chapter.

Annual Gathering 2022

by Ralph Grove

The 2022 Annual Gathering will be held on September 17 at Pocahontas State Park.

If you've ever been to one of the Virginia Chapter's annual fall get-togethers, you know how much fun it is to get together with other Club members for a day or weekend of socializing and activism. Unfortunately, our 2021 gathering had to be canceled due to the COVID epidemic. We are optimistically making plans to hold a one-day gathering in 2022, on Saturday, September 17, at Pocahontas State Park.

This is dependent upon the Sierra Club's meeting protocols for next year, of course, which are yet to be determined. But for now, please mark the date on your calendars and watch for more information.

We'll need a small team to plan for the event—program, food, etc. If you have an interest in contributing to the effort, please contact me at rfgrove@icloud.com to get involved.

Ralph Grove is the vice chair of the Virginia Chapter.

Virginia Sierran

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

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

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

Please contact member.care@sierraclub.org for membership and mailing issues and address.changes@sierraclub.org to change your mailing address.

My story and our story by Kate West

When I joined the Sierra Club staff in 2009, I was new to the “environmentalist” community as well as being new to the organization. Prior to focusing my career on fighting climate change, I was an activist and community organizer for economic justice. With a passion for human rights and worker rights, I had found my way into the fair trade movement. I was motivated by the success of broad grassroots coalitions that had leveraged the shared interests of millions of people to challenge and change policies on a large scale—policies that improved people’s lives; removed barriers to education, nutrition and care; and were essential to liberation, learning and engagement with the natural world. The labor movement, civil rights movement and anti-apartheid

movement were among such coalitions.

I saw the climate action movement as related at the time, but my understanding of just how intertwined the various movements are has deepened greatly since then. Initially, I chose to be an activist because I couldn’t bear to stand by while I saw injustice and oppression being committed and knew I had the privilege and (by working with others) the power to stop it.

Today, I choose to continue working in the environmental movement or climate justice movement, as I prefer to call it, for the same reason, finding new purpose in my role and exploring new concepts. I am driven by a sense of urgency to build a movement big enough to effectively tackle this global challenge. I’m

eager to transform our organizational culture and movement into one that welcomes and uplifts the perspectives of those who most need to tell their stories and have their voices heard—those that the environmental movement has historically silenced.

My story is intertwined with that of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter and with yours. We don’t have time to hesitate on climate change or on building our movement to reflect the depth and breadth of people power necessary to make our vision of sustainability and justice a reality. We must be bold—as bold about inclusion as we are about protecting our planet. We are fighting for our collective right to breathe, our right to have clean water and the right of every person’s life to be valued more highly than corporate profit. We have to commit to supporting each other’s struggles so we can stay united. Without making this commitment to one another, we will not have the power to succeed.

I will be thinking about this as we enter the new year and continuing to draw strength and inspiration from those whose lives have been shaped by struggles outside my experience. I welcome their wisdom. I look forward to working with you all to close the margins and will continue challenging myself to learn what I have been socialized not to see so that I can show up more fully for our people and our movement.

Access to clean, renewable electricity and innovations in our food systems and waste management can make this vision possible, but we must demand it together, genuinely together, meaning we have to build trust where it has yet to be built.

Kate West is the director of the Virginia Chapter.

Welcoming McKenna Dunbar to the Virginia Chapter!

by Ann Creasy



president of Ecological Justice Initiative, an environmental advocacy nonprofit focused on youth-focused environmental research and engagement. Concerned Citizens of Charles City County, Bridging the Gap in Virginia, the North Face, Greening Youth Foundation, the Climate Reality Project, Stop the Abuse of Virginia Energy Coalition, Divest MVP and Mother’s Out Front are some of the organizations they have worked with in the past.

McKenna is passionate about energy policy and environmental law and has a background in environmental justice, clean energy finance and solar research. She enjoys hiking, listening to German rap, volunteering at her university’s greenhouse and listening to podcasts about sustainability and energy markets.

If you are interested in building electrification, please reach out to McKenna to join in on the work! Her email is mckenna.dunbar@sierraclub.org

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

I am excited to welcome our newest team member to the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter, McKenna Dunbar! McKenna is staff at the Virginia Chapter based in Richmond, Virginia. She will be working on engaging communities around building electrification.

McKenna Dunbar acts as the community engagement coordinator for the Virginia Chapter and leads a team focused on building and home electrification developments. Most of their work focuses on reducing dependence on fossil fuels in order to move the electric sector to clean energy.

McKenna is the founder and

Call to update email preferences

The total membership of the Virginia Chapter is around 20,000 members, but about a third have yet to update their membership accounts in order to receive mass email communications directly from the Chapter. The problem of this gap became clear when numerous members did not receive an email containing vital information regarding the ExCom election.

The good news is that the fix is easy! All one has to do is visit <https://vasierra.club/account> and login or sign up for access to manage their membership account and preferred communications.

Once you are logged in, follow these steps:

- Click the “My Account” drop down menu on the top left and select “Communication Preferences”
- Select “Manage email newsletters and email contact preferences”
- Make sure the “My Chapter” category is set to “Subscribed”
- Scroll down and click “Save Preferences.”

In four easy steps, you can ensure you won’t miss any updates, advocacy opportunities or events that are directly sponsored by our chapter. Please contact tim.cywinski@sierraclub.org if you have any questions.

Reopening in-person SCPRO outings: A complicated process

by Gary Kosciusko



SCPRO participants assemble before a recent hike at historic Oatlands in Leesburg, Virginia (photo courtesy of Glenn Gillis).

In the last issue, we announced that Sierra Club in-person outings had resumed in July, albeit at a slower, more deliberate pace. For outings leaders, getting people to experience the outdoors with us is our passion, our reason for being, our main focus. As with so many other aspects of our lives, however, the ongoing coronavirus pandemic has made the resumption of outings more challenging and complicated than it might otherwise be. Our leaders had to be recer-

tified in Basic Outings Leader Training and Basic First Aid, as many existing certifications had expired over almost 16 months of inactivity; this training was handled online and locally.

Meanwhile, the Club at the national level had approved outings protocols that were specific to the pandemic—protocols that our leaders would need to follow. Throughout the pandemic, the national Outings Activities Governance Team, or OAGT, has done an outstanding job hosting reg-

ular Zoom “gatherings” at which it could explain the protocols, answer questions and receive feedback from leaders across the country. It then provided input (one of many inputs) to the top decision-makers in the Club.

The October Zoom was a special gathering where top leadership participated for the first time. More specifically, Interim Managing Director Eva Hernandez-Simmons, Acting Executive Director Dan Chu, Board of Director members Patrick Murphy and Ross McFarlane and Program Department Co-director Byron Ramos-Gudiel each made presentations. Among the many points they made was that outings are central to the Club’s mission and foundational to the way we engage with the public.

The Zoom program closed out with representative volunteers of National outings, Inspiring Connections Outdoors and local outings programs, respectively, making pitches that assessed where their programs stood and highlighted particular concerns directly to Club leadership.

Among the other challenges to reopening in-person outings

are the requirement to wear face masks in indoor, close-quarter settings; the stipulation that leaders shall not request the vaccination status of outings participants (making such a request is apparently illegal in some states); and lengthy medical forms for all overnight outings and outings held in the backcountry. In the last case, this extra paperwork has effectively discouraged leaders from undertaking overnight or backcountry trips. But whether or not leaders personally agree with the protocols, they must still be followed as a condition for conducting in-person events.

We have been told to expect a new set of outings protocols by February 2022, with revisions based on feedback received by the OAGT and the state of the pandemic at that time. Meanwhile, we will do our utmost to try to increase our outings offerings to the public, because, to paraphrase an old saying, “An hour outdoors is worth a whole day indoors.”

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

The Blue Ridge Group: A proposed realignment

by Jim Lynch

The Blue Ridge Group of the Sierra Club has been in existence since 1980 and is composed of Nelson and Buckingham counties and the northern part of Amherst County. While the group has been very active over the years, its executive committee has reached the decision to recommend that the group be dissolved. Under the rules of the Sierra Club, notice of the proposed dissolution and realignment must be posted at least two weeks before the chapter executive committee votes on the matter. If any member of the Virginia Chapter would like to comment, please send an email to Group Boundary Chair Jim Lynch at jplynch3@gmail.com

The reasons for the dissolution of the group include: the dwindling number of executive committee members, the advanced age of the remaining

members and the inability to recruit new active members.

While it’s difficult to see a group close shop, it is important to recognize the significant contributions of the Blue Ridge Group to the environmental work of the Sierra Club and the Virginia Chapter over a span of four decades. They have been leaders in so many critical issues that face us in our state. Even though the group will cease to exist, the members are fully committed to continuing the good work. Under the rules of the Club, members who are now in the Blue Ridge Group will be assigned, by zip code, to the two receiving groups.

The following history of the Blue Ridge Group was written by its executive committee. It is important to recognize all that they have done over the many years.

The Blue Ridge Group has, since its inception, been active in

pursuing important environmental goals in our area as well as participating in Chapter and National efforts. The group was originally established to fight against the attempt to site a nuclear power plant in Nelson County. It ran a survival training camp for about six years in the mid-80s that, among other things, provided the group with a substantial treasury.

Another early group campaign was to focus attention on the fish kills in the Piney and Tye Rivers in Nelson County. The tailings from the ore mining at the American Cyanamid plant in Piney River, Virginia, were leaching into Piney River, a tributary of both the Tye and James rivers. The EPA eventually designated the area as a Superfund Site.

Another notable accomplishment of the group was the designation of a protected beach on the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico

to aid breeding sea turtles.

Closer to home, land was donated to Nelson County along the Tye River near the town of Massies Mill in Nelson County. Massies Mill was one of the hardest hit locations from flooding from Hurricane Camille in 1969. The Blue Ridge Group developed the land into a small park offering a picnic area with several tables, public river access, a kiosk, native plant beds and a stone monument with a bronze plaque commemorating the victims of the Hurricane Camille flood. The Blue Ridge Group has maintained the park grounds by sponsoring work days there once or twice a year.

Group members were active in the effort to have several major mountains in the George Washington National Forest, the Priest and Three Ridges, designated as

See Blue Ridge Group, page 5.

Falls of the James Group upcoming events!

by Shavon Peacock

Join Falls of the James Group for their monthly virtual programs!

- 1/11/22 7:00-8:00pm—Monarchs: Endangered but not Protected, with Chris Burnside and Karl Green.

- 2/8/22 7:00-8:00pm—University of Richmond Student Environmental Presentation Highlighting Conservation Projects, with Dr. Todd Lookingbill

- 3/8/22 7:00-8:00pm—Urban Farms, with Duron Chavis

- 4/12/22 7:00-8:00pm—Wetlands: What Exactly Are They and What Value Do They Contain? with Dr. Scott Neubauer at Virginia Commonwealth University



View of Ashton Creek at Garland Dodd Point of Rocks Park (photo courtesy of Shavon Peacock).

Hike at Garland Dodd Point of Rocks Park in Chester, Virginia

- 1/22/22 10:00-11:30am Garland Dodd Point of Rocks Park Hike, overlooking Ashton Creek and the marsh boardwalk.

We will hike around 2.7 miles at Garland Dodd Park along the Appomattox River. We will take a hike through several habitats, including eastern deciduous forest, the banks of the Appomattox River and tidal freshwater marsh. As the forest trails yield to the fresh-

waters of Ashton Creek Marsh, the trail continues as a floating boardwalk with an overlook at each end. The boardwalk provides an excellent place to study a number wetland birds including bald eagles. Bring your binoculars!

The Indigenous Algonquian people lived here, Captain John Smith explored this area and the park was the southern end of the Union position during the Bermuda Hundred Campaign and has remnants of Union earthworks.

The park covers moderately hilly terrain, so it is considered

moderately difficult. The trails are mostly easy to walk but do include a couple of steep hills. Trails may be muddy, depending on recent weather. Total hiking time will be 1-1.5 hours.

All events listed are free and open to the public. See the Falls of the James events calendar at sierraclub.org/virginia/falls-james to register for these and other events.

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

Blue Ridge Group continued from page 4

wilderness areas.

Members of the Blue Ridge Group were instrumental in working with local landowners to create the Blue Ridge Railway Trail. This Rails to Trails project involved 20 years of effort in working with landowners, Nelson and Amherst Counties and VDOT to complete the construction. Several of the group's ExCom members are still active on the board of the Blue Ridge Railway Trail.

The Blue Ridge Group was successful in engaging members with a variety of outings, educational meetings and campaigns that included stream monitoring using the Izaak Walton League's Save Our Streams protocols; information about plans to renew uranium mining; an essay contest for Nelson County High School

students; and membership meetings on ornithology, herpetology, wildlife rehabilitation and Chestnut tree research, to name a few.

The group had an outings chair who lead hikes for many years and also excelled in political lobbying. Group members were active in supporting environmental politicians and participated in events such as Environmental Lobby Day in Richmond.

One of the staples of the group's activity was the removal of trash from local rivers and lakes. Some of the cleanups on the James River involved the use of batteaus and resulted in the removal of hundreds of discarded tires.

The group has used its monetary resources to support other environmental organizations

such as the Virginia Wilderness Committee; Wild Virginia; and grassroot organizations that fought the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, such as Friends of Nelson and Friends of Buckingham.

The group purchased and donated books and videos to the local library, donated a watershed model to the County Extension Office, donated funds to a local private school for multiday environmental education experiences on the Chesapeake Bay and purchased and planted trees at James River State Park in Buckingham County.

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

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.

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Propelling the electrification of school buildings in the era of the clean energy transition

by McKenna Dunbar



A late December afternoon at Tuckahoe Elementary School in Richmond, Virginia (photo courtesy of Tim Kern).

To combat the impending climate crisis, our future depends on transforming our electric grid into being less carbon intensive. As a society whose energy demands are increasing due to technological advancements and industrial prowess, it is in the best interest of fossil fuel corporations and clean energy advocates alike to ensure that our electricity generation will be cleaner for years to come. Building electrification does just that. This clean energy method replaces the energy source technologies that use fossil fuels with electricity from renewables and low carbon tech. Encouraging economy-wide electrification is at the forefront of strategic imperatives that promote a more sustainable world, especially prioritizing a carbon-neutral outlook.

Virginia's egregious history of redlining has had a lasting impact on how the state is presently run. Deeply rooted initiatives of racial disparity and segregation made in the early twentieth century have continuing consequences

for residents today. These disparities come in the form of polarizing public health incongruities, energy burdens, lessened economic opportunity for marginalized populations as well as diverted investment in building infrastructures. Title 1 schools (high-poverty schools with a concentration of low-income individuals) are so prominent in siloed Black localities due to long-withstanding systemic inequities rooted in segregationist policy where school funding was dependent on property value. The denial of resources to marginalized populations was intentional and desired. Unfortunately, this impact has translated into lessened financing of public schools in marginalized districts today. An electrification reckoning is needed to bridge the economic and racial divide in the commonwealth's public education system.

The advancement of electrification technologies in Virginia schools lowers utility prices and increases the electric grid's reliability. It has the great potential

of reducing carbon dioxide emissions across the transportation, building and industrial sectors as a whole. As noted by the EPA, combined emissions of these categories account for a whopping 63% of total U.S. gas emissions, with 29% of emissions coming directly from fossil fuel combustion associated with residential and commercial buildings.

In examining Virginia's energy consumption by end-use sectors alone, the U.S. Energy Information Administration notes that residential and commercial buildings account for nearly 49% of energy expenditures. These statistics show the value of developing infrastructure investments and integrating green sustainable technologies in the building sector. Moving forward, we must prioritize large-scale investments in renewable energy to transform our electricity grids. Doubling down on building electrification initiatives will lower future financial infrastructure costs, improve energy access, reduce dependence on fossil fuels and even reduce energy burdens for Virginia communities as a whole. As a leading state in energy production through coal, it is imperative that we no longer cling to this outdated form of energy, especially in the new age of renewables.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates that in 2021 natural gas accounted for approximately 58% of Virginia's utility-scale electricity net generation, meaning that over half of our state's electricity derives from natural-gas-fired power plants. In line with Virginia's commitment to 100% clean, renewable electric-

ity by 2050 through the Virginia Clean Economy Act, swift and practical action is needed to ensure an equitable and resilient state for all of its residents. Accelerating the adoption of building electrification in Virginia benefits the economy and workforce development. It revitalizes communities by ensuring that public health and environmental justice are the foundation of future societal expansion.

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

If you would like to learn more and be a part of our work advocating for developments in the electrification sphere, equitable energy distribution and renewable grid technologies, please contact me at mckenna.dunbar@sierraclub.org or reach out via LinkedIn.

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

Youth Leadership Council plans and updates

by Hunter Noffsinger

This year we established the Chapter's first ever Youth Leadership Council, or YLC. The council is a group of young people from across the commonwealth who will influence the Chapter's work and advocate for policy that reflects their interests.

Youth voices are critical in the fight against climate change and offer a fresh, unique perspective, and the YLC is an exciting step in ensuring they are heard and re-

spected within the environmental movement.

The council started meeting in September and has so far been focused on establishing its structure, what areas of work to focus on and ideas for advocacy projects. While the YLC is still in its early days, potential areas for work have already been centered around environmental justice, education on environmental issues and more. There is so much po-

tential for what the YLC can accomplish, and they are only just scratching the surface.

It has been refreshing to hear new ideas, goals and perspectives coming from the council, and I can't wait to see these ideas come to fruition. In the coming year you will likely see the YLC take on new projects like putting together educational events and rallies or tackling the chaos that is the General Assembly.

This group of young leaders brings different experiences and knowledge to the Chapter that will greatly benefit our work in putting people ahead of polluters.

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

Virginia legislative priorities: Holding the line on climate progress

by Connor Kish and Bob Shippee

The 2022 session of the General Assembly is upon us. Throughout the fall and early winter, Chapter staff and volunteer leadership have been hard at work devising and implementing a Chapter-wide legislative strategy accompanied by a range of specific tactics.

The General Assembly looks much different in 2022 than it has in the previous two years. The House is now controlled by the Republican Party, as is the governor's office. The Senate remains in Democratic control, with a slim 21-19 margin. Heading into this year's very important session, our view is that the historic action taken over the past two years on climate must be sustained, not repealed or weakened. We are working to ensure legislators fully understand the benefits of their pro-climate votes, including the progress already underway as well as the significant future economic and climate benefits to Virginia.

Because of how successful our work has been over the past two years, there are a number of bills that became law now in need of protection. Below is a sampling of just a few laws that we will be

working to protect in 2022.

We will work to defend the Virginia Clean Economy Act, or VCEA, a landmark 2020 law that ends carbon emissions from the power sector by 2050. The VCEA mandates energy efficiency standards and sets Virginia on the path to massive solar and offshore wind energy production. The VCEA is a law that creates jobs; since its passage, Virginia has already moved into the top five states in the country for rate of solar power installation. We must ensure the VCEA is not weakened or repealed and that Virginia is able to capitalize on the rapid job growth and economic advancement that comes with the development of clean energy.

We will defend the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, or RGGI, which is already under threat by the incoming gubernatorial administration. RGGI limits how much the energy sector can pollute and creates a "cost" on pollution that's paid by the fossil fuel industry. Using the money earned, the commonwealth distributes the funding to local governments for flood resilience efforts and for energy efficiency upgrades for lower-income

Virginians. Over time, pollution allowances decrease, until eventually the utility sector must be 100% powered by renewables. RGGI is a successful, more than decade-long collaborative effort of many states. We know that Virginia's participation in the RGGI program grows the economy and creates jobs. We need to ensure Virginia continues participating.

We will defend the adoption of Advanced Clean Car Standards. Thanks to Del. Lamont Bagby's 2021 legislation, Virginia is on the path to a life free of tailpipe pollution. Soon, more electric vehicles will be arriving on your local dealership lots. This program will drastically benefit all Virginians by taking a huge chunk of pollution out of the air. We must make sure that the full program is allowed to be implemented so we can see its benefits.

We will defend the Virginia Environmental Justice Act. This critical law placed in state code definitions related to disproportionately-impacted communities and specified meaningful engagement requirements that state agencies must undertake before issuing permits. We will defend it in its entirety, and we

will work tirelessly to ensure that no bill repealing or weakening it is passed in 2022.

The legislative session begins January 12, 2022. We will work closely with our Legislative Committee and staff at the chapter and national levels to implement an engagement plan that utilizes our large, active membership to ensure that legislators hear from their constituents on the importance of these laws and why their votes to sustain them are vital. In addition, we will pursue continued progress on building efficiency, solar on schools and the transition to electric vehicle fleets.

In all this, we need your help! So take a moment, and visit <https://linktr.ee/sierraclubva>—our newly-launched landing page and dashboard—for all actions that need your support! Bookmark this page and visit it frequently; we will be updating it with critically important action items before and during the legislative session.

Connor Kish is the legislative and political director and Bob Shippee is the legislative chair and political co-chair of the Virginia Chapter.

Virginia Chapter email lists

Join these email lists to get more informed about and involved with Virginia Chapter activities:

Virginia Climate Movement

This is a statewide list of people active in the Virginia climate movement. You can 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 our email 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>

Biogas: A greenwashing solution

by Gustavo Angeles

Last month, we held a webinar to talk about biogas. If the term is not familiar to you, get used to it, because in the following years you are going to hear more about these so-called “renewable natural gas projects.” It is the future for the industry according to industry representatives. Last month, Robert Blue, at an offshore-wind-related ceremony in the Navy Shipyard, mentioned that Dominion is the country’s leader in producing carbon negative renewable natural gas.

In 2018 Dominion signed a contract with Smithfield to create a joint venture called Align RNG with the purpose of extracting methane from pig manure in three states: Utah, North Carolina and Virginia. Currently, the project is up and running in Utah.

It just received all the necessary permits in North Carolina, and we just saw the first development here in Virginia. Surry County is in the process of approving the first plant that will extract methane from hog manure on capped hog waste lagoons.

This is where Dominion energy sees the future when we talk about renewable energy. Extracting methane from pig lagoons can be considered a renewable energy process and gives this partnership carbon tax credits. In August Dominion was allowed by the SCC to raise their rates because of joining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, or RGGI. On one hand they are going to produce carbon credits, and on the other hand they are charging more to ratepayers

because they have to buy some of those carbon credits to offset their carbon emissions.

Last month, the planning commission in Surry County approved a project for a conditional use permit to construct a regional industrial facility to be used to filter and process raw biogas from multiple swine farms to create pipeline quality renewable gas. There will be a public hearing on January 6 at 7pm to consider this application. If you live in the county, please reach out to your board of supervisors to talk about this industrial facility and the problems it presents.

Covering a lagoon with a digester does not make the lagoon any less vulnerable to flooding during major weather events. Align’s project harms communi-

ties, our rivers and streams and the air we breathe while Smithfield and Dominion Energy stand to make money by displacing the burden of their pollution onto families and communities. These kinds of projects do not reduce the pollution from hog waste industrial operations. In fact, the project may increase operational capacity due to the attraction of producing more gas. The kind of business that Surry County wants to see is not more concentrated animal feeding operations.

For more information, please contact Gustavo Angeles at gustavo.angeles@sierraclub.org

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

Data centers threaten the Rural Crescent in Prince William County

by Ann Bennett

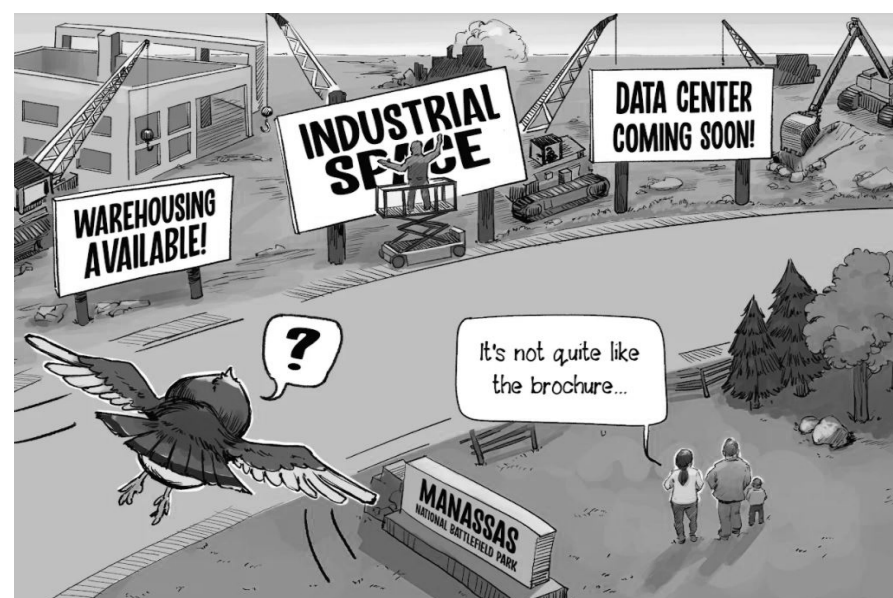
With over 20 national park sites—historic, natural, trail and byways, Virginia is a destination for well over 20 million annual visitors who seek educational, historical and recreational activities at properties managed by the National Park Service.

Unfortunately, your Virginia National Parks are threatened again. Major land use changes appear to be on a fast track in Prince William County, home to Manassas National Battlefield Park

(<https://nps.gov/mana/index.htm>) and Prince William Forest National Park, the largest national protected area in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan region (<https://nps.gov/prwi/index.htm>).

Prince William County’s board of supervisors is considering designating over 2,100 acres of “Rural Crescent” land for data centers and other industrial or commercial uses just a stone’s throw away from these national public lands. Conway Robinson State Park and the Occoquan Reservoir Watershed, a key source of drinking water, are at risk as well.

Prince William County already has about 3,100 acres in its in-



A cartoon by Noah Regan depicting the threat to parkland in Prince William County by the data centers and other industrial development (courtesy of Noah Regan).

dustrial-zoned data center overlay district, more than it needs. Adding rural land to the overlay district is short-sighted and unnecessary. In fact, it appears that Prince William County is moving toward land use decision-making before its own study of the issue is complete.

County leadership was visionary 20 years ago when it established protections in the Rural Crescent. The Rural Crescent

not only protects farmland and natural resources, but it has also served as a de facto buffer to climate impacts in a county with no formal plan to reduce carbon emissions.

Nearly one million people visit each of these parks annually to experience pristine forests, unchanged historic landscapes and access to nature, trails and quiet. National park visitors don’t deserve to have their visitor ex-

perience diminished by the unsightly appearance and proximity of these huge data centers and warehouses. Imagine a data center next to Yellowstone or adjacent to the National Mall. You probably can’t. So why is it okay here?

If you live in Prince William County, it’s time to reach out to your board of supervisors. The rest of us are encouraged to ask Sens. Tim Kaine and Mark Warner and Reps. Jennifer Wexton (10th-CD, includes Manassas National Battlefield Park) and Rob Wittman (1st-CD, includes Prince William Forest National Park) to ensure the protection of these two threatened national parks.

The Great Falls Group of the Virginia Chapter is working in coalition with a large number of national and local organizations to protect the Rural Crescent. Check out the coalition website at <https://growsmartpw.org> for more information on their work.

Ann Bennett is an at-large Ex-Com member of the Virginia Chapter.

Banned from Montgomery County

by Daryl Downing

You may've read my article in the last Virginia Sierran about my arrest for trespassing on Mountain Valley Pipeline property/easement.

The 10 of us arrested had our day in court (in Christiansburg) on October 25. Very late the previous week we were offered a deal. The deal was only available if all 10 of those charged accepted it. Many individuals and attorneys had to be contacted in a short period of time, but at the 11th hour, all agreed.

Terms:

- The felony charges (related to the type of vehicle to which two protesters

were locked) would be dismissed.

- We'd plead guilty to one misdemeanor charge.
- One misdemeanor charge would be dismissed.
- We're not allowed to go to Montgomery County for one year. Really!
- We're not allowed to go on MVP property or easements in Virginia for one year.
- We had to pay a \$150 fine.
- One hundred fifty days jail time—suspended.
- Twelve months of keeping the peace and good behavior.

My bill, including court costs, was approximately \$250. A group I'd never heard of paid my attorney's fees. Money was raised to pay the fines and court costs for those who needed the financial assistance.

The amazing support of every kind that was available prior to the NVDA (nonviolent direct action) continued after the arrest and release of the group. I'm profoundly grateful for the advice, guidance and financial support that was provided to me and the other activists. Honestly, I have no regrets. The MVP is a crime against humanity and the natural world, and the sooner it's thrown on the trash pile along with the

Atlantic Coast Pipeline, the better.

I'm also incredibly appreciative towards all the staff members and volunteers from many organizations that continue to fight the MVP in other ways. Persistence and effective tactics will help us stop this 303-mile, 42-inch fossil fuel monstrosity. #NoMVP

I participated in this action as a private citizen, not as a Sierran.

Daryl Downing is an at-large ExCom member of the Virginia Chapter.

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- Mar 12-13 Washington, DC area
- Mar 19-20 Farmville, VA
- Mar 26-27 Blacksburg, VA
- Mar 26-27 Norfolk, VA
- Apr 9-10 Charlottesville, VA
- Apr 23-24 Lexington, VA
- Apr 30-May 1 Richmond, VA
- May 21-22 Norfolk, VA
- May 28-30 In the mountains near Blacksburg, VA
- Jun 4 - 5 Washington, DC area
- Jun 11-12 Charlottesville, 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.

The offshore wind express has left the station

by Eileen Woll

Ralph Northam began his tenure by releasing a Virginia Energy Plan in 2018 that called for the implementation of 2,000 MW of offshore wind by 2028. In 2019 he issued Executive Order 43 calling for 2,500 MW of offshore wind to be developed by 2026. To this, Dominion remarked, “challenge accepted,” and subsequently filed an application with PJM, the regional transmission organization, to do just that.

On Northam’s watch in Oc-

tober 2020, Dominion’s pilot offshore wind turbines came online. Virginia made history as the first offshore wind project in the nation in federal waters. Also on his watch, Siemens Gamesa announced the first North American wind manufacturing facility was planned for Portsmouth, helping to anchor Hampton Roads as a supply chain hub for offshore wind.

In 2021, Northam’s last year in office, offshore wind moved at

a herculean pace. It started with Northam signing into law the landmark Virginia Clean Economy Act, which, among other things, mandates that up to 5,200 MW of offshore wind be constructed and delivering power to the grid by 2035.

So now we have a new governor who has generally expressed support for offshore wind. And through the years, offshore wind has generally enjoyed bipartisan support, albeit for varying rea-

sons.

In its last days, Northam’s administration finally produced, per Executive Order 43, a clean energy workforce development plan. It’ll be up to the Youngkin administration to implement and fund that plan.

Funds must be directed to support clean energy workforce development programs that are accessible, affordable and community-based. Funds must also

See Offshore wind on page 11.



Mark your calendar, the Richmond Virginia Environmental Film Festival returns February 18 - March 4, 2022. For the 12th year, the event will showcase the newest local and national films that focus awareness on critical environmental issues and inspire action. After being voted as one of the best film festivals by Style readers, the Richmond Virginia Environmental Film Festival was recently awarded the Virginia Travel Leader Award by Virginia Green Travel Alliance.

The festival kicks off on Friday, February 18 at the Richmond City Main Library with the James River Association presenting Eight Billion Angels which tells the truth about the conflict between the size of our global population and the sustainability of our planet. The next day, Saturday, Feb 19, bring the kids to the Byrd Theater for the traditional showing of The Lorax who speaks for the trees to confront environmental destruction. One Health, an episode of the VPM program Untamed, which won two Telly awards and an Emmy nomination, will be followed by a Q&A with Ed Clark, President and Founder of the Wildlife Center of Virginia. High Tide in Dorchester is a tale of a Chesapeake Bay town affected by climate change.

The festival continues at the Byrd Theater on Sunday, February 20 and includes the award-winning films from the Virginia Environmental Film Contest. The following two weeks films will be presented by our partners: Drive Electric RVA, Pedal Power, Virginia Interfaith Power and Light, University of Richmond, VCU Biology Department, Maymont Foundation, City of Richmond Department of Sustainability, Richmond Main Library and Henrico County Library.

As always, admission to the festival is free and open to the public due to the generous support of our loyal community sponsors, such as Enrichmond Foundation, Convert Solar, Ian Patrick of Merrill Lynch, Capital Region Land Conservancy, Sierra Club-Falls of the James Group, RIC Today, VPM, Blue Ridge Outdoors magazine and Natural Awakenings magazine.

Save the dates and check in periodically at <https://RVAEFF.org> to get all the latest updates and film announcements as they become available.

Gill Sigmon
President, 2022 RVA Environmental Film Festival
rvaenvilmfest@gmail.com

Passion fuels Sierrans' advocacy for electric fleet vehicles

by Cheri Conca



Electrification Workgroup members Ruth Woollett and John Bloom at the Virginia Chapter's 2021 Drive Electric EV car show (photo courtesy of Cheri Conca).

In July 2020 a group of Virginia Sierrans held their first Zoom meeting to discuss electrification of the transportation sector. Thus was born the Chapter's Electrification Workgroup. Group members' interests encompass a broad range of topics, such as electrification of municipal and school buses; EV charging stations and infrastructure; legislation, funding and incentives for electric vehicles; and solar-powered EVs. Over time a portion of the group's work became focused on propelling local governments and transit authorities to electrify their fleet vehicles, especially transit buses. Several

members are working on electrification in Northern Virginia and a few others in Richmond and Harrisonburg. The group envisions building a team of volunteers working to electrify fleets across the commonwealth.

As the Chapter's conservation program coordinator, I am fortunate to be a part of the workgroup, drafting agendas, taking minutes and pitching in where needed. I am continually impressed and inspired by members' knowledge, enthusiasm, persistence and passion. Believe me, these people are passionate about their electric cars! It's been fascinating to hear about instant

torque, charging tips and experiences and the head-turning quotient of electric cars.

But the root of the volunteers' passion is their concern for the environment. They are intensely aware that reducing tailpipe emissions is an essential factor in addressing climate change, environmental justice and public health. Last but far from least, the Electrification Workgroup members are fun. The conversation is as lively and entertaining as it is productive and informative.

Here are some examples of what members have accomplished and what they are working toward:

- A Drive Electric Week car show in September that provided a one-stop "shopping" experience for hundreds of EV-curious people, allowing them to view nearly two dozen EV models, plus an EV charger and landscaping equipment, and to speak with the owners.

- Drafting an "anti-ICEing" bill that would penalize fossil fuel car owners for parking in spaces reserved for EV charging. ICEing is an electric vehicle term for when an Internal Combustion Engine, or ICE, vehicle parks in a space that is designated for electric vehicle charging.

- Planning a statewide fleet electrification campaign to urge localities to commit to purchasing 100% battery electric transit buses and fleet vehicles and to provide resources to help them to do so.

Given that 45% of the state's carbon dioxide emissions come from transportation, the electrification of municipal fleets is vitally important to protect public health and fight climate change. Work-

group members recognized that Virginia's electrification efforts were lagging behind those of Maryland and Washington, D.C., and decided to help nudge their communities' efforts along. The group tracks which municipalities are already committed to electrification and what plans they have put into place to reach their goals. The group also tracks funding sources and plans to encourage localities to apply for grants and incentives.

Although market and regulatory forces are making it easier than ever for localities to electrify their fleets, the Electrification Workgroup's advocacy is still important. The useful life of a diesel bus in the U.S. is typically 12-15 years, which means that diesel buses purchased in 2022 could still be on the road in 2037. And electric bus orders can take a year and a half to be fulfilled. The longer that local decision makers wait to commit to 100% battery electric vehicles, the longer fossil fuels will be spewing from municipally owned tailpipes. The group's work helps educate and persuade local leaders to take steps now to build a clean transportation future for their communities.

The Electrification Workgroup welcomes Sierra Club members from all over the commonwealth and is particularly interested in gaining volunteers from the Hampton Roads, Charlottesville and Roanoke areas.

Meetings are held virtually at noon on the first and third Tuesdays of the month. If you would like to attend, please contact cheri.conca@sierraclub.org

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

Offshore wind

continued from page 10

be directed to promoting those training opportunities to the specific communities as outlined in the Virginia Clean Economy Act (i.e., historically disadvantaged communities, veterans, local workers).

While the Northam admin-

istration is marked for enacting the policy that brought Siemens Gamesa to Virginia and drove Dominion to bring 2,600 MW of offshore wind online—enough to power 660,000 homes, it's going to be up to the Youngkin administration to ensure that offshore

wind is done right—meaning it is brought online in a way that is fair, equitable and beneficial for all Virginians. In particular, this means ensuring that the job opportunities and training/educational programs are available, affordable, community-based and

widely promoted throughout the commonwealth.

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

Build (and renovate) our homes right from the start: The Virginia building code process begins!

by Susan Stillman

Who makes the rules about how homes are built and renovated? There is a board called the BHCD, the Board of Housing and Community Development, made up of citizens that are selected from Virginia's congressional districts by the governor. These board members take the results of work by stakeholders and vote to make changes (or not) to Virginia's building code.

A coalition of organizations (e.g., the Sierra Club, Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions, Climate Action Alliance for the Valley, Virginia Grassroots and Clinicians for Climate Action) will submit and advocate for improvements to the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code. Currently the building code is a mix of the International Energy Conservation Code, or IECC, from 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018. It is behind the 2018 and 2021

IECC in critical ways. Improving the code will reduce the energy cost burden for home occupants, make the homes more comfortable, improve the health of the occupants and help localities and the state meet carbon reduction goals. The Department of Energy and the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory have assessed cost-effectiveness and found that the 2021 IECC will save residents money and benefit the public compared to builders' incremental costs of compliance. (See bit.ly/EnergyCodesPublication for more information.)

The coalition will urge the BHCD to adopt the full 2021 IECC, plus adopt a few additional measures that will save energy and reduce pollution. Likely additional proposals (e.g., readiness for solar and EV charging and promoting heat pumps while avoiding wasteful resistance heating) will

resemble those we submitted in the 2018 Code review process, which can be found here: bit.ly/2018CodeReview

We anticipate that builders and their allies will oppose updating Virginia's building code to the full 2021 IECC. They will likely continue to argue for incremental energy code provisions dating back to 2012. The argument made by the builders is that the incremental cost of making homes more efficient makes them unaffordable. This argument is self-serving and ignores that residents have to heat and cool these homes for the life of the home's existence, which is likely more than 70 years.

In 2021, the Virginia General Assembly enacted HB2227, which requires the BHCD to consider adoption of codes standards at least as stringent as the latest IECC. This new law should

strengthen the chances that Virginia's building code will meet or exceed the 2021 IECC. However, without strong advocacy for efficiency and sustainability in building codes, the BHCD may adhere to its past practice of continuing old exceptions to the latest IECC, absent consent by builders.

Our coalition is currently very Northern Virginia centric with the exception of Climate Action Alliance for the Valley. We'd like to grow the coalition so that there is representation around the commonwealth. If you would like to get involved please contact me, Susan Stillman, at stillman.susan@gmail.com

Susan Stillman is the renewable energy vice-chair of the Virginia Chapter.

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