

Virginia Chapter Annual Report 2019



SIERRA CLUB
VIRGINIA CHAPTER



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Looking Inward

Foundational work to set us up for transformational change.

2019 was a year spent identifying changes that will serve our Chapter leaders, members and mission well in the years ahead. We adopted a strategic plan in early 2019 with three years' implementation steps grouped into phases: foundational, transformational, and comprehensive. This plan serves as a guide to building a **foundation** that will **transform and grow** our base to be **more powerful together**. The plan centered on four focus areas: climate change, communication, leadership and member engagement. Implementation efforts then built upon key themes including: diversity, focused messaging, clear goals, and space for volunteer projects.

While the year got off to a challenging start with the state's top officials embroiled in scandal, our work on equity and environmental justice aligned with many calls from social justice groups across the Commonwealth for Virginia to take a critical look at how we are dismantling systemic racism in the former Capital of the Confederacy, home to stolen lands of native peoples and leader in the domestic slave trade. Becoming a more committed and vocal ally to communities of color demanding racial justice took hold as a cornerstone of our mission, to "inspire, engage, educate and empower everyone in Virginia to be stewards of the natural and human environment and implement solutions to the climate crisis."

To build the stronger foundation needed for our work ahead, the Chapter's Implementation Plan Committee identified ways to better support and respond to local needs, bolster our structure and communications, and enhance our recruitment and engagement efforts. With new clarity of purpose and a focused set of objectives, our Chapter Chair and Director met with

each of our local groups to review the strategic plan and create an inclusive dialogue about how groups advance our larger goals as well as how to support groups' goals. They brought this message with them: building a more robust relationship between our chapter and groups is the key to success; we are all in this together. As any good organizer knows, it's not enough to simply put words on paper. Real results occur through actively listening to each other and building stronger relationships to develop shared goals and strategies.

In 2019, we also conducted a robust and intentional year-round advocacy program to leverage our field organizing strength in setting the stage for our legislative objectives. We used the year leading up to significant state legislative elections to expand grassroots support for distributed solar through our More Solar More Places campaign and amplify environmental justice demands. In addition, we expanded our coalition work by participating in the launch of the Green New Deal Virginia coalition and collaborating with clean energy business groups beyond those traditionally engaged through the Virginia Conservation Network. During the summer months, we developed an agenda for bills to prioritize in the 2020 session that would be ambitious but achievable. Yet, the outcome of the elections brought sweeping changes that exceeded our expectations, and facilitated even greater gains in the year ahead.

Via grassroots organizing, coalition building, advocacy, and earned media, the Virginia Chapter is reimagining how we engage our membership, use innovative communications, support and empower our leaders, and focus on climate solutions. This enables our chapter to begin building a stronger foundation for the years ahead, as we had set out to do. Throughout the year and into 2020, we kept

environmental issues—particularly opposition to fracked gas and the need for bold climate action and environmental justice—front and center in the press and public dialogue to ensure that we would continue to move these important issues forward.

A few highlights from our work in 2019 include:

- **Delayed the construction of the Mountain Valley and Atlantic Coast Pipelines by over twelve months**
- **After years of building public support, we celebrated Governor Northam's Executive Order 43, which lays out a vision for Virginia to modernize its energy grid, transition to clean energy, and increase efficiency to meet the needs of the state in the decades ahead**
- **Virginia's political landscape dramatically changed with the 2019 elections producing a democratic majority in both chambers for the first time in decades, and opening the door for further progress for clean energy in Virginia**
- **Successfully passed legislation requiring Dominion to clean up its 27 million cubic yards of toxic coal ash sitting on the banks of Virginia's rivers**

The support of our donors, volunteers and activists is what powers our movement and your dedication has paid dividends! Together, we have built a network over 100,000 strong that continues to grow and lead successful advocacy campaigns on climate solutions. As we face new twists and turns, we are so grateful for the work that went into developing and initiating the foundational phase of our strategic plan in 2019. Through development of the plan, chapter leaders, members, and staff brought to light how we can better focus our efforts, play to our strengths, be more effective, and strive to grow.

Behind the scenes

We are committed to informing, empowering and engaging activists in implementing strategic climate solutions in and for Virginia.

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We are 100% Virginia

We refined our strategies to focus on three core areas where we could move the needle:

1. Stop any new fossil fuel infrastructure projects
2. Secure state climate and energy policies that ensure all future electricity demand is met through energy efficiency and clean renewable power
3. Increase public demand for distributed renewable energy options and local government commitments to climate action

Climate solutions must happen at both the state and local level: your Chapter is working tirelessly on all fronts to generate the momentum needed to create a healthy future for every single one of us. Virginia remains one of the few states, and the only state in the South, independently proceeding with a plan to limit greenhouse gas emissions from the power sector.

Each of these strategies built power toward our long-term objective, which Governor Northam committed the state to with Executive Order 43: to achieve 100% clean energy statewide by 2050. Most important, the executive order ties plans for clean energy to jobs, focused on pathways out of poverty. To reach these goals in a way that benefits all Virginians, the state will need to increase energy efficiency and reject fracked-gas.



Activism in Action

Local grassroots campaigns, including 100% Virginia (also known as “Ready for 100”) and More Solar More Places engaged local residents in concrete ways to ramp up the use of clean energy in their communities and advocate for the removal of barriers to distributed energy. Local volunteer leadership is the key ingredient in pressuring city councils, boards of supervisors, mayors and administrators to establish climate and clean energy goals. These initiatives educate Virginia residents about the benefits of distributed energy resources, such as solar power, and connect them with other local activists, building teams to call on their local and state officials to expand access to renewable energy. Their efforts also ensure that clean energy is brought online in a way that is equitable and meets their unique needs.

In September, after a hard-fought three year effort, Arlington officially committed to 100% clean electricity community-wide by 2035, 100% clean electricity for county government operations by 2025, and carbon neutrality by 2050. Following closely behind in December, Fredericksburg City Council unanimously passed a resolution committing to 100% clean energy community-wide by 2050 and for municipal operations

by 2035! In 2019, Staunton residents began planning their Ready for 100 campaign to get their city to commit to running on 100% renewable energy by 2050. They would be the first in the Shenandoah Valley, which could help spur regional collaboration.

Volunteers worked in concert with staff organizers to plan and host numerous engagement events mobilizing Virginians around the value of distributed solar and the benefits that come with it, including: diverse ownership (diminishing monopoly utility companies’ hold on all generation resources), substantially more job opportunities, and power provided closer to where it is needed.



Throughout 2019, we also increased our advocacy for offshore wind, Virginia’s single most abundant available clean energy resource. Specifically, we worked with the Department of Mines Minerals and Energy

We are 100% Virginia *Continued*

(DMME) and pressured Dominion to complete the Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind pilot project, which will bring 2,600 megawatts of clean energy to over 650,000 homes by 2026 and provide essential data for further wind development. With the potential of making Virginia a hub for the offshore wind industry on the East Coast, including 14,000 projected jobs, this initiative is truly a win-win for combating the climate crisis with a clean energy source that supports sustainable communities and job creation.



The Year of the Climate Strike

In a broader context, 2019 was the year of the climate strike, with the youth movement for climate action taking center stage. These actions culminated in the September global strike, and we joined dozens of other groups to support actions demanding bold action in Richmond and across the state. Recognizing the value in unity to build a larger, stronger and more diverse movement, we increased the scope of our partnerships and offered support for efforts led by others so they could build on the lessons we have learned.

Thanks in large part to the ongoing flurry of activity on these issues, and emboldened by our victories, our coalition continued to grow and achieved significant advancements for clean energy and pollution reduction that will benefit Virginians for generations to come.

Yet, despite our victories, Virginia saw carbon emissions increase in 2019 due to the numerous gas-fired power plants brought online. It is critical that we continue to send a loud, clear message to public officials and corporate polluters like Dominion Energy that fracked gas is detrimental to our communities' health and climate.

Clean Bus Initiative

To address pollution from Virginia's transportation sector, Governor Northam and Dominion Energy announced a program that aims to replace 13,000 diesel school buses in Virginia with clean, electric buses. Virginia has 133 school districts, which serve over 1.2 million students and 17,000 school buses in its total fleet. Creating the largest initiative for electric buses in the U.S. to date is a historic commitment that will improve public health and address the climate crisis. This investment in zero-emission vehicles puts Virginia on the path to having one of the cleanest and safest



transportation systems in the country. The pilot program will deploy 50 buses in 2020, and is currently the largest electric school bus program in the country. Under the VW settlement, Virginia has invested over \$80 million in mitigation actions that support electrification of the transportation sector to reduce air pollution. This includes \$14 million in state funding to deploy electric transit buses and \$20 million in VW Trust funds for electric school buses. In 2019, Virginia deployed the first 17 electric buses in Alexandria, Blacksburg, and Hampton Roads.



Protecting Virginia's Trees

We collected 554 grassroots comments and collaborated with partners on technical comments in opposition to the Enviva Southampton expansion, a proposal to enlarge a harmful and polluting biomass operation from 535,000 to 781,000 trees per year. Unfortunately, the permit was approved despite the concerns raised. Even with new VOC and air toxics pollution controls, the expansion will result in a doubling of nitrogen oxide and particulate matter emissions, and a tripling of carbon monoxide emissions. Our comments called for a limit on production until controls are installed, as well as better monitoring and more enforceable limits in the permit.

Environmental Justice

Fighting for a Better Quality of Life

Evidence of environmental injustice is prevalent throughout our state. One need look no further than Buckingham County or Charles City County, Virginia, to see examples of environmental racism. Local residents, such as those from the Union Hill community and Concerned Citizens of Charles City County (C5) are leading advocacy campaigns to protect their communities from harmful pipelines, compressor stations, power plants, and more. These efforts are a true testament to what grassroots organizing should look like. Currently, participation in the permitting process for a polluting facility is not easily accessible for impacted community members. At the Virginia Chapter, we are making sure that people are aware of these processes and how to provide input so their voices are heard.

Numerous victories in 2019 resulted from the combination of legal challenges and strategic organizing. The Stop the Pipelines campaign, an uphill battle for Virginia's communities, water, air and ecosystems against the Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley pipelines, finished 2019 with more milestones and opportunities to support and collaborate on amazing work by community-led groups. In this, our sixth year of organized opposition, allies fighting the dirty, dangerous and unnecessary Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP) received welcome news as the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals vacated a federal permit because it had failed to adequately protect endangered or threatened species along the path of the proposed project.

Our campaign's approach to the pipeline fight is to support and uplift the voices of frontline communities. Accordingly, we supported a weekend of action

mid-year with two large-scale events in opposition to the ACP and Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP): "End Environmental Racism Now: March with Union Hill" and "Herring, Stand with Appalachia: No Mountain Valley Pipeline". With Virginians from all across the state, we united to oppose unjust and unneeded fracked-gas pipelines, and to stand in solidarity for environmental justice and climate action. On Friday, May 17, participants gathered in Richmond with community members of Union Hill, Reverend William J. Barber, II of the Poor People's Campaign, and Karena Gore, with the Center for Earth Ethics, to march across the Lee Bridge in Richmond, on the anniversary of a march by the Poor People's Campaign during the U.S. civil rights movement in the 1960s.

The following day, Rev. Lennox Yearwood, president of the Hip Hop Caucus, joined the rally and concert to stop construction on the pipeline. Virginians gathered at the courthouse in Attorney General Mark Herring's hometown to ask him to stand with Appalachia, halt work on the MVP, pursue his lawsuit against the pipeline developers for hundreds of water quality violations, and stand up for the state's authority to revoke the project's water quality permit.

In 2018, Attorney General Mark Herring filed a lawsuit against the MVP on behalf of the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and the State Water Control Board. The lawsuit accused the MVP of more than 300

violations of state regulations meant to curb erosion and sediment. In 2019, the MVP was fined \$2.15 million, a fraction of the project's total cost of \$5.5 billion, for these violations.



Another important development was the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's draft environmental impact statement for MVP's proposed Southgate extension in July. A coalition of impacted residents and environmental organizations organized talking points, technical comments and action alerts to collect public comments. In coordination with the Sierra Club's Beyond Dirty Fuels team, we collected over 15,000 comments in opposition to the proposed extension to submit alongside partner groups.



Environmental Justice *Continued*

Fighting New Fracked Gas Threats

The threat of new fracked gas projects continued to spread in 2019, drawing the ire of impacted communities and climate activists alike. Two new merchant power plants, the Chickahominy Gas Plant and C4GT plant, were proposed in Charles City County. In early 2019, news of the Chickahominy Gas Plant came as a surprise to many local residents. This further demonstrates a pattern of poor public engagement during the permitting process. Concerned Citizens of Charles City County (or C5) was formed in June to educate and engage county residents around issues facing their communities, as county officials have failed to represent their interests.

The tendrils of the C4GT gas plant extend across a broad region of the Eastern Commonwealth. Virginia Natural Gas is seeking permission to build yet another pipeline project in Virginia to supply it with fuel. If approved by the State Corporation Commission, the Header Improvement Project will allow a 24+ mile pipeline that requires construction in Northern Virginia, Central Virginia and Hampton Roads and includes compressor stations in Prince William County, Caroline County, and Chesapeake City.

Increasing Environmental Injustice Awareness Statewide

Our local groups play a critical role in spreading awareness of environmental justice issues across Virginia. The Chapter is working with our twelve local groups to analyze our local programs and campaigns and develop strategies to expand collaboration with frontline communities. Chapter leaders and staff are building regional environmental justice teams across the state: such committees have been formed in the Chesapeake Bay and York River Groups. A critical component of environmental justice is listening to directly impacted residents. We work with civic leagues and neighborhood associations to hear how they are directly affected by environmental issues, particularly in low-income and communities of color. Through this dialogue, we seek ways in which we can partner to support their goals and initiate mutually beneficial campaigns.

2019 continued to teach us lessons in how to best support frontline communities. After years of hard work, we saw progress in the courts. We witnessed communities' relentless battles through public hearings, comments, rallies, and more. We hope that you become more invested in supporting local environmental justice issues in your community, and continue your personal journey as we move forward together on our organizational journey toward increased diversity and equity.

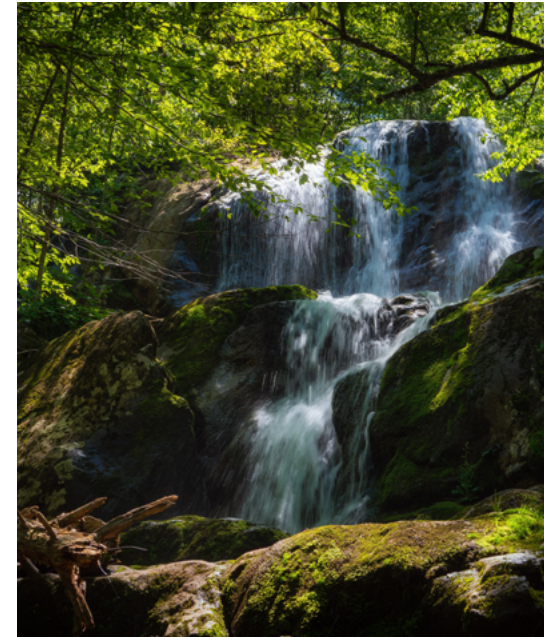
Legislative and Political Progress

After years of work, a long-term solution to Virginia's coal ash problem was achieved this legislative session as a compromise was reached between environmental groups, the Northam administration, Dominion and key advocates in the Senate (Sen. Surovell) and House (Del. Carroll-Foy). A bill passed requiring Dominion to clean up its 27 million cubic yards of toxic ash sitting on the banks of Virginia's rivers. Dominion was required to remove the coal ash from sites on Virginia's riverbanks and either recycle or relocate it to modern, lined landfills. This solution will ensure that the Chesapeake Bay watershed is protected from toxic coal ash. While ratepayers will foot the bill for this environmental clean-up, the law does include restrictions on what expenses qualify for an added rate of return and establishes a maximum monthly impact on customer bills.

Virginia legislators also voted for a new redistricting process that will include the public for the first time, correct the hyperpartisan process of the past and be transparent to the public. After different versions of reform passed each body, a conference committee agreed upon a compromise that increases transparency and creates a 12-person commission composed of six legislators and six citizens to determine district boundaries after the 2020 census. To become enshrined in our constitution, the same resolution will have to be passed in 2020 and be approved by a majority of voters via the 2020 ballot.

Virginia is now firmly on path to joining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) and has committed to reaching 100 percent clean energy by 2050. In September 2019, Governor Northam announced Executive Order 43, which laid out a vision for Virginia to modernize its energy grid, transition to clean energy, and increase efficiency to meet the needs of the state in the decades ahead. After years of building public support and demanding the state establish a commitment to cut carbon pollution, we celebrated this milestone in the transition from dirty fuels to sustainable energy resources—but our work was far from done. After this point, our focus became ensuring the commitment would be implemented in a way that benefits all Virginia residents and, in particular, those disproportionately impacted by pollution and climate change.

Just weeks later, the political landscape in Virginia saw a sea change with the 2019 elections producing a Democratic majority in both chambers for the first time in decades. This shift was a welcome and monumental change in the state, which opened the door for further progress for clean energy in Virginia.



Supporting your Sierra Club Virginia Chapter

Our supporters scale great heights to protect Virginia's environment. In 2019, these donors enabled us to ward off threats to our vision for a healthy, sustainable Virginia while productively working to build solutions to the climate crisis.

Thank you for all that
you give to this work!

Scaling Old Rag \$100-249

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Old Rag.....	3,268'
Hogback.....	3,474'
Pinnacle.....	3,730'
Stony Man	4,010'
Whitetop.....	5,518'
Mount Rogers ...	5,728'

* Indicates sustaining monthly donor
† Indicates contributions raised
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fundraising platform
(see: teamsierra.org/virginia)

Act Local Invest in Virginia

Every day, dozens of volunteers are taking action with the Sierra Club in Virginia. From speaking out for a cleaner environment to exploring every nook and cranny of our beautiful Commonwealth, we think globally and act locally. Our work makes a difference in ensuring that we leave our children a living Virginia legacy – clean air, clean water, a stable climate and opportunity for all people to thrive in a healthy community.

Your support enables us to:

- ✓ Build the political will for climate action and environmental protection among our state leaders and representatives.
- ✓ Ensure it is Virginia's policy to promote environmental justice.
- ✓ Resist dirty infrastructure like fracked-gas pipelines and power plants that would add to the negative impacts of climate change and disproportionately affect marginalized populations.
- ✓ Ensure all Virginians have clean, affordable energy to power their homes, businesses, public/municipal buildings and schools.
- ✓ Cut pollution from the transportation sector.



Your generous contribution to the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter makes this work possible. And remember that when you give, 100% of your gift stays in Virginia to support our local work. For this reason, contributing to the Virginia Chapter is a long-term investment to protect the environmental health of our state for future generations.

Give today at
vasierra.club/donate



The Sierra Club is the most enduring and influential grassroots environmental organization in the United States. We amplify the power of our 3.8 million members and activists to defend everyone's right to a healthy world.

We know actions speak louder than words. That's why we've built a national community of volunteers, advocates, and grassroots activists who show up when and where it counts. Our supporters have the tools and resources to make themselves heard in nearly every district in every state across the country.

From securing protection for 439 parks and monuments, to winning passage of the Clean Air and Endangered Species Acts, to putting over 281 coal plants on the path to replacement with clean energy, to securing the right of every kid in America to visit a national park, we have an unmatched record of success and impact.

The Sierra Club Virginia Chapter is over 20,000 members strong. We coordinate action to promote climate solutions and oppose projects and policies that put the interests of corporate polluters above the needs of communities.



SIERRA CLUB
VIRGINIA CHAPTER

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