



SIERRA  
CLUB

VIRGINIA CHAPTER

# Virginia Sierran

The Official Newsletter of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter  
Winter 2025

## A Tribute to President Jimmy Carter, the Nation's First Climate-Conscious President

by Lynn Godfrey

**A**s the nation mourns the passing of President Jimmy Carter and his lasting legacy, some are surprised to learn of his commitment to renewable energy. President Carter was a remarkable human being—and, in my belief—the best President in modern-day history. The significance of his contributions are often overlooked, or reflect a lack of awareness of the totality of his time in office. Sadly, Carter's single term was overshadowed by the Iran hostage crisis, but some of his accomplishments impact our lives more than four decades after he left office. President Carter's commitment to gender equality, human rights, energy conservation and climate change were refreshing, albeit unusual for the 1970s. He was—and it could be argued—is the first and only President committed to renewable energy sources, especially solar power.



President Jimmy Carter at a dedication ceremony for the White House solar array on June 20, 1979.

The Department(s) of Energy and Education and FEMA were all established during his one-term presidency. While these important agencies still exist, his commitment to an alternative energy source—other than oil and fossil fuels—has been a dream deferred. According to an article in *The Lakeview Journal* by Jennifer Almquist "...the goal of Solar America was that 20% of America's energy would be renewable by the year 2000."<sup>1</sup> The program would address America's dependency on OPEC, exemplified during the 1973 energy crisis when OPEC nations cut off oil supply to the west. Those who lived through that experience probably remember long lines at the pump to buy gasoline.



## Agriculture & Climate Change

by Ralph Grove

Test your understanding of the connection between agriculture and climate change by answering four simple questions.<sup>1</sup>

1. Approximately what portion of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions result from food systems (agriculture and food distribution)?  
A) one tenth  
B) one fifth  
C) one quarter
2. Close to half of the world's habitable surface is devoted to agriculture. What part of that is used for animal agriculture (meat and dairy)?  
A) 50%  
B) 80%  
C) 90%
3. How much more GHG is produced, on average, in producing protein from beef as compared to beans?  
A) 12x more  
B) 25x  
C) 38x
4. How much more GHG is produced, on average, in creating dairy milk vs. soy milk?  
A) 3.2x more  
B) 5.9x  
C) 12.5x

JIMMY CARTER PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

SEE CARTER ON BACK PAGE ➡➡

SEE ANSWERS ON PAGE 11 ➡➡

## 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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## From the Chair



## Spotlight on Outings

Happy New Year to all! I hope you had a joyous and restful holiday season. I'd like to say a few words about the Sierra Club's Outings Program, with a focus on what we're doing here in Virginia.

The Sierra Club is well known for its Outings Program. Each year, we take nearly 250,000 people outdoors through a variety of programs across the country designed to foster lifelong connections to—and passion for—na-

ture and the great outdoors. Thousands of Outings Leaders help plan and organize a wide array of trips, from day hikes in local parks to international excursions. The Outings program gives people the opportunity to enjoy nature and introduces prospective new members to the Sierra Club and our important conservation work. For information about upcoming programs, please check out the Events calendar on our Chapter website at [www.sierraclub.org/virginia/events-calendar](http://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/events-calendar)

Our program depends upon volunteers like you to flourish. If you love the outdoors and would like to share your enthusiasm with others, please consider training to become an Outings Leader. We need you!

The basic requirements for a local Outings Leader are:

- 🌲 Be a current Sierra Club member 18 years of age or older
- 🌲 Complete the Outings Leader Training course provided by Sierra Club
- 🌲 Complete a certified first-aid training course, such as Red Cross Basic First Aid
- 🌲 Demonstrate proficiency of essential skills for activities you plan to lead
- 🌲 Complete one or more mentored outings trips as a provisional leader

To learn more, please visit our website at

[www.sierraclub.org/outdoors-for-all/volunteer](http://www.sierraclub.org/outdoors-for-all/volunteer) or speak to one of our experienced Outings Leaders:

- 🌲 In the Northern Virginia area, contact Vicky Hsu, hhueichi@gmail.com
- 🌲 For the rest of Virginia, contact Ralph Grove, rfgrove@icloud.com

We hope to see you on an outing soon!

Judy Gayer and Ralph Grove

## Proposed Dissolution of the New River Group

The New River Group is proposing to dissolve. In accordance with Sierra Club rules, notice is required to be given in the chapter newsletter at least two weeks before the matter is voted on in the Chapter Executive Committee. This action is precipitated by the lack of volunteers to take on critical group responsibilities.

If anyone wishes to challenge the dissolution of the New River Group, please write the Boundary Committee Chair. You may also speak at the next ExCom meeting on March 8, 2025.

Jim Lynch, Boundary Committee Chair | [jplynch3@gmail.com](mailto:jplynch3@gmail.com)



## Demand More Transit to Give Our Climate a Break by Cheri Conca

**F**loating above traffic, I settle into a comfortable seat, check my phone, look out the window, and feel the tension leaving my brain and body. Am I dreaming? No. I'm on a transit bus from LAX (Los Angeles International Airport) to Union Station, where my son will pick me up in about 30 minutes and take me to his home in East Los Angeles. The bus ride is cathartic after my flight and allows the anticipation of seeing my family grow. It also saves my son more than 30 miles of driving and who-knows-how-much-time to LAX and back, while taking another vehicle off the congested route from the airport to the transit station. My bus moves relatively quickly in one of the HOT (High Occupancy Toll) lanes, traveling past seven lanes of stop-and-go traffic.

I wish there were more transit options in Virginia, where 74% of all residents live in urban areas. Transportation is the number one source of climate-threatening pollution in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Creating new transit routes and increasing frequency on existing routes in cities and towns is an effective way to fight climate change. Transportation alternatives could also reduce illnesses exacerbated by tailpipe emissions, and take cars off our clogged roads and highways.

### Transportation is the number one source of climate-threatening pollution in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Ask people what they like about transit options and they might say:

"Cars separate you from life in the city, and drive your general anxiety higher. Public transportation integrates you with life in the city, and decreases anxiety."

"Public transit gives a sense that locations are connected... so it feels like it makes your world bigger in a sense."

"It's incredibly freeing—it gets me where I need to go without the hassle of gas, directions, safety concerns, parking, tolls, speeding tickets, and all the other worries."

"It provides options for people with disabilities."

Although there is growing support for transportation alternatives, resistance to investing in transit options remains a challenge in Virginia—and across the U.S. Changing this mindset is essential.

The CTB (Commonwealth Transportation Board) chooses which transportation projects to fund through its biennial SmartScale ([www.smartscale.virginia.gov](http://www.smartscale.virginia.gov)) process. In 2024, staff at the CTB released the list of projects they recommended for funding that fiscal year. Of 122 projects statewide, **just three** were dedicated to transit. The CTB gets its list of projects from elected officials in counties, cities, and towns, which is why your voice is so important. Local representatives are committed to listening to you because your votes speak louder than words.

Unfortunately, the number of transit projects across Virginia doesn't appear to be increasing. Of 271 projects submitted for FY (fiscal year) 2026, **just six** focused on bus transit. The vast majority were plans for building or expanding highways, with a small number of bike/pedestrian projects. Of the six bus transit projects submitted, three were eliminated by CTB



### 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 [www.sierraclub.org/virginia/hampton-roads-updates](http://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/hampton-roads-updates)

**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 [www.sierraclub.org/virginia/fojgemail](http://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/fojgemail)

**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 [www.sierraclub.org/virginia/northern-virginia-updates](http://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/northern-virginia-updates)

## STOP MEGA CRUISE SHIPS IN YORKTOWN



The York River system supports diverse fauna (oysters, blue crabs, menhaden, drum, dolphin, and much more) enjoyed by both tourists and locals. This complex and fragile ecosystem needs our protection from massive ocean-class cruise ships that could have significant impact on our historic community, environment, and the quality of life in the Yorktown community.

### Transit Options (cont'd from page 3)

staff during the pre-screening process, leaving—yet again—**just three** bus transit projects recommended for funding throughout the commonwealth for FY2026.

Five of the six transit projects submitted for FY2026 were from Richmond. Other municipalities need to submit transit projects, too. We need to change the status quo and offer more clean transportation options for people to travel where they live, work, and play. Decision-makers hear plenty from road-focused constituents and lobbyists; they also need to hear from you. Whether your community needs more frequent or expanded bus or train service, brand new bus service, or accessible bus rapid transit, tell your local decision makers to invest in better transit.

Cheri Conca, Transportation and Smart Growth Program Manager

## Ocean Liners Threaten Our Fragile Ecosystems by Elizabeth Wilkins

**T**he citizens of Yorktown were blindsided by the announcement in 2023 that Princess Cruise Lines partnered with York County and the Commonwealth of Virginia to bring large, ocean-going cruise ships to Historic Yorktown. The small community (population 285) reacted swiftly in opposition to the plan, citing pollution, scale and overtourism concerns. The grassroots group Preserve Yorktown expanded outreach to the county, the state, and beyond, gathering more than 7800 signatures on a petition to stop Princess Lines' assault on Yorktown. We received welcome support from the Sierra Club York River Group, the Friends of Earth and the York River Stewards. In early 2024, Princess withdrew its planned pilot program, contrasting our opposition with the "Southern Hospitality" shown by Norfolk.

We knew it would be a matter of time before Princess and others would try again for Yorktown; but we assembled far too much damning information on the cruise ship industry to take a break from the fight. Preserve Yorktown broadened its scope to include all Virginia coastal waters, forming a new group, Protect Virginia. Among other state-level actions, Protect Virginia recently submitted a Petition for Rulemaking to the Virginia DEQ (Department of Environmental Quality). The petition seeks more stringent environmental controls on large cruise ships, and was heard by the State Water Control Board and the Air Pollution Control Board. The Sierra Club and Friends of Earth actively supported this effort by generating action alerts for the public open comment period. Unfortunately, the two boards summarily dismissed the petition, using arguments gleaned from the influential cruise Industry trade association (CLIA) public comments.

Virginia is at a crossroads with the cruise industry. There are three registered Princess lobbyists in Richmond for 2024-2025 whose stated plan is

**Fewer than 300 residents live in the Historic Yorktown Community, while the average ocean liner cruise ship can carry 3,000 passengers.**



for growth in the coastal Commonwealth. One avenue for expansion has been a push to legalize on-board gambling in Virginia waters, seen by one Princess lobbyist as “rolling out a welcome mat”—or, in other words—vastly increasing profits for the industry. Protect Virginia was instrumental in defeating such a bill (HB1478) in the 2024 legislative session. The Commonwealth has a responsibility to examine this potential expansion in the broader context of environmental and cultural impacts, unfair labor practices and competition with land-based businesses. Virtually all large cruise ships are built and registered outside the U.S. to avoid taxes and U.S. labor laws, while utilizing local infrastructure, emergency services and other amenities, and polluting the waterways and port cities they visit.

In Virginia, the potential for environmental harm from cruise ships is of particular concern for the Chesapeake Bay, its commercial and recreational fisheries, and the fragile ecosystems that support them. Atmospheric pollution, ocean acidification, toxic discharges from scrubbers, and treated black and graywater (nutrient-rich effluents) are among serious concerns raised by increasing cruise ship traffic. Open loop scrubbers, which work by spraying ambient seawater into the exhaust stacks and flushing the toxic, highly acidic washwater back into the waterways,



are designed to limit sulfur emissions but simply convert an air pollution problem into a water pollution problem. For this reason, these scrubbers have been banned in more than 90 ports globally.

The cruise industry is notorious for violations of existing pollution regulations. Princess Cruise Lines received the largest ever maritime fine (\$40m in 2016) for seven felony convictions stemming from deliberate vessel pollution, with corporate-level knowledge, and violated their probation as recently as 2019 (\$20m fine). Accidental pollution incidents—beyond significant operational impacts—are increasing in proportion to the burgeoning growth (both in size and numbers of ships) of the cruise industry. Several of the latest “floating cities” can carry close to 10,000 passengers and crew.

Communities across the globe are pushing back against the real environmental and cultural damage created by increasing cruise ship encroachment and exploitation, and Virginia should heed the warning. Please visit [Protect-Virginia.org](https://Protect-Virginia.org) to learn more.

Elizabeth Wilkins, Protect Virginia  
Member, Sierra Club, York River Group, Protect-Virginia.Org



## Farewell to Gustavo Angeles by Joe Brancoli

I derive many benefits from living near the Richmond office of the Virginia Chapter, notably the opportunity to develop relationships with Chapter staff. The downside is a sense of loss when one of these wonderful people moves on to another phase of life, as happened recently with Environmental Justice Director Gustavo Angeles.

I assumed the role of Group Chair of FOJ (Falls of the James) close to the same time Gustavo joined the staff. To say that he was consistently a pleasure to work with is an understatement. Gustavo never appeared to count the hours—or begrudge any effort—in his work for the Chapter. What’s more, he was always enthusiastic, and I never saw him in a cranky mood while driving to Hopewell to meet with a community activist; leading hikes for Spanish speaking community members; opening the office at unusual hours; and testifying in endless commission meetings.

Gustavo was always smiling, while serious in his commitments to the many thousand things he did and contributions he made. The above—while heartfelt—seems a bit too prosaic, so, to spell it out further:

**G** gracious to all  
**U** understanding of others’ needs  
**S** simply delightful to work with  
**T** true to the principle of equity  
**A** always ready to fight injustice  
**V** virtually unstoppable  
**O** the O.G.= Original Gustavo

Joe Brancoli



## Newest Virginia Parks by Glenn Gillis

With one of the finest park systems in the United States, Virginia is renowned for its national and state parks, and a few of the most famous historic sites in the nation. In keeping with this tradition of preserving Virginia's beautiful and historic landscape, the Old Dominion is always adding new sites to its ever growing legacy of preservation. These are four of Virginia's new parks and historic sites.

JUDY GALLAGHER



## Featherstone National Wildlife Refuge

The official groundbreaking of a new section of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail took place on August 23, 2024 at Featherstone National Wildlife Refuge in Prince William County. The Trail stretches over 800 miles from the Laurel Highlands of Pennsylvania to the mouth of the Potomac River at the junction of the Chesapeake Bay. The growing Trail is nearing completion through Virginia from Loudoun County through the Northern Neck. This new section of the Trail through Featherstone National Wildlife Refuge will connect Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge and Veterans Park on the north to Neabsco Regional Park and Leesylvania State Park to the south. Completion is expected by the end of 2025.

## Beaverdam Reservoir Regional Park

In October, NOVA Parks—in partnership with Loudoun Water—celebrated the grand opening of Reservoir Park in Loudoun County. Located in Ashburn, the park sits on more than 600 acres, including the 350-acre reservoir. Featuring picnic pavilions, a boardwalk, fishing, canoe and kayak rentals, there is also a welcome center with plenty of parking for visitors, hikers, and school groups. Opportunities exist for environmental education and space for high school crew teams.

Constructed by volunteers from Sierra Club Potomac Region and the Potomac Heritage Trail Association, the park features an 8-mile circuit trail, which intersects with trails at Evergreen Village Regional Park and Goose Creek Pointe Park. Future plans call for a 20-plus mile trail hugging the Goose Creek State Scenic River leading to the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail.

Far right: Sierra Club Outings Leader Glenn Gillis helped build the 8-mile long Beaverdam Reservoir Trail around Beaverdam Reservoir. Gillis is flanked by Phyllis Randall, Chair of the Loudoun Board of Supervisors, and Sylvia Glass, Broad Run District Supervisor for the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors. Park map courtesy of Loudoun Water

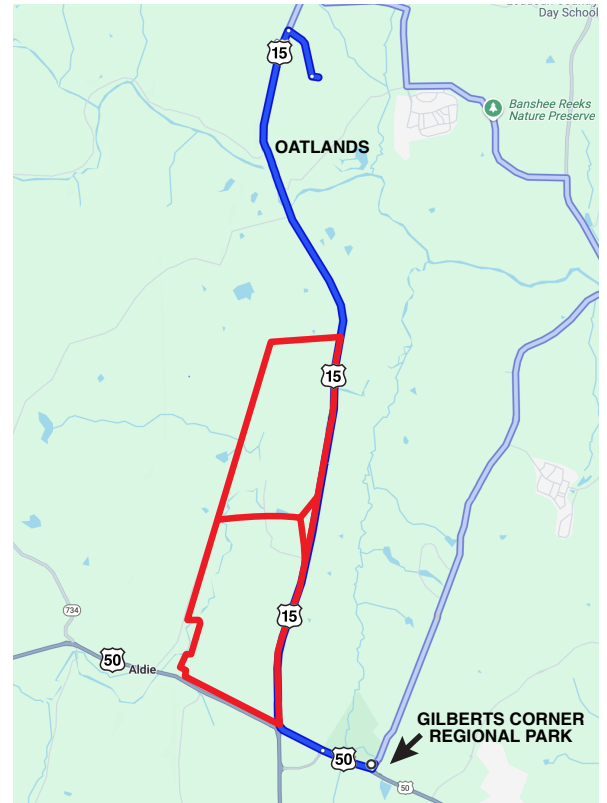






## Oak Hill State Park

President James Monroe's former estate near Loudoun County will soon become part of Virginia's newest state park. Oak Hill State Park will protect 1,240 acres of pristine landscape in rapidly developing Northern Virginia. With support from Virginia Senators Tim Kaine and Mark Warner and Congresswomen Jennifer Wexton, 6 million dollars from the National Park Service Land and Water Conservation Fund have been acquired to purchase the estate. The Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation was also instrumental in securing funding for the new park. Although Oak Hill has been privately owned for more than 200 years, the property has been well-preserved and is already a National Historic Landmark. The new park will offer camping, hiking trails, fishing, horse-back riding, and historic tours of the home of President James Monroe.



**Above:** Located below Bull Run Mountain along U.S. Route 15, the new park sits between Gilberts Corner Regional Park and Oatlands National Historic Trust.

**Top left:** Oak Hill State Park will offer historic tours of President James Monroe's former home.



## Chesapeake National Recreation Area Expansion

As the largest, most beautiful and historic estuary in the United States, the Chesapeake Bay stretches through both Maryland and Virginia. Along its scenic shoreline and Tidewater region lie many public parks, wildlife preserves, and historic sites, many of which are within the Chesapeake Bay Gateway Network.

**The CNRA will increase diverse public access to the Chesapeake Bay and strengthen the culture of stewardship across the region. Everyone who resides in the region has an important role in Bay conservation and culture. —Sen. Chris Van Hollen**

Legislation has been introduced to further protect the Bay and expand historic preservation and outdoor recreation. Maryland Senator Chris Van Hollen and Maryland Congressman Paul Sarbanes are among lawmakers who proposed the creation of a Chesapeake National Recreation Area. First introduced in July 2023, the legislation recently passed through the United States Senate and awaits passage by the U.S. House of Representatives and final Presidential approval. The bill allows for the purchase of land and conservation easements from willing sellers. It adds several historic sites in Annapolis, Maryland and the North Beach of Fort Monroe National Monument in Hampton, Virginia as the first sites of the Chesapeake National Recreation Area.

## CHESAPEAKE BAY GROUP

### Focus on Plastics

**T**his year we are focusing on reducing the use of plastics. One of our goals is to convince cities in the Hampton Roads area to adopt the 5-cent plastic bag fee.

### The Story of Plastic

On **February 8th**, the Naro Cinema will show *The Story of Plastic*, a 95-minute documentary released for Earth Day's 50th anniversary. The film explores the global crisis of plastic pollution and its impact on the health of our planet and its people.



Spanning three continents, it highlights the catastrophe: overflowing garbage fields, rivers and seas clogged with waste, and skies choked with emissions from plastic production.

Featuring interviews with experts and activists, the film reveals the disastrous consequences of plastic smothering ecosystems and poisoning communities, while showcasing the global movement rising in response. With original animation, archival footage, and first-person accounts, it simplifies a complex problem increasingly affecting the planet's well-being.

To register go to

[www.norfolk.gov/storyofplasticsvp](http://www.norfolk.gov/storyofplasticsvp)

### Sierra Club ExCom Openings

We are looking for two more ExCom members to bring our total to seven. If you would like to become a member, please contact our chair, **David Grochmal** at [dmgrochmal@cox.net](mailto:dmgrochmal@cox.net).

### Welcome Our New Executive Community Members

**M**any groups are slowly recovering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chesapeake Bay Group is no exception. As we make progress toward increasing membership and engagement, we are happy to welcome two new executive committee members.



**Josh Dewar** (left), who transitioned from education to the technology sector, is an avid hiker with a passion for teamwork and community connections. He is committed to bringing people together to explore the outdoors. By relaunching our Outings program and participating in local cleanup events, Josh hopes to foster collaboration with other environmental groups and empower people interested in activism to work together in meaningful ways.

**Bob Daniels** (above right) is a retired Licensed Clinical Psychologist who recognizes nature as an antidote and respite from cultural and political stressors. Daniels shares insights and experience from his practice on his website, [www.roguepsychologist.com](http://www.roguepsychologist.com). He lives on a branch of the Lafayette River and maintains the Muskrat Flats Shoreline Trail and Soggy Bottoms for neighbors and visitors to enjoy.

### Five Cents

**Molly Riley** of Lynnhaven River Now was our guest speaker in January, sharing the environmental impact of single-use plastic bags. Molly updated us on the movement to encourage the Virginia Beach City Council to pass an ordinance imposing a five-cent fee for plastic bags in grocery stores, drug stores and convenience stores. The fee would help reduce the number of consumers opting for plastic bags.





## FRIENDS OF THE JAMES GROUP

### Green Giant Award Presentation Potluck Dinner

**N**early 50 people attended the FOJG (Friends of the James Group) delicious potluck dinner and Green Giant Award presentation in December at the Science Museum of Virginia. Congratulations to all of the recipients, who contributed significantly to their communities and the environment.

SHAVON PEACOCK



From L to R: FOJG ExCom Chair Joe Brancoli, Nicole Martin, Beth Kreydatus, Laura Thomas, Denise Payne, Steve Marzolf, and Gray Montrose.



Thanks to **Nicole Brown**, President of the Chesterfield County NAACP for her work fighting the proposed gas plant in Chesterfield County. As a Board Member of the Friends of Chesterfield, she partnered with other community groups to oppose the plant. She is a frequent speaker at community forums on environmental justice and the Chesterfield gas plant.



VCU Department of Focused Inquiry Professor **Dr. Beth Kreydatus** received the award for her efforts in education and outreach for VCU's Institute for Sustainable Energy and Environment. Dr. Kreydatus worked with C5 (Concerned Citizens of Charles City County) in successfully opposing proposed gas plants, and is helping build a green workforce program in Charles City County. While working with her students on sustainability service-learning projects, Kreydatus was involved with several youth-led organizations, including VCU's Green Action, GreenTeenz and Henrico Conservation Action Network. Her roles as an advocate for a stronger sustainability plan for VCU and a climate action plan for Henrico County also make her deserving of the Green Giant.



**Laura Thomas** was awarded the Green Giant for her work as Director of the Office of Sustainability for Richmond City. For more than two years, Laura advanced climate justice work in the community, and her efforts led to the City Council's adoption of RVAgreen 2050, the first-ever Climate Equity Action Plan. In her previous role as Sustainability Administrator for the City of Largo, Florida, Laura worked to

transition municipal fleets to environmentally friendly all-electric, develop policies to advance climate justice, and helped initiate Largo's first equity-centered, community-led planning process.



#### Denise Payne and Steve Marzolf

each earned a Green Giant award for their work as leaders in the Swansboro West Civic Association, which received a grant from the Richmond Office of Sustainability to plant 100 trees in their neighborhood. A \$20,000 grant was recently awarded to Swansboro West and Southside ReLeaf from the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay to conduct community visioning for a park at the Swansboro Elementary School. The park would be the only public greenspace within the Swansboro West community. Denise and Steve prune trees with the Richmond Tree Stewards, regularly clear invasives with Southside ReLeaf, conduct monthly cleanups in Swansboro West, and attend countless city meetings to advocate for their community. Both volunteered at the FOJG/University of Richmond Big Yard Sale this last year.



#### Gray Montrose

received the award for her work in Clean Air Act law, land use, energy development, resource protection, environmental justice and cultural heritage, working with tribal leaders to address matters of importance to Virginia's native peoples. Montrose applies her expertise to the diverse conservation work of the Capital Region Land Conservancy and is an active member of the Varina community. She served as Assistant Director with the Virginia Coastal Policy Center preparing communities for rising sea levels and new, increasing coastal hazards. In addition, Gray worked to guide state agencies through significant regulatory and policy changes. Her work was crucial, following *Friends of Buckingham v. State Air Pollution Control Board*, No. 19-1152 (4th Cir. 2020), the first court-mandated consideration of environmental justice in permitting decisions. Her background in easements and land use proved valuable as her department worked closely to manage conservation incentive programs for multiple state agencies, contributing to the stewardship and protection of millions of acres, natural, cultural, and historic resources.

**Thanks again to these GREEN GIANTS of environmental protection!**

## RAPPAHANNOCK GROUP

### Student Climate Action Summit February 21-22

**T**he RGSC is a proud supporter of this year's **Student Climate Action Summit** at the University of Mary Washington, Cedric Rucker University Center, College Avenue, in Fredericksburg, Virginia. If you care about the planet and want to make a difference, join us for discussions, workshops, and speakers on climate and the environment.

**Friday, February 21, 2025**

**6:00-8:00pm**

Discussions With Climate Advocates panel discussion

**Saturday, February 22, 2025**

**11:00am-3:00pm**

Student speakers, advocacy workshops, and tabling opportunities

RGSC encourages all high school and college students, climate activists, and interested community members to attend.

Go to [Eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com) and search "Student Climate Action Summit" at University of Mary Washington to sign up for one or both sessions. There will be two listings, one for February 21st and another for February 22nd.

### Virginia Sierran

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

[www.sierraclub.org/virginia](https://www.sierraclub.org/virginia)

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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.

### Rappahannock Group Sierra Club Hosts Data Center Forum

**O**n December 4, 2024, the SCRG (Sierra Club Rappahannock Group), Sierra Club Virginia, and Inform Fredericksburg held their fifth Data Center Community Forum in Spotsylvania County. This series began in October 2023 and included discussions on data centers in Stafford, Fredericksburg, Caroline, and Spotsylvania counties.



LINDA MULLER

### Forum Highlights Concerns

The forum featured a panel of representatives from the data center industry, local government, Sierra Club Virginia, and the Piedmont Environmental Council. Discussions centered on the challenges, benefits, and impacts of data centers on local communities with an open question and answer session.

🌲 **Energy Consumption:** Data centers require a significant amount of power, potentially increasing electricity bills and straining the power grid. Industry representatives have proposed SMRs (small nuclear reactors) as a clean energy solution, but concerns exist about their unproven technology and potential cost increases. Dominion Energy already filed an increased rate adjustment for the proposed North Anna SMR in Louisa County. See Virginia State Corporation Commission: [scc.virginia.gov/gov.pages.case-information](https://scc.virginia.gov/gov.pages.case-information) (PUR-2024-00205)

🌲 **Water Usage:** Data centers require millions of gallons of water for cooling, with some regional proposals drawing from the drought-stressed Rappahannock River and local reservoirs. Many residents expressed concerns about protecting water resources, and emphasized the importance of using water conservation methods. Closed-loop recycled water systems or waterless cooling systems were discussed as options for water preservation strategies. Unfortunately, it's not uncommon for data center developers to avoid transparency regarding the projected amount of water usage for the projects.

### Importance of Resident Engagement

Forum attendees encouraged residents to stay informed about proposed data centers and voice their concerns to local officials. While data centers offer desirable tax benefits, residents need to understand potential drawbacks like increased energy costs and water usage.



## PIEDMONT GROUP

### Earth Flag Presentations

**W**e awarded an Earth Flag in November to another wonderful unsung hero in our community. **Betsy Soulsby** is a remarkable recycling ambassador, organizing electronic waste pick-ups, directing sorting efforts at McIntire Center, recycling cardboard for the Greene County Food Bank, serving on Albemarle's Solid Waste Alternatives Advisory Committee and the ACPS (Albemarle County Public School) Albemarle County Environmental Sustainability Committee.

One of Betsy's amazing accomplishments has been her work with ACPS, creating a lunchroom composting program, diverting 3.8 tons of food waste—and counting—from the landfill into a composting program. I watched her interact with the students; she is so good at working one-on-one with children, helping them understand why reducing food waste is important. One favorite exchange was with a little boy who asked, "why are we doing that?" Betsy responded by asking if he remembered when wildfire smoke made it too dangerous to go outside. She then pointed out that reducing methane by composting would help make the climate better for everyone.

Two local television stations covered the story, making this a publicity trifecta: 1) promoting composting, 2) honoring Betsy, and 3) reminding folks what the Sierra Club is doing in local communities.



**W**e were delighted to present an Earth Flag in December to the students and faculty of **St. Anne's-Belfield** (pictured above) at Riverview Park on its long-term monitoring of the Rivanna watershed. Under a permit from the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, the school monitors three species of freshwater mussels at two sites. New specimens are tagged, and the recaptured ones are recorded and measured for size. The data collected helps evaluate the conservation needs for these threatened and critically endangered species. The school also collects monthly data on the diversity and population sizes of aquatic insect larvae, which are sensitive to water quality.

We are so impressed by the work St. Anne's-Belfield is doing—as well as the enthusiasm students show for getting cold and wet!

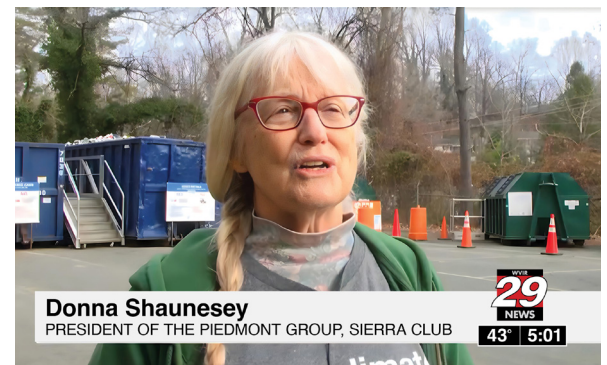
### Food, Agriculture & Climate Change (cont'd from page 1)

1. C) 26% percent of global GHG emissions can be attributed to food production. This includes the impact of producing raw materials (fertilizers, etc.), growing food, packaging it, and distributing it.
2. B) Of the 44% of the habitable surface of the earth that is devoted to agriculture, more than three-fourths is used for grazing animals and growing livestock feed.
3. C) 100 grams of beef protein produces 25 kilograms of CO2 equivalent on average, while the same amount of protein from beans produces 0.65 kg, or about 1/38th as much. There is significant variance in GHG produced by the best grazing practices vs. the worst, but beans are still a better choice for the climate, regardless.
4. A) Producing a liter of dairy milk emits on average 3.15kg of GHG, and a liter of soy milk produces .98kg, about one third less. Other plant-based milks have similarly smaller GHG emissions.

The bottom line is that agriculture is a huge driver of climate change, as well as water pollution and deforestation. What you eat makes a difference as well as where it comes from. Moving towards a more plant-centric diet will help to reduce GHG emissions and reduce air and water pollution. Choosing organically and regeneratively grown food of all types also helps to improve the health and sustainability of soil and ecosystems.

(Data sources: [ourworldindata.org](https://ourworldindata.org))

**Ralph Grove, Food & Agriculture Issue Chair**



### Valuable Publicity for Environmental Concerns

Sierra Club Virginia Group Chair **Donna Shaunesey** shared concerns about declining recycling rates in Albemarle County in an interview with local affiliate WVIR in December.

## 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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## Sierrans Elected to Virginia Chapter ExCom

Goal-setting and policy decisions for the Virginia Sierra Club are made by volunteer leaders who serve on the ExCom (Chapter Executive Committee). The Virginia Chapter ExCom has eight elected at-large delegates, one delegate from SC (Sierra Club) Potomac Region Outings and one from each of our nine Groups. The at-large members are elected by the general membership and serve two-year terms. We are pleased to announce that four members were recently elected to the ExCom:

**Daryl Downing, Gaby Irizarry Negrón, Yugonda Sample-Jones, and Robin Van Tine**

To learn more about the ExCom, please visit [www.sierraclub.org/virginia](http://www.sierraclub.org/virginia) and search for "grassroots leadership."

**John Cruickshank**  
Nominations & Elections Committee

## Sierra Club Virginia Chapter

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## Carter (cont'd from page 1)

Carter believed that renewable energy sources could reduce pollution and dependence on fossil fuels. As proof of his commitment to the Solar America program, the President installed thirty two solar panels on the roof of the White House, and the program offered tax credits to homeowners who did the same. Perhaps this sounds somewhat familiar, but the year was 1979. President Carter was ahead of his time.

## Carter believed that renewable energy sources could reduce pollution and dependence on fossil fuels.

Ronald Reagan had the solar panels removed in 1981, and reduced the Solar America program by 90%. The panels were given to Union College where they heated water for the cafeteria for 12 years. A report on fossil fuels' contribution to global warming was released shortly before President Carter left office in 1981. It suggested reducing carbon emissions at levels later recommended during the Paris Accord some thirty-five years later. In a recent AP article, Carter's biographer Jonathan Alter wrote, "Reagan ended high-level conversations about carbon emissions. He opposed efficiency standards as government overreach and rolled back some regulations. His chief of staff, Don Regan, called the solar panels "a joke."

According to data from the National Museum of American History, the White House solar panels were manufactured in the Commonwealth.

- 🌳 Date Made: ca 1977
- 🌳 User: Carter, Jimmy
- 🌳 Maker: Inter Technology/Solar Corporation
- 🌳 Location: Currently not on view
- 🌳 Place Made: United States: Virginia, Warrenton

We need to celebrate the memory and tremendous contributions of our 39th President, and honor his legacy and extraordinary vision for a clean, healthy planet.

Hail to the Chief. Rest in Power, President Jimmy Carter!

**Lynn Godfrey**

<sup>1</sup>Local power: Norfolk's link to Jimmy Carter's White House solar panels | *The Lakeville Journal*